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The philosophical and historical dynamics of Watsuji Tetsuro's cultural phenomenology

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THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL DYNAMICS OF WATSUJI
TETSURŌ'S CULTURAL PHENOMENOLOGY

by

Edgar A. Weir, Jr.

Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1999

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree
Department of History
College of Liberal Arts**

**Graduate College
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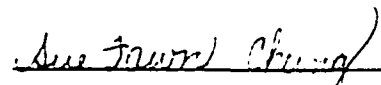
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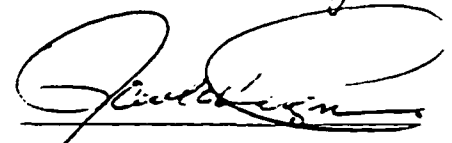
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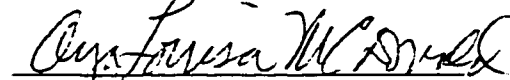
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ABSTRACT

The Philosophical and Historical Dynamics of Watsuji Tetsurō's Cultural Phenomenology

by

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This study will examine one of the greatest modern Japanese philosophers, Watsuji Tetsurō. In a long and prodigious life Watsuji produced some of the most insightful works now extant in ethics, cultural identity, and intellectual history. This work will explicate two pillars of Watsuji's philosophy: the source of authentic Japanese identity and the primacy of human relationships within that authenticity. This study will also uncover the conjunctures between history and thought that sparked the developments and transformations in Watsuji's philosophy. More importantly, it will attempt to free Watsuji's theories from teleological approaches that have utilized the war, erroneously conflating Watsuji's politics with his philosophy, as the ultimate trajectory for any analyses, and will endeavor to free Watsuji's thought from Westerncentric normative judgments and subsequent approaches.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On March 7, 1945, Watsuji Tetsurō (和辻哲朗), 1889-1960, and a small group of like-minded individuals met in a Shinjuku restaurant to “reink the modern age.” The group was forced to move the location for their weekly meetings several times due to continued bombings by Allied Forces. A wide variety of topics were discussed including the works of Machiavelli and Shakespeare. These discussions were instrumental in formulating the theories behind Watsuji’s postwar work, *Sakoku: Nihon no Higeiki* 鎖国日本の悲劇 [*National Seclusion: Japan’s Tragedy*, 1950].

The basic argument that arose out of this work was that, as the title implies, Japan’s tragedy was to close itself off from the outside world during the Tokugawa era (1600-1868). While there were positive results from this closing, in large part, Watsuji believed that it produced ill effects for Japan, which ultimately led to Japan’s entry into World War II.

Not only did *sakoku* (鎖国), the isolationist policy, retard the scientific spirit in Japan at a time when the West was making great advances in science and technology, but *sakoku* also had the effect, Watsuji believed, of allowing the development of “an unusually narrow fanaticism, based on intuition rather

than reason, which considered everything Japanese to be superior.”¹ Watsuji contended that where Japan had held exclusive faith in intuition, the West held exclusive faith in reason. What was needed, he argued, and essentially what never changed for Watsuji, was his belief in the efficacy of a balance between intuition and reason.

This change in terms of Japan’s seclusion was a major break with Watsuji’s earlier writings on the subject, which viewed modern science essentially as an inherently domineering negative force, and the closing of Japan as a necessary action in light of the West’s imperialistic aggression. Watsuji believed the reason for the war lay in the Japanese isolationist policy of the Tokugawa era and specifically the spirit of the military leaders of the time. Watsuji now believed that the lack of the scientific spirit, which ultimately led to war, was not an inherent shortcoming of the Japanese, but was the outcome of the suffocation of that spirit by the Tokugawa militarists. The final outcome of this suffocation was Japan’s entry and subsequent defeat in the war. In effect, Watsuji contended that a dominant ideology imposed by the military leaders was the source of Japan’s plunge into war. Militants essentially forced inauthentic ideas, chiefly an overemphasis on intuition, on the Japanese people and it was only a matter of time before there was a violent reaction, albeit not before their defeat in World War II.

In fact, after the war, as a member of the *Heiwa Mondai Danwakai* 平和問題談話会 (Discussion Group on Peace), Watsuji’s political

¹ Robert N. Bellah, Japan’s Cultural Identity: Some Reflections on the Work of Watsuji Tetsuro.” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24:4 (August 1965), 590.

metamorphosis continued. Watsuji viewed the “Cold War reverse course” instituted by SCAP as a return to the militarist problems of the 1930s, or at least the 1920s. Watsuji and several other members viewed the partial peace being negotiated by the U.S. and Japan as a danger to long-term peace in the region and elsewhere. They reasoned that by tying the Japanese economy exclusively to the U.S. and its allies they would become economically subservient to them. They believed that only through unfettered access to all markets could they hope to recover from their postwar economic devastation, which was to the intellectuals of this group and many of their countrymen, a necessary precursor to non-alignment and the eventual attainment of world peace. After all, they contended, economic hardships in prewar Japan, as in prewar Germany, were major causes for their ultimate entry into war and their ultimate downfall. Although the members naturally differed in their respective ideas and the exact methods to achieve them, all were adamant that Japan must not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Watsuji and a few *Heiwa Mondai Danwakai* members finally acquiesced to a partial peace believing that it would eventually lead the way to a comprehensive and non-aligned peace. However, they never lost sight of their ultimate goal for Japan to become, as even General Douglas MacArthur first envisioned, the “Switzerland of Asia.” Since the postwar era this shift by Watsuji has been seen as a revolutionary transformation by the philosopher and as a marked departure from his prewar writings. In effect, Watsuji transformed this one aspect of his philosophy from a belief that *sakoku* was necessary to a

belief that *sakoku* became a national tragedy and that Japan should strive in the future to be one of the most open countries in the world.

However, the problem that has arisen is that this net accusation of change and philosophical reversal has been cast over all of Watsuji's writings, whether or not they were alleged to have been "involved" in wartime rhetoric or ideology, or whether they were pertinent to this one aspect of Watsuji's philosophy.

Even such reputable scholars as Tetsuo Najita and H.D. Harootunian have unjustly made this "logical" jump. In the *Cambridge History of Japan*, a multivolume set highly respected in the academic community and well read by future Japan specialists, they write: "In prewar Japan, no group helped defend the state more consistently and enthusiastically than did the philosophers of the Kyoto faction, and none came closer than they did to defining the philosophic contours of Japanese fascism."² This turns out to be an umbrella statement for not only actual members of the Kyoto School, which many erroneously believe to be a single-minded monolithic entity, but it also envelops peripheral "members" such as Watsuji. In light of the atrocities carried out by actual fascists and ultranationalists, such designations must naturally be used with great care.

Even more recently, Peter Dale, in *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, attempts to diminish Watsuji's work by stating that he simply "copied" work

²Tetsuo Najita and H. D. Harootunian, "Japanese Revolt Against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Japan: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Duus, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 741.

done in other countries. In the case of subject/object nonduality Dale follows the trail back to its implied “origin” in Germany.

Indeed we might argue that the ideological tradition of 1909-11 which identifies the kernel of Japaneseness in the unity of subject and object (itself heavily indebted to German sources) was mediated to the postwar generation through the extensive reformulations of scholars who immersed themselves in German thought during the twenties and thirties.³

In Robert C. Marshall’s review of Dale’s book he pinpoints Dale’s agenda pointedly when he writes that Dale makes his own assertions “through a rhetoric of searing invective, which hides his own project of epistemological imperialism.”⁴ What is even more troubling and relevant for this paper is that Dale continues his attacks by comparing Watsuji’s most important work on the theory of the foundation of societal relationships with fascist doctrine.

[W]e cannot but remark the cunning recreation as a distinctive Japanese ethical structure of what was, contemporaneously in Europe, known as a fascist doctrine according to which. “Immanent in the concept of the individual is the concept of society”. The irony is unrecognised.⁵

Perhaps indicative of the intellectual agendas of such critics, Dale’s ultimate goal in his work, as the title suggests, is to prove that Japan is not a unique country. Certainly with regards to the origins of subject/object nonduality, Dale seems to have forgotten the German antecedents in Asian philosophy. In Sanskrit the terms *nirvikalpa* (without thought construction) and *savikalpa* (with thought construction) designate the epistemological

³Peter Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*. (New York, 1986), 215.

⁴Robert C. Marshall, Review of “The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness,” in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, , 267.

⁵ Ibid., 218.

dimension of the terms. There are of course other dimensions, namely nonduality of action and nonduality of perception.⁶ But again this approach would lead us to the same “cultural particularism” that Dale himself is guilty.

In the case of Japan’s uniqueness, Dale’s critics agree with his basic position that all countries are unique, but continue that among all the “unique nations” in the world Japan is “uniquely unique.” There is, of course, no simply answer. The debate defies simply binary “Yes” or “No” answers. Perhaps both camps are correct in insisting that they are right. Both camps, however, are certainly wrong if they insist that their generalizations are true of all aspects of Japanese culture. We should endeavor to refrain from excessive oversimplifications and make serious efforts to understand the world for what it is—a complex human creation.⁷ Undoubtedly, this tendency towards oversimplification, specifically conflating Watsuji’s politics, which he later changed, with his philosophical foundations, is at the heart of postwar blanket denunciations of Watsuji’s work.

In 1925, the Japan Principle Society (原理日本社), an organization that can rightly be called ultranationalistic, in fact denounced Watsuji and others as “being pro-democratic, liberal, and pro-individualists and thus dangerous in the

⁶ The concepts were explicated in one of the oldest Hindu texts, the *Vedānta-Sūtra*, also known as the *Brahma-Sūtra*, which dates back to the period from 400 B.C.E. to 100 C.E. The Indologist Max Müller believed it to be older than the *Bhagavad-Gita* itself.

⁷ However, perhaps it is ironic that such an approach—avoiding a definitive answer—itself is seen by many as a uniquely Japanese way of answering the question.

eyes of the ultranationalists.”⁸ Whether or not Watsuji’s formulations in the prewar period can justifiably be labeled as liberal in its present accepted interpretation is open to debate by virtue of his theory of social interaction ontologically defining an individual. Nonetheless, he was labeled an enemy of the state. Later during the war with China, the nationalists attacked the studies of Tsuda Sokichi (津田左右吉), 1873-1961, in ancient history. Tsuda attempted to liberate the sacred books of Japan, the *Kojiki* 古事記 [*Record of Ancient Matters*], and the *Nihonshoki* 日本書紀 [*Chronicles of Japan*], from their dogmatic interpretations that were supported by the state, which at that time was controlled by the military. In 1940, Tsuda’s works were banned and he was forced to retire from teaching. During the court trial that ensued, Watsuji defended Tsuda’s scholarship and his right to express his beliefs. This of course cemented the view by the military and other ultranationalists that Watsuji was indeed a true enemy of the state.

If one was to simply accept such denunciations of Watsuji at face value, which unfortunately with the weight of the *Cambridge History* series many young students do, one would not bother to investigate objectively the many contributions of Watsuji that were not only relevant when they were written but are just as relevant and beneficial today in a world far more complex. What makes this grouping so prevalent when it comes to Japanese philosophers and their historical context is that it is easier to assign blanket culpability than

⁸James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds. *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 119-120.

to disentangle philosophical and intellectual complexities and ambivalences. With this state of affairs in mind, this work will attempt to separate Watsuji's philosophies that should have never been grouped together in any postwar denunciations and explicate them on their own terms. However, considering the immense number of works and ideas advanced by Watsuji, this work will be limited to the foundations which permeate almost all his other philosophical renderings.

Yet at the same time, it is important to understand some of the pertinent contexts within which Watsuji developed his ideas. Thus before we analyze Watsuji's work, it is helpful to get a feel for the times and especially the history of philosophy in Japan. We must remember that philosophy, as it is practiced in the West, has had a long and rich legacy in that region and has thus facilitated a different level and realm of discourse than in Japan, where it has only recently been "imported." It is a true testament to Japanese philosophers that they were able to achieve and contribute so much to the level of international philosophical discourse after only a short exposure. Yet, with the postwar denunciations explicated above not only of Watsuji but many other Japanese philosophers, the full extent of those contributions has yet to be recognized or appreciated. However, the lack of appreciation is not limited to the West. Many students in Japan lament the reluctance of Japanese universities, for political or other reasons, to teach courses on Japanese philosophy, especially those philosophies advanced during the prewar era.

Philosophy and Japan

In contrast to the Meiji era (明治時代), 1868-1912, the Taishō era (大正時代), 1912-1926, within which Watsuji accomplished most of his representative formulations, was from the standpoint of intellectual history, marked by a relative atmosphere of stability, at least in the realm of importation. The tumultuous wholesale adoption of Western structures, ideas and products had begun to subside, and the Japanese began to assimilate what they adopted. To Japan's credit this process of philosophical and institutional syncretism had been successfully accomplished in most of Japan's history. The crucial and deciding factors that made this case new was the relative speed and amount of changes that were required. Yet in a sense it was now a matter of sitting back and taking stock in all that had happened in the previous half century. Concepts such as individual rights, freedom, and democracy, which had heretofore been only abstract concepts, were now beginning to be tangibly felt by the masses.⁹

⁹ However, concerning democracy and all its corollaries, there are differing views of this history. Stephen S. Large contends that these concepts, specifically liberal and proletarian democracy had only penetrated superficially into the Japanese psyche. "...[M]ost of them [democratic organizations] were not ideological enough in pursuing pragmatic policies...[thus]they demonstrated that liberal organizations without truly liberal ideals and socialist organizations without progressive socialist ideals were little better than no liberalism and no socialism at all." Stephen S. Large, "The Patterns of Taishō Democracy," in *Japan Examined*, eds. Harry Wray and Hilary Conroy (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), 180. David A. Titus disagrees with Large's assessment. Titus argues that democracy is indeed a difficult concept to implement while staring down the barrel of a gun. However, where liberal democracy ultimately failed in the prewar era because of the gun, it ultimately succeeded in the postwar era by that very same gun. Francis Fukuyama writes, "Japan's democratization was accomplished at the point of a

Not only did the importation of Western-style philosophy pose theoretical problems for the Japanese, but so did the more practical issues pose problems for Japan when faced with centuries old indigenous concepts and institutions. Tanizaki Junichiro (谷崎純一郎), 1886-1965, one of the most famous of Japanese novelists and social critics, often wrote about the difficulties inherent in East-West cultural exchanges. In one of his most eloquent essays, *In Praise of Shadows*, Tanizaki described the unnaturalness of modern Western architecture in a traditional Japanese space.

What incredible pains the fancier of traditional architecture must take when he sets out to build a house in pure Japanese style, striving somehow to make electric wires, gas pipes, and water lines harmonize with the austerity of Japanese rooms—even someone who has never built a house for himself must sense this when he visits a teahouse, a restaurant, or an inn. For the solitary eccentric it is another matter, he can ignore the blessings of scientific civilization and retreat to some forsaken corner of the countryside; but a man who has a family and lives in the city cannot turn his back on the necessities of modern life—heating, electric lights, sanitary facilities—merely for the sake of doing things the Japanese way.¹⁰

Nowhere was the physical landscape of Japan altered so much then in the building of railroads across Japan. Not only was the modern train an aesthetic abomination, it was also a harbinger of a material revolution that beget a loneliness described eloquently in Natsume Sōseki's (夏目漱石), 1867-

gun, so to speak, but the result proved durable long past the point where democracy could be said to have been imposed coercively." Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History and The Last Man*. (New York: Free Press, 1992). 110.

¹⁰ Tanizaki Junichirō. *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1977). 1. This problem of modernity was of course not limited to Japan. In 1922, the poet T.S. Eliot attempted to illustrate the incomprehensibility of the modern condition by writing a poem that was perhaps equally incomprehensible. *The Waste Land*.

1916, most famous work, *Kokoro* 心 (1967). Ironically, Natsume writes that loneliness reaches its most profound depth when man is surrounded by others. In a vehicle that is meant to bring people together the opposite more often occurs.

I was already a misanthrope when I left home for the last time. That people could not be trusted must already have become a conviction deeply rooted in my system. It was then that I began to think of my uncle, my aunt, and all the other relatives whom I had come to have as typical of the entire human race. On the Tokyo-bound train, I found myself watching suspiciously my fellow passengers. And when anyone spoke to me, I became even more suspicious. My heart was heavy. I felt as though I had swallowed lead.¹¹

When the Japanese people of this era began to take a breath and reevaluate what they had accomplished, which many scholars even today believe was the most profound and the quickest transformation of any society in the history of the world, they realized that on some issues they had gone down the wrong road. One of those roads was of course their adoption of all that was Western at the expense of their own indigenous traditions. This sublimation of “things Japanese” was not always done for reasons of unsuitability or incorrectness of “things Japanese” as compared to imported Western concepts or structures, but were thrown to the side almost solely because they were “indigenous” to Japan, or at least had come to be seen as such.

This did not necessarily imply that all that was Western was necessarily inappropriate for Japan or Asia in general. For example, Spencerian social

¹¹ Natsume Sōseki (夏目漱石), *Kokoro* (心), trans. Edwin McClellan, (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, Inc., 1957), 149.

evolutionary theory not only explained to some the domination of the West, but it was also used to justify the difference of the East. Herbert Spencer's (1820-1903) "survival of the fittest" concept provided the notion that a country can take a different path from Europe as long as that path proved to be a successful adaptation to the particular environment. Within this framework, the West was not necessarily completely superior to the East; it was simply more efficient within its own unique environment. Similarly, Watsuji utilized the Western method of hermeneutics, but not necessarily the Western interpretation of the results of such a method. These and other methodologies were usually welcome in Japan but not always the "accepted" or "self-evident" conclusions.

The reaction to the reincorporation of "things Japanese" was as multifaceted as the reaction to the incorporation of things foreign. In the Meiji era, the pendulum¹² had indeed swung far too much. Some radical social critics of the time went so far as to encourage intermarriage with foreigners, especially Westerners, to ameliorate the Japanese stock. Another suggested that the English language be adopted and the Japanese language be discarded.¹³ Such

¹² The pendulum analogy is often used in this type of analysis, but it is important for the correct understanding of this state of affairs to think of this "pendulum" in a three-dimensional sense. History does not simply sway back and forth along the same line, but is multi-linear. A "return" may be a move back, but it is usually a move back to a completely new point, however it may resemble an earlier era, or more often, how we want it to resemble an earlier era.

¹³ Kita Ikki (北一輝), in his 1919 work *Nihon kokka kaizō hōan* 日本改造法案大綱 [An Outline Plan for the Reorganization of the Japanese State], encouraged his fellow compatriots to adopt the international language of Esperanto. In order to alleviate partiality towards a particular nation or culture, he believed such a "transcendental" language would serve perfectly as Japan's official second language.

rantings, while admittedly at the extreme end of the spectrum, were symptomatic of the times. The pendulum needed to return to a balanced position. Unfortunately, this was not to happen for quite some time. The problem again arose when overcompensation and the human proclivity to “join in” showed itself and the pendulum again began to swing too far to the opposite side. This overcompensation and piling-on mentality, what Nietzsche characterized as the herd-mentality, was a deciding factor in the ushering in of the ultra-nationalism that eventually led to war.

Also during the Taishō era a new phenomena arose in Japan, one that has historically followed the advent of modernization, an educated middle class. The existence of this new educated and dynamic class was a necessary prerequisite and thus partly responsible for the level of discourse utilized by Watsuji and many other philosophers and social critics. There was a marked increase in educated urban dwellers, professional men, executives, writers and entertainers. These new classes expanded and blurred the lines of the now far removed Confucian classes of the Tokugawa period (1600-1868). Moreover, those same new “modern individuals” participated and enjoyed all that was brought to fruition in the new Taishō culture.

The education of the masses was one of the new variables that defined the Taishō era. Between 1900 and 1925, the number of universities, high schools and professional schools rose sharply. The relation between power and discourse was undergoing a fundamental change. No longer was the intellectual agenda of the country set by elitist intellectuals. With increased

accessibility to knowledge and increased ability to speak their minds, the public was able to move the dialogue of the nation in a more varied direction. The education of the masses also ushered in a feeling of equality among the people even though actual equality had yet to be achieved. Ronald Dore points out that "...bows and respect language did not come too easily to the tenant who had been top of his class at the primary school while the landlord occupied only a middling place."¹⁴

Of course, the traditional elitist powers that existed still attempted to mold the public as they saw fit. Early twentieth-century Japanese elementary textbooks were still produced and the actual content strictly dictated by governmental editorial boards. However, once students left the classroom they were bombarded by a plethora of sources from Western philosophy and psychology to science fiction and detective stories. And it was exactly this "new breed" of Japanese that Watsuji and others like him were writing for in the hopes of bringing balance back to the Japanese nation.

Watsuji was certainly not unique in his call for a "return to Japan" (*nihon e no kaiki*, 日本への回帰). There are four distinctive "return to Japan" periods in its modern history. The first occurred in the 1880s to 1890s as a reaction to the systematic Westernization and Enlightenment movements of the 1870s. Kuga Katsunan (陸羯南), 1857-1907. Miyake Setsurei (三宅雪嶺), 1860-1945. Shiga Shigetaka (志賀重昂), 1863-1927, and Takayama Chōgyū

¹⁴ Ronald Dore, *Land Reform in Japan*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 54.

(高山樗牛).¹⁵ 1871-1902, are the most famous and representative individuals from this period. Kuga, for example, often attacked the belief that *bunmei kaika* (civilization and enlightenment, 文明開化) values were universal. He argued that liberals failed to understand the true meaning of history. The nation-state, for Kuga, produced the framework within which any effective and enduring Japanese reform must take place. He believed that *bunmei kaika* proponents “failed to grasp the historic, that is to say, organic, relationship between the nation and the individual.”¹⁶

Takayama Chōgyū, on the other hand, changed his views concerning the state several times in his life. At first, he called for unity among the people, but then, under the influence of the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), advocated that the unique individual, the Nietzschean *Übermensch*,¹⁷ should be free from all restraints. Later, his inner conflict between the *Übermensch* and statism was resolved under the tenants of

¹⁵ He is also known as Takayama Rinjirō (高山林次郎). In terms of the state's position in the Japanese polity, Takayama believed that the state was simply the “Mittelzweck,” the means, and not the final goal, the “Endzweck.” Under the influence of Nietzsche's individualism and his own love of literature, Takayama later translated Goethe's *The Sorrow of Young Werther*.

¹⁶ Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 97.

¹⁷ Unfortunately, this is another untranslatable concepts. Kurt Rudolf Fischer insightfully insists that “[w]e undercut Nietzsche if we wish to determine what the “Übermensch” is. Because I think it is part of the determination of the “Übermensch” not to be determined—that we shall have to experiment, that we shall have to create. Nietzsche puts emphasis on the creativity of man and therefore we should accentuate that the conception of the “Übermensch” is necessarily not determined. We cannot ask whether an author has confused the issue, or has presented us with a dangerous alternative.” Quoted in Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 8.

Nichiren Buddhism (日蓮宗), and specifically the founder of the sect. Nichiren (日蓮), 1222-1282, who searched for truth through the state.¹⁸

The second movement occurred in the late 1920s and 1930s as a reaction to the cosmopolitanism, liberalism, and democratic mood of the preceding two decades. This wave was embodied in the life and works of Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多郎), 1870-1945, Suzuki Teitarō Daisetsu (D.T.) (鈴木貞太郎大拙), 1870-1966, and the subject of this study, Watsuji Tetsurō.

The third “return to Japan” wave occurred in the 1950s and 1960s as a reaction to the internationalization and specifically the Americanization of postwar Japan. This period is represented by the works of Kuwahara Takeo (桑原武夫), 1904-1988, Takeyama Michio (竹山道男), born 1903, and Hayashi Fusao (林房雄), 1903-1975, who was a member of the school of contemporary aestheticians referred to as the *Nihon romanha* (Japan Romantic School, 日本ロマン派).¹⁹ Hayashi asserted that the Pacific War with the United States was the culmination of a century of struggle that began with the imperialistic actions of Commodore Matthew Perry’s “opening” of Japan in 1854. Hayashi also rejected the Western rational description of history and especially the meta-narrative of material progress. Hayashi and his compatriots saw such

¹⁸ In Nichiren’s case, he attempted to convert Japanese rulers to exclusive faith in the Lotus Sutra (*rengekei*, 蓮華經), which he believed to be the only true and efficacious teaching for Japan. He was later exiled for these acts and beliefs.

¹⁹ Other members include: Yasuda Yojūrō (安田與重郎), 1910-81, Kamei Katsuichirō (亀井勝一郎), 1907-66, and for brief periods, Dazai Osamu (太宰治), 1909-48, and Mishima Yukio (三島由紀夫), 1925-70.

rational descriptions as simply another instance of the West's cultural imperialism.

The fourth and final wave of this phenomenon began in the 1980s with the publication of Ishihara Shintarō (石原慎太郎), and Sony chairman Morita Akio's (盛田昭夫) 1989 work *The Japan That Can Say No*.²⁰ (*Nō to ieru Nihon*, ノーと言える日本). Ishihara and Morita declared that Japan had the right as a world power to reassert its sovereignty that they believed it had all but ceded after World War II, especially in the guise of the Mutual Security Treaty of 1951.

Even though there has indeed been many "return to Japan" movements in Japan's modern history, or for that matter its ancient history as well, most scholars agree that the most dynamic and interesting was the era of the 1920s and 1930s, not only because of the historical context in terms of the war, but recently there has been a growing appreciation of the sheer volume and the breadth of those contributions. Although an appreciation of the philosophical dimensions has been late in coming, Japanese writers have not suffered the same fate.

Shiga Naoya (志賀直哉), 1883-1971, brought about a transformation in Japanese literature through the reorientation of the subjective to a more

²⁰ The contentions made in this book were so controversial that other unauthorized English translations were produced almost immediately after the publication of the original in order to satisfy the foreign community. Morita was amazed at the sensation of the book in the United States. He had assumed that it would only be read in Japan, but after the book was also pirated by the Pentagon for internal distribution and read into the Congressional record, Morita all but disowned his part in the book.

egalitarian basis. This was a new concept in a country that for over two centuries had considered the only valid power base that of the samurai class. All these new avenues of discourse and intellectual ferment were necessary if intellectual elites, such as Watsuji, intended to direct the paradigms of the future.

Natsume Sōseki (夏目漱石), 1867-1916, was also instrumental in reflecting and possibly affecting this marked change. While Watsuji was at Tokyo University, he often stood outside Natsume's lecture hall and listened intently at all that was uttered by one of his heroes. In 1914, Natsume spoke out strongly "... about the need to maintain a spirit of 'individualism' vis-à-vis the state. As a novelist, he was a masterful delineator of how difficult it was to maintain one's balance and integrity in a nation that was inexorably undergoing frenetic change."²¹ However, as we shall soon see, individual in this context and in Watsuji's own formulations did not imply predominately ego-centered individualism, but instead a balance between the individual and the community.

Natsume also believed the passing of the previous era was an important landmark in Japanese history. He became the voice of the generation when he lamented the passing of an era at the time of the Meiji Emperor's death in 1912. Natsume, and many of his countrymen, saw the Emperor's passing as a symbol of the passing of what Japan was. The Meiji era became the bridge between the old Japan and the new "Westernized" Japan. Natsume wrote, "On

²¹ John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 189.

the night of the Imperial Funeral I sat in my study and listened to the booming of the cannon. To me, it sounded like the last lament for the passing of an age.”²² Many in Japan attempted to rebuild this bridge in order to reacquaint the Japanese with their past. Watsuji, of course, utilized philosophy as his chosen method to achieve his many goals and that is where we shall turn now.

Introduction of “Western” Philosophy to Japan

Again, we must always keep in mind that whereas European philosophers had at their fingertips thousands of years of familiar philosophical and logical texts and concepts, Japanese philosophers had only decades by which to measure their familiarity with philosophy, at least of course, as it is practiced in the Western sense.

The first question to ask is what exactly is the difference between “Western philosophy” (*tetsugaku*, 哲学), and “Eastern thought.” (*shisō*, 思想). For an excellent exposition on this difference we need only to turn to the person most scholars call the “father of Japanese philosophy,” Nishi Amane.

Philosophy in the Orient is called Confucianism; the originators of Confucianism were Confucius and Mencius. Confucian scholars since the time of Confucius and Mencius have continued

²² Natsume, *Kokoro*, 246. Although this is a quote from Natsume that may indeed be overused, it is still poignant nonetheless. After World War II, the same feeling was expressed by Osaragi Jirō (大佛次郎), 1897-1973, through the central character of his novel *Homecoming* (帰郷), translated by Brewster Horwitz, Kyogo, “He didn’t mean to let anything bind him, but something like a mist or an ether was stealing into his heart insensibly and satisfying his longing for the old Japan. It hadn’t been a bad country. But it was ended now. That made him sad. He felt sorry for the young savages who were growing up in these postwar days, ignorant even of what had been good in the past.” (New York: Knopf, 1954), 215.

to preserve the teachings of these men without change. However, while scholars in the West are the heirs of an ancient intellectual continuum, with each new discovery they have been active in attacking the theories of previous writers. Therefore philosophy has gradually developed and been made over.²³

Nishi continues rather straightforwardly and writes. "What prevents the Chinese Confucianists from attaining preeminence is the phrase 'attachment to antiquity.' Once the finger is put on the sore spot, they will become enlightened and equal the West."²⁴ Thus the defining difference between "philosophy" and "thought" for Nishi is the "Eastern" trait of holding on to traditional authority and structures which are continually put to the test and disposed of as seen fit by "Western-style philosophers."

There is an alternative definition of this difference that is also pertinent to the present study. Many believe that the true heart of the difference between Western philosophy and Eastern thought is the emphasis put on transformation, a pivotal point in Watsuji's hermeneutics. Western philosophy is perceived as more "analytical or theoretical" and in effect is essentially preoccupied with "purely conceptual matters." Eastern thought, and for that matter modern Japanese philosophy, which has retained at least this one attribute, on the other hand is regarded as transformative or predominantly concerned with how its principles can be realized in everyday human existence. To put it simply, the Eastern method implies that philosophy must be lived, not just debated. This

²³ Nishi Amane (西周), *Hyakugaku renkan* 百学连环 in *Nishi Amane zenshu* 西周全集 [The Collected Writings of Nishi Amane] quoted in Thomas Havens, *Nishi Amane and Modern Japanese Thought*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), 108.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

would partially explain the reason behind Japanese philosophers' affinities for the "this-worldly" strains of Western philosophy, e.g., the pragmatism of William James (1842-1910), the utilitarian philosophy of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and, of course, one of the main topics of this study, the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). The question thus arises as to exactly how the Eastern approach attempts to accomplish such a transformation. This question, specifically with regard to Watsuji Tetsurō, will also be one of the focuses of this study.

As previously mentioned, in the first two decades of the Meiji period 明治時代 (1868-1912) most Japanese believed that along with a great many material changes that had to be accomplished the intellectual underpinnings of the nation, its Eastern thought, had also to be reformed or set aside as needed.

Since the beginnings of the Tokugawa period (徳川時代), 1600-1868, Confucianism (儒教), specifically Shushi Confucianism (朱子学), an adaptation of the teachings of the Song Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130-1200) and other prominent Chinese scholars, served the purpose of intellectually uniting Japanese society.²⁵ This heritage was attacked by many Meiji reformers but none as famous as Fukuzawa Yuikichi 福沢諭吉 (1834-1901).

²⁵ Before this time, Buddhist doctrine united the country, but due to many abuses, both political and sociological, Buddhism was consciously supplanted by the Tokugawa *bakufu* for neo-Confucianism. However this "conversion" to Zhu Xi orthodoxy did not take place immediately. In 1790, almost two centuries after the establishment of the Tokugawa *bakufu*, all other schools of Confucianism were purged under the recommendation of the *bakufu* senior councilor Matsudaira Sadanobu (松平定信), 1759-1829, under the umbrella of the Kansei Reforms (寛政の改革) of 1787 to 1793.

It is not only that I hold little regard for the Chinese teaching, but I have even been endeavoring to drive its degenerate influences from my country....

The true reason of my opposing the Chinese teaching with such vigor is my belief that in this age of transition, if this retrogressive doctrine remains at all in our young men's minds, the new civilization cannot give its full benefit to this country. In my determination to save our coming generation, I was prepared even to face single-handed the Chinese scholars of the country as a whole.²⁶

Recent scholarship however suggests that the Tokugawa period was in fact beneficial on many fronts in ushering in Japan's modern period. Thomas Havens states, "...it is now commonly accepted that the Tokugawa experience, far from retarding subsequent modernization, was an essential cornerstone for the Meiji Reforms."²⁷

However, John W. Hall reminds us in his work, *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan*, that any seeds of modernity planted in the Tokugawa period came about not because of the Tokugawa order, but in spite of it. The historian and political scientist Maruyama Masao (丸山真男) also sees the roots of any modernization, up to and including individualism, taking place outside the norms set forth by the Tokugawa government.²⁸ Whatever the legacy of the Tokugawa period, if there was one at all, most scholars agree that modern Japan began in the Meiji period.²⁹

²⁶ Fukuzawa Yukichi. *The Autobiography of Yukichi Fukuzawa*, trans. Eiichi Kiyooka (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 216.

²⁷ Havens, *Nishi Amane*, 7.

²⁸ Maruyama writes, "During the last years of the Tokugawa period, there were certainly some enlightenment thinkers who insisted on the value of individualism. We can consider the *radicalism* of the lower *ex-samurai* in terms of the *reaction* formula of the *uprooted*, atomized intellectual."²⁸ (Italics mine) Maruyama Masao, "Patterns of Individuation and the Case of Japan: A

Now that we have defined what philosophy is vis-à-vis thought, we must now trace its steps into Japan. This turns out to be an illuminating process in the understanding of Japan at the time. As stated earlier, the collapse of the Tokugawa government also ushered in a collapse of its ethical rationale, Shushi Confucianism, that gave great importance to *jindō* ("way of mankind," 人道). Furthermore, in the early years of the Meiji era Buddhism also was attacked from various directions. This led to a vacuum in Japanese society, more importantly, an ethical vacuum. As can be expected many were worried about this ethical free-for-all but at the same time many others accepted it with open arms as an opportunity to reshape Japan into an intellectually modern nation. Of course, before a balance between indigenous beliefs and foreign ideas could be achieved, or for that matter recognized as needed, Japanese intellectuals first had to begin to understand these new foreign ideas.

Funayama Shin'ichi (船山信一), author of *Hēguru Tetsugaku to Nishida Tetsugaku* ヘーゲル哲学と西田哲学 [*Hegel's Philosophy and Nishida's Philosophy*, 1984], dates the formal introduction of Western philosophy to Japan in 1862, one year after the arrival of Perry's blackships and six years

Conceptual Scheme." *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, ed. Marius Jansen, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 505.

²⁹ Of course, these same scholars never tire in their attempt to define modernity and the exact date in the Meiji era of the Japanese plunge into modernity. What started as another interesting yet rather ordinary conference on Asian Studies in Hakone, Japan, in 1960 soon turned into a divided, contentious and lively debate. Not many anticipated such a volatile conference on what many assumed to be a foregone conclusion, the meaning and periodization of modernization in Japan. The participants in this conference included, among others, Marius B. Jansen, John Whitney Hall, Maruyama Masao, and Edwin O. Reischauer.

before the Meiji Restoration. Funayama chose this date because it was during that year that Nishi Amane and Masamichi Tsuda traveled to Holland and brought back works by Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill.³⁰ Similar to later intellectual introductions from abroad, Japanese scholars concentrated almost exclusively on exegesis and commentary on the new philosophical imports. However, soon they realized that this was not enough. Arisaka Yoko states, "...as thinkers became more aware of the fruitful tension between 'Western rationality' and 'traditional values' in Japanese culture, they felt the need to establish a philosophy which reflected both the modern mode of thinking and their own spirit."³¹ One of the first to attempt this Herculean task was Nishi Amane.

Nishi Amane: The "Father of Japanese Philosophy"

Nishi Amane (西周), 1829-1897, is widely considered to be the "father of Japanese philosophy." This designation does not stem from his breakthrough theoretical philosophy but from his foundational work in establishing the "language," that is, not only words and phrases, but even the approaches of philosophy in Japan.

³⁰ Several different works by these authors were brought back to Japan in this period. Also, works by Cousin, Montesquieu, and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* were introduced, as well as Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, and several books from Jules Verne, including *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

³¹ Yoko Arisaka, "Space and History: Philosophy and Imperialism in Nishida and Watsuji," (doctoral dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1996), 4.

The Nishi family was one of the few families allowed by the isolationist Tokugawa government to have access to foreign books and knowledge. In Nagasaki (長崎), members of the family became translators, probably of Dutch, in the first part of the eighteenth-century. With this access, many in the Nishi family became physicians for the rich and powerful. Nishi Amane was the son of one of these members in what is now called Shimane Prefecture (島根県), made up of the old provinces of Izumo (出雲), Iwami (石見), and Oki (隠岐). Despite this remarkable access by his family, there is no evidence that Nishi Amane's early education included Western studies. However, through his grandfather and later his own studies of the Confucian scholar Ogyū Sorai (荻生徂来), 1666-1728, Nishi began to be deeply affected by various forms of Japanese intellectual thought.

Quite by accident, Nishi was on hand when Perry's ship sailed into Uraga Bay. The forced opening of Japan by American gunships soon overwhelmed the country both militarily and politically. At this time, Nishi had been appointed as a lecturer of Confucian subjects. When the foreign crisis arose, he was also commanded to study coastal defense techniques. His routine job of teaching Confucian subjects soon opened up the world of thought outside of Japan. In 1853-54, he decided to study Western learning full time. Nishi told his friends, "From now on, if I want to succeed in life and follow the right path, I cannot after all neglect Western learning....I shall give it my undivided attention."³²

³² Havens, *Nishi Amane*, 107.

Along with his major contributions to Japanese philosophy by way of introducing the positivism of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill, Nishi is most famous in the history of Japanese philosophy for the coining of terms and concepts used in philosophical discourse. In the case of the word philosophy, Nishi originally vacillated between a phonetic transcription *hirosphi* (ヒロソヒ) and *kitetsugaku* (希哲学), literally “the study of seeking clarity.” Nishi finally decided in his 1874 work *Hyakuichi Shinron* on the word (*tetsugaku*, 哲学) which meant simply “to study clarity.” Nishi also invented or gave new modern meanings to the Japanese words for subjectivity (*shukan*, 主観), objectivity (*kyakkan*, 客観), reasoning power (*risei*, 理性), reason or understanding (*gosei*, 悟性), reality (*jitsuzai*, 实在), phenomena (*genshō*, 現象), psychology (*shinrigaku*, 心理学), *a priori* (*senten*, 先天), and *a posteriori* (*kōten*, 後天).

Nishi took many of his clues from Chinese terminology for it was still the *lingua franca* of the scholarly class, yet as Havens points out “...Chinese was merely the medium of expression, not the temper of his thought.”³³ Nishi transformed the Chinese terms into metaphorical meanings. Havens continues that “...[t]his transition from literalism to nominalism signified the demise of the classical tradition, not any inhibition or compromise of Nishi’s basic commitment to the West.”³⁴

³³ Ibid., 107.

³⁴ Ibid., 107.

China had been after all a profound role model for Japan for over a millennium. After the opening of Japan, the government dispatched the Iwakura Mission in 1871 to survey the status of the outside world. After witnessing the advances of the West, they dropped anchor in a Chinese harbor only to see backwardness and despair arising from a powerless country in the face of Western exploitation. A few years before Nishi's death, Japan defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, effectively crushing Japan's hitherto respect and admiration of their once great neighbor.

In his later years Nishi began to mark time intellectually. Instead of advancing further, he concentrated on restating the themes of the *bunmei kaika* (civilization and enlightenment, 文明開化) era. However, from a man who spanned such a phenomenal period in Japanese history, from the traditional to the modern, this can well be expected. Certainly, this is not to say that his influence did not live on. But "[w]hereas most of the enlighteners became Spencerians, modern Confucianists, or nationalists after the first Meiji decade, Nishi remained a syncretist in a new age of specialists, still an apostle of *bunmei kaika* long after that concept had outlived its usefulness in Japan's intellectual world."³⁵ Nishi lit the torch, but now it was time to pass it on. Watsuji was certainly heir to Nishi's fortune, but so was another philosopher, whom many consider the greatest modern Japanese philosopher, Nishida Kitarō. Not only was Nishida Watsuji's philosophical compatriot, but they were also close friends. Thus no analysis of Japanese philosophy in the early

³⁵ Ibid., 221.

20th Century or Watsuji's contributions would be complete without a short introduction to Nishida's life and works.

Nishida Kitarō: The Dean of Japanese Philosophy

Although Nishi is considered the father of Japanese philosophy, the dean of modern Japanese philosophy is undeniably Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多郎), 1870-1945. As pointed out earlier Western-style philosophy had a very short history in Japan but it is remarkable, to both philosophers in Japan and around the world, how quickly intellectuals like Nishida and Watsuji devised unique and significant contributions to the field, although as this work shows these contributions have only recently been recognized.

Born in 1870, on the eve of the elimination of Tokugawa class

distinctions, Nishida was an influential philosopher until



Figure 1 Nishida
Kitarō

the end of the Second World War.³⁶ An elementary friend

of his, the popularizer of Zen in the West, Suzuki

Daisetsu, also known as D.T. Suzuki, perhaps is an

indication of Nishida's future role in life, as a synthesizer

of Eastern and Western philosophy. While teaching at the

Fourth Higher School in Kanazawa (金沢), mostly

German language courses, he began to write what became

his greatest work, *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 [*A Study of Good*, 1911]. Just as

³⁶ Although the Second World War has a direct translation in Japanese, (*Dainiji sekai taisen*, 第二次世界大戦, it is also known in Japan as the Fifteen-Year War, reflecting the fact that Japan was in effect mobilized for war from 1931 to 1945.

Watsuji later took his philosophical departure from Heidegger. Nishida began his philosophical discourse from the vision of “pure experience” as expounded by William James. Nishida’s “pure experience,” attained through his own experience with Zen and his studies of Western philosophy, specifically William James, is characterized as prior to all binary oppositions, such as subject and object. Although the exact formulation of his concept of “pure experience” changed throughout the years, it was still an important pillar in his total philosophy no matter how it was configured.

Another monumental work by Nishida that has connections to Watsuji’s theory of spatiality was Nishida’s “Basho,” written in article form and published in 1926. The importance of this concept according to A. Jacinto Zavala is that the fundamental concept of “*mu no basho*,” (無の場所) or “the *topos* of nothingness,” repossessed the dialectical language of Buddhism and became what was to from then on simply called “Nishida philosophy.”³⁷

Nishida taught at Kyoto University (京都大学) from 1910 until his retirement in 1928. Other works by Nishida include material that was influenced by his attempts at synthesizing other scholars into the Eastern tradition. *Jikaku ni okeru chokkan to hansei* 自覚に於ける直感と反省 [*Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*, 1917] was influenced by the work of the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and several Neo-Kantian philosophers. Nishida was indeed infinitely more mystical and religiously oriented in his philosophy than Watsuji. In fact, Yuasa Yasuo, a

³⁷ See Dilworth, et al., *Sourcebook*, 2.

student of Watsuji's, contends that "[w]hile Watsuji's sensitivity to art and culture was clearly of an exceptionally high order, it seems to me that he was a man largely incapable of understanding religion....In Watsuji's mind, religion was nothing more than a single aspect of ethnic culture."³⁸

A limited bibliography of Nishida's work will attest to his intellectual breadth. In 1927 he published *Hataruku mono kara miru mono* 働く者から見る者 [*From the Acting to the Seeing*], in 1930, *Ippansha no jikakuteki taikai* 一般者の自覚的体系 [*The Self-Conscious System of the Universal*], in 1932, *Mu no Jikakuteki gentei* 無の自覚的限定 [*The Self-Conscious Determination of Nothingness*], and in 1933-34, *Tetsugaku no kompon mondai* 哲学の根本問題 [*Fundamental Problems of Philosophy*] in two volumes.

Illustrative of Nishida's popularity, and equally illustrative of the hunger for knowledge that was reawakened in the Japanese people after years of militant repression during the war years, was that over two-hundred fans of Nishida's camped out in front of the Iwanami bookstore for three days after the war for a chance to purchase a new edition of the philosopher's collected writings.

As Japan's imminent philosopher, Nishida has been reevaluated in the postwar era to the point that even today he is a topic of positive discussion in philosophical circles, a situation that has yet to extend to Watsuji and other

³⁸ Yuasa Yasuo, Correspondence with Professor Carter, in Appendix: Correspondence with Yuasa Yasuo, in *Watsuji Tetsuro's Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*, trans. Yamamoto Scisaku and Robert E. Carter, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 312.

20th Century Japanese philosophers and intellectuals. But before that reevaluation began, the weapon of choice by critics of Japanese philosophers was to accuse them of being members of the infamous Kyoto School of philosophers. However, even this school has recently seen a revival of not only their reputation and contributions but also their relevancy today inside and outside of Japan.

The Kyoto School

Intellectual schools are, of course, endemic to philosophical discourse wherein like-minded individuals meet and work out problems from ostensibly similar perspectives. In Japan, the most famous of such schools was the Kyoto School. The definition of the “Kyoto School (京都学派),” as any demarcation of such a highly nebulous entity, is extremely difficult to pinpoint. Furthermore, in the case of this particular “school” the parameters have not only changed spatially but temporally as well. The name, Kyoto School, was first introduced polemically by the Marxist Tosaka Jun (戸坂潤), 1900-1945, in 1931. Tosaka attempted to delineate what he saw as a rightist tendency centering on the “leader” of this school, Nishida Kitarō. Furthermore, in the case of Watsuji, Tosaka believed he was especially dangerous in that he expressed “reactionary Japanism in ‘a la mode, modern, chic scholarly methods.’”³⁹

³⁹ Tosaka Jun 戸坂潤, *Nihon Iderogii-ron* 日本イデオロギー論 [*An Essay on Japanese Ideology*], (Tokyo: Hakuyōsha, 1935), quoted in Beiliah, 587.

A similarity to the issues involved in Heidegger's own wartime actions arises with respect to the Kyoto School. Later reevaluations of the accomplishments, especially political, of the Kyoto School was brought to the foreground through the example of Heidegger's own wartime affiliations. People began to reexamine philosophers and scholars who were hitherto assumed to be apolitical. The case of Heidegger's association with the German Nazi Party was soon superimposed on the members of the Kyoto School themselves. This new "objective" evaluation brought an extra variable to the history of the school. Although not all were happy about these new revelations of political affiliations, most historians were satisfied that the school could finally be correctly studied, warts and all.

The principle members of the Kyoto School (京都学派), along with Nishida, include Koyama Iwao (高山岩男), 1905- . Kōsaka Masaaki (高坂正顕), 1900-1969, Suzuki Shigetaka (鈴木成高), 1907- . and Nishitani Keiji (西谷啓治), 1900-1991. These philosophers were all students of Nishida and identified themselves with the philosophy faculty of Kyoto University. One of the group's main objectives was to bring Nishida's philosophy down to earth in order to justify or direct national policy. In this vein, the members produced a series of articles and books throughout the 1930s. Najita and Harootunian, quoted earlier, reflect the accepted view of this school that its central purpose was to justify Japanese aggression, imperialism and fascism.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of scholarship on the Kyoto School is filled with simplifications and generalizations of the scholars of that school. Certainly

these scholars, including Watsuji, need to be discussed more precisely and in relation to their times than summarily dismissed as rightists or fascists. An indication of the difficulty inherent in such reflexive judgments can be found in the contemporary reaction to the school's writings. During the Pacific War, Kyoto School members produced a number of texts, which had definite right-wing and nationalistic approaches. But as the historian Graham Parkes points out these writings were attacked by both sides for being either too rightist or not rightist enough⁴⁰ Nishitani Keiji summed up the problem well after the war when he remarked, "During the war we were struck on the cheek from the right; after the war we were struck on the cheek from the left."⁴¹

We must also understand the philosophies of the Kyoto School, and Watsuji, in light of the West's imperial expansion that by 1899 had reached the Philippines where perhaps anywhere from 55-75,000 combatants and non-combatants were killed in American concentration camps. Also in that same year, U.S. Secretary of State John Hay requested an Open Door policy in China effectively carving up the country for the Western powers. Russia, off the northern tip of Japan, was also moving troops closer to the Japanese archipelago. Much of the Japanese public believed they were being surrounded by a Western conspiracy.

⁴⁰ Graham Parkes, "The Putative Fascism of the Kyoto School and the Political Correctness of the Modern Academy," in *Philosophy East and West* 47:3 (July 1997), 3.

⁴¹ Quoted by Horio Tsutomu in "The *Chūōkōron* Discussions," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 291.

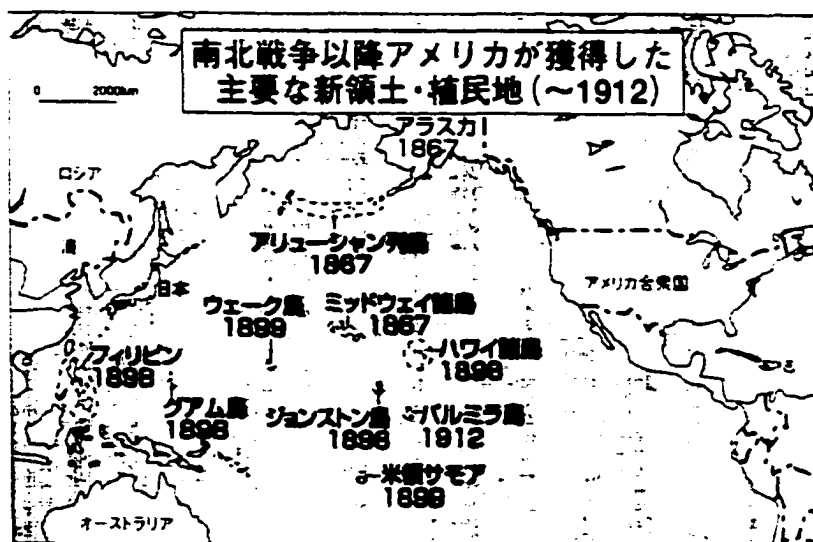


Figure 2 Locations of U.S. imperialistic activity from 1867 to 1912. (1867 Midway, 1898 Philippines, 1899 Hawaii) Many Japanese believed they were in effect being surrounded by the United States and other Western powers.

Certainly, fear of the West during this time is understandable, and perhaps so is the pride the Japanese felt in their accomplishments similarly understandable. However, as Horio Tsutomu points out perhaps "... Western imperialism means something different...in a country just released from the domination of a superpower and eager for self-assertion in the newest world order. If we are to think about such historical issues in terms of their potential for illuminating similar, contemporary problems—and this is surely the most fruitful way to think about them—we must nevertheless try to understand the earlier phenomena in their full historical context."⁴²

The importance of the Kyoto School for this study is the attempt by some to place Watsuji as a member of the school and with an illogical leap of guilt by association summarily condemn all of Watsuji's writings as reactionary. As stated earlier, the Kyoto School is extremely difficult to

⁴² Parkes, 7.

narrow down precisely. In addition, as such, there are instances where Kyoto School philosophies and ideas do indeed intersect with Watsuji's own. The similarities or differences between Watsuji and the Kyoto School philosophers depends on one's interpretation and perspective, and unfortunately one's agenda. However, we would indeed be justified in contending that the same motivations, not necessarily malicious ones, for example the pride in one's own country and culture, that spurred on the Kyoto School philosophers also motivated Watsuji. But before we judge such intersections, we first need to explicate Watsuji himself in order to have a full and accurate accounting.

CHAPTER 2

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY¹

Watsuji Tetsurō, the second son of a physician was born in 1889 (Meiji 22) in what is today part of Himeji (姫路), Hyōgo Prefecture (兵庫県) near Osaka (大阪). Watsuji received some of the best Western-style education available in Japan at the time. However, the early influence of his father in his



Figure 3 Watsuji in his school uniform.



Figure 4 Watsuji, front row 3rd from left, with his classmates.

later philosophy cannot be ignored. His father strongly adhered to Confucian

¹This study should in no way be considered a comprehensive biography of Watsuji's life. Yuasa Yasuo's (湯浅素雄) work is an excellent biography, although unfortunately it has yet to be translated into English

ethics, and instilled in Watsuji the importance of loyalty and devotion. Thus from early on Watsuji received a balanced education of Western and Japanese subjects.

In March 1906 (Meiji 39) he was admitted to the First Higher School in Tokyo (*Daiichi kōtō gakkō*, 第一高等学校). His classmates included the son of



Figure 5 Watsuji, back row middle, in high school.

the Japanese Minister to the

United States, Kuki Shūzō

(九鬼周造), 1888-1941.² later to

author such books as *Seiyō kinsei tetsugakushi kōgi*

西洋近世哲学史講義 [*Lectures on the History of Modern Western*

Philosophy], *Hōshi no ōin ni*

tsuite 奉詩の押韻について [*Concerning Rhyme in National Poetry*], and *Iki no kōzō* いきの構造 [*The Structure of "iki"*].³ which, like many of Watsuji's own works, attempted to detail the characteristics of Japanese culture before the modern era.

Watsuji's life is commonly broken down into four periods, a convention begun by Kōsaka Masaaki (高坂正顕) in his work, *Nishida Kitarō to Watsuji*

² Kuki later studied in Europe under the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) at the University of Freiburg. Kuki also visited Heidegger's home with his wife while studying in Europe.

³ This title is translated by Tetsuo Najita and H. D. Harootunian as, *The Structure of Tokugawa Aesthetic Style*. See "Japan's Revolt Against the West," in *Modern Japanese Thought*, ed. Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 233.

Tetsurō 西田幾多郎と和辻哲郎 [*Nishida Kitarō and Watsuji Tetsurō*]

published four years after the death of Watsuji. In the first period ending in 1915 when he was 26, Watsuji focused and produced works on three thinkers. Schopenhauer (1912), Nietzsche (1913), and Kierkegaard (1915). His Kierkegaard work entitled simply *Søren Kierkegaard*, written when he was just twenty-six years old, is credited with introducing Kierkegaard to the Japanese. Reflecting Kierkegaard's own struggle, Watsuji too attempted to construct an ideal self. In the preface to his work, Watsuji writes. "My intention is to struggle resolutely and construct a life for the self (*jiko no seikatsu*) [自己の生活]. My mind does not, rest night or day. I recognize in myself many ugly, weak and bad things. I must completely burn these up through self-discipline."⁴

Watsuji had intended to write his undergraduate thesis for the Faculty of Literature at Tokyo Imperial University (*Tōkyō Teikoku Daigaku Bunka Daigaku*, 東京帝国大学文科大学) on Nietzsche, but was not permitted to do so by his professors. The university philosophy faculty, specifically Inoue Tetsujirō (井上哲次郎), 1855-1944, did not approve of the poetic philosophy of Nietzsche, who had just been recently introduced to Japan a decade earlier by Takayama Chōgyū. In 1912, Watsuji submitted at the 11th hour his new thesis entitled *On Schopenhauer's Pessimism and Theory of Salvation* (ショーペンハウアーの厭と解脱論世主義) written in English for Professor

⁴ Quoted in Robert N. Bellah, "Japan's Cultural Identity: Some Reflections on the Work of Watsuji Tetsuro," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24:4 (August 1965), 586.

Raphael von Koeber (1848-1923). Watsuji's work on Nietzsche was later adapted and revised, and submitted as his graduate thesis and was also incorporated into his work *Guzo Saiko* 偶像再興 [*Revival of Idols*], 1918), written under the influence of Natsume Sōseki⁵ in which, reflecting Nietzsche, "...he attacked the modern bourgeois spirit and called for the revival of the cultural sensibilities of the Japanese past."⁶

Many fond accounts have been written concerning Professor Raphael von Koeber (1848-1923), including Watsuji's entitled simply *Keeberu Sensei* ケーベル先生 [*Professor Koeber*], and the authors Natsume Sōseki, and Abe Jirō (阿部次郎), 1883-1959. Other students of Koeber's include Hatano Seiichi (波多野精一), 1877-1950, Tanabe Hajime (田辺元),⁷ 1885-1962, and Watsuji's high school classmate Kuki Shūzō.



Figure 6 Raphael von Koeber

Raphael von Koeber, a Russian by birth of German and Swedish extraction, was born in present day Gorki in 1848. He studied music under Anton Grigorevich Rubinstein (1829-1894) at the Moscow Music

⁵ For an excellent and insightful analysis of Natsume's influence on Watsuji, see David Dilworth, "Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960): Cultural phenomenologist and ethicist," *Philosophy East and West*, 24:1 (Jan 1974), 7-11.

⁶ David Dilworth, "Watsuji Tetsurō," in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents*, eds. David A. Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo, with Agustin Jacinto Zavala (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 223-224.

⁷ Tanabe later went to Germany and studied under Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) at the University of Freiburg in 1922.

Conservatory. He used this training later in Japan, teaching piano at the Ueno School of Arts. Later he studied philosophy at the universities of Jena and Heidelberg. Like his future student, Watsuji, Koeber also completed a thesis on the subject of Schopenhauer. However, for all his academic achievements it was the man himself that most, including Watsuji, looked up to. He was an artistic type of sage-philosopher, who incarnated the almost mystical ideal of a tutor.⁸

In Watsuji's second period, from 1916 to 1926, he concentrated almost exclusively on cultural studies. During this period Watsuji lectured at Tōyō University (東洋大学)⁹ and Hōsei University (法政大学) until his departure for

Europe in 1926. Watsuji

published several works

covering cultural issues

during this time including

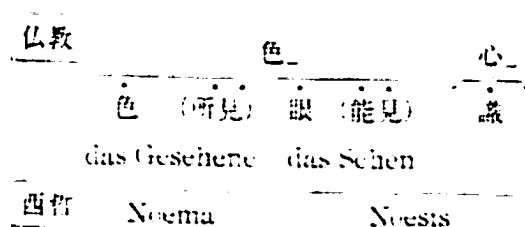


Figure 7 Watsuji's attempt to locate a common dialogue for the philosophies of East and West.

Gūzo Saiko 偶像再興

[Revival of the Idols.

1918], *Koji Junrei* 古寺巡礼 [Pilgrimage to the Ancient Temples, 1919], and *Nihon Seishinshi Kenkyū* 日本精神史研究 [The Study of the History of the Japanese Spirit, 1926]. This last work contains material on Japanese culture.

⁸ Gino K. Piovesana S.J., *Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought: 1862-1996, A Survey*. (Richmond, Surrey: Japan Library, 1997), 50.

⁹ Tōyō University was previously named the Tetsugakukan (哲学館), the Philosophical Institute, a Buddhist influenced institution.

aesthetics, and political thought in relation to Buddhist, specifically Dōgen¹⁰ (道元), 1200-1253, and non-Buddhist perspectives.

In his work *Nihon Kodai Bunka* 日本古代文化 [*The Ancient Culture of Japan*, 1920], Watsuji held that the myths of early Shinto, while not literally true, "...could be reinterpreted in terms of the more sophisticated higher culture later introduced from outside without thereby losing their true significance."¹¹

Watsuji thus differed with the imminent scholar Motoori

Norinaga's (本居宣長), 1730-1801, absolute irrational

faith in Shintō myth (*Shintō shinwa*, 神道神話). Watsuji

argued that such myths needed to be continually

reinterpreted; only the reverence for the emperor should

remain constant. William LaFleur states that *Revival of*

the Idols (*Gūzo Saiko*) and *Pilgrimage to the Ancient*

Temples (*Koji Junrei*) represent Watsuji's Taishoesque

criticism of the infatuation during the Meiji era with all

that was Western. In *Revival of the Idols*, Watsuji argues against the use of

political, military, or economic criteria for the discernment of a country's

relative position vis-à-vis other countries. Watsuji sees the development of

these areas as not necessarily indicative of a superior nation. He believed that

if such criterion alone were used then "...the powerful European nations, Great

Britain, France, Germany as well as the U.S.A., [would still be] far superior to



Figure 8 Watsuji in his 20s.

¹⁰ Dōgen is known posthumously as Shōyō Daishi (承陽大師).

¹¹ Robert N. Bellah, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24:4 (August 1965), 573.

Japanese culture.”¹² He continues by asserting that Japan should not be ashamed of its cultural and spiritual roots in ancient India and China and that Japan must develop its own unique identity.

As mentioned earlier, *Gūzō Saiko* was a reformulation of issues discussed in his graduate thesis on Nietzsche. His work, *Niiche Kenkyu*, 二一チエ研究 [*A Study of Nietzsche*, 1913], became a landmark in Nietzsche scholarship in Japan. Watsuji felt a strong affinity with the ideas of Nietzsche. In his diary Watsuji wrote, “I believe that authentic Japanese blood corresponds to Nietzsche.”¹³ This inner correspondence between the two philosophers was most significantly based on their mutual promotion of spirituality over the bourgeois “spirit” of materiality.

Furthermore, Watsuji recognized an affinity to Nietzsche’s belief in the superiority of the creative elite over the general populace whose lives they both believed were mainly dictated by the relative abundance or deprivation of material resources. From this belief, it was only a small step for Watsuji to the opposition of universal suffrage, which, to his chagrin, was finally passed into law in Japan in 1925, yet still limited to males.¹⁴ However, this belief later changed after Japan’s defeat in World War II. Thereupon, he began to argue

¹² Watsuji Tetsurō, *Gūzō Saiko* 偶像再興 [*Revival of the Idols*], as quoted in Isamu Nagami’s “The Ontological Foundation in Tetsurō Watsuji’s Philosophy: Kū and Human Existence,” *Philosophy East and West* 31:3 (July, 1981), 281.

¹³ Ibid., 280.

¹⁴ Women’s suffrage was finally passed under the aegis of SCAP (Supreme Commander Allied Powers) during the postwar occupation of Japan.

that Japan's cultural tradition in fact could be harmonized with democracy, a marked shift, arguably a transformation.

In addition, in his "Nietzschean vein," Watsuji denounced all that was inauthentic, ranging from rationalism to utilitarianism to the recently imported technological culture of the West. Watsuji attempted to reconnect contemporary Japan with the authentic and creative spirit of the past, reflecting Nietzsche's own philological quest for a similar spirit in ancient Greece.

Another work of Watsuji's during this period attempted to understand the historical underpinnings of Western thought. In 1926, Watsuji published *Genshi Kiristokyo no Bunkashi-teki Igi* 原始キリスト教の文化史的意義 [*The Significance of Primitive Christianity in Cultural History*]. In this work, Watsuji compares twentieth-century Europe with the Roman world during the advent of Christianity. In fact, Watsuji contended that contemporary Americans profoundly resembled the ancient Romans with respect to their utter lack of culture as compared with the ancient Greeks, and their exaggerated emphasis on superficial practicality. Watsuji wrote that "[t]he Romans were masters at the creation of artificial social structures through law, and the Americans are equally adept at the conscious creation of groups through legal devices. And just as the Romans ruled the world of their day with weapons and Roman know-how, so the Anglo-Saxons after the First World War have come to rule the world with weapons and the power of modern science."¹⁵ This interest in the foundations of Western thought was a continual thread

¹⁵ Bellah, 583-584.

throughout Watsuji's life, not only as it related spatially to Japan and the rest of Asia, but also as it related temporally within the West itself.

In 1925, the administrators of Kyoto University asked one of their philosophy professors, Hatano Seiichi¹⁶ (波多野精一), 1877-1950, a fellow student of Koeber, to formally offer Watsuji a position at the university. Watsuji originally refused this offer citing his own inexperience. Three months later Hatano, with the assistance of Nishida Kitarō, and Fujii Kenjiro (藤井健治郎), 1872-1931, again asked Watsuji to accept a position as Assistant Professor of Ethics. With such backing, Watsuji believed he could no longer refuse the offer. Watsuji finally accepted the position at the university by writing the following eloquent, polite, and extremely humble letter.

I have had the honor of reading your previous two letters and am truly grateful for your kind advice. I am a specialist in ethics, and in the Japanese world of such specialists, even now I am doubtful of the possibility of carrying out lectures outside of my specialized field. To say it reasonably, it is interesting that there are such specialists at all. Without a proper understanding of philosophy and the history of philosophy, I think it is suspicious whether one is able to research specifically in ethics and its history. However, in Japan, the strange part of this is that this fact is becoming increasingly less strange. Even if one thinks the walls dividing professors of philosophy are coming down, will not opposition appear from other perspectives? However, if that does transpire, and there is hope of success, then I will be very pleased....Of course, I do not believe I will become a world-class specialist in ethics. In addition, I realize that I am not sufficiently intelligent to become a systematic thinker, which

¹⁶ Hatano studied under Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936) and Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915) in 1904, introducing Japan to the Southwest German School's, also known as the Baden School, philosophy of value. Piovesana relates that "On the occasion of the translation of his *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* (The Object of Knowledge), Rickert remarked that he was more read in Japan than in Germany." Piovesana, *Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought*, 75.

is my own fate. Perhaps you will be able to choose the next person for this position with sufficient qualifications in philosophy and at the same time that person will have an interest in the problems of ethics...

While I am able, I want to contribute as much as I can to the study of Japanese and Western culture. Therefore, whichever chair you appoint me to, I will without fail continue such research as my main area. (But I do not know the future.)¹⁷

In 1925, Watsuji officially accepted the appointment to Kyoto University (京都大学). Watsuji taught ethics there until he moved to Tokyo University (東京大学) in 1934 (Showa 9). The humility Watsuji expressed in this letter is quite indicative of the humility he was to show throughout his life. Although he himself voiced concerns over his own lack of experience in other fields of philosophy outside of ethics, which he felt would also affect his specialty, his later work, *Ethics as the Study of Man* (1934), is widely considered the definitive work on the subject in Japan.

Revealing of the bond that was to develop between Nishida and Watsuji, and equally revealing of Watsuji's relationship with his son, was when Watsuji and his son Natsuhiko 夏彦 awaited test results for a prestigious school in Kyoto, Musashi



Figure 9 Watsuji Tetsurō and his wife, Teru.

High School. Watsuji had intended to accompany his son to the school to

¹⁷ Watsuji Teru (和辻照), *Watsuji Tetsurō to tomo ni. 和辻哲郎とともに [Together With Watsuji Tetsurō]* (Tokyo, 1966), 145-147.

receive the results in case his son needed consoling. But Nishida unexpectedly dropped by Watsuji's home and offered to phone the officials at the school, whom Nishida knew, on Watsuji's behalf. Natsuhiko passed. The very fact that Nishida dropped by Watsuji's home unannounced, a rather uncommon occurrence in Japan, attests to their quick friendship.

As a young man, Watsuji, like many of his time, immersed himself in the culture of cosmopolitanism exemplified by a deep fascination with Western philosophy and literature. In fact, this immersion took a dark side in the form of hedonism in Watsuji's early life. However, according to Kōsaka Masaaki, Watsuji transformed this *Sturm und Drang* period—allegedly under the influence of Nietzsche—into a happy marriage and family life. In fact, we can credit most of the information available on Watsuji's personal life with his wife Teru's loving accounts in *Watsuji Tetsurō to tomo ni* 和辻哲郎とともに [Together with Watsuji Tetsurō, 1966]. Also Watsuji's letters later compiled into a single volume *Kokoku no tsuma e* 故国の妻へ [To My Wife in My Native Country, 1965] provides hundreds of love letters written by Watsuji, as the title suggests, to his wife back in Japan when he was in Europe.¹⁸ Yet this young hedonistic period of Watsuji's perhaps attuned him better to the shortcomings

¹⁸ Watsuji was certainly unusual for his time in this regard. One of the first subjects of Watsuji's research, Schopenhauer, perhaps was more indicative of the views towards women at that time. "Throughout their lives women remain children, always see only what is nearest to them, cling to the present, take the appearance of things for reality, and prefer trivialities to the most important affairs. Thus it is the faculty of reason by virtue whereof man does not, like the animals, live merely in the present...In consequence of her weaker faculty of reason, woman shares less in the advantages and disadvantages that this entails." *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Vol. 2. (Oxford, 1974), 615-616.

of his culture and the sufferings of other men than those supposedly healthy people who were blindly caught up in the bounding advance of their society.

While Watsuji was conducting research for his work *Guzo Junrei* in Nara, he wrote his wife almost everyday. From a hotel in Nara on May 21.

1918 Watsuji, twenty-nine years old, writes to his wife Teru:

Today I was riding on an old road in the mountains and the azaleas were in full bloom, but I could only think of one thing. The most important thing in my life is to live forever in love with you my wife. Whatever job I have and whatever goals I set, everything will be built on our love. My ultimate goal then is to keep our love alive. Because I have your love, I can do my part in this world. If you were gone, I would have no life.¹⁹

The third period of Watsuji's intellectual odyssey began in March 1927 while he was in Europe and extends until March 1949, when he retired from Tokyo University at the age of sixty. This third period was understandably the most prolific of his career. In 1929, Watsuji edited and provided a modern translation of Zen Master Dōgen's work, *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki* 正法眼蔵随聞記 [*Register of Talks on the Shōbōgenzo*] still in use today and instrumental in reacquainting the Japanese, outside of Zen circles, with a philosopher many argue to be the greatest in all of Japanese history. In addition, during this period Watsuji wrote *Genshi Bukkyō nojissen tetsugaku* 原始仏教の実践哲学 [*The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism*, 1932] on the basis of which he received a Doctor of Letters from Tokyo University.

¹⁹ Watsuji Teru, 和辻照 *Watsuji Teisurō to tomo ni*, 和辻哲郎とともに (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1966), 98.

From 1927 to his retirement in 1949, Watsuji wrote or edited the two foundational works of much of his later thought. *Ethics as the Study of Man* 人間の学としての倫理学 and

Climate and Culture: An

Anthropological Study

風土：人間学的考察. He extended

and amplified many of his points on

the former work in his three-volume

set entitled simply, *Rinrigaku* 倫理学

[*Ethics*], in successive volumes in

1937, 1942, and 1949. These works

will be a major focus of this study and as such will be discussed in

detail later. This third period also encompassed the greatest

philosophical and personal test for Watsuji. World War II. How he

handled this test both as a culmination of his earlier theories and how he

reacted to both war and defeat was the ultimate test of the man.

The fourth and final period of Watsuji's life was professionally

the most Spartan yet personally often the most prosperous. In this last

period, he published the best-selling work, *Sakoku—Nihon no higeiki*

鎖国日本の悲劇 [*National Seclusion: Japan's Tragedy*, 1950]. Again,

this book effectively contradicted his former position that the closing of

Japan during the Tokugawa era (徳川時代), 1600-1868, was beneficial

to Japan. Watsuji also wrote or edited *Uzumoreta Nihon* 埋もれた日本



Figure 10 Front row from left: D.T. Suzuki, Makino Shin, Nishida Kitarō. Back row from left: Iwanami Shigeo, Watsuji Tetsurō, Takemi Tarō.

[*Buried Japan*. 1951], and *Nihon rinri shisōshi* 日本倫理思想史 [*History of Japanese Ethical Thought*, 2 vols. 1952, 1953]. The last two works of his life were *Katsura rikyū: seisaku katei no kōsatsu* 桂離宮 [*The Katsura Imperial Villa: Reflections on the Process of Its Construction*. 1955], and *Nihon geijutsu kenkyū* 日本芸術研究 [*A Study of Japanese Art*. 1955], reflecting perhaps a move away from controversial subject matter to the aesthetic pleasures of Japanese culture.

Most of Watsuji's works and his collected writings were published by Iwanami Shoten (岩波書店), which was founded by Iwanami Shigeo (岩波茂雄), 1881-1946. Watsuji and Iwanami also cultivated a great friendship over the years to the extent that Watsuji and Iwanami are buried next to each other. Iwanami was inspired by the Meiji Charter Oath of 1868, which promised to seek knowledge throughout the world to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule. Iwanami concentrated on serious intellectual publishing, while Kōdansha, another of Japan's largest publishing houses, focused on books and magazines designed for mass consumption. "Iwanami culture"²⁰ and "Kōdansha culture" were familiar descriptions of the separate worlds of elite and popular publishing respectively. Iwanami later published an influential journal, *Shisō* 思想 [*Thought*], which was edited by Watsuji. The journal began in 1921 devoted to important

²⁰ Maruyama Masao's term. See his *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 63 and 304.

philosophical problems with contributions by Nishida and the existentialist philosopher Kuki Shūzō. Recently, however, the journal, reflecting the changed philosophy of the founder later, has been publishing articles with a more popular appeal.

As David Dilworth points out, a “partial listing of Watsuji’s historical works can be said to represent only the outer surface of his philosophical sensibilities. They were the application and concrete exemplification of his fundamental ethical position.”²¹ This cultural-ethical foundation is based on two of Watsuji’s major works, *Fūdo* and *Rinrigaku*, which together will provide us with the major analytical thrust of the current study.

On December 26, 1960 at the age of 71 Watsuji died in his home in Nerima, Tokyo surrounded by his loved ones. Watsuji, in his long and fruitful life, had indeed been caught up in all the problems mankind faced in the turbulent years of the first part of the 20th Century. But in the final analysis, he was a man who asked many of the most profound questions that face us all, even though, as he was first to admit, he was very often at a loss for the answers—itself perhaps the curse of modernity. Watsuji did not succeed in all that he set out to achieve, but the foundations of his philosophy are still just as relevant today as when they were written. These foundations, however, must be seen in their own light and not, as has been the custom, to manipulate them to serve particular agendas.

²¹ David Dilworth, “Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960): Cultural phenomenologist and ethician,” *Philosophy East and West*, 24:1 (Jan 1974), 7.

CHAPTER 3

THE PHILOSOPHY OF WATSUJI TETSURŌ

One of the most important responsibilities of intellectuals in a modern liberal society is to identify problematic issues facing society and attempt to provide answers or at the very least constructive criticism. The quicker a society changes the quicker such intellectuals should endeavor to assist it in its course of action, and unfortunately the more difficult such an endeavor becomes. Watsuji Tetsurō was neither shy nor short in his recommendations for the future direction of Japan. Although many of Watsuji's contentions have provoked sharp criticism, both inside and outside of Japan, we must keep in mind that as the 1920s turned into the 1930s Japan moved further and further from the status of a liberal society--itself determined by one's interpretation. The pronouncements and restrictions of the state in relation to the *kokutai* (国体, national polity) markedly increased. Like many intellectuals of his time, he concentrated on concepts that could rightly transcend national boundaries, even if, as we shall soon see, he himself did not always make the leap from a national perspective to an international perspective. His main attempt in life was to perfect or at least to improve his fellow Japanese by reconnecting them with, as he saw it, their authentic historical and ethical characters.

Within the context of the times detailed above, one final spark provided Watsuji with the drive to set out on his course. That final spark was his reading of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*, 1926).

Watsuji Tetsurō and Martin Heidegger

Perhaps with the exception of the Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukacs (1885-1971), no contemporary thinker was more extensively and intensely read by Japanese intellectuals in the 1930s than Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Watsuji himself has been credited with pioneering interest in existentialism in Japan. From this perspective alone, Watsuji was already a major figure of the Taishō period. However, most scholars, in and out of Japan, now agree that no other philosopher has had such a lasting impact on Japanese philosophy than Heidegger himself. Yuasa Yasuo relates that on the day following Heidegger's death, on May 26, 1976, the commentary hour on NHK (Japan's public television station) devoted quite some time to the contributions, philosophy, and life of the renowned philosopher. While in Germany, Heidegger's birthplace, only ten seconds were devoted to the reporting of Heidegger's passing.



Figure 11 Martin Heidegger

Heidegger, who was the same age as Watsuji, provided the spark that ignited Watsuji's two greatest works, *Fūdo* and *Rinrigaku* [*Ethics*]. However,

this spark begot not a positive reaction but rather negative one. Watsuji had two major criticisms of Heidegger as represented by his seminal work *Sein und Zeit*. Firstly, Watsuji believed Heidegger placed far too much emphasis on temporality at the expense of spatiality; and secondly, he believed Heidegger unjustly emphasized the individual in *Dasein* (being-in-the-world) over the societal relationships of mankind. As we shall soon see, Watsuji attempted to address these perceived deficiencies and inaccuracies through his own work on the spatial characteristics of *fūdo* (風土) and *aidagara* (間柄), which he believed were the “origin” and the essence, respectively, of Japanese culture.

While in Germany, Watsuji devoted a great deal of time to the recently published *Sein und Zeit*. In what has become Watsuji’s most famous book,

Fūdo: Ningengakuteki Kōsatsu 風土：人間学的考察 [*Climate and Culture: An Anthropological Study*, 1935],¹ he explained in the preface his motivation for undertaking the work and what can be construed as the intellectual foundation for most of his later works:

It was in the early summer of 1927 when I was reading Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* in Berlin that I first came to reflect on the problem of climate. I found myself intrigued by the attempt to treat the structure of man’s existence in terms of time but I found it hard to see why, when time had thus been made to play a part in the structure of subjective existence, at the same juncture space also was not postulated as part of the basic structure of existence. Indeed it would be a mistake to allege that space is never taken into account in Heidegger’s thinking, for *Lebendige*

¹ This book’s recent paperback edition—the 21st printing since 1979—is advertised in Japan as one of the “101 books one should have read.” The subtitle of this book, *Ningengakuteki Kōsatsu*, has been variously translated as, “A Philosophical Study,” and “An Anthropological Study.” Certainly the latter comes closest to the original Japanese, and yet the philosophical approach in the work is stronger than the anthropological typologies.

Natur was given fresh life by the German Romantics, yet even so it tended to be almost obscured in the face of the strong glare to which time was exposed. I perceived that herein lay the limitations of Heidegger's work, for time not linked with space is not time in the true sense and Heidegger stopped short at this point because his *Dasein* was the *Dasein* of the individual only. He treated human existence as being the existence of man. From the standpoint of the dual structure—both individual and social—of human existence, he did not advance beyond an abstraction of a single aspect. But it is only when human existence is treated in terms of its concrete duality that time and space are linked and that history also (which never appears fully in Heidegger) is first revealed in its true guise. And at the same time the connection between history and climate becomes evident.²

Watsuji's first attempt to address this perceived imbalance was through his theory of *fūdo*. And this theory will also be the first of Watsuji's in our three-sphere analysis. Watsuji believed that to affect the future of Japanese culture through present actions a correct understanding of the origins of that culture was indispensable. He contended that the way in which the Japanese people viewed the world, and in fact their very culture, originated first and foremost from the specific Japanese *milieu*, its *fūdo*.

Fūdo

The term *fūdo* (風土) consists of two characters: "wind" (風, *fū* or *kaze*) and "earth" or "land" (土, *do*). In common usage the term denotes the geo-climatic features of a particular region, e.g., "the *fūdo* of Nevada is arid and hot." According to Watsuji, *fūdo* is "...a general term for the natural

²Watsuji Tetsurō, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, trans. Geoffrey Bownas (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1961). This 1961 translation, while sufficient in its totality, unfortunately utilizes certain terms that do not do justice to the original and in fact may cause misinterpretations of Watsuji's work.

environment of a given land, its climate, its weather, the geological and productive nature of the soil, its topographic and scenic features.”³

However, the English translation of *fūdo*, as simply climate, (*kikō*, 気候), can be misleading by implying that the term narrowly denotes weather-related features. For this reason Augustin Berque,⁴ a French geographer and Japanologist, translates the term as “milieu” in order to designate the meaning implied by Watsuji beyond the common use of the term in both English and Japanese. Arisaka agrees with Berque’s interpretation. She states,

The term “milieu” is more appropriate than “climate,” since for Watsuji the notion of *fūdo* includes not only the natural environment but also the social and historical environment at the same time. The term “milieu” is used to capture the sense in which one’s environment forms an integral aspect of who one is: for instance, one’s family might be considered a particular milieu in which one grows up, or one might live in a certain geo-historical milieu, such as “the late 20th Century in California” which fundamentally affects the way in which a person is.⁵

Watsuji’s analysis of *fūdo*-related conditions, especially his anthropological analysis, was indeed far from revolutionary. Many historians have stated the impetus for this book was Watsuji’s guilt—or from a Japanese sociological standpoint, shame—at returning early from Germany basically empty-handed. He thus set out to write as expeditiously as possible an analysis

³Watsuji, *Climate and Culture*, 1.

⁴Berque’s works include *Nippon no Fukei, Seiyō no Keikan: Soshite Zokei no Jidai* (Japanese Scenery and Western Landscape: And the Era of Paysagement, 1991), and “Identification of the Self in Relation to the Environment,” in *Japanese Sense of Self*, Nancy Rosengerger, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 93-104.

⁵Yoko Arisaka, “Space and History: Philosophy and Imperialism in Nishida and Watsuji,” (doctoral dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1996), 190.

of his trip in order to “justify” it to his supporters including his colleagues at the university and the Ministry of Education who provided the funds for his trip.

Although Watsuji knew of similar geographical theories of human development, he intended his work to be predominately philosophically rather than anthropologically oriented. Watsuji compared his view of *fūdo* with those of Hippocrates through Bodin, Montesquieu, Herder and Hegel, the last two being the most influential on Watsuji’s thought.⁶

In spite of the fact that there are many inadequacies in Watsuji’s analysis of *fūdo* in all its manifestations and connotations, it is, in the end, still a substantial foundation for many of Watsuji’s later formulations; therefore, we must address it, as such, and assign it the importance it deserves in his life and thought.

⁶Although to provide proper credit for theories on “Climate and Culture.” Warren E. Gates states that scholars from Arnold Toynbee to Franz Rosenthal were correct in believing that Ibn Khaldūn’s (1332-1406) “climate and culture” work *Muqaddimah* was “undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time or place.” Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 2nd edition, (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 322, quoted in Warren E. Gates, “The Spread of Ibn Khaldūn’s Ideas on Climate and Culture,” in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 28:3 (July-September 1967), 415. In this paper Gates argues that Montesquieu could very well have been influenced by Ibn Khaldūn’s work through the travels of Sir John Chardin. Gates contends that in 1680, with the publication of Chardin’s *Voyages* in London, Ibn Khaldūn’s theories of climate and his extensive cultural criticism made their first impact on Europe. Rosenthal continues by contending that with regards to the theory of climate included in the above work, Ibn Khaldūn “se montre précurseur incontestable de Montesquieu.” G.H. Bousquet, *Les Textes économiques de la Mouqaddima (1375-1379)*, (Paris and Algiers, 1961), as quoted in *ibid.*, 415.

Watsuji divides the southern Eurasian continent into three zones: desert, meadow, and most important for our purposes, monsoon. The monsoon zone includes India through Southeast Asia. For Watsuji, there was a unique seasonal relationship between the Asian continent of the monsoon zone and the Indian Ocean. During the summer months, the monsoon blew towards the continent from the southwest and in the winter, it reversed direction. This cyclical event caused intense humidity through torrential rains and heat in the long summer months. This combination of moisture and heat produced areas that were rich in plants and animal life. These cultures, according to Watsuji's logical connection, thus saw nature as life rather than death.

Watsuji also noted that the violent rainstorms, savage winds, floods, and droughts persuaded the inhabitants of this area to abandon all resistance to the elemental forces of nature. Here, he believed, he had found the source of Asia's characteristic resignation to the inclemency of nature that was often reflected in the religions of Asia. Even more fundamental, however, nature was not bound by regularity and order but, on the contrary, was harsh and irregular, producing cultures that did not view the space around them in terms of geometric reason.⁷

Watsuji was also deeply fascinated by the sharp and obvious contrasts between the desert and monsoon zones. It was apparent to him that the differences in climate resulted in strong cultural differences, but as we shall see later, these "results" should not be taken causally. For example, Watsuji saw climatic differences clearly manifested in the widely divergent religious traditions. Watsuji contrasted the cosmologies arising out of the particular

⁷ Najita and Harootunian, "Japan's Revolt," 244.

fūdo related conditions of Eastern religions, specifically Buddhism and Hinduism, and Western religion, namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

What is the reason for this difference? Nature in the monsoon zone nurtures plant and animal life through heat and the abundance of rain. From this is born a receptive life-style that accepts the blessings of nature, which is great and alive. Nature can become violent, causing floods and droughts, but if these are tolerated it soon returns to its former state. From this comes the Eastern world-view, which accepts the destiny of life while receiving salvation from the gods by extolling them. In contrast, nature in the desert bestows death upon those who would sit around and wait. Man in this zone must actively overcome nature so as to possess his life. This calls for a strict morality through which one obeys the will of an absolute god that transcends nature. Watsuji thought that in this lies a historical "womb" for the aggressiveness of ego-consciousness which is seen in the tradition of Western spiritual history.⁸

As we can see from this passage, Watsuji did not believe in the transcendental nature of religion. He considered religion to be simply another aspect of ethnic culture.

Obviously there are a great many generalizations in the above theory. But what did all these "generalizations" ultimately mean for Watsuji? It is of the utmost importance for us to examine the underlying intent of Watsuji's theories. We need look at the heart of his argument. However, before we begin this process, let us reexamine Watsuji's foundational theory of *fūdo* as extrapolated in Chapter I.

Chapter I of *Fūdo* entitled "The Basic Principles of Climate," drafted in 1929, redrafted in 1931, and revised in 1935, is described by

⁸Yasuo Yuasa, "The Encounter of Modern Japanese Philosophy with Heidegger," in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 166.

Arisaka as the “most Heideggerian section.”⁹ In this first chapter of *Fūdo*, Watsuji set down an important point in his theory of human existence (*ningen sonzai*, 人間存在). The distinction between the subject as *shutai* (主体), acting subject, and the subject as an epistemological subject, *shukan* (主観), was for Watsuji a crucial one to identify and thus this differentiation is indispensable for our understanding of much of Watsuji’s work in this field. As alluded to earlier, the linkage between *fūdo* and the “subject” should not be seen as a causal relationship. Watsuji broached this concept by stating:

The issue is not how the natural environment affects human life. What is normally thought of as the “natural environment” is an objectification, having the human “characteristic *fudo*” (*fudosei*) as its concrete foundation. Thinking in terms of the relation between natural environment and human life objectifies human life as well. So this approach merely considers the relation between two objects. It does not take up the problem of human existence as acting subject (*shutai*). Our investigation takes this approach. We shall discuss various forms of *fudo*, but they are all expressions of human existence as subject, not of our natural environment.¹⁰

⁹Arisaka, “Space and History,” 186. Although I too am often guilty of such characterizations, we must be diligent to avoid doing so. Of course, this is not a trait of the “West” alone. Asian scholars, too, have often designated, for example, Heidegger as the “Western version” of Buddhist thought or Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*, (1818) as a mere secularized reflection of the *Bhagavada Gita*, (circa 5th century B.C.E.--2nd century C.E.). Such characterizations miss the point and are quite often motivated by ego, oversimplifications, or simply ignorance of the other. Attempts to ascertain a path of philosophical infinite regress are not only futile, but more often than not, more indicative of the nature of the writer than of the subject itself.

¹⁰Arisaka, “Space and History,” 187-188. This is her translation, which is far superior to Bownas’, of the passage in Watsuji’s *Fūdo*. The term *fudosei* (風土性) is a term coined by Watsuji.

As is true in many cases, the use of Chinese/Japanese ideograms facilitates the understanding of the concepts advanced. The term *shutai* (主体) uses two characters: the first *shu* (主) can be translated variously as the “Lord, lord, master, employer, etc., and the second ideogram, *tai* (体) can be translated as the “body, substance, object, reality, style, form.” Thus the ideograms together denote a “lord of the body or substance,” used by Watsuji as “the acting agent.” On the other hand, *shukan* (主観) consists of the same first character, *shu* (主), but the second character, *kan* (観), is translated as “look, appearance, view, outlook or contemplate.” For example, *kan* (観) in *rekishikan* (歴史観) turns the word *rekishi* 歴史 (history) into the “view of history.” Thus *shukan* (主観) denotes the “outlook of the subject,” Watsuji’s epistemological subject.

However, in these and other terms Watsuji was quite close to Heidegger’s controversial etymological method in that they were both more interested in the ambiguous *connotations* of a particular term than its actual *denotations*. This method was much maligned by his major critic Tosaka Jun. Tosaka sarcastically stated that this method of etymology belies an inherent superiority of the Japanese language in comparison with other languages in expressing the truth.

The underlying meaning of Watsuji’s concept of *fūdo* was as a spatial-environmental-social category, which would describe the essential basis of human existence. In effect, Watsuji used his *fūdo* categories to explicate certain characteristics of existence. The question of modern subjectivity in

Japan was, after all, one of the most perplexing and contentious dilemmas in the post-Meiji Restoration (1868-), and just as much so later in the post-WWII era.¹¹

For Watsuji then, human existence is an acting agent (*shutai*) rather than a subject of thought (*shukan*). Sakai states,

What distinguishes the subject as *shutai* from the subject as *shukan* or the epistemological subject is primarily the practical nature of *shutai* because of which the subject as *shutai* cannot be accommodated within the subjective-objective opposition. For this reason, Watsuji could argue that, insofar as the subjective (*shutai-teki*) being of Man is concerned, it should not be grasped as an object opposed to the epistemological subject (*shukan*).¹²

The subject as *shutai* (主体), active subject, cannot be objectified for it is the activity that objectifies. More importantly, *shutai* as action must be spatially and temporally contextualized, thus differing from the contemplative *shukan* (主観) that can effectively transcend space and time. This concept of *shutai* as an acting agent will obviously be revisited again in the next section in the guise of the “essential” social category of *fūdo*, *aidagara* (間柄, betweenness). Within the *fūdo* category of environment, Watsuji used “coldness” to illustrate his point of subject-object nonduality.

But what is coldness? Is it that air at a certain temperature, i.e., coldness as physical object, stimulates the

¹¹For an excellent analysis of the postwar case, see: J. Victor Koschmann, “The Debate on Subjectivity in Postwar Japan: Foundations of Modernism as a Political Critique,” *Pacific Affairs*, 54:4 (Winter 1981-1982), 609-631. Koschmann notes that an “explicit rejection of the recent Japanese past was virtually a condition for participation in intellectual discourse in the early postwar years.” (612).

¹²Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism*. (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 80-81.

sensory organs of our bodies and we as psychological subjects experience it as a certain psychological condition?...But if so, how could we know the independent existence of coldness *prior to our feeling cold*? This is impossible...Rather, we discover coldness *through* feeling cold...The intentional object is not the same as a psychological content. Thus, coldness as an intentional object is not coldness as an experience existing independently of objective coldness. When we feel cold, we don't feel the "sensation" of coldness, but rather we directly feel the "coldness in the air." Thus the intentional "relation" of feeling coldness is already a relation to the coldness in the atmosphere. The problem of how the sensation of coldness relates to external coldness does not arise in the first place...Considered in this manner, the distinction between subject and object and the related distinction of an independently existing "we" and "coldness" is misconceived. When we are cold, we already dwell in the coldness in the air. Our dealing with coldness is no other than that our selves are "outside" in the cold. In this sense, as Heidegger emphasizes, our way of being is characterized by *ex-sistere* or "standing out," i.e., intentionality."¹³

Watsuji stated that we are in the contextualized world of *dasein*—standing-out in it—and because of this, it was not coldness that was external but our selves. This *dasein* was a finitudinal contextualization of the world with respect to human existence. In addition, this contextualization, of course, included Watsuji's conception of "coldness."

An understanding of the linguistic features of the Japanese language is perhaps indispensable for the comprehension of Watsuji's idea of "environmental" nonduality. In Japanese, the grammatical subject of a sentence is not always required. Thus, it is possible for one to say simply "samui desu" 寒いです。 (is cold) without reference to "It" それは寒いです。 (It is cold.) or "I" 私は寒いです。 (I am cold.) Coldness is at the same time in

¹³Watsuji Teisurō, *Fūdo*, trans. Arisaka Yoko, in her "Space and History," 191-192.

the air and in the person who feels it. With the addition of other references, a distinction can of course be made between “I am cold.” 私は寒いです。
(Watashi wa samui desu.), and “It is cold (here)”¹⁴ ここは寒いです。(Koko wa samui desu.). The point to be made here is that the self is thoroughly infiltrated by the atmosphere and that we are thus “standing out” in this same atmosphere.¹⁵

The further importance of this contextualized self is the interaction between the self and the environment that it produces. Watsuji explained that.

[w]hen we feel cold we tighten our bodies, put on extra clothing, go near a fireplace. More importantly, we put extra clothing on our children and put the old folks closer to the fire. Or we work in order to buy clothing and coal. A charcoal dealer bakes charcoal in the mountains, and the textile factory produces fabric. In other words, in “dealing” with coldness we individually and socially engage in various practices to prevent it...Milieu-based self-understanding reveals itself in these practices; it is not about understanding “subjectivity.”¹⁶

Because this interaction between the self and spatial *fūdo* occurs temporally, Watsuji insisted that it was imperative to incorporate both aspects in any analysis. As stated earlier, this lack of balance between the two was the source of Watsuji’s greatest critique of Heidegger.

¹⁴ There is added confusion in this example for the Japanese language differentiates between coldness one feels in the air around one, e.g. “It is cold in this room..” and the coldness one feels “from” an object, e.g. “This plate is cold,” in this case an alternative predicate would be used, namely “*tsumetai*.” This fact notwithstanding, I believe the above example is sufficient in understanding Watsuji’s example of “coldness.”

¹⁵ This trait is a dominant one in the Japanese language but by no means peculiar to Japanese alone. Even in English through such expressions as “fine” and “gloomy,” we can convey similar blurs between the distinction of inner and outer.

¹⁶ Arisaka, “Space and History,” 195.

This system of nondual co-origination or the mutual arising of entities was also addressed by Nishida Kitarō. Nishida postulated that the existential self was simultaneously an expressive and an expressed monad of the world. David Dilworth in his interpretative essay on Nishida's *Last Writings* sums up this concept

...the "historical-formative act" as the existential determination of the "absolute present" both incorporates and yet falls outside the conceptual nets of either Aristotle's logic of the grammatical subject or Kant's logic of the transcendental predicate. He rings various changes on the possibilities of discourse in the respective frameworks of Aristotle and Kant, only to show how they are to be returned to the more concretely lived matrix of the "historical space of the absolute present." In this vein he [Nishida] writes: "From my standpoint, the *Ding-an-sich* is nothing other than the transforming matrix in which the self finds itself—the matrix of the self-forming historical world that is immediately expressed in the self."¹⁷

Human Existence and Being-Betweenness

Now that we have detailed Watsuji's theory of the origin of Japanese culture, what did Watsuji believe was one of the most important cultural traits of the Japanese that made them so unique and in effect defined their Being? Watsuji believed that there was one characteristic of the Japanese that not only defined the authenticity of the Japanese Spirit but could also be hermeneutically uncovered throughout Japanese history—the socio-foundational attribute of *ningen sonzai* 人間存在 (human existence), *aidagara* 間柄 or being-betweenness.

¹⁷Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, translated with an introduction by David A. Dilworth. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 20.

As noted earlier, Watsuji disagreed with Heidegger's overemphasis on the individual in his formulation of *Dasein*. Watsuji believed that the social relationships of individuals were what actually defined them.

This individualizing tendency in the West for Watsuji results

...from the fact that such words as *anthropos*, *homo*, *man*, or *Mensch* cannot denote anything but an individual human being. If we take such a stance, we have no alternative but to explain such things as the relationships between person and person, communal existence, society, and so forth by appealing to terms somewhat different from that of *human being*. But if a human being is, basically speaking, a social animal, then social relationships cannot be separated from her.¹⁸

Watsuji again resorts to an etymological distinction to illustrate his point. The Japanese word for "human being" is *ningen* 人間. By dissecting the word *ningen*, Watsuji identified the social relationship necessary for his belief that "man is a social animal." *Ningen* consists of two characters, *nin* 人 (*hito*) and *gen* 間 (*aida*).¹⁹ meaning person and the space between persons respectively. Thus, for Watsuji, the term *ningen* by virtue of its *kanji* 漢字 (Japanese/Chinese characters) implied the space between people that separates one person from another and at the same time relates them together. Furthermore, there is a third person perspective in this term in that *hito* 人 (person) can never apply to oneself but always to another, and because the other is mediated with still another any analysis by its very definition implies a

¹⁸Watsuji Tetsurō. *Rinrigaku*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert E. Carter (New York, 1996), 13-14.

¹⁹Japanese characters commonly have two categories of readings, the "Chinese" reading (*onyomi*, 音読み), typically utilized in compound words as in this case — *nin* + *gen*, and the specific Japanese reading (*kunyomi*, 訓読み), *hito* + *aida*.

trilateral relationship. In fact, in Japanese, the first person pronoun “I.” is similarly mediated by the other. Depending to whom one is speaking, various first person pronouns can be used to convey the relation, superior (*watakushi*, 私), inferior (*ore* or *boku*, 俺, 僕 (masculine); and *atashi* 私 (feminine)), or neutral (*watashi*, 私), between the first and second person.²⁰

Since there is indeed space between the two mediated individuals, a worldly plane is therefore assumed as a crucial component of this category. *Aida* 間 is thus related to the world of “social space” 世の中 (*yo no naka*), in which individuals are thrown, reflecting Heidegger’s similar concept of *Geworfenheit* (thrownness). Watsuji agreed with Heidegger’s contention that this thrownness is a crucial element of the culturally and historically contextualized *Dasein*, however, Watsuji’s theory of religion, as simply another component of culture, prevented him from using such “transcendental” terminology. Thus, there are two moments in man’s social being: “being-in-the-world” an essential space for belonging to society,²¹ and “being-with” as determined by the mutual mediation of individuals. *Ningen* thus denotes the dialectical structure that is unified in the Japanese conception of “human being.” “It is the public and, at the same time, the individual human beings

²⁰In using the word “I” minimally, the possessive pronoun “my” is also commonly admitted. Japanese nouns also do not require articles or preceding possessive pronouns.

²¹For an excellent analysis of this concept in Heidegger’s thought, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary of Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I*. (Cambridge, 1990).

living within it. Therefore, it refers not merely to an individual ‘human being’ nor merely to ‘society.’”²²

Watsuji, of course, did not advance these theories for their own theoretical sake, but instead, as stated above, he was attempting to establish a foundation for authentic action in the future. This transformative philosophy is where we will now devote our attention. It is in effect our third area of analysis in regards to Watsuji’s ideas and an act of summation of his life’s intentions to reacquaint the Japanese with their own tradition in order to develop a greater appreciation for “things Japanese,” which he believed would engender greater attempts by the Japanese people to practice them in their daily lives.

Again, Watsuji accepted Heidegger’s view of the everydayness of *Dasein* as his starting point. For Heidegger, this everyday existence is the existence of *das Man*. The authentic being lives life through a realization of possibilities. However, the terms authentic and inauthentic should not be understood as normative designations. Although Heidegger’s German term, *eigentlich*, literally “my-ownness,” is inherently less normative as compared to the English term, “authentic,” Watsuji believed that they were still ultimately predicated on the individual.

Authenticity is prescribed in terms of the *totality’s immediate immanence* in the person, so that the person’s authentic self is given as conforming to the systematicity governing the relationality of subjective positions from the outset. A

²²Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, 15.

preestablished harmony is always already implied in the concept of authenticity. [*Italics mine.*]²³

Thus for Watsuji, Heidegger's authenticity is in fact inauthenticity, and perhaps the reverse is also true.

Only when such inauthenticity is negated in the merger of the self and the other [*jita-fuji*], that is, when the "self" is forgotten, can authenticity be realized. Retrospectively, one may call the totality of the human being thus realized the "authentic self." But, in this case, the authentic self is more like Kant's trans-individual subject than Heidegger's individual self that becomes totality through death.²⁴

The culmination of Watsuji's search for authenticity can be understood in this concept of double-negation. Man's dialectical nature revealed above "...involves an essential movement of negation wherein, on the one hand, the standpoint of the behaving "individual" arises only as the negation of every whole (society) while on the other, the totality of man is established in the negation of such individuality."²⁵

One becomes an individual through negation—the negation of the other. To be an individual thus requires one to rebel against social requirements and expectations. Conversely, to become a member of a social group requires one to negate one's individuality. Robert E. Carter points out that Watsuji understood that from a Western perspective this could very well be a case of poor logic.

²³Sakai, *Translation*, 94.

²⁴Quoted in Sakai, *Translation*, 94-95.

²⁵David Dilworth, "Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960): Cultural Phenomenologist and Ethician," *Philosophy East and West* 24:1 (January 1974), 21.

One can remain an individual and as such join as many groups as one wishes. Or one can think of oneself as an individual and yet as a parent, a worker, an artist, a theater goer, and so forth.

Watsuji understands this, but he argues that it is possible to think in this way only if one has already granted logical priority to the individual *qua* individual. Whatever group one belongs to, one belongs to it as an individual, and this individuality is not quenchable, except through death (Heidegger, Sartre, de Beauvoir, etc.), by inauthenticity (Heidegger, Sartre, de Beauvoir, etc.), or bad faith (Sartre). One can reject one's individuality, but even then one denies one's freedom freely, as an individual, if only potentially.²⁶

Watsuji escapes from this philosophical trap by positing his theory of the negation of negation steeped in a framework of nonduality. Authentic wholeness, for Watsuji, was only achieved in a nondual relationship, despite the seemingly apparent opposition between the self and the group. Of course, the first negation, which we must keep in mind is not necessarily sequential, is the negation of the group influence on the individual. The negation of the group implies a necessary affirmation of the individual, at least for the moment. The second negation is the negation of one's individual separateness from others. Once this is complete, there arises the authenticity of compassion and benevolence, which is *ningen's* "authentic countenance." The negation of negation, for Watsuji, was the true meaning of goodness.

Only through the proper understanding of Watsuji's interpretation of the dialectical system can we hope to comprehend this philosophy of double negation. Hegel, of course, provides us with a Western instance of the dialectical process. In this process, Hegel achieves a synthesis through what at

²⁶Robert E. Carter, "Interpretive Essay: Strands of Influence," in Watsuji Tetsurō's *Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*. (New York, 1996), 331-332.

least seems to be an elimination of the constituent parts, the thesis and antithesis. Perhaps it would be more accurate to state that the elements are “blended” rather than eliminated. Nonetheless, this process does not preserve the original elements, as Watsuji would have them preserved. Watsuji’s preservation of elements is a preservation without blending, without the creation of a new entity out of its antecedents. In Watsuji’s dialectical process, the thesis and the antithesis are preserved wholly intact in the “new” synthesis.

Watsuji contends that this “negation of negation is the real movement of the self-return of the absolute whole...”: this is the true human relationship he seeks. Thus for Watsuji, the Japanese people need only to negate their individuality, and by doing so return to society-at-large. By doing so, culture, that had as its major driving force the specific Japanese milieu, will naturally imbue society and thereby engulf modern Japan with an authentic Japanese Spirit.

The Japanese Spirit

Now that we have analyzed the “origin” of Japanese culture and its non-dual structure, we must now look into its “manifestation.”²⁷ For this we must turn to Watsuji’s cultural hermeneutic approach to the uncovering of the Japanese Spirit (*nihon seishin*, 日本精神)²⁸. Like Dilthey, Watsuji realized

²⁷This is of course contrary to the point of subject/object nonduality I have just made, but unfortunately the English language is rather limited in this regard.

²⁸Yamatogokoro (大和心) and Yamatodamashi (大和魂) have also been used historically as variations on the term Japanese Spirit.

something as abstract as Spirit/*Geist* could not be grasped simply through the exclusive use of logic. Furthermore, like Heidegger, Watsuji knew that to establish a duality between subject and epistemic object would ultimately bear little fruit. In fact, Watsuji pointed out that even on a common plane the definition of Spirit was difficult to ascertain.

The term "the Japanese spirit" is in fashion nowadays [1934]. But if we try to say what it means, I think it is not very clear. The situation is that as long as people do not ask what the Japanese spirit is, everybody seems to know; but once the question is posed, it is less and less understood.²⁹

The Japanese Spirit, says Watsuji, is a simple concept to comprehend, that is, until one begins the actual task of comprehension. In the early 1930s, there were virulent attacks from the left waged against the concept of a Japanese Spirit or the Yamato heart. According to its detractors, such an idea was conservative, reactionary, and was not an approach that would enable the Japanese nation to advance successfully into the future.

Watsuji disagreed strongly with their interpretation. He argued that the Japanese Spirit, as historically formulated, was, on the contrary, the epitome of advancement and progression.

[T]he kind of national self-consciousness that arose through the proponents of Native Studies in the late Tokugawa era functioned as a movement of negation of the Middle Ages, and at the same time, as a movement to discover our own nation on the world stage.³⁰

²⁹Dilworth, et al., *Sourcebook*, 231.

³⁰Watsuji Tetsurō, *The Japanese Spirit*, trans. A. Jacinto Zavala and David Dilworth in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy. Selected Documents*. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 233.

Watsuji continues by defiantly stating that the drive for a national self-consciousness embodied in the concept of the "Japanese Spirit" "...was a progressive movement keeping pace with the modern world, and in no way was it reactionary."³¹

In order to ascertain the Japanese Spirit "objectively," Watsuji realized that he must also dispense with its nationalistic connotations. In a rather historically unfortunate beginning to this defense of the Japanese Spirit against negative connotations Watsuji writes:

In its present-day use, the term "Japanese spirit" is understood as having a right-wing, reactionary, and conservative connotation. It is not considered right-wing or reactionary when we speak of the Greek or German spirit; so why is it that only when the Japanese spirit is patriotically invoked it is considered right-wing and reactionary?³²

Watsuji argues that the national self-consciousness used to take over the Tokugawa government was of the same type used by Joan of Arc to destroy feudalism in France. Yet, neither of these was seen as necessarily reactionary or conservative. Thus, national self-consciousness, he believed, could not be construed in and of itself negatively. Watsuji thus deduced that negative connotations were only attached to such actions when they went against the grain of social and political reform.

In short, what is called "reformist" or "reactionary" involves the currents of opinion within the social political movement itself, and it is not an essential direction of national self-consciousness. If we see it in this manner, the fact that invoking the Japanese

³¹*Ibid.*, 234.

³²Dilworth, et al., *Sourcebook*, 231.

spirit is nationalistic is not by itself determinable as either reformist or conservative.³³

Similarly, as this paper suggests, Watsuji himself was also condemned *in toto* because his earlier politics went against the “currents of opinion.”

Watsuji believed that Western institutions and ideologies, specifically Marxism and bourgeois liberalism, were threats to the authentic Japanese Spirit. He argued that the only method to access the Japanese Spirit was to re-appropriate Japan’s unique culture. He emphasized that Japan’s indigenous culture was “produced” by none other than the active subject 主体 (*shutai*), the Japanese people themselves. He, of course, concedes that a great deal of Japanese culture has been imported from abroad, but he turns this around by stating that this very fact is indicative of one of Japan’s most unique cultural traits—the admiration, importation, and adoption of foreign ideas and structures.

This characteristic shows that the Japanese race possesses a very keen receptivity to superior foreign culture and that it can take a humble attitude in order to open itself and learn what it has thus received....[T]his characteristic does not necessarily indicate a weak point of Japan....[O]ther countries were seen only from their most excellent, creative sides.³⁴

What then is meant by the term “Japanese Spirit?” Watsuji believes that only through the outward manifestations of the Japanese Spirit can we approach apprehension.

If discernment of the Japanese spirit through its manifestations is the right way to approach the subject, then all the life-expressions in general of the Japanese people would be its

³³Ibid., 231.

³⁴Ibid., 251-253.

manifestations. To select out only some while abandoning the rest cannot be done without bias. Then, insofar as they are the action of a Japanese, would not both the bribe of a politician and the fraudulence of an entrepreneur be manifestations of the Japanese spirit? It would seem logically to follow insofar as these actions are objective manifestations life-expressive of the Japanese people.³⁵

Watsuji argued that individual actions such as bribery or even self-sacrifice were not manifestations of the Japanese Spirit. Only when they become social actions do they take on the level of authentic manifestations. It is not until the act of bribery or self-sacrifice becomes social that it expresses authentic Japanese Spirit.

As long as it is kept secret, it does not yet take on significance as a life expression of the Japanese people. Therefore, it is not yet a manifestation of the Japanese spirit. However, once it has been made manifest, it becomes a social action that becomes enveloped in public indignation. Sometimes it even brings about direct acts of self-sacrifice by individuals who feel the brunt of such outrage and indignation. If an action that is kept secret does not cause such a phenomenon and only becomes a cause of public outcry when it appears openly, we can say that the meaning of that action differs completely depending on whether or not it enters into the public domain.³⁶

The point to be made here is that an individual act does not become a manifestation of the Japanese Spirit if it takes place in a vacuum. Rather, the action and subsequent reaction in their totality are in effect summed up to represent an authentic manifestation of the Japanese Spirit. For example, a misdeed by a politician only becomes representative when the society at large reacts one way or the other to the infraction. This total reaction by society, positively or negatively manifested, becomes the Japanese Spirit. In addition,

³⁵Ibid., 242.

³⁶Ibid., 243.

there was a unique temporal progression of this authentic Japanese Spirit. For example, what may have accurately represented the Japanese Spirit in the Kamakura Period (1185-1333) may not necessarily represent the Japanese Spirit today.

CHAPTER 4

TRADITION AND MODERNITY¹

In the last few decades, there has been a reluctance among scholars to analyze modern Japanese history in terms of modernization. However, this backlash has largely occurred due to the overemphasis of those categories in earlier studies of Japan. Sheldon Garon points out that given that the concerns of the 1950s and 1960s are no longer appropriate in today's world then there is a definite need to reevaluate our concept of modernization and its relationship to Japan.

As Marius Jansen recently acknowledged, the original proponents of modernization perceived themselves to be advocates of a growing, yet relatively weak and misunderstood, Japan (Jansen 1988:46, 68). John Dower expressed this somewhat differently when he noted that the modernization scholars had written at a time when the United States government envisioned Japan as a bulwark against Communism and the Japanese model as the

¹Chikio Hayashi and Yasumasa Kuroda contend that, according to their surveys from 1953 to 1973, the tradition versus modernity dimension played a significant part among the Japanese in viewing the world. But since that time the pattern has "gradually started to be diluted, and the trend has become more pronounced from 1983 to the present. Furthermore we found that this was largely a function of the younger age group respondents (age twenty to twenty-four) changing their configuration of attitudes over the past forty years. In other words, the Japanese no longer view the world in terms of what is traditional and modern (the tradition set in the Meiji era to modernize Japan)." Chikio Hayashi and Yasumasa Kuroda, *Japanese Culture in Comparative Perspective*. (Westport, 1997), 5.

desired path for Third World development (Dower 1975:33-34, 48).²

Today we are therefore no longer obliged to analyze Japanese history from a specific, often politically motivated, perspective. We are now able to address objectively questions pertaining to the direct or indirect effects of the quest for modernity on the Japanese nation and people, and for our purposes here, the effect that quest had on Watsuji's life and work. However, before we begin we must come to terms with the fundamental relationship between ideology, its producers, and those whom it affects, certainly a major preoccupation in modern academia.

There are three *nihonjinron* perspectives in relation to the formation and propagation of ideology that are crucial in order to establish a theoretical foundation for any discussion of the subject: 1) the threatened identity perspective, 2) the ethical superiority perspective, and 3) the dominant ideology perspective.

The first perspective, the threatened identity perspective, views Japanese actions and ideas from within an impact response paradigm. In this theory, the Japanese development of *nihonjinron* was an attempt to rescue Japanese identity specifically in the face of Westernization and modernization. *Nihonjinron* is seen as an attempt to detail and often reconstruct Japanese identity vis-à-vis Westernization and modernization. As detailed earlier, this activity is understood as delineating the essential differences between "us"

²Sheldon Garon, "Rethinking Modernization and Modernity in Japanese History: A Focus on State-Society Relations," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 53:2 (May 1994), 362.

(Japanese), and “them” (Western). In order to substantiate such a difference, reconstruction of traditional Japanese characteristics becomes an integral part of the process.

The second perspective, the ethical superiority perspective, is utilized to identify the cultural reasons for Japan’s ethical success. Many Japanese, including Watsuji, in the 1930s and 1940s saw the materialism and individualism of the Western world as the root cause of the West’s ethical shortcomings and degradations. The West’s “loss of the whole,” according to Watsuji and many of his contemporaries, was being imported to Japan itself, a development they attempted to curtail, or at the very least diminish its most insidious consequences.

The last perspective, the dominant ideology thesis, is, of course, a spin-off of Marxist theories. Adherents of this perspective posit that ideology is used specifically and almost exclusively by the holders of power to dominate the subordinate classes. From this perspective, *nihonjinron* are simply considered the manipulations of ideas for a specific end. Rather than explaining the harmonious social culture of Japan as an apparent advantage of *nihonjinron*, this thesis stipulates that *nihonjinron* ideology was produced by the dominant class with the specific intent to rule over their subordinates. “As a ruling ideology, the *nihonjinron* serves to implant particular cultural values, congruent with the values and interests of the dominant class, into the consciousness of the people. By accepting the legitimacy of the dominant

system. the subordinate class is successfully incorporated into the existing social arrangements.”³

If Watsuji was, wittingly or unwittingly, a participant in the formulation or dissemination of such a dominant ideology it would of course contradict his monolithic perspective of Japanese society by introducing classical dialectical Marxist categories. Yet there could also be another explanation that would fall outside the Marxist paradigm, Parsonian functionalism. The structural-functional theory of Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) posits that there is a self-equilibrating system that maintains and continues social systems in terms of shared values and beliefs. This internalisation of common themes by the people through social interactions and expectations would fit within Watsuji’s own theories of subject/object nonduality and Buddhist-inspired coorigination detailed earlier in Watsuji’s example of “coldness.” Within this system the elites would simply be validating cultural traits, what Parsons termed “core values,” that were already present in themselves and in the people as a whole. Elites would therefore not be manipulators but facilitators of latent potential.

Certainly, Watsuji was not alone in such a belief. During the prewar era, many Japanese intellectuals, including one of the leading liberal theorists and Tokyo Imperial University political scientist Yoshino Sakuzō⁴ (吉野作造), 1878-1933, were influenced by the idealism of G. W. F. Hegel who posited that external institutional entities were manifestations of internal consciousnesses.

³Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*. (New York, 1992), 192.

⁴Yoshino, unlike Watsuji, opposed “imperial rule.”

Hegel believed that not only was the existing order the product of man but also the “facilitator of man’s effort to realize his true self (*shinjitsu no jiga*)”⁵ [真実の自我].

Unfortunately, such a theory grounded as it is in personal or even more ambiguously in class-based motivations cannot be verified or proven, except by perhaps the most militant Japanese “Whig historians.” Moreover, many critics of Parsonian theory assert that it can only account for stability but not change. The extreme alternative to this theory, according to Watsuji’s formulations, would stipulate that authentic “universal” Japanese culture as historically constituted, in fact, did not exist. Watsuji’s theory suggests that culture or Spirit “originates” from the Japanese people themselves, but if the Japanese people were simply being manipulated by such a “dominant ideology” then any culture that has arisen before the establishment of liberal democracy in the post-war era is, in fact, not “Japanese culture” at all, but actually the culture of some Japanese—specifically the culture of the ruling elite.

Certainly there are infinite particular manifestations of the Japanese Spirit in culture, but if characteristics such as loyalty and filial piety were simply productions by the elite to control the people, then not all the particular manifestations that originate from these essential qualities are Japanese at all. With such a postulate, we could in effect call into question the entire history of Japanese culture from the Jōmon period (縄文時代) over two thousand years ago, or at the very least perhaps back to the time of Prince Shōtoku (聖徳太子).

⁵Germaine A. Houston, “The State, Modernity, and the Fate of Liberalism Prewar Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 51:2 (May, 1992), 302.

572-621, to virtually the present day. This is a contention that Watsuji, nor most rational scholars, would certainly not make.

Instead, if we were to deem it necessary to investigate a deterministic origin for Watsuji's theories, perhaps we would indeed be justified in looking to the first two perspectives: the threatened identity perspective and the ethical superiority perspective. In employing the first theory we must be cautious and heed the arguments made by Paul Cohen that by simply designating Japanese or Chinese action as simply a reaction to the West we limit the potential insights that otherwise would bear considerable fruit. "The concept of a 'Western impact' conveys nicely the sense of an initial collision, but it says little about the complex chain of effects set in motion by the collision."⁶ Certainly there are particular events in Japan's history that are undeniably clear manifestations of the "West acts" and "Japan reacts" paradigm. The West admittedly acted as the starting gun, figuratively and literally, for Japan's race into the modern, but the West by no means decided what kind of race Japan was to run.

In the case of Watsuji, he without a doubt realized that Japan's threatened identity was indeed a result of Western intrusion, both voluntarily and involuntarily induced. But from that point on other forces were at work. Of course, the second perspective, the ethical superiority concept, was a key component of the continuing and often complex story.

⁶Paul Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past*. (New York, 1984), 55.

Until the last few decades, a great deal of the discussions of tradition and modernization in Japan has dealt with political and economic issues exclusively. Certainly these two areas should be given their due regard as the vanguard of the modernization movement, but there is another equally important component of the modernization process that has suffered except in just a few cases. Watsuji's early emphasis on the cultural dimensions of modernization is of course a notable and early exception.

In fact, Japan with its unique history of isolation and sudden opening to the outside world in 1854 was more sensitive to the cultural context than most countries. Motoori Norinaga was by far one of the leading figures at the heart of the cultural debate, the issue of cultural identity. Motoori was instrumental in returning Japan to a part of its authentic tradition, in his case, from the exaggerated attention that was then given to Chinese literature (*kangaku*, 漢学). Motoori produced over 180 volumes of writings and in more than thirty-years devoted considerable time and effort in an attempt to raise ancient Japanese literature (*wagaku*, 和学) to its former place of honor and respect. Indicative of Motoori's emphasis on the pertinence of literature in any such discussion of identity is his poetic and characteristically ambiguous answer to the question of the Japanese mind.

敷島の大和心を 人間はば 朝日に匂う山桜花

If a person asks me what the Japanese mind is like,
it is a mountain cherry blossom barely visible under the morning sun.⁷

⁷Quoted in Chikio Hayashi and Yasumasa Kuroda, *Japanese Culture in Comparative Perspective*. (Westport, 1997), 17.

Watsuji spent his life attempting to pinpoint what it was to be Japanese. but in his case it was in the face of Western dominance and cultural imperialism. His concepts of *fūdo* and *aidagara* were, as we have seen, central concepts in his search. Watsuji, in his hermeneutical approach to the uncovering of tradition, followed Dilthey's optimism with regards to the results of such an endeavor rather than Heidegger's warning of the unsound nature of such interpretations of tradition: "When tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it 'transmits' is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed."⁸

Watsuji also believed in the allusiveness of the Japanese mind. In *Fūdo*, he characteristically correlates Japan's nature and the emotions of the Japanese.

Emotions can alternate with the unanticipated and abrupt intensity of a seasonal yet savage typhoon. This emotional power is not characterized by a tenacious sustention, but rather by a savagery akin to that of Japan's own searing autumn winds. This has led often to historical phenomena of the character not of a sustained struggle but of a complete social overturning. And it has further produced the distinctive Japanese cast of mind that exalts and sets great value on emotion and abhors all tenacity. It is of deep significance and highly appropriate that this mood of the Japanese should be symbolised by the cherry blossoms, for they flower abruptly, showily and almost in indecent haste; but the blooms have no tenacity—they fall as abruptly and disinterestedly as they flowered.⁹

⁸ Quoted in Stephen Vlastos, ed., *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), xii.

⁹ *Fūdo*, 136.

This is exactly what Watsuji was attempting to do in his own country, not simply to deny the future validity of Western/modern institutions but to ensure that by adopting those institutions Japanese institutions were not indiscriminately cast aside.

The results of Watsuji's almost lifelong search for the true nature of the Japanese Spirit would fill volumes, and of course it essentially has in his twenty-volume set of collected writings listed in Appendix I. But for our purposes here, we must look for the common denominator of Watsuji's work on *fūdo*, *aidagara*, the Japanese Spirit, Japanese ethics, and aesthetics—for this we need to look no further than to his conception of the Japanese individual. As discussed earlier, Eastern thought has been characterized vis-à-vis Western philosophy as emphasizing the transformative over the theoretical. Watsuji and many of his contemporaries eschewed the individualistic Robinson Crusoe foundation of modern philosophy, instead concentrating on the investigation of man as a social being. His insistence that social relationships were essential in formulating what it was to be human was interestingly portrayed in the earlier case of bribery; that is, the act of bribery does not constitute a manifestation of the Japanese Spirit until it has become part of the "public domain."

Perhaps the Western love of a vigorous unchanging absolute partly informs the need to have the individual consistent in all social relationships, while the Japanese love of impermanence and no similar desire for an absolute allows the Japanese to move chameleon-like in and out of social relationships. Certainly, the Japanese have throughout their long history avoided absolutist

doctrines and ideas. Hayashi Chikio and Kuroda Yasumasa contend that what finally brought the Japanese nation to the verge of ruin in World War II was the search for and the attempted subservience to the absolute doctrine of *kokutai*, which Hayashi and Kuroda believe went against the Japanese Spirit, thus in part accounting for Japan's plunge into war.¹⁰

However the same characteristics that led Japan into an exaggeratedly cultural particularist and eventually nationalistic movement also prevented the possibility of a thorough revolution in Japan that may have had other consequences. Germaine A. Hoston writes that

the most important contributor to Japan's relative success in adapting to the new urgencies without a revolutionary outcome may well have been the innovative manner in which the Meiji oligarchs blended old and new, native and imported elements to contrive an effective national myth, the *kokutai* family conception of the state, and then propagated this powerful new conception of the body politic systematically through a national educational system.¹¹

This virtual denial of the absolute also shows itself in Watsuji's concept of the authentic Japanese self. Watsuji did not totally deny personal individuality in order to make the social being absolutely dominant, but instead looked for a middle course between the two. Man, for Watsuji, must make a conscious decision to negate his individuality in order to join with the absolute whole. A lack of this individual decision would only produce a being termed by Nietzsche as a "herd animal."

¹⁰ See Chikio Hayashi and Yasumasa Kuroda, *Japanese Culture in Comparative Perspective*. (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997).

¹¹ Germaine A. Hoston, "The State, Modernity, and the Fate of Liberalism in Prewar Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 51:2 (May 1992), 291.

According to Watsuji's view of the effects of modernization with its Western paradigms, the atomistic individual had become the dominant entity. Although he had denied the efficacy of a truly liberal democracy, a point he later altered, he still believed in the totality as a sum of its parts. However, any analysis of "liberalism" in the Japanese setting must be precise and not fall into a definitional trap, one even more general than Watsuji's own definition. Liberalism is often defined as a rational movement, therefore making its "logical" opponent, anti-liberalism, founded on wholly irrational elements. We must not overlook the fact that rationality is often present in irrational movements, and that irrationalism is, more than we like to admit, also often present in ostensibly reasonable decisions.

State, Society, and the Individual

Watsuji and his fellow citizens were not alone in their distaste for the modern West. Japan's historical circumstances closely resembled Germany's at the same time. From an historical perspective, this is not surprising. The authors of Japan's constitution, specifically Itō Hirobumi (伊藤博文), 1841-1909, utilized the Prussian constitution as a model for their own and as already noted German philosophies were the most prevalent in Japan at the beginning of its modern period.

But the focal point of Germany and Japan's critique of the West was undeniably the highly atomistic constitution of the individual and its constituent institutions. Certainly as Ralf Dahrendorf points out, the political

manifestation of individualism, liberal democracy. “is not as old as sympathetic historians would have it.”¹² Dahrendorf concedes that the theory may indeed go back to the Enlightenment or before, but the practice of true liberal democracy, he continues, barely goes back to the Jacksonian revolution in the United States. Perhaps even this is too kind of a periodization considering that minorities were effectively disenfranchised until well into the 1960s.

But what were some of the historical situations in Japan at the time that formed some of Watsuji’s perspectives on liberalism and the individual? We could certainly not obtain a clear or complete picture of the situation if we were to designate Watsuji’s theories as simply a result of indigenous Japanese thought. Japan, like Germany, industrialized later than most European societies. Partly due to this fact, liberalism became indelibly linked with modernization. In the U.S., on the other hand, the “classical liberal” relationship between the state and the individual was well developed before the onslaught of modernization. In Japan, however, late industrialization was undertaken under the tutelage of the state which was even more pronounced due to the belief, unfounded or not, that if Japan did not establish a “rich country, strong army” (*fukoku kyōhei*, 富国強兵) soon, then they would be colonized by the Western powers as was the case in China.

Japanese liberals did not follow the “classical liberalism” of the 18th and early mid-19th Century British type that emphasized individualism, a laissez-

¹² Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany*. (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 1967), 33.

faire relationship between politics and economics, and a fundamental distrust of state power. Instead, they followed the “progressive liberalism” of late-19th Century English liberals such as Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882), John Atkinson Hobson (1858-1940),¹³ and Leonard Trelawney Hobhouse (1864-1929). This type of liberalism “advocated that the state play an active and positive role in supporting the material and spiritual development of the individual.”¹⁴ Japanese liberals proclaimed that only this type of state-based liberalism could right the wrongs of the industrial revolution.

Thus from the beginning of the modern period in Japan there was an emphasis on society as a collective, and only consequently did there arise a construction of a certain relationship between the individual, the state, and society. Yoshino Sakuzō, perhaps the leading liberal advocate of the time, argued that popular sovereignty was not appropriate for Japan since the Japanese people had not fought for the right to rule their country as did the French and English. However, as Carol Gluck astutely points out, we must remember that Japan was not so simply ideologically defined or manufactured. And that “ideology, as it is consciously practiced, still looms larger in studies of ideology than it did in the lives of those for whom it was conceived.”¹⁵

¹³Hobson’s work on imperialism introduced an insidiously “evil” element into the Japanese discourse. Hobson defined imperialism as “the use of the machinery of government by private interests, mainly capitalists, to secure for them economic gains outside the country.” *Imperialism, A Study*. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1954), 94.

¹⁴Hoston, 289.

¹⁵ Carol Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 14-15.

Nonetheless, we are certainly warranted in placing Watsuji in the intellectual context of the time and contending that Watsuji, who was surely able to give more time and effort to the investigation and contemplation of such issues from his position as lecturer of ethics and philosophy than the average man on the street who was forced to survive at almost any cost in the difficult times before World War II.

Watsuji's basic objection to Western individualism was that it did not account for the immanent relationships and interconnections between the individual and society that essentially make man what he is. For Watsuji, and most Asians influenced by Confucianism, individuals cannot be conceived of in isolation from the community. To do so would simply be an endeavor in abstraction. Even if we were to accept a Crusoeian-type of individual as our point of analysis, what is absent spatially, the "betweenness" or *aidagara*, would still exist temporally in our historical connectedness with our ancestors. Watsuji writes that "it is never inappropriate to grasp *ningen sonzai* as the unified structure of past, present, and future. To put this another way, the structural unity of *ningen sonzai* 'comes to the home ground in the present.'"¹⁶ What we obtain is not a new thing, a new person, but instead a person that is at the same time an individual and a member of a community. What is achieved is, in a sense, a return. We return to a state before the individual or society. For Watsuji, and for Nishida, this preexistent nondual home is "nothingness."

¹⁶ *Rinrigaku*, 190.

We cannot help but to appeal to the *Dao Te Ching* for a more profound and poetic exposition of this difficult concept.

Unfortunately, when Watsuji figures the state into this equation, he begins a journey that will haunt his legacy for decades. Bellah writes that the ideal situation for Watsuji was “one in which culture, group and individual are focused organically into a single body, a *kyōdōtai* (協同体) (*gemeinschaft*). The most adequate and comprehensive *kyōdōtai* is the state, expressed most fully when embodied in the Japanese emperor who expresses in a mediate way, the only possible way, absolute value.”¹⁷ This does not imply, however, that Watsuji completely denies the legitimacy of *gesellschaft* processes. He claimed that *gesellschaft* advancement was necessary, that is progressive, if and only if it lead to a higher form of *gemeinschaft*.

The state is thus the highest ethical structure. The state is the only institution that can encompass authentic unselfishness and unity. Here we must return to Watsuji’s theory of double-negation. In the individual sphere, selfishness, for example, can be overcome by negating oneself into the group. Unfortunately, however, group selfishness can also arise in this new setting. To counteract this group-selfishness the group must then be “overcome” by the state, for only in the state can man’s true nature be realized. Thus, Parsonian functionalism takes hold in that the shared values and beliefs are internalized in the state.

¹⁷Bellah, 592.

Watsuji believed that the Japanese could only become truly authentic through a reattachment to their authentic Japanese identity as it was related to *fūdo*, and *aidagara* based *ningen sonzai*, and that the state had a substantial and justifiable role in such a reattachment. Unfortunately, as can be seen by the war to come, Watsuji put undue faith in the ability of the military leadership in the 1930s and 1940s to manifest the authentic Japanese Spirit he expounded. Watsuji's philosophy in effect was erroneous by conflating the nation and state without certain qualifications. After the war, Watsuji realized the inauthenticity of the state as it was constituted in the 1930s and 1940s. For him the state must be a *true* representation of the people for it to qualify as a balancing force in the face of such negative factors as group selfishness.

In summary, we can see that inasmuch as Watsuji's theory of *ningen sonzai* (human existence) is defined in terms of practical intersubjectivity, individual acts are not "primary." A person becomes an individual by negating one's public aspect but to stop there would be "inauthentic." Watsuji believed that true authenticity lies in the second negation, the negation of negation where we realize the community and thereby return to an original dual aspect human mode of existence.

Thus a true act in this realm of authenticity, as we have seen in the case of bribery, does not manifest itself but through such an "advanced relationship." That is, "the act occurs in the full sense only when it aims at

some specific relationship with another subject and hence at some possible relationship.”¹⁸

¹⁸ *Ethics*, 242.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

But was/is Watsuji's philosophy only relevant to Japan? Or, did Watsuji advance his ideas for social improvement only for the benefit of the Japanese? Certainly, Watsuji continually viewed the problems of modernity on a global scale, but his emphasis was always on the Japanese case.

It is indeed common for intellectuals worldwide, and even for the "common" man, to follow such a culturalist mentality of simply designating differences between entities, whether racial, ethnic, or national, as solely a matter of culture. Western scholars often approach such studies by asking questions such as: Did Japanese philosophers given their cultural differences really understand Heidegger or Hegel? Or, alternatively, how did the "Oriental" tradition distort their studies of Western philosophers?

We must realize that simply by the fact that we have been brought up in the so-called West does not necessarily endow us with a better understanding of our "own" Western philosophy. Western philosophy is after all as diverse and heterogeneous as that of Eastern philosophy and thought, which, contrary to even popular opinion in the West, ranges far and wide from sometimes polytheistic Hinduism to Tantric Buddhism to the pragmatic this-worldly

religion/philosophy of Confucianism. Scholars including Robert Bellah, David Dilworth, Naoki Sakai, and Yoko Arisaka have all chimed in with their own opinions on the issue of Watsuji and cultural particularism.

Robert Bellah in a 1965 *Journal of Asian Studies* article attempts to prove that Watsuji was guilty of culturalism by way of a “national narcissism” associated with the Kyoto School. Although Watsuji was indeed peripherally related to this faction as discussed earlier, accusations against that group by Maruyama Masao, Ienaga Saburō, Arima Tatsuo, and the Marxist scholar Tōsaka Jun cannot be justifiably leveled on Watsuji simply because he may have been a member. Certainly, guilt by association is even more tenuous when the association itself is highly questionable.

Dilworth in response to Bellah’s argument advances a theory of his own. Dilworth uses a model that bifurcates Watsuji’s logic of ideas and historical methodology into two parameters. On the one hand, he places the influence of Nietzsche, Heidegger, et al., and on the other he places, Natsume, Nishida, et al.

Like so many creative Japanese thinkers, this concrete fusion of East and West achieved by Watsuji would seem to illustrate the theme of “the self-identity of contradictions” which Nishida, Watsuji, and others have found at the basis of Japanese culture. (Contrary to Bellah’s approach, I would suggest that this kind of identity of contradictories has produced, not “cultural particularism” and “national narcissism,” but a meaningful variety of cultural universalism at each significant stage of Japanese civilization, including the modern period.)¹⁹

¹⁹David Dilworth, “Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960): Cultural Phenomenologist and Ethician,” *Philosophy East & West*, 24:1 (January 1974), 8.

Watsuji realized that man was indeed a reciprocal product of time and space. He himself was not free of these confines. Based on his concept of *fūdo*, itself sociologically changing, peoples' worldviews are free to be reevaluated within those new spatio-temporal categories. If worldviews should prove inadequate, Watsuji would be the first to dismiss them, as he did after the war with regards to his politics. And indeed, Watsuji's ideas of Japan's place in modernity have benefited from new categories achieved in the postwar era.

Perhaps we can view the "prewar Watsuji" as a sort of intellectually latent potentiality of the "postwar Watsuji." But the problem in so doing is that this would only cloak the issue in absolutist terms in that the "postwar Watsuji" was always present in the prewar era. Certainly, this would be a teleological category with the postwar era determining the structure of the prewar era: but, the problem arises that by thus categorizing the prewar era as relative to that era we, at least from a "Western mindset" (itself highly nebulous), superimpose blatantly normative judgments on the entire era. To keep us in the proper space, i.e. prewar Japan, we must contextualize Watsuji in that particular history as much as possible, of course, given the many restrictions of the historical method.

Profound intellectual and institutional conflicts and the myriad of issues and problems evolving from those conflicts were certainly not unique to Japan in the interwar period. They were present in every capitalist economy, albeit not as severe, except perhaps in Germany. What made the Japanese and

German case unique was that the inherent contradictions became so insurmountable that they began to be linked to the very legitimacy of the democratic system to the point that no saving institution was foreseeable. The victims were not only the people engaged in the war itself but also the experiment in constitutionalism and democracy.²⁰ Perhaps the determining variable in this experiment was the state control of the mass media.



Figure 12 Cover of a 1943 Japanese magazine. Doll-like children dressed in their national costumes illustrating the unity of the Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Certainly, a quick survey of some of the reporting during that time shows that it was far from objective. For example, in 1928 as Chiang Kai-shek's army moved north. Japanese forces were sent to intervene. When a clash ensued, the Kwantung army, in order to justify their involvement, reported back to Japan that 300 Japanese had been massacred by the Chinese.

This story was picked up by the Japanese press and reported as fact. However, the truth, which was not discovered until after the war, was that only 13

²⁰ For an excellent study of the German case see Detlev J.K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*. Translated by Richard Deveson. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987). Peukert characterizes the German situation during this time as effectively a Chernobyl-level meltdown.

Japanese had been killed, and they had been executed by Chinese authorities for smuggling opium. There were no laws to ensure truth in reporting. In fact, the first laws concerning the popular press turned upside down any attempts at fair and unbiased reporting.

As a result of the National General Mobilization Law 国家総動員法



Figure 13 Japan was certainly not the only country to believe it was the “Light of Asia.” This Pulitzer Prize winning cartoon from 1933 depicts Japan as the beacon of light for the rest of Asia, almost two years after it invaded Manchuria.

[*Kokka Sōdōin Hō*] promulgated on April 1, 1938, the government of Japan, which at the time had effectively become the military leaders, had free rein to impose any and all restrictions on the press that it deemed appropriate.²¹ Two articles were instrumental in ensuring government power over what people read and very often what they subsequently thought.²² Article 16 gave the government the power to

²¹ This law was preceded by others: Peace Preservation Law (*Chian Iji Hō*, 治安維持法) of 1887, Peace Police Law (*Chian Keisatsu Hō*, 治安警察法) of 1900, and the successor to the 1887 law the 1925 Peace Preservation Law.

²² Perhaps we should keep in mind the several instances of press manipulations of the American populace, for example, Hearst influence on the Spanish-American War.

essentially control private enterprise, including, of course, the mass media, and Article 20 allowed the government to restrict or prohibit press freedoms.²³

Propaganda, censorship and communitarian pressures certainly affected the activities of Japanese intellectuals during the prewar and war periods. And it was often the idea of mobilization rather than the particular well elucidated aims of mobilization that affected people the most. The line between reformism and revolutionism also became increasingly blurred. Antonio Gramsci's concepts of domination, physical coercion, and hegemony, ideological coercion, certainly pertain to the Japanese experience. And as Kato Shūichi points out "it was difficult to be consistent as a liberal without advocating change that would be deemed revolutionary."²⁴ Any such reformists soon learned to keep their views to themselves, even if they were prophetic enough to see the broad shape of events that was overtaking Japan. Maruyama Masao points out in his seminal work, *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, that laws were not necessarily the strongest form of

²³ Article 16: "The government may, out of necessity for national mobilization in time of war, order the opening, consignment, transfer, cooperation and either the abolition or suspension of enterprises; or again abolish, merge, or change the purpose of corporate bodies in accordance with Imperial Ordinances.

And Article 20: "The government may, out of necessity for national mobilization in time of war, restrict or prohibit the insertion of [articles in] newspapers or other publications in accordance with Imperial Ordinances.

The government may prohibit the sale and distribution of newspapers or other publications containing items that hinder the national general mobilization in violation of restrictions or prohibitions under the foregoing provision and may confiscate them. In such events, the government may confiscate the original plates." Richard Mitchell, *Censorship in Imperial Japan*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 173.

²⁴Kato Shūichi, "Taishō Democracy as the Pre-Stage for Japanese Militarism," in *Japan in Crisis*, eds. Bernard S. Silberman and H. D. Harootunian (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 218.

coercion. Areas of conflict were more often settled preemptively through societal beliefs, especially, that devotion to the service of the state was one of the highest ideals.

This line of thought is not meant to imply that Watsuji was a liberal (again, depending on one's definition) being prevented from expressing his true beliefs by the government. In the trying times of the interwar period drastic measures were certainly required. If one could not move to the left, for among other reasons, the loyalty required by other Communist nations and the very revolutionary program espoused, then the right was perhaps the only option. As we have seen, the military often utilized Watsuji's theories for their own convoluted ends. We must keep in mind that quite often the greatest failure of historical analyses is not that they sometimes simplify reality in order to explore causal relationships, but that they attempt to explain things they cannot possibly explain, such as discrete historical events. We must keep this fact in mind here also and refrain from making "obvious" links between the military and Watsuji.

But why didn't Watsuji and those like him not speak out against the war? With regards to intellectuals, specifically university professors during the prewar and war period there were many levels of support or denial open to such individuals which makes historical causality a difficult path to follow. During the war, Japanese communists, for example, either were required to recant their beliefs or suffer imprisonment. Those who "chose" imprisonment, such as Tokuda Kyūichi and Shiga Yoshio, were later "rewarded" as heroes for

their acts of defiance towards the military establishment.²⁵ This situation, with the Cold War looming in the background, was the source of continual consternation in the halls of the occupation authority and in the Japanese government itself. However, this blanket innocence of Japanese communists for the war was not always justified, for more often than not the communists were jailed for their untraditional political beliefs rather than their opposition to Japanese imperialism.

For better or for worse, the non-confrontational tradition of Japanese intellectuals, a category Watsuji can be included in, and the people at large, more often resulted in oblique references to the war. Of course threat of imprisonment and public persecution served to reinforce centuries of conflict avoidance. Certainly, those opposed to the war and whom did not speak up can be categorized in two camps: 1) those who believed they could not effectively voice their beliefs in however a minor way from behind bars; and, 2) those who were less concerned about the people at large and more concerned about their own personal welfare. Inner motivations again are difficult to assess, if not in some cases, here perhaps, impossible to ascertain.

Any inherently absolutist normative questions of right and wrong are of course often quite irrelevant in the realm of war, which is in itself commonly accepted in all cultures as wrong. No such questions can be answered in the abstract, which here again raises the issue and problems of attempts at absolutist or situational ethical analyses. Particular instances provide us with a

²⁵ Robert A. Scalapino, *The Japanese Communist Movement, 1920-1966*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

better idea of the circumstances and the problems involved. But there are of course concrete guiding parameters that are applicable to all these situations. However, not until the entire picture, which perhaps we can never completely ascertain, is seen can we venture to judge individuals and individual instances. This is not to infer that we must give into the relativists and only judge individual actions within its spatio-temporal context, but this context must provide us with at the very least a starting point.

In the case of Watsuji Tetsurō, his specific actions are not the source of controversy but instead his philosophical ideas are the focal point of investigations into his war guilt or innocence. Bellah states that "...the humane and gracious figure of Watsuji Tetsurō would not be problematic for modern Japan were it not for the fact that partly *behind the cloak* of just such thinking as his, a profoundly pathological social movement brought Japan near to total disaster."²⁶ However, we must keep in mind that ideologues of all persuasions often have very little reservation in detaching ideology from its producer, and Japanese militarists were no exception. Kita Ikki (北一輝), 1883-1937, for example, who in effect "designed" a portion of the political system later used by the military, was soon executed by that same military after they gained control. This is in marked contrast to Heidegger, whose philosophy is hard to collate with Nazi tenets, but whose Nazi activities are now well documented. Of course, actions are infinitely easier to locate as compared to philosophical writings which can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. Such problems are

²⁶ Bellah, 593. [Italics mine.]

exacerbated when the language in question is as highly ambiguous as Japanese. Many postwar businessmen soon realized that “yes” did not always mean “yes” and “no” was often conveyed in dozens of oblique references. Certainly Watsuji mirrors one of the first subjects of his studies, Nietzsche, by being misconstrued as to the authentic meaning of his work.

Perhaps the key to comprehending Watsuji’s politics before 1945 can be found in the very lack of information detailed above. Spatiality became, as we have seen, the keystone of Watsuji’s work. But when “space” is limited, namely information responses, then the Japanese Spirit could not be properly manifested, nor could Watsuji’s true Spirit be properly manifested. As discussed above, bribery is not such a manifestation until it is reacted to by the general populace. Thus, by the same token, the war, according to Watsuji’s formulations, was not such a manifestation until the walls of censorship were destroyed which allowed the Japanese public, including Watsuji himself, to see the full dimension of what happened, and then and only then such reactions became manifestations of the authentic Japanese Spirit. And this only occurred after the war had come to an end.²⁷ Thus Watsuji’s prewar politics, restricted as they were by state control of the media, were transformed when the media was “freed” in the postwar era.

²⁷ Even Iwanami, Watsuji’s publisher, was concerned about the lack of information disseminated from the top to the bottom echelons of society in the war era. After the war, Iwanami ventured into the popular press world of “Kodansha culture.” He believed that support for the war was due to the lack of “real culture” reaching the people.

In this sense, the defeat of Japan enabled the true Japanese Spirit and Watsuji's true Spirit to be known. Certainly even this approach could be criticized for accepting what amounts to situational ethics. But the purpose of this study is not to superimpose Western absolutist normative concepts on Japanese history. However, we must keep in mind that even so-called absolutist doctrines must often also be interpreted by mankind, making them even less absolutist than their names imply.

In the case of the war it was the lack of information that contributed to the Japanese Spirit. However, the Japanese Spirit or more specifically Japanese culture is also open to change. Impermanence and the proclivity of Japan to seclude itself from the rest of the world were major constituents of Japanese culture throughout its history. Certainly, they fulfilled Watsuji's concept of *fūdo*, in that typhoons enabled the Japanese to defeat two major invasions in 1274 and 1281 and at the same time provided the cultural resignation to the natural elements. It is interesting to note that according to Watsuji's formulations the Japanese Spirit of impermanence has all but banished the Japanese Spirit of seclusion. Today, Japan is after all one of the most dependent countries in the world on outside resources and markets. Again, Western-style absolutism was no problem for the pragmatic Watsuji. Culture must change and adapt to its changing environment, and as Watsuji proclaimed, Japan's indigenous culture was "produced" by none other than the active subject 主体 (*shutai*), the Japanese people themselves, who themselves are always changing and adapting to their new environments.

Although Watsuji modified his political theories after the war, his view of the Emperor's role remained the same and provoked a great deal of controversy. However, the controversy is rather easily dismissed by ensuring that the *Imperial system* and the Emperor at the time of the war, *Hirohito*, are correctly delineated, just as we have attempted to delineate Watsuji's philosophical foundations and his so-called political pronouncements. Certainly no one can deny the part the Imperial system has played in unifying the Japanese nation for over two-thousand years, in both good times and bad. After discussing the issue with Yuasa Yasuo, Robert E. Carter states that Watsuji simply defended the Imperial system because of the "institution's service as a unifying force between Japan's ethnic culture and its intellectual tradition for the 2,000 years prior to the modern period."²⁸ He did not endorse Hirohito's wartime involvement, itself still in question today. Perhaps it is ironic that SCAP policies towards the Emperor essentially institutionalized the imperial house as an institution above "mundane" politics, just as Watsuji envisioned.

It is crucial not to stop with a single-minded focus on the failures of the era. Most postwar scholarship simply addressed the question, "What went wrong?" Fortunately, since then studies have concentrated more on the question, "What went on?" without seeing history through the screen of war. Wartime philosophers and social critics in Japan and Germany it would see

²⁸ Robert E. Carter's correspondence with Yuasa Yasuo, in *Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert E. Carter. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 313.

must always be critiqued in terms of the eventual war--an approach that I have attempted to avoid as much as possible. In this study I have attempted to address both questions. But I have also focused on one more important question, "What can be taken from this period and applied to today?"

Perhaps the greatest lesson we can take from Watsuji's writings is the primacy of human relations. In fact, for Watsuji, ethics was not simply another branch of philosophy but it was the very core of philosophy itself.

The noted political scientist Maruyama Masao is renowned for taking aim at the very societal relationships Watsuji advocated, especially the concept of *kyōdōtai*. But Irokawa Daikichi disagrees with Maruyama's polemical attack by stating that his assessment is "ahistorical in the extreme" in that it uses as its base of analysis the period from late Meiji to the 1930s, certainly the most troubling era in Japan's history. Irokawa contends that this is an unfair appraisal by arguing that such an analysis of *kyōdōtai* in the Japanese setting must include the half-century before the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, which Maruyama conveniently ignores for the more controversial periods of the 1920s and 1930s.²⁹

In fact, the renowned Japanologist Chalmers Johnson advances Irokawa's critique to the post-World War II era in his 1995 work *Japan: Who Governs?*, in which he contends that Japan effectively won the Cold War. Japan continues today, Johnson argues, even under considerable pressure from outside sources, to continue its practice of communitarian democracy. Harvard

²⁹ Irokawa Daikichi, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, trans. Marius B. Jansen (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

professor Robert Putnam has, at the same time, been speaking out and spreading the idea that America must build up “social capital” if it is to be revitalized. Putnam certainly mirrors the correct perspective of Watsuji’s philosophy when he states, “The specific reforms of the Progressive Era are no longer appropriate for our time, but the practical, enthusiastic idealism of that era—and its achievements—should inspire us.”³⁰ Perhaps what Watsuji spent his life trying to accomplish, a sense of community and belongingness, is the same goal these and a great many others have been seeking. If so, Johnson may indeed be correct in saying that Japan won the Cold War—although perhaps it would be more appropriate to state that Japan has won the peace. Johnson was not only referring to the economic success of Japan provided by Cold War geopolitics, but to its success in strengthening the social fabric, as demonstrated in the drastically reduced rate of violent crime, divorce, babies born out of wedlock, poverty, and other forms of social disorganization. If these authors are on the right track, perhaps atomistic individualism has indeed reached its height. Putnam and others are urging their compatriots to promote the sense of community over individualism.

In the history of the West, we have tried to assimilate other cultures, but since the 1960s and 1970s, we have recognized that perhaps there is something we can learn from other cultures. As William R. LaFleur contends, “Watsuji was arguably the best read and the most sharply articulate among the Asian

³⁰ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 401.

thinkers who addressed [the problem of] individualism.³¹ And as such, perhaps there is a great deal we can still learn from him.

Reflecting Peter Fritzsche's analysis of Weimar Germany, if we are to see Watsuji's political failures in terms of experiments designed to manage (however deleteriously) the modern condition, then the failure of his attempts at those times are not the same as the destruction of the laboratory.³² In the final analysis, we must

admit that Watsuji's philosophical mistakes and successes certainly qualify him for the club of "human-all-too-human." He was indeed very often "caught up in the tangles of his own rhetoric."³³ But we must not summarily discount the goals that Watsuji was trying to achieve, goals that for us even



Figure 14 Watsuji at his home in 1950.

today could serve us and our societies well. Watsuji's efforts, and similar

³¹ LaFleur, ix.

³² Peter Fritzsche, "Did Weimar Fail?" in *The Journal of Modern History* 68 (September 1996), 631.

³³ LaFleur, 256.

efforts in Japan and Germany before 1945, to reexamine the conflicts and passions of modernity becomes, inevitably, a commentary on contemporary problems as well. We do ourselves a disservice by ignoring Watsuji and other intellectuals in Japan and Germany solely on the basis of the war.

Watsuji began his career with a profound appreciation of the cultures and philosophies of the West in a time when these ideas and ideals were still relatively new, but then began to appreciate his own unique culture as well. In his later years the transparent wall of division between Japan and the rest of the world shattered for Watsuji and he began to envelop himself in a true “study of man.” not as an individual atomistic entity, but as transcending Beings that exist through fundamental and empathetic relations to that which is beyond—our fellow man. Certainly Watsuji would applaud one’s comprehension of the intersubjectivity of human relations, which was the basis for his life’s work, but for Watsuji the true measure of success would undoubtedly be in one’s personal transformation sparked by such a realization. Acting upon such a philosophy would be Watsuji’s highest ideal as he himself acted with his wife, children, and those around him, and in fact humanity as a whole. In all the many trials, tribulations, and transformations of Watsuji’s long life there was one thing that never changed—his humility and his love of mankind. We still have a lot to learn, or, more importantly, we still have a lot to do.

APPENDIX I

THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF WATSUJI TETSUŌ Published by Iwanami Shoten, 1961-1963

Volume 1

Niiche Kenkyu (ニーチェ研究) [*A Study of Nietzsche*], 1913.

Zeeren Kierukegooru (ゼエレン・キエルケゴオル) [*Soren Kierkegaard*], 1915.

Volume 2

Koji Junrei (古寺巡礼) [*Pilgrimages to Ancient Temples*], 1919.

Katsura Rikkyū (桂離宮) [*The Katsura Imperial Villa*], 1955.

Volume 3

Nihon Kodai Bunka (日本古代文化) [*Ancient Japanese Culture*], 1920.

Uzumoreta Nihon (埋もれた日本) [*The Buried Japan*], 1951.

Volume 4

Nihon Seishinshi Kenkyū (日本精神史研究) [*Study of the History of the Japanese Spirit*], 1926.

Zoku Nihon Seishinshi Kenkyū (続日本精神史研究) [*Continued Study of the History of the Japanese Spirit*], 1934.

Volume 5

Genshi Bukkyō no Jissen Tetsugaku (原始仏教の実践哲学) [*The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism*], 1927.

仏教哲学の最初の展開

Volume 6

Keeberu Sensei (ケーベル先生) [*Professor Koebel*], 1948.

Homerosu Hihan (ホメーロス批判) [*A Critique of Homer*], 1946. written in 1936.

Koshi (孔子) [*Confucius*], 1936.

Kindai Rekishitetsugaku no Senkusha (近代歴史哲学の先駆者 ヴィコとヘルダ) [*Pioneers of Modern Philosophy of History: Vico and Herder*], 1940.

Volume 7

Genshi Kirisutokyō no Bunkashiteki Igi (原始キリスト教の文化史的意義) [*The Significance of Primitive Christianity in Cultural History*], 1926.

Porisuteki Ningen no Rinrigaku (ポリス的人間の倫理学) [*The Ethics of the Man of the Greek Polis*], 1948.

Volume 8

Fūdo (風土) [*Climate and Culture*], 1935.

Itaria Kodai Junrei (イタリア古寺巡礼) [*Pilgrimage to Ancient Italy*], 1950.

Volume 9

Ningen no Gaku toshite no Rinrigaku (人間の学としての倫理学) [*Ethics as the Study of Man*], 1934.

Kanto Jissen Risei Hihan (カント実践理性批判) [*A Critique on Kant's Practical Reason*], 1935.

Jinkaku to Jinruisei (人格と人類性) [*Personality and Humanity*], 1938.

Volume 10-11

Rinrigaku (倫理学) [*Ethics*], vol. 1, 1937; vol. 2, 1942; vol. 3, 1949.

Volume 12-13

Nihon Rinri Shisōshi (日本倫理思想史) [*History of Japanese Ethical Thought*], 2 volumes, 1952.

Volume 14

Sonnō Shisō to Sono Dentō—Nihon Rinri Shisōshi (尊皇思想とその伝統日本倫理思想史) [*The Thought of the Reverence for the Emperor and its Tradition: History of Japanese Ethical Thought*], 1943.

Nihon no Shindō (日本の臣道) [*The Way of the Japanese Subject*], 1944.

Volume 15

Sakoku: Nihon no Higeiki (鎖国日本の悲劇) [*National Seclusion. Japan's Tragedy*], 1951.

Volume 16

Kabuki to Ayatsuri Jōruri (歌舞伎と操り浄瑠璃) [], 1955.

Volume 17

Gūzō Saikō (偶像再興) [*Revival of Idols*], 1918.

Men to Perusona [*Mask and Persona*], 1937.

Amerika no Kokuminsei (アメリカの国民性) [*The Character of the American People*], 1944.

Volume 18

Jidoden no Kokoromi (自叙伝の試み) [*An Attempt at an Autobiography*], never completed.

Volume 19

Bukkyō Rinri Shisōshi (仏教倫理思想史) [*History of Buddhist Ethical Thought*].

Volume 20

Shosetsu, Gikyoiku, Hyōron, Zuisō, Kōen. 小説・戯曲・評論・随想・講演
[*Novels, Plays, Editorials, Occasional Thoughts, and Lectures*]

APPENDIX II

BIOGRAPHICAL CHRONOLOGY

| | | | | |
|------|----------|---------|-------------------------|---|
| 1889 | Meiji 22 | | March 1 | Born Hyōgyō ken. second son of doctor |
| 1895 | Meiji 28 | Age: 6 | April 1 | Enters elementary school |
| 1901 | Meiji 34 | Age: 12 | April 1 | Enters middle school |
| 1906 | Meiji 39 | Age: 17 | September 10 | Enters First Higher High School |
| 1909 | Meiji 42 | Age: 20 | July 1 September 10 | Graduated High School Enters Tokyo Imperial University. Department of Philosophy. Majors in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy |
| 1912 | Meiji 45 | Age 23 | June 27 July 10 | Marriage to Takase Teru. Graduates Tokyo Imperial University. Department of Philosophy. Graduation thesis: <i>On Schopenhauer's Pessimism and Salvation Theory</i> . |
| 1913 | Taishō 2 | Age: 24 | October 1 | <i>A Study of Nietzsche</i> published. |
| 1914 | Taishō 3 | Age: 25 | February 15 | Oldest daughter Kyōko born. |
| 1915 | Taishō 4 | Age: 26 | September October 15 | Moved to Kanagawa Prefecture. Tazusawa in Fujisawa. <i>Soren Kierkegaard</i> published. |
| 1916 | Taishō 5 | Age: 27 | August 31 | Passes physical for military service. |
| 1917 | Taishō 6 | Age: 28 | May 1 | <i>Collected Writings of Nietzsche</i> |

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|------|-----------|---------|--------------|--|
| | | | | translated into Japanese by Iwanami. |
| 1918 | Taishō 7 | Age: 29 | June | Moves to Tokyo. Shiba ward. Mitako. |
| | | | December 20 | <i>Revival of Idols</i> published. |
| 1919 | Taishō 8 | Age: 30 | May 23 | <i>Pilgrimage to Ancient Shrines</i> published. |
| 1920 | Taishō 9 | Age: 31 | May 1 | Lecturer, Tōyō University. until March 1925. |
| | | | November 10 | <i>Ancient Japanese Culture</i> published. |
| 1921 | Taishō 10 | Age: 32 | March 15 | Moved outside Tokyo, Setagaya. |
| | | | June 9 | Oldest son, Natsuhiko born. |
| | | | October | From this time until about May 1925, editor of Iwanami Publishing's magazine <i>Shiso</i> [Thought]. |
| 1922 | Taishō 11 | Age: 33 | April 1 | Instructor, Hōsei University. until March 1926, Instructor Keiō University until 1923. and at the Tsuda Eigakujuku until 1924. |
| 1924 | Taishō 13 | Age: 35 | March | Moved outside Tokyo. Nakano ward. |
| | | | August 10 | Works by Swedish playwright August Strindberg translated. |
| 1925 | Taishō 14 | Age: 36 | March 1 | Lecturer, Tokyo Imperial University, Department of Literature. |
| | | | July 28 | Appointed Assistant Professor of Ethics, Tokyo Imperial University. |
| 1926 | Taishō 15 | Age: 37 | September 25 | <i>A Study into the History of the Japanese Spirit</i> published. |
| | | | November 25 | <i>The Significance of Primitive Christianity in the History of Culture</i> published. |
| 1927 | Shōwa 2 | Age: 38 | January 22 | Departs for three-year overseas |

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|------|----------|---------|--------------|--|
| | | | | research tour in Germany as a Ministry of Education overseas researcher. to study the history of moral thought. Travels to Paris. Geneva. Rome. Naples. Sicily. Florence. Bologna. Ravenna. Padua. and finally Venice in the middle of March 1928. |
| | | | February 1 | <i>The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism</i> published. |
| | | | September 25 | Father dies. 71 years old. |
| 1928 | Showa 3 | Age: 39 | July 3 | Cuts short his study in Germany and returns to Japan. |
| 1929 | Showa 4 | Age: 40 | April 1 | Lecturer. Ryūkoku University |
| | | | June 25 | <i>Register of Talks on the Sōbōgenzo</i> edited and published. |
| | | | October 24 | Mother dies. 62 years old. |
| 1931 | Showa 6 | Age: 42 | March 31 | Professor, Kyoto Imperial University. |
| 1932 | Showa 7 | Age: 43 | April 1 | Instructor. Otani University. |
| | | | July 1 | Received Doctor of Letters. Dissertation: <i>The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism</i> . |
| 1934 | Showa 9 | Age: 45 | March 20 | <i>Ethics as the Study of Man</i> published. |
| | | | June 26 | Moved to Tokyo. Hongō. |
| | | | July 25 | Professor of Ethics. Tokyo Imperial University. |
| 1935 | Showa 10 | Age: 46 | September 25 | <i>Continued Research into the History of the Japanese Spirit</i> published. |
| | | | September 30 | <i>Fūdo: An Anthropological Study</i> published. |
| | | | October 5 | <i>A Critique on the Practical Reason of Kant</i> published. |
| 1937 | Showa 11 | Age: 48 | April 30 | <i>Ethics</i> , volume 1 published. |
| | | | December | Counselor Pedagogy Department of the Ministry of Education |

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|------|----------|---------|-------------|---|
| | | | December 20 | <i>Mask and Persona</i> published. |
| 1938 | Showa 13 | Age: 49 | November 5 | <i>Confucius</i> published. |
| | | | November 30 | <i>Personality and Humanity</i> published. |
| | | | December 28 | Moved to Nerima, Tokyo. |
| 1939 | Showa 14 | Age: 50 | June 8 | Member, Committee for the preservation of murals at Hōryūji temple. |
| | | | July 2 | Fell ill with heart problems. |
| | | | August 10 | Updated edition of <i>Ancient Japanese Culture</i> published. |
| 1940 | Showa 15 | Age: 51 | May | <i>Ethics</i> edited by Kōsaka Maasaki and Kaneko Takazo. |
| | | | June 30 | Revised edition of <i>History of the Japanese Spirit</i> published. |
| | | | December 14 | Translated <i>An Aspect of the Greek Spirit</i> with Tanaka Hideo. |
| 1942 | Showa 17 | Age: 53 | January 23 | Lecturer before the Emperor. |
| | | | June 15 | <i>Ethics</i> , vol. 3 published. |
| | | | December 25 | <i>A Study of Nietzsche</i> revised and edited, published. |
| 1943 | Showa 18 | Age: 54 | January 22 | Lecturer before the Emperor (Renga). |
| | | | December 20 | <i>The Thought of the Reverence for the Emperor and its Tradition: History of Japanese Ethical Thought</i> published. |
| 1944 | Showa 19 | Age: 55 | April 24 | Advisor of Tokyo Imperial University. |
| | | | July 10 | <i>The Way of the Japanese Subject and The National Character of America</i> published. |
| 1946 | Showa 21 | Age: 57 | November 1 | <i>A Critique of Homer</i> published. |
| 1947 | Showa 22 | Age: 58 | March 20 | <i>Pilgrimage to Ancient Temples</i> , revised edition published. |
| | | | August 30 | <i>Soren Kierkegaard</i> , revised edition published. |
| | | | November 4 | Advisor, National Museum. |

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|------|----------|---------|--------------|--|
| 1948 | Showa 23 | Age: 59 | January 15 | <i>The Ethics of the Man of the Greek Polis</i> published. |
| | | | May 15 | <i>Professor Koebel</i> published. |
| | | | June 20 | <i>Confucius</i> republished. |
| | | | November 15 | <i>The Symbol of National Unity.</i> published. |
| 1949 | Showa 24 | Age: 60 | February | Lecturer before the Emperor on Tuesdays. |
| | | | March 31 | Retired from Tokyo University. |
| | | | May 10 | <i>Ethics</i> vol. 3 published. |
| | | | May 18 | Member, Deliberative Council of the Ministry of Education. |
| | | | September 21 | Member Exhibit Committee, National Museum. |
| | | | October 5 | Member Japan Academy. |
| 1950 | Showa 25 | Age: 61 | April 15 | <i>Sakoku—A National Tragedy</i> published. |
| | | | April 15 | <i>Pilgrimage to Ancient Italy</i> published. |
| | | | August 15 | <i>Pioneers of Modern Philosophy of History</i> republished. |
| | | | September 10 | <i>To Those Who Love Nietzsche</i> translated with Tezuka Tomio. |
| | | | November | Founding president of the Japanese Association of Ethics, a position held until his death in 1960. |
| | | | December 21 | Member, Special Deliberative Council on Cultural Property. |
| 1951 | Showa 26 | Age: 62 | May 26 | Received Yomiuri Prize for <i>Sakoku</i> , donates prize money to endowment. |
| | | | June 15 | <i>History of Greek Ethics and the Ethics of the Greek Polis Man</i> , edited edition published. |
| | | | July 15 | <i>Buried Japan</i> published. |
| 1952 | Showa 27 | Age: 63 | January 26 | <i>History of Japan's Ethical Thought</i> , vol. 1 republished. |
| | | | November 3 | Fell ill with heart problems, while in Kobe. |

| | | | | |
|------|------------------------|---------|-------------|--|
| | | | November 25 | <i>History of Japan's Ethical Thought</i> , vol. 2 republished. |
| 1954 | Showa 29 | Age: 65 | December 15 | Collected Writings of Watsuji Tetsurō published. |
| 1955 | Showa 30 published. | Age: 66 | March 25 | <i>A Study of Japanese Art</i> |
| | | | June 16 | Member, National Commission for UNESCO-Japan. |
| | | | July 5 | <i>Confucius</i> republished. |
| | | | November 3 | Awarded Order of Culture |
| | | | November 20 | <i>The Katsura Imperial Villa: Reflections on the Process of Its Construction</i> published. |
| 1956 | Showa 31 | Age: 67 | February 10 | <i>Pilgrimage to Ancient Italy</i> republished. |
| 1958 | Showa 33 | Age: 69 | March 25 | Hospitalized for heart tests. |
| 1960 | Showa 35 | Age: 71 | January 6 | Hospitalized for pneumonia. |
| | | | February 7 | Hospitalized for heart problems. |
| | | | December 26 | Died 12:40 pm of heart failure at his home in Nerima, Tokyo. |
| | | | December 30 | Funeral. |
| 1961 | Showa 36 | | February 12 | Ashes laid to rest at Kitakamakura. |

APPENDIX III

GLOSSARY

| | | |
|--------------|------|--------------------------------------|
| aidagara | 間柄 | being-betweenness |
| bunka | 文化 | culture |
| bunmei kaika | 文明開化 | civilization and enlightenment |
| chōnin | 町人 | a townsman; a merchant |
| fūdo | 風土 | climate (in the philosophical sense) |
| genshō | 現象 | phenomena |
| gosei | 悟性 | reason or understanding |
| jindō | 人道 | way of mankind |
| jitsuzai | 实在 | reality |
| kangaku | 漢学 | Chinese classical literature |
| kikō | 氣候 | climate (weather); cf. <i>fūdo</i> |
| kojinshugi | 個人主義 | individualism |
| kokutai | 国体 | national polity |
| kōten | 後天 | a posteriori |
| kyakkan | 客観 | objectivity |
| kyōdōtai | 協同体 | <i>gemeinschaft</i> |
| nihonjinron | 日本人論 | discussions of the Japanese |

| | | |
|---------------|------|---|
| ningen | 人間 | human beings |
| ningen sonzai | 人間存在 | human existence |
| rieki shakai | 利益社会 | “ <i>gesellschaft</i> ”: lit. “profit society |
| rekishi | 歴史 | history |
| rinri | 倫理 | ethics |
| risei | 理性 | reasoning power |
| seishin | 精神 | spirit |
| senten | 先天 | a priori |
| shinrigaku | 心理学 | psychology |
| shukan | 主観 | subjectivity; epistemological subject |
| shutai | 主体 | acting subject: cf. <i>shukan</i> |
| tetsugaku | 哲学 | philosophy: cf. <i>shiso</i> |
| wagaku | 和学 | Japanese classical literature |
| yo no naka | 世の中 | social space: in the world |

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