

**Eclipse of the Other in Prewar Japanese Discursive Space:  
Japanese Cultural Identity in the Modern World**

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## Introduction\*

This paper is about the question of Japanese national identity. Some might argue that the question of national identity is obsolete in the face of the current forces of globalization, which, they believe, have been rapidly transforming existing cultural differences into a single, global culture. Such a view underestimates the deep-rootedness of the question. Given the present hegemonic processes in international relations, the construction of national identity remains of central importance to any conception of the current reconfiguration of the world order. The reason for this lies in the unique historical origins and ontological status of both the space of international politics and that of the modern nation-state. If we view the creation of international space as a ‘globalization’ of European, linear, spatio-political design, then we can see that modern nation-states operate as bulwarks against universalizing forces, ‘safe-guards’ of the cultural integrity particular to territorially based human organizations united by common socio-linguistic discourse and historical experience. Indeed, no human organization can survive without constructing a signifying boundary differentiating its identity from others, its inside from its outside, and in the modern world, these two phenomena—international space and the nation-state—are the inseparable twins of the hegemonic system. To complicate the matter, however, cultural identity as such cannot be ‘attained’ or ‘lived’; and yet at the same time, both the structural complementarity of ‘imagined communities’ and the nature of the system of representation mediating the historical world and human cognition are constantly manufacturing the necessity for the illusion of cultural identity. At the intersection of these multiple and problematic dimensions of national identity, prewar Japanese society became increasingly preoccupied with the mission of ‘recovering’ its cultural identity, and in the process generated something hitherto unseen: a Japanese world-view centered on a notion of the superiority of traditional Japanese culture. As prewar history has demonstrated, such a preoccupation was a narcissistic illusion and a campaign of violence against Asian ‘others’.

In this paper, I conceive identity as a particular cognitive inclination or a ‘movement’ of a mind troubled by its need—i.e., the desire for identity—characterized by a retrogressive longing for an idealized past. Here I do not follow the conventional definition of national identity in the field of international politics—the embodiment of the cultural characteristics common to a people. Investigating the development of Japanese prewar discursive space between the rise of the romantic movement circa 1905 and its maturity in the mid-1930s, I found Japanese intellectuals persistently attempted to erase the existence and influences of the Other—the epistemological separation between the subject and the object from which scientific objectivity and the modern conceptions of humanity and history arises—by constantly challenging, denying and eventually dismissing such philosophical traits from the native discursive space. This consistent effort to eliminate the Other

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matured in the mid-1930s, and the native discursive space came to demonstrate two highly problematic and seemingly paradoxical characteristics: a hermeneutic 'play of language' characterized by an arbitrary linkage among signifiers devoid of meaning, and a 'desire' for subjectivity and an articulation of meaning under the single banner of 'Japan'—the cultural essence of the Japanese. Curiously, this development was accompanied by an extremely reductive description of non-Japanese peoples (i.e., Chinese, Korean, and American), in such a way as to affirm the superiority of Japanese culture. I argue that these features were the expression of a Japanese 'collective effort' to reconstruct a lost cultural identity, an attempt to construct an imagined cultural ideal which had until then never existed. This was made possible only by denying the past encounters with and the present existence of the Other and by radically diverging away from the historical world, and as such constituted the discursive preconditions to a fascist logic of action and a mythological belief in the divinity of the emperor.

Seen in this light, then, a discussion of the question of Japanese national identity demands as much attention as the relation between the historical world and the humanly constructed realm of knowledge (discourse). Borrowing Gilles Deleuze's concept of the Other and two modes of cognition he distinguishes, I maintain that the socio-cultural conditions of Japan in the 1930s can be described as cognition/discourse in the absence of the Other, wherein the cognitive frame sustaining the structure of discourse as a whole is collapsed. In this structureless discursive space, the world appears devoid of the critical distance between lived experiences and knowledge about it, and 'identity' between consciousness and its object (the body) could coincide. At the heart of the Japanese discursive and social development that gradually slid into fascism lies, in my view, this distortion of the cognitive/discursive structure, which authorized an attempted 'reliving' of a lost cultural identity in the world of the 'otherwise-Other'. As I hope to show in some detail in the following discussion, this was not achieved without a series of 'intellectual violations' and a massive assault against the tenets of rationality, objectivity, and history.

This paper is as much a product of my 'awkward' subject position—the fact that I am a Japanese immigrant to Canada and working in English speaking discourse— as it is an intellectual exploration of the subject matter. Due to this 'cross-boundariness' of my subject position, I am endowed with a 'double-objective' directed towards both Japanese and Canadian societies. For those Japanese-born and educated, the critical analysis of Japanese fascism is inescapable—particularly given the potential signs of danger in the current social and discursive state of the country—and it is my presence and academic environment in Canada that allows me to take an 'outsider's approach'. On the other hand, it is equally inescapable that my position in Canadian society—as 'Japanese', 'visible minority', and 'immigrant'—further my commitment to the goal of fostering a better understanding of the ontological burden carried by all 'others'.

The world at large is increasingly confined in a narcissistic enclosure in which each `community' is concerned with their own interests. The message this study hopes to send to the field of international politics, and those seriously concerned about the future well-being of the world, is one of the importance of understanding the mutual causes and structural dependence in the problematic surrounding identity, and that the potential `solution' of the problem of identity lies in the hands of all participants of the international hegemony. For Canadians, in particular, as members of a multi-cultural nation, the question of hegemonic representation and identity of the `other' is an inescapable issue, for Canada's well-being is dependent on mutual understanding, respect, and productive relations between the `self' and the `other'. Once again, we need to confirm the presence of the Other in our discursive space—as a reminder of the necessity for openness and meaningful communication between different peoples—without which we jeopardize the survival of the hegemonic system itself

### **I. Identity and the Other—Theoretical Underpinnings**

When one extensively uses the term `discourse' in certain fields of the social sciences, one cannot escape at least a brief justification for the utility of the concept. An analysis with a predominant focus on discourse is often criticized for its `neglect of the material world', or its `failure to show its relation to the material/structural aspects of history'. To be sure, one's analysis must not be ahistorical, nor divorced from the `material'; however, the lack of historicity and `materiality' is a problem indifferent of one's focus on the discursive or otherwise. What lies beneath these criticisms is an assumption that the world can be conceived as composed of two realms—the `material' and the `cognitive'. As David Campbell, drawing Richard Rorty's insight, tacitly argues;

...projects like philosophy's traditional desire to see "how language relates to the world" result in "the impossible attempt to step outside our skins—the traditions, linguistic and other, within which we do our thinking and self-criticism—and compare ourselves with something absolute."<sup>1</sup>

One must be aware that there is no single statement which can be free from a discursive context, and the very categories we use, the problematic we identify, and the scope of our knowledge are conditioned by both culture and history.

What I am arguing here is that discourse, or any other names given to a system of representation, cannot be equated with the world; put differently, it could even be said that the (physical) world exists outside of and perhaps independently of any discourse. Rather, discourse stands as an inescapable medium between the self and the world. The world we can know is the one humanly constructed; there is no world beyond and free of this mediation which we can conceive of. In this sense, discourse is not merely `language' reducible to a sum of all signifiers and signified, and neither is it something that can control or change the objective world. As Foucault argues,

...we must not resolve discourse into a play of pre-existing significations; we must not imagine that the world turns toward us a legible face which we would only have

to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, since discourse is a humanly constructed space making the world appear in a particular way, it imposes its own bias favouring some values by excluding others. This bias does not belong to nor originate from the discourse itself; instead, it is a reflection of the very conditions which constantly reshape itself, that is, socio-political power relations which themselves are external to the discourse. Moreover, since discourse constitutes the cognitive framework in which one perceives, understands and functions, the very modality of discourse can 'guide' people to act in certain ways which are often regarded as 'natural'. Put differently, one can only conceive the world in relation to what discourse informs. The question is then, what gives a discourse its structure, categories and contents, what drives society in a particular direction, if the subject's cognition is structured by the discourse? There is no simple answer to this question. Perhaps we begin to answer it by looking at the relation between the perceiving subject and the world as its object, the perceived.

How does the world become 'perceivable' and bearable for us to live in; what makes it appear as if a structured whole, regulated by 'laws', and hence a manageable place for us? One explanation is that given by Kantian philosophy that the world we can and cannot perceive is regulated by the very limitations of our cognitive and sensory equipment. In this explanation, the limitations of human perception impose a structural grid, the structural order inherent in the human sensory capacity itself, filtering the way the world can appear to us. The structuring order of the perceived world, then, originates in the 'biologically' given properties of the self/ego, who stands in the center of the universe as a perceiving subject. The question of identity is formulated in this way as the distance between the self as a perceiver and the world to be perceived. What if, however, this cognizant subject itself is in some way conditioned by the world as perceived object, by the precondition which allows the subject to take a subject position? With our inadequate understanding of the mechanism of cognition, we have no way of verifying this Kantian explanation; neither can we rule out the possibility that something outside our frame of perception is structuring our cognitive understanding.

Without entirely denying the Kantian argument, Gilles Deleuze introduces another way of approaching the question. He argues that "the mistake of theories of knowledge is that they postulate the contemporaneity of subject and object", and that in so doing, the temporal difference inherent in the process of identification, as well as the spatial difference between the perceiving subject and its object, is annihilated.<sup>3</sup> Instead of conceiving the question as a problematic between the perceiving subject and the perceived world, Deleuze locates the issue at stake in two different modes of being of the subject as perceiver, that is, in a mode of cognition in the presence of *the Other* and one in its absence. According to Deleuze, the presence of the Other allows the distinction between one's consciousness and its object, while its absence allows the two to be equated. Thus, the question of identity should be seen in the shift of the subject's orientation from one cognitive

mode to another. In order to understand the question of identity and the problem surrounding it in a Deleuzian sense, we have to begin with understanding of his key concept—the Other.

Deleuze himself seemingly has difficulty defining what is meant by the Other. He attempts to provide several defining characteristics of the concept: “the Other is initially a structure of the perceptual field, without which the entire field could not function as it does”<sup>4</sup>; “the Other, as structure, is *the expression of a possible world*: it is the expressed, grasped as not yet existing outside of that which expresses it”<sup>5</sup>; “In defining the Other...as the expression of a possible world, we make of it... an a priori principle of the organization of every perceptual field in accordance with the categories; we make of it the structure which allows this functioning as the ‘categorization’ of this field”<sup>6</sup>. In my interpretation, the Other is a historically determined *a priori* structure which shapes cognition by drawing a boundary between what is conceivable and what is not, and by functioning as a mirror to which relation the world can appear. In this sense, the Other is *a constitutive outside of the discursive space* in which one is located, so that the realm inside its boundary becomes intelligible under a single perspective, reason, and rationality. Therefore, the Other cannot be represented in any of the available categories in the existing discourse, being literally beyond one’s cognition, while one’s encounter with the Other provides a frame, or a structure, within which one’s cognition can operate.

The effect of the presence of the Other in the subject’s cognition is the assurance of the distinction between consciousness and its object, reminding the subject of the temporal difference to which the two belong. Deleuze describes;

...the Other causes my consciousness to tip necessarily into an ‘I was’, into a past which no longer coincides with the object. Before the appearance of the Other, there was, for example, a reassuring world from which my consciousness could not be distinguished. The Other then makes its appearance, expressing the possibility of a frightening world which cannot be developed without the one preceding it passing away. For my part, I am nothing other than my past objects, and my self is made up of a past world, the passing away of which was brought about precisely by the Other. If the Other is a possible world, I am a past world... The Other thus assures the distinction of consciousness and its object as a temporal distinction.<sup>7</sup> (p61-2)

The encounter with the Other makes one aware of the state of the self and/or the meaning of the world in their process of temporal passing, and thus, they become no longer identifiable with their present state. What one has just come to be able to perceive has already become property of the past, pushed temporarily behind by the encounter with the Other, opening up that which had been previously inconceivable, the possible world in front of the subject.

This argument is indicative of the difficulty involved in defining another key concept of this paper—identity. The difficulty arises from an ‘elusiveness’ of the concept, as well as from the misleadingly positive connotation associated with ethical imperatives (i.e., thou shalt...). According to the above account, however, one can become conscious of one’s identity—the previous state of being—only when it has just been lost. One is either in a state of, so-to-speak, ‘unconsciously living

one's own identity' in the absence of the Other, in which one is free from a consciousness of the uneasy 'split between the mind and the body', or one has become conscious of one's identity in the very experience of its loss in the presence of the Other. In other words, identity is nothing like 'one's defining characteristic' or the 'continuation of one's root/origin' as it is often described; instead, consciousness of identity is a product of what is lost to presence, or more precisely, it is an additional category to one's cognitive map discovered by a retrospective movement of the conscious mind which records the change that has occurred in the self. In this scheme, one's 'cultural identity' as such cannot be consciously lived/experienced, and preoccupation with the 'desire for identity' signifies a romantic/emotional state of mind which refuses to face up to this moment of passing, the encounter with the Other which had already happened.

The last point can be more clearly illustrated by noting what Deleuze says about the subject's cognitive orientation in the absence of the Other.

In the Other's absence, consciousness and its objects are one. There is no longer any possibility of error, not only because the Other is no longer there to be the tribunal of all reality—to debate, falsify, or verify that which I think I see; but also because, lacking in its structure, it allows consciousness to cling to, and to coincide with, the object in an eternal present. [Quoting from *Friday*, Michel Tournier's rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe*] "And it is as though, in consequence, my days had rearranged themselves. No longer do they jostle on each other's heels. Each stands separate and upright, proudly affirming its own worth. And since they are no longer to be distinguished as the stages of a plan in process of execution, they so resemble each other as to be superimposed in my memory, so that I seem to be ceaselessly reliving the same day." Consciousness ceases to be a light cast upon objects in order to become a pure phosphorescence of things in themselves...<sup>8</sup>

In this mode of cognition, one fails to recognize that present consciousness can only see the object (or the self) in the past, as 'what it was', and this failure makes the subject feel as if the present subject and its object coincide in the present. The absence of the Other reduces all possible worlds into a singularity, the only world is in the present. The world, therefore, appears as if a timeless, unchanging continuation of what is at any given moment of perception. Since there is no temporality involved in this scheme of thought, the thing perceived by the subject is fixed into an eternal essence of matter, and the world appears as the assemblage of pure surface with neither a structure nor a frame to hold the epi-phenomenal pieces in order. In this cognitive realm, the world of subjective consciousness is united with its 'object' [though such 'object' should perhaps be called 'things' to distinguish between the differing construals of the world under the two modes of cognition], there is no place for objective judgment to intervene, and moreover, where there is no objective judgment, there are no ethics.

The advent of modern subjectivity in prewar Japanese society can be seen as the result of unwanted influences which brought about an objectification of the self, or an externalization of the subject, that is, a view of the self as an object from outside. This duality was accompanied by a sense of loss or a depletion of identity; Japanese people of the Meiji era became aware of their previous state of

contented innocence, free from the shrewd, analytical eyes of a modern consciousness which alienated the body as object, as a lost state. This encounter of the Japanese with the modern West and the philosophical properties thrust the Japanese 'temporarily forward', making them different from what they were, opening their eyes to a possible identity until that time unthought. Employing the Deleuzian paradigm, we may describe this shift in their cognition as one from in the absence of the Other to its presence. The reverse movement, from the presence of the Other to its absence, what Deleuze calls 'destructuration', and what might be described as a romantic/emotional static state of mind, involves an active negation of the world just opened up, driven by the desire to reconstitute what has been made into the 'irrecoverable past' in the encounter with the Other. This desire to deny the encounter with the Other and its fall out, may be used to characterize prewar Japanese discursive development in the period from the rise of romanticism around 1905 to the finale of WWII. Might we see the cognitive orientation of Japanese discourse in the 1930s as an attempt to erase the possibilities of the Other (and the impact of the modern West), carried out in the hope of reconstituting the 'world-as-it-used-to-be', and of 'reliving' the past? In such an attempt, both temporality and socio-historical processes collapse, and the essence of a lost ideal is equated with present life experience as the presence of things-in-themselves.

What happens when one slides into this problematic cognitive mode, in the absence of the Other, is a breakdown of the *structure* which conditions the field of cognition, a structure organized and sustained in the presence of the Other. Since the Other is the constitutive outside on which all knowledge depends, the outside limit beyond which one's knowledge of the world cannot reach, the elimination of the Other results not in a realization of one's dreamed for world in history, but in a radical deviation from the world as historically viewed. In Deleuze's words, those who eliminate the Other from their cognition,

... liberate an image without resemblance [to the 'real' world], or their own double which is normally repressed. This double in turn liberates pure elements which are ordinarily held prisoner. The world is not disturbed by the absence of the Other; on the contrary, it is the glorious double of the world which is found to be hidden by its presence. This is Robinson's discovery: the discovery of the surface, of the elemental beyond, of the 'otherwise-Other'.<sup>9</sup>

In this phenomenal/ahistorical world in which consciousness and its 'objects' (i.e., 'things') are united, the satisfaction of one's desire becomes absolute and a matter of *necessity*. To speak a subject's desire is a misconstrual, for the very ground which gives rise to subjects and objects has collapsed, and there is no longer a subject as such: "desire is not then internal to a subject, any more than it tends toward an object: it is strictly immanent to a plan which it does not preexist, a plan which it must construct."<sup>10</sup> When seen from the level of the collective, society as a whole can fall into a state of operating in an illusory world, in which the entire discursive space becomes one that informs nothing but the world of necessity, ceaselessly motivating the 'subjectless-subject' to fulfill a 'plan' of desire. In this scenario, the entire cognitive system loses its structure, its limit boundary, and the possible world as the structure-Other is effaced, leaving the subject prisoner of the present, and of

the obsessive world of the pure surface and elements. Moreover, as Deleuze has stated, there is even “no longer any possibility of error”, “consciousness [is allowed] to cling to, and to coincide with, the object in an eternal present” and each thing-in-itself “proudly affirm[s] its own worth”.<sup>11</sup> As I argue in the following sections, this schema gives us a potent image of the state of Japanese discursive space in the 1930s. What Deleuze calls Robinson’s “discovery of the surface,” “the elemental beyond,” and “the `otherwise-Other””, in so far as the intellectual production of the age suggests, was shared by many Japanese.

Moreover, if this spread of pure surface epi-phenomena in the discursive space can be seen as a manifestation of cognition in the absence of the Other, which resulted from a romantic/aesthetic cognitive disposition, then, might we characterize prewar Japanese discursive space as simultaneously laden with the desire to regain a perceived lost identity, a desire manifest in the attempt to construct ideal images of the past wherein one could supposedly live an identity of timeless cultural essence? A further question of great importance is: Does this cognitive state provide a fertile seed bed for fascism, which Emile Nolte has described as ‘a refusal of transcendence’, a nurturing ground for corporeal politics—the soil in which action is favoured over discussion, and blood and will over thought and reason. It is my hypothesis that deep down in the socio-political phenomenon referred to as fascism lies a problem of cognition, that is, the loss of the structure that orders cognition and discourse as a whole caused by a breakdown in the system of discursive mediation between human cognition and the physical world in which the latter is adequately mirrored in the former. In the case of prewar Japanese society, this problematic mode of cognition was accompanied by and accelerated in conjunction with the rise of the desire for cultural identity, itself a product of the particular historical context of international space in which the modern hegemonic world was in the process of formation.

The above socio-cultural and psychological analysis of the experience of the Japanese people, therefore, must be located in the much larger process of the formation of modern hegemonic discourse, from which representation the Japanese were excluded and/or ‘mis-represented’ as lesser Westerners. The central issues here are the questions of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ and that of the question of identity of those who are denied full representation. All knowledge is constantly drawing and redrawing the boundary between what is to be included in and what excluded from its domain, defining and distinguishing ‘inside from ‘outside’, ‘self’ from ‘other’ and ‘representable’ from ‘unrepresentable’. A ‘strategic exclusion’, or the exclusion of the ‘constitutive outside’ allows an enclosed realm of intelligibility to be established. To what extent did the modern world emerge as a single intelligible space under Western eyes, and transforming the different cultures and peoples of the non-West from a state of being external to the West to one of being internal, intelligible, lesser than the ‘self’—i.e., the ‘others’? To the same extent, then, this establishment of an enclosed discursive space—the modern world—invited resistance in the very exclusion of those who were deprived of identity. This resistance could be pursued either by means of negotiating boundaries

defining the 'self' and the 'other', or challenging the authority of the modern world view by constructing an all together alternative realm of intelligibility. The latter option was attempted by the prewar Japanese society which sought to construct an anti-modern, anti-Western nativist discursive space, one operating within a 'Japanese perspective' proudly representing the Japanese as the 'self', at the expense of generating its own 'others'.

The problematic development in prewar Japanese discursive space, by attempting to erect an alternative constitution with its own boundaries and exclusions, could then also be seen as a nativist challenge to the authority of Euro-centric international hegemonic discourse. In this pursuit, both insiders (nativist) and outsiders (Others) fell subject to its local hegemonic construction: inside because equated with the homogenization of the essence of Japanese tradition, and outside the realm of the Others excluded from representation by their conversion into lesser 'others', the falsely represented externality. In its impossible desire of representing what was already made unrepresentable, however, this challenge to the international hegemonic discourse was inherently contradictory and self-destructive. Despite its motivation to be free from the influence of Euro-centric universal hegemonic discourse, this nativist discourse actually functioned within the modern/Western international hegemony in such a way as to reinforce the latter's central authority and the former's very dependence on it. At the core of this desperate and destructive attempt, often described as ultra-nationalism and/or fascism, lies the issue yet to be resolved, that is, the identity of the Others, those who were deprived of identity and the voices for representing themselves in international hegemonic discourse, which is perhaps shared by all peoples from non-Western parts of the world. Indeed, the study of prewar Japanese discursive space clearly demonstrates a Japanese preoccupation with the consciousness of its cultural difference from the West and a desperate attempt to eliminate all influences from, or even the fact of an encounter with, the Other.

In the following sections of this paper, I investigate Japanese prewar discursive space seeking to demonstrate the characteristics I have described as a shift in the mode of cognition from that in the presence to that in the absence of the Other. I argue that prewar intellectual productions were driven by non-rational, extra-discursive inclinations, namely a desire to recover a perceived lost identity. Such extra-discursive forces sought to eliminate some key aspects of rational knowledge, such as modern subjectivity, the historical and the political, and 'objectivity', that is, the degree of 'accuracy' in representing the historical world. The process of elimination of the Other also led to two highly problematic features of prewar Japanese discursive space—the 'play of language' devoid of meaning and the reclamation of a 'lost subjectivity'. That this problematic tendency developed in Japanese discursive space reflects an historical legacy of the way Japan as a non-Western country encountered the modern West in relation to which Japan's national identity was formulated. I therefore argue that the problematic development in the Japanese discursive space must be located in the particular international context of the time, namely the expansion of the modern world. In the following section, I study the development of the Japanese discursive space up to and including

the 1930s, hoping to show specific tactical and academic ‘violations’ committed by influential prewar scholars in the service of the elimination of the Other. I pay particular attention to Watsuji Tetsuro’s work on ethics and cultural studies which I think best demonstrates the problematic features of cognition in the absence of the Other. The section following attempts to address the meaning and significance of such developments in a greater historical context.

Before beginning, however, I should clarify my use of the key term, the Other. I am using the term in two distinctive senses, following Deleuze: first the Other as the structure which “conditions the functioning of the entire perceptual field [or discursive space] in general”<sup>12</sup>, and second, the Other as “the concrete Other” actualizing the structure in specific actor(s)/situation(s). For example, the Other as structure was met by Japanese society in the 19th century in the form of the modern West, whereas the concrete/actual/representative Other could be the West, the U.S., China, or Korea. In addition, I make a distinction between the Other[s] (capital O) and the ‘other’[s] (small o) in order to clarify different relations to the discursive space in question; that is, the former designates *externality*, what remains outside the system of cognition and/or representation, whereas the latter designates a *falsely internalized version of externality*, a violent reduction and ‘mis-representation’ of the incomprehensible. For example, the West and China, those who cannot be fully defined nor represented in Japanese discourse—are Others to the Japanese, whereas the treatment of the West and China by Japanese discourse in the 1930s constitutes their reduction, into a crude stereotype as ‘others’. The term ‘discursive space’ is employed to mean the entire sphere of knowledge to which one has access, in order to make a clearer distinction from the term ‘discourse’, which may be confined to a particular field of knowledge.

## II. Prewar Japanese Discursive Developments—A Study

### *Kokutai no Hongi*—Ideological Finale

In 1937, the year of the Japanese military assault on mainland China, the Ministry of Education published *Fundamentals of Our National Polity* (*Kokutai no Hongi*), a spiritual guidebook preparing the Japanese people for the coming of a ‘total war’. Despite its clear exhortation for self-sacrifice from the people, the booklet was accepted with a surprising (and disturbing) popularity; final sales were in the neighborhood of 2,000,000, immensely outnumbering the initial printing of 300,000 copies.<sup>13</sup> It opens with a condemnation of Enlightenment values, which are identified as causes of the “ideological and social evils of present-day Japan”, and ends with a proclamation of Japan’s “mission” in world civilization: that of providing a synthesis between Eastern and Western philosophy.

The various ideological and social evils of present-day Japan are the result of ignoring the fundamental and running after the trivial, of lack of judgment, and a failure to digest things thoroughly; and this is due to the fact that since the days of Meiji so many aspects of European and American culture, systems, and learning, have been imported, and that, too rapidly. As a matter of fact, the foreign ideologies imported into our country are in the main ideologies of the Enlightenment that have

come down from the eighteenth century, or extensions of them. The view of the world and of life that form the basis of these ideologies are a rationalism and a positivism, lacking in historical views, which on the one hand lay the highest value on, and assert the liberty and equality of, individuals, and on the other hand lay value on a world by nature abstract, transcending nations and races. Consequently, importance is laid upon human beings and their groupings, who have become isolated from historical entities, abstract and independent of each other. It is political, social, moral, and pedagogical theories based on such views of the world and of life, that have on the one hand made contributions to the various reforms seen in our country, and on the other have had deep and wide influence on our nation's primary ideology and cult...<sup>14</sup>

Our present mission as a people is to build up a new Japanese culture by adopting and sublimating Western cultures with our national polity as the basis, and to contribute spontaneously to the advancement of world culture. Our nation early saw the introduction of Chinese and Indian cultures, and even succeeded in evolving original creations and developments. This was made possible, indeed, by *the profound and boundless nature of our national polity*; so that the mission of the people to whom it is bequeathed is truly great in its historical significance.<sup>15</sup>

What is referred as 'our national polity', more popularly known as *kokutai*, is the equation of the nation with its people on the principle of the imperial descent of all Japanese, in which the entire population was conceived as members of a family extended from ancient times. The text attempts to evoke one's sense of responsibility to the family, to the local representatives of each agrarian community, and to the emperor at the top of hierarchy merging the ethical and ideological structures. Noteworthy is the text's theoretical leap from the criticism of modernity as Western in the opening passage to Japan's cultural 'mission' in the world in its conclusion, without any reasonable explanation or logically coherent justification. The criticism of Western philosophy bluntly sketched in the introduction is not analyzed in the rest of the work; instead, it appears that each reader's imagination, after reading the aesthetically presented virtues of the Japanese character in the middle part of the booklet, is expected to fill in the missing chains of rational explanation. Presumably, each reader would be/was convinced of the necessity of the 'civilizing' mission the text advocates in its conclusion. For such a work to obtain its overwhelming popularity and influence, however, a particular modality of discursive space capable of filling the gap of logic and the absence of explanation must have already been in place. Or, restating this, throwing in emotionally appealing phrases and slogans was thought to be 'content' sufficient to motivate the masses for action. This power of prewar Japanese discourse falsely reasoned was a product of a gradual 'singularization' of the discursive space in which all debates were folded into the particular mode of discourse and arguments counter to the dominant ideas were understood in the very mode one intended to challenge.

Certain features of *Fundamentals of Our National Polity (Kokutai no Hongi)* demonstrate some of the "evils" of prewar Japan, although neither in the way the text intended nor for the reasons it suggests (i.e., the obsolescence of modern values). What the text demonstrates is the particular inclination

inherent in prewar Japanese discursive space towards the elimination of the historical, the political, the material, and modern subjectivity from discussion. These elisions are what were perceived as the salient features of the modern West, which had introduced into Japan social division, conflicts, and a breakdown in the moral unity of the nation, experienced as the loss of a sense of identity. The dominance of this exclusively cultural spiritual and aesthetic perspective, in which the problematics and resolutions of the critical historical period were sought, resulted in a blindness to the crude reality of Japanese imperialism intensified by the military advance to China. Prewar discourse functioned as an interpretive screening system showing how one *should* perceive and understand the world, a system of interpretation constructed by and for the enclosed community, indifferent to the degree of divergence from 'objective' events and the perspective of Others.

### **The Rise of 'Romantic' Social Sciences—Folk Ethnology and *Nohonshugi***

The 'romantic' tendency to devalue the intellect, the objective, the modern subject and the historical was neither an isolated event in any one particular scholar nor specific fields of knowledge, but affected the entire discursive sphere. Hasumi Shigehiko, a Japanese contemporary theorist, locates the advent of this romantic inclination by early Taisho era (1912-1925) in the field of literature. Hasumi characterizes this movement from *shajitsu-shugi* to *shizen-shugi* as the death of literary realism, or realist materialism, wherein *shajitsu-shugi* typifies observation with the 'analytical eyes of the intellect', while the latter, that of observation with 'spiritual eyes' in which intellect and emotion are supposedly synthesized.<sup>16</sup> By analyzing debates on *shizen-shugi*, Hasumi finds that the rise of this ambiguous literary category itself works as a system to nullify meaningful debate governed by some level of objectivity based on reason.<sup>17</sup> This romantic, anti-objectivist stance of literary and scholarly work is, according to Hasumi, a result of a reduction of the opposition between the subject and the object into that between 'life' and 'material' in favour for the former, a reduction in which logic fails to understand the meaning of 'life' as fundamentally beyond the subject/object duality.<sup>18</sup> In this, the emphasis lies on the assumption of the superiority of the categories of 'emotion', 'subjectivity', 'collectivity', and 'spatiality' over their counter-parts, 'reason', 'objectivity', 'individuality' and 'temporality'. One of the effects of the rise of *shizen-shugi* and the abandonment of reason in favour of spirituality was a widespread cynical mood, contemptuous of the 'objective'/'scientific' and 'material' aspects of knowledge as inferior; or rather vice-versa, that is, the very rise of this anti-rationalism allowed *shizen-shugi* to prevail.

The social sciences were equally, if not more dramatically, affected by this rise of anti-rational/modern romanticism. Yanagida Kunio, in one of his major works *Tono Monogatari* (The tale of Tono), established the discipline of Japanese ethnology by studying the lifestyle of rural agrarian villages and organizing local folk myths into a modern form of knowledge known as *minzoku-gaku*. Disaffected by the intrusion of modern/Western influences, particularly prevalent in the urban sector, Yanagida, a disaffected urbanite, devoted his energies to preserving what he believed was a disappearing Japanese 'tradition' that remained only in the countryside. This aesthetic

representation of the countryside was later adapted by a group of reactionary and revolutionary social scientists who advocated the transformation of the Japanese socio-political order into one centered on agriculture and traditional cultural values—the advocates of *nobonshugi* (agriculture-ists). Yanagida and the *nobonshugi* intellectuals depicted rural agrarian life in an idealized form using a language in which the distance between this-worldly processes of agrarian labour and the mythological realm of deity practice is transcended. In so doing, they not only succeeded in evoking strongly idealized images of a ‘traditional Japan’ in their readers, but also motivated the rural people to realize this idealized tradition.

The disciplines of folk ethnology and *nobonshugi* were heavily dependent on popular folk beliefs, in which the process of agricultural production was interpreted as the fulfillment of human duty to the gods in an elaborate system of symbolic meanings. In these folk beliefs, the labour of food production and sexual relations between men and women were valued as acts of prosperity, ensuring physical well-being and the reproduction of human life.<sup>19</sup> In this narrative, the sacred origin of mankind created a linkage between the cosmic order and one's bodily substance considered as a gift from the gods, tacitly assuring the maintenance and propagation of the ancestral lineage as obligatory deity duties.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, agrarian villages, as the sites where deity duties were fulfilled, were also suffused with important values and rich meanings. Since sacred cultivation was practiced on lands inherited from one's ancestors, those who shared the same lands were regarded as ‘brothers’ and villages were considered to be a single extended family. This filiality was evoked by images of shared bodily substance, and the mutual ancestral soil figuratively referred to as the material of the human body.<sup>21</sup> For example, the word ‘*tami*’ (people) composed of the two Chinese characters ‘*ta*’, meaning rice field, and ‘*mi*’, the body, was thought to literally signify both ‘the body in the field’ and ‘the field as the body’.<sup>22</sup>

Between the late 1920s and the mid-1930s, folk ethnology and *nobonshugi* were successfully grafted upon these popular mythological beliefs. The effect of this modernization of everyday knowledge was that villagers became conscious of their status in folk ethnologic and *nobonshugi* discourses as objects. Conscious of such status, villagers began to make reference those discourses in their daily deliberations and practices; and by doing so they began to realize the anti-modern agrarian communalism advocated by the *nobonshugi*-ists. After the Russo-Japanese war (1905), intensified modernization began to cultivate the ground for the later popular acceptance of these doctrines. Soaring taxes, the stagnation of agricultural prices, and the influx of modern goods and ideas from the metropole combined with a growing emigration to the cities, led to the breakdown of the socio-communal fabric, particularly amongst the young.<sup>23</sup> The introduction of Marxism in previous decades, the principal means by which Western concepts of subjectivity and historical progress took root in the rural villages, led in the late 1910s the first collective negotiation between landlords and agrarian tenants. The ensuing radical social differentiation and internal divisions were the face of the Other that villagers encountered, appearing to many as ‘chaotic’, ‘uncertain’, and ‘conflictious’

vis-à-vis previously 'calm', 'predictable', and 'harmonious' village life. By the late 1920s, however, these divisions were united under the banner of 'revitalizing the villages', turning the current of the times from division to unity, conflict to harmony, and from progressive politics to aesthetic harmony.

One of concrete results of this motivation towards the realization of an ideal vision of communal village life was the collapse from late 1920s onwards of the Marxist agrarian movement (the first collectively organized political movement of tenant agrarians), whose leaders often converted into *nobonshugi* advocates. Kobayashi Norito, a leading activist in the Nagano division, argued for a 'return to concrete places'—i.e. the family and the village—in which one should actively strive for their co-prosperity, rather than creating internal divisions.<sup>24</sup> 'Converts' like Kobayashi evinced a discovery of 'everyday life' and village 'reality' accompanied by a recognition of the unsustainability of the Western concept of social struggle to Japanese communal 'reality'.<sup>25</sup> Wago Tsuneo, another 'convert', called for rural submission to the supremacy of the collective good, and denounced the freedom of the self in favour of the communal whole.<sup>26</sup> Underlying the radical shift in Wago's position was a spiritual yearning for the 'totality of life' and a 'unity with the universe' which, he felt, could purify the triviality of human conflicts and replace the hollowness of ideals with religious salvation.<sup>27</sup> As a result, Wago increasingly departed from his prior concern with worldly problems and removed himself into a religious world of ideals. The fundamental difficulties these leaders faced, ones which were perhaps shared by many others of the time, were those of justifying their cause in a discursive environment increasingly singularized and moralized under the growing authority of the sign of 'Japan' and its 'tradition', an authority essentially incompatible with a progressive organized agrarian movement operating via internal divisions and conflicts.

The fundamental influential power of *nobonshugi*, like the old mythology, was its capacity to construct a 'coherent', 'total' and imaginary world view, in which the boundaries between the present and the past, humans and gods, and culture and nature were blurred. However, this concatenation of the historical with the eternal in *nobonshugi* was not the 'innocent' practice of prior times, but rather the historical construct of folk ethnology and *nobonshugi* in which the subjects of the discourse (agrarian villagers) were at the same time textual objects, and as such the door was opened to political manipulation. By virtue of one's daily participation in agricultural labour and obligation to the deities, farmers translated the distant age of the gods into the 'reality' of the present, and thereby made incarnate the living form of the divine cosmos. This timeless world of gods and humans allowed one to envisage culture and the humanly constructed social order as part of a natural-organic entity; the parts (the individual villagers) were conceived as constitutive segments of the whole (the village as an image of the national and cosmic family). In this conception of the folk, culture and society were absorbed into a 'natural' order, thereby nullifying the impact of newly introduced Western concepts of history and social struggle. As a result, the folk were removed from the sphere of social differentiations resulting from production, and social hierarchy and inequality

among classes was rationalized as a 'natural' given—translated into the totality of 'naturalized' culture.<sup>28</sup> The devaluation of history in turn enabled an elevation of the values of the countryside, ancestral lands, and agricultural field and soil. By transforming the social and the political into the cultural, and the cultural into the 'natural', living in the world became a simple, depoliticized and dehistoricized, reproduction of timeless essences. In short, while folk ethnology effectively captured its audience by describing the rural folk in aesthetic terms, *nobonsbugi* motivated villagers to take part in its project of constructing an idealized socio-political order centering on village harmony.

The irony of folk knowledge and *nobonsbugi* was that they ended up being servants of conservative forces and the state, despite their initial promise of saving the rural poor from institutional and economic powers. By creating a type of knowledge which elided the distinction between what belonged to the realm of discourse and what discourse referred to—i.e., the lives of the rural folk—, the rural poor were transformed into both the objects of knowledge and the agents for carrying out the project of realizing an idealized image of the countryside as the embodiment of Japanese cultural tradition. What was introduced by the Other—i.e., the modern conceptions of a subject who attempted to take control over his/her fate and that of history as continuous social struggle—were replaced by a vision of harmonious rural collective life devoid of conflicts and internal differences. In the experience of the countryside, therefore, the elimination of the Other was achieved by a successful articulation of the pre-existing cosmology and agrarian myths into a modern romantic and revolutionary knowledge in which rural folk were tacitly subjugated to the hierarchical social power of the discourse of the state, giving rise to the constitutive unit—the modern 'folk' village—of the socio-political system of *kokutai*.

### **The Hermeneutics of Surface—The Discourse of 'Japan' in the Mid-1930s**

The mid-1930s is known in Japan as the era of the 'recovery of literary art' (*bungei fukkō*) by which is meant the liberation of literature from 'politics'. It may also be seen as a breakdown of leftist 'politics' (such as labour movement, communism, and agrarian tenant movement) from 1933 and the rising dominance of fascist 'politics' (the beginning of Japan's military invasion to China) from 1937.<sup>29</sup> Karatani Kojin, a contemporary Japanese philosopher and literary critic, argues that this short time period saw a 'literalization (or 'humanization') of philosophy', that is, a merge between literary criticism and what appears to be philosophy in favour for the former.<sup>30</sup> The most influential prewar scholars of the social sciences and humanities, including Nishida Kitaro (philosophy) and Watsuji Tetsuro (ethics), whose major works were published in this period, attempted to incorporate existential aspects into a 'crude formal scientism'.<sup>31</sup> These works, which largely spoke to the urban literate classes were undeniably reactionary in their import, in their attempt to eliminate all the objective scientific categories and materialist aspects of Marxism, in favour of what were called the 'human' scientific categories and existential aspects of Marxism mixed with aesthetic and religious language.<sup>32</sup>

Watsuji Tetsuro, one of the most influential and respected prewar Japanese thinkers, is extremely important in an analysis of how prewar Japanese discursive space advanced towards its complete elimination of the Other. A careful examination of his major works deserves particular attention, in terms of the method and language used, the themes described, and the `enemies' targeted. An analysis of Watsuji's work not only informs us of the various flaws in his logic, but also allows us to see the particular `motivation' running through his texts which seems to make all his theoretical problems and inclinations inevitable and even necessary. How and why these highly problematic works became so influential in the discursive space of the era is a question that must be addressed?

Watsuji was highly critical of the positivistic separation of the subject and the object (and of man from nature) in modern/Western scientific knowledge. In one of his representative work, *Fudo: ningengaku-teki kosatsu* (*Fudo, a humanistic study*; 1935), Watsuji rejects the conception of an autonomous subject thrown into the objective environment, and advances in its stead the concept of *fudo* (`climatological features') as "a structural constituent of human existence"<sup>33</sup>; that is, *fudo* is the geographical space in which collective human life is organized and practiced. Watsuji was inspired by Heidegger's *Being and Time*, with which he was both fascinated and frustrated; Watsuji's ambition was to incorporate spatial constituents of human existence into Heidegger's conception of human temporal existence.<sup>34</sup> According to Watsuji, the predominance of temporality over spatiality in Heidegger's thought arises because of his bias for the individual subject (and his being as *Dasein*) and his lack of conception of human existence as both individual and social. However, Watsuji's interest in spatiality over temporality is a curious one, particularly when one notes that spatiality was easily linked to Japan's sense of isolation and uniqueness, whereas a focus on temporality is likely to suggest Japan's backwardness in modern history. Based on his emphasis of the collective and corporeal existence of mankind, Watsuji attempts to deal with the remaining question of spatiality, or *fudo*, not as a mere extension of physical/mathematical space objectified vis-à-vis mankind, as modern Western philosophy tends to see it, but in the context of the temporality and historicity of human existence.<sup>35</sup>

However, this incorporation of subjectivity to what is objectified and Watsuji's theoretical conception of spatiality as the embodiment of human collectivity was made possible only at the expense of nullifying the modern conception of the individual, autonomous subject. This trade-off can be seen, for example, in the following passage;

A man lives and dies. Despite the continuous process of the death of the individual, mankind lives and human relations continue. Human existence unceasingly continues by unceasingly ending. The `existence towards death' in the perspective of the individual is the `existence towards life' in the perspective of the social... History obtains so-to-speak corporeal body in the unity of historicity and *fudo* [as humanly inhabited space]. If `spirit' is defined in opposition to materiality, history cannot be a self-realization of spirit. Only when spirit is a subject which objectifies itself, does it realize itself as history. This, what might be called *subjective corporeality*, is what I mean as *fudo*-ness.<sup>36</sup>

The price for this corporeal conception of *fudo* was the absorption of the materiality of history into spirit, resulting in a nullification of the dialectical tension between the two mutually irreducible components of existence, and simultaneously confirms the predominance of the social whole over the individual part. Watsuji's nullification of historical process and downplaying modern subjectivity here became much more manifest in Watsuji's collective ethics, his 'social scientific' studies of the mid-1930s.

In his *Ningen no gaku toshiteno rinri-gaku* (*Ethics as the Study of Humanity*; 1934) and *Rinri-gaku* (*Ethics*; 1937, vol.1), Watsuji criticizes that he sees as the sheer 'objectivism' and atomistic conception of the subject in both Marxist materialism and liberal institutionalism, and attempts to 'humanize' the analysis of socio-cultural problems by 'overcoming' the problem of the subject/object duality via a notion of mankind as a collective being. Watsuji explains that the Japanese word *ningen* (mankind), should not be reduced to mean 'person'/'man' as it is often used in modern commonsense, but has to be understood as a being within the sphere of human relations, and indeed as the manifestation of such collectivity, as is indicated by the two Chinese characters constituting the term (the first of which signifies 'person' and the second 'between').<sup>37</sup> Further, Watsuji defines *rinri* (ethics) as already and always embodied in social relations: "*rinri wa jinrin no ri*", that is, ethics ('*rinri*') is the logic ('*ri*') of the moral ways of mankind ('*jinrin*').<sup>38</sup> For Watsuji, *Jinrin* is defined as the interactive relations normally held in the socio-cultural arena of the Japanese people. In other words, Watsuji boldly equates ethics with the status-quo of society, without any social scientific investigation of the society. Moreover, due to his assumption that ethical relations between individuals is embodied in and maintained by collective Japanese social existence, Watsuji is entirely indifferent to the necessity of formulating beyond contingency universal and/or objective standards for ethics. By equating semantic signification and social reality in a contingent schema, Watsuji's theory of ethics functions as a mechanism masking social injustice under an idealized vision of the socio-cultural virtue of the Japanese, and clearly props up the *de facto* power of those who exercised power.

Tosaka Jun, a prewar Marxist literary critic, argues that Watsuji's theory operates with an implicit but firm assumption of Japanese superiority relative to others and is a powerful ideological instrument confirming the uniqueness of Japanese culture and society. According to Tosaka, Watsuji's terminologies of *ningen* (mankind), *rinri* (ethics), and *sonzai* (being) are the central constituents of that on which his theory depends, and as such does little to account for why and how the communal socio-cultural system came into being.<sup>39</sup> Tosaka argues that Watsuji does not analyze his subject matter in any objective way; instead, he constructs a narrative that impressionistically evokes the idea that communally-based Japanese society is precious, and something to be proud of as a superior form of ethics in the world.<sup>40</sup> This academic sleight of hand, however, is tacitly concealed by the narrative structure of Watsuji's text in which only one of two possible functions of the Japanese copula is used. That is, Watsuji reduces the particularity of a thing to its phenomenological manifestation. In Japanese, 'facts' or 'things-in-themselves' are indicated

by the copula, *'ga aru'*, that which recognizes a distance between the subject and the object and signifies the existence of the object without reference to the subject, while the copula *'de aru'* describes an event interpreted by the subject.<sup>41</sup> Noteworthy here is that the copula *'de aru'* lends itself to a moral imperative, and that Watsuji's discourse, in subordinating grammar to narrative—its preference of *'de aru'* over *'ga aru'*—advances a 'description' of socio-cultural practice as a quasi-Hegelian unfolding of a pre-existing truth which is in fact a value judgment. When Watsuji proudly represents Japanese social relations as the embodiment of collective ethics, he elides the distinction between is and ought, and thus his exhortation to his readers to fulfill their duty of performing their 'proper' roles in society is only possible by glossing over this elision and representing his discourse as descriptive fact.

As is often pointed out, hermeneutic study is valid only insofar as it recognizes its limited scope and applicability in the analysis of socio-linguistic regularity in the realm of the symbolic, and only insofar as it assumes an artificially enclosed, homogenized socio-cultural space free from external/international influences. This is not the case with Watsuji's hermeneutics. Instead, the subject of his text is objectified as a discursive constituent. That is, the people are seen as both cultural symbols and the source of meaning on the one hand, while his methodology sanctions his conclusion from any material, historical, or political inquiry, such as a study of structural power relations among different social segments, on the other. His hermeneutic method allows for an elimination of material aspects, which are then thrown behind his phenomenology, and terminology conveniently omitting socio-historical human conditions in which the subject is subordinated to 'objective' power.<sup>42</sup> Thus, not only is the particularity of the individual absorbed into the harmony of the social whole, as can be seen in his concept of *ningen as aidagara* (i.e., being within the sphere of human relations), but by eliding the critical distance between an idealized image of the Japanese as the embodiments of socio-cultural harmony and the people themselves, Watsuji's description of social relations, like the *nobonshugi*-ists', takes on the character of a moral imperative prescribing social roles for each individual. What is clear is that Watsuji's project of 'overcoming the exclusion of the collective experience of people from theory—the 'dehumanization' he found in modern Western knowledge—in the end amounted to advocating the subjugation of the masses to his pre-existing truth of a timeless and harmonious society devoid of political and historical processes and practices. The elimination of the distance between 'what is theorized' and 'what is', and his neglect of the existence of any mediating system of representation standing between knowledge and human life, lies at the core of the problem in Japanese social sciences that continues to exert a powerful influence over contemporary Japanese discursive space.

Equally contributing to the consolidation of the problematic discursive space of the 1930s was the powerful philosophical work of Nishida Kitaro, the first Japanese 'philosopher', from whose influence, it was said, no intellectual of that time was entirely free. Unlike Watsuji, Nishida's work is much more strictly governed by reason and an 'objective' method, with clear definitions of key

concepts, particularly in the 1910s and 1920s. In the 1930s, however, Nishida's work began to show a similar romantic inclination, then wide-spread in the discursive space, and for that reason, it is said that his philosophy at that time won far reaching popularity among non-academic readers despite its complexity.

Under the strong influence of German idealism, Nishida launched an ambitious project of formulating 'Eastern philosophy' by means of a Western 'scientific' method, and in doing so, attempted to relativize the universality of Western ontology. In order to establish a Japanese-version of philosophy, Nishida articulated a key concept, 'pure experience' (*jyunsui keiken*)—a Japanese way of life based on Zen Buddhist ontology—into the realm of intelligibility. For him, pure experience is a form of 'direct knowledge' prior to subject-object, act-meaning, or being-value separation, and therefore, that which could not be doubted.<sup>43</sup> In his *Zen no Kenkyu* (*Study of Good*, 1911), Nishida identified an unresolvable tension between the particularity of individuals and the generality of the predicate (a concept analogous to Heidegger's 'Being'), which relation could never be explained by logic, but only by the self-consciousness of the individual thrown into the system of 'objective' constraints (roughly speaking socio-environmental factors).<sup>44</sup> Nishida calls this predicate defining all being, non-being, that which cannot be defined by anything other than itself, *mu no basho* (the place of nothingness). The challenge contained in the concept of *mu no basho* is in its ontological questioning, which like in Heideggerian idealism, arose as a criticism of modern Western philosophy's dislocation of 'others' from their own 'cultural' space, and their displacement into the realm of universal intelligibility.

This logic of place is developed by Nishida in the 1930s into a concept of negative (being-less) transcendental truth called 'absolutely contradictory self-identity' (*zettai mujun-teki jikodoitsu*). It is, perhaps, the most influential and well circulated concept in his philosophy. In it the duality between the subject and the object, the individual and the collective, and material and product, are united in being itself. In so arguing, however, Nishida was aware of the irreducibility of the two opposed terms, since this 'unity' is achieved through a discontinuous logical and ontological 'jump' which is not lived only imagined.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Nishida's concept of absolutely contradictory self-identity was generally interpreted and elaborated as a state in which all historical and dialectical contradictions are meta-theoretically transcended, wherein the distinction between being in history and the order of 'nature' is abolished in a state of self-realization of *mu* (nothingness).<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, since *mu no basho* was understood and taught in the academic discourse of the 1930s as the quintessential embodiment of the Japanese cultural/religious way of life, it quickly became equated with the essence of 'Japan', functioning as an, although undefinable, transcendental truth towards which key terminologies and the network of meanings and evoked images in the discursive space of the 1930s congregated. Being a signifying absence, this negative 'gathering point' lent itself to being replaced by other signifiers, and in fact this is what happened in the discursive space of the 1930s: the debates at that time centered on the question 'What is the essence of Japan/What

constitutes Japanese identity?’ attempted to construct a positive term out of Nishida’s negative essence. In other words, Nishida’s philosophy became, both irrespective of his intentions and largely by means of the unfaithful interpretations of his work by many of his contemporaries, the ideological foundation on which a nativist and fascist ‘philosophy of Japan’ was established. Nishida’s success in giving world authority to Japanese cultural/religious values, his creation of a symbolic and philosophical concept powerful enough to signify the essence of ‘Japan’, was to some large extent hi-jacked by ideologues with more pragmatic agendas.<sup>47</sup> Once this recontextualization of Nishida’s philosophy was in place, the entire discursive space was rather easily transformed into a single intelligible sphere.

### Constructing Japan’s ‘others’—Pan-Asianism

One should not forget that the maturation process of the discourse of ‘Japan’ was co-temporal with the erasure of Others outside Japan, those whose ‘shadow’ images were internalized and represented as idealized objects in a homogenized Japanese discursive space. This reduction of Others into mere ‘signs’ was completed by the beginning of the era of the ‘recovery of literary art’, an era which produced an enormous number of texts depicting ‘Asia’ (and ‘Korea’, ‘China’) and the ‘West’, as well as ‘Japan’, in idealized and objectified terms free from the historical and material conditions of the time. For example, in the early 1920’s Wago Tsuneo, a *nobonshugi* agrarian leader, saw it as the “responsibility of the Japanese” to awaken a “*chosen* spirit”, long asleep in the “sad history” of Korea, in order to “provide *chosen-jin* (the Koreans) with a secure economic life”.<sup>48</sup> Wago’s *Chosen* spirit, however, is a romantic construction of Korean-ness equated with his religious and aesthetic conception of the traditional beauty of the people as living embodiment of Buddhism. According to Wago’s logic, the liberation of the Koreans from their “sad history” meant not throwing off the chains of Japanese imperialism but rather a re-establishment of the unfulfilled ideal of the annexation of Korea, the realization of a ‘brotherhood’ between the two nations which, he thought, was spoiled by the Japanese government’s ‘policy misconduct’.<sup>49</sup> Wago’s *nobonshugi* promoted Japanese emigration to Korea, where, he expected, the “equal co-existence” between the two peoples of two great traditional spirits would be realized. Rather obviously, Wago’s sympathy for Korean peasants and his ideal conception of ‘Japan’s task’ of assisting both Korean socio-economic development and their ‘spiritual recovery’ were betrayed most clearly as forms of Korean resistance, more or less consistent after the Russo-Japanese war, to Japanese rule. Wago’s abstract and aesthetic idealization of the Korean peasantry was so removed from the historical experience of the Koreans that even his short visit to the Korean countryside in 1927 could not shatter his solid image of the *chosen* spirit and Japan’s mission of assistance.<sup>50</sup>

While Wago’s idealization of the Koreans appears today naive and somewhat ‘innocent’, his depoliticized conception of political issues (i.e., emigration, and economic development assistance) formulated in exclusively cultural and religious terms, contributed to the elimination of the political in Japanese prewar discourse, and was itself thus a powerful form of ideology. This romantic, anti-

historical, and idealistic construction of brotherhood with the Koreans was one of the principal legitimating strategies in Japan's 1910 annexation of the country, the establishment of Manchu-kuo, and became later a foundational plank in the militarist ideology of the 'Greater-Asian co-prosperity'. Chosen spirit, fraternal love and the notion of assistance were amalgamated under the theory of *doso-ron*. In *doso-ron* (theory of the same ancestry), difference between the Japanese and the Koreans was denied; the latter were seen as a sub-group of the former. Like Wago, this theory advocated Japan's 'love' and 'duty' as 'brother' to support Korean economic development, while the actual procedure was much dependent on Japan's military power. This affectionate formulation was perhaps a tactic disguising both the necessity of military force and the Japanese fear of Koreans who needed to be subjugated to the paternal authority of the Japanese emperor. The hypocrisy of this theory was in its turning a blind eye to the use of brute force; its anti-factual formulation itself was sanctioned by the increasingly enclosed, narcissistic, and 'humanized' discursive space that had progressively structured Japanese intellectual debate since the Taisho era. Once the Koreans were represented as idealized 'other' in Japanese discursive space, objectified, voiceless 'signs' without a subject position, violence against them by crude military force could be interpreted and explained the dominant ideologies (i.e., *doso-ron* and 'Asian co-prosperity') themselves authorized by a mode of the discourse devoid of the material, the political and the historical.

That the discourse of 'Japan' could not be established without generating 'others', those necessarily excluded in the construction of an enclosed Japan-centered realm of intelligibility, is perhaps most clearly seen in a series of Watsuji's works devoted to the typology of 'national characteristics'. Watsuji applied his concept of *fudo* in his comparative socio-cultural analysis to the relation between the geo-climatological features of different parts of the world and the characteristics of the peoples resident there. The vastness of the Chinese sub-continent was described as static, empty, and monotonous; these climatic aspects, he argued, necessarily make the Chinese a people "[lacking in] emotion", whose "passive and persistent personality [is] manifest in their persistent will power and harshness of emotions", and that it was their "perseverance to tradition and strong sense of history" that allow them to "bear the static emptiness" of their geography.<sup>51</sup> In his 1929 work ("*Shina-jin no tokusei*"; "Particularities of the Chinese") comparing the 'national character' of the Japanese and the Chinese, Watsuji maintains that,

When we compare the lack of feeling of the Chinese, we become painfully aware [of] how emotional sensitivity is a vital characteristic of the Japanese. This means that the Japanese are weaker in will to survival than the Chinese; however, it simultaneously means that the latter are much more humane in their emotions.<sup>52</sup>

The Japanese, argues Watsuji, thus must maintain national unity in order to counter-act Chinese power, because a Japanese individual cannot win in competition with a Chinese and that if "the Chinese win over the Japanese, then, that would be a *regression for humanity*."<sup>53</sup> Despite his detailed elaboration of Chinese characteristics, Watsuji's discourse of national characteristics says more about his own fear of the Chinese people, than about the Chinese themselves.

This crude typology is also exercised in his characterization of the 'West' in an earlier work. In his "*Genshi kiristo-kyo no bunkashi-teki igi?*" ("The cultural historical significance of primitive Christianity") of 1921, Watsuji compares the Romans with the Anglo-Saxons and finds that they are "extremely alike in terms of their bruteness, of their practical, pragmatic orientations."<sup>54</sup> His monotonous denunciation of the 'barbaric' character of Romans and Anglo-Saxons, contrasted with what he sees as Asian 'spiritual' culture, is extended to modern civilization and all modernized nations in a kind of eschatological curse against the modern age: "Prussian civilization... is equally barbaric. So is modern Japanese civilization, in its contemptuous mimickery of the Anglo-Saxons. However, the epitome of this characteristic is exemplified by the North American barbarians, Yankees."; "Romans were the barbarians who ended the age of culture. Are Anglo-Saxons not barbarians who arose to tell the end of modern culture?"<sup>55</sup> These statements are unworthy of serious analysis; however they are cited in order to demonstrate how Watsuji's characterizations of all non-Japanese peoples are formulated as negatives of what he conceives of as 'true Japanese characteristics'—the standard against which all peoples are compared. Although these works on national typologies were published in the 1920s, the underlying thesis of his major works of the mid-1930s, while formulated with greater sophistication, can be found in his earlier assumption of the superiority of Japanese culture. Watsuji's earlier texts speak loud and clear of his unstated ideological agenda to confirm and spread a belief in Japanese cultural superiority, and directly contributed towards the subsequent annihilation of the Others and the homogenization of Japanese discursive space. Once silent 'others' are constructed as viable categories—i.e., as shadow images—in the discourse of 'Japan', statements about them can only function to reinforce self-affirmations of Japanese superiority.

Pan-Asianism can be seen as a product of the artificial creation of sameness in a singular discursive space in which 'Asia' and the 'West' were reduced into mere signs to affirm the centrality of the master sign—'Japan'. One of the most powerful components of Pan-Asianism, together with *dosoron*, was theory of civilization that first appeared in 1906 and became popular in the Taisho era (1912-25). Okuma Shigenobu argues that Eastern and Western civilizations developed along different paths and "met by accident in Japan."<sup>56</sup> Okuma's conception that Eastern and Western civilizations harmoniously co-existed in Japan, however, was later revised in 1919 by the notion that Eastern and Western civilizations were fundamentally incompatible and bound to confront to each other. This radical shift of emphasis may have been a reflection of the heightening tensions between the U.S. and Japan during this period over the issue of emigration. Be that as it may, what is certain is that Okuma's about face represented the completion of the movement of internalizing the West as Other, in which the West was internalized as a 'shadow image', a stereotyped 'other'. As Japanese relations with the US deteriorated in the 1930s, and the boundaries between categories and theories were increasingly drawn in an arbitrarily fashion reflecting the desires of the producers of knowledge, 'Asia' was both idealized (as embodiment of cultural beauty relative to the 'West') and viewed contemptuously (as economically backward vis-à-vis the Japanese). Harmonious and confrontational relations between civilizations were separately applied to 'Asia' and the 'West'

respectively, whereas Japan's unique position as synthesis of the two civilizations remained in both. Curiously, this internationalism/universalism served as the basis of Pan-Asianism, which attempted to negate the differences within the homogenized category 'Asia', and unite a common front against Western geo-political aspirations in Asia. Pan-Asianism, in this sense, was not a form of *nationalism*; rather, it should be understood as the external expression of the maturation process of the discourse of 'Japan', complementary twin of the narcissistic enclosure of discursive space in which the identity of 'Japan' was sought.

Following on the heels of this process of the elimination of both internal and external Others was the rise of an indulgent discursive monologue enclosed in an homogenized discursive space of an exclusivist community. Karatani has characterized this monologue as "a self-indulgent attitude towards ambiguity, an abandonment of the task of distinguishing difference from sameness" (p139), and a "play with the images of signs" that obscured the temporal and spatial differences of various texts, resulting in a widespread illusion of 'sameness' (i.e., communal unity).<sup>57</sup> Out of this illusion of 'sameness' rose Taisho universalism in which a false democracy and cosmopolitan internationalism established themselves as the dominant trends for conceiving domestic social relations and external relations.<sup>58</sup> This Taisho idealistic internationalism, Karatani argues, must be distinguished from the internationalism typical of the previous era:

[Meiji scholars like Natsume Soseki] attempted to 'scientifically' objectify the universal ground of difference between Western and Eastern literature on a material and historical level...In the Taisho era, this was completely reversed, that is, the difference between the West and Japan began to be emphasized, from the perspective of sameness, in which the 'West' became a mere sign, and so did 'Toyo' [Asia].<sup>59</sup>

While the discourse of 'things that are Japanese' in the Taisho era was merely a mode of self-signification in the context of a greater pro-modernizationism, it was in the mid-1930s, the era of the 'recovery of literary art', when this discursive state was fused with greater intellectual and social concerns. The fundamental question of Japan and the West was addressed by Watsuji and Nishida in the increasingly tense environment of the coming of war, and in this 'tightening' of the socio-political conditions, the cosmopolitan internationalist posture of the Taisho era was replaced by an exclusionary cultural particularism.

## Conclusion

The consequence of the 'literalization of philosophy', and the 'humanization of scientific knowledge' in the mid-1930s was the emergence of an increasingly narcissistic, 'enclosed' discursive space seemingly devoid of an objective/material/historical vision of the world, and the transposition of what was once external to the discourse into its sphere of intelligibility—what I have called the disappearance of the Other. At the same time, this maturity of the 'pure surface' fostered an increased desire for 'lost subjectivity', the desire to formulate what defines 'Japan'. The emergence of 'Japan' as an ethically motivated 'transcendental signified', in which the boundary

between reason and experience was bluntly erased in favour for the latter, marked a turning point where personal religious/aesthetic feelings were championed at the expense of social and political justice—a triumph of emotion over reason. The advancement of this discursive trend had direct social implications, including the collapse of both urban industrial and rural agrarian social struggles, and the political and military campaigns against Asia. The construction of Asian ‘others’ in terms of dogmatic nationalist ideology was a complementary-twin of the emergence and authorization of what constituted ‘Japan’, imposing on Asians a Japanese definition of them as ‘others’. At this stage, Japanese discursive space was freed from the historical and the material; there would be henceforth nothing external to a discursive space which absorbed all under its sphere.

The completion of this narcissistic discursive enclosure in the 1930s aided and abetted the march towards *kokutai*—the principle building block of Japanese fascism centered on the cult of the emperor. The triumph of Japanese fascism based on a right-wing ‘philosophy of action’, corporatist politics, and the mythology of the emperor was only a step away from this discursive condition, ruled by the necessity of reconstructing a lost identity: a deeply troubled cognitive orientation lacking a structure for maintaining distance between what belongs to discourse and what is its object. Prewar discourse’s endless indulgence in solipsistic debates produced the ideological finale of *Fundamentals of Our National Polity*, or *kokutai no honji*, and beyond.

### III. Beyond the ‘Otherwise-Other’—A Discussion

In the above analysis, I attempted to show some specific tactics employed in influential Japanese prewar intellectual artefacts, which seemed to satisfy pressing social ‘needs’ of the time for the eliminating the Other—the alien aspects of modern/Western philosophy. I focused on three streams of knowledge produced: 1] folk ethnology and *nobonshugi*, 2] Watsuji’s ‘humanized social science’, and 3] the description of external Others (largely Asians). Despite their different audiences, tactics employed, and targets of elimination, these three streams of knowledge can be seen as structurally complementary, and mutually reinforcing, endowed with a distinct task to give rise to the discursive space centered on ‘Japan’. In order to show the relation among them, I provide a brief summary of the above discussion for this purpose.

Ethnologists like Yanagida and *nobonshugi* advocates formulated a sense of cultural identity common to all Japanese strongly associated with past ‘tradition’. This identity is characterized by strongly mythological/cosmological images of the unity with nature, and was felt to be increasingly jeopardized by the influence of the modern West. This imagery of ‘otherwise-Other’ was powerfully present in war ideologies like *kokutai no honji*, as an aesthetic, spiritual essence of ‘Japan’. Folk knowledge also served as an ideological instrument for transforming the countryside into the ‘spiritual homeland’ of all Japanese. By virtue of this modern Japanese knowledge in which the boundary between the past and the present, nature and culture, and deity and human were

collapsed, rural folk became subject to the goal of constructing an idealized image of traditional Japanese society. Indeed, this powerful aesthetic and moral imperative to recover lost tradition counteracted and transcended the growing consciousness of modern subjectivity and history and nullified their effects. Agrarian tenant movements which had introduced internal conflicts and differences into rural communities, soon transformed into movements of *nobonshugi*. Therefore, we may say that the influence of the modern West as Other in the countryside was 'overcome' in the process of the maturation of folk ethnology and *nobonshugi*, and the construction of an 'otherwise-Other' was underway, preparing society for *kokutai*.

In the urban sector where the concept of cultural unity was in an advanced state of erosion, the role of romantic knowledge was less dramatic than in the countryside. However, the maturity of the process of eliminating the Other in the discursive space was powerful enough to motivate the urban population to realize the true, authentic 'Japan'. In this context, Watsuji's concept of ethics as everyday cultural practice and the elision of the boundary between knowledge and its objects effectively authorized both cultural pride and a strong moral imperative among urban populations. Beyond that, Watsuji's work made at least two more important contributions to the nullification of the Other. The first was his redefinition of the notions of human existence as collective and space as the corporeality of the socio-cultural life of the peoples, in such a way as to preempt modern subjectivity. The second contribution came from his methodology; his hermeneutic elaboration of meanings effectively obscured the material, historical, political and the structural, and thereby accelerated an indulgence in a 'play of language' internalizing and defining what ought to have remained outside the boundary of knowledge. Japanese discursive space in the 1930s was a full-fledged realization of what Deleuze described as "the discovery of the surface, of the elemental beyond, of the 'otherwise-Other'", in which meanings were arbitrarily associated with signs—i.e., 'Japan', 'human' and 'ethics', in flagrant disregard of their historical counterparts. In this discursive context, Nishida's effort to formulate a Japanese version of philosophy provided a negative 'gathering point' for meaning in this completely decentered discursive space, a vacant conceptual center which could be reorganized and restructured under the signs of 'Japan', '*kokutai*', and the 'emperor'.

This process of constructing the ideal images of Japanese cultural essence involved the necessary internalization and reduction of the concrete/historical Others of Japan—Korea, China, and the U.S.—transforming them into intelligible 'others' under a Japan-centered perspective in which the Japanese took up the position of the 'self'. The structural complementarity between this 'conversion' of external Others and the rise of 'Japan' as the 'gathering point' for all meaning is crucial; in fact, they are two sides of a single coin, the inside and the outside of the boundary drawn by the hegemonic perspective. Asianism, in particular, played a key role in this process, for it provided the discursive ground on which the construction of 'Japan' was made possible, by selectively identifying and differentiating 'Asia' from 'Japan', and the 'West' from 'Asia', leaving

Japan in the strategic center. This usage of Asianism as a buffer can most clearly be seen in the double-standard imposed upon Asia, that is, 'Asia' was both idealized and subject to contempt according to whether Japan wished to identify with or differentiate itself from the characteristics in question. Wago's depiction of 'Koreans' as 'brothers' with great spiritual potential, and as 'victims' of the 'sad history' of the past exemplifies this point. Once again, the material, political and historical are missing from this knowledge, and images of Others are constructed unconstrained by their objective/ historical conditions in order to confirm the superiority of the Japanese. In other words, the transformation in the discursive space of the 1930s of external Others into 'others' less than the Japanese, was the axiom enabling the rise of a Japanese hegemonic perspective, the negative-twin of the construction of the 'otherwise-Other' in which 'others' served as the mirror defining the Japanese 'self'.

What motivated prewar Japanese intellectuals and society as a whole to incline to the discourse of 'Japan' with its 'sloppy' logic and strongly romantic sentiments; what was the source of this extra-rational force driving prewar Japanese discursive space in the way it did? Some situate this romantic driving force in the orientation of the society as a whole—i.e., in the 'cultural characteristics' of Japan and/or the 'psychological inclination' of the Japanese. I reject this line of argument, as exemplified in ideas of the 'political culturalists', which assume essential characteristics in 'Japanese culture' or a 'psychological inclination' common to all Japanese. Should it then be sought in the inclination of figures like Watsuji and Yanagida, or in the power of the newly formed modern nation-state to manipulate the production of knowledge to suit its own interests of manufacturing and controlling a discourse of national power? The first answer places the responsibility on those Japanese intellectuals, who over-reacted against modern/Western perspectives and ideas, and thereby, intended or not, misinformed and 'misguided' society as a whole. The second answer, on the other hand, is suggestive of the potent role the state could play in producing, transmitting, and circulating knowledge favorable to its leaders' aspirations, and the critical role of knowledge in the reorganization of society.

Although it is not my intention to underestimate responsibility on the producers of knowledge nor on the system of disseminating knowledge in the critical stage of nation-state formation, there is an undeniable instrumentalist bent to these conceptions of knowledge in that they assume a too straight-forward cause-effect relation between knowledge and historical outcomes. By giving too much credence to the producers and operational mechanism of knowledge, this argument obscures the question of what conditioned the very cognitive schema of the producers of knowledge. My argument is to emphasize the role and functioning of the entire discursive space as a humanly constructed mediating system, only through which the world reveal itself; for individuals cannot step outside the particular historical and cultural discursive context in which they live. I would argue that the problematic development of prewar Japanese discursive space was driven neither by ideological innovation of particular intellectuals nor the state power apparatus in its deepest sense, but was

rather a manifestation of a deeper driving force originating external to the realm of discourse, namely, the quest for identity. I argue that this quest gradually distorted prewar discursive space—constructing what Deleuze has called the ‘otherwise-Other’—and it was through the mediation of this distortion that the ‘lost’ identity and totality of the world was restored. This point intersects with another important question of what determines the degree of ‘objectivity’ in discursive space, ‘objectivity’ in terms of the relative ‘accuracy’ of representing historical world. The Deleuzian concept of the Other allows us to conceive ‘objectivity’ as a capacity of ‘openness’ and ‘fairness’ towards the Other, or the state of discourse capable of tolerating and accepting differences as beyond its sphere of intelligibility.

What was then the ‘guiding logic’ and the mechanism for replacing the Other with the ‘otherwise-Other’ in Japanese discursive space of the 1930s? Karatani Kojin has called this system of nullification of what is alien and external, and its transformation into what is ‘comprehensible’ and ‘Japanese’ as *jinen*. *Jinen* is also a concept which might characterize the Shintoist/ animistic cosmological view of the world which refutes transcendental truth, by accepting the world as it is, in understanding that a system describing the necessity of the way things are is one fundamentally beyond the will of the subject.<sup>60</sup> In Japanese, the Chinese characters signifying the concept of *jinen* are also identical to the characters for Nature (*shizen*), and combine this with two concepts of Western philosophy: the *essence* of a thing, or its transcendental ‘true’ being, and the negative *function* which makes being as being without the subject’s interference.<sup>61</sup> This dual-meaning of the concept gives us an image of the power concealed in the term and its ability to induce acceptance of historically/ socially determined relations as ‘natural’ ways of being beyond any humanly constructed world.

How was *jinen* manifest in the development of prewar Japanese discursive space? As most explicitly exemplified in Watsuji’s redefinition of Western conceptions of spatiality (*judo*) and man, the elimination of the modern as Other was brought about by the ‘humanization’ of the original (Western) concepts, by incorporating what Watsuji believed were the ‘humane’, ‘indivisible’ and ‘affectionate’ aspects of humanity to a crude ‘scientific’, ‘atomistic’ and ‘materialistic’ conception. In doing so, ‘alien’ modern concepts were ‘nativized’ and rendered non-threatening. This ‘nativization’ of aspects of the modern—the functioning of *jinen*—actively internalized what used to be external and beyond the understanding of Japanese discursive space—i.e., the figurative and concrete Other. In this process, what was in an asymmetrical relation to Japanese discursive space was made symmetrical by the conceptual structure and the available categories. The transformation of the conception of ‘human’ from the modern subject to Watsuji’s ‘subject-less subject’ exemplified this reduction. The same process generated a self-conscious identity, a self defined in opposition to an ‘other’, a reduced internalized version of the alien Other. In Karatani’s conception, *jinen* can also be understood as a process of ‘self-differentiation’, in which the subject is made aware of itself only in the process of distinguishing itself from ‘what it is not’.<sup>62</sup> The modern conception

of man as an autonomous self-regulating individual was transformed to a concept of man as both individual and constituent of the socio-cultural whole; and this double role was then understood to be the exclusive cultural virtue of the Japanese. The reduction of the external Other into an intelligible 'other', or its 'nativization' by the *jinen* mechanism, was not, however, an adaptation of the Other but rather a *rejection* of it, since the presence of what constitutes the cognitive boundary for the Japanese, and its existence as limitation, was denied by this act of inclusion. In other words, the rise and the maturing of *jinen* was an absorption of what should have remained outside the discursive boundary, the Deleuzian Other that structures cognition and makes possible a 'possible world'. *Jinen* in this sense is opposed to the concept of the Other, in that it creates a narcissistically enclosed discursive space in which the subject indulges in an endless monologue in a language describing nothing but himself (the 'double').

We can therefore begin to see how the mechanism of *jinen* could produce a discursive space devoid of the Other in the 1930s. However, the deeper cause of this phenomenon, that is, the persistent attempt, consciously or sub-consciously, to erect an 'otherwise-Other' cannot be explained without investigating the way in which Japan encountered the West as Other. And this in turn is linked to the problem of the identity of the 'other', an ontological difficulty experienced by the peoples of the non-West excluded from hegemonic representation and whose differences vis-à-vis the West were reduced into a form of lesser Western identity. Thus we have the situation in which, on the one hand, *jinen* (or the 'deconstruction' of the modern) is little more than a narcissistic nativist, reactionary force threatening the universality of the contemporary world. Yet, on the other hand, the *jinen* phenomenon was a reactionary response to the universalizing hegemonic forces which threatened Japanese culture, already fallen under their potent influences, with erasure. Modern hegemonic representation exploits culture in a contradictory way: the differences between cultures provide the basis on which the collective polity of the nation-state operates, on the one hand, while the same differences are negated by the principle of universality, on the other. Japanese cultural identity then can be seen as caught up with an ambivalence arising from the process establishing the modern hegemonic world, whose authorizing discourse is dependent upon a plurality of cultures and yet denies their particularity in incorporating them into the world of universal intelligibility. The Japanese social scientist Sakai Naoki has argued that

Japan is defined as a specific and unitary particularity in universal terms: Japan's uniqueness and identity are provided insofar as Japan stands out as a particular object in the universal field of the West. Only when it is integrated into Western universalism does it gain its own identity as a particularity. In other words, Japan becomes endowed with and aware of its 'self' only when it is recognized by the West... [The Japanese cultural particularists'] insistence on Japan's peculiarity and difference from the West embodies a nagging urge to see the self from the viewpoint of the Other. But this is nothing but the positing of Japan's identity in Western terms which in turn establishes the centrality of the West as the universal point of reference.<sup>63</sup>

As Edward Said and others have argued, the establishment of the modern universal world was but an expansion of a European hegemonic perspective vis-à-vis the non-West, largely through the agency of the twin modern institutional forces of international capital and the universal state system. As universal perspective came into being, the plurality of cultures and peoples whose spatial differences were asymmetrical to the European notion challenged the very idea of a 'universal world' and a single mankind. These Others threatened the very universality of the European perspective, and hence sought to neutralize that threat by converting those differences into something intelligible to Europeans, preferably, what Europe had already temporarily overcome. The non-West, initially an externality to European discourse, was converted into a shadow image of Europe's past, that is, into one of stages of development in the succession of time from 'tradition' to 'modern'.<sup>64</sup> This representational violence against the preexisting spatial diversity of different cultures and peoples was the pre-condition for the emergence of modern hegemony centering on the West. Accordingly, the world only became intelligible as a unified geo-political time and space by falling under the hegemonic gaze of the West operating under a single set of 'rules of the game', governed by the laws of the international market and 'autonomous' sovereign nation-states. Differently put, the exclusion of non-Western others has served as the constitutive 'outside' of this hegemonic representation, that without which the world could not emerge as the one we know it today. The result was annihilation of the cultures and peoples of the non-West, whose identity was reduced to that of being both the opposite of and less than the Western 'self'. The hierarchy of identity within the modern world rests on this definition of Western self and non-Western other, in which all actors are obliged to endlessly strive in History in order to overcome one's own incompleteness (i.e., 'barbarism' and 'underdevelopment').

This was the context in which Japan departed from its 'pre-modern' history and voluntary isolation from the rest of the world and entered 'modern history'. The English victory over China in the Opium wars (1842) was viewed as the fall of anti-Western bulwark, and perceived by the Japanese as opening Japan to a total exposure to the imperial powers that threatened to devour the country.<sup>65</sup> The Meiji Restoration (1868) can be seen then as the internal political reaction to that extraordinary external state of affairs, a 'solution' chosen by nationalist leaders of the country in order to achieve the economic and military muscle necessary to maintaining the political and cultural autonomy of the nation. In hindsight, it is clear that material modernization without adapting modern ideas was a wishful thinking, given that participation in international polity and economy meant subordination to the 'rules of the game' of international institutions—international capitalism and the universal nation-state representative system. Rapid socio-economic changes brought on by the process of modernization was accompanied by a breakdown of the historically deep seated cultural value principles that had sustained both the traditional family system and hierarchical but complementary village social relations. This transition was experienced by many as trauma, was often perceived as a disintegration of the society as a whole and the loss of cultural identity. The introduction of modern conceptions of the human, nature and history was most often experienced as an increasing

objectification and alienation of one's own body from consciousness and nature, formerly felt to be in unity with the self, and now only appearing as 'landscape'. It was not accidental that Watsuji was preoccupied with a redefinition of man (*ningen*) and nature (*fudo*). This emergence of a conceptual hegemony, increasingly defined as alien, in the same movement nourished a yearning for the certainties of the past and a quest in reclamation of lost cultural identity that reconstructed a lost 'tradition' in the present. The most explicit embodiments of this longing were folk ethnology and *nobonshugi* which presented an alternate vision of the world based on agrarian communal life .

Once the national priority of securing political autonomy was more or less achieved after the Russo-Japanese war, the encounter with the West as the Other entered a second, more introspective phase. A prevalent socio-cultural 'mood' of yearning for the perceived previous state of 'innocence', free from all anxiety, pain, and doubt about one's own identity took hold of society. It is noteworthy that in Japan's case memories of a painful encounter with the Other were provoked only after the achievement of the proclaimed national goal (material wealth). The question of the extent to which material wealth allowed the Japanese to repudiate 'excessive' internationalism and to call their crippled 'cultural autonomy' and national identity into question is an interesting one. Be that as it may an 'atmosphere' of yearning for the past was romantically expressed a movement to pitting 'spirituality' and 'humanity' against 'scientific objectivity' and modern epistemology. The sense of lost happiness was in this phase commonly understood as resulting from brute intrusion of the modern West which had destroyed the virtue of Japanese cultural tradition; regaining the lost tradition was seen as the only possible bulwark against the further alienation, pain and cultural annihilation. The more the presence of the gaze of the modern West was felt, so works this psychology, the stronger was the need for national/cultural identity. This motivation, however, was also a denial of the presence of the Other in Japanese discursive space—the Other both as the a priori structure of cognition introduced by the modern West and as an actual representative of it (i.e., the Western power).

The process of the elimination of the Other, a movement that quickly slid into an operationalization of *jinen*, was therefore an expression of a desire for cultural identity driven by an acute sense of its lack, an ethical impulse to recover the broken linkage between the self and the world. In the discursive space in which the distance between perception and its object was elided, the subject was preoccupied with 'regaining the lost identity of consciousness and experience'. In this case, the 'recovery of identity' becomes a necessity, without which, it is perceived, the world (in the absence of the Other) can no longer be sustained. This ethical and emotional motivation which underlay prewar Japanese discursive development ultimately coalesced into 'Japan', the 'transcendental signified' into which all meanings were articulated and integrated in order to fill the profoundly felt 'lack'. *Jinen* created the 'world-otherwise' in prewar Japanese discursive space, a conceptual world that had only existed in the past, and denied the actuality of its pastness; that is, *jinen* engineered an idealized past world in the present. It was a "reactionary response of the senses and aesthetic

experiences, which had been alienated by stoic, foreign, and moralistic Marxist visions of society that were perceived as alien”.<sup>66</sup>

What is ironic in this `revolt' against the modern West as Other is that the desire to refute the modern is itself is a product of the modern; the scope and contents of Japan's desire were formulated in the very categories of the modern, desiring “an object only as expressed by the Other in the mode of possible”.<sup>67</sup> Watsuji's desire to redefine the concepts of space as human habitat (*judo*) and that of `mankind' as socio-cultural collective (*ningen*) was only possible by virtue of his experiencing space and humanity in the modern/Western way. The same is true of Nishida's and Yanagida's attempts to construct Buddhist inspired Japanese versions of philosophy and ethnology, the contents of which first came to be illuminated by modern/Western epistemology. The irony here is that both this very desire to refute the Other and the means of replacing it were dependent on and configured by the Other; and therefore, the construction of an `otherwise-Other', despite the seemingly wholesale rejection of the properties of the modern that Japanese intellectuals champions served in the end to both reinforce the centrality of the modern/Western epistemological perspective, that without which such desires were unimaginable.

The above argument based on Japanese is experience also applicable to the difficulties experienced by many non-Western societies, those whose collective identity was annihilated in Euro-centric hegemonic representation. In order to operate effectively within the international hegemonic system, the non-West must not simply `catch-up' to Western levels of material wealth, but more significantly they must somehow `manage' their ontological dislocation from the homeland of their perceived `lost identity'. Since their encounter with the Other induces self-differentiation on the part of native cultures, they are stuck with the task of reconciling what they are `represented' to be in the hegemonic system and that which they feel they were. In addition, there is the problem of what they see mirrored in their perception of the Other. The extent to which they perceive a threat in that mirror, and in the awesome technological, economic, conceptual, and political power of the West, will often, and perhaps justifiably, lead to an anti-modern and anti-materialist reaction, as it did in the Japanese case, counter-acting any state projects of material modernization. To complicate the matter, however, a sense of national identity is an indispensable necessity in justifying and rationalizing the state's authority and ability to steer the nation, and motivate the population towards its goals. The fact is that there is no modern nation-state, or any other form of collective polity for that matter, without collective identity—that which successfully draws the boundaries between inside and outside, and self and other, in order to establish the delicate balance between the universal international system and the politico-cultural autonomy of the sovereign state—which lies at the structural core of the modern world. The dilemma of the non-West is to establish a functional system of mediation (both institutional and symbolic) that can constantly affirm its unity and domestic hegemony, while simultaneously being structurally dependent on the rationalist international political economic institutions safeguarded by the hegemonic discourse that denies the

cultures of the non-West. This is why nativist counter-hegemonic resistance almost always takes the aesthetic expression of nationalist identity claims and religious fundamentalism, and is inherently threatening to the international hegemonic system. The fundamental cause of this challenge lies in the problem of non-Western identity, the hegemonic representation of which is a 'fraud', if it is not excluded all together from the hegemonic system, and therefore, non-Western identity often seeks itself 'outside' Euro-centric hegemonic discourse—an impossible dream—and in doing so destroys the possibility of the world, the Other, all together.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to draw out some of the lessons this study of prewar Japanese experience could provide for the world at large and Canadian society in particular. Due to the very nature of identity, its being both indispensable for human survival and its necessary generation of 'others', the question of identity implies something unresolvable in relations between individuals and nations. This does not mean that individuals and nations are in a constant state of conflict, as some realists in the field of international relations have argued; rather, as experience indicates, communication and negotiation have been effective tools for fostering co-existence among different peoples and nations. However, there are certain conditions when these instruments do not appear to be an option, particularly when the Other disappears from discursive and cognitive space. The point I want to repeat here is that the slide from the state of cognition in the presence of the Other to that in the absence of the Other in Japanese discursive space was extra-discursively and extra-rationally motivated and induced by Japanese exclusion from hegemonic representation. That is to say, there is a danger inherent in the international hegemonic system of generating challenges from 'others'. These challenges potentially arise in so far as the hegemonic power of the contemporary international system is at work, that is in so far as the sense of misery such as economic inequality and the multitudes of 'disastrous misfortunes' constantly visiting the developing societies are felt.

What I am insisting on is that problems seemingly confined within national boundaries are indeed international, and must be the concern of all participants of the international, and each social, hegemony. Those whose identity have been deprived must remember that it is not possible to formulate identity as such in their own terms, because of the very structure the human world is mediated by language, and any attempt to construct an alternative identity would inevitably be self-destructive, in creating its own 'others', and would paradoxically merely confirm the authority of the hegemonic perspective. On the other hand, the lesson to be drawn from past Japanese experience is not a reinforcement of the hegemonic view for all, but a sense of tolerance and accommodation for 'others'; and that demands strength and confidence to live a less certain and more flexible identity on the part of the 'self'. The solution to the problem of both non-Western and Western identity, conceived in the broadest sense, lies in the capacity of each individual and nation to reject any and every narcissistic enclosure of discourse that operationalizes 'us' vs. 'them' in the name of securing identity. Indeed it appears that the world at large is rapidly falling into the

state of cognition described as that in the absence of the Other; in both international and domestic societies—i.e., the rise of a renewed racism, nationalist fundamentalist movements, and religious mystical cults. To struggle against narcissism and the enclosed 'logic of community' is the only way out to an opening up of new possibilities of learning, communicating and negotiating with each-Other.

## Notes

1. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, p5.
2. *ibid.*, p6.
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Deleuze Reader*, p62.
4. *ibid.*, p59.
5. *ibid.*, p60, emphasis in original.
6. *ibid.*, p61.
7. *ibid.*, pp61-2.
8. *ibid.*, p62.
9. *ibid.*, p66.
10. Graham Burchell, “Introduction to Deleuze”, p114.
11. Deleuze, *ibid.*, p62.
12. *ibid.*, p65.
13. Tsunoda Ryusaku et al., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, p787.
14. *ibid.*, p786.
15. *ibid.*, p795, emphasis added.
16. Hasumi Shigehiko, “Taisho-teki Gensetsu to Hihyo” (“Taisho-esque Language and Criticism”), pp137-8.
17. *ibid.*, pp138-9.
18. *ibid.*, p138.
19. Harry Harootunian, “Disciplining Native Knowledge and Producing Place: Yanagita Kunio, Origuchi Shinobu, Tanaka Yasuma”.
20. Najita Tetsuo, “Japanese Revolt against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century”, pp723-4.
21. Harootunian, *ibid.*
22. Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism*, p.
23. Regarding the social changes of the modernizing countryside, Ann Waswo’s “The Transformation of Rural Society, 1900-1950” is very helpful.
24. Yasuda Tetsuo, *Nihon Fashizumu no Minshu Undo (The Mass Movement of Japanese Fascism)*, pp112-3.
25. *ibid.*, pp113-7.
26. *ibid.*, pp217-221.
27. *ibid.*, pp194-9.
28. Harootunian, *ibid.* My argument here is substantially indebted to H.D. Harootunian.
29. Karatani Kojin, *Kindai Nihon no Hihyo, Showa-ben I (A Criticism of Modern Japan, Showa I)*, p126.
30. *ibid.*, p127.
31. *ibid.*, p128. These works include: 1934, *Ningen no gaku toshite no rinri-gaku*; 1935, *Fudo*; 1937, *Rinri-gaku*, vol.1 by Watsuji Testuro; and 1935, *Testugaku ronbunshu daiichi* by Nishida Kitaro.
32. Tosaka Jun, *Gendai no Tame no Testugaku (Philosophy for Today)*, p169.
33. Watsuji Testuro, *Fudo: Ningengaku-teki Kosatsu (Fudo, a humanistic Study)*, p3.
34. *ibid.*, pp3-4.
35. *ibid.*, p4.

36. *ibid.*, pp19-20, emphasis added. Author's translation.
37. Watsuji, *Ningen no gaku toshite no rinri-gaku (Ethics as the Study of Humanity)*, pp10-12.
38. *ibid.*, p8.
39. Tosaka, "Nihon Rinri-gaku to Ningen-gaku" ("Japanese Ethics and the Study of Humanity"), p212.
40. *ibid.*
41. Ichikura Hirosuke, Yuasa Yasuo et al., "Toron: Watsuji Tetsuro no Gakumon to Shiso" ("Discussion: The Thought of Watsuji Testuro"), p36.
42. *ibid.*, p29.
43. Abe Masao, "Introduction" to *An Inquiry into the Good*.
44. Nishida Kitaro, *Zen no Kenkyu (Study of the Good)*.
45. Karatani, "Posuto-modan ni okeru `Shutai' no Mondai" ("The Problem of the `Subject' in Postmodernity"), p291.
46. It is highly debatable whether or not, and to what extent Nishida's philosophy in the mid-1930s was an active constituent of the discursive state of the time. While it is true that the discursive context and modality of the times was reductive in its employment of Nishida's concept of absolutely contradictory self-identity, the concept itself was also latent with a totalizing tendency: an image of harmonious `synthesis' in which all contradictions are transcended. In Karatani's understanding, Nishida's misunderstanding of Decartes is largely responsible for his ambiguous philosophical position, particularly on the question of subjectivity.
47. Here again, it is indeterminate whether Nishida's concept logically and necessarily led to the formulation of Japanese cultural essence as transcendental signified, or whether his concept was bastardized and `hi-jacked' by the discursive modality.
48. Yasuda, *ibid.*, p226.
49. *ibid.*
50. *ibid.*, p221.
51. Wastuji, *Fudo*, p148.
52. Nakamura Yujiro, *Gendai Jyonen Ron*, p24.
53. *ibid.*, (*italics added*).
54. *ibid.*, p10.
55. *ibid.*
56. Yamamuro Shiniichi, *Ajia Ninshiki no Kijibu (Fundamentals for an Understanding of Asia)*, p19.
57. Karatani, *Kindai Nibon no Hihyo*, p139.
58. Hasumi, *ibid.*
59. Karatani, *ibid.*, pp137-8.
60. Karatani, "Nihon-teki `Jinen' ni tsuite" (On the Concept of Japanese `Jinen"), pp150-1.
61. Ichikura, *ibid.*, pp27-8.
62. Karatani, *ibid.*, pp159-164.
63. Sakai Naoki, "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism", p105.
64. William Connolly, "Identity and Difference in Global Politics".
65. Yamamuro, *ibid.*, p9.

66. Karatani, *Kindai Nihon no Hihyo*, p249.

67. Deleuze, *ibid.*, p66.

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