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**The human being : when philosophy meets history. Miki Kiyoshi,
Watsuji Tetsuro and their quest for a New Ningen**

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VI. *NINGEN* AND IDEOLOGY

The *Escaton* of the War and the Failure of a Destiny

Ideology has no history.²⁰⁶

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.²⁰⁷

State of the Field

This final chapter explores the relationship between the ideology of the Japanese wartime regime and the ‘ideas’ and ‘ideals’ of Miki and Watsuji. I will demonstrate that the failure of the Japanese empire and the loss of the Second World War coincided with the failure of Miki and Watsuji’s vision of Japan.

As said, in this particular instance ideology will be employed within the boundaries of Gramsci’s hegemony and Althusser’s ideology. In these terms, the relationship between ideology and the philosophy of the *ningen* will be defined as the philosophy of the *ningen* belonging to the state apparatus that produces and reproduces knowledge. On the other hand, I consider the hegemony of the Japanese wartime regime as that form of power that won over its subjects by means of consent in its all different forms. Ideology therefore does not only represent false consciousness as it was in Marx and Engels but it includes a ‘human’ factor as well that, if somehow missing in Althusser, is certainly preponderant in Gramsci. As we shall see later, the ideology of Watsuji’s philosophy of *ningen* could be judged according to the Gramscian definition of hegemony. Watsuji supported the power of the Japanese wartime regime through his idea that the state should not be coercive but that its subjects should naturally converge towards it because of the control hegemony exercise on their consciousness.

When dealing with ideology and intellectuals, it is often easy to vulgarize or to be apologetic of the production of certain authors, depending on the political orientation of the given scholar or the historical context. In particular, Miki and Watsuji have been respectively regarded as a Leftist pundit and a nationalist ideologue. As said in the introduction, in the case of Japanese commentators and critics, any discussion regarding Miki’s involvement with the

²⁰⁶ Althusser 1977: 150.

²⁰⁷ Gramsci 1971: 276.

Shōwa Research Association was usually omitted or his role downplayed (Shimizu 1951; Kuno 1966; Arakawa 1968; Miyakawa 1970; Shimizu 1976; Uchida 2004). Only recently, Tsuda and Machiguchi have dealt with the problem of Miki's intellectual contribution to the theory of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in the broader context of his philosophical production (Tsuda 2007; Machiguchi 2004). Shimizu notices that the first edition of Miki's *Collected Works* (*chosakushū*), compiled between 1946 and 1952, excluded the documents that Miki drafted for the Shōwa Research Association (Shimizu 1976: 60). Only in 1968, when the *Complete Works* (*zenshū*) was first published, the editors eventually decided to include these controversial works (Shimizu 1976: 60). The reason behind this sudden turn has to be attributed to the change in the political context. As Shimizu argues, right after the end of WWII and during the American occupation the editors of the *Collected Works* possibly wanted to stress the role Miki had in the Left rather than his involvement with a nationalistic think-tank (Shimizu 1976: 60). On the other hand, at the end of the 1960s, Japan had become a global economic power and the works that were there emerging in regard to the history of the Second World War had started dealing with the painful issue of the Shōwa association (Shimizu 1976: 61). Therefore the pamphlets suddenly reappeared alongside Miki's writings on Marxism and existentialism.

In Europe and America, if compared to the scholarship on Nishida, Watsuji, Nishitani and other Kyōto School members, not many studies have been dedicated to Miki. Amongst the few published, Crowley and Fletcher have predominantly focused their attention to the role Miki played in the Shōwa Research Association (Crowley 1971; Fletcher 1979; Fletcher 1982). Recently, Harootunian has attempted to contextualize Miki's theory of the East Asian Cooperation in the bigger framework of his intellectual career (Harootunian 2000a: 293-357). These three scholars, to a greater or lesser extent, agree on the point that Miki was a nationalist ideologue. Goto-Jones, on the other hand, provides two contrasting assessments of Miki, first leaning more towards the collaborationist side and, later, affirming that Miki's ideas had been manipulated by the Right (Goto-Jones 2005a: 104-9; Goto-Jones 2006). As it is clear from this brief account, the discrepancy in the treatment Miki received from Japanese, European and American scholars is a sign of the complexity of both Miki's production and of his compromised political position.

The state of the field of 'Watsuji's studies' is somehow different. His book *Climate* was translated in English already in 1962 and the fact that Watsuji was not really purged in the aftermath of the Second World War gives some indication of the climate in which his work was received. Nevertheless, the scholarship on Watsuji resembles very much the one on

Miki. In other words, critics are divided on the extent to which he actually contributed to the ideology of the wartime regime. Nobody denies that Watsuji was a conservative, but Japanese critics, such as Yuasa, Yoshizawa, Kōsaka, Nagami and Ichikura tend to be apologetic of the most ideological parts of Watsuji's philosophy (Yuasa 1981; Yuasa 1987; Yoshizawa 1994; Kōsaka 1962; Nagami 1981; Ichikura 2005). In addition, they stress the 'Buddhist' elements present in Watsuji's works, arguing that the principle of 'emptiness' (*kū*) eschews the possibility of the creation or envisioning of a totalitarian state. Other Japanese scholars, such as Furukawa, Kosaka and Mine, have tried to provide a more comprehensive assessment, highlighting the factors that might have pushed Watsuji to collaborate to the ideology of his time (Furukawa 1973; Kosaka 1997; Mine 1998; Mine 2002). The situation in Europe and America somehow mirrors the Japanese one. Some critics consider Watsuji a 'full' ideologue (Bellah 1965; Najita and Harootunian 1988: 711-74; Sakai 1997; Harootunian 2000a: 250-92), whilst others have strenuously tried to justify his political positions (Dilworth 1974; LaFleur 1978; LaFleur 2001 and, to some extent, Arisaka 1996b).

I have never denied the fact that Watsuji was a nationalist ideologue and I have not negated the impact of Miki's Marxism on the Japanese Left of his time. Nevertheless, in this chapter I will show how Miki came to join the Shōwa Research Association in 1938 and the extent to which his previous production on *ningen* and technology contributed to the elaboration of the concept of the 'East Asian Cooperative Body' (*tōa kyōdōtai*). On the other hand, I will consider Watsuji's most political works, *The Way of the Japanese Subject* (*Nihon no shindō*) and *The American National Character* (*America no kokuminsei*) and his participation in the committee that prepared the first draft of the *Kokutai no hongī* (*Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*).²⁰⁸ These pieces function as a cluster for the ideas he had expressed in his prewar and interwar books.

²⁰⁸ Now, respectively, in WTZ XIV: 297-312 and WTZ XVII: 451-81.

Escaton and Destiny

In the 1940s, the similarities between Miki and Watsuji become striking: their language coincides with the terminology of the political leaders, their rhetoric merge, the Japan they each envisioned becomes one Japan or, in Miki's words 'a Third Japan' (Miki 1938: 609). Both supported the establishment of a Greater East Asia that should have comprised most East and South-East Asia under the leadership of Japan and they both criticized American imperialism, Western capitalism and colonialism. De facto, it appears that they did not consider the Japanese invasion of China and of most of South-East Asia as another form of colonialism but, rather, as a 'liberation' from Western oppression and exploitation. Miki and Watsuji were not alone in supporting the political claims of the Japanese government; almost all the members of the Kyōto School shared their vision for a new Japan in one way or the other. What is of most interest to us here is the accent they pose on 'destiny'.

Destiny represents the key to understand this sudden intellectual convergence. The historical climate Miki, Watsuji and the other members of the Kyōto School lived in and in which they developed their ideas was one of *Angst* and uneasiness towards modernity. It appears that, from the Taishō period onwards, Japan had struggled to find a place in the world. As explained elsewhere, Watsuji protracted this way of thinking even in the postwar period.²⁰⁹ If the discourse on medianity as the quintessential human condition is mainly concerned with society in the first period of Miki and Watsuji's intellectual lives, in this stage medianity appears to have become the uncertain position that Japan had in the world. It is therefore of no surprise that in the late 1930s and early 1940s Miki and Watsuji, as well the other Kyōto School members, talked about the 'world-historical mission' or 'world-historical place' of Japan.²¹⁰ Miki and Watsuji started their philosophical elaborations by posing the accent on the societal aspect of the human being rather than on its individuality. Their constant struggle to overcome the Cartesian duality of subject and object resulted in the creation of an absolute totality, or an Absolute Nothingness in Nishida's terms, which, instead of freeing the individual it subjugated it to an immanent, higher authority. This negation of

²⁰⁹ See chap. 4.

²¹⁰ See the (in)famous *The World-Historical Standpoint of Japan (Sekaishiteki tachiba to nihon)* published by the journal *Chūōkōron* in 1943 that collects a series of three round-table discussions held at Kyoto University between 1941 and 1942. The authors, Nishitani Keiji, Kōsaka Masaaki, Suzuki Shigetaka and Kōyama Iwao, were all members of the Kyōto School. In the postwar period, these roundtables together with the 1942-symposium *Overcoming Modernity (Kindai no chōkoku)*, sponsored by the journal *Bungakukai*, were interpreted as a sign of the involvement of the Kyōto School with the ultranationalist regime (see Minamoto 1995; Horio 1995; Goto-Jones 2005a: 109-116; Uhl 2008).

freedom, which Uchida underlines as being the eternal struggle in Miki philosophy, predestined the human being towards a clear and defined path (Uchida 2004). The destiny of the human being hence becomes the destiny and the mission of a whole nation.

Uhl has explored this quasi-religious dimension in Nishitani and Nishida, linking it to the concept of ‘self-realization’ or the ‘*concern about the self*’ that underpins the discourse on the moral and ethical renovation of Japan (Uhl 2008: 129; emphasis in the original). Despite the fact that I share some sympathy with this interpretation of some of the members of the Kyōto School’s ideas, I would like to push this discourse even further. I would argue that not only this renovation of the *ningen* takes place on a semi-religious platform, but that it is embodied in the *escaton* of the war.

In this instance, the *escaton* needs to be considered in Paul’s and John’s terms, where the eschatology of history is inevitably related to the Apocalypse (Bultmann 1957: 38-55).²¹¹ Dodd and Löwith stress the importance of the separation between God’s teleology of history and the teleology of human history (Dodd 1944: 89; Löwith 1949: 182-90). The coming of Christ is an unrepeatable, fulfilling, apocalyptic, now-time event. It allows for metaphysical history to enter into the realm of human history, it overthrows the power of evil, it fulfills historical destiny and it allows for man to experience eternal life (Dodd 1944: 86).

Obviously, this kind of discourse cannot be fully applied to Miki and Watsuji that were not Jewish or Christian thinkers. In addition to this characteristic, Löwith denies that it is possible to transfer the Christian eschatology into a philosophical discourse, since in the Christian faith the goal is the redemption from sin and death (Löwith 1949: 189). Nevertheless, there is some room left for expanding this discourse on eschatology in the realm of ideas. If we link the *kairos*, the eternal and clustered present, to the *escaton*, then the idea of the fulfillment of the teleology of history could be realized in the historical mission of Japan. Hence, it should be possible to link the failed destiny of Japan to the failed destiny of intellectuals and ideas. Miki and Watsuji effectively created a ‘religion of the human being’ that, on the one hand, eschewed theology as we know it but, on the other, still maintained the religious trait of faith. Faith here is the faith in the end of the war, of the *escaton* of the war qua *re-ordering of the world geo-political and cultural scenario*. The Messiah Miki and Watsuji were waiting for was the end of and victory in the war that would have allowed Japan to elevate itself to a new position and that would have fulfilled its historical destiny. Along

²¹¹ Paul contributed to theology by interpreting the apocalyptic view of history in the light of anthropology, and John stripped the eschatology of its expectations of the future by stressing the present happening of the *escaton* in the coming of Christ himself (Bultmann 1957: 41-7).

these lines, the singularity of the Apocalyptic event is preserved, since the end of the war appeared in a catastrophic form. The *escaton* becomes a *human escaton* and not a metaphysical one.²¹² Ideas transform themselves into a vision for history, in a future that will finally bring peace to the anxiety of the past forty years.²¹³

The *kairos* that we have previously analyzed that does not allow for a teleology of history is the perfect example of the significance of the *escaton*.²¹⁴ Discussing the failure of Miki's thought in creating a link and equilibrium between everydayness and world historicity, we have demonstrated that Miki was not able to overcome the problem of the supremacy of world history. His ideas found their historical counterpart in the geo-political situation of the 1930s, with Japan taking its first steps into imperialism and with basic freedoms being denied on a domestic level. In the 1940s, the world history linked to the *kairos* qua event becomes inevitably intertwined with the destiny and historical mission of Japan in Asia. Therefore, his vision finds life in historical reality. In this respect, the *escaton* works as this vision. With the defeat, despite the fact that Miki could not witness it since he died in prison in September 1945, his vision of Japan and the longing for the Third Japan were crushed. For Watsuji, whose elaboration of time does not involve the *kairos*, the *escaton* is even more reflected in a pure and visionary state of victory. He, who survived 1945 and went on writing until 1960, felt that the loss of WWII was not only a national defeat but a personal one as well.²¹⁵ The situation of *Angst* that Watsuji equated to the pervasive presence of capitalism, egotism and utilitarianism in Japan, did not disappear in the 1950s. His vision failed together with Japan's mission and the historical destiny of the Japanese nation was not fulfilled. Watsuji thus becomes like a Christian, waiting for the second coming of Christ and longing for a renewed, worldly role for Japan. It is in this instance that the discourse on the *sakoku* period has to be considered, as the explanation of the reason why the *escaton* did not materialized in the way he had foreseen it.

I believe that the atmosphere of *Angst* that pervaded Japan after 1945 and that I consider being expressed in the *shutaisei* debate and around the question of war-responsibility is nothing else than consequence of the failure of *ideas* and *intellectuals* in the previous years. For the Kyōto School, their historicized human being but de-historicized nation linked to the historicity of the human being qua nation did not fulfill its historical mission. The key is faith

²¹² Some have argued that Heidegger did the same by bringing back eschatology from metaphysics to human history with the elaboration of his concept of the Being-towards-death.

²¹³ Interesting is Cullmann's comparison between the *escaton* and the V-Day (quoted in Löwith 1949: 188-9 and 251-2).

²¹⁴ See Chap. 4.

²¹⁵ See Chap. 4.

and, as Löwith says: ‘the confidence in a theological *escaton* stands or fails with faith alone’ (Löwith 1949: 252). Not solely a failed theological *escaton*, I would argue, but a failed intellectual *escaton* as well.

In political terms, the *escaton* that Miki envisioned and the one of Watsuji’s slightly differ in their origin but not in their outcome. Miki failed to recognize that the way he had characterized his human being was doomed from its start. His philosophy completely merged with ideology in the moment when Miki defined the human being as the Japanese nation attaining its moral destiny. Differently, Watsuji retained part of his faith in Japan after 1945. In this case, his attempt to reshape the destiny of the Japanese nation in the post-1945 world shows signs of continuity. Nevertheless, it is not a problem of ideas crushed by political power, otherwise the ‘ideologue’ theory could not be sustained. In his case, as well as in Tanabe and Nishitani’s, it is a problem of convergence between history and ideas.²¹⁶ What is lost is the political faith in the *escaton* but not in the vision. Therefore, the failure is the sudden convergence between history and ideas on a political level but the continuation of the vision of a second *escaton* for Japan is matter of intellectual *escaton*. Power did not overthrow their philosophies, history did.

Miki and Watsuji created a human being that was, in its existential and philosophical foundation, social, historical and national. The elaboration and subsequent renovation that followed did nothing more than strengthening the national traits of the *ningen*. Bound to a Japanese history, trapped into a historical present unable to fulfill its development towards historical completion and born out of faith, it could not exempt itself from being crushed together with historical reality. The condition of medianity doomed the human being from its early philosophical appearance. In this context, it is without doubt that questions related to Miki’s role as an ideologue of the interwar status quo or the extent to which Watsuji could be regarded a nationalist do not fully address the problem explained above. Miki and Watsuji contributed to the ideology of the Japanese empire, but how they did it and which destiny they envisioned is the most pressing issue that we now have to take into consideration.

²¹⁶ Tanabe and Nishitani, after August 1945, mostly published on religion and withdrew from the political landscape. This discourse will not be explored further, but I nonetheless believe that both thinkers shared the same vision of the *escaton* as Miki and Watsuji. The withdrawal from politics, in my view, is dictated precisely by the failure of the political *escaton*.

The Shōwa Research Association

The Shōwa Research Association was informally set up in 1933 by Gotō Ryūnosuke together with the soon-to-be prime minister Prince Konoe Fumimaro (Shimizu 1976: 59; Sakai 1992: 16). This association was officially recognized in 1936 and it functioned as Konoe's brain-trust. Several intellectuals, philosophers and economists were called to join the discussion groups with the main objective of advising Konoe on matters of foreign policy and economic planning (Shillony 1981: 111). In his book dedicated to the association, Sakai Saburō, a former member himself, lists thirteen different sub-groups the association was divided into, according to the political issues that needed to be addressed (Sakai 1992: 59-60). Miki joined the Shōwa Research Association in 1938 and, according to Shimizu Ikutarō's personal account of the meetings, he worked closely with Shimizu, with the Marxist philosopher Funayama Shin'ichi, the historians of science Sugai Jun'ichi and Saigusa Hiroto and the two journalists from the Asahi Shinbun Ryū Shintarō and Sasa Hirō (Shimizu 1976: 59). Other important members of the association were the professor of economics and chief strategist of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere Rōyama Masamichi, the expert on China and Manchuria Taira Teizō, the sinologist Ozaki Hotsumi, the professor of economics Yabe Teiji, and Kazami Akira, who will subsequently occupy strategic positions in the first and second Konoe cabinets (1937-1939 and 1940-41) (Crowley 1971: 324). As it is clear from this list of names, the group was not composed solely by right-wing figures. On the contrary, it brought together people from different backgrounds and activities, who were supposed to provide a strong economical and theoretical underpinning to Konoe's policies.²¹⁷

In November 1938, after the China incident, Konoe declared that China had been 'the victim of the imperialistic ambitions and rivalries of the Occidental powers' and that Japan had the mission to reestablish justice in East Asia (Konoe quoted in Crowley 1974: 279). It was the start of the New Order Movement that sought to subtract Western powers of their colonial territories and to subject them to Japanese ruling. The New Order was also deeply intertwined with the idea of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (*dai tōa kyōeiken*) or simply 'Greater East Asia' (*dai tōa*). These slogans describe the different principles that Konoe wanted Japan to satisfy, which spanned from the construction of an East and South-East Asian regional block in the name of the unity of the Asian race, the defeat of communism and capitalism and to put an end to the presence of Western powers in the block

²¹⁷ Miyamoto affirms that the ultra-nationalist Minoda Muneki even wrote an article titled 'The magical language of the Shōwa Research Association' (*Shōwa Kenkyūkai no gengo majitsu*) criticizing it for being 'anti-kokutai' (Miyamoto 1978: 119).

(Crowley 1974: 287).²¹⁸ Despite the fact that the association ceased to exist in 1940 the ideology behind it did not die with it.²¹⁹ In December 1941 Japanese planes bombarded the American Naval base of Pearl Harbor and from then on the total war started.

During the four years of its activity, the association produced a striking amount of documents and pamphlets on the problems of the invasion of China and Asia, domestic issues and economic reforms, and the creation of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. In this regard, it appears that Miki's contribution was crucial in drafting two documents that set out the ideological and theoretical principles of Greater East Asia. The first one, *The Intellectual Principles of the New Japan (Shin nihon shisō genri)*, appeared in January 1939 and the second one, *The Intellectual Principles of the New Japan, Continuum. The Philosophical Bases of Cooperativism (Shin nihon shisō genri zokuhen. Kyōdōshugi no tetsugakuteki kiso)* was published in September of the same year.²²⁰ Despite the fact that Shimizu admits that the second pamphlet might have been written by a different person (they are quite dissimilar in style and language), the themes present in both documents are very similar to the articles and pieces that Miki wrote in the mid-1930s, before formally joining the association (Shimizu 1976: 62-3). From about 1935 onwards, Miki started being interested in the problem of the relationship between China and Japan and he wrote extensively on the cultural relations between the two countries and the position of Japan in world history.²²¹ In the following section we will see which of his writings are more relevant to the construction of the 'new principles'.

²¹⁸ The idea of 'Greater East Asia' was not a novelty or an invention of the 1930s-1940s Japan. The difference is that, during those years, it stood as the intellectual and ideological backdrop of Japan imperialistic aims.

²¹⁹ In 1941, Ozaki, one of the members of the association, was found guilty of treason in connection to the Sorge Ring (Shillony 1981: 112). Richard Sorge was a Russian spy in Japan. In 1941, he and Ozaki were arrested and put in jail for treason under the Peace Preservation Law. They were both hanged in 1944. It appears that, despite his involvement in the Shōwa Kenkyukai and his proximity to Konoe, Ozaki secretly provided sensitive documents to Sorge and the Soviets. For a detailed account of the Sorge Ring, although to be carefully read, see Johnson 1990.

²²⁰ Nowadays, they can be found in MKZ XVII: 507-533 and MKZ XVII: 534-588.

²²¹ From 1935 is *The Problem of Sino-Japanese Thought (Nisshi shisō mondai)* published in December in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* (now in MKZ XV: 28-35), from 1937 *The Imperial Way of World History (Sekaishi no kōdō)* and *The Reality of Japan (Nihon no genjitsu)* published, respectively, in July in *Shinchō* and in November in *Chūōkōron* (now in MKZ XIII: 402-407 and 438-463) and from 1938 *The Significance of World History in Modern Japan (Gendai nihon ni okeru sekaishi no igi)*, *20th Century Thought (Nijū seki no shisō)*, *The Foundation of the Greater East Asia Thought (Tōa shisō no konkyō)* published respectively in June in *Kaizō*, in July in *Nihon Hyōron* and in December in *Kaizō* (now in MKZ XIV: 143-150 and 151-158; MKZ XV: 308-325).

Towards the ‘Intellectual Principles of the New Japan’

The goal of this section and of the following one will be to demonstrate that Miki’s system of the human being reached completion in the creation of the Japanese nation with a new mission in the world. As we shall see, the development of the *ningen* from a *ningen*-class of the Marxist period until the *homo faber* of *Philosophy of Technology* will finally materialize in the Japan of 1940s and its struggle to create a Japanese empire. I will thus argue that Miki’s statement that ‘attaining self-awareness of one’s own moral destiny is crucial’ is a proof that his human being had eventually merged with the Japanese nation and died with it.

In the aftermath of the 1936 February incident, Miki wrote *The Japanese Character and Fascism (Nihonteki seikaku to fashizumu)*, where he lamented the fact that Japan had been taken over by the fascist tendencies of ‘Japanism’ (MKZ XIII: 252).²²² Miki interpreted the rebels’ attempt as a sign of the radicalization of the term ‘Japanese spirit’ (*nihon no seishin*) and he condemned the rebellion, although in implicit terms, for not having recognized that no pure Japan ever existed. Along the lines of Watsuji, Miki defined Japanese culture as ‘stratified’ (MKZ XIII: 258). As in his theory of the renovation of the human being, he states that fascism is nothing else than a mis-conception of the ‘Japanese character’, because, he argues, even this character that is a form without a form is subjected to change and continuous renovation (MKZ XIII: 260-3). He attributed the rise of fascism in Japan to the seclusion of the Tokugawa period that allowed for elements of feudalism to linger in Japanese society and that were never overcome (MKZ XIII: 250-1).²²³

Miki never denied the great cultural debt that Japan owed to China in the creation of the ‘stratified’ culture of Japan, but he thought that it was time for Japan to lead China towards a path of modernization and political stability. In 1935, Miki wrote that China was in need of help in forming an alliance against Western modernity (MKZ XV: 32-4). He reaches the conclusion that, in this world of decline of Western thought, Japan has the chance of emerging and contributing to world history (MKZ XV: 34).

This discourse on ‘help’ that China apparently needed is restated in a very short but significant piece from 1940. The article is the printed version of a dialogue between Miki and Zhou Fohai, who at the time was the second commander in chief of Wang Jingwei’s puppet

²²² Originally published in *Chūōkōron* in August 1936. Now in MKZ XIII 241-267. During the February incident a group of army officers led an attempted *coup d’état* in the name of the restoration of the political power of the emperor. The rebels were calling for a ‘Shōwa Restoration’ and the reinforcement of the imperial ruling and the doctrine of the *kokutai* (Bix 2000: 298).

²²³ This discourse is very similar to the critique that the Second Soviet Comintern addressed to Japan in 1922. They, too, found that the feudal elements present in Japanese society were hampering the path to revolution. On the other hand, it is not that dissimilar from Watsuji’s discourse on the *sakoku* period.

government in Nanjing.²²⁴ Their main concern is ‘nationalism’ (*minzokushugi*) and the link between what they call ‘natural’ or ‘people’s nationalism’ (*minzokushugi*) and ‘state-nationalism’ (*kokkashugi*), characterized by military strength (Miki *et al.* 1940: 83). Miki suggests to Wang that many countries have undergone the path of unifying these two sides of the same coin, including Japan, but that China might need some more time. As a solution, Miki proposes the Greater East Asia as symbol of the peaceful co-existence of different countries in one sphere, where each and every country is independent and ‘nationally’ free (Miki *et al.* 1940: 84-5).

In 1937, in *The Reality of Japan*, Miki lays out some major themes that will then make up the kernel of the two Shōwa Kenkyūkai’s documents on the ‘new Japan’. This article, which nevertheless shows heavy signs of censorship, faces the philosophical background behind the phrases ‘Japanese spirit’ and ‘Chinese spirit’ (MKZ XIII: 445). Miki, noticing how the most recent intellectual and political discussions had shifted from ‘Japan’ to ‘Asia’, proposes to look at the situation by the standpoint of world-history. Comparing what was then only an idea of a Greater East Asia to the unifying role that the Roman empire or the Catholic Church had in European history, he argues that Buddhism could function as a principle of unity in East Asia (MKZ XIII: 450-4). Buddhism, as much as Christianity, retains its religious, transcendental character. Human existence, as seen in the previous chapters, is transcendental as well since its life in the world is characterized by the movement of transcendence from object to subject (MKZ XIII: 77-8).²²⁵ Together, religion and existence share this common transcendental ground that allows for both to preserve their ‘world character’. On the stage of world-history, Buddhism has now to allow for the Japanese character of ‘worldly-ness’ to emerge without losing its own in the process. Therefore, Buddhism as a religion needs to drive the political process behind the Japanese expansion in Asia, but not transform itself into politics otherwise it will lose its authority (MKZ XIII: 81). Nonetheless, Miki cannot solve the problem of the particularity of Buddhism, in the sense that Buddhism remained confined to the Asian continent, whilst he seems to imply that Christianity spread well beyond its birth boundaries. One of the most important issues here is that Miki does not seem to distinguish between the political role the Catholic Church qua establishment had and Christianity as a religion in general. There is a disparity between his treatment of Buddhism, that to him covers a cultural rather than a political role, and his treatment of the Catholic Church. The two things

²²⁴ *The Problem of Nationalism (Minzoku no mondai)*. Published in *Chūōkōron* in May 1940.

²²⁵ In *Religion as the Inspiring Force of the New Japan (Shin nihon no shidōryoku toshite no shūkyō)*. Originally published in *Kōru* in January 1938. Now in MKZ XIII: 71-81.

somehow conflate when Miki affirms that some Christian countries are now witnessing a flourishing of totalitarianism and nationalism, as if Japan, by virtue of the Buddhist principle of ‘nothingness’, was immune from this threat.²²⁶ The most fundamental Buddhist principle, nothingness, thus transforms itself from a religious principle into a cultural and political factor. This consideration is very important, since it represents the basis of the Asian Cooperativism theory where the discourse around culture was used to disguise Japan’s real political ambitions.

Facing the impossibility of resolving the question of the relationship between religion and politics, Miki introduces ‘science’. Miki argues that ‘tradition’ (*dentō*) could help in unifying Asia but that, at the same time, ‘science’ (or Watsuji’s ‘scientific spirit’) should go hand-in-hand with it (MKZ XIII: 462):

There is no doubt that Eastern thought has been greatly limited by the underdevelopment of science that makes world universality possible
(MKZ XIII: 462)

The world-character of a regional Buddhism and the scientific spirit of modernity should thus provide the fundamental bases for Japan to finally enter world-history. The sustainability of such a way of reasoning was nevertheless doubted by Miki himself only a couple of months before, in *The 20th Century Thought*, when he returned to the problem of *Angst*:

What humanity experienced in the Great War was not the question of ‘choice’ (*sentaku*) but rather of ‘a destiny difficult to escape from’ (*nigere muzukashii unmei*) and as Scheler said, instead of complete unity, the world was thrown into the midst of contrasting ideologies of an unprecedented scale [...] The Second World War is now difficult to avoid, and through the general pessimism that has spread far more than imagined, rebuilding a unifying principle for the history of humanity has become perhaps an impossible task
(MKZ XIV: 155-6)

The abstraction of nationalism and, most of all, internationalism, are the causes behind the impossibility of tracing a new ‘worldy-human’ historical principle. Similarly to Nishida, Watsuji and other Kyōto School members, Miki launches an implicit attack on the League of Nations, considering it only an association based on the ‘individuality’ of single countries (MKZ XIII: 405-6).²²⁷ Miki calls it ‘the abstraction’ of the ‘way’ (*michi*) that has pushed history and reality to part and that has given birth to this form of internationalism that is based

²²⁶ Miki seems to imply, throughout the whole article, that there was never a ‘Renaissance period’ in the East. As seen before, this is what made the renovation of the human being possible in Europe.

²²⁷ In *The Imperial Way of World History*.

solely on capitalist development (MKZ XIII: 406-7). Miki therefore considers capitalism as the root of this kind of wrong world-cooperation. In this instance, Miki brings about a similar critique of capitalism to the one Watsuji had put forward in his dialogues with Kawakami Hajime and later in his *Study of Ethics*.²²⁸

Capitalism is the cause of the transformation of the traditional *Gemeinschaft* into the modern *Gesellschaft*, where the old principles that belonged to the community have been replaced by the capitalist spirit. To Miki, capitalist and liberalism have the same root, which is the abstraction of history from reality and he warns against constructing a new Asia on the basis of economic exchange and trade (MKZ XIV: 149).²²⁹ To him, establishing a cooperation of this sort will simply perpetuate the imperialism of Western powers. Instead, he affirms, ‘the unity of Asia is a matter of true world history’ (MKZ XIV: 149).

The *motifs* that underpin Miki’s vision for Japan are several and they all intertwined. On the one hand, the scientific spirit that the ‘East’ failed to appropriate in the past centuries could be seen as the continuation of his discourse on technology. Technology here is ‘social’ technology or the technology that in the East never developed into in the technology of things (MKZ XVII: 140-2).²³⁰ Buddhism, as explained above, functions as cultural glue, the element that, together with race, melds commonalities in the whole Asia.²³¹

In this convergence, Miki sees the chance for the ‘East’ to substitute Europe in leading world history and to create a new Greater East Asia not simply confined to geographical boundaries but pregnant with ‘world significance’ (*sekaiteki igi*) (MKZ XV: 309).²³² He explains that ‘Europeanism’ (*Yōroppashugi*), an expression borrowed from Ranke, has finally declined under the heavy hit of Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (1918), Ernst Troeltsch’s *Historism and Its Problems* (1922) and Leopold von Ranke’s *World History* (1888) (MKZ XIV: 147-8).

If the East Asia Cooperative Body (*tōa kyōdōtai*) has today to have world significance, it surely needs to be concretized in the particularity of East Asia. Nevertheless, particularity cannot be a mere particular, but a particular and a universal at the same time. In other words, it cannot be confined to geographical boundaries, it has to become the mark of the new world order

²²⁸ See Chap. 2 and Chap. 3.

²²⁹ In *The Significance of World History in Modern Japan*.

²³⁰ In *The History of the Sino-Japanese Cultural Relationship (Nisshi bunka kankeishi)*, originally published in *Taiheihō Mondai Shiryō* in March 1940. Now in MKZ XVII: 126-85.

²³¹ In *The Reality of Japan*, Miki criticizes the discourse on the ‘common race’ (*dōshū*) that the most right-wing ideologists were putting forward (MKZ XIII: 447). For the history of the narrative of race in China and Japan see Karl 1998 and Duara 2001.

²³² In *The Foundations of the Greater East Asia Thought*. For a similar discourse on the position of Japan in world-history through an overcoming of European philosophy from Kant to Ranke see Uhl 2008.

Again, the new *Gemeinschaft* that will be born from the new order in Asia will make each and every country there included self-aware of its particularity. At the same time, nations will accept the sense of belonging to this higher entity. Again:

If the unity of the East is a matter of world history, so it has to be considered. In other words, it represents the solution of the problem of capitalism. In what ways we can overcome the contradictions immanent in capitalism is a matter of the great concern for world history today. Not confronting these issues would mean not facing the reality of the true, world-historical significance of the unity of the East

(MKZ XV: 324)

Conflating Tönnies' ideas of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* with Bergson's 'open' and 'closed' societies, Miki tries to convince us that the closed societies inside an open structure would only correspond to a new capitalist alliance and not a cultural and historical one. Asian nations have to open to this new Japanese project, otherwise the 'modern *Gesellschaft*' would take over and this would be 'unforgivable' (*yurusarenai*).

Uchida affirms that Miki's idea of cooperativism is an act of resistance to Western imperialism (Uchida in Miki 2007: 243). Taking as a proof Miki's statements that Japan was in need of a process of cultural self-criticism before going and occupy half of Asia and that feudalism was still present in the Asian spirit, he concludes that Miki brought forward this idea on the basis of the 'pathos' Japan shared with the other Asian peoples (Uchida in Miki 2007: 249). Leaning towards a contemporary theory of post-colonialism that involves a critique of colonial modernity and capitalist development, Uchida transforms Miki into a contemporary intellectual of resistance. Very much alike Goto-Jones' theory that Nishida was not effective in his 'speaking the truth to power', Uchida posits Miki's problematic involvement with the regime in the context of Miki's theory of the renovation of the human being and eventually attempts to find a positive assessment of this troubled period of his life.

My disagreement with Uchida does not regard the context of his statements. It rather points at the fact that it is not possible to define Miki as a 'post-colonial intellectual' *ante litteram*. Miki's vision of a new Asia, at this stage, has already taken the form of propaganda. His proximity to Konoe transformed his language into a political pamphlet. Far from arguing that it is solely a problem of language, I see this ultimate step in Miki's philosophy as the completion of his system of creation of the national human being. From his early writings on capitalism during his Marxist period Miki eschewed the crucial problem of 'class', posing the

basis for a direct link between the late 1920s and the late 1930s. If imperialism forms the alliance between mob and capital, overstepping the problem of class, then Miki had already created it in his creation of the *ningen*-class.²³³

Miki's mistake was precisely the overlooking of the internal mechanisms that regulate capitalism. If imperialism is the necessity of the capital of the nation state to channel the exchange-value and overpopulation, then the expansion of the nation state is inherently linked to the overflowing of capital. Miki never recognized this aspect of Marxist theory, and therefore created the form of imperialism typical of fascist ideologies. His critique of capitalism is the fascist one, not the one of a post-colonialist. His cultural and, I would argue, 'human' imperialism rooted in his faith in a national and international awakening does not constitute an act of resistance. Rather, in its own right, it represents a philosophical discourse that blurred the boundaries between politics and culture, between intellectual and political activity. His vision of a common destiny for the whole Asia misses, or probably it is too close, the reality of the unfolding of history. The lucidity and objectivity that had characterized his previous writings, contrastingly charged with pathos and anxiety, loses its efficacy in the rhetoric of Japanese imperialism. That rhetoric was the one that Miki had defined as the true character of the human being.

The question here is not whether Miki can be rescued from history or historical memory, but rather why he supported Konoe's principles of the 'New Order in Asia'.

The 'Principles'

The Intellectual Principles of the New Japan appeared in January 1939 as a product of the Shōwa Research Association. In reality, most of the pamphlet was compiled by Miki. In November 1938, when Miki joined the association, he delivered a speech called *The World-Historical Significance of the China Incident* (*Shina jihen no sekaishiteki igi*). This speech, together with *The Reality of Japan*, forms the backbone of the *Principles*. Repeating his

²³³ See Arendt 2004: 196-209. Following Arendt, if the imperialist expansion was a way to overcome the class division and struggle in the formation of the paradoxical alliance between mob capital then: 'the aim of these movements was, so to speak, to imperialize the whole nation (and not only the 'superfluous' part of it), to combine domestic and foreign policy in such a way as to organize the nation for the looting of foreign territories and the permanent degradation of alien people' (Arendt 2004: 206).

previous arguments on the necessity of helping China in expelling foreign powers and combating Western imperialism, he gives a new interpretation of the China Incident according to the categories of space and time:

Spatially, the world-historical meaning of the China Incident will make the unity of the world possible through the realization of an East Asian unity [...] Temporally, the significance of the China Incident must bring an end the problems of capitalism [...] There is a mutual relationship between these spatial and temporal problems and it will not be possible to create a real unity in East Asia unless the issues of capitalism have being solved

(MKZ XVII: 508-11)

The pamphlet reaches its intellectual peak when Miki argues that the unity in Asia will represent a ‘new Renaissance’ such as the one that happened in Italy and sparked the emergence of national consciousness in Europe (MKZ XVII: 512). The *leitmotif* of the Renaissance, which always constituted Miki’s point of reference in the outline of the theory of human renovation, becomes a model also for his theory of the East Asian cooperation. This new kind of Asian Renaissance will be based on ‘Eastern humanism’ (*tōyōteki hyūmanizumu*):

Against Western humanism (*seyōteki hyūmanizumu*) that is based on humanism (*ningenshugi*) and culturalism (*bunkashugi*), Eastern humanism represents the connubium between man and nature, between life-style and culture. Against the idea of ‘human species’ (*jinrui*) that is at the root of Western humanism, Eastern humanism is underpinned by concepts such as ‘nothingness’ (*mu*), ‘nature’ (*shizen*) and ‘heaven’ (*ten*). Again, Eastern humanism will accomplish the rational order of society by following the ethical way on which the cultivation of the self lies upon

(MKZ XVII: 514)

The process of renovation does not only involve the solution of the contradictions immanent in capitalism and the creation of a new ‘Asian human being’, it involves a process of renovation of culture through sublation. Eastern culture, purged of its feudalistic elements, would elevate itself into a new *Gemeinschaft*. The human being, Miki adds in a Watsuji reminiscence, is born and lives within society, the society that will defeat the individualistic tendencies of utilitarian ones. Rationalism and irrationalism, nationalism and internationalism, familism and modernism, communism and liberalism, all these contradictory factors will be sublated into the new cooperative body that will bring stability and freedom to the people of Asia.

The creation of the East Asian Cooperative Body under the leadership of Japan will not only depend on the initiative of the Japanese people, it will be based on the moral destiny of Japan in the face of the present incident. *Attaining self-awareness of one's own moral destiny is crucial*

(MKZ XVII: 533; emphasis added)

What are the philosophical principles that underpin this idea of the awareness of Japan's destiny? They are the 'practical' principles of cooperativism.²³⁴ They are realized by a concrete and technological subject, the *shutai*, that abides to the social and practical standpoint of the present (MKZ XVII: 539-44).

The development of history looks to the future and looking at things historically means looking at them in their unfolding. Praxis is not simply the past, it is also prescribed by the future. *The historical present, past and future in which we act are, at the same time, present, temporal and eternal and the instant stands as the unity between time and eternity*

(MKZ XVII: 545-6; emphasis added)

Cooperativism therefore is based on the theory of the form without a form, that Miki had already outlined in his theory of technology, that will reach historical and practical form in the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Assessing Miki's involvement with the Japanese wartime establishment is an issue that has sparked quite some controversy in Japan. Yonetani, following some earlier assessments of Miki philosophy, agrees that Miki's language sounds like the one of a *tenkōsha* or the intellectual who has abjured his faith to embrace the ideology of the Japanese nationalist regime (Yonetani 1998: 48). Sakai, on the other hand, treats Miki as a full member and enthusiastic participant of different governmental think-tanks, even before the Shōwa association (Sakai 1992: 157-63). Shiozaki, in direct antagonism to Sakai, explains that Miki's situation has to be understood and interpreted according to the 'logic of state of affairs' (*jimu no ronri*), an expression that Miki himself used in one of his articles (Shiozaki 1993: 18).²³⁵ Following Miki's original, in which he equated the logic of the state of affairs with the logic of politics in Machiavellian terms, Shiozaki argues that Miki's involvement

²³⁴ In *The Intellectual Principles of New Japan. Continuum. The Philosophical Bases of Cooperativism*.

²³⁵ *The Logic of the State of Affairs (Jimu no ronri)*. Originally published in *Chisei* in October 1939. Now in MKZ XIV: 299-306. Shiozaki's aim is to rewrite the narrative behind the idea of cooperativism and how this has been interpreted in the postwar period. To Shiozaki, Miki's elaboration was highly influenced by Krauss, who was then professor at Jōchi University (nowadays Sophia University) and who was at that time translating the 'Dictionary of Catholicism'. Krauss' main theory was 'solidarism' (*rentaishugi*) to be attained through the 'principle of help', a catholic principle behind solidarity (Shiozaki 1993: 28). In my personal view, this kind of narrative sounds like historical negationism.

was dictated by the *raison d'état*. Nevertheless, if we carefully look at Miki's piece, the situation appears to be quite different. Miki refers to Machiavelli's idea of logic of the affairs as a political and technological act (MKZ XIV: 299). Since Machiavelli, Miki continues, considered the logic of the affairs as based on an objective knowledge of history and reality, the *raison d'état* has to be the natural self-preservation of the state and the development of its vital force (MKZ XIV: 301-4). Thus, it is quite difficult to judge from this piece whether Miki thought that there was no other choice for him but to join the Shōwa association. Certainly, the *raison d'état* could be interpreted as Miki's endorsement of the China Incident and the advance in North China. Therefore, both the idea of *tenkō* and of the submission to political and historical necessity do not appear to be very helpful in attempting to interpret the reason behind Miki support for the ideology of the Japanese status quo.

Shimizu, despite his effort to rescue Miki from the judgment of history, argues that Miki never lost faith in the human being and that, in his deep love for Japan, he was trying to warn it against the fascist tendencies of the Right (Shimizu 1951: 10-4). Shimizu himself seems to be regretting having joined the Shōwa Research Association, especially when he read Miki's pieces and he contextualized them in Miki's theory of the human being. How to hence explain Miki's continuous support for the Shōwa group and his proximity to Konoe? Shimizu is right when he affirms that Miki's idea of *ningen* underpins even this part of his political and intellectual life. It is the *ningen*, but it is not the one of his Pascal period, it is the *homo faber* of technology. A *homo faber* that recognizes itself in the Japanese nation and in the creation of a sphere of influence aimed at overcoming liberalism and communism. It is the genealogy of the idea that, from its origins, dooms its outcome. In the realm of ideas, Miki himself affirms that 'since military activities cannot be carried on permanently, Japan has to resort to the measure of influencing China by means of ideas' (Miki 1938: 607). The Third Japan represents the force that should implement the change in its synthesis of Eastern and Western cultures and that is now:

In the midst of the travails for its birth. We are certainly experiencing the period of "*Sturm und Drang*". There might be certain overstepping and shortcomings, but the Third Japan is sure to be born

(Miki 1938: 609)

The *Sturm und Drang* deeply reflects the period of uncertainty that pervaded the late 1930s and the early 1940s. The idea of a Third Japan that should have been born right after the conquest of North China historically materialized in the Japanese empire. Nevertheless, if we return to the passage quoted above on time and eternity, we once again face the national

temporality of the *kairos*, which is the crystallized present. How could a temporal present that belongs to past, present and future be reconciled with the future birth of a renovated Japan is a problem of ideas. In this instance the *kairos* is deeply intertwined with the idea of the *escaton*. Miki's vision of the Third Japan is born out of the technological subject and the political nation in an attempt of creating an entity capable of overcoming the problems of modernity, war, power and geo-political equilibrium. The intellectual *escaton* is therefore immersed in the faith in the attainment of *one's own moral destiny*. The moral destiny of Japan is the creation of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere and this specific, national destiny will be fulfilled only when the faith in a de-historicized historical present will meet the real, historical reality. In historical and historiographical terms, these two elements partially meet in the territorial expansion of the Japanese empire. In ideological terms, and not in the sense of 'ideology' but in the sense of 'ideas', these two elements create a fatal connubium that nevertheless is never fulfilled. It does not materialize because the *escaton* of the end of the war qua victory never arrives.

Miki had complete faith in the human being, as Shimizu points out, but it is precisely this flaw in his thinking that helped him recreating the *kairos* of the supremacy of world history over everydayness. From Pascal onwards, the *medianity* that underpins his elaboration of *ningen* never reaches completion. The most basic problem here is that no matter whether Miki is considering Pascal, Marx, Lukács, Hegel, Kant, Dessauer, Heidegger, he needs to construct a system that is anthropological and, therefore, inherently *median*. On a world-scale, *medianity* is the situation Japan found itself into. The *Angst* remains pervasive, medianity remains the fundamental condition of a nation kept between totality and infinity (Miki's eternity in the instant) that is: 'un milieu entre rien et tout [...] également incapable de voir le neant d'où il est tiré, et l'infini où il est englouti' (Pascal 72). This is the historical reality that Miki is missing out and that helps him building a system that is and will still remain detached from the reality of the human condition because based on faith in a particular idea of Japan. Analyzing Miki's idea of cooperationism in the name of Derrida's *differance*, as Machiguchi does, would naturally eschews any moral responsibility of Miki's involvement with the imperialistic ideology (Machiguchi 2004: 234-7). Moreover, it would disregard 'the structural differences between its own historical location and other histories, past and present' (Dirlik 1997: 10). Since Miki himself talked about moral destiny, that same moral destiny becomes his moral responsibility. The I-Thou relationship between the Japanese and the rest of Asia is not a question of identification after the old world order has been disrupted and therefore a 'decentering' of global politics. It stands as a national I-Thou that brings a whole nation to re-

iterate the same kind of colonial occupation that the European powers and America had previously perpetrated.

Most probably, Miki's overlooking of the economical side of Marxism, his fascination with Heidegger and the existentialists and his immersion in the technology discourse, all contributed to the *caesura* between Miki's highly complex theoretical system and his political activity. Nonetheless, I cannot believe that ideas are not political. Thus, arguing that Miki had two sides, one good and one bad, or censoring his contribution to the Shōwa association or praising him only for his innovations in Marxist dialectics overlook the fact that Miki's politics was born out of Miki philosophy. From a human being to a society and then a nation, this *ningen* never ceased to be medianity, uncertainty, collectivity and practice and its de-historicization brings the nation towards an intellectual *escaton* that was predestined to fail from its seeds.

Miki's adventure with the Shōwa Research Association ends here. In January 1942, he was drafted by the ministry of propaganda and sent to Manila, in the Philippines, with other novelists and intellectuals. They were all called *bunkajin* or 'men of culture' and their mission was one of providing intellectual support to the government's policy of completing 'the emancipation of Asia' (Taraiko in Kiyoshi *et al.* 2008: 311). Miki returned to Japan in December of the same year and in March 1945 he was arrested and incarcerated on suspicion of having given shelter to a member of the underground Japanese Communist Party. He died in prison in September, after the war had ended and after American troops had been deployed to Japan.

Watsuji and the *Kokutai no Hongi*

The *Kokutai no hongii* was issued by the Ministry of Education in May 1937, as a response to the 1936 February incident. The document was primarily directed to education and it was supposed to be used in schools. Nationally, it sold more than two million copies (Bix 2000: 313). The *Kokutai no hongii*, as the title suggests, had the objective of reinforcing the role of the emperor both on a moral and political level and to affirm the particularity and

purity of Japan. It condemned European and American cultures and their rationalism and positivist ideologies that led to the rise of Nazism and fascism in Germany and Italy (Hall 1949: 52-4). Moreover, it decreed that all Japanese subjects had to obey to emperor Hirohito, since:

The Way of the subjects exists where the entire nation serves the Emperor united in mind in the very spirit in which many deities served at the time when the Imperial Grandchild, Ninidi no Mikoto, descended on earth. That is, we by nature serve the Emperor and walk the Way of the Empire, and it is perfectly natural that we subjects should possess this essential quality

(Hall 1949: 79)

The *Kokutai no hongii* was clearly intended as a propaganda document and it was issued with the vision of strengthening the national support for the war in China. Watsuji appears in the list of names of intellectuals who wrote the first draft of the pamphlet, while it seems that he did not take part in the committee who prepared the final and published document. Indeed, some of the ideas that are present in the *Kokutai no hongii* can be retraced in Watsuji's own books. For example, the condemnation of Western rationalism and utilitarianism that had contaminated Japanese culture and that, to him, is best represented in the 'chōnin spirit' (*chōnin seishin*) (WTZ IV: 463).²³⁶ Or the fact that the reverence to the emperor is a theme that runs throughout Japanese history and that guides the ethical and moral behavior of the Japanese people.²³⁷

The expressions used in the *Kokutai no hongii* strongly match a discourse that Watsuji addressed to the Navy academy in 1943. This discourse, *The Way of the Japanese Subject*, was printed together with another lecture that he delivered, *The American National Character*, in 1944 for the 'Wartime National Library'. The Ministry of Education distributed two million copies of this pamphlet (Bellah 1965: 579). Some scholars have tried to argue that Watsuji's involvement with the *Kokutai no Hongii* committee has no political value and that it needs to be contextualized in the framework of his philosophical work. Even Bellah, who is quite critical of Watsuji, affirms that 'Watsuji is a long way from the fanatic traditionalists' (Bellah 1965: 589). Notwithstanding his distance from right-wing figures such as Minoda Muneki and the Genri Nihonsha, Watsuji's opinion regarding the Japanese cultural and ethical uniqueness does compromise his position. Watsuji's considerations on the Japanese

²³⁶ In *A Study of the Japanese Spirit*.

²³⁷ These themes were not unique to Watsuji. Most Japanese conservative thinkers of these years argued along the same lines.

spirit and the greatness of Japanese ethics could be only limitedly justified. His participation in the committee should be considered in relation to the pamphlet and in relation to his work on the reverence to the emperor and the *kokutai* that thus reveal his political position. His vision of Japan, which is also re-stated in some of his wartime memos, was one of a country that morally stood on top of Asia and was destined to guide it towards a path of liberation from Western occupation. Different from Miki, Watsuji did see Buddhism as a cultural factor but he ditched it in favor of the Shinto deity Amaterasu, a symbol of his political support for State Shinto. Since to Watsuji there is no higher ethical entity than the state itself, as explained in *Study of Ethics*, religion cannot but be subordinated to the state's sovereign power. Compared to Miki's understanding of the role of Buddhism in politics, Watsuji considers politics above any category of human life. The moral destiny of Japan thus becomes, first of all, a political one and, secondly, a duty that needs to be carried out with the selflessness that he claimed characterized the *bushi* ethics from the Kamakura period onwards. Secondly, the moral destiny of Japan is embedded in the defeat of the American *Gesellschaft* and in the guiding of Asia back to its communal *Gemeinschaft*.

The Way of the Japanese Subject

In *The Way of the Japanese Subject*, Watsuji lectures the navy cadets on the 'way of the Japanese subject' as the 'way of our ancestors' (WTZ XIV: 297). The first part focuses on the question of whether the expressions 'to happily die for the Emperor' and, more significantly, 'not to die until the enemy is defeated' still retain the significance of being attached to one's own life. Watsuji explains that, if this is the case, then the sacrifice would have no ethical value, since it would mean that there is still an attachment to the ego. Instead:

This 'ego' (*watakushi*) needs to be destroyed as well, since sacrifice (*sekinin*) solely must remain [...] This is the state that, I believe, the ancient referred to as 'the standpoint that transcends life and death' (*shisei wo koeta tachiba*)²³⁸

(WTZ XIV: 297)

²³⁸ *Sekinin* literally means 'responsibility'. I decided to translate it as 'sacrifice' since it seems to convey more the ultimate 'responsibility' these men were asked when sent to die in the war.

This standpoint is the one that apparently characterized the *bushi* ethics, when samurai dutifully died for their lord. Nevertheless, Watsuji argues that it later became a moral code indicating the Emperor, rather than the shogun or the feudal lord and that it deepened its significance through the contamination with Buddhism or Christianity or, later, Confucianism (WTZ XIV: 298-9). In order to better clarify the moral superiority of the Japanese people, Watsuji brings as an example Francisco Xavier, the Jesuit missionary who came from Macau to Japan before the persecutions against Christians started, who wrote that the Japanese had higher moral standards than European people (WTZ XIV: 303-4). The standpoint that transcends life and death is therefore that moral and ethical principle that pushed samurai and warriors to carry on with the ultimate sacrifice for the reverence to the lord and, then, to the emperor. It needs to be kept in mind that when Watsuji was pronouncing this discourse he was lecturing young Navy cadets that were about to be shipped off into combat zones. Therefore, this kind of affirmation has a great impact even on an ethical level, because, especially in 1944, in the name of the emperor many Japanese soldiers died as *kamikaze*.

The absolute particularity of Japan is subsequently linked to the figure of Amaterasu and her being a ‘non-absolute’ deity. As we have seen in the two books dedicated to the reverence of the emperor, Amaterasu is considered to be only the most ‘revered’ in the Ise sanctuary and the one, who, at the same time, ‘was revering’ (WTZ XIV 27-37; WTZ XIV: 307-8).²³⁹ This is her most quintessential characteristic:

Because Amaterasu Ōmikami is not an absolute deity but *an intermediate one*, she expresses what means to be complete and *non-exclusive*. She is the truthful expression of the absolute
(WTZ XIV: 308; emphasis in the original)

The veneration of the emperor as a living god thus descends from this idea that the ‘Way’ is more important than the deity itself. Whilst Judaism, Islam and Christianity venerate a God that is absolute and exclusive, the Japanese have always focused their attention on the Way of revering rather than what had to be exclusively revered. This absolute Way resembles the Absolute Totality that Watsuji described in his *Study of Ethics*. If there the famous ‘noematic residue’ of the totality immanent in the individual pushed the human being to rejoin its structural, total basis, here the noematic residue is embodied in the ‘Way’ of the Japanese subjects:

²³⁹ In *The Reverence to the Emperor and Its Tradition* and *The Way of the Japanese Subject*.

The Way to which every absolute relates and that is the deepest foundation of man, every ethical structure, is truly concretized in the state (*kokka*)²⁴⁰

(WTZ XIV: 309)

In this instance the totality pushes the human being to go beyond its attachment to the ego and ultimately sacrifice itself in the name of the divine emperor. In Watsuji's view, the state, the highest of every ethical structure, should not even ask for that, since the human being is naturally pushed to obedience and negation of its freedom. Again, in his memo on what kind of popular leadership should have guided the Greater East Asia, Watsuji writes that the problem of the state is the most important issue to be addressed if Japan wants to lead the continent (WTZ BII: 454).²⁴¹ Moreover, the moral aim of Japan would be to establish the Greater East Asia in order for Japanese history to enter world history (WTZ BII: 457).²⁴² In this sense, even if contradictory, Watsuji's human being comes very close to Heidegger's Being-towards-Death. In *Study of Ethics* and *Climate* Watsuji had harshly criticized Heidegger's idea that the true and authentic *Dasein* was represented in its awareness of the finitude of its existence. Here Watsuji pre-destines a whole nation of subjects to the authenticity of the Way which involves death.

There is not much difference between Heidegger calling on his students to sacrifice themselves in the name of the greatness of the German *Volk* in his Rectoral Address and Watsuji calling on the cadets to die for the emperor. Sakai notices this shift in Watsuji's thought and he also points out the fact that Watsuji and Heidegger reached the same kind of conclusion (Sakai 1997: 100). Sakai argues that it is due to the 'appropriation of an individual's death by the state' that they come together (Sakai 1997: 100). Despite the similarities, I believe that Heidegger and Watsuji converged on this matter of the authenticity of life by means of death because of the principle of the *escaton* behind it. It is not because the state appropriates an individual's death that the German *Volk* and the Japanese *minzoku* are asked to sacrifice themselves. It is because, for Heidegger, the principle of the Being-towards-Death is inherently linked to the problem of the present time and the attainment of the *authentic temporality* in the ripened time. The state comes in second place. The *escaton*

²⁴⁰ Dilworth and Viglielmo translate *kokka* with 'nation' (Dilworth *et al.* 1998: 285). I believe that in this instance translating *kokka* with 'state' better fits into Watsuji's own philosophical system, where the state is recognized as the highest structures of all.

²⁴¹ In (*Autographed memo*) *What Kind of Education is needed for the Popular Leadership in Greater East Asia?* (*Jihitsu. Dai tōa no shidōteki kokumin taru ga tameni ware kokumin wo donna ni kyōiku subekika*) 1942. Now in WTZ BII: 453-6.

²⁴² In *My Impression on the Establishment of Greater East Asia* (*Dai tōa kensetsu ni kan suru iken*), 1942. Now in WTZ BII: 457-8.

thus becomes a human vision that only later becomes the German state. In Watsuji the state is the highest ethical structure of all ethical structures and therefore can dictate the faith of its subjects. In this instance the *escaton* remains a human one but it is not linked to temporality or the ripened time, it is intertwined to the idea that daily life is permeated by the standpoint of transcendence of life and death. The cultural specificity of this affirmation is sanctioned by the fact that this standpoint could only be a characteristic of the Japanese people:

The experience of transcending life and death in the sole moment of the fighting with the enemy is undoubtedly an honorable one. Nonetheless, when it saturates (*shintō*) every aspect of one's own life and when it becomes the real 'pure and clear heart' (*seimeishin*) with one's all might (*kōshin*), then it indeed is this absolute state of mind

(WTZ XIV: 312)

Every aspect of the everyday life, therefore, has to be permeated by this spirit of transcendence of life and death. This passage is quite exemplary of the way the Japanese government was asking the whole country to sacrifice itself in order to win the war.

If the ideological expressions of the *Kokutai no hongī* are compared to the language of the *Way of the Japanese Subject* the similarities are quite evident. The propaganda document distributed in the schools throughout the country had the objective of educating the population to the reverence of the emperor and to put their faith in his hands. The discourse Watsuji pronounces does the same, it calls for an ultimate sacrifice. In this instance, negating the fact that Watsuji supported the government ideology is quite unfruitful and eschews the possibility of comprehending the reason behind which Watsuji delivered such a perfect propaganda piece. In a much broader context, it appears that the critique of individualism that Watsuji directed towards Heidegger and that was subsequently replaced by the ethics of the national human being negates the possibility of freedom. Watsuji's *escaton* is, more than Miki, based on the faith in the reverence of the emperor qua unique possibility for Japan to win the war. In this instance the establishment of the Greater East Asia appears more of a contingent consequence of the moral destiny of Japan. In fact, Watsuji says:

[...] the establishment of Greater East Asia portrays the significance of the exceptional shift world history is undergoing. Regarding the accomplishment of this great enterprise unprecedented in world history, the Japanese people (*nihon minzoku*) have to take a firm and independent stance [...] that should not simply be acquired through the defeat of the American way of thinking, but rather by sufficiently knowing it and therefore being able to transcend it

(WTZ BII: 457)

Watsuji's consideration on Greater East Asia is more linked to the inherent moral direction Japan is following. In this sense, as the authors of the *Kokutai no hongii*, he does not deny that American culture has penetrated into Japan. What he is calling for is the overcoming of this individualistic tendencies in order to complete the mission Japan was 'chosen' for. Recalling another piece that has been previously analyzed, *The Standpoint of the Bearer of the Creation of Culture*, it is clear that the discourse is almost the same.²⁴³ In 1937 Watsuji wrote that 'the role prescribed to the Japanese is essentially to preserve the freedom of ten million Asians'. Here Watsuji writes that the establishment of the Greater East Asia is an exceptional event that never before had materialized in world-history. Yet again, the 'pathetic but heroic destiny of Japan' will be to create this geographical, cultural and political space where Japan could fulfill its historical destiny. Evidently, the mission of Japan is Watsuji's *eschaton* that is based solely on faith. Watsuji regards the creation of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere more as the 'natural' outcome of the particularity of Japan, rather than seeing it as the *Sturm und Drang* in Miki's terms. In Watsuji, the *eschaton* has a different origin. Nevertheless, the result is equal. The element that they have in common is the national human being, that whether is theorized on the level of culture and 'ethics' as in Watsuji, or theorized on a more philosophical level as in Miki, it always reaches its completion on a global scale. In other words, the human being qua *medianity* cannot be confined anymore to the national boundaries, it becomes the renovation of the whole Asia as significance of the attainment of the moral destiny of Japan which could not but end in this way.

The American National Character

In *The American National Character* Watsuji launches a harsh attack on American and British culture. Delivered in 1943, this lecture was published together with *The Way of the Japanese Subject* and it functions as its mirror. As a matter of fact, if the first piece was an apology of the Japanese spirit, the second one reinforces the arguments there expressed through negation. What the American character represents is not what the Japanese spirit

²⁴³ See Chap. 4.

stands for. Analyzing how Hobbes and Bacon influences those two cultures, he affirms that American civilization has now reached the stage of being a ‘machine civilization’ (*kikai bunmei*) because its morality was never a true morality, but one of self-interest (WTZ XVII: 455-74). The ‘machine civilization’ is the one that slaughtered the Native Americans in the name of Jesus Christ, but that, in reality, did it for the control and expansion of their territory. The same happened with the enslavement of African-Americans who, on paper, had the same rights of the Anglo-Saxons but that had no basic rights in their daily lives (WTZ XVII: 469-70). Watsuji attributes the ‘national character’ of the American people to two factors: the Hobbsian ‘law of nature’ (*shizenhō*) and the Baconian ‘logic of invention’ (*hatusmei no ronri*). To Watsuji, Hobbes’ theory of the state of nature is what drove the Anglo-Saxons to ‘massacre the natives’ without any moral or ethical standard (WTZ XVII: 465). On the other hand, Bacon’s idea of the relationship between philosophy and science is what represents, to Watsuji, the foundation of the American *Gesellschaft* (WTZ XVII: 473-5). Despite the fact that Watsuji considers the mechanical technology (*kikai gijustu*) that the Anglo-Saxons reached in the 18th century *subarashii* (*super*), he also counterargues that this very same spirit is what started permeating society as well (WTZ XVII: 474 ff). In this respect, Watsuji seems to agree with Miki that ‘Western technology’ was the one of ‘things’ and that Eastern technology, or in this case the Japanese morality, remained on a ‘spiritual level’. Watsuji considers Americans as being a mere ‘material civilization’ by means of which no culture and, therefore, no ethical improvement was ever possible.

To Watsuji, the event that best embodies the ‘uncivilization’ and the egotistic character of American culture was the arrival of Commodore Perry in the Uraga port in 1854. This historical fact, which triggered the Meiji restoration under the *sonnō jōi* slogan, explains more than anything else the American will of subjugating Japan to its own economical power. Watsuji says that this kind of society that masks itself under the declaration of the ‘pursuit of happiness’ is a society that does not have in its structure a ‘moral significance’ (*jinriteki igi*) (WTZ XVII: 480).

In this sense, their defeat of the enemy is solely considered in utilitarian ends. Even more, their daily lives have lost moral significance. They need great excitement to be made to work and when they build machines they use that force to subjugate nature and human beings [...] To them the most immediate meaning of enterprises is nothing different than the *charm of gambling* [...] Under the influence of a civilized superstition they fight *with all their force*. But they are only awaiting for a nervous breakdown (*nervous breakdown*). The true potentiality of one people does not rely on the

power of quantity but on its moral strength. Like a gambler who impatiently bets all he has, they will be suddenly crushed
(WTZ XVII: 480-1; emphasis and English in the original)

Comparing this passage with what Watsuji had described as being the quintessential features of Japanese morality it is possible to see how the two parts of the pamphlet fit together. On the one hand, Americans' daily lives are not permeated by the spirit of transcendence of life and death that is at the basis of Japanese people. This state of mind that Watsuji linked to the two expressions of 'happily dying for the emperor' and 'not die until the enemy is defeated' is in stark contrast to the way the Anglo-Saxon non-civilized civilization massacres other peoples only for utilitarian purposes. The moral stance of Japanese *bushi* and, in 1943, of Japanese soldiers, elevates itself upon the gambling spirit of the Americans that are waiting for a nervous breakdown to happen to them. Once again, the dichotomy *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* is used by Watsuji to re-state that the ethical exceptionalism of Japan should be the driving force behind the victory in the Second World War. Remembering Watsuji's lament of the lack of scientific spirit that predestined Japan to lose WWII, there is a huge difference between what technology represented to him.

Watsuji's faith in the *eschaton* of the war finds its most rampant expressions in the 1944 pamphlet. His complete faith in Japanese morality pushed him to affirm that a new era in world-history had started. The defeat in 1945 triggered a mechanism of withdrawal into Japanese history to locate the causes of the failure of this *eschaton*. His view that the *kokutai* should not be abolished, that the emperor still remained the symbol of national unity and that the *sakoku* period was uniquely to blame for the defeat seems to indicate that Watsuji was still hoping for a new role for Japan in world-history. The particularity of Japan that in 1951 brought Watsuji to write that Japan was still a great nation with its pacifist constitution never disappeared from his philosophy. His conservatism, sometimes overlapping with the wartime ideology, brought him to the personal loss of his own ideas. LaFleur argues that Watsuji embraced the solution of religion in the name of Buddhist vacuity and he, together with other scholars, such as Berque, Arisaka, and most recently McCarthy, have argued that his *aidagara* or medianity represents a kind of benevolent principle that could be used in inter-religious dialogue, or in a kind of post-colonial critique of Eurocentrism, or even in feminist theory (LaFleur 1978; Berque 1994; Arisaka 1996b; McCarthy 2008).

I believe that the statement that Watsuji embraced the solution of religion is a correct one. Nevertheless, the religion that lies behind Watsuji's theorization of the *aidagara* is not Buddhism, it is the religion of the Japanese national human being. The medianity that

characterizes Watsuji's system, that to him takes life in the *aidagara*, is still a product of *Angst* towards the future of Japan and Western modernity. The post-colonial critique of Eurocentrism that some have theorized for both Miki and Watsuji does not properly function here. As long as the critique of Eurocentrism will result in the perpetuation of imperialism in the name of racial superiority it will not be possible to consider it under a positive light. And if a transnational ethics of care implies the occupation of China and South-East Asia, as well as Korea and Taiwan, in the name of the I-Thou ethical relationship, then it will pose the basis for further imperialistic and colonial theories.

Watsuji's philosophy is tainted with the ideology of the Japanese wartime regime and it is very difficult to deny his political responsibility. His *escaton* did not materialize and his personal faith in the human being that constitutes the focus of his mediations and philosophical speculations crushed in August 1945. He is like a prophet who, in Dodd's words:

[...] a particular historical crisis, constituted by the ministry, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is interpreted in terms of a mythological concept, which had been made by the prophets into a sublime symbol for the divine meaning and purpose of history in its fullness. The characteristics of the Day of the Lord as described in prophecy and apocalypse are boldly transferred to the historical crisis
(Dodd 1949: 85)

Watsuji interpreted the historical crisis of his time in the name of the mythological concept of the reverence of the emperor that was symbolized in the sublime meaning of the death in the name of the emperor. The Day of the Lord, which must be imagined as victory in the Second World War, came in the apocalyptic event of two atomic bombs. The historical crisis did not find its expected and final resolution, it just spiraled down even further.

Conclusions

The medianity that has been the kernel of this thesis for so many pages finds its end in the loss of the *escaton*. Miki and Watsuji, who firmly believed in a Japanese success in world-history, saw their expectations bankrupted by the war. The ideological stains embedded in their philosophies remain testament of their collaboration with the wartime regime. Attempting to rescue the philosophy of the human being from the judgment of history and historiography seems to me a vane effort to deny what the essence of a philosophical discourse should be.

The most fundamental question a philosophical discourse should thus attempt to answer is how to interpret the present in light of the past. Only by understanding the mechanisms that lay behind a given philosophical or historical discourse we could reconstruct the path certain ideas followed and, most importantly, how they unfolded. In the case of Miki and Watsuji, their communal, societal, national and imperialist *ningen* has proven to be a powerful concept that had inevitable consequences. The inherent flaw in its conceptualization, grounding medianity in the historical *Angst*, was exposed by their faith in the *escaton*. It is here that the historical context and the one of ideas come together.

On the one hand, the prolonged crisis that started in the 1920s and continued until the 1950s pushed Miki and Watsuji to reflect on the status of their 'human being'. On the other, the direction they chose for it, the one of the national *ningen*, was a response to this crisis. The fact that they chose the 'human being' as the kernel of their philosophical speculations is symptomatic of how deep this historical and existential uncertainty was. They not only strove to reconceptualize epistemology, they wanted to redefine existentialism in the sense of 'human existence'. They sought a new element of specificity that could change the course of historical and philosophical events.

It is in this context that the *escaton* functions at his best. By strongly believing in the Japanese nation and its moral destiny Miki and Watsuji showed complete faith in the Japan that they had themselves molded. It is for this reason that their *ningen* was predestined to fail from its genesis. By underpinning it in the specific character of medianity they trapped it in a condition that could not evolve if not in the limited space and time they had assigned to it. These space and time became the Japanese ones. The *escaton* charged their systems with great expectations for the future and, at the same time, it doomed them to bankruptcy. Miki and Watsuji chose not to stop and to continue on the path of medianity. This will probably go down in history as their biggest mistake, the one that failed their entire philosophical enterprises.