

Introduction

“The Darkness of the Lived Moment”

H. D. Harootunian

Not long after the formal surrender papers were signed in September 1945, ending Japan's war in the Pacific and Asia, the philosopher Kakehashi Akihide recalled how he had learned of the death of two prominent thinkers who had been imprisoned earlier: Miki Kiyoshi (1897–1945), who died in prison six weeks after the war ended, and Tosaka Jun (1900–1945), who died a month before, on August 9. Shocked by how slowly the news of these two deaths had become public, Kakehashi was even more shaken by the thought that Japan was now deprived of two of its leading thinkers, whom many believed would have played dominant roles in shaping forthcoming discussions on the crucial question of how to envision a new political, social, and cultural endowment for the defeated nation.¹ Both had been modernists. Miki, one of the most powerful philosophers out of Kyoto and surely the most ambitious, had traveled a dizzying intellectual trajectory in which he tried to master all of the principal philosophic perspectives of the twentieth century. His purpose was to bring together the vast diversity of ideas into concourse with each other in a

1. Kakehashi Akihide, “Rōgoku to guntai,” in *Kaisō no Tosaka Jun* (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1976), 35–72.

theory called conceptual power, almost as if this immense staging would possess the magical power of an amulet. For Miki, the logic of conceptual power and its promise to pull together diverse intellectual strands like the dialectic—but claiming also to include it—was, as he put it, a “philosophy of action.” By the same measure, Tosaka, who shared Miki’s intellectual ambition but in a Marxian register, had already distinguished himself as the leading philosopher of materialism before the war and as one of the few who consistently rejected the state’s efforts to elicit from him a renunciation of progressive thinking (*tenkō*). Kakehashi was particularly dismayed by the personal loss of his friend (and comrade) Tosaka and wondered why there seemed to be so little information concerning his fateful incarceration and the last days of the most original and brilliant Marxist thinker of the prewar years, one whose accomplishments remained unparalleled in the postwar period. Tosaka’s death and the way news of it trickled out raised the question: Why was the most determinant philosopher of materialism of his day forgotten so rapidly while Miki was immediately restored to a privileged place in public memory in 1945, effectively overshadowing his activities in Konoe Fumimaro’s policy-oriented research apparatus (Shōwa kenkyūkai) and his wartime service to the fascist state? Miki’s last days won widespread sympathy from a war-weary population: In his prison death it undoubtedly saw its own tragic sacrifice. Unlike Tosaka, Miki composed what came to be regarded as his last philosophic testament, *Philosophic Notes* (*Testugaku nōto*, 1941–1942), published in 1946. A permanent reminder of the war, brutality, and senseless destruction, like the “autobiography” (*Jijoden*, 1946) of the older Marxist Kawakami Hajime, Miki’s “Philosophic Notes” became an instant bestseller.

It may be that these texts, and others, enabled postwar survivors to turn away from a prewar moment that had deposited the residues of its reckless course on the present and look to the possibilities offered by an as yet unenvisioned future. But such an act would have required mobilizing a national amnesia on an immense scale to imagine a better future-present than the past-present that had shaped their immediate moment. The success of these two works—by a pioneer of Marxism in Japan and by one who had a brief but influential encounter that produced a number of remarkable readings in which Marx’s humanism and conception of history were rethought—attests to how sacrifice, suffering, and survivorship, in one form or another, were able to capture the popular imagination in a time of despair and hopelessness surrounded by signs of ruin and destruction. These particular examples represented by Miki and Kawakami may

have been also enhanced by expressions of religiosity, which both thinkers embraced.

In subsequent narratives of the postwar period and its preoccupations with the prewar past produced in Japan and elsewhere, no mention has been made of the solitary figure of Tosaka, whose conditions of imprisonment led directly to his death at the age of forty-five and constituted nothing less than an act of state execution and premeditated murder. Unfortunately, Tosaka left no last testament of imprisonment, only his prewar writings; there were no final, enduring meditations on religious solace or even the consolations of philosophic reflection given that incarceration had been meant to silence him by preventing him from writing. The proscription against reading and writing had started earlier, before his final imprisonment, when in 1937 he was forced to stop writing and then a year later, when he and the group at the Society for the Study of Materialism (Yuibutsuron kenkyūkai) were arrested and found guilty of violating the Peace Preservation Laws. Tosaka's prison history recalls the example of Antonio Gramsci rotting in an Italian fascist jail. But Gramsci was permitted to read and write, which he did prodigiously and for which the posthumously published *Prison Notebooks* remains a monument to his spirit and intelligence.² Still, perhaps owing to the late development in politics and economy experienced by Japan and Italy, Tosaka and Gramsci shared a kinship in two respects: Both were unable to escape the preoccupation with culture that had further narrowed Marxism in the 1930s to its Western horizon, prompting both to search for a broader, global perspective; and both privileged what Gramsci named praxis and Tosaka called actualization—immediacy, immanence of the moment, and the necessity for action. Since it was already evident he would not recant like so many of his contemporaries, Tosaka was put in an airless cell not much larger than a cigar box, his inhuman internment designed to silence him completely. The state's aim was to obliterate his memory altogether from the past he had lived as present—and which his work constitutes a painful but indelible record of struggle. In the end, Tosaka saw his fate resembling Rosa Luxemburg's, as indicated by his decision to name his place of final detention after her.³

2. In English, see, for example, Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

3. Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) was murdered by the right-wing paramilitary group Freikorps while in the custody of Social Democrats after the failed German Revolution in 1919.

What appears so astonishing in the prewar fascist state's effort to silence Tosaka is that it succeeded beyond all expectations, exceeding its own moment and extending well into the postwar period. This alone forces us to note the interesting symmetry between the prewar state's desire to silence Tosaka and the erasure of his memory and powerful critique from postwar historiography and discourse. The act of official silencing worked to actually eliminate his powerful and original presence in the 1930s—his brilliant rethinking of Marxism as a philosophy of the everyday, his scorching critique of the collusion of liberalism and fascism, and his fearless assessments of the “current situation,” comprising the crisis of capitalism and contemporaneity and his tireless leadership of the *Yuibutsuron kenkyūkai*. The irony of his presence after death was the continuity of the prewar state's determination to still his critical dissembling of “Japanism” and “archaism” as the twin forms bolstering fascist ideology that prevailed in Japan with the postwar order's success in repressing his account of how liberalism had been implicated in producing fascism before the war. It is apparent now that the postwar state's valorization of *Nihonjinron* and its variants was nothing more than a transformation and thus a repetition of the Japanism and archaism Tosaka struggled to disclose as expressions of fascist ideology in his time.⁴ If the prewar state managed to finally silence his voice, its postwar successor destroyed so thoroughly the memory of his critique in the interest of a “second start” for liberalism and a “second enlightenment” that it is as if it had never existed. This was as true of the left as it was of those liberals associated with modernism (*kindaishugi*). In the several postwar discussions seeking to lay the foundations for a new liberal democratic order, Tosaka's name or critique never surfaced. Not even a renewed Japan Communist Party (JCP), which came out of the war with its status momentarily authoritative, was prepared to resuscitate the critique of its most original thinker and committed martyr. The reason for this derived from Tosaka's long-standing critique of the nation-form and nationalism, which many contemporaries had simply taken for granted as an unproblematic category. In postwar Japan, the JCP would enthusiastically embrace the nation in its campaign to win popular support, especially after the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, abandoning

4. *Nihonjinron*, literally “A Discourse on the Japanese,” is often translated as “A Theory of Japanese Uniqueness,” referring to a long tradition of cultural chauvinism in the postwar period. The Bubble Economy in the 1980s led to another boom in such thinking.

both the international division of labor and the idea of internationalism itself.

What I am proposing is a direct relationship in the immediate postwar years between a determined desire to resuscitate the figure of prewar society by distancing it from explicit military and imperial association and the removal of Tosaka as a principal casualty of this drive to reconfigure the past for an “enlightened,” “rational,” and liberal past in the present. Yet this coupling entailed diminishing the memory of what Ernst Bloch once described as the “darkness of the lived moment,” superscripting the very conditions of the world Tosaka and others had inhabited and had sacrificed their own lives trying to prevent the fascism that finally plunged the country into a ruinous war.⁵ Hence, the darkness that veiled the “unmastered Now and its unopened future,” which the postwar sought to define as futural expectancy, appeared closer to a repetition of the past.⁶ The much-heralded “second start” of modernists like Maruyama Masao was in reality an attempted rescue of a prewar liberalism that had been aborted—repetition with a difference pledged to improving upon the past or subtracting from it its regressive and “irrational” elements. Instead, postwar society ignored the warnings of Tosaka’s critique: It was liberalism itself that had made prewar society what it had become. With American help, Japan retained the emperor and the imperial house to maintain a fictional “historical community” between the national present and its past.

What the repetition and its reliance on the analogy signified by the call for a “second start” managed to conceal was the vast difference between the conjunctures of the 1930s that “interpellated” Japan into global events from its postwar successor that was in the process of making the country into a faithful client of an emerging American imperium. We know from Tosaka’s diverse accounts of newspapers, radio, and film⁷—the favored optic through which to gain access to the current situation for analysis—that he and his generation faced a complex context that combined world depression, militarism, and fascism at home and imperialism and colonialism abroad. Throughout the ill-fated decade of the 1930s there appeared widespread agreement persuading people they were living in a time of historical crisis set into motion by accelerated capitalist accumula-

5. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 1:295.

6. *Ibid.*

7. See also Fabian Schäfer’s and Gavin Walker’s chapters in this volume.

tion. World depression supplied the momentary occasion to combine the diverse political, social, and economic forces that would constitute a new conjuncture and its identification of the contradictions unleashed by capitalist accumulation. That is to say, conjuncture was the lens through which to think about the historical reality of those moments when a diversity of circumstances from different sectors confront each other to “present a world, torn between powers in collusion and the ‘crises’ which unites them in a circle.”⁸ Tosaka’s last major work, *Japan as a Link in the World* (*Sekai no ikkan toshite no Nihon*) expressed precisely the role played by the conjuncture’s structuring force in combining different elements into a momentary configural unity and Japan’s relationship to it in the historical reality of the 1930s.

As early as 1927, Tosaka, responding to an economic recession in Japan that prefigured the final collapse into a world depression, was already turning away from the attractions of Miki Kiyoshi’s humanistic Marxism and its Hegelian dimension mediated by Georg Lukacs’ *History and Class Consciousness* (which informed Miki’s Marxian forays). In a later essay on Miki, who was his senior (*senpai*) and remained his friend and mentor, Tosaka proposed that Miki’s Marxism never aspired to materialist philosophy but rather to a “materialist view of history,” driven by a concern for meaning and hermeneutics. At this time Tosaka began to move toward the materiality that clearly was driving modern life into the depths of financial failure. Shortly after, this perception was reinforced by his reaction to Japan’s decision to send a military force to Shandong.

We know that the high watermark of the contemporary crisis was the proliferation of discourse on culture (art) that sought constantly to reshape its relationship to politics in such a way as to displace the figure of the masses altogether for the folk. It was also at this juncture that Tosaka turned to ideological critique and the promise of practice. These cultural discourses sought to white-out the complex differentiations that were already showing signs of social conflict for the implantation of an image of a more culturally unified and integrated social order no longer divided by class, gender, sexual differences, and such. They aimed at those temporal and spatial zones where the lived contradictions seemed to be more sharply etched into the fabric of Japanese life. So much of Tosaka’s criti-

8. Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, ed. Francois Matheron and Olivier Corpet, trans. G. M. Goshagrian (London: Verso, 2006), 188.

cal practice showed awareness of this heightened turn toward cultural discourse and how it had failed to conceal its grounding in an ontological view of the world. In this conceptualization of culture, existence was replaced by its derivatives and ontology stood in for philosophy.⁹ By the early 1930s, Tosaka had already designated a new vocation for philosophic reflection as the recovery of the everyday as it was being lived in capitalist Japan rather than transcendental preoccupations that bracketed social reality. The critical program he envisaged concentrated on explaining the forms of ideological mediation inscribed in the evidence and experience of everyday life. Ideological critique corresponded only to Marxism, he insisted, which was dedicated to grasping ideology as idealist forms, not to the application of social scientific formulae that was implicated in producing ideology. This meant that critique elucidated the ideological character of thought and logic at its deepest internal and abstract level. This explanation was concerned with showing how “historical and social existence determined logic,” constituting its reality, the “process of extracting historical and social existence” that would ultimately disclose the social form of class consciousness. What Tosaka recognized was the way ideological “truth character” appeared as a “fictional character.”¹⁰ It first grasped “truth” in relationship to “form and content” and subordinated content as raw material to its shaping, which made it—the content—a “formalized fiction.” Tosaka considered “form” to be that which “grasped and unified the content as content.” The reason for this is that a form/shape (*keitai*) filled with content differs from form as such (*keishiki*) that excludes content because it (*keitai*) is weighted by a “realistic, substantive principle,” which is the character of content.¹¹ Accordingly, this standpoint determines the adequacy of logic by placing the motivation for it in “sentiment or faith,” in what is its “characteristic logic.” Hence, the reality of logic in this way mediates the idea of practice down to the “political” character as a “realization of historical movement.” Thus Tosaka argued, a logic based on a historical and social ground is situated as a true logic from one separated from this basis, which makes it a “fictional form” by way of a “stagnant logic.” Eventually, a logic not grounded in history,

9. See “Rekishi to benshōhō,” in *Tosaka Jun zenshū* (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1966), 3:51–77 (hereafter cited as *TJz*).

10. Yoshida Masatoshi, ed., *Tosaka Jun no tetsugaku* (Tokyo: Kobushi bunko, 2001), 302.

11. *Ibid.*

indifferent to “historical necessity,” is one that possesses, in principle, a “fixed fictional form.”

Here, Tosaka unfolded his critique of a conception of the world founded on the search for fixed meaning, which always comes last (*saigo*), and consciousness that sought to identify life with a sense of interiority (*seimei*), with “a conscience that must not be doubted, indeed a freedom from all other things.”¹² Why this sense of interiority comes last and itself constitutes the character of existence stems from the human capacity to “symbolize the autonomy of such things as self (ego), speculation, conceptions of consciousness according to an interior life. Humans become aware of a truly lived interior life within the autonomous, free, and absolute activity of consciousness. These are unavoidably the last reality.”¹³ In other words, “existence is consciousness.” This life philosophy (vitalism), whereby existence—Being—is produced by consciousness, pursues the last guarantee of existence, which is found in feeling (*kanjō*) or clear reason. For Tosaka, this privileging of emotion and universal reason was nothing more than the substance of phenomenology, Bergson’s intuitionism, the “universal pertinence of Kant.” But reality cannot be explained without proof and surely not by positing it within the clarity of an interiorized life or “consciousness.” Here, Tosaka’s distrust of interiority and consciousness resembled the Soviet thinkers Bakhtin’s and Volosinov’s dismissal of the autonomy of consciousness for a conception of interior speech and conduct rooted in external social relations.¹⁴

The reality that produces the character of Being shows itself within the material substance, the matter of existence itself, which is its historical character. In this regard, Tosaka proposed that for history’s character, historical time is the last principle beyond which there are no other principles to rely on. Time can only rely on history itself and not on any other principle of temporality such as the eternal, which comes from nowhere. History is its own time and cannot employ the time of phenomenology, metaphysics, or even science. In another text, later on, Tosaka named this

12. TJz, 3:71.

13. Ibid.

14. See, for example, M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); and V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

principle of historical time the everyday.¹⁵ Hence, the principle of history itself is the character of the real. Reality is not the expression of the law of identity (if a, not b) but rather the way the ultimate totality of the concrete is connected. But the material substance forms the ultimate principle and history must avoid any dependence on principles outside of it. The historical principle imparts history itself. The representative work of actual ideological criticism, where Tosaka appealed to the materiality of historical and social grounding, is the *The Japanese Ideology* (*Nihon ideorogiron*), which disclosed the substance of “Japanism” and “liberalism” *tout court*—the central ideology of the “golden age of fascism before the war.”¹⁶ In actuality, bourgeois liberalism formed the “foundation of society’s common sense” in Japan, whereby the philosophy of liberalism produced the ideology of Japanism as a “Japan-style fascism” through the instrumentality of a hermeneutic method that identified fixed meaning.

We often forget that when Tosaka wrote the preface to his book, he confessed that it was modeled after Marx’s *The German Ideology*, even though he recognized it was composed a hundred years later and in a different political location and historical circumstances. What Tosaka perceived in Marx’s presentation of historical materialism was a critique of the several philosophies in Germany that had delegated to themselves the task of solving society’s troubles, comparable to the problems he was recognizing for his critique against an idealism that already was holding certain elements of Japanese society in its thrall. But it would be wrong to conclude that Tosaka’s *The Japanese Ideology* was simply a superscripting of Marx’s critique rather than a crucial rethinking and reworking of its principal logic in order for it to speak to a different place and historical moment. What Tosaka managed to take from the *The German Ideology* was the operation of the inversion and the identification of philosophy’s complicity in installing the misrecognized order of hierarchy whereby spirit (culture) occupied the place of material life, as the heavenly reigned over the earthly. He could agree with Marx that Kant was the bourgeoisie’s “whitewashing spokesman” because both he and the class had failed to notice that the theoretical ideas attributed to the class had as their basis

15. TJz, 3:72. The text is “Nichijōsei no genri to rekishiteki jikan,” in TJz, 3:95–104; it is translated as “The Principle of Everydayness and Historical Time” in this volume.

16. Yoshida, *Tosaka Jun no tetsugaku*, 304.

“material interests” and “will” conditioned and determined by material relations of production. Kant thus succeeded in separating these theoretical expressions from the very interests informing the making of “materially motivated determinations of the will of the French bourgeoisie into *pure* self-determinations of ‘*free will*,’ of the will in and for itself, of the human will” and thus managed to convert it into ideology and moral postulates.¹⁷ Tosaka perceived that Japanese liberalism, in this respect, suffered from the same defect of illusion dogging the German version, inasmuch as both refused to recognize the “correlation” of liberalism with the “real” interests from which it derived and thus disavowed its reason for existing by fixing its attention on “ideological reflections about real liberalism.”¹⁸ In Marx’s criticism of Max Stirner, the transformation of the final separation of the bourgeois liberal from the empirical figure is completed and the “middle class” (as the dominant class) is converted into a “thought, nothing but a thought,” and the state comes forward as the “true man.” In this way, an understanding of liberalism reverts back to its “sublimated” Hegelian forms, which means belonging to the sphere of the sacred and the relation of the bourgeois to the modern state is transformed into a holy relationship, a “cult.”¹⁹ It was this particular itinerary that explains how liberalism became identified with the sacred, spiritual, cultural, and transcendent—and provided Tosaka with the principal point of his critique.

Tosaka saw in Japan’s incipient liberalism the same flight from economic considerations, indeed from liberalism (*jiyūshugi*) itself and the interests informing such theoretical expression, which explained its easy embrace of both cultural freedom and the religious. Although the origins of liberalism derived from a recognition of the centrality of the economic—capitalism—and its thinking reflected a reliance on political liberalism, Tosaka argued that “liberal philosophy was not limited to having a system faithful to liberal thought in general. Why this has been the case is because the content of idealism has crawled into it entirely,” and there is no guarantee that it any longer values the name of liberalism. “To this extent, the ideal of liberalistic thinking has become a miscellany of

17. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, 1845–47 (New York, International Publishers: 1976), 5:195.

18. *Ibid.*, 196.

19. *Ibid.*, 196, 197–198.

freedoms.”²⁰ Elsewhere, Tosaka proposed that liberalism had become like a large *furoshiki*, wrapping up a diversity of ideas in one bundle.²¹ Liberalism’s declaration of freedom from politics has become solely a problem for cultural freedom. “This,” he charged, “is manifest in the liberalist ideals of contemporary liberals. One of the positions associated with this ideal of liberal freedom has been to elevate it to the level of religious consciousness.” Its presence is visible in a number of religions while both Buddhism and Catholicism, he observed, were beginning to show signs of cooperation with the state. Buddhism and especially its philosophy were already identified with the “Japanese spirit.” “Today,” Tosaka continued, “the way of the cultivated intelligentsia that has reached the (register) of religious ideals is a special product of one kind of liberalist consciousness.”²² But what it showed above all else was the extent to which liberalism had departed from its original vocation, no longer determined by political and economic interests and the social reality of contradictions it has been forced to live and negotiate. Its identity with the religious meant that it had now become a form of absolutism at the conceptual level of aligning with contemporary emperor-centered absolutism, even though Tosaka never went so far as to make this connection explicit. In exchange for an understanding of contemporary reality and its structure of contradictions, liberalism turned to the promise of idealist philosophy and its offer to grasp the contradictions either as an *interior aporia* and disregard the force of the social or simply dismiss them altogether. For Tosaka, a religious consciousness that moves toward exceeding the bounds of liberalism constituted an accommodation with Japanism. Pure religion or “only” religion did not exist, apart from residing in some recessive Jamesian precinct of “private affairs.”²³

The purpose of this account of how liberalism had shed its political and economic vocation to become aligned with cultural freedom and of how the religious itself had been enlisted to provide it with a transhistorical authority was to show the extent to which the “basic component of its system [liberalism] was refined” (*seiren*) into a “philosophy of hermeneutics” that easily diverted explanation from the order of things to an unseen

20. Tosaka Jun, *Nihon ideogōron* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1977), 19.

21. A *furoshiki* is a large Japanese handkerchief often used to wrap and carry items.

22. Tosaka, *Nihon ideogōron*, 19–20.

23. *Ibid.*, 21. Philosopher of pragmatism William James (1842–1910) is most famously the author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).

order that produced fixed and unchanging meaning. In Tosaka's reckoning, hermeneutics, in its search for the source of ultimate meaning, avoided the encounter with the earthly order and its materiality for an illusory reunion with a transtemporal realm. Its most prominent result was to accord privilege to what he called "literary liberalism" or a form of "literary-ism" in its apprehension of social reality. In this regard, Tosaka linked the formation of hermeneutics with the cultural freedom liberalism had embraced after its abandonment of political economy. The most notable methodological production of hermeneutic philosophy was found in its disciplinizing of philology as the principal instrument for the extraction of meaning and the interpretative enterprise it was made to serve. This servitude of philology to hermeneutics constituted a form of colonization. "If the principle of the literary [*bunkashugi*] is the hermeneutic method, which adopts literary categories based on the real, philology is based only on literary-like interpretations and the study of the origins of languages, derived from old texts and documents."²⁴ Tailoring the ideal of method to explicating words and their etymologies, Tosaka reasoned that its explanatory results were invariably constrained by a reliance on old textual materials, namely the classics.

This procedure inevitably resulted in reworking the content of national history (and indeed became indistinguishable from it) according to the classical templates since its aim was to replace the way contemporary problems were understood and resolved under the authoritative imperative of philological interpretations derived from explicating the textual traces of antiquity.²⁵ In this way, a philologically based philosophic hermeneutics was reduced to a preoccupation with securing access to, and scouring the recesses of, a hidden order of meaning rather than engaging the immediate requirements of contemporary material reality. With this shifting of domains of discourse, the interpretative impulse meant moving away from the temporal demands of the present to an atemporal and indeterminate zone of archaism—Tosaka's analogue to Marx's "ghostly" non-place or "spiritual history" rooted in heaven rather than earth.²⁶ "That philosophy," Tosaka stated, referring to hermeneutics, "became the perfect instrument of Japanism the moment it was applied to national history."²⁷

24. *Ibid.*, 24–25.

25. *Ibid.*, 25.

26. Marx and Engels, 5:160ff.

27. Tosaka, *Nihon ideorogiron*, 26.

For rescuing the order of meaning and exchanging it for immediate reality, philosophy was guilty of committing a “trick,” a conjuration. For liberal thinkers philological interpretation of classic texts imparted a knowledge of national history that observed no real division of time to supply the occasion for ignoring the actual problems of contemporary society. It is interesting to observe, in this connection, that the historian Hani Gorō had already shown how bourgeois historians had assiduously avoided confronting a history of the present for a fixation with a static past, signifying their fidelity to the bourgeois idea of studying history for its own sake.²⁸ Elsewhere, Tosaka, in a text specifically concerned with hermeneutics, referred to its operation as a “camouflage” (*gisō*) because he was convinced that philology was not necessarily fated to exclusively provide only the grounding of a timeless order of meaning to reinforce some form of fascist cultural ideology (like Japanism) since examples were plentiful to testify to its broader explanatory use.²⁹ But the decision to utilize classical studies to understand the problems of the present constituted a sleight of hand and exemplified how philology had become “philologism” (*bunkengakushugi*).³⁰

For Tosaka, this ideological use of philology recalls for us, again, the critique of Volosinov and Bakhtin produced a few years earlier, which puts into question philology’s obsession with dead languages and their claims to authority over living speech in a way that resembled the domination of dead labor over living labor. Where philology foundered, despite its putative explanatory neutrality, was in providing the ground to support “various forms of reaction on an international scale necessarily derived from the content of capitalism itself.”³¹ Philology’s defects were multiple: The effort to explain words for things eliminated the necessary space between them, making the referent and the referred one and the same thing. This identification was made possible by removing philology from the historico-linguistic substance of language, whereby etymology becomes a poor and inadequate example of historical investigation. Tosaka insisted that the classics could not perform as a substitute for history and offered no basis for determining the problems of the present-day. The disjuncture

28. Hani Gorō, *Hani Gorō rekishiron chosakushū* (Tokyo: Aoki shoten, 1967), 2:150–160.

29. See “Gisōshita kindaiteki kannen ron,” 211–233, and “Fukkō genshō no bunseki,” in *Tosaka, Nihon ideorogiron*, 172–185.

30. Tosaka, *Nihon ideorogiron*, 26.

31. *Ibid.*

between classical categories and current logic has meant only that the ethics of an earlier time cannot be resituated in the present. Here, he was clearly targeting Watsuji Tetsurō and indeed the whole structure of morality in contemporary Japan, which had been invested in installing the contradictory claims of a timeless ethics exempted from history to curb the social excesses of capitalist modernization. Finally, Tosaka was convinced that while the translation of classical categories is a necessity for the modern present, it must always be informed by the full recognition that neither the original form nor the content will ever be exactly reproduced. And nor should it because history is never completed.

What caught Tosaka's attention was the logic that drove the philosophical ideology into the domains of an ahistorical archaism. Because "the history of the present developed from what would come before," the figure of the archaic was positioned in such a way as to supply the means with which to interpret and account for the (distorted) forms of contemporary reality.³² A necessary presumption accompanying the imperative toward archaism was the belief that the present represented a degraded departure or lowering of standards achieved in an earlier time. At this point, archaism joined Japanism and its project to expropriate national history and colonize its terrain into the domain of an eternal spiritual history, which Tosaka aligned with comparable developments in Mussolini's Italy and Nazi Germany because Japanism "shares (with them) a certain common interest."³³ Moreover, archaism embodied the principle of "primitivism" (*genshika*), which resided at the heart of the modern state and guaranteed its claim to irreducible and exceptional uniqueness. This principle of primitivism ultimately authorized the appeal to restore older social forms like the family system and "feudal" social relationships that presumably had managed to surmount history to become the unwavering model for both the family and the state in Japan's modern society. But the plea to primitivism was an escape hatch, a philosophic *trompe-l'oeil* promising an illusory way out of history that opened the way to elevating family and nation to the level of a politically absolute and transhistorical existence. The importance of archaism lay in its reliance on mysticism and apparition, whose effects all of its current and contemporary forms

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

inadvertently conspired to display, time and again, how the timeless religious presence constituted both the mark of the modern and its thoroughgoing political nature. In Tosaka's understanding, archaism, spiritualism, mysticism have all been colored by the tint of Japanism, just as contemporary forms of Asianism, Orientalism, and Imperial Wayism (*ōdōron*) reflected the imperative of spirit. Its absolutism is nothing more than the application of a hermeneutic method employing the instrumentality of philology to establish the dominion of a spiritual national history that observes no real temporal break between past and present. Even though Japanism and its authorizing archaism revealed nuanced differences from European versions of fascism, qualifying it as the cultural expression of a "Japanese type," it still constituted an inflection of the form of fascism itself. If, as Tosaka suggested, its content actually emerged from the humus of an archaic native history and the philological ideology serving it, its archaic form and its rejection of time for duration shared a family resemblance with cultural fascism and the "logic of a holistic society" in Italy, Germany, Romania, and elsewhere in the world of the 1930s. But by the same token, Tosaka recognized how hermeneutics had opened the way to securing a broader-based kinship between diverse national fascisms to constitute a representative philosophy of the times, as affirmed by the "undisguised philologism of Martin Heidegger."³⁴

Hence, archaism, driven by the principle of primitivism, emerged from the social contradictions of capitalism. For Tosaka its appearance signified a moment of crisis when capitalism sought to think itself explicitly as transhistorical to overcome the contradictions it had produced in the crucial interwar period. The way out it offered was to eternalize the past into an eternal duration that no longer observed the markers of historical division—the "mincing of time" Tosaka elsewhere described as the condition of history. By superimposing a timeless archaic presence on the present, capital and its state sponsor had found a way to regulate contemporary society. However, there was nothing uniquely Japanese about this "solution," according to Tosaka, which in the interwar conjuncture was clearly visible throughout the industrial and industrializing world in the conduct of many other nation-states. Even though there was a sharing of this kind of nation-state form on an international scale, Tosaka warned of

34. *Ibid.*, 27.

its “chauvinistic” and exceptionalist excesses: “A number of people have seen that the archaic phenomenon in contemporary Japan is connected to various chauvinistic attitudes.” But, he continued, it was impossible to separate the requirements of contemporary imperialism from those animating the “primitivistic ideal” fueling this “archaic phenomenon.”³⁵ It was this fearful imagery of the worst impulses of nationalistic exceptionalism and its imperial aspirations in the world of the 1930s that prompted him elsewhere to call for a true “universalism,” by which he meant a form of thinking and culture that “cannot do without translating on a worldly scale in the broadest sense of meaning. Similar to that true literature that has to be a ‘world literature,’ a philosophy or theory that merely is understood only by a certain nation or people is without exception a fraud.”³⁶ Here, it seems, is a glimpse of that world history Marx once claimed that had yet to be written.

In *The German Ideology*, we know that the target of Marx’s withering assault was philosophy, especially its idealistic avatar in Germany in the 1830s and 1840s. Prevented from living a modern history in reality, Germany had to live it in thought. Hegel’s modern state applied only to England and France. Germany’s backwardness substituted philosophy for an engagement with lived social reality and a romanticized feudal past for the present. With Tosaka, writing a century later, the perceived circumstances of Japan’s development as a late-developing nation permitted a continuation of the parallelism but in a different historical register. The need for philosophy derived from the exigencies of contemporary bourgeois society as much as from any characteristic of bourgeois history. What he meant by making this distinction is that while bourgeois history already embodied a necessary relationship between the middle class and the act of representation—as Marx had affirmed and dramatized in his critique of philosophy accompanying the inauguration of capitalism in Germany—Tosaka’s immediate present and the conjunctural circumstances challenging it necessitated the urgency of articulating a distinctively bourgeois philosophy positioned to address and account for the current situation. The problem he faced was trying to discern in the formation of a decidedly modern philosophy the silhouette of fascism that relied on neither appeals to the fantasy of feudal pasts nor the exotic lure of an

35. Ibid., 185.

36. Ibid., 153.

imagined Oriental world. Targeting philosophy meant disassembling the hermeneutic ambition to find and fix meaning and its desire to instantiate the archaic as the means to collapse the temporal divide between past and present. While the Japanese bourgeoisie was probably more evolved than its German counterpart in the mid-nineteenth century, it had never really been given the opportunity to carry out its supposed historical task and achieve its own political revolution. Its historical task was easily transferred to the world of philosophic idealism, which, for Tosaka, embodied the ideology of contemporary bourgeois society represented best by thinkers like Watsuji Tetsurō and his teachers, Tanabe Hajime and especially Nishida Kitarō.³⁷

Even though Nishida's philosophy gestured toward mysticism and religiosity, it was less the sign of a feudal mentality or an atavistic Orientalism since his philosophy was modern.³⁸ While Tosaka acknowledged that mysticism belongs to German romantic thought and reflects the historical circumstances of backwardness, it is, nevertheless, still linked to "what today must be called the 'religious situation,'" which is possible to detect in the content of Nishida's philosophy.³⁹ Tosaka agreed that Nishida's philosophy was not cloaked in religion and mysticism in the usual sense, but rather its traces were manifestly inscribed in his method—especially in the way he justified even those who opposed it. "The method rested on the standpoint of nothingness" as against a philosophy of being, even though Tosaka rejected this claim. Despite attempts to associate Nishida's philosophy with the "new theology" that had contributed to uniting fascist ideology in Germany and elsewhere, Tosaka was persuaded that no evidence demonstrated a direct relationship. Nishida's philosophy was nothing more than a proper academic philosophy of a bourgeois society with an explicit method arising from a concentration on the determination of particular epistemological goals it seeks to employ.⁴⁰ The connection he wanted to make was between class and politics (i.e., fascism) and this explains why he argued so strenuously to show how Nishida's philosophy (and Kyoto by propinquity) represented a proper academic bourgeois philosophy. In this regard, there is more than an echo of Marx's attack on Stirner and Bauer as spokesmen for the German petit bourgeoisie. Yet

37. *Ibid.*, 235–239.

38. *Ibid.*, 248.

39. *Ibid.*, 237.

40. *Ibid.*, 239.

inscribed in the methodological rigor of Nishida's philosophy lurked a nagging romantic impulse, consciously directed to resolving the problem of how to know, order, and systematize in thought the diverse categories and the fundamental ideas related to existence.

According to Tosaka, there was a genealogy for this effort to interpret the world as a categorical system, beginning with Fichte and threading its way through Schelling to Hegel: It was a genealogy that represented nothing more than the life and death process of German romantic philosophy. In Tosaka's judgment, Nishida completed this philosophic trajectory (whose lesser acolytes Marx had already demolished), taking it as far as it could go, "down to its purest and most self-conscious form."⁴¹ This "completing" was the characteristic standpoint of Nishida's philosophy, inasmuch as it, like one of the earlier stages in the itinerary completed by Hegel, was "a natural phenomenon issuing from the self-conscious goal of the romantic categorical systematization of the world." As a result of the "completion" of the philosophical genealogical tableau, Tosaka conceded that Nishida's philosophy must become the problem and advised turning attention, once again, to explaining its construction of a methodology committed to grasping existence. The resolution of the problem at hand, he warned, was not easily captured by simply determining whether existence is substantial (material) or spiritual. Rather the resolution must distinguish between the category of existence and existence itself and understand how the idea is completed.

Tosaka wondered how a philosophical method, founded on the logic of nothingness and that therefore presumed the operation of a dialectical law, resulted only in "clarifying meaning of that which had become dialectical."⁴² In spite of operating under the sign of the dialectic, he was convinced that the method never really employed it. Instead, the method was driven by a logic concerned only with "interpreting how to consider the meaning of dialectics (itself)." Even though it appeared to be concerned with apprehending the meaning of what calls itself dialectics, it has never managed to rise above the act of fixing meaning to actually consider it dialectically. Whether it was addressing the dilemma of "continuity of discontinuity" or the "rationality of irrationality," the method

41. *Ibid.*, 240.

42. *Ibid.*, 245.

has never passed beyond revealing its reliance on “one kind of transdialectical mysticism.” Apart from employing the “logic of nothingness,” Tosaka charged, “it was nothing but a denial of the dialectic of existence” that resulted in a “dialectics of nothing” for its failure to “treat existence.” “The logic of nothingness was nothing more than a deformation [*wai-kyoku*], which exchanged the management of things [*jibutsu*] for the meaning elicited by the facts.”⁴³ Tosaka reasoned that Nishida’s logic, with its momentous exchanging of things for interpretation, was actually undermined by virtue of the impossibility involved in “sufficiently managing the meaning brought to facts, because it is not possible to manage things themselves.” But the real question relates only to how meaning is made independently from these facts and things. Specifically, the predicament he discerned was deciding not what things are in actuality but rather determining how what conveys meaning is “valued in the name of these things.”⁴⁴ It is important to recognize in this move the inversion demanded by commodity exchange of an exchange of the concrete—the thing for an abstraction, undoubtedly calling attention to the operation of commodity exchange. Yet it revealed in condensed form the whole inversion from material life to spiritual existence, which, according to Tosaka, was initiated the moment liberalism abandoned politics and economics for religion and culture. The most important consequence of this inversion was to replace a history of the present—a history responsive to the immediacies of contemporary social reality—with the history of an indeterminate past, a bad history for a good one. Moreover, he continued, it is not what society, history, and nature are but what meaning the idea of society, history, and nature possess, what position they occupy in the categorical system of meaning. As an example, Tosaka offered the following: “Society doesn’t only possess meaning for the I-and-thou relationship.” When you begin to pick out and choose words and phrases from within the capacious “self-conscious determination of nothingness,” it is no different for countless readers who will invest diverse meanings with their own usage. The point he wished to emphasize is that the presumed authority claimed for the archaic precedent could offer no ground for fixing a singular meaning for all times. Hence, the “logic of nothingness” has made only the “logical

43. *Ibid.*, 246.

44. *Ibid.*

significance' of things and facts the problem."⁴⁵ With its method, steeped in a hermeneutic philosophy dedicated to illuminating meaning, it is impossible to escape the approach to being and existence as if it were simply an idea.

Tosaka reported that Nishida's great colleague at Kyoto, Tanabe Hajime, resembled Hegel insofar as both were idealists who shared a rigorous antimaterialism, a description Tanabe might have welcomed. But Nishida, he continued, inverted this position and made it into a negative logic. Why the theory of nothingness fails as a logic is because it has no capacity to think through existence, which, for Tosaka and materialism, started with the production of material life and the satisfaction of needs. It was always stopping short of taking this step to remain captive to the endless search for "logical meaning." Owing to this pursuit, Tanabe was emboldened to portray Nishida's philosophy as a "gothic temple" and withheld "prais(ing) this attitude because it had failed to consider that late romanticism had retreated to the darkness of the middle ages."⁴⁶ Yet, Tosaka concluded, Nishida had no taste for the feudal, it was not his style. His thinking rather produced a modern philosophy that supplied a "thankful spiritual offering to the bourgeoisie."⁴⁷ As for the cultivated contemporaries (*gendaijin*) of modern capitalism in Japan, it was now possible to discover in the precincts of Nishida's philosophy a habitat for the homeless, culturally free consciousness of the bourgeois self. But we must remember that the cost for this cultural freedom was enabled by the flight of political liberalism, which had opened its doors to welcome a diversity of ideas, often clashing with each other. Such a veritable witches' brew of ideologies made possible its fateful encounter with the religious and hermeneutics that prepared the way for fascism in the form of an archaism empowered to replace the exemplars of national history with a new spiritual history called Japanism. "It was for this reason that (Nishida's philosophy) became the representative of cultural liberalism (as opposed to economic, political liberalism)" and explains its "popularity" with a class—the bourgeoisie—that fought for self-definition through cultural authority and won.⁴⁸

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 248.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., 249.

The question still remains: What did the postwar era forfeit by consigning Tosaka and his critique to forgetfulness and silence? The answer is probably far more important than any of us can imagine. Yet the translations and essays collected in this volume, the first of its kind in English, will provide both the necessary dimension of diversity denoting the remarkable range of interests and engagement exemplified in Tosaka's writings and a beginning to grasping the power of their potential for envisioning the new in a present already committed to the regime of repeating its failed past.

