

Ethical Pitfalls in Imperial Zen and Nishida Philosophy

Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique

Christopher IVES

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF Ichikawa Hakugen, virtually no Japanese Buddhist has examined the role of Zen in Japan's Fifteen-Year War (1931–1945). Ichikawa argued that Zen took a submissive stance at the time and that prominent Zen figures helped rationalize, glorify, or even promote Japanese imperialism. A parallel problematic surfaces in wartime writings of layman Nishida Kitarō, who Ichikawa claims “stumbled” ethically no less than Zen had done.¹

ICHIKAWA'S BACKGROUND

Ichikawa (1902–1986) was born into a Rinzai Zen temple family and spent his entire career as a university student and professor at Hanazono University, from his matriculation in 1921 to his retirement in 1973. In his telling, Ichikawa was a shy child, naturally intimidated and repulsed by the education he received under the imperial educational system and “terrified” of the state and the supreme commander (emperor) who could order his death.² With this disposition he found himself increasingly against war and the rhetoric of the *kokutai* (national polity).

Ichikawa's orientation was shaped further by a “positivist” middle-school history teacher and by reading Natsume Sōseki, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and,

¹ Ichikawa set forth his critique of Zen and Nishida primarily in 禅と現代思想 [Zen and contemporary thought] (1967), 仏教者の戦争責任 [Buddhists' responsibility for war] (1971), and 日本ファシズム下の宗教 [Religion under Japanese fascism] (1975). In this paper all quotations of Ichikawa are from these three works, which were republished respectively in volumes 2, 3, and 4 of his *Collected Writings*.

² IHC 3:17.

later, Hugo, Tolstoy, Kropotkin, Marx, Engels, and the anarchist Ōsugi Sakae.³ Gradually, a “humanistic anger toward the evils of society and the state”⁴ welled up in him, and his lifelong interest in Buddhism, socialism, and anarchism began to crystallize.

Though his anger did not drive Ichikawa into prewar political activism, he did publish several articles on Buddhism and socialism in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and on several occasions he was interrogated by the Special Higher Police Force (特高) about certain of his writings. During the war he did not publicly recant his socialist stance as many others did, but later he criticized his own failure to oppose Japanese militarism more actively and condemned his passivity as equivalent to recantation (転向).

Through such reflection on his prewar and wartime stance, Ichikawa became more involved in politics, serving on the Kyoto Board of Education in the 1950s and participating in various organizations and movements to address human rights issues in Japan, the security treaty with the United States, and the Vietnam War. In his scholarship Ichikawa examined Buddhist war responsibility, with particular attention to nationalist Zen figures located at the recent end of a fairly continuous history—since the Kamakura period—of close collaboration between Zen institutions and those in political power.

NATIONALIST ZEN

This nationalist trend in modern Zen circles is evident around the time of the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), when Suzuki Teitarō (later known in the West as D. T. Suzuki) wrote:

There is a violent country [China], and insofar as it obstructs our commerce and infringes upon our rights, it directly interrupts the progress of all humankind. In the name of religion, our country refuses to submit itself to this. For this reason, unavoidably we have taken up arms. For the sake of justice and justice alone, we are simply chastising the country that represents injustice, and there is nothing else we seek. This is a religious action.⁵

Zen nationalism found further expression during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) in statements by Shaku Sōen and others, and it attained its most virulent form—what Ichikawa termed “Imperial Way Zen”—during the Fifteen-Year War. In 1934, for example, Iida Tōin declared:

³ IHC 3:18.

⁴ IHC 3:18.

⁵ In 新宗教論 [A new treatise on religion], quoted in IHC 4:36.

Since the distant age of the gods, our country has come into existence equipped naturally with the Great Way of sovereign and subject. The dyad of sovereign and subject is the intrinsic nature of our country, and being unchanging, this nature constitutes righteousness.... It opens no crack for rationally asking “why” to enter.⁶

Continuing along these essentialist lines, Iida later asked,

If the state were to perish, what would protect the Buddha-Dharma? If the Buddha-Dharma were to perish, upon what would the state be established?... There is no Buddha-Dharma apart from loyalty.... In all corners of the world there is no place where the Imperial Favor does not operate. The voices of pines and bamboo echo “Long may it live!” (*ban-zai*). The Imperial wind and the Buddha’s sun are nondual.⁷

With this attitude toward the state and the imperial system, Iida celebrated Zen connections to militarism in the 1930s: “We should be cognizant of how much power Zen gave to the Way of the Warrior. It is truly a cause for rejoicing that the Zen sect has recently become popular among military men. No matter how much we do *zazen*, if it is not of service in the present events, then it would be better not to do it.”⁸

Iida was not alone in urging his compatriots to make Zen “of service” in the “present events” constituting what many Buddhists called a “holy war” (聖戦). Yamazaki Ekishū exclaimed, “In Great Zen Samadhi we become united with the emperor. In each of our actions we live, moment to moment, with the greatest respect [for the emperor]. When we personify [this spirit] in our daily lives, we become masters of every situation in accordance with our sacrificial duty. This is living Zen.”⁹ Hata Eshō celebrated the attack on Pearl Harbor:

December 8th is the holy day on which Śākyamuni realized the Way, and [for this reason] it has been a day for commemorating the liberation of humankind. It is exceedingly wonderful that in 1941 we were able to

⁶ 飯田權隱 Iida Tōin, 參禪漫錄 [Random comments on the practice of Zen] (1934), quoted in IHC 2:30. Iida Tōin (1863–1937) was a prominent Sōtō figure who founded the Shōrinkutsudōjō in 1931.

⁷ Iida, 槐安國語提唱錄 [Zen talks on the *Kaiankokugo*] (1944), quoted in IHC 4:35.

⁸ Iida, *Random Comments*, 262; quoted in IHC 2:159. The translation of this quote is adapted from Daizen Brian Victoria’s rendering in “Japanese Corporate Zen,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 12/1 (1980): 64.

⁹ 山崎益洲 Yamazaki Ekishū, 敵愾心の興揚と禪 [The promotion of enmity and its relation to Zen], quoted in IHC 4:46. This translation is an adaptation of Victoria’s in “Japanese Corporate Zen,” 64. Yamazaki Ekishū (1882–1961) served as head priest of Buttsū-ji and head abbot of the consolidated Rinzai Zen sect around the end of the war (1945–1946).

make this very day also into a holy day for eternally commemorating the reconstruction of the world. On this day was handed down to us the Great Imperial Edict declaring war aimed at punishing the arrogant United States and England, and news of the destruction of American forward bases in Hawaii spread quickly throughout the world. We gained a real taste of good fortune, and we must offer thanks—to the four groups of superiors to whom we are indebted—for being able to applaud the freshness of victory in name and reality.¹⁰

Lest Ichikawa be accused of selectively lifting unrepresentative imperialist statements out of context to construct a straw man named “Imperial Way Zen,” a perusal of wartime issues of *Zengaku-kenkyū*, *Daijōzen*, *Daibōrin*, and other Buddhist journals soon reveals that Zen statements such as these were neither rare nor exceptional.

To account for these statements and overall Zen support of Japanese imperialism and militarism, Ichikawa critiqued philosophical, institutional, and historical dimensions of Zen.¹¹ In his reading, “Zen” emerged at a tumultuous time in Chinese history and, like philosophical Taoism, directed itself toward finding security in the midst of social unrest. As expressed by such Taoist notions as “Because it does not contend, it is never at fault”¹² and the “usefulness of the useless,” a prominent religious orientation in East Asia has been to give up resistance to, and then accept and accord with, the actuality around oneself. To promote this “accord with the principles of things as a kind of naturalism,”¹³ one restrains from judgmental discrimination and thereby removes oneself from the psychological basis of preferences, struggle, and resulting anguish. Summarizing this Taoistic approach, through which one is said to achieve a kind of harmony with nature and other people, Ichikawa wrote, “If one discards discrimination between affirmation and negation and accords with nature, one can secure one’s life.”¹⁴

Ch’an and Zen developed this way of “stabilizing the mind and securing one’s life” (安心立命)¹⁵ in the face of social chaos. In their approach, as Ichikawa portrayed it,¹⁶ “By becoming one (成り切る) with actuality, a person

¹⁰ In the journal *Dōgen*; quoted in IHC 4:15.

¹¹ For the sake of focus, this paper will consider only his treatment of the philosophical dimension.

¹² Adapted from D. C. Lau, tr., *Tao Te Ching* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1976), 64.

¹³ IHC 2:13.

¹⁴ IHC 2:13.

¹⁵ Cf. Dōgen’s 永平広録 [The Public Record of Eihei], quoted in IHC 2:9.

¹⁶ Assessment of the historical and philosophical accuracy of Ichikawa’s characterization of Taoism and Ch’an/Zen will have to wait for another occasion.

transcends actuality,”¹⁷ in that by relinquishing ego-centeredness and “becoming one” with the situation at hand a person can discover freedom in necessity (必然即自由). The *Record of Lin-chi* conveys this method of finding freedom beyond the dichotomy of relative freedom and necessity with the statements, “Make yourself master of every situation, and wherever you stand is the true [place]”; and “The mind turns in accordance with myriad circumstances, and this turning, in truth, is most profound.”¹⁸ In Dōgen’s words, “To learn the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be confirmed by all things....”¹⁹ And as Shidō Bunan (1603–1676) advised, “While living become like a dead person, then do as you wish.” In this liberated freedom, according to D. T. Suzuki, “Zen does not affirm or negate temporal actuality. Actuality has historicity, with which the ultimacy of Zen has no dealings.”²⁰

Though perhaps existentially liberating for individual Buddhists, this approach to actuality has caused Zen to flounder ethically in socio-political actualities with which it has “become one,” especially in the 1930s and early 1940s. For example, reflecting on what might be entailed in the notions of becoming master of one’s situation and according with circumstances, Ichikawa problematized the “situation” of which Zen has made people master:

Is it the situation in which one is placed or participates? Is it a matter of attaining freedom in the sense of becoming master of one’s situation by changing in accordance with it? Are we to take the personal initiative to act above and beyond what we are commanded to do, as in “unquestioning compliance with the emperor’s directives,” rather than resisting or grudgingly obeying “supreme command(s) in the holy war”? In other words, is becoming master of one’s situation a matter of living as a faithful and pliant organization man who through self-discipline admonishes himself against civil disobedience?²¹

To Ichikawa, the situations in which Zen has become “master” are the realms of warriors, the military, the anti-communist right-wing, and the industrial sector.²² Along these lines he concluded that what Zen offers is a stance of accommodation:

¹⁷ IHC 2:129.

¹⁸ Adapted from Ruth Fuller Sasaki, tr., *The Record of Lin-chi* (Kyoto: Institute for Zen Studies, 1975), 17 and 27.

¹⁹ *Genjōkōan* fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō*.

²⁰ 禪百題 [One hundred Zen topics], quoted in IHC 4:7.

²¹ IHC 2:135.

²² IHC 2:160.

As indicated in the line [in the *Record of Lin-chi*], “The mind turns in accordance with the myriad circumstances,” one creates a way of living that adapts daily to the new historical state of affairs; in the age of the Imperial Way one conducts oneself imperialistically, and in an age of democracy one conducts oneself democratically. Because one does not dwell in any one place, one lives in accordance with all places.²³

Coupled with the historical cooperation between Zen and those in power (the “state”), this existential orientation opened the door fully for Zen to support modern Japanese imperialism, which is precisely what the tradition did.

Ichikawa suggested that to “become master of one’s situation” could have meant to criticize the war publicly, but almost all Zen figures chose to be “masters” of a different sort. To quote Iida Tōin once again, “If one becomes master of every situation, the place where the mind turns is truly profound. Mountains are mountains; the sovereign is the sovereign; waters are waters; subjects are subjects. The great imperial nation of Japan—*banzai, banzai!*”²⁴ Cognizant of the posture of wartime Zen, Hisamatsu Shin’ichi wrote, as quoted by Ichikawa, “Zen often speaks of ‘becoming master of every situation,’ but during the war did this not become a situation in which Zen became opportunistic and, rather than becoming a master (主) of circumstances, tended to have its mind snatched by circumstances and thus became a guest (客) of those circumstances?”²⁵

To Ichikawa, the ethical stumbling of Zen “masters” also derives from the harmony extolled in much of the discourse about Zen and Japanese culture. Possessing the contemplative wisdom advocated by Zen, “One tends to engage in a way of living that does not fight the pre-existing actuality pressing upon oneself but, on the contrary, accommodates it.”²⁶ Living like the water that takes the shape of whatever vessel into which it is poured, Zen Buddhists run the risk of succumbing to a kind of flexible, shifting submission that lacks the consistency of principles, convictions, and actions necessary for a critical social ethic.²⁷ More specifically, ideals of harmony, nonresistance, and tolerance found an expression in the twentieth century that at the very least stood in stark tension with Buddhist rhetoric of compassion, of applying “skillful means” to liberate *all* sentient beings:

²³ IHC 3:120.

²⁴ Iida, *Random Comments*; quoted in IHC 2:139.

²⁵ 絶対主体道 [The way of absolute subjectivity] (Tokyo: Kōbundō Shobō, 1948), 144–5; quoted in IHC 2:128.

²⁶ IHC 3:101.

²⁷ IHC 3:124.

With what has modern Japanese Buddhism harmonized itself? With State Shinto. With state power and authority. With militarism. Accordingly, with war.

To what has modern Japanese Buddhism been nonresistant? To State Shinto. To state power and authority. To militarism. To wars of invasion.

Of what has modern Japanese Buddhism been tolerant? Of those with whom it harmonizes. Of its own responsibility for the war.²⁸

Representatives of the Zen tradition have also applauded how the spiritual state of an awakened Zen Buddhist is like a mirror, reflecting what comes before it without discrimination, beyond duality, in an absolute objectivity that does not ask “why?” or wrestle with issues of good and evil. This is often offered to the “West” as a way to overcome the intolerance and conflict criticized by Zen figures as destructive ramifications of dualistic thinking. Ichikawa argues, however, that if such criticism had instead “been directed early on at the intolerance and combative nature of State Shinto and Imperial Way Buddhism, it might have been in time [to stop what happened].”²⁹ It might have also precluded the court testimony given by Colonel Aizawa Saburō when he was being tried for murdering General Nagata Tetsuzan in 1935: “I was in an absolute sphere, so there was neither affirmation nor negation, neither good nor evil.”³⁰ (Of course, given what Suzuki claimed about Zen ultimacy having no dealings with actuality, perhaps nothing in Aizawa’s actions or explanation runs contrary to “Zen.”)

ICHIKAWA’S CRITIQUE OF NISHIDA PHILOSOPHY

Parallel to his critique of Zen, Ichikawa also raised questions about the wartime writings of “Kyoto-school philosophy” founder Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), especially *The Problem of Japanese Culture* (日本文化の問題, 1938), *The Problem of the Raison d’état* (国家理由の問題, 1941), and *The National Polity* (国体, 1944). In these essays late in his career, Nishida applied his philosophical framework to the Japanese imperial system. For example, in a discussion of history he maintained:

The meaning of the formation of the historical world lies in the fact that the creation of heaven and earth is none other than the founding of the nation. For this reason, there is an unbroken lineage through the ages

²⁸ IHC 2:86–7.

²⁹ IHC 3:112.

³⁰ Quoted in IHC 2:166.

that is coeval with heaven and earth.... This is why there emerged the belief that Japan is a divine nation. In imperial edicts we can hear the voice of [the main] *kami* through a *kami* manifest in human form.³¹

Into this divine history Nishida inserted the role of the imperial subject:

Active intuition is to accord faithfully with the facts of national history that have developed with the myth of the formation of the Japanese nation as their point of origin and main axis, to empty the self and return to oneness with the emperor as the center of the absolute present; it is to act in terms of the national polity as an individual in the historical world, in the manner of “all [is] from the imperial household [and returns] to the imperial household.”³²

This household is the all-encompassing locus of (Nishida’s) Japanese existence, for “The imperial household is the absolute present that includes past and future, and we are born in it, work in it, and die in it.”³³ This center entails debt and concomitant political duty:

Our lives are our lives yet are not ours.... Though we may have a meal or a set of clothes, it is not our own.... In our personal lives as well we must not forget the thought of returning to oneness with the emperor and serving the state.³⁴

One’s ability to serve the state in this way, Nishida argued, has a religious basis, expressed by him in the kind of Zen terms discussed above:

Religiously awakened people can become “master of every situation” as the self-determination of the absolute present. In all respects these people are active. For each, “the place in which one stands is truth”... From a true religious awakening one can submit to the state.³⁵

³¹ NKZ 12:409–10; quoted in IHC 3:195. I thank Professor Yusa Michiko for helping me locate this essay.

³² NKZ 12:409–10; quoted in IHC 4:13–14.

³³ Quoted in IHC 3:194.

³⁴ NKZ 7:443; quoted in IHC 3:195.

³⁵ NKZ 11:144; quoted in IHC 3:195. The glorification of submitting to the state appeared in other essays. At one point, for example, Nishida wrote, “Our selves must be national in the sense of always being historical and formative as individuals of the world of the absolute present. True obedience to the nation should be derived from the standpoint of true religious self-awareness. Mere seeking one’s own peace of mind is selfish.” Nishida Kitarō, “Towards a Philosophy of Religion with the Concept of Pre-established Harmony as a Guide,” tr. David A. Dilworth, *The Eastern Buddhist* 3/1 (1970): 45; originally published in 1944 and reprinted in NKZ 11:114–46. Cited by Robert Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” *History of Religions* 33/1 (August 1993): 24.

Nishida thus attributed to Japan a divine history, conceived of the imperial household as the “absolute present” central to that history, and took Japanese existence to be derived from the imperial system and oriented toward selflessly serving it. In Nishida’s imperialist statements, made at a time when Japan was engaged in a war based ideologically on the very institutional structures (imperial household, divine nation, imperial edicts), historical claims (imperial lineage, national history), and behaviors (emptying the self, becoming one with the emperor, submitting to the state) that Nishida extolled, Ichikawa discerned philosophical issues similar to what he criticized in Zen.

Parallel to the Zen idea of “becoming one” with what one experiences, in the opening sentence of *An Inquiry into the Good* Nishida wrote: “To experience means to know facts just as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one’s own fabrications.”³⁶ In the course of his writings Nishida’s thought developed from this “pure experience” of “facts just as they are” and eventually arrived at consideration of the “historical world.” Through this development he attempted to provide a logic and an ontological ground for the initial epistemology of “pure experience” and thereby rid his standpoint of what he called “psychologism.” In this process he formulated such notions as the “logic of place,” and at times he wrote in a Kegon Buddhist vein about the importance of “See[ing] the universal principle in the particular thing” (事の中に理を見る), with the universal and the particular existing in an “absolutely contradictory self-identity” or in terms of what his friend D. T. Suzuki termed the “logic of *soku-hi* (即非).” Summarizing Nishida’s standpoint, Ichikawa wrote that

actuality, formed in terms of absolutely contradictory self-identity, is the absolute.... The absolutely contradictory self-identity is the formula of the self-expression of the absolute. Logic is not the subjective formula of our thought but the formula of the self-formation of the world. It is not that we think about the world from the self, for we must think about the self from the world. This is “absolute objectivism,” in which “the ten thousand things advance and confirm the self.” The philosophy that began from “facts just as they are” has arrived at the historical world in which actuality, just as it is, is the absolute (現実即絶対).³⁷

From Ichikawa’s perspective, this standpoint presents problems when applied to the socio-political realm, as Nishida did when he meshed it with the Japanese imperial system. First, “In ‘fact-ism’ (事実主義) or ‘actuality-ism’

³⁶ Nishida Kitarō, IG, 3.

³⁷ IHC 3:193–4.

(現実主義) as the viewpoint of seeing the universal principle in the particular thing, one can discern the nondual structure of ‘ought’ and ‘is’. This ‘nondual’ viewpoint, like the viewpoint of [Suzuki’s] *soku*, is a contemplative viewpoint.”³⁸ In other words, “This is a matter of seeing the principle at the base of actuality, not of changing the material structure of actuality,”³⁹ and with such contemplative passivity this approach generally accepts actuality and hence makes no distinction between “is” and “ought” and provides no impetus for social criticism or transformative activism.

Second, in seeing the absolute present and the imperial household as one and locating the universal principle (理) in the particular thing (事) called the imperial household, Nishida helped provide a philosophical foundation for the “holy war” being waged in the name of the emperor.⁴⁰ This paralleled the tendency of traditional Zen to accept and even glorify its political actuality, whether the Kamakura warrior government or the modern imperialist state.

Third, from the standpoint of what Ichikawa called “actuality-ism,” Nishida claimed, “The content of our will(s) is given only by the self-determination of history in actuality.”⁴¹ Ichikawa judged this and other facets of Nishida’s philosophy as undermining critical ethical freedom, which is based on autonomy and principles that are not shaped “only” by the circumstances of present actuality, and hence diverges in character from the water that assumes the shape of any vessel into which it is poured. Indeed, the forms the “self-determination of history” took soon after Nishida made his claim about our wills (1934) and prior to his essays on the Japanese state included escalation of the war with China (from 1937), the “national spiritual mobilization” of the Japanese (国民精神総動員, 1937), and such Ministry of Education texts as *Fundamentals of the National Polity* (国体の本義, 1937). Ichikawa even declared that Nishida himself was “given content” by his historical actuality: “Both Nishida’s samurai-style elitism, which was formed in the environment of old families from Japan Sea coastal areas, inclusive of the declining warrior class and bankrupt landowners, and his sensibility, which was formed by life and education under the authoritarianism of the imperial system, determined the historical body called Layman Sunshin [Nishida].”⁴² With this socio-historical conditioning, Nishida wrote in his diary about the imperial family, the peerage, senior statesmen, and schoolfellows, but made

³⁸ IHC 4:107.

³⁹ IHC 4:107.

⁴⁰ IHC 3:210.

⁴¹ IHC 3:121, quoting Nishida’s *The Self-Determination of Nothingness* (NKZ 7).

⁴² IHC 3:119–20.

virtually no reference to the daily life of ordinary people or such central political topics of his time as rice riots, elections, debates about “democracy,” the formation of socialist and anarchist political parties, antiwar movements, and the Public Order Preservation Law.⁴³

Ichikawa called attention to ethical pitfalls not only in Nishida’s “actuality-ism” but also in his logic of place and the notion of “absolutely contradictory self-identity” (as well as in Suzuki’s logic of *soku-hi*). Among other things, “absolutely contradictory self-identity” conveys the religious notion that by entering directly into existential insecurity one is liberated from it, such that suffering is liberation even while it remains suffering. Philosophically it expresses the relation between the one and the many, the universal principle and the particular thing. Problems emerge, however, in the socio-political application of this logic. To Ichikawa,

the logic of *soku-hi*, that is, the logic of the absolutely contradictory self-identity in which non-freedom, just as it is, is freedom, in which [according to some] ‘to become servant of every situation’ (to sacrifice the self and serve the public in the holy war) is to ‘become master of every situation’ (as in Mahāyāna Zen), played the social and political role [of promoting the imperial system].⁴⁴

This is a logic of harmony:

In the place of absolute nothingness, existence and nonexistence, value and anti-value, rationality and irrationality, are identical. More than a logic of confrontation and rejection, this is a logic of magnanimity and harmony. This is [a function of] the non-conflictuality and tolerance of place (場所).⁴⁵

Further, at the social level the logics of place and *soku-hi* hold for all societies and all actualities, just as the sum of the three inner angles of a triangle is always 180 degrees,⁴⁶ and hence in and of themselves they provide no basis for critical evaluation of societies or for praxis aimed at transforming a society from what it “is” to what it might or “ought” to be.

With this overall character, Nishida’s standpoint offers little philosophical support for critical, autonomous responsibility. Insofar as the will gets its content and “truth” from actuality and “each action is the self-determination of the absolute present such that ‘every place one stands is truth’ [*Record of Linchi*], there emerges no responsibility that can be taken and no thing to take

⁴³ IHC 3:201.

⁴⁴ IHC 3:12.

⁴⁵ IHC 3:198.

⁴⁶ IHC 3:198.

responsibility.”⁴⁷ Of course, this issue goes beyond Nishida, for to the extent Japanese were faithful subjects submitting to imperial decrees during the “holy war,” the sense of personal responsibility for the war has been weak.⁴⁸ More often than not, Ichikawa claimed, the only responsibility many Japanese Buddhists felt immediately after the war was toward the emperor for their allowing the nation to be defeated. In the final analysis,

from the standpoint of absolute objectivism, that is, the “fact-ism” of “seeing the principle in the particular thing,” while Nishida in one respect negated the fact of the “Greater East Asia Holy War,” he ultimately affirmed it and treated it in terms of the logic of “from the imperial household to the imperial household.”⁴⁹

Simply put, Nishida’s wartime essays served to provide a philosophical basis for the state, the national polity, and the “holy war,” and in this way helped “dispel the doubts of students bound for the front and provide a foundation for resignation to death.”⁵⁰ (Although in many passages Nishida did not specify whether the state and national polity about which he was writing was the actual Japanese state or an ideal state, he at one point wrote that “national polity” was found only in Japan.⁵¹)

For Ichikawa, one of the central problems in the approach of Nishida and Suzuki is the lack of a critical modern self. About Nishida he asserted,

The doubt and negation that constitute the methodology of philosophy were directed completely inwards, toward the self, and because of this the moment for the maturation of the modern self, which is the subject of the modern critical spirit, was obliterated. As a result of this prior obliteration of the modern self—which could have been expected to doubt, criticize, and resist the absolutism of the imperial system—the central ideology of the Imperial Way settled into an *a priori* position relative to the pure experience underlying the individual self [Nishida], and thus from the start it conditioned that pure experience.⁵²

He added:

⁴⁷ IHC 3:206.

⁴⁸ IHC 3:123.

⁴⁹ IHC 2:76.

⁵⁰ IHC 2:31.

⁵¹ NKZ 12:410, quoted in IHC 4:108. In his essay on the national polity, Nishida claimed, “Strictly speaking, what is called ‘national polity’ does not exist outside of our country.”

⁵² IHC 3:208.

Nishida's emperor worship and authoritarian moral consciousness did not die the Great Death and burn to ashes. One cannot speak of having a cosmopolitan nature when lifting up the Imperial Way. Rather, contrariwise, the Imperial Way was internalized and absolutized through the death of modern intellectuality, took on religious authority, and controlled the private lives of individuals.... To speak of the Imperial Way having a cosmopolitan nature is like speaking of a round triangle....⁵³

As conceptualized by Ichikawa, this "modern self" that these Zen-influenced thinkers lacked has the ability to criticize.⁵⁴ Though certain Zen figures might condemn this "self" as the locus of attachment, Ichikawa argued that democratic freedom and fundamental human rights were secured through struggles that lasted many years and were sustained through attachment to self and attachment to things.⁵⁵ And in one work Ichikawa pondered how absolute, religious freedom, if it had been developed into a critical ethic at the time of the "clarification of the national polity" (国体明徴), "support for the Imperial Way" (皇道翼賛), and the "holy war" might "in the face of the rampancy of parochial, arrogant State Shinto, have dealt it a painful blow of the staff."⁵⁶ Whatever the reason, Zen "failed to become like a dead person while alive and, in response to imperial-system fascism, failed to 'refute false doctrines and bring out the truth' (破邪顯正)."⁵⁷

More broadly, in summarizing factors that led prominent Zen figures, Nishida, and Buddhists in general to exhibit passive conformity to or even active support of Japanese imperialism, Ichikawa exclaimed:

In the context of the anti-communist and anti-peace stance seen in the romantically emotional cluster of such concepts as absolute nothingness, [unique] historical actuality, no-self, the identity of contradiction, and "destroying the self to serve the public," many Japanese spread the pollution of their no-self philosophy and extended holy-war egoism throughout Asia.⁵⁸

On a personal note, Ichikawa outlined how this *Zeitgeist* affected him:

Lying deep in my consciousness was the true thought (諦念) that seeing facts "just as they are," accepting actuality "just as it is," and according

⁵³ IHC 3:208–9.

⁵⁴ Consideration of the extent to which Ichikawa held a rather optimistic view of the ethical dimension of the "modern critical self" is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁵⁵ IHC 2:63.

⁵⁶ IHC 3:50.

⁵⁷ IHC 2:187.

⁵⁸ IHC 4:47–8.

with the laws of facts and actuality—that is to say, making into one’s subjectivity the wisdom that discerns in actuality that necessity is, just as it is, freedom—constituted the path to peace of mind in which one “sees the universal principle in the particular thing.” And when I stood in the face of the actuality called the national polity, this thought became a trans-ego foundation for my submissive conformity to the power of that actuality.⁵⁹

Ichikawa’s critique of Japanese imperialism is not limited to the above points about Zen and Nishida. Though beyond the scope of this paper, he also attributed the wartime stumbling of Japanese to such factors as the historical interdependency between Japanese Buddhism and those in political power (the “state”); passive interpretations of the doctrine of *karma*; the lack of notions of justice and human rights in Buddhism, partially owing to the doctrine of no-self; the philosophy of debt (恩); Japanese views of the “home” at the level of family and nation and their connection to ancestor worship; and the spirituality of aging and tranquility, which contributes to uncritical passivity in the social arena.

FURTHER ISSUES IN NISHIDA PHILOSOPHY

This paper has outlined Ichikawa’s critique of the relationship Zen and Nishida had to Japanese imperialism. Stepping back from and examining this critique, one might argue that we should let bygones be bygones, that the Fifteen-Year War is in the past and should be left there. Given the apparent reluctance of the Zen tradition to look squarely at the issue of war responsibility, however, the possibility of its being “doomed to repeat” past mistakes is not insignificant. And even if one argues that in fact Japanese Zen Buddhists have reflected on and learned from past mistakes, we are still left with the fact that they have rarely spoken publicly about postwar issues related to those of the 1930s and 1940s, such as the Yasukuni Shrine, attacks by rightists, and the human rights problems faced by resident Koreans, *burakumin*, and others. One might contend that this is not the proper domain of Zen, but, as sketched earlier in this essay, prominent Zen figures did take clear political stances earlier in this century and historically Zen has never remained in any unpolitical or apolitical domain. The question, then, is that of how Zen Buddhists will function—inevitably and unavoidably—as political players in history.

Perhaps most challenged by Ichikawa’s critique are Zen formulations of compassion. Representatives of the tradition often claim that awakening (*satori*) is necessarily accompanied by wisdom and compassion. Assuming

⁵⁹ IHC 2:145.

that support for Japanese imperialism reflects a certain deficiency of the kind of wisdom and compassion Mahāyāna Buddhism advocates, we are left with a dilemma: either Suzuki and the more orthodox Zen figures examined here had not attained awakening (and hence lacked wisdom and compassion), or they *were* awakened and the rhetoric of accompanying wisdom and compassion is just that—rhetoric. (One way around this dilemma is to restrict wisdom and compassion to a narrow religious definition and argue that they do not connote anything ethical, but in their discourse Suzuki and others do portray them as having ethical significance as well.)

Furthermore, given the rather belligerent support for Japanese imperialism shown by persons who functioned as *rōshi* in orthodox monastic Zen and its lineages (unlike Suzuki and Nishida), perhaps Zen should advocate not only killing the buddhas and patriarchs but also turning the sword against one or the other of two sacred cows of Zen: either the notion that awakening is necessarily accompanied by wisdom and compassion; or the notion that lineages include only awakened *rōshi*, who serve as enlightened links in chains of “mind-to-mind transmission” stretching back to the purported founder of the tradition (Bodhidharma) and even to the historical Buddha.⁶⁰ That is to say, if one wants to maintain the central claim that all Zen figures with the title of *rōshi* in an orthodox lineage are awakened, one appears compelled to sacrifice the other central claim that awakening is necessarily accompanied by wisdom and compassion (which the ostensibly awakened Zen *rōshi* quoted above appeared to lack). Conversely, if one wants to maintain the central claim that awakening does indeed come equipped with wisdom and compassion, one appears compelled to conclude that those imperialistic Zen *rōshi* were not awakened and hence also compelled to sacrifice the claim that all *rōshi* are awakened.

In short, assuming for the sake of argument that there is such a distinct experience or way of experiencing as awakening, we must conclude either that Zen awakening, though existentially liberating, lacks any fundamental or inherent connection to the realm of ethics, or that there have been *rōshi* who have not realized awakening (despite the usual connotation of their title, or their having received certification (印可証明) or “Dharma-transmission” in a lineage).

Next, any attempt to assess involvement by Nishida in Japanese “nationalism”⁶¹ runs up against several barriers. The first concerns intention: what

⁶⁰ Conceptualized in this way, Zen lineages, with their systems of certification and succession, serve as the de facto touchstone for “orthodoxy” and the locus of organization and control in the tradition.

⁶¹ For the sake of convenience, I use the term *nationalism* broadly without attempting to make fine distinctions between *kokka-shugi*, *minzoku-shugi*, and other Japanese expressions that

was Nishida attempting to accomplish through his wartime writings, lectures, and activities, and, more narrowly, what meaning did he ascribe to specific statements and actions? Given the inherent difficulty of reconstructing retrospectively the intention behind statements made over fifty years ago (not to mention the issues of whether authors and actors have intention or motivation that is unambiguously clear to themselves and whether self-representations are accurate or honest), the more manageable question is one of definition: what was the apparent connotation (and denotation) of the terms Nishida employed?

As sketched by Ichikawa, in his later writings on history Nishida marshalled arguments held together by the very terminological warp around which ultranationalists wove their ideology: national polity, imperial household, divine nation, “all the world under one roof,” and so forth. Some have claimed that Nishida’s definitions of these terms differed from those ascribed by ultranationalists, and that even though Nishida’s writings appear to advance arguments nearly indistinguishable from nationalistic propaganda, he participated in the Shinto-based lexicon if not overall discursive space of imperialist and militarist ideologues in order to steer his nation toward the kind of historical creation and co-prosperity sphere he envisioned. At the very least we are left with the need to examine closely the arguments of specific texts while considering their intertextuality (*vis-à-vis* other works by Nishida and related texts) and their social, political, economic, and historical contexts.⁶² Through such careful analysis of Kyoto school wartime texts in all of their complexity and ambiguity we can steer a middle way between the Scylla of obfuscatory apologetics and the Charybdis of accusatory polemics.

A further issue crops up, however, when we shift from texts to their reception. Even if we could somehow reconstruct Nishida’s intention and pin down the “exact meaning” of specific terms or texts as a whole, this methodology does not take into account possible effects his discourse had on students, colleagues, general readers, and those in power. Allowing for a distinction between connotative and performative dimensions of texts, and granting that words and texts take on a life of their own (or are adopted into countless interpretative homes) once introduced to an audience of readers, we can consider the possibility that Nishida’s discourse had an impact divergent from what he intended. Specifically, his decision to adopt the Shinto terminology brandished by ultranationalists may have actually served to

have been rendered *nationalism* in English. Other papers in this volume offer analyses of these expressions.

⁶² In this regard, Yusa Michiko’s methodology of comparing Nishida’s “On Scholarly Methods” with *Fundamental Principles of the National Polity* proves useful as one part of the exegesis necessary for assessing Kyoto-school wartime texts as fairly and accurately as possible.

promote their—not his—overall objectives, in that readers swayed by what he wrote (or awed by his status) and unable to differentiate it from other formulations of the imperial system or Japan’s historical role came to be more receptive to those other formulations.

Granting these hermeneutical considerations, analysis of Nishida’s formal writings and letters provides evidence supportive of the argument that he was trying to steer his country away from destructive imperialism and hence was not a nationalist in any narrow or belligerent sense. In letters Nishida clearly expressed worries about developments in Japan at that time;⁶³ he was a consistent advocate of academic freedom;⁶⁴ in his wartime writings he occasionally rejected what he termed “invasionism” and imperialist egoism; he was criticized by the army and such rightists as Minoda Muneki for the Western elements in his philosophy, even though—and in part because—he and his Kyoto school colleagues had close connections to Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro and the navy.

Even acknowledging this evidence and the impossibility of pinning down the actual effects his writings had on his audience, we are still confronted by numerous issues in Nishida’s philosophical system, several of which were raised by Ichikawa in his critique. These issues include:

1. a tendency to identify the “is” with the “ought,” the particular “fact” with the universal “principle,” and the actual with the absolute;
2. an articulation of the state as the source and embodiment of moral value;
3. an affirmation of the myth of Japanese origins and the accompanying pseudo-history of an unbroken lineage of emperors descended from cosmogonic *kami*;
4. an advocacy of submission to the state and fusion with the emperor;
5. a dearth of economic analysis;
6. a bias toward harmony and unity; and
7. an espousal of Japan’s taking the lead in Asia at a time when Japan was “taking the lead” through military aggression and colonial rule.

First, Ichikawa’s characterization of Nishida’s system, as a kind of “actuality-ism” that obfuscates distinctions between what is and what ought to be, seems valid. Similar to statements Ichikawa brought to the fore, in “The National Polity” Nishida explicitly negated reflection in terms of the ought:

⁶³ See M. Yusa, “Nishida and the Question of Japanese Nationalism,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 46/2 (Summer 1991): 203–9.

⁶⁴ Yusa, “Nishida and the Question of Japanese Nationalism,” 204.

Our self is not found in the place where one follows the ought of abstract reason. Human beings are not machines of logic. Nor does mere arbitrariness constitute the self.... Our self is born in terms of a historical body. Without the subject of the ethnic nation (民族) there is no historical formation.... The ethnic nation forms the historical world through the mediation of our selves as the self-formative power of the historical world.⁶⁵

In this same essay Nishida also wrote, “The zenith of Japanese spirit is in ‘actuality just as it is, is the absolute’.”⁶⁶

Further, as discussed before, Ichikawa reproached Nishida for contending that the imperial household is the absolute present and the fundamental principle upon which Japanese culture and the Japanese state were based. This component of Ichikawa’s critique corresponds to points made by other Japanese scholars. Furuta Hikaru argues that

the philosophy of Nishida and the Kyoto school takes a standpoint in which the truly “subjective” way of being relative to actuality is to discover what ought to exist (the *ought*) within what is actual (the *is*) in the state and war and, through uninterrupted practice, to maintain the unity of this *is* and *ought*. This philosophy was welcomed by the intelligentsia at that time, who were in anguish over the gap between the “actuality” of the state’s war and the philosophy of the “self,” for the one thing able to bridge that gap was that philosophy’s logic of “the *ought*, just as it is, is the *is*; the *is*, just as it is, is the *ought*.” But insofar as this logic found in the “imperial way” (the political principles of the imperial system) a fundamental principle that could support historical unfolding in terms of “the *is*, just as it is, is the *ought*” and operated on the basis of this great presupposition, it gave precedence not to a functioning in which the *is* was controlled by the *ought* but a functioning in which the *is* was justified by the *ought*.⁶⁷

In conjunction with this facet of his thought, Nishida also argued that the state supplies morality and consequently takes on a religious coloring:

The state is the power that creates value. The true state must, as the subject of historical formation, be the creator of value.... What is called

⁶⁵ NKZ 12:398.

⁶⁶ NKZ 12:411.

⁶⁷ 古田 光 Furuta Hikaru, 十五年戦争下の思想と哲学 [Thought and philosophy of the fifteen-year war], in Furuta Hikaru, 作田啓一 Sakuta Keiichi and 生松敬三 Ikimatsu Keizō, eds., 近代日本社会思想史 [The history of modern Japanese social thought], vol. 2 (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 1971), 278.

national value is creative value. For this reason it is true moral value. In the background the state possesses something religious.⁶⁸

And again:

...in the history of our nation, which as the self-determination of the absolute present forms history, for the first time was realized the national polity in which the state, just as it is, is morality (国家即道德).⁶⁹

In conjunction with this articulation of the state in moral terms, Nishida appeared to accept as literally true the divine history—unfolding around an unbroken imperial lineage since the founding of the nation by Jinmu—revered by ultranationalists, even though in passages he used the word “myth” (albeit seemingly in the technical sense of cosmogonic stories about the *kami*). One question demanding an answer here is whether Nishida, whom many have deemed a highly sophisticated, modern thinker with a critical view of history, actually took this “history” at face value.

Even if he did not, Nishida affirmed if not glorified this pseudo-history, as well as both the centrality of the imperial system to Japanese culture and the moral status of the state; and he did so at a time when these highly ideological constructs were being marshalled propagandistically to pursue ends that Nishida seemed nervous about in his personal correspondence. In general, Nishida’s thought does not sufficiently resolve the tension between his insistence that the state becomes a genuine state only when it possesses a universality or transcendence (of, among other things, “national egoism”) and his parochial championing of Japan’s highly particularized national polity and imperial system.

Exacerbating this philosophical problem is Nishida’s affirmation of serving the state. As quoted above, he admonished his readers, “we must not forget the thought of returning to oneness with the emperor and serving the state.”⁷⁰ In “Principles for a New World Order” he affirmed “thought guidance” (albeit while criticizing certain existing forms of it),⁷¹ the notion of gaining one’s individual moral mission from the state,⁷² and such authoritarian slogans as “the unity of sovereign and subject” and “active support by all subjects.”⁷³ One might question this advocacy of obedience to the state and

⁶⁸ NKZ 12:399. Nishida did not clarify the nature of this linkage between moral value and religion in the essay.

⁶⁹ NKZ 12:409.

⁷⁰ NKZ 7:443; quoted in IHC 3:195.

⁷¹ NKZ 12:431.

⁷² NKZ 12:433.

⁷³ NKZ 12:431.

ask whether Nishida gave sufficient critical attention to the character and policies of the *actual* Japanese state and to the question of whether they were morally acceptable on the basis of autonomous moral principles that transcend that state and its promulgated norms (“morality”).

A further issue deserving attention is the dearth of economic analysis in Nishida’s thought. Ichikawa criticized Nishida for class bias and a rejection of class struggle as a critical, dialectical “moment” in history while allowing—to a certain, undefined extent—for conflict between mutually negating nations in the world of active creation, of poiesis “from that which is made to that which makes.”⁷⁴ Interestingly, one of the few economic statements in Nishida’s writings is an unqualified affirmation of the factory (as a locus of production in the creation of the historical world) in his wartime essay, “The National Polity.” In much nationalist discourse in Japan (and elsewhere) class issues get subsumed and obscured by emphasis on such overarching concepts as the nation state and the national polity (or the Japanese spirit). The use of such categories has led to hackneyed pronouncements about how the Japanese are a homogeneous, harmonious folk (or race), as seen in “The National Polity” where Nishida referred to the Japanese as monoethnic and “blending together” in the imperial system.

One can justifiably argue that this emphasis in Nishida’s later thought, even when divergent from and in tension with ultranationalist standpoints, masked socio-economic tensions and contributed indirectly to an expansionist foreign policy by helping foster the sense of unity as an “us” in an antagonistic relationship with a Western “them” (a unity Japanist discourse has claimed was not politically constructed and maintained but present in Japanese society from the beginning because of shared blood, language, and spirit). It is interesting to note here that Marxist critics have argued that, more broadly, capitalists attempted in the early-Shōwa period to divert attention from and mitigate tensions surrounding domestic socio-economic conditions by formulating both an official ideology in terms of a class-blind national polity or Japanese spirit and an expansionist foreign policy. This Marxist analysis, however, overestimates the power that capitalist elites possessed in the 1930s and fails to account for the full and complex range of forces at work in Japanese society at that time.

To Ichikawa and others, the issue of Nishida’s handling of economic issues and class conflict is part of a larger problem: Nishida’s tendency to downplay conflict (in actuality and in principle) and to move too quickly to an affirmation of harmony. This tendency appeared, for example, in Nishida’s sanitized portrayals of Japanese history, as in the assertion, “When we con-

⁷⁴ Logically, his system allows for mutual negation between individuals, but he granted this virtually no social or political specificity.

sider the history of the emergence of our state, we understand that there was never anything like ‘struggle’ or ‘subjugation’ of different races and peoples [in our country], but that the clans, by melting into one united body under the banner of the Heavenly Grandson’s clan, came to form the well-rounded body of one people.”⁷⁵ Based on this and other such statements, Arima Tatsuo contends that

Nishida...abhorred conflict in any form whatsoever. He had already stated that what characterized Japanese history was the presence of the imperial household and that this presence should be able to overcome the realities of political conflict.⁷⁶

(Paradoxically, despite his overall disavowal of domestic conflict, Nishida accepted its international form: in his New Year’s lecture for the emperor in 1941, he explained, “For various peoples to enter this one world means that they enter one and the same environment. Therefore, there necessarily arise mutual struggles and conflicts among peoples, and wars are inevitable.”⁷⁷)

This tendency to obfuscate distinctions between *is* and *ought* and to downplay conflict prompts the meta-level question of how the metaphysical and religious dimensions so central to much of Kyoto school philosophy play out politically in terms of criticism of concrete actualities or advocacy of specific lines of praxis. That is to say, in making the transition from “pure experience” to the “historical world,” was Nishida able to extricate himself from a religious epistemology centered on “pure experience” and a “unifying activity” prior to subject-object duality and give full, critical attention to concrete subjects and objects, their conflicts, and the adjudication—through dualistic principles and non-intuitional, rational thought—of conflicting claims? Or did his starting point of “pure experience,” with its somewhat monistic character, prevent him from engaging adequately in such critical analysis, from being able to criticize the *is* insofar as it fell short of an *ought*?

From the perspective of Arima Tatsuo, “The primary sin of a Nishida or a Watsuji was not that their ideal of harmony in the individual might be untenable, but that they confused the realities of politics with personal longings for serenity and harmony.”⁷⁸ Arima further asserts,

⁷⁵ NKZ 12:416; quoted by Klaus Kracht, “Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945) as a Philosopher of the State,” in Gordon Daniels, ed., *Europe Interprets Japan* (Tenterden, Kent: Paul Norbury Publications, 1984), 202. Kracht argues that Nishida’s way of treating contradiction “leads to a theory of permanent reconciliation,” to a “dialectic of justification.”

⁷⁶ Arima Tatsuo, *The Failure of Freedom: A Portrait of Modern Japanese Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 12.

⁷⁷ Cited after an unpublished translation by Yusa Michiko.

⁷⁸ Arima, *The Failure of Freedom*, 13.

The philosophical category of pure experience, with all its logical embellishments, was used to preach social resignation as a means of achieving individual enlightenment. . . . When the idea of pure experience is realized within the individual, it encourages a kind of religious submission to reality. This being the ultimate reality, there is no need for the self to remold its social surroundings.⁷⁹

Finally, perhaps equally problematical was Nishida's affirmation of Japan's taking the lead in Asia at a time when Japanese belligerence was being justified in terms of leading Asia out from under Western imperialism. He makes this affirmation in such essays as "The Philosophical Foundation of Communalism" (1939) and "Principles for a New World Order" (1943). For example, in the latter he wrote, "To build the 'one particular world' [of East Asia], there must be one [state] standing at its center, which takes this task upon itself. In East Asia the [leading force] is none other than our country of Japan."⁸⁰ This statement takes on an ominous character in light of the last lines of that essay:

It can be said that the solution to the problem of the current world-historical problem is provided by the fundamental principles of our national polity. England and the United States must submit to this, and, moreover, the Axis Powers will come to emulate this.⁸¹

Although Nishida did warn against certain means of taking the lead, his advocacy of Japan as having a unique role as the leader of Asia put him on a slippery rhetorical slope that in all likelihood served (inadvertently or otherwise) to rationalize actions by the army and other players in militaristic Japanese expansionism.

In conjunction with this issue of Japan's taking the lead, it is worth noting that many Japanese intellectuals, including Kyoto school philosophers, construed the Fifteen-Year War as a war of liberation. Although several hundred years of destructive Western imperialism stood in the background of early-Shōwa historical events, the portrayal of Japanese actions as efforts by a cornered nation—"the one remaining uncolonized nation"—to take the lead and liberate Asia from Western, especially Anglo-Saxon (as portrayed in the *Chūōkōron* discussions in 1941–1942), colonialism flies in the face of several facts: there were such Asian areas as Thailand that were not colonized by Western powers, and Japan itself colonized its Asian neighbors, such as Taiwan from 1895, Korea from 1910, and Manchuria from the 1920s; fur-

⁷⁹ Arima, *The Failure of Freedom*, 13–14.

⁸⁰ NKZ 12:429; quoted by Kracht, "Nishida Kitarō," 203.

⁸¹ NKZ 12:434.

ther, Japan's non-Anglo-Saxon German and Italian allies had participated in Western imperialism and colonialism in Asia and other parts of the world.

Related to this, when looking at Japan or the Kyoto school and "the war," one must ask "Which war?" Narrow focus only on the "Pacific War" (1941–1945), though promoted by the Occupation's insistence on this terminology, makes it possible to portray Japan as a nation cornered by Western colonialism and blockades that shifted from peace to war in late 1941 to protect itself and liberate Asia. This portrayal diverts attention both from Japan's own aggressive imperialism in the preceding decades (an imperialism perhaps understandable in part as a kind of a mimetic stance towards the very West whose imperialism Japan was ostensibly trying to eradicate in Asia), and from the fact that certain Kyoto-school thinkers apparently accepted Japan's aggression toward China, Korea, and other Asian areas prior to 1941.⁸²

Ichikawa's critique of Nishida and the additional discussion above reveal certain patterns. In his essays Nishida did warn against "invasionism" and self-serving imperialism; Nishida was criticized by ultranationalists; and in his correspondence he did express concerns about the direction in which Japan was headed. These data were not presented by Ichikawa, which leaves his critique a bit lacking in nuance. However, though Nishida may not have intended to promote Japanese aggression abroad and authoritarian control at home, and though he may not have had any significant influence on people or events around him (no matter what he might have written, said, or done), his writings at the least validated the main ideological building blocks of militarists at that time: the centrality of and divine history behind a sanctified imperial system; the moral authority of the state; the moral and religious dimensions of submitting to the emperor and the state; and the necessity for Japan to take the lead in Asia. This philosophical validation—though perhaps inadvertent—looms large in comparison with Nishida's personal qualms, his occasional caveats about "invasionism," and the pressure exerted on him by ultranationalists.

Certain Japanese scholars concur with this tentative conclusion that Nishida's writings provided philosophical support for Japan's expansionist nationalism. Furuta Hikaru writes,

...during the war the main aspiration common to Nishida and the Kyoto school was to follow along with the movement of the Japanese state while attempting to check as much as possible, from within, the trend toward egoistic imperialism and self-righteous nationalism. To this end he followed the strategy of assenting *in name* to such slogans of the mil-

⁸² In the *Chūōkōron* discussions Nishitani Keiji spoke of the "opacity" of events in China, and remarked how people "mistakenly" viewed Japanese actions as an imperialist invasion on a par with the imperialism carried out by Europe and the United States.

itary fascists as “national polity,” “imperial way,” and “all the world under one roof,” while transforming their content into concepts of Nishida philosophy and a philosophy of history, and through this tried to redirect the course of the actual state. But, precisely for this reason the philosophy of this school of thought, although drawing a harsh reaction from the army and right-wing thinkers, performed the function of offering a conceptual dialectic that *in terms of content* glorified Japanese imperialistic domination of Asian peoples carried out *on the pretext of* “all the world under one roof.” As for the Japanese intelligentsia, this philosophy *in substance* assumed the role of having them, *on the pretext of* the “holy war,” participate wholeheartedly in and cooperate with the Pacific War and all of its contradictions. Herein lies the tragedy of the Kyoto school, inclusive of Nishida.⁸³

Of course, with regard to the question of Zen, the Kyoto school, and Japanese nationalism, there is much gray and little black or white, as with most ethical and political issues. There was diversity among individuals affiliated with Zen and the Kyoto school, and some of them changed their personal views and stances over time.⁸⁴ Clarification of the relationship these Buddhists and intellectuals had to Japanese “nationalism” thus calls for a nuanced approach that takes into account variation in and between the individuals in question. Through such inquiry, one can begin to assess their philosophical views in terms of coherence and consistency and examine linkages between theory and praxis, between philosophical systems and complex political actualities.

⁸³ Furuta, “The Fifteen-Year War,” 277.

⁸⁴ For example, though beyond the scope of this paper, close examination of the statements in the *Chūōkōron* discussions indicates that Nishitani Keiji, Kōsaka Masaaki, Kōyama Iwao, and Suzuki Shigetaka had a more enthusiastic attitude toward Japanese imperialism than Nishida, and such figures as Tanabe Hajime explicitly changed their standpoint.