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## *The Illusions of the Modern and the Pleasures of the Pre-Modern*

### *I*

Back in 1943, in the midst of the wartime, an article appeared in the US magazine *Fortune*, which was provocatively entitled “The Japanese Mind: A Picture of the Mentality That We Must Understand If We Are To Conquer.”<sup>1</sup> As might be expected from its title, the article purported to be critical of the Japanese way of thinking and acting which it assumed to underlie Japanese wartime behavior.

Among many unexpected things the article contains, nothing is more surprising than the fact that its author was Karl Löwith (1897–1973), a German philosopher. For although he has since fallen into near oblivion and is not much talked about these days in Japan, in the pre-“postmodern” period he was veritably well-known and widely read because of his actual presence in this country. Incidentally, in the United States much attention has recently been paid to him because of his pioneering and radical critique of Heidegger, his former teacher.<sup>2</sup> Between 1936 and 1941 he taught in the department of philosophy at Tohoku Imperial University in Sendai.<sup>3</sup> Karl Löwith came to prewar Japan quite acci-

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1. *Fortune*, Vol. 28, no 6, (New York, December 1943), 132–35; 230; 232, 234; 236; 239–40; 242, now included in *Karl Löwith Samtliche Schriften 2* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1983).

2. See, for example, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, trans. G. Steiner and ed. Richard Wolin (Columbia UP., 1995).

3. For Löwith’s biographical account, see Karl Löwith, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933*, trans. Elizabeth King (London: Athlone P., 1944).

dentally and in fact not without some reluctance. Labeled as Jewish by Nazi Germany, he was compelled to lead an exile life in Italy, Japan and the United States successively until he eventually returned to Germany in 1952. According to a reliable source, while in Rome from 1934 to 1936 he was desperately in need of a new position elsewhere because of the tenacious Nazi persecution, which he experienced in both its more blatant and subtle forms. It was under these pressing circumstances that Baron Kuki Shuzo, then Professor of Philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University and one of the former fellow students at Heidegger's seminar in Germany, offered Löwith a position at Tohoku Imperial University. Löwith, it must be admitted, was not completely eager to take a position in what then seemed like such an outlandish place, but it is not unfair to say that he was able to ensure his very survival in this unexpected way. At any rate, he thus came to Japan and spent about four years of intellectually prolific life in Sendai, producing *inter alia* one of his most important works, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*.<sup>4</sup> In early 1941, about ten months before Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, he once again decided to move his place of exile from Japan to the United States.

It is, therefore, in a way shocking for the Japanese to find this eminent guest professor of philosophy, whom they were proud to have had once living among them, taking a propagandist stance in the article in question in favour of their wartime enemy. What comes as some relief and consolation for the Japanese, however, is the fact that his critique of the Japanese mentality as described in the article is thoroughly consistent with what he has to say about it elsewhere: there is no blatant sign of opportunist betrayal about it, neither ostentatiously humouring the Americans nor unfairly putting the Japanese in an unfavourable light.

After all is said and done, the article "The Japanese Mind," however, is critical through and through of the Japanese way of thinking and acting. According to Löwith, the Japanese mentality is poles apart from that of the modern West, even though the Japanese believe they have successfully undergone modernization. More than that, the Japanese even take it for granted that they can surpass Western civilization.

The proof of the matter can be found, he claims, in their superb con-

4. The entire manuscripts were written in Japan before 1936, the German version appeared in 1941 and the English one in 1964.

ceptual invention, "*wakon-yosai*" (i.e., the ideal that the Japanese Spirit can and should be perfected by Western Learning.) This ambitious and cunning grafting of the East and West, "the tradition of Oriental antiquity and Occidental modernity," is in fact not a creative mixture but, as Löwith's shrewd analysis shows, an entity defined by a means-to-end relationship. Western Learning, which amounts to the same thing in this instance as "Occidental modernity," is always bound to serve as a tool of the Japanese Spirit, the ultimate end. An extreme example Löwith tellingly provides is that of "a Japanese Hegelian at the Imperial University of Tokyo, who announced that Hegel's logical principle is an appropriate scheme for understanding Japanese mythology. For this man, Hegel's grand principle of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis illuminates the three famous gifts of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu to the heavenly Japanese monarch [*tenno*], gifts that are still preserved in the sacred Shinto shrine Ise—the sword, the mirror, and the jewel."<sup>5</sup> I must hasten to add, however, that the "Japanese Hegelian at the Imperial University of Tokyo" Löwith refers to here was in all probability Kihira Tadayoshi (1874–1949), who was, however, not a *bona fide* member of the Imperial University of Tokyo but a part-time instructor who held his regular appointment at Gakushuin University.<sup>6</sup> This, of course, has nothing to do with the validity of Löwith's analysis of the Japanese way of life, which he bluntly describes as "amphibious" because it comprises two disparate elements: traditional Japanese Spirit and Western modernity. And his point is that this amphibious existence always has as its ultimate end the Japanese spirit.

What is then this Japanese spirit that functions as the ultimate end of all learning? The answer is sought in the semi-mysterious recognition of "nothingness." The genuine Japanese way of thinking, Löwith says, "has never been built up from logical concepts. Rather it has been a direct, intuitive grasp, expressed in paradoxical images." As an exemplary exponent of this manner of thinking, Löwith rightfully takes up Nishida Kitaro, who in Löwith's apt description "attempts to understand in terms of Western philosophy the Buddhist experience and notion of 'nothingness.'" While the Western philosophy, as Nishida understands it, is

5. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

6. I owe this information to Professor Karube Tadashi of the University of Tokyo, an expert on modern Japanese thought.

limited by the frame of “being,” what he prizes as the supreme nothingness of Oriental philosophy is “the richest and most perfect stature of being, the ground of every particular existence in nature and history.”<sup>7</sup>

What is noteworthy here is the intuitiveness and emotionalism with which this recognition of nothingness is charged. There is hardly the will to logical construction in it, be it dialectical development, or teleological progression, or positive ethics. What is discernible is a nebulous tenacity of feeling. Since Japanese culture is inspired neither by Plato’s “eros,” nor by the faith of the Jewish prophets, nor by the Chinese teaching of manners and habits, one might ask whether it has a principle at all. Nishida would answer that it is based on sensitivity and feeling and is therefore indefinable and hardly intelligible for the Western intellect. “Even our supreme moral principle, loyalty to the monarch,” he points out, “has simply developed on emotional grounds.” It is then through the faculty of sensitivity and feeling that the supreme epistemological principle of nothingness and the other supreme moral principle of “loyalty to the monarch” are equally grasped and intuited. In the world where such intuition is all powerful, cutting the Gordian knot wherever it goes, one can easily see how the traditions of Zen Buddhism and its culture exert substantial influences. Death and self-sacrifice can be not only accepted but also prized as supreme instances of ethical as well as aesthetic ideal. Löwith expresses this in a clear-cut way: “the ultimate values for the Japanese mind have never been ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,’ but rather loyalty, a free disregard of life and an honorable death.”<sup>8</sup>

But when it comes down to the real business of modernity and modernization, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” is what it is all about. The modernized Japan, however, has not come to understand, let alone to possess, these essential values of the modern West. It rather boasts of retaining the Japanese Spirit, “the tradition of Oriental antiquity,” the ultimate end, to which all kinds of learning, including that of modern West, are but means. And this is exactly what makes Löwith regard mod-

7. Löwith, p. 135.

8. Löwith, p. 242.

9. It is interesting to note that Kevin Doak’s analysis of Yasuda Yojuro’s thought as “Japan as irony” points out the same kernel of the idea: “‘Japan as irony’ is an attempt to capture the nature of the Japanese experience of modernity. Brought out of a feudal society by a revo-

ern Japan as a contradiction in terms, a logical impossibility.<sup>9</sup>

One should never forget that the whole adoption of Western civilization in Japan was brought about by obedience to the monarch’s edict, by loyalty but not by a spontaneous movement of emancipation.<sup>10</sup> In Löwith’s view, then, the modernization of Japan, at least in its spiritual dimension, is totally an atavistic move. In the final analysis, it results merely in a confirmation of the Japanese Spirit in terms of and by means of Western culture and learning. In this instance of modernity in disguise there is no place for “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” i.e., what the exponents of postmodernism label as “the Master Narratives of the modern.”

## II

In the same year 1943 that saw the publication of Löwith’s article “The Japanese Mind” in the United States, two works appeared on the other side of the Pacific Ocean that dealt with the same topic in a similar vein. One was *The World Historical Standpoint and Japan* and the other was *Overcoming Modernity*. The topic they had in common was how to assess and situate Japan in the contemporary global and historical contexts. Since *Overcoming Modernity* looks more familiar and is taken up in depth elsewhere, let me focus on *The World Historical Standpoint and Japan*.<sup>11</sup> It is the report of a series of three symposia that were held in the years 1941 and 42, the initial one significantly taking place thirteen days before Japan entered the disastrous Second World War. Naturally, the tone of the argument was affected by the successive outcomes of the war as it was fought, but the fundamental outlook and position remained essentially unchanged throughout the series.

On 26 November 1941, thirteen days before Japan’s surprise attack

lution that proclaimed a ‘restoration’ of the days of old, modern Japan is a contradiction of terms,” *Dreams of Difference: The Japan Romantic School and the Crisis of Modernity* (U. of California P., 1994), pp. 16–7.

10. Löwith, p. 240.

11. [*Sekai shiteki tachiba to Nippon*] (Tokyo: Chuo-koron-sha, 1943, March 15). The work consists of the reports of the three symposia “World Historical Standpoint and Japan” (on 26 November 1941), “Ethics and Historicity of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” (4 March 1942), and “Philosophy of the Total War” (24 November 1942).

on Pearl Harbor (which triggered the Pacific phase of the Second World War), four leading intellectuals of the day got together in Tokyo to hold a round-table talk. The participants were all from Kyoto Imperial University: Kōsaka Masaaki (1900–69 Professor of Philosophy), Nishitani Keiji (1900–90 Professor of Philosophy), Kōyama Iwao (1905–93 Associate Professor of Philosophy), and Suzuki Shigetaka (1907–88 Associate Professor of Occidental History). They all belonged to the so-called “Kyoto School” of philosophy, whose charismatic leader was a philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), a man who was in Karl Löwith’s view “the only original thinker” of the day. Although he was absent from the symposia, Nishida’s influence was nonetheless almost omnipresent throughout the discussions.

At the outset, Kōsaka proposed to take up the issue of “the philosophy of history” in the present-day Japan, i.e., how it can and should be constructed under the present historical circumstances in which it finds itself. But, he argued, the issue would inevitably lead to the problem of “the philosophy of world history” because without a world-historical perspective any philosophical reflection on Japan’s history would be meaningless. Philosophizing about Japan’s history at that point in time thus meant philosophizing on the world-wide scale about what will become of Japan, what meaning it will come to bear, and what duty and responsibility it is expected to carry out in the world to come. But, importantly, Kōsaka went on to argue that Western philosophy of history (represented by Hegel and Ranke) would be useless in the construction of the much-needed philosophy of history for present Japan. His reason was that the situation Japan was now facing was so unique and specific that previous philosophical reflections on history would provide no appropriate model for Japan to benefit from.

From the beginning and throughout the whole discussion, the importance of the unique “historical self-consciousness” specific to contemporary Japan was emphasized. The participants, at that moment, were not aware of the surprise attack that was to be made in a couple of weeks’ time, but they seem to have smelt something unusual in the air. And no doubt this was precisely what urged Kōsaka, albeit subconsciously, to take up the problem of history at the outset of the whole discussion. They were somehow convinced that they were standing at the very threshold of a major historical change.

Along with such “historical self-consciousness” specific to contemporary Japan, the unique role it is expected to play for world history was equally stressed. At the bottom of this recognition rested the assumption that the West—which meant Europe and North America—had done more than enough for its mission of modernization and now had nothing any more to offer to the betterment of the rest of the world; furthermore, the West had come to impose its negative ideals of imperialism, colonialism, individualism and liberalism on the entire world. The participants of the discussion were of the opinion that world history seen from the Japanese standpoint differs from the one seen from the Western viewpoint. The latter (the West), due to its indelibly Eurocentric perspective and its sense of cultural superiority, failed to recognize matters of global significance as such, and when in rare instances it did, it either relegated them eventually to European affairs or took them merely as threats to European hegemony. Thus, they concluded, it was hardly possible that Europe could ever be awoken to the reality that it was but one of many local civilizations.

But the Japanese standpoint toward the world history, with its unique “historical self-consciousness,” as the participants of the discussion unanimously agreed, was fundamentally different from and far superior to the Western attitude. In the first place, this historical standpoint accorded the Japanese the privilege of perspective from which they could identify the limitations inherent in modern Western ideas and principles in action. And thus, if Japan had invaded China in the region of Manchuria back in 1931, according to the Kyoto philosophers’ understanding (which by the way represented that of the Japanese majority in those days) the action was never an instance of imperialist invasion but rather a justifiable countermove against Western imperialist hegemonism. If Japan had not taken this kind of counteraction, the logic goes, the whole of Asia would have fallen under the Western imperialist powers. As the first and the only Asian nation ever to be modernized, Japan took it as its duty to halt the further advances of Western hegemony in Asia.

Another outcome consequent to the “historical self-consciousness” uniquely enjoyed by the Japanese people is the facile endorsement of the project called “the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.” It was contended that such a project was necessary to stave off the on-going infiltration of Western colonization, to counter the Western political strat-

egy of bloc economics and to realize the unique role that contemporary world history assigns to Japan. But what kind of New Order could and should it be? On what principle and in what way should it be constructed?

It can be immediately said that the New Order, as the four philosophers from Kyoto depicted it in the course of their discussion, was characterized precisely by what the old order (the Western hegemony) lacked. What the Western way of thinking and doing was said to have lacked was the critical perspective to cope with such alleged evils as historical progressivism, historicism and its concomitant relativism and skepticism, unbridled individualism and liberalism, and the insoluble contradiction between scientific technology and spiritual concerns. The envisaged New Order was therefore expected to supersede these fundamental problems with radical innovations in both theory and practice. This was obviously a tall order. But, much to our surprise, the four philosophers from Kyoto eventually came up with a solution and presented an outline of the New Order. It is undeniable, however, that what they smugly considered the genuine solution seems to us, benefiting from the advantage of hindsight, to be merely a solution arrived at through the philosophers' stone (i.e., alchemy).

The philosophers' stone in this instance comprises several interrelated elements. The most important of all is the idea of "minzoku-kokka" (literally "the nation-state," but in its overtones it has the connotation of defining the nation in terms of ethnicity). As a "minzoku-kokka" Japan is structured like a grand family with the monarch as its head or father.<sup>12</sup> It is by dint of this grand family structure that it is able to overcome the unbridled individualism and liberalism from which the modern West is said to be suffering. Taken as a close-knit family, where the parts and the whole are indistinguishably interdependent, the "minzoku-kokka" does not allow any libertine individualism to run amuck but keeps it within the bounds of the harmonious whole. Not only in its structure but also in its content the "minzoku-kokka" is conceived of as a family: one can talk about the problems of "blood" and "life," and even collective "subjectivity." The "minzoku-kokka" is veritably a body politic, a family writ large with the monarch as its head, a vital entity with a collective sub-

12. See especially, the sections "the Ethics of *Minzoku* and the Ethics of the World" and "the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere As the Sphere of *Minzoku*" (pp. 184–211) and "Ethics of 'Family'" and "Politics and the Spirit of 'Family'" (pp. 225–49).

jectivity. Based upon these premises, the four scholars hit upon the charming idea of "moralische Energie."<sup>13</sup> The idea originates from Ranke and betrays their German-oriented culture, but the important thing is that this concept enabled them to indulge in nationalism and nativism without sounding anachronistically pre-modern. This fantastic concept allowed them to talk about such contentious issues as "ethnic national vitality," "ethnic national subjectivity" and "war as a touchstone of these,"<sup>14</sup> while giving them at the same time the illusion of overcoming the problems of relativism and skepticism as well as what was taken to be the insoluble contradiction between matters scientific and spiritual. The "moralische Energie," as it manifests itself in the collective subjectivity of the "minzoku-kokka," functions as a cure-all in any struggle against the modern West. Despite its weakness as a conceptual construct (or perhaps because of it?), the word "moralische Energie" seems to have caught on well not only among the discussants but also in the Japanese reading public at large.

Delighted and encouraged by the promising world view that the concept of "moralische Energie" opened up, the four philosophers went on to propose other principles for the New Order, which they found in the old traditions of Oriental philosophy. One concerned the philosophy of history and was used to cope with an annoying product of the modern West, the idea of "historical progressivism." Criticizing the idea of "historical progressivism" for its endemic proclivity to produce conflict, one of the Kyoto philosophers declared the superiority of the Japanese historical tradition both in theory and practice, a superiority that, according to him, was distinguished by a radical innovation that avoided all serious conflict. Another principle employed in the justification of the New Order is the principle of "absolute nothingness," which has deep roots in the traditional way of thinking. When it comes to "absolute nothingness," the Kyoto professors cannot help taking advantage of the precious ideas of their mentor, Nishida Kitarō. "In the Orient," Kōsaka said, "there is a different principle for an understanding of history which enables us to overcome the relativism and skepticism of the West. It is qualified by 'absolute nothingness.'"<sup>15</sup> In the same vein did he remark, "if you thor-

13. Op. cit., p. 101.

14. See the section entitled "World History and Moral," *ibid.*, pp. 101–12.

15. Op. cit., p. 72.

oughly consider the problem of historicism, one discovers the base of the absolute origin, or 'absolute nothingness,' and thereby one can overcome mere historicism."<sup>16</sup>

Lastly but not least, the good old traditional principle of "the right man in the right place" is brought to bear on the envisaged New Order.<sup>17</sup> To render it as "the right man in the right place" will certainly miss the correct meaning. The idea is of a more hierarchical sort, the pecking order, and it would be more appropriate to render it as "to place a human being where he (naturally) belongs." As you can easily see, the idea was proposed in order to overcome another product of modern West, the idea of the equality of mankind, which the four philosophers came to find merely a formal principle lacking in universal validity. The modern West, they claimed, had made use of the idea of equal rights only where and when it was to its advantage, whereas their own supreme principle of "to place a human being where he (naturally) belongs" is based on the more enduring foundation of natural law or the rationality of nature. Be that as it may, we find it difficult not to be embarrassed when we come to see that this principle was conducive to the project of the so-called "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," where the different ethnic groups in that area were hierarchically placed on the arrant principle of ethnic or national discrimination. What the Japanese did in the name of this "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" served only as the confirmation of their ethnic national superiority.

Starting with the unique "historical self-consciousness," which the Japanese were privileged to enjoy through the workings of world history, the four Kyoto philosophers' discussion ended with the idea of "the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," whose backbone principles were fabricated, as we have seen, with typical pre-modern concepts and values. The evils unleashed by the modern West were assumed to be eradicated by the New Order (which was new only in name and in fact constituted by pre-modern ideas of traditional Japan). Counter-modernization or "overcoming modernity" was attempted by appealing atavistically to the pre-modern tradition. If Karl Löwith had had a chance to attend these symposia he would have said something like this: that Japan's "overcoming modernity" is a logical impossibility because "modern Japan" itself is

16. Op. cit., p. 94.

17. Op. cit., p. 208.

a contradiction in terms. As a matter of fact, both projects (the modernization of Japan and the "overcoming modernity") were both envisaged on the same structural principle, which is none other than the monarchical system: the "*minzoku-kokka*" family with the monarch as its father. If the Meiji Restoration and its modernization were accomplished by an edict of the monarch, the project of "the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" was also an idea saturated with similarly valorized ideas. In fine, should we be forced to label the movement of "overcoming modernity" as "postmodern," then we'd also have to say, after the fashion of Karl Löwith, that both modern and postmodern Japan are equally a contradiction in terms.

### III

Such were the conditions under which things modern and "beyond the modern" (if we can name the movement of "overcoming modernity" this way) were treated in the prewar and interwar period of Japan. One might be tempted to ask: what was the situation like in the postwar period, since one would expect it to be very much different from that in the previous times. In my view, however, the situation does not appear to have changed much. At least that is the case, I believe, insofar as spiritual modernization, or being spiritually modern, means committing oneself to the pursuit of such grand ideals as liberty and equality at the risk of one's life. Now these values, "liberty and equality," are specifically Western ones, which Löwith as well as Hegelians (of various denominations) would characterize as "historical" because these are regarded as the driving forces, typically human, that will propel the onward movement of history as the Western world takes it. But, as we have seen with Löwith and the Kyoto philosophers, these were precisely the ideals that were characteristically lacking in prewar and interwar Japan. The question we must address in this connection, then, is "were these modern ideals finally understood and accepted in postwar Japan, where democracy was the keyword under the American occupation?" Naturally there can be no definitive answer. For, not only understanding and acceptance are different things in general, but the question in particular even demands the digestion of the ideals.

But, as luck would have it, in 1959 there happened to arrive in Japan a witness testifying that the Japanese were not yet modern in the sense that they had yet to embrace the concept of history that is propelled by the ideals of liberty and equality. The man who stood witness to this state of affairs is, as you know, Alexandre Kojève (1902–68), a Russian émigré philosopher and interpreter of Hegel. Following Hegel's thought in his unique way through *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he came to a fascinating conclusion in 1948 that “the Hegelian-Marxist end of history was not yet to come, but was already present, here and now.”<sup>18</sup> According to his theory, if “history” is a distinct story unfolded and realized by humans it must have its end in its double sense of the word. The end as an ideal is the driving force and thereby distinguishes the human being from other animals. But since “history” is a developmental process through which the human ideals are gradually brought into being, “history” has its logical end, its completion. Now, the ideals of liberty and equality, which stem from the distinguishing characteristic of human desire and function as the main driving force of modern history, seemed to Kojève in 1948 to be already realized in the United States. The United States represented a “classless society,” one in which humans had become “post-historical animals” whose needs were in their essentials fulfilled and satisfied because they in theory no longer had to fight for liberty and equality. He therefore placed it in the “post-historical period,” where the “American way of life” (as it was called symbolically) was paradigmatic, “the actual presence of the United States in the World prefiguring the ‘eternal present’ future of all of humanity.”<sup>19</sup>

But in 1959, after a significant visit to Japan, Kojève was compelled to make what he called “a radical change of opinion on this point.”<sup>20</sup> The “oriental” experience led him to write what is certain to remain one of the most fascinating accounts of the Japanese in the twentieth century.

There I was able to observe a Society that is one of a kind, because it alone has for almost three centuries experienced life at the “end of History”... “Post-historical” Japanese civilization undertook ways

18. A footnote to the second edition of his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Cornell UP., 1969), p. 160.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

20. *Loc. cit.*

diametrically opposed to the “American way.”<sup>21</sup>

To characterize the way of life the “post-historical Japanese” are leading, he called it “snobbery,” by which he apparently meant a kind of ritualistic formalism whose effectiveness toward human behavior, however, was stronger than that of such Western ideals as liberty and equality that had propelled its “historical” development. No doubt there was no longer in Japan any Religion, Morals or Politics in the “European” or “historical” sense of the word.

*Snobbery* in its pure form created disciplines negating the “natural” or “animal” given which in effectiveness far surpassed those that arose, in Japan or elsewhere, from “historical” Action—that is, from the warlike and revolutionary Fights or from forced Work.<sup>22</sup>

Whether his diagnosis of the Japanese as being “post-historical animals” holds true is less important than the fact that Kojève rightfully enough saw in Japanese society the lack of the “historical” sense as the West typically takes it, i.e., the “historical” sense in which humans will negate their natural given for the sake of such human ideals as equality and liberty. One may be tempted, as some actually are, to read in Kojève's account of the “post-historical” Japan a sort of theoretical justification for talking about a “postmodern” Japan. But I think there is neither rhyme nor reason for it. After all, Kojève was a perfectly good Hegelian and, as a complete Hegelian, his thought was strictly conditioned by the historical scope of his mentor, who had unfortunately entertained very little idea about the United States and no idea whatsoever about Japan. Coming to Japan, and embarrassed by what he had hardly expected, Kojève had merely to invent a different species of humans outside History, i.e., Western history. Should there be a student of Japanese postmodernism who seeks its theoretical foundation in Kojève's account of “post-historical” Japanese, she will therefore commit a blatant mistake. But Kojève was certainly right when he saw in the Japanese a different species of human beings which is unaccountable within the modern

21. *Loc. cit.*

22. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Western conceptual framework of history.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the half-a-century experience of democracy, the politico-cultural forces of collectivism and nativism, what I call “pre-modern” traditions, which informed the national bases of modern Japan do not seem to be inactive. Not that the sovereignty of the people and the basic human rights or the principle of equality have not been sufficiently understood. On the contrary, it is difficult to find any country in the postwar period where these fundamental ideas of democracy have been so thoroughly and so quickly learnt. From one perspective, it was the unintended completion of the modernization of Japan. For it was during the postwar decades that the spiritual modernization, which had been cautiously kept out of the Japanese modern project, was finally and quite abruptly carried through. Perhaps the problem is rather the very speed with which these fundamentals were inculcated and even swallowed. Enlarging upon the model of Freud’s concept of “unconscious,” scholars in the humanities are often talking of “political unconscious” or “cultural unconscious.” In my understanding, such an idea of the politico-cultural unconscious helps to explain the all-powerful and yet invisible forces of collectivism and nativism with which the modern Japanese otherwise enlightened mentality is, of only on rare occasions, carried away. Deep within the cultural unconscious of the modern Japanese there still lurks the powerful pre-modern sensibility. Instances that demonstrate the existence and power of this undercurrent are numerous and varying in degrees. Of these, one of the most outstanding that has ever happened in recent times was the collapse and death of the last Emperor Showa, or better known as Emperor Hirohito.

Emperor Hirohito died on January 7, 1989. The ritual of burial, as the author of *In the Realm of A Dying Emperor* (1991) describes it, could not be performed without reference to the double structure of modern Japan.

From the instant of his death to the staging of his burial some forty days later, the state choreographed an elaborate dance representing constitu-

23. As for Kojève and Japan, see Alan Wolfe, “Suicide and Japanese Postmodern: A Postnarrative Paradigm?” in *Postmodernism and Japan*, eds. Masao Miyoshi & H. D. Harootunian (Durham & London: Duke UP., 1989), pp. 220–22. See also, Shadia B. Drury, *Alexandre Kojève* (Macmillan, 1994), pp. 53–56.

tionality and mystery. Western modernity and Eastern tradition. The dance had to suggest a history at once progressive and alluring, glossing adroitly over the interlude of war to elaborate the forty years of postwar prosperity.<sup>24</sup>

But what was most impressive to the native Japanese as well as to the foreigners was the behavior of the whole society, which literally came to a halt and standstill for over four months from his collapse on September 19, 1988 through his death on January 7, 1989. “Daily reverential reporting on the body of the emperor throughout the island nation both provoked and reinforced a massively orchestrated exercise in ‘self-restraint,’ or *jishuku*, a newly popularized word.”<sup>25</sup> In the national promotion of “self-restraint” innumerable activities and conducts, daily or otherwise, fell victim one after another to the pressure of collectivism, ranging from the use of felicitous wording such as “nice day” from commercials, and of alcohol from political fund-raisers, seasonal neighborhood festivals, weddings etc., etc. Among those who stood an eyewitness to these abstemious behaviors under the shadow of the Emperor’s imminent death, I believe I was not alone at that time in being reminded of the myth of the Arthurian legend in medieval Europe, the dying king with the corresponding mortal effects on all that surround him, from nature, the realm and cities to his people.

Now this was as recent as 1989, when people in Japan took it for granted that they were on the right track through modernity and even, as some fancied that way, post-modernity, carrying with them the modern passports of democracy, capitalism and scientific technology. But then, suddenly and willy-nilly, they were forced to recognize the existence at subconscious level of a totally different dimension that rejects all the essential passports for modernity. In a way, it was a forced recognition of what an eminent scholar of Japanese culture calls the two “different temporalities,”<sup>26</sup> whose clash lay at the heart of Japan’s modern experience: one the unchanging that approaches eternity, the other the fast changing that belongs to capitalism. And it may come as no surprise if these

24. Norma Field, *In the Realm of A Dying Emperor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 20.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

26. Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton UP., 2000), p. xxiv.



“two temporalities,” another version of the double structure we have been discussing, were captured by a novelist Tokunaga Sunao, a contemporary of Tanizaki, back in the 1920.

The streetcars, automobiles, trucks and bicycles all stop; even the side cars, which come flying impetuously, chained to each other, come to a halt. What’s happened? What has occurred? The pale November sun brings out swarms of people as if they were rough knobs in a sand storm. The human waves, like a cluster of beads in a pool, shove against each other and begin to sway. What has happened is the “Imperial Passing Through,” the visitation of an important personage to the Prince Regent. Whispers that begin at the front [of the stalled crowd] spread, in an instant, to the rear. The motor cars stop their buzzing; people remove their hats.<sup>27</sup>

A temporality of modernity propelled by capitalism and supported by democracy, like a bolt out of the blue, came to a standstill, while a different temporality, the moment of pre-modern timelessness with its invisible but immediately felt<sup>28</sup> authority, exerted its potentials. It appears that the problem with modern Japan, as scholars of different specialties point out, can essentially be sought in this double temporality, double structure. Not that I am problematizing the emperor system as such, let alone individual emperors. What I would like to emphasize is the point that this fundamental double structure of modern Japan dies hard, producing, as I suspect, some of the serious problems in crucial matters both private and public. Or rather, the spontaneous overflow of the pleasure of pre-modern collectivism stays so powerful that it works to the detriment of the healthy territorialization in mentality between public and private spheres. The social field and the disciplined individual, each in its genuine sense of the word, are yet to be born. After all, it was a thing to be remembered that the postwar democracy had been declared and carried out in a similar way as the earlier Meiji modernization had been done—as Karl Löwith pointed out—under the monarch’s edict.

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27. *Taiyo no nai machi* (Steets without sun), quoted in loc. cit.

28. As for the immediacy as a pre-modern characteristic, see Tansman, p. 16.