

## *Japanese Theologian Uwoki Tadakazu and His “Japanese Religious Spirit” in Wartime*

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### *Introduction*

In the last few years, there have been an increasing number of publications concerning the attitudes of Japanese scholars towards the wartime government, when freedom of expression and religious practice were restricted.<sup>1</sup> Writers of such literature claim that enough time has passed to reflect on the period. The Liberal Democratic Party’s recent move towards re-militarization and its emphasis on creating a stronger national consciousness through educational reform, have prompted some to reconsider the wartime emperor system [*tennousei*].<sup>2</sup> Among Christian scholars, there has been a debate concerning the intentions of those who argued for “Japanese Christianity” during the war.<sup>3</sup> Questions have

1. Eiichi Amemiya, “Jyo Nihon ni okeru Kaareru Baruto shingaku juyou nitsuiteno mondai teiki,” in *Nihon ni okeru Karl Barth: haisen madeno juyoushi no shodenmen*, ed. Barth shingaku juyoushi kenkyukai (Tokyo: kabushikigaisha shinkyou shuppansha, 2009), 30–31; Mitsuo Miyata, *Kenni to fukujuu: Kindai nihon ni okeru romasho 13 shou* (Tokyo: Kabushikigaisha shinkyoushuppansha, 2004); Susumu Shimazono, *Kokkashintou to nihonjin* (Tokyo: Iwanamishoten, 2010); Norihisa Suzuki, “Shuukyougaku kenkyuusha no shakaiteki hatsugen,” *Shuukyoukenkyuu* 78, no.4 (2005): 1229–1248.
2. Amemiya, “Jyo.” 15–18; Dohi Akio, “Hajimeni,” in *Jyugonen sensouki no tennousei to kirisutokyoo*, ed. Tomisaka kirisutokyoo sentaa (Tokyo: Shinkyou shuppansha, 2007), 1–3.
3. Makoto Hara, “Senjiki no kirisutokyoo shisou: nihonteki kirisutokyoo wo chuishin ni,” *Kirisutokyoo kenkyuu* 61 no. 2 (1999): 79–105; Mikaru Ishihama, “Senji wo tootta kirisutosha tachi,” in *Jyugonen sensouki no tennousei to kirisutokyoo*, ed. Tomisaka kirisutokyoo center (Tokyo: Shinkyo Shuppansha, 2007), 490–544; Yoshimitsu Kasahara, “Nihonteki kirisutokyoo’ hihan,” *Kirisutokyoo shakai mondai kenkyuu* 22 (1974): 114–139; Yoshitaka Kumano, “Nihonteki kirisutokyoo sono 2,” *Fukuin to Sekai* (March 1972): 95–99;

been raised as to whether Christians should have spoken in favor of the government and the emperor, or should have been loyal to Christian doctrine.<sup>4</sup> In this essay, I look at how Uwoki Tadakazu (1892–1954), a protestant theologian at the Doshisha University, uses the phrase “Japanese religious spirit” [*nihon shuukyou seishin*] to explain what he calls “Japanese Christianity” [*nihon kirisutokyou*] in his most famous book, *Nihon kirisutokyou no seishiteki dentou* [The Spiritual Tradition of Japanese Christianity, 1941].<sup>5</sup> While Uwoki spoke in favor of Japanese Christianity, some critics argue that his reason for doing so was not solely to support the government.<sup>6</sup> I attempt to tease out his perception of the Christian God in relation to Japanese religious spirit, and the complication involved in support for the wartime government’s ideology.

During the Fifteen-Year War (1931–1945), there was heightened national consciousness among scholars of various fields.<sup>7</sup> Following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the increase in government censorship led many intellectuals to publicly support national policies. While the Japanese government upheld freedom of religious belief in its constitution, it kept close ties with Kokka Shinto, a government-supported branch of Shinto, by calling it a “non-religion.”<sup>8</sup> Kokka Shinto was created during the Meiji period by combining Shinto with the system of reverence for the royal family and the emperor to unite Japan as a nation state. The emperor was considered a direct descendent of the Shinto goddess Amaterasu.<sup>9</sup> Educational policies based on the Kokka Shinto were issued, and those who disobeyed were arrested and imprisoned.

From the 1930s throughout World War II, the term “Japanese spirit” [*nihonseishin*] was commonly utilized by the Japanese government, by

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Kyoungae Lee, “Nihonteki kirisutokyou wo megutte: Uwoki tadakazu Nihonkirisutokyou no seishin dentou ni tsuite no ichikousatsu,” *Orio aishin tannki daigaku ronbunnshuu* 0, no. 41 (2007): 3–18; Miyata, *Kenni*, 123–154, 273.

4. Mitsuo Miyata, *Kokka to shuukyou romasho jyuusanshou kaishakushi eikyoushi no kenkyuu* (Tokyo: Iwanamishoten, 2010).

5. Tadakazu Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyou no seishinteki dento* (Tokyo: Daikuusha, 1941).

6. Hara, “Senjiki no,” 97; Kumano, “Nihonteki kirisutokyou sono 2,” 95.

7. Hara, “Senjiki,” 79–105; Ishihama, “Senji,” 490–544; Kasahara, “Nihonteki,” 114–139; Miyata, *Kenni*, 123–154, 273; Suzuki, “Shuukyougaku,” 315–334.

8. Shimazono, *Kokka*, 3, 7, 17.

9. Shimazono, *Kokka*, 57.

philosophers and scholars of religion.<sup>10</sup> Although the notion of “Japanese spirit” was used in various ways and scholars argued about it, the government defined it as a consciousness that revered the emperor as the nation’s supernatural leader.<sup>11</sup> The term was used to promote the ethnic consciousness of the Japanese people, and to convey Japanese uniqueness and superiority over other nations. The government promoted the idea of Japanese spirit in the minds of the people by establishing research institutions, issuing laws, publishing pamphlets, and teaching children at schools. With the Japanese spirit, Japanese people were to show total loyalty towards the unique state, or *kokutai*, which consisted of the ties between the godly emperor and the people. National consciousness in Japan had been closely related to religion.<sup>12</sup>

There had been an elevated awareness among Christian scholars about the compatibility of Christianity, a universal religion, and the national identity centered on the emperor, as imposed by the Japanese government. Because the government viewed Christianity as “foreign,” there was an active discourse on what “Japanese Christianity” [*nihon teki kirisutokyou*] or [*nihon kirisutokyou*] might be.<sup>13</sup> The definition of Japanese Christianity varied, but many argued for the similarities between Shinto and Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Few Christian scholars and pastors actively wrote about Japanese Christianity and tried to reconcile the total

10. Ishihama, “Senji,” 490–544; Suzuki, “Shuukyougaku,” 315–334; Yasuji Tanaka, “Nihonseishinron no ryuuukou to hennyou,” in 1930 *nendaito sesshoku kuukan diasupora shisou to buugaku*, ed. Ko Ogata (Tokyo: Soubunsha shuppan, 2008), 62–91.

11. Ishihama, “Senji,” 490.

12. Shimazono, *Kokka*, 57, 61, 166–167; Watanabe Hiroshi, *Nihonseiji Shisoushi jyuunana kara juukyuu seiki* (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 2010), 345, 418–419. State building in Japan was closely done in relation to religion following the *seijo* (Western) model in which the Japanese intellectuals saw Christianity as being the uniting factor of the nation state. Ito Hirofumi said that Japan should place the emperor as being the head of the state, just as Christianity unites people of European states.

13. Takashi Gonoi, *Nihon kirisutokyou shi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawakoubunkan, 1990), 280–281, 304–305. In some ways, Christians in Japan had always seen it as “the religion of the West” (*youkyou*). The government persecuted Christians since the Edo period, and again during the Fifteen Year War. Those Christians who disobeyed government principles were persecuted. Because of this, around the late 1890s Christian churches began to support the government and speak about “Japanese Christianity.”

14. Hara, “Senjiki,” 79–105.

loyalty towards the emperor and Christian God, but most of them failed to make logical statements.<sup>15</sup> Scholars have criticized those who actively praised the emperor or, merged the emperor with the Christian God instead of fighting for their belief.<sup>16</sup>

There is a difficulty in labeling Uwoki as being solely for or against the government's wartime policy. The Japanese intellectual historian, Maeda Tsutomu, states that it is too easy to criticize the wartime intellectuals' notion of the Japanese tradition, which contributes to nation-state building. Maeda comments on the Japanese intellectual historian Muraoka Tsunetsugu's (1884–1946) use of "Japanese spirit." According to Maeda, Muraoka recognized that Japanese spirit existed like a container ever since the beginning of Japan and that only its contents changed over time. In this sense, Muraoka could not go beyond the influence of political discourse of his time. Yet, Maeda suggests that, like Uwoki, Muraoka was interested in historical experiences which defined the Japanese spirit, rather than just following the nationalist discourse. Therefore, we should credit him for his effort to find something universal.<sup>17</sup> I attempt to follow Maeda's argument that it is important to look at the writing and its context carefully and to find out what it can teach us today.

In *Nihonkirisutokyou no seishinteki dento*, Uwoki looks at the historical process by which the "essence of Christianity," [*Kirisutokyou no honshitsu*] or [*Kirisutokyou no shinzui*], has been revealed to the Japanese people<sup>18</sup>. He assumes that all Japanese have an innate essence that he calls the Japanese religious spirit. Upon an encounter with a new religion, this Japanese religious spirit evocates [*shokuhatsu*] and acknowledges the truths revealed from the religion. As a result, the encounter "produces" a new form of religion, such as Japanese Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Although Uwoki's concept of Japanese Christianity has been studied previously, his interpretation of the Japanese religious spirit has not received the same attention.<sup>20</sup> I suggest that Uwoki's interpretation of the Japanese religious

15. Hara, "Senjiki," 99; Kasahara, "Nihonteki kirisutokyou," 36–139; Miyata, *Kenni*, 135–154.

16. Amemiya, *Nihon ni okeru*, 17, 28–35; Miyata, *Kenni*, 1–3.

17. Tsutomu Maeda, "Kaisetsu," in *Shinnpen nihonshisoushi kenkyuu Muraoka Noritsugu ron-bun sen*, ed. Tsutomu Maeda (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2004), 435–438.

18. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyou*, 30–31.

19. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyou*, 25.

20. Hara, "Senjiki no," 79–105; Kasahara, "Nihonteki kirisutokyou," 114–139; Kumano,

spirit as an agent that regulates the acceptance of Christianity contradicts his understanding of the Christian God as being the one and only God that transcends all other historical beings. As a result, his work ends up emphasizing the superiority and transcendence of the Japanese religious spirit much like the pre-war and wartime government discourse despite his academic interest that is supposedly distinct from it.

### *Political Context of Uwoki*

In some ways, the censorship during the war period was particularly harsh for Christians as their churches were financially supported by Americans, and many theologians and church personnel studied in the U.S. and Germany.<sup>21</sup> In 1935, the government strengthened the imposition of the Peace Preservation Laws to pressure religious organizations to follow the emperor-centered state policies. There was a total control of thoughts through censorship and police surveillance. In 1939 a law which allowed the government to control religious institutions [*shuukyou dantai houan*] was issued. World War II began in 1941, which was the year in which Uwoki’s book was published. In the same year, the United Church of Christ in Japan was founded, but it kept quiet about the government’s war policy.<sup>22</sup> Because of the harsh thought control, most Christians supported government policy in this political environment. Few Christians who were disrespectful towards the government ideology were arrested.<sup>23</sup>

It is difficult to tell what political stance Uwoki held. Theologians, Kumano Yoshitaka and Hara Makoto have claimed that he was not in support of the government policy, but that his interest in emphasizing the classification of Japanese Christianity was “solely academic.”<sup>24</sup> Uwoki was greatly influenced by a German theologian Adolf von Harnack who spoke of the historical and cultural influences on the acceptance

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“Nihonteki kirisutokyou sono 2,” 94–99; Miyata, *Kenni*, 123–154, 273; Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyou*, 36. The term “formation” or *souzou* in Japanese is used by Uwoki.

21. Gono, *Nihonkirisutokyou shi*, 293.

22. Gono, *Nihonkirisutokyou shi*, 297–300.

23. Gono, *Nihonkirisutokyou shi*, 303.

24. Hara, “Senjiki no,” 97; Kumano, “Nihonteki kirisutokyou sono 2,” 95.

of Christian essence. He also studied under an American theologian, Arthur C. McGiffert, who worked on church history. His Japanese teacher included Ebina Danjo, who spoke of Japanese Christianity as being compatible with the emperor-centered state ideology.<sup>25</sup> Kumano and Hara state that Uwoki's academic reasoning applies to the question of the indigenization of Christianity, which is an academic topic that has been relevant in the post-war era.<sup>26</sup> In fact, Uwoki's 1952 article, "The Influence of Non-Christian Religions on Japanese Life and Thought," also reveals his belief in the importance of "culture" for understanding religion.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, other theologians and scholars of Christianity argue that Uwoki had a nationalistic goal which supported the war. Kasahara Yoshimitsu writes that while Uwoki had an academic interest in formulating Japanese Christianity, he ended up agreeing with the nationalist ideology of the time that stated there should be a Japanese Christianity based on Japanese spirit.<sup>28</sup> Miyata Mitsuo also addresses that Uwoki praises Japanese Christianity as the most enriched in its content.<sup>29</sup> Lee Kyoungae points out that Uwoki grounds his Japanese Christianity on Shinto-based national consciousness.<sup>30</sup> A combination of the two groups of criticisms seems to apply to Uwoki. In the following, I will make a close reading of Uwoki's text to reveal his struggle to reconcile the Christian

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25. Tetsutaro Ariga, "Ko uwoki tadakazu kyouju ryakureki," *Kirisutokyō kenkyū* 28 (1955): 173–177; Kasahara, "Nihonteki kirisutokyō shi," 119–120; Masataro Matsumoto, "Uwoki tadakazu kyouju wo tsuishaku shite," *Kirisutokyō kenkyū* 28, no. 3–4 (1955): 182–187.

26. Hara, "Senjiki no," 97; Yoshitaka Kumano, "Nihonteki kirisutokyō sono 6," *Fukuin to Sekai* 9 (1972): 98.

27. Tadakazu Uwoki, "The Influence of Non-Christian Religions on Japanese Life and Thought- Problems and Suggestions for Christian Evangelism," *Kirisutokyō kenkyū* 32, no. 4 (1963): 13–38; Kumano, "Nihonteki kirisutokyō sono 2," 95. Kumano also argues that he does not mix Christian truth with Japanese spirit. Kumano, for example, argues that Uwoki uses "Japanese Christianity" [*nihon kirisutokyō*] instead of "Japanese-oriented Christianity, or "Japanese like Christianity" [*nihonteki kirisutokyō*], because he does not think that the essence of Christianity is modified for the Japanese way of life, but that "it remains the same and appears through the Japanese land."

28. Kasahara, "Nihonteki kirisutokyō shi," 134.

29. Miyata, *Kenni*, 147.

30. Lee, "Nihonteki," 9–13.

doctrine with government ideology.

### *Christianity for Uwoki*

Uwoki writes that Christianity is a “spiritual religion” [*seishinteki shuukyou*]. He uses this term to emphasize the importance of spiritual experience in Christianity and distinguishes it from religions that are focused on dogma and philosophy.<sup>31</sup> The essence of Christianity is accepted only through the evocation of an individual’s ethnically-specific “religious spirit” [*shuukyou seishin*].<sup>32</sup> Christianity is acquired by people only if their ethnically-specific religious spirit is evoked by the Christian spirit [*kirisutokyō seishin*].<sup>33</sup> Uwoki seems to take Japanese religious spirit for granted and does not provide its definition. Yet it can be drawn from the text that the term refers to an ethnically-specific essence which has existed in Japanese people throughout history. Uwoki states that the nature of the Japanese religious spirit and its evocation through Christianity determines Japanese people’s interpretation of the Christian essence.<sup>34</sup>

Uwoki argues that the essence of Christianity, such as principles taught by Jesus through the Gospels, is initially hidden from individuals, and that its worldly revelation takes place through historically and environmentally specific “types of understanding” [*kirisutokyō rikai youshiki*] of believers.<sup>35</sup> In other words, “Christian spiritual history is about reaching to the Eternal and Absolute through *what is specific and relative*” [emphasis added].<sup>36</sup> The nature of Christianity is that its “eternal” [*eien naru mono*] God is accepted by people through their worldly experiences.<sup>37</sup> He writes that “Christian Revelation is the Revelation of the transcendental *God who exists beyond historical experience and thought*. If the Revelation involves the transcendental God touching

31. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 3.

32. Uwoki, *Nhionkirisutokyō*, 3, 15.

33. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 5–6, 5.

34. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisuokyō*, 6–9.

35. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 8, 9–10.

36. Uwoki, *Nihokirisutokyō*, 16.

37. Uwoki, *Nihokirisutokyō*, 16.

the historical world, then Revelation cannot exist without historical phenomena.”<sup>38</sup> These specific types of understanding are formed under what he calls the “spiritual tradition” [*seishinteki dentou*] of each “ethnic group” [*minzoku*.]<sup>39</sup> In Uwoki’s theory, the universal essence of Christianity is revealed when different forms of Christian practice, such as the Japanese type [*nihon ruikeri*] and Anglo-Saxon type [*anguro saxon ruikeri*], are compared and integrated.<sup>40</sup>

### *Japanese Religious Spirit*

Uwoki believed that without the presence of an “ethnic spirit” [*minzoku seishin*], formulated through a particular “spiritual tradition” [*seishinteki dentou*], the Christian essence could not be acknowledged.<sup>41</sup> Thus he writes that “the reason for the existence of Christianity [in Japan], relies on the [Japanese] spiritual tradition.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, if the “Japanese religious spirit” had no need for what Christianity could offer, or if it did not have the ability to acknowledge the essence of Christianity, Christianity would not have been accepted by any Japanese. This is in spite of the fact that Christian Revelation is “made possible by the work of the Gospel” [*fukuin no honshitsuteki na hataraki*] that is transcendental.<sup>43</sup>

Uwoki writes that the hidden essence of Christianity was understood by the Japanese through Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shinto, which spread before the arrival of Christianity in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> and mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example, the ethics of Protestantism, when it arrived in

38. “啓示とはなにか。それは思惟と體驗とを絶する超越の神の啓示である。超越神が歴史の世界に觸れることが啓示であるとすれば、歴史的事実性を持たぬ啓示は存しない。基督教に於ける啓示は、一方に超越的なる神を豫想すると共に、他方に基督の歴史的事実性を不可欠の條件とする。”

Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 213.

39. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 39.

40. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 9. As already mentioned, Uwoki’s ideas on spiritual history were influenced by German theologians, such as Adolf von Harnack. According to Uwoki, Harnack emphasized the influence of historical and environmental factors on the revelation of the Gospel’s work.

41. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 39.

42. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 39.

43. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 166.

1859, were understood through the lens of Confucianism, which was the predominant teaching among the elites at the time. According to Uwoki, the Christian concept of salvation attracted the intellectuals and *bushi* who could not feel saved through Confucianism.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the understanding of the Shinto god as creator, together with the Confucian teaching of loyalty, supported the acknowledgement of the Christian God.<sup>45</sup> Uwoki argues that Japanese Christianity reveals the most Christian essence out of all other forms, such as the Anglo-Saxon type, because the Japanese religious spirit had been exposed to multiple religions and developed the ability to acknowledge many aspects of the hidden essence of Christianity.<sup>46</sup> Here he seems to support the Japanese government’s invasion of Asia, for he writes, “Japan has the responsibility to spread Japanese Christianity in East Asia because it unifies Eastern and Western elements and is therefore the superior form of Christianity in the region.”<sup>47</sup>

Uwoki tries to reconcile the coexistence of the national consciousness based on the belief in the Shinto god Amaterasu and the essence of Christianity, but fails to do so.<sup>48</sup> He asserts that Christianity should be strongly grounded in the “national consciousness” [*kokuminteki ishiki*] in order for the Japanese to accept it and produce a distinctively Japanese Christianity.<sup>49</sup> He writes, “without the existence of national consciousness, there wouldn’t have been the development of Japanese Christianity.”<sup>50</sup> While Uwoki is careful to note that no “Japanese element” would mix with Christianity and change its essence, his acknowledgment contradicts the transcendental nature of the Christian God. He writes, “the right development does not involve mixing [...]. Christianity should play the role of nurturing the religious spirit of the Japanese citizens through *being a pure and simple*” Christianity [emphasis

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44. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyou*, 34. At that time, Buddhism was not dominantly accepted by the elites.

45. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyou*, 187–193.

46. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyou*, 35–39.

47. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyou*, 36, 194.

48. Lee, “Nihonteki,” 9–13.

49. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyou*, 34.

50. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyou*, 38.

added].<sup>51</sup> Yet, Uwoki suggests that the Japanese religious spirit and the Christian spirit function in a similar way in that they both exist throughout history, and “are revealed through *each other*” [emphasis added] and “develop” each other through interactions.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Uwoki writes that “it’s not that there were two spiritual principles, one Christian [*kirisutokyō seishinshugi*] and the other Japanese [*nihon seishinsugi*], but what existed was one and the same tendency of spiritual principle.”<sup>53</sup> While this comment may suggest a permeation of the Christian universal message, it is difficult to see how Christianity can be separated from, or transcend the Japanese religious spirit or any other Japanese quality.

### *Conclusion*

Uwoki’s contradiction, which equates the function of the historical Japanese religious spirit with the universal and transcendental Christian revelation, is the result of his intellectual interest in historically different types of revelation of Christian truth and a political environment of harsh censorship. Kumano states that, in addition to Uwoki’s academic influences from German and American theologians, his use of “Japanese religious spirit” reflects the situation of wartime Christian scholars, when Christianity had to be defended from government which labeled it as being the religion of the enemy. In his opinion, it is unfair to criticize Uwoki for his position regarding Japan, and that we need to understand the political context in which Christians were persecuted.<sup>54</sup> However, an author’s intention does not necessarily lead to an intended effect of

51. “基督教も亦単純なる基督教であることにより國民の宗教的精神の培養に役立つべきである。”

Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 7.

52. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 140; “基督教の特色は習合宗教を案出することでなく、神道は神道、佛教は佛教、基督教は基督教として存續しつゝ、最も密接なる相互關係に立つことを信ずる處に在る。相互關係とは、他を深めつゝ自らを深めることで、之が眞の意味に於ける福音傳道である。” Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 193.

53. “基督教精神主義とわが國固有の精神主義との、二種の精神主義があったのではなく、存在したものは唯一不二の精神主義的動向であった。” Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 145; Uwoki writes, that he cannot translate 精神主義 [*seishinshugi*] into a non-Japanese language, and that “Spiritualism” or “Geistigkeit” do not really say what the term means. Uwoki, *Nihonkirisutokyō*, 140.

54. Kumano, “Nihonteki kirisutokyō sono 6,” 97.

a book. Regardless of his intention or political stance, a close analysis of Uwoki’s Japanese religious spirit shows that he could not escape the dominant nationalist discourse to reach the universal truth, which he claimed to believe. Uwoki reveals the intellectual’s struggle among many ideologies that each called for universality. He leaves contemporary scholars with a question of how to reconcile nationalist discourse with a trans-historical message.

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