

1. Research

Political philosophy of the Kyoto School, 1932-1945

- Mostly approached as appendage to philosophy of religion or nationalist/fascist ideology by
 - (1) Comparative philosophers of religion and
 - (2) Historians of Japan.

Both pass moral judgement on political behaviour rather than engage with the ideas, i.e. “side-stepping” and “side-swiping” (Heisig 2009).

- A “third way” less frequently travelled: Political philosophy/theory and history of political thought.
- Filling a “Japan-shaped hole” in comparative political theory.

Core question 1

What was the Kyoto School?

- According to (1) “philosophy of nothingness” (Heisig 2001, Ohashi 2012), with philosophy of religion as “arche and telos” (Davis 2014); according to (2) it defined “the philosophic contours of Japanese fascism” (Najita & Harootunian 1998).
- A different answer, based on Tosaka Jun’s original political/sociological definition (1932): An intellectual network with no conceptual unity or privileged place for Buddhism (Steffensen 2016; 2017abc; Fujita 2001; Nakai 1956). By no means a “racial philosophy of total war” (Heisig 1991 and many others).

Core question 2

Who was in, who was out?

- First generation no problem: Nishida & Tanabe (Tosaka excludes Watsuji, Kuki. Nakai includes Watsuji, Kuki, Hatano).
- Second generation: Post-hoc elevation of Nishitani to status of “third man” (Heisig, Goto-Jones et al.), when contemporary sources identify Miki as Nishida’s “formidable successor” (Tosaka, Steffensen 2016; 2017abc).
- Why was Miki written out and Nishitani written in? Marx and the “politics problem.”

Core question 3

Political philosophy in the Kyoto School

- According to group (1) a “series of questionable footnotes” (Davis 2014) by well-meaning but politically naïve intellectuals.
- According to group (2) a form of racist “Japanese-style fascism” directly inspired by Heidegger, Rocco, Gentile, Hitler, Mussolini (Fletcher, Pincus, Thomas, Harootunian, Goto-Jones).
- The original definition was political, what made Miki Nishida’s heir was *Philosophy of History* (1930). KS philosophers produced original social & political theory in dialogue with Marxism (Tosaka, Steffensen 2016, 2017).

Core question 4

What kind of political philosophy?

- Divergent positions, but most draw on East Asian and mostly German sources to question ontological and methodological assumptions of liberal individualism, self-universalising Eurocentrism, tradition and modernity, subjectivity, political agency, community.
- Remarkable parallels with post-Rawlsian communitarianism (Taylor, Sandel, MacIntyre) and postcolonial theorisation of subjectivity, agency and resistance.

2. Career so far



The making of an accidental philosopher

- Irish Research Council MSCA COFUND (60/40) career development fellowship, 2014-2017.
- A long and winding road through three countries and two disciplines to a doctorate in philosophy 2014.
- University College Cork, 2014.
- University of Tokyo, 2015-2016.
- University College Dublin, 2017.

2.1. Two years in Tokyo

Tokyo, Cork and Dublin: A tale of three cities

- Tokyo: Warm welcome, excellent administrative support, intellectually diverse and stimulating environment, supportive mentoring, networking opportunities.
- Cork: From no. 1 in Europe and 2 in the world to obscurity in comparative philosophy. First mentor left, second retired.
- Dublin: “Re-integration phase” at UCD. Welcoming, pluralistic department developing connections with and interest in Japan and China.
- Moving country, especially with family, takes effort and time. Tokyo could learn from Copenhagen re. schooling.

3. Career plans

Country, institution, prospects: A complex equation

- Goal: Professionally and financially rewarding position in place that gives “greatest utility to the greatest number” of family members.
- Preference for Tokyo, but not at all costs.
- “Europe” is an abstraction papering over enormous differences in salary, progression, funding, socio-economic conditions, political situation... Specific institutions in Europe attractive, others less so.
- “Hurdles and difficulties”: Moving back harder than moving to Japan. Japanese/East Asian political philosophy a “homeless” field.