

## **Bridging Civilizations through Nothingness: Manchuria As Nishida Kitaro's "Place"**

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This paper examines the notion of bridging civilizations in Asia, especially in pre-War Japan. While the bridge is intended to bring together the East and the West, it inevitably shares an ontological assumption that leads to a confrontational understanding of civilization politics: the East and the West have to be ontologically distinctive from each other, on opposite sides of the bridge. The momentum of confrontation comes not only from the believed distinction between the two, but also from the attempt to integrate the "East" into one single action unit to defend against the intrusion of the West.

This paper is a conceptual exercise to explain how in the modern Japanese mind, the distinctive notions of bridging civilizations, Manchukuo, and China could have all been connected to Western imperialism in Asia, pointing out that Manchukuo has been an ideal place for Japan to demonstrate its role as a bridge between civilizations, other than just nationalism or colonialism familiar in the literature.<sup>1</sup> This paper will also discern how and why the quest for transcendence, presupposed by the bridge analogy, could come from a retrospective discourse, as opposed to future-oriented mutual learning and mingling. Under the peculiar narrative framework of the Japanese bridge, "Japan" existed even before the birth of civilizations.

Japan belonged within the scope of Oriental despotism designated for all Eastern polities by Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).<sup>2</sup> Japan's practice of bridging in Manchuria, through the establishment of Manchukuo (1932-1945) united all narrators involved in the debate on Asia in general and China in particular. Few, if any, were opposed to the annexation of Manchuria despite the great differences in deriving philosophical justifications of the act.<sup>3</sup> Manchukuo served as a promise of "the Princely Way and the Happy Land," where East and West were allegedly harmonized.<sup>4</sup> The epistemological speculation of this paper is that Manchuria served two functions in the construction of Japanese modernity: Manchuria could transcend the ontological distinction between East and West by finding a higher ontology in nothingness; and Manchuria could demonstrate the absolute inclusiveness of the Japanese nation as a collective bridge of civilizations.

To appreciate the philosophical value of Manchukuo, this paper closely examines Nishida Kitaro's (1870-1945) views. This is not because Nishida had spoken on Manchuria but because Manchuria, as reification, made his philosophy of nothingness practically relevant. Most existing notes on Manchukuo attest to the ardent support provided by Oriental (*toyo*) Studies, which was in association with the Tokyo school indebted to Shiratori Kurakichi (1865-1942). Few ever tried to trace Manchukuo in the thoughts of the contending Kyoto School, of which Nishida was the founder. A possible explanation for the absence of Nishida in the literature on Manchukuo is the Kyoto school's strong relationship with the navy; Manchukuo was the result of efforts by the army, which was allied to the Tokyo School. The following discussion links the notion of bridging civilizations to Japanese modernity, then to Nishida's philosophy of nothingness, and finally to Manchuria and Manchukuo.

### **Bridging Civilizations: The Meanings**

A bridge of civilizations exists wherever different civilizations meet. Theoretically, this rendezvous point could exist at any level of civilization – say, a matchmaker between two family traditions. However, to justify one's own community as a bridge of civilizations requires conscious conceptualization of a self-role as a two-way meeting point. Colonies often witness the adoption of the notion of the bridge, especially among indigenous intellectuals trained in the 'motherland'. In the following discussion, "bridging civilizations" refers to those thinkers, places, themes, mechanisms and other factors that provide routes allowing mutual influence between different civilizations, as defined by any narrators on civilizations. The missionary, the merchant or the comprador facilitating one-sided influences are not considered relevant in this paper.

Bridges that have been consciously understood as bridging the East and the West probably exist everywhere in Asia – except in China. Usually intellectuals from communities suffering the intrusion of imperialism are ready to re-evaluate their own past. One useful way to compensate for the humiliation brought by political and military defeat was to stress the spiritual superiority of one's cultural tradition. The adherence to tradition would typically run into criticism from progressive forces eager to promote Westernization as the only way to revive the nation. Equally notable is the advocacy for a mix that reconciles the conservative with the progressive. All three approaches inevitably turn hybrid as the conservatives should also acknowledge and desire the material superiority of the West while the progressives have likewise settled on the continuation of some form of tradition.

More importantly, they share one same orientation in that all are attempting to reform their own culture. Historically, one of them would emerge as the victor, either in modernization achieved by the progressive or in the revolutionary war waged against the imperialist; yet, their own cultural tradition is invariably the one that encompasses

a problem and requires treatment. The introspective epistemology almost guarantees that postcolonial intellectuals lack enough confidence in facing the West, usually represented by the society of the colonizer, which has always been the given point of reference.

To overcome the sense of inferiority, a narrator is required to not only prescribe for the problems of the Eastern society, but also for the equally ailing Western society. In other words, instead of competing on the Western standard to see which civilizations could eventually end up being more 'Western', one would have to identify the possibility of an alternative destiny beyond the West before one could regain self-confidence. Self-reformation often casts doubt on one's own tradition and would no longer appear pitiful if the Western societies are targets of reformation at the same time. This would mean that both are somehow flawed.

Presumably, only narrators who appreciate the strength of both the eclipsed materialist civilization of the West and the eclipsed spiritual civilization of the East have the final answer to human destiny. It is likely that these narrators, engrossed in the Eastern culture when young and the Western culture after reaching adulthood, will have a stronger desire to bridge civilizations because this would be how they could better cope with disdain from both sides for failing their purity test.

Despite the fact that only intellectuals from inferior colonies have the intrinsic need for self-respect granted by the bridge, their colonial inferiority is at the same time the premise of attraction because learning from the West satisfies the self-image of a superior civilizer in the West. When an Eastern intellectual could recite Shakespeare or expound St. Augustine better than his Western colleagues, he won respect due to the contrast evident in the stereotyped difference represented by his Eastern identity. Their intellectual capacity won their reputation and their advice received serious attention. Once they achieved this status, they were able to return to the East with the encouragement that not everything indigenous is backward. There is much to contribute to a universal civilization that could not progress without the mix of Eastern civilization.

A bridging narrative should convince the Western societies that there are essential things to learn from the East. It should likewise convince the Eastern society that its cultural tradition is the remedy for the obsessive materialism of the West. The burden of proof is typically on the Eastern civilization--that it is indispensable. A bridge in between should be located neither solely in the East nor solely in the West; therefore, the bridging narrative must defend the East or the West from dominating one's own identity. To take on this objective role, the West can be easily defined racially as well as geographically, while the East can be anchored in China. In comparison, a bridge is always understood in the cultural or religious context, so it is not a role which everybody is ready to assume. The following discussion introduces the Nishida Kitaro

model, which, in the author's opinion, had the intellectual power to coordinate thoughts on Japanese modernity before and after Nishida.

Japanese intellectuals have generally welcomed the influence of Western civilizations following an earlier period characterized by resistance. Most reflected upon Japan's role at the collective level. Before Nishida, Shiratori Kurakishi of the Tokyo School was a thinker deeply engrossed in the in-between position of Japan vis-a-vis the East and the West. The Kyoto School of philosophy, which Nishida had helped to shape, likewise considered Japanese intervention an inevitable step in the formation of truly world history. Despite their otherwise wide difference, both schools were confident that Japanese could demonstrate their role in facilitating world civilization by being the only people that succeeded in converging the West with the East.

### **Bridging Civilizations: The Modes**

To compare, note that Rabindranath Tagore was one excellent example of how a colonial intellectual, once accepted by the ruler of his society, could become an ardent advocate for mutual learning among civilizations. Indeed, he traveled to both China and Japan with the purpose of convincing local intellectuals of the merit of their traditions, from which Tagore believes Western materialist civilization had much to learn. To liberate human beings from materialism, Tagore resorted to the spiritual civilizations of the East. His preaching encountered suspicion from those who endeavored to catch up with Western materialism. Positive repercussions registered in some circles nonetheless.

Japan was no India, though, in that Japan was never a colony while India had been one for hundreds of years. Resistance became the dominant discourse toward imperialism in the colony if India were to achieve independence. But in Japan, independence was a different issue, one defined mostly in terms of culture. Learning from the West was thus still a viable approach in Japan, since learning did not simultaneously take physical subjugation for granted as it would have under colonial rule in India.

It was also possible for Japanese intellectuals to imagine the day when Japan eventually would overtake the West. Furthermore, the Japanese nation is, according to the ancient myth, the descendent of Goddess Amaterasu and was one in unity. By comparison, India was divided into numerous smaller gatherings – each distinctive in religious and territorial characteristics. This probably explains why in Japan the narratives on modernity resided primarily on the national level, while India witnessed mostly the individualist discourses of liberation.

For Tagore, the East and the West met in each individual's mind. Individuals as meeting places required conscious preparation. Although Tagore appeared active in

preaching the necessity of mutual learning and the importance of preserving Eastern traditions, he was conservative to the extent that his answer was neither one of reformation nor change at the societal or “civilizational” level. The action that one should take to open up and allow civilizations to meet inside one’s mind seemed functional to the preservation of civilizations as they are.

In fact, Tagore praised Confucianism and frequently cited the exportation of Buddhism from India to China in ancient time and its re-importation back into India. For Tagore, all exchanges were equal and the question of who was superior did not need to be asked. All this depended on the Eastern societies being able to willingly treat their own tradition with a positive attitude and, as a result, preserve the tradition.

In contrast, it was Japan’s collective subjectivity that bothered Nishida. In fact, most Japanese modern thinkers were likewise preoccupied with how to represent Japanese subjectivity to the world. Shiratori wrote the first systematic theory on Japan’s role as a bridge of civilizations. Japan’s role was to lead the East into modernity, according to Shiratori, because Japan was the only modern country that simultaneously understood the East. The West lacked such a universal spirit in comparison. Shiratori’s enthusiasm for the origin of civilization in Mongolia-Manchuria provided a clue to why this area fascinates most Japanese.

Stefan Tanaka notes how, with the assistance of scientific linguistics and archeology, Shiratori was able to trace the origin of Christianity (as well as Confucianism) to Mongolia-Manchuria, thereby equalizing the two civilizations.<sup>5</sup> As a Shinto absolutist, Shiratori held that Japan, due to its permanent and stable divine identity, was the only God-made country in the world and the only country that was able to acquire new civilizations without suffering the fear of extinction. Shiratori painstakingly showed how Japan was able constantly to mingle different civilizations through north-south contacts, which the secular Chinese dynasties, embedded in conservative ritual politics, had failed to accomplish. The implicit parallel between Mongolia-Manchuria and Japan’s divinity exists in their both being original in divinity as well as transcendent of specific civilizations. Ironically, it was Nishida of the rival Kyoto School that gave a philosophical foundation of their connection.

In effect, the puzzle that Nishida dealt with was also the one left by Shiratori. The puzzle was a mechanism for what could have been a justification allowing the Japanese nation to stay together and simultaneously provide it with a divine origin and a constant mixer. Moreover, how exactly could the true learner have been exempted from the internal split if both the East and the West had co-existed? Eventually, how exactly could a bridge of civilizations – one which acquired both the East and the West characteristics – have had its own subjectivity? Or, put differently, he wanted to know where Japan’s place was.

These were concerns quite far away from Tagore's attempt at transcendence beyond national identities. Nishida was eager to show what Japan had always been rather than what Japan could be. In addition, Nishida denied the possibility of other countries mimicking Japan's way of bridging, so preaching was not necessary for Nishida as it was for Tagore. Tagore did not worry about the maintenance of subjectivity since individuals had to consciously allow their own bodies to serve as the meeting places of civilizations. Subjectivity was thus the necessary assumption for such meetings to take place.

In contrast, Nishida wondered about where such subjectivity (i.e. *jiti*, or literally foundational corpse) was possible while Japan shifted between the East and the West. He finally gave birth to the philosophy of "nothingness."<sup>6</sup> It was in the place of nothingness where the Japanese nation must have existed, according to his argument. In all specific situations, Japan was an actor whose meaning was contingent upon an 'Other' that was interacting with Japan.

Shifting between situations, Japan the actor could not determine the shifting in specific situations. There must have been a Japan that existed beyond specific situations watching and providing the subjectivity that determined the shift whenever it occurred. By definition, the subjectivity beyond specific situations did not depend on an "Other." Logically it would have to be in nothingness and, as an ultimate seer, could not be seen.<sup>7</sup> The ultimate seer, in nothingness, might as well be a dramatic expression of divinity, whose form (or lack of form) could not be seen or shown.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the ultimate seer parallels the imagination of Amaterasu, the Goddess and the pre-ontological origin of everything possible.

Scholars of the Kyoto school did not hesitate to cite Shinto scriptures when justifying Japanese expansion during WWII, indicating a connection between Shinto and the philosophy of nothingness.<sup>9</sup> The constant shifting actor among specific situations, plus nothingness, composed a dialectical dyad, enabling the simultaneous existence of everything and their opposite.<sup>10</sup> Learning from the West was, for the Kyoto School, no longer Tagore's sense of learning, but a divine mission to be carried out through a predestined role given by the Goddess expressible (or inexpressible) only in nothingness.

Because for each individual, it was a duty to learn and, conceptually, it was something that only the Japanese could learn, Japan was the sole country that could represent the world. Equally important, Nishida was not advocating one's own culture, which Tagore urged, since one's own culture should have been transcendental. As a result, Tagore's individual learners learning each from their own culture gave way to Japan as the collective learner that was freed by an ultimate seer from any specific culture. Instead of blaming Kyoto school's notorious intervention during the heyday of war as being partially responsible for the war, the discussion

suggested the contrary--that it was the Fascist action in Manchuria that sent the innocent philosophers of nothingness into a fit.

### **The Princely Way in the Nothingness of Manchuria**

“The Princely Way and the Happy Land” which the Japanese Fascist regime struggled to establish in Manchuria was a direct manifestation of a Goddess’ blessing that originated from *Kojiki* (the earliest Imperial Chronicle). The “princely” combination of the East and the West was not incompatible with Tagore’s own effort of bridging civilizations, at least at the abstract level; there were clearly remnants of ancient thought in Japan’s military conquest of Manchuria and the establishment of a modern state of Manchukuo. Accordingly, Manchukuo could not be reduced to only a materialist product of modernity or a base for capitalist/mercantilist industrialization.<sup>11</sup>

Ishihara Kanji (1889-1949), an ardent advocate of the Princely Way and the Happy Land who plotted the Mukden incident, gave a quite materialist interpretation to the meaning of Manchukuo by identifying the Mongolia-Manchuria region as Japan’s lifeline.<sup>12</sup> Later on, the notion of a Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere likewise strengthened the adherence to materialism since the ‘sphere’ was conceived of as the constitution of mutually supporting economies. However, Manchukuo was not just about materialism. Facing the opposition of Western nations, Japan insisted on pushing through its plans in Manchuria with determination – even to the extent of quitting the League of Nations in 1933. Ishihara’s theory, instead, stressed the harmonious cooperation among the five ‘nations’ in Manchuria (Han Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Mongolians and Manchurians). He believed that the spirit of “the Princely Way and the Happy Land” could be a model for neighboring Asian people to emulate whereby Japan demonstrated to the world its achievement of true universality.<sup>13</sup>

To extend the Goddess’ influence to Manchukuo, the Japanese Fascist regime arranged for the marriage between the last Manchurian (or Chinese) emperor’s family and a Japanese woman of imperial descent to complete the story of the princely land. *Kojiki* notes that all the lands in Japan should be connected in the imagined kinship of blood with the Goddess’s line. Through the marriage, Manchukuo also acquired a place in the Goddess’ domain. Japanese settlers responded to the extension of the imperial family with enthusiasm. Thousands moved to Manchuria to witness (or be witnessed by) the Princely Way by contributing to the development of the Happy Land of Manchukuo.

Neither capitalism nor imperialism could explain the exodus of lower class immigrants or the noticeable enthusiasm amongst them. The phenomenon could not be explained by for-profit incentives, interest in accumulating capital, or imperialist

conquest of territory. The competitive atmosphere against Western dominance could have played a part,<sup>14</sup> but the excitement over being a witness, and even a participant in the rise of the Princely Way alone should have been a sufficient incentive. Being related to the Goddess – thanks to the actual physical presence in Manchuria – was the shortest road to the Goddess' place, being the ultimate seer and the place of nothingness.

The Mongolian-Manchurian lure to the Japanese rank-and-file, as well as Nishida's philosophy of nothingness, existed even before the Mukden incident. Shiratori's research, both in terms of the subject and the findings, reflected the appeal of Manchuria to intellectuals. Stefan Tanaka detects an Orientalist mind set in Shiratori's writing on Manchuria. Before he was trained in Western philosophy and science, Shiratori was a student of conservative Sinology, hence the burden on him to prove that Japan was historically as well as spiritually independent from China.

The Orientalist writers in Europe never experienced the same burden of proof that Shiratori was forced to shoulder. Under the pressure of simultaneously showing independence of Japan from Sinologist convention and the capacity of Japan to overtake Europe, Shiratori's so-called Orientalist treatment of China and Mongolia mimicked the European treatment of China. Such mimicking was instrumental to the cleansing of Japan's Chinese component. Moreover, it was not Christianity that supported Shiratori's view on China, but rather the Goddess Amaterasu. The latter represented an appeal to origins rather than to destiny in modernity. Despite his exaggerated critique on Shiratori's Orientalism, Tanaka is nonetheless keen on Shiratori's motivation behind his treatment of Mongolia.

Shiratori, as well as his student Tsuda Soukichi (1873-1961) and others, joined the Geological Survey Institute of the Southern Manchurian Railroad under the leadership of Goto Shinpei (1857-1929) in 1906; Goto was a former governor of Taiwan. By 1914, they together concluded a large-scaled survey of Northern China's villages. Although the military dismissed these materials as being impractical and shut down the research department, Shiratori was able to make significant intellectual use of the data in his later proposition on China and, ultimately, on Japan, particularly regarding the future of their civilization.

Shiratori altered his thinking on Japan's Manchuria policy accordingly, from supporting the neutrality of Manchuria to its conquest. In fact, most China scholars of Japan at the time supported military action in Manchuria despite their irreconcilable perspectives. For Shiratori, a neutral Manchuria could keep other powers from intervening within its territory, so as to leave room for Japan's influence. As the United States placed its support behind China, Shiratori agreed that since Manchuria could only fare well under Japan, interference from other powers had to be denied.



Tanaka discovered an ulterior intention beneath Shiratori's treatment of his subject. Shiratori wanted to show that Mongolia was the origin of heaven both in Christianity and in Confucianism so as to equalize the Eastern and the Western civilizations. In the East, he wanted to show how Japan and China evolved into different paths contingent upon the imagined kinship to Amaterasu. Kinship enabled the Japanese to learn from foreign cultures with a firm identity; but without it, the Chinese eventually reduced themselves to no more than a bunch of cultural conservatives that blocked learning for the sake of protecting an increasingly outdated identity. Therefore, Shiratori was able to explain why Japan could learn from Western modernity while at the same time still understand the Eastern way. If Tanaka's reading is accurate, Shiratori shared with younger Nishida a will to achieve a higher level of universality for Japan than Europe could ever dream of.

In addition to the intellectuals' attention on Manchuria, Li Narangoa also briefs an incident which suggests that the same appeal existed for the Japanese people in general.<sup>15</sup> Li records how Onisaburou Deguchi (1871-1948), the spiritual teacher of Omotokyo, was lauded for his heroism after his coincidental trip to Manchuria and Mongolia. Omotokyo was a religious derivative of Shinto, whose priests promoted the new religion as a bridge of civilization. They preached about world peace and humanism in Europe but anti-colonialism in Asia.

Omotokyo promoted the idea of uniting East Asia by first taking over Manchuria and Mongolia. Ishihara, then with the Japanese military in the Manchu area, and Omotokyo were mutually so inclined. In fact, Omotokyo specifically believed that the Eastern Spirit could liberate Manchuria from Western materialism. However, Omotokyo was treated as a suspect by the Japanese government whose state Shinto Omotokyo disliked and criticized. In 1921, the military government put Onisaburou under house arrest, accusing him of treason.

Coincidence led Onisaburou to Mongolia in 1924 wearing the disguise of a Lama. He led a troop of 1,000 independence fighters in Mongolia to oppose Zhang Zuoling, the Manchurian warlord. His action later triggered syndromes of hero worship among Manchurian Ronins, pan-Asianists and the Japanese media, where Onisaburou consolidated his image as the king of fairyland. He returned to Japan after six months, reporting his alleged contribution to the agricultural development in Manchuria-Mongolia, which he claimed would resolve the surplus population problems of Japan. Travels to Mongolia and Manchuria quickly became a fad in Japan. On the other hand, the treason trials against Onisaburou lost momentum, as he was effective in demonstrating his loyalty to Japan.

Lusting for the Princely Way in Manchuria has persisted even for Japan in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Two popular films featuring award winner Takako Tokiwa, including the movie "Red Moon" (2004) and the mini-series "The Princess in Migration and the

Brother of the Last Emperor" (2003), are stories about the contribution Japanese settlers made to the development of Manchukuo. Both films are critical of the Japanese military's manipulation of the political economy, as well as its abuse of Manchukuo's culture. However, there were no reservations about Manchukuo in itself. Ironically, toward the end of Red Moon, Manchukuo remained a dream land for fleeing settlers. In addition, all the critical voices toward the Fascist tyranny in Manchukuo come from females.

Almost all the actions, revolutionary or not, were initiatives by women. It is the collection of different feminine roles that the ideal of the Princely Way carried throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The military is in the film exclusively to be faulted for the loss of Manchukuo. On the other hand, the Princely Way represented by the combination of these energizing roles parallels the place of nothingness that absorbs all specific situations into a fundamental, mothering existence where all lives originate.

What had driven the military, settlers, and religious disciples to Manchuria-Mongolia was more than mere expansionism. Perhaps the quest for higher capital accumulation, the opportunity to start a new life, and the excitement over imaginative adventure were driving the move to conquer Manchuria-Mongolia. However, anywhere else---Korea, Taiwan, Burma---would have to a different extent satisfied these motives. They did not, though; none of them could have represented the East as China could. To do so would have completely fallen short of the promise of transcendence beyond the East-West divide.

Something more fundamental was at work. The Japanese were fascinated by the formation of Manchukuo in 1931. This is where Nishida's theory becomes most powerful. It explains, as well as reflects, an inexpressible connection: the imagination of Amaterasu, Japan's readiness to bridge civilizations, and the meaning of Manchukuo. This does not mean that Nishida and his school caused the expansion moves; their enthusiasm, aroused by Japan's rise, was witnessed and cemented by the Manchurian-Mongolian lifeline, thus providing a clue to the otherwise mysterious motivating force.

According to Nishida, the place of nothingness could not be seen by any, but it could "see all." It could not be derived from anything, yet could be the origin of anything. It could not take an action, but actions of all sorts could only take place in the "place." Shiratori's life-long struggle for a Japanese identity removed from China pointed to a Manchuria that happened to be the origin of civilizations, which later evolved into the Confucian East and the Christian West. His absolute loyalty to the Imperial family sanctified his scholarship to the service of Shinto. Manchuria was not a virgin land or an Orientalized "Other," which critics of later generations denounce

the Fascist expansion for: Instead, from Nishida's philosophical hindsight, the Fascist regime and the settlers were in Manchuria to "be seen."

This was similar to the politics of representation where, in the later period of globalization, multi-culturalists have wanted to give voice to a subaltern, local identity before an imagined global audience. In pre-World War II Japan, when Shinto ran into the predicament of Japan being either indistinctively separated from Chinese Confucianism or obsessively indulged in Westernization, how to represent Amaterasu's lasting spirit of over ten thousands of years proved to be extremely challenging. Manchuria could well have been the perfect answer to this quest for being "seen" in action.

The philosophy of place and nothingness could provide a language to describe the inexpressible desire of representing a universal spirit. Actions in the origin of civilization paralleled the sense of "coming from the place of nothingness." Actions were to be seen by the ultimate seer, Amaterasu. The Princely Way and the Happy Land that supposedly brought together the East and the West in their common origin would have proven the unlimited possibility and the highest form of universality under Shinto.

If the sense of representing the lasting spirit of Amaterasu was so pervasive in pre-World War II Japan, it was not an expressible motivation in the familiar language of modernity. Nishida was able to devise a self-philosophy that took advantage of such concepts as "subjectivity," "goodness," "experience" and so on, which he borrowed from European philosophical traditions, to translate the ubiquitous desire to transcend the East-West divide in Japan. Manchuria, the Happy Land, is the life line, the collectivity of the mothering settlers, and the place where the ultimate seer looks out into the world; the land/regime bridges civilizations of the East and the West not only through their common destiny but also in their common origin.

### **Bridging Civilizations -- Their Common Origin**

Initial encounters of the Western civilization resulting from imperialism or colonialism invariably incurred the sense of inferiority in local societies. Responses can usually be divided into three different approaches: progressivism promoting radical Westernization, conservatism resisting Westernization and centrism reconciling the East and the West. Actual narrators and activists switched allegiances easily when one approach seemed denied by the conditions while another appeared to be viable at a certain point.

The advocates of different approaches share one common mentality – all of them looked at their own society as the target of reformation and believed in some imagined kind of West as their reference. Achievements – in terms of either

progressive modernization, conservative war of anti-imperialism/anti-colonialism, or centrist mediation among different forces – all acquired significance by proving success the face of the imagined Western civilization: progressivism succeeds in progression toward the Western model; conservatism, resistance against the Western intrusion; and centrism, incorporation of the Western strength into the Eastern spirit. Needless to say, the appeal to something Western in order to begin the construction of one's self-knowledge produces a sense of inferiority.

To rebuild one's self-confidence, local intellectuals must transcend the practice of treating the West exclusively as the reference point. Transcendence begins by including the Western civilizations into the scope of examination at the same time, instead of its being simply a model to be emulated or an evil to be resisted. Nevertheless, one can simultaneously show appreciation of the West and display the wisdom of the East only when the strength and the weakness of the Western civilization are in sight.

The appreciation of the West might enhance one's acceptance among Western colleagues, who can only respect the wisdom represented by the colleague coming from the East after accepting him or her. Whenever the intellectuals from the East accept in themselves a Western component, they would be ready to provide a remedy to the problem of "their own" Western civilization. The East and the West can now learn from each other as Eastern intellectuals learn from both sides. The intellectuals themselves are the bridges between the colony and the mother country. Hopefully, their community would eventually develop into the bridge between the Eastern and the Western civilizations as well.

Despite the common wish to be "in between" and to pose as a teacher for both sides by preaching one's strength to the other and vice versa, the bridge conceptualization nonetheless differs among individual thinkers. First of all, any bridge conception defines who creates the bridge. British Indian Rabindranath Tagore and Japanese Nishida Kitaro represented two different answers: Tagore saw individuals as the meeting place of civilizations, while Nishida looked to a collective subjectivity.

Next, the bridge thinkers are preoccupied with determining whether or not a bridge is considered 'existing and complete' or 'incoming and in formation'. Tagore, for example, demanded active learning and counting in every individual so that his bridge resembled a kind of process thinking and was constantly in formation. On the other hand, Nishida envisioned the "place" of nothingness where fusion was original and almost automatic, though limited to Shinto.

Alongside Nishida, Shiratori's scholarship on Manchuria-Mongolia reified Nishida's place of nothingness. Interestingly, Shiratori and Nishida were different on many other aspects. For example, Shiratori was affiliated with the army, Nishida, the navy; likewise, Shiratori founded the Tokyo School based on modern science while Nishida, the Kyoto School of philosophy. Nishida was too late to intervene in the Manchurian crisis, but his philosophy of nothingness could have been a perfect outlet for the supporter of Manchukuo as a mean of expressing deep attachment. Nonetheless, Nishida could still posthumously explain what sort of thinking prompted the incessant dream of Manchuria.

In light of this, as well as the connection between Nishida's philosophy of nothingness and the establishment of Manchukuo, Japan's action in Manchuria and the lingering regard of the contemporary Japanese society toward Manchuria should be seen in a deeper context. Nishida's language was intended to introduce Japanese selfhood to the curious Westerner.

However, it is useful in another aspect – one that has been largely ignored. Nishida pointed out the possibility that the bridge of civilizations does not have to be one of mutual learning for the time to come. Rather, a bridge of civilizations could well exist philosophically even before the momentous meeting between two civilizations. It was the drive to actualize this possibility that had prompted Shiratori to discover the beginning of civilizations in Mongolia and Manchuria. The same drive also prompted rank-and-file settlers to believe in the Princely Way and the Happy Land, each a response to the call of the Fascist regime.

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