

Miki Kiyoshi and the Afterlives of His Thought

edited by

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CHISOKUDŌ

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Editors' Introduction

The times in which Miki Kiyoshi lived bear an unsettling resemblance to our own. The advance of fascism, the escalation of armed hostilities, the erosion of freedoms at the hands of authoritarian governments, and the anxieties generated by technological acceleration all offer a spectral mirror for our present reality. Miki Kiyoshi was, in his time, a prolific author, a popular public figure, and an intellectual actor of his age. His political commitments led him to prison, charged with supporting the Communist Party; yet the conviction that intellectuals should participate in public life also led him to become a member of the Shōwa Research Association—an institution associated with a certain strategic nationalism at the service of Konoe Fumimaro's agenda—and to serve as a writer associated with the Japanese military in the Philippines. For this very reason, Miki is difficult to classify in a simple framework. Some place him within the left wing of the Kyoto School as a “rebel,”¹ alongside figures such as Tosaka Jun or Nakai Masakazu; others align him with more conservative thinkers like Kōsaka Masaaki, or with the participants in the discussions on “overcoming modernity” and the “world-historical standpoint and Japan.”²

Miki was, in that sense, a hybrid intellectual, with one foot in the academy and the other in the arena of public debate, writing opinion columns, participating in roundtables, and producing works of philo-

1. GOTO-JONES 2005, 111.

2. For example, William Miles Fletcher writes that “in the Shōwa Research Association... Miki began to affirm some of fascism's basic concepts as ideals for Japan to emulate” (FLETCHER 2016). See also MIN 2024.

sophical popularization. This very hybridity, one might argue, led to works that coincide with what Tosaka Jun had in mind when he spoke of “theoretical journalism” (理論的ジャーナリズム)—written works that Tosaka understood as products of the persecution and marginalization suffered by left-wing intellectuals during the interwar period. Yet it would be insufficient to define Miki Kiyoshi merely as a hybrid intellectual, as though he were a figure who never fully realized himself or never found definite contours for his writings. In his own way, Miki was always faithful to a certain style and a certain discourse. His philosophy has, it is true, been criticized as an irresolvable dialectic between pathos and logos, between the emotional and the rational—a dialectic whose very irresolvability risks tipping into indifference, or even neutrality.³ Miki himself would have offered a different reading: he would have insisted that this constant, infinite, unclosable dialectic is a dialectic of openness, of ceaseless inquiry. For Miki, to be in the world—the fundamental experience or *kisō keiken* (基礎経験)—was precisely this; and this, likewise, is the fate of the human being.

In 2025, we marked eighty years since the death of Miki Kiyoshi in prison, infected, malnourished, and abandoned by his peers, forgotten by those who had once been his mentors. We are called to remember Miki with, on the one hand, the objectivity that academic inquiry demands, and, on the other, from within the present—as Miki himself required, as he understood the task of history: always situated in the now. As this introduction begins, Miki’s present resembles our own all too closely. Miki was a writer of urgency, a writer of crisis, a writer of imperfection—an imperfect writer attempting to grapple with deeply imperfect times. Philosophy is often asked for a certain perfection (a certain *systematicity*), a certain rigor, which in critical times is not only impossible to achieve but is itself a trap. Miki understood this trap.

If it remains important to return to Miki, to bring Miki into the present, it is not out of mere nostalgia or philological fanaticism. Miki

3. HARRINGTON 2009.

may, in his own way, have mapped certain exits from within the trap of the present. It is in this spirit that we seek to think of Miki as a *post-European* philosopher. By using this term, borrowed from Yuk Hui, we can expand the possibilities of Miki's thought in multiple directions. The Second World War reconfigured the world along different axes; the end of bipolarity is usually located with the fall of the Soviet Union, which gave way to the multipolar and postmodern world of capitalist realism. Yet the current conjuncture, in which multipolarity continues to be discussed—alongside the decline of American hegemony and a new geopolitical reconfiguration—recalls the multipolarity of the first half of the twentieth century more than it does the multipolarity of the post-Soviet era. To think post-Europe, in this sense, implies dislocating the history of philosophy, resituating it at its various margins, in order to think a multidialectical world.

What, then, is Miki's post-Europe? Unlike other philosophers of the Kyoto School who turned more explicitly toward authors and traditions associated with the East—such as Zen Buddhism—Miki would invoke Shinran only in a posthumous text, while Buddhist and other “Eastern” traditions remain almost absent from his other writings, at least in terminological terms. Post-Europe, for Miki, is not simply a gesture of exoticization; it is a method. It is a method of reading from a situated Japanese present; it is a method of critical translation; and it is a method of political reappropriation.

To speak of non-European philosophy does not mean simply calling for the cancellation of Western philosophy. The term “post-European” is, for this reason, the more important one: it signals that the philosophy of Miki and of the Kyoto School in general is not simply “Eastern philosophy,” but post-European philosophy, a philosophy that *responds* to the fiction “Europe”—which indicates not the end of Europe, nor even the end of European hegemony, but rather its interrogation. And to interrogate Europe is, in a certain sense, to overcome Europe—perhaps even to overcome modernity. It is commonly held that the philosophers of the Kyoto School failed in their attempt to

overcome modernity—they were instead overcome by modernity themselves, as Harootunian pointed out⁴—and Miki may have been among them, insofar as he sought to overcome modernity through a cooperativism that remained, in the end, in the service of Japan's expansionist interests. Yet it would be equally mistaken to think of modernity as something insurmountable, or as a permanent, unmovable totem. Modernity can be present and absent in different places and different periods; after all, modernity is also a method and a tool. It fractures and reconstitutes itself in a process that is at once alchemical and geological—tectonic plates in continuous drift, a reaccommodation of hermeneutical stacks. Hence, Miki is a post-European philosopher because his thinking is technological in nature; in his thought, East and West are not formally opposed in quasi-mystical terms. On the contrary, Miki suggests that the response to Europe must be technological, challenging Europe's technological monolingualism to open the door to technodiversity.

Miki translates critically for the masses and politically appropriates the authors he engages as lures—lures for a revolution to come. Miki is, certainly, a popularizer. But not just any popularizer. Miki never merely reconstructs the thought of the authors he reads. As Tosaka described in his critical representation of him, Miki always performs a slight displacement, a small *glitch*—he intervenes in the thought of these authors, often uncovering both their weaknesses and their strengths. Miki was never a complacent author. When he reads Pascal, he reveals his proximity to existentialism; when he reads Heidegger, he reveals his proximity to Marxism.

ABOUT THIS VOLUME

We have described Miki as a philosopher of open texts—imperfect texts that entered into dialogue both with his present and

4. HAROOTUNIAN 2000.

with our own. Hence, this volume seeks to attend to various echoes and legacies of Miki's thought both in the past and in the present. As is well known, Miki undertook a study trip to Europe, with the financial support of the publisher Iwanami Shigeo. There he encountered central figures of the philosophical world, including Rickert, Heidegger, Gadamer, Herrigel, and others. Miki was himself a paradoxical *post-European*. The legacies of those encounters persist and can be traced even where there was no sustained dialogical exchange over time. Miki's inheritance from Rickert, his similarities and tensions with Gadamer, his frictions with Hattori Shisō, or even with Kōsaka Masaaki and Kōyama Iwao are all signs of a latent dialogue between different ways of understanding the function of philosophy in relation to history.

At the same time, Miki's thought has resonated with the thought of authors who, without having read him, share his philosophical sensibility and ideas, generating unexpected dissonances or harmonies. In this sense, Miki's philosophy and his engagement with technology were pioneering and prophetic, announcing tensions that are very much alive today. The danger of technology lies precisely where it draws closest to us—and salvation, to recall Hölderlin's words, lies in that very same intersection. Miki finds in technology both danger and salvation simultaneously. As the essays in this volume show, the ideas of many contemporary thinkers resonate with Miki's philosophy of technology: in relation to action, as in Hannah Arendt; in relation to nature and the unfounded, as in Nancy; or in the call of the organic, as in Simondon and Hui.

The reception of Miki's thought has been discontinuous but fruitful. Miki's figure in the postwar years was as ambiguous as it had been during his lifetime, as reflected in the special issues of the journals *Shisō* and *Sekai*. Kuno Osamu and Nakamura Yūjirō were perhaps two of the postwar philosophers whose thought resonated most with Miki's, and who sought to keep his memory critically alive. This volume also explores the legacies of Miki's life and thought in other parts of Asia.

While Miki's influence on Korean thinkers such as Pak Chong-hong has already received attention,⁵ here we also cast a glance at Miki's legacy in China—in the Chinese reception of his Marxism—and at Miki's passage through the Philippines, a passage so fraught that his figure as propagandist proved uncomfortable to his colleagues, to his superiors, and to subsequent interpreters alike.⁶

What we understand by “legacy,” then, is not simple replication or iteration, but also revocation, distortion, and confrontation. In the case of Watsuji Tetsurō, for instance, Miki's concept of *situation* always entered into tension with Watsuji's notion of *fūdo* (*milieu*)—the latter conceived as something inert. Though Watsuji himself might not have accepted the characterization, Miki never ceased to emphasize the importance of the historical dimension within the environmental. For Miki, there is no milieu without a subject—an active subject, a subjectivity that irrupts into the environment in a poietic, practical relation, transforming it and being simultaneously transformed.

In this book of echoes and legacies, we have sought to explore unexpected crossings, improbable entanglements, and also agonistic encounters that had remained unexplored—not because some of them are not plainly visible, but because they have been little examined in the scholarship, within and outside Japan. It should be noted that studies on Miki have grown considerably in recent years. The first English translation of a complete book by Miki—the *Logic of the Imagination*, by John Krummel—has undoubtedly opened the door to a new era of Miki exegesis in English. The preceding volume in this series, *Miki Kiyoshi and the Crisis of Thought*, edited by Steve Lofts, Nakamura Norihito, and Fernando Wirtz, was the first English-language volume devoted solely to Miki, and as such it introduced different central aspects of Miki's thought. A project based at Osaka

5. See KWAK 2024.

6. See MIYANAGA 2025.

University from 2024 was focused on Miki,⁷ and recent publications include volumes on Miki in the Philippines, on the “masks” of Miki,⁸ on the *Jinseiron nōto* (*Notes on the Philosophy of Life*),⁹ and on Miki and Arendt, together with a new edition of Miki’s text on Shinran.¹⁰ In that sense, Miki’s thought is very much alive.¹¹

In our volume, we seek to go a step further: to bring together younger scholars and more established researchers, to offer them the opportunity to explore Miki’s thought with great freedom—to examine its obscurities, its shadows, its vibrations that resonate at a distance, its entanglements and parallels with other voices from both past and present. Miki’s questions—the questions of philosophical integrity, of freedom, and of technology—continue to call to us from afar, from the dark, from the shadow of hegemony where critical thought persists and resists. We hope that our volume will further open the range of possibilities in Miki’s thought, helping us to find a language—a language for this era of algorithmic flattening, of the invisibilization of the human at the hands of corporations: a language that is not only post-European but post-plutocratic and post-hegemonic, in an age yet to be named.

The present volume is organized into two parts. The first, “Echoes,” brings together contributions that place Miki’s thought in dialogue with other philosophical traditions, exploring the points of contact, tension, and mutual illumination between his work and that of both Japanese and Western thinkers. The second, “Legacies,” focuses on the historical contexts of Miki’s thought and on the ways in which it was received, appropriated, and transformed over time, both within and

7. Led by KONDŌ Kazunori.

8. MIYANAGA 2025.

9. MIYAJIMA, MORISHITA, TANAKA 2025.

10. MORI 2026; IWATA 2025.

11. It remains a future task to more fully highlight the reception of Miki within Asia. For recent contributions in Thai, see LHASPAJCHIMANANDH, THONGPREM, and WANGRUNGKIJ (2022, 2024, 2025), as well as LHASPAJCHIMANANDH and THONGPREM (2022).

beyond Japan. Of course, these two movements are complementary and often overlap and influence one another. Our intention is not to present them as two parallel lines, but rather as giving rise to a polylogue. In any case, these echoes and resonances are not so much modes of survival as they are active modes of engagement with Miki's work.

The first part opens with Melanie Coughlin's chapter, which traces the presence of the concept of the "elemental imagination" (根源的構想力) in the work of Nishitani Keiji, arguing that both Nishitani and Miki theorize imagination as a tool of resistance against fascistic uses of myth. Coughlin shows that the *Logic of the Imagination* left an enduring political legacy in Nishitani's thought, visible even in his later formulations that were apparently far removed from the concerns of the war. Yuk Hui, for his part, situates Miki's philosophy of technology in the context of contemporary geopolitical reconfiguration, proposing that the distinction between the fictional and the rational in the *Logic of the Imagination* opens a path toward a post-European philosophy of technology. Read alongside Simondon and Heidegger, Miki emerges here as a thinker who anticipated some of the most pressing problems in philosophical reflection on technology. Matsui Nobuyuki then examines the relationship between Miki and the postwar philosopher Nakamura Yūjirō, tracing their divergent approaches to embodiment: while Miki's logic of imagination commits to a robust embodiment as the basis of creativity, Nakamura reframes that commitment through the lens of vulnerable embodiment, seeking to address the "loss of sense of reality" characteristic of postwar Japan. Okada Yūta offers a detailed comparison of Miki's philosophy of technology with that of Gilbert Simondon, reading both as philosophies of form: while Miki understands technology as form-giving through imagination, Simondon locates that mediation in technical objects; despite this difference, both share a dialectical and moderately optimistic conception of technical invention.

Ōmura Kazuma and Nakamura Norihito's chapter reconstructs the intellectual lineage running from Miki to the postwar philosopher

Kuno Osamu, who served as a crucial mediator of the Frankfurt School in Japan. The authors argue that the Japanese version of critical theory Kuno developed cannot be understood without his reading of Miki during the years of fascism, and that from this synthesis emerged a specifically Japanese form of critical thought oriented toward democratization. Kitano Ryōtarō identifies philosophical resonances between Miki and Hannah Arendt in their treatment of technology as “making,” tracing in both the decisive influence of Heidegger’s philosophy of the 1920s. Despite their differences regarding the nature of human activity, the chapter reveals a deeper shared concern for the conditions under which genuine creativity becomes possible. Joseph Turner, for his part, brings Miki into dialogue with Jean-Luc Nancy to develop a conception of technology as “formative disruption,” overcoming both instrumentalist and determinist frameworks. The comparison reveals unexpected convergences between Japanese philosophy in the Nishidian tradition and French deconstruction in their understanding of how worlds and subjects are co-constituted through technology. The first part concludes with Shimoyama Chiharu’s chapter, which compares Miki and Gadamer on history and tradition, seeking a “third path” between the uncritical affirmation of historical unity and its wholesale rejection. The chapter shows that both thinkers share a sensitivity to the “dynamism of history” and a common critique of Neo-Kantianism, though they articulate in different ways how tradition addresses the agent situated in the present.

The second part, “Legacies,” opens with Joseph Henares’s chapter, which examines how Miki’s posthumous image was constructed through articles published in the journals *Sekai* and *Shisō* during the American Occupation, highlighting the role of Iwanami Shoten in shaping competing narratives about his legacy. Henares distinguishes between a commemorative mode, centered on the person and friendship, and a critical mode, concerned with the relevance of Miki’s thought for the future of the Japanese left. Romaric Jannel recovers the concept of subjectivity or *shutaisei* (主体性) as one of Miki’s most

significant contributions to Kyoto School thought, albeit one that is frequently overlooked in recent scholarship, and traces its influence on Japanese environmental philosophy through the biologist and ecologist Imanishi Kinji, showing how Miki's active subjectivity was transformed into a theory of the subjectivity of living beings as a whole. Tamada Ryūtarō then examines Miki's philosophical formation in light of his encounter with Heinrich Rickert during his stay in Heidelberg in 1922, before his decisive passage through Marburg and his encounter with Heidegger. The chapter illuminates the Neo-Kantian dimension of Miki's thought through a German-language essay he wrote during his time in Europe, cited in Hani Gorō's 1946 memorial lecture.

Walter Wyman analyzes the complex relationship between Miki and the Marxist historian Hattori Shisō, who was one of Miki's most severe critics yet also an attentive reader of his ideas on religion and Shinran. The chapter traces the evolution of this relationship from pre-war polemic to postwar conciliation, revealing unexpected points of convergence between the two thinkers regarding the compatibility of Buddhism and Marxism. Wei Wei reconstructs the reception history of Miki's Marxist philosophy in China, arguing that it has been filtered through external labels such as "Kyoto School" or "left-wing" rather than engaged with on its own philosophical terms, and proposes a more nuanced reading of Miki within Chinese intellectual history. Yu-Ning Henares analyzes the postwar short story "A Study of the Human Being in Miki Kiyoshi" by Kon Hidemi, in which a semi-fictionalized version of Miki serves as protagonist. The chapter distinguishes this "Miki-as-character" from the historical philosopher and argues that the fictionalization responds both to literary trends in 1950s Japan and to a tense personal relationship between Kon and Miki during their time together in the Philippines in 1942. Kyle Shuttleworth brings Miki's philosophy of technology into dialogue with the more implicit and critical stance of Watsuji Tetsurō, finding unexpected convergences despite their apparent differences. The chapter evaluates the histor-

ical limitations of both positions, shaped by the context of the war and Japanese imperialism, and draws lessons for thinking about our contemporary relationship with technology. The volume concludes with Ōsaki Harumi's chapter, which compares Miki's philosophy of world history with that of the "Big Four" of the Kyoto School, arguing that Miki's view of history, like the view of history proposed by the "Big Four," served to justify the Second Sino-Japanese War. The chapter demands that we confront the negative legacies of wartime philosophy and proposes that taking Miki seriously means embracing the complexities and contradictions of philosophical thought in times of crisis.

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The Political Legacy of Miki's Elemental Imagination in Nishitani

Melanie COUGHLIN

Miki Kiyoshi and Nishitani Keiji were contemporaries, but the latter's much longer life can obscure this fact. Nishitani's thought has been divided into three distinct periods spanning roughly half a century.¹ Miki's thought, by contrast, might also be arranged into three periods but these span only a couple of decades and the final period includes posthumous publications. A risk of this mismatch is the ease with which we might overlook just how profoundly even Miki's "late" thought is at work throughout most of Nishitani's.

By following a strong connection between the late Nishitani and the mature Miki back into Nishitani's earlier works, we can see not only the enduring relevance of Miki but also reveal an under-appreciated critical dimension within Nishitani's account of the imagination.² Miki, of course, is famous as one of the most politically engaged members of the Kyoto School. Nishitani's political engagement, by contrast, is often minimized in order to salvage his philosophy as a whole

1. The three periods in Nishitani's thought delineated by UEDA 2001, 311.

2. For discussions of Nishitani's theory of the imagination in English, see ONO 2008; HOSOYA 2008; KETA 2008; BOUSO 2019; MARINUCCI 2020; LOFTS 2023; BOUSO 2023.