



Steve Lofts, Nakamura Norihito, and Fernando Wirtz, eds.

Miki Kiyoshi and the Crisis of Thought

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This is the first edited volume in English devoted solely to the pivotal figure of Miki Kiyoshi (1897–1945). Historical context plays a central role in Miki’s thought. The title of the work, *Miki Kiyoshi and the Crisis of Thought*, frames Miki as a philosopher of crisis, and this crisis occurred in a specific time and place: 1930s Japan.

As editors Steve Lofts, Nakamura Norihito, and Fernando Wirtz claim in their introduction, Miki was both a “symptom” and a “thinker” of this period of crisis, which he diagnosed as characterized by a tension between subjectivity and objectivity, between *pathos* and *logos* (p. 2). In this way, the editors bring philosophical scholarship and historical analysis together, contributing to what I see as a recent historical turn in the field of English language scholarship on Japanese philosophy in the past few years. This historical turn includes not only the present volume but also other recent works that show a renewed interest in the study of philosophy as mediated by history, such as works on the Meiji influences on Nishida Kitarō,¹ on the postwar essays of Nishitani Keiji,² and on the 1930s thought of Tosaka Jun³ and Miki Kiyoshi.⁴

At the same time, the present volume distinguishes itself from previous historically-oriented collections on the Kyoto School like *Rude Awakenings*,⁵ *Confronting Capital and Empire*,⁶ and *Repoliticising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*⁷ precisely because it does not focus on the thorny issue of the Kyoto School’s relationship to politics. Harumi Osaki, in her review of the present volume in the *Journal of Japanese Studies*, critiques it for not dealing directly with Miki’s support for the invasion of China and for Imperial Japan’s totalitarianism and imperialism.⁸ Readers searching for a study of Miki’s political stances might take some interest in Kenn Nakata Steffensen’s essay on Miki’s humanist journalism in the mid–1930s.

1. Richard Stone, *The Origins of Modern Japanese Philosophy: Nishida Kitarō and the Meiji Period*, Bloomsbury Studies in World Philosophies (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024).

2. Sova P. K. Cerda and James W. Heisig, eds., *Nishitani Keiji: Essays and Reflections 1*, Studies in Japanese Philosophy (Tokyo: Chisokudō Publications, 2024). Sova P. K. Cerda and James W. Heisig, eds., *Nishitani Keiji: Essays and Reflections 2*, Studies in Japanese Philosophy (Tokyo: Chisokudō Publications, 2024).

3. Tosaka Jun, *The Japanese Ideology: A Marxist Critique of Liberalism and Fascism*, trans. Robert Stolz (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024).

4. Miki Kiyoshi, *Miki Kiyoshi’s The Logic of Imagination: A Critical Introduction and Translation*, trans. John W. M. Krummel (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024).

5. James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1995).

6. Viren Murthy, Fabian Schäfer, Max Ward, eds., *Confronting Capital and Empire: Rethinking Kyoto School Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2017).

7. Christopher Goto-Jones, ed., *RePoliticising the Kyoto School as Philosophy* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008).

8. Harumi Osaki, review of *Miki Kiyoshi and the Crisis of Thought*, ed. Steve Lofts, Nakamura Norihito, and Fernando Wirtz, *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 51, no. 1 (Winter 2025): 257–62.

Overall, however, such readers will need to look elsewhere for more detailed critical analyses of Miki's politics.

Not counting the editors' introduction, there is a total of ten substantive chapters in this book, which are followed by a final summary chapter entitled "The Writings of Miki Kiyoshi." This consists of a thorough English translation of all of the titles of the works in the twenty-volume *Collected Works of Miki Kiyosh*, including the titles of the newspaper articles and dictionary entries that Miki authored. The writer of this final chapter, Morisato Takeshi, and his assistant Tekla Nanuashvili are to be credited for their work in creating this useful compilation.

While the editors do not do so, one could profitably divide the ten substantive chapters into two groups. The contributions of the first group, made up of Ōsawa Satoshi's "Miki Kiyoshi as Editor," Nakamura Norihito's "Miki Kiyoshi's *Philosophy of History*: Beyond Organicism," Arisaka Yōko's "Miki's Philosophical Anthropology: Embodiment, Mediality, and Everydayness," John Krummel's "Imagination and Technology in Miki Kiyoshi: Ontological Formation of/as Being-in-the-World," and Kenn Nakata Steffensen's "Theorizing Humanist Politics in a Dwindling Public Sphere: Aspects of Miki Kiyoshi's Journalistic Commentary," are concerned with detailed analyses of one to several specific works in Miki's oeuvre. In contrast, the contributions of the second group, made up of Hans Peter Liederbach's "Historicizing Anti-Cartesianism: Miki Kiyoshi's Appropriation of Heidegger's 'Fundamental Experience,'" Dennis Stromback's "Miki Kiyoshi—An Existential Marxist?," Steve Lofts' "Miki Kiyoshi's Philosophy of Religion: A Philosophy of History of Everydayness," Kwak Minseok's "The Time of Crisis and the Question of Ethnicity in Colonial Korea," and Matsui Nobuyuki and Fernando Wirtz's "Miki's Philosophy of Technology," provide thematic discussions of Miki's thought in general. The essays of the first group are particularly helpful for readers interested in a technical reconstruction of the arguments of specific works by Miki, while the essays of the second group will be attractive to those whose interests lie in larger-picture discussions of the direction and tendencies of Miki's thought as a whole.

Within the first group, Ōsawa Satoshi's contribution is uniquely historically-oriented. This chapter, "Miki Kiyoshi as Editor," is a translation of Ōsawa Satoshi's 2017–2018 article 「編集する三木清」 by Wirtz and Nakamura. Here, through an analysis of eighteen of Miki's letters and six postcards discovered in Iwanami Shoten archives, Ōsawa offers an inside look at Miki's central role in bringing about Iwanami Shoten's ultimately incomplete publication of the Iwanami book series *Philosophy Series, Continued* (続哲学叢書). While Ōsawa does not delve into the content of Miki's philosophy as such, his work provides a rare inside look at the

complex material realities behind Miki's participation in the process of knowledge production with Japanese publisher Iwanami Shoten.

Continuing along the members of the first group, we now turn to Nakamura, Arisaka, and Krummel, who each offer helpful discussions of key works by Miki. As the title suggests, Nakamura's "Miki Kiyoshi's *Philosophy of History*: Beyond Organicism" is a study of Miki's 1932 work *Philosophy of History* (『歴史哲学』). Here, Nakamura offers an analysis of Miki's concept of "history as fact," which Miki used to refer to social and embodied action in opposition to the standpoints of positivist historicism and teleological philosophies of history. Arisaka's "Miki's Philosophical Anthropology: Embodiment, Mediality, and Everydayness" studies Miki's unfinished 1933–1937 work *Philosophical Anthropology* (『哲学的人間学』), explaining the meaning of three modalities of experience—embodiment, mediality, and everydayness—that Miki discussed in this work. She explains how Miki's philosophical anthropology was one in which the human being was free and embodied, relating to the world through productive action.

Finally, Krummel's "Imagination and Technology in Miki Kiyoshi: Ontological Formation of/as Being-in-the-World" offers an analysis of Miki's 1941 work *Philosophy of Technology* (『技術哲学』) and Miki's unfinished late 1930s and early 1940s masterpiece *Logic of Imagination* (『構想力の論理』), which Krummel has recently translated into English.⁹ As the title suggests, Krummel here focuses on Miki's conceptions of imagination and technology, explaining how, for Miki, the logic of imagination involved the transformation of forms, forms whose media are myth, institution and technology – all three of which are dialectical unities of logos and pathos. For Miki, the essence of technology was invention, the production of new forms through the synthesis of the objective cognition of natural laws (*logos*) and the subjective postulation of goals (*pathos*). Near the end of his piece, Krummel intriguingly suggests that in Miki's thought, invention might even have been present in pure nature without human intervention, a possibility that could further upend the human-centric perspective that Krummel suggests that Miki rejected in his later work.

Kenn Nakata Steffensen's "Theorizing Humanist Politics in a Dwindling Public Sphere: Aspects of Miki Kiyoshi's Journalistic Commentary" offers an important look at several of Miki's politically-oriented newspaper articles. Here, Steffensen focuses largely on what Miki wrote with regard to liberalism and humanism in several articles, including the July 1933 *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* piece "The Standpoint of the Liberals" (『自由主義者の立場』) and the 1937 article "Political Logic and Human Logic" (『政治の論理と人間の論理』). Steffensen argues that in the mid–

9. See footnote 4.

1930s, Miki was a consistent humanist, claiming that even as Miki turned away from traditional liberalism, he continued to hold to something like a non-rationalist but still politically liberal “new humanism,” in line with Gide and Dostoevsky. The article concludes its analysis in 1938, and so the question of Miki’s collaboration with the Shōwa Research Association and his relationship with co-prosperity sphere ideology is only briefly touched upon.

In the second group, both Liederbach and Stromback’s contributions deal with the transition from Miki’s early work on Pascal to Miki’s Marxist period. Liederbach’s “Historicizing Anti-Cartesianism: Miki Kiyoshi’s Appropriation of Heidegger’s ‘Fundamental Experience’” offers neither a comparison of Miki and Heidegger nor an examination of the “influence” of Heidegger on Miki, but an account of what he terms the anti-Cartesian “constellation” formed by Heidegger and Miki. In particular, Liederbach goes into detail discussing Heidegger and Miki’s conceptions of “fundamental experience,” arguing that Miki dealt with the concept in an ahistorical way in his work on Pascal, but later came to advocate a historically and socially determined “fundamental experience” during his Marxian period. In contrast, Stromback’s contribution, “Miki Kiyoshi—An Existential Marxist?” sees more continuity between these periods. Stromback argues against a sharp break between early and middle-period Miki, claiming that Miki’s conception of the existential self and his proto-concept of society, which he formulated in his Pascalian period, developed into an existential Marxism in his Marxian period. Stromback backs up his claims with a careful exposition of Miki’s early and middle-period works, and, at the end of his chapter, gestures towards a certain degree of continuity between the works of the early and middle period and the works of the late period.

The remaining entries all discuss Miki’s ideas in a way that highlight their relevance outside of the study of Miki himself. Lofts’ “Miki Kiyoshi’s Philosophy of Religion: A Philosophy of History of Everydayness” argues for an interpretation of Miki as an advocate for a “new philosophy of Buddhism,” one that advocates approaching the “original nothingness” in the present of the everyday. Lofts’ article follows this thread through much of Miki’s career, moving from his early work on Pascal to his *Philosophical Anthropology*. Here, Lofts shows how Miki, who believed that religion was the source of culture, advocated a reformatory renaissance in Japanese Buddhism that could help to reconstruct Japanese culture, and details how his understanding of history intersects with his view of the radical finitude of the everyday. Kwak’s “The Time of Crisis and the Question of Ethnicity in Colonial Korea” centers on Miki’s conceptualizations of “crisis” and “anxiety” and their influence on the thought of Korean intellectual Pak Chong-hong. Miki understood a “crisis” to be a period of contradiction between objective existence and

subjective fact, with anxiety being the innermost part of this crisis, and held that this crisis could be overcome through “creation out of nothingness.” Pak Chong-hong, however, argued that Miki’s solution was too subjective, and advocated a self-negating ethnic self-consciousness rooted in Korean culture as a more objective solution to the problem. Finally, Matsui and Wirtz, in “Miki’s Philosophy of Technology,” do not only discuss Miki’s philosophical views on technology, but argue that Miki developed a concept of philosophy *as* technology. As Matsui and Wirtz argue, in Miki’s thought, the function of technology was the production of forms, a task that was also the task of philosophy in the sense of sociotechnics. Thus, after a detailed study of Miki’s conceptualization of technology as simultaneously subjective and objective, and after discussing the place of philosophy in relation to this conceptualization, Matsui and Wirtz conclude that the core of Miki’s logic is an attempt to redefine philosophy as technological (p. 233).

In conclusion, *Miki Kiyoshi and the Crisis of Thought* stands as a significant contribution to the growing field of English-language scholarship on Japanese philosophy, particularly through the way that it conveys information not just about Miki himself, but about the contours of intellectual life against the backdrop of the historical crisis that Miki and his contemporaries faced. By balancing detailed analyses of specific works with broader thematic explorations, the volume offers valuable insights for both specialists and newcomers to Miki’s thought. Although it largely sidesteps direct engagement with Miki’s controversial political affiliations, the volume excels in illuminating his philosophical responses to crisis, suggesting an enduring relevance to his ideas on history, technology, experience, and other topics. This collection not only enriches our understanding of Miki as a thinker of his time but also invites further exploration into the intersections of philosophy and history in scholarship on the Kyoto School.

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