

Prof. Yingjin Xu (复旦大学哲学学院 教授) 講演会

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Nishida Kitarō's "Logic of Basho" and Its Political Implications

--a Cognitive Linguistics-inspired Reading

Yingjin Xu, Fudan University

Abstract

The Kyoto School philosophers' attitudes towards Japan's involvement both in the Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific Ocean War are notoriously ambiguous. As for instance, although Nishida Kitarō, the leading philosopher of the whole school, is labeled by some as an "official philosopher" backed by the wartime Japanese government, some historical evidence can also show that he is actually a pacifist and even a dissent of Japanese government's war policies. The patent incompatibility between these historical data simply requires a plausible explanation, and what is intended to offer in this article is exactly a cognitive linguistic-inspired explanation of it. More specifically, Nishida's "Logic of Basho", which addresses the feature of the "fusion both of the subjectivity and objectivity" of cognition, is going to be reconstructed as a theory philosophizing the context-sensitivity features of cognition conducted by native speakers of Japanese. From this point of view, Nishida's "Logic of Basho" can be further labeled as a theory elaborated "from the bug's perspective" (a phrase borrowed from Katsuhiko Kanaya). Hence, the typical Nishida's way of doing philosophical exploration, which focuses on both ordinary people's feelings in their linguistic practices and more extraordinary intuitions involved in religions and arts, is by nature indifferent to higher-level speculations required by typical political thinking. So any attempt to relate the core idea of Nishida's philosophy to militarism or totalitarianism would be farfetched. Moreover, since the Nishida-favored explorations in the artistic and religious dimensions inevitably require minimal space of freedom, it can be even deduced that his philosophy should be more compatible with a democratic constitution which can provide such freedom. By contrast, according to Tanabe Hajime's "Logic of Species", the state is assumed to play the role both of the substratum of individuals and of the embodied form of "God", or in other words, the notion of "state" should be built into his system as the "media" between individuals and the "Absolute Nothingness" from the very beginning. Therefore, it should be more challenging for Tanabe's readers to distance such a framework from the typical fascist ideology.

Key Words and Phrases

Kyoto school; cognitive linguistic; the bug's perspective; the Logic of Basho; the Logic of Species; the Co-Prosperity Sphere