

Received: Nov 19, 2023
Accepted: Nov 27, 2023
Published: Nov 27, 2023

Exploring Nishida Kitaro's Thought and His Contribution to the Development of a Japanese Perspective on International Relations

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Abstract

This article explains the development of the International Relations (IR) perspective in Japan through the contribution of Nishida Kitaro, a leading philosopher from the Kyoto school. Nishida Kitaro is a Japanese philosopher who created unique concepts that combine elements of Japanese culture and spirituality with Western thought. In the context of IR, Nishida's concepts such as "pure experience", "bashō logic", and "self-contradictory identity" offer alternative views in understanding global issues and the dynamics of inter-state relations. This research uses document and internet-based analysis methods, with qualitative data to explore Nishida's thinking and his contribution to IR studies. Research findings show that the concept of "pure experience" teaches about pure experience that is integrated with reality, presenting an inclusive perspective in analyzing global issues. Meanwhile, "the logic of basho" which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things through the place where they appear, influences a collaborative approach to handling global issues. The thought of "self-contradictory identity" opens up insight into the complexity of reality and avoids simplistic views in analyzing actor actions in international relations. Overall, Nishida Kitaro's thinking provides a unique perspective that differs from Western IR, opening up opportunities for understanding and addressing complex challenges in interstate relations. His contribution to building a uniquely Japanese IR perspective has the potential to provide an interesting alternative to understanding the dynamics of international relations.

Keywords: *International Relations, Nishida Kitaro, Japan, Non-Western Perspective*

Introduction

Since its inception after World War I, the study of International Relations (IR) has often been identified as an American discipline (Bakry, 2017). As stated by Alfred Grosser, a German-French political scientist, the study of IR is an American specialist. This was later emphasized by Stanley Hoffmann (1977), an IR academic from Harvard University, who stated that the study of IR is a uniquely American field of social science. Furthermore, Steve Smith, Professor of International Relations from the University of Exeter, explained that IR studies are a discipline that represents the interests of America. Smith comprehensively explains that the presence of American dominance in the study of IR is due to the export of various policy agendas carried out by American IR scientists which are veiled in the form of theories and various epistemological and methodological assumptions (Smith, 2000). This dominance in this case is evident when looking at two IR theories that are identical to the American style "worldview", namely Realism (with its various variants) and Liberalism (with all its forms). These two theories have long dominated various reading literature in IR studies around the world (Rosyidin, 2020).

However, after the end of the Cold War, IR scholars became interested in exploring the range of IR thought that developed outside the Western World (the US and European countries). This is because Western IR theories have been shown to fail in accounting for major events in global politics (Bakry, 2017). The effort to explore various Non-Western IR thoughts became more massive when Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (2009) published a masterpiece entitled "Why is there no non-western international relations Theory", which caused a long debate among IR scholars which then sparked other IR scholars to try to explore various non-Western IR thoughts around the world (Rosyidin, 2020). Efforts to explore Non-Western IR thought in this case were shown by several IR scholars such as Arlene Tickner who tried to trace Latin American IR thought, Guy Martin and Michael Anda who tried to explore artefacts of African IR thought, and Andrei Tsygankov who explored Russian IR thought.

In the Asian region, especially in China, the exploration of IR thought has experienced significant development. In building thoughts that are contained in the form of theories and concepts of Chinese HI, Chinese HI scholars try to explore by looking at various sides of culture,

philosophy, and the long history of China has long had (Rosyidin, 2020). Along the way, many Chinese IR scholars later contributed various extraordinary ideas or ideas to build Chinese-style IR studies such as Zhao Tinyang, Qin Yaqing, and Yan Xuotong. Various theoretical contributions and concepts of thought from Chinese IR scholars are then known as a distinctive Chinese school of IR thought referred to as the Chinese school (Ardianto, 2023).

Apart from China, efforts to explore IR perspectives have also emerged in Japan. Although it did not experience too significant a development like China, the Japanese-style IR perspective offers different characteristics in understanding phenomena and events that occur in international relations. Almost like China, to develop and explore artefacts of Japanese IR thought. Japanese IR scholars also focus their exploration efforts on various forms of culture, philosophy, and the long history of Japan. In this regard, Japanese IR scholars see the various philosophical concepts of Japanese philosophers as potentially fertile ground for the development of a Japanese-style IR perspective. Kosuke Shimizu (2022), Professor of International Relations at Ryukoku University, mentions that Japanese philosophers, especially those whose thoughts are incorporated into a

school of thought known as the Kyoto School, have contributed greatly to the development and construction of an International Relations perspective with Japanese characteristics.

This paper generally seeks to see a typical Japanese perspective on international relations. As one of the developed countries in the Asian region, the development of science, especially regarding the thought of Japanese-style IR studies, is an interesting topic to add to the repertoire of knowledge and alternative perspectives in understanding the dynamics of international relations currently. In particular, this research will focus on one of the important exponents of Japanese philosophy whose ideas are considered to have made a crucial contribution to the development and advancement of an alternative perspective of Japanese Non-Western IR, namely, Nishida Kitaro. Nishida Kitaro is a prominent Japanese philosopher who is also the founder of the Kyoto School (Shimizu, 2022). Furthermore, this research seeks to see how Nishida Kitaro's distinctive Japanese IR thought positions itself in viewing and understanding the dynamics that occur in the international environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is descriptive research, which in this research uses two data collection methods, namely document-based analysis methods and internet-based analysis methods. Furthermore, this research uses a qualitative data analysis method, which specifically uses the secondary analysis method in analyzing the data that has been obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of the Japanese HI perspective in this case cannot be separated from the name of Japan's leading philosopher, Nishida Kitaro. Christopher S. Jones (2002) in his article "If Not a Clash, Then What? Huntington, Nishida Kitaro, and the Politics of Civilizations" explains that the philosophical thinking of Nishida Kitaro contains fertile ground for further development of Japanese IR theory by focusing attention on the importance of the specific practices of Non-Western traditions in the inter-civilizational world. In addition to Jones, Graham Gerard Ong (2004) in his article entitled "Building an IR Theory with 'Japanese Characteristics': Nishida Kitaro and Emptiness", also mentions that various concepts of thought derived from Nishida Kitaro can make an important contribution in the effort to build

a Japanese perspective and theory of IR. Furthermore, in Takashi Inoguchi's (2007) work entitled "Are There Any Theories of International Relationship in Japan", Takashi explicitly asserts that the ideas of Nishida Kitaro have provided great opportunities for the progress and development of Japanese IR studies. Furthermore, Takashi mentions Nishida Kitaro's thoughts as innate constructivism. Therefore, the ideas of Nishida Kitaro and his contribution to the development and progression of IR studies become an interesting discussion when examining non-Western IR perspectives from Japan.

Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945) was a Japanese philosopher who is considered one of the most important figures in the history of modern Japanese philosophy. He was born in a village around Kanazawa, Japan, and studied philosophy at the University of Tokyo before teaching at Kyoto University, where he became one of the founders of the influential Kyoto School (Yusa, 2002). Nishida Kitaro's philosophy is generally known as "Nishida Philosophy". His thought combines concepts of Western philosophy with elements of Japanese culture and spirituality, creating a unique approach to understanding reality and human existence. Nishida Kitaro's thought can be considered

a form of constructivist philosophy, which emphasizes how consciousness and reality mutually shape each other (Inoguchi, 2007).

In his philosophical journey, Nishida Kitaro has developed many concepts of philosophical thought in Japan, at least several concepts became the work of thought from Nishida Kitaro such as (1). Pure Experience; (2). The Logic of Basho; (3). Self-Contradictory Identity; (4). Good and Nothingness; (5). Religion and Morality; and (6). Values, Ethics, and Feeling (Carter, 1989). However, of the various concepts derived from Nishida Kitaro's ideas, if derived in the scope of IR studies, the concepts of pure experience; the logic of basho; and self-contradictory identity in this case are considered by Japanese IR scholars as a formula that can be used to develop and build an IR perspective with distinctive Japanese characteristics.

In the work entitled "Kyoto School and International Relations" by Kosuke Shimizu (2022), Shimizu explicitly illustrates that the concepts carried by Nishida Kitaro, namely "pure experience" and "the logic of basho" provide a new construction of understanding to explore and understand one's position in the world environment from the point of pure

experience and place. In addition to the concept of "Pure Experience" and the concept of "The Logic of Basho", Agnieszka Kozyra (2008) in her article entitled "Nishida Kitaro's Logic of Absolutely Contradictory Self Identity and the Problem of Orthodoxy in the Zen Tradition" states that the concept of "self-contradictory identity" is also an important contribution of Nishida Kitaro's thought which provides insight and enlightenment in understanding something contradictory. The concepts of pure experience; the logic of basho; and self-contradictory identity in this case are interrelated and connected to the concept of identity.

The concept of identity itself in this case is an important concept contained in IR studies (Inoguchi, 2007). So based on this, the various concepts carried out by Nishida Kitaro can offer an alternative view in seeing and understanding the concept of identity as one of the key concepts in IR studies. This is then explained by Takashi Inoguchi (2007) as constructivism with Japanese characteristics or what Takashi calls innate constructivism.

Nishida Kitaro himself is known as an excellent thinker and writer, having published many articles and books. Of his various works, the most famous is Zen no Kenkyu (An Inquiry into the Good), which

was the first book written by Nishida and became the central idea towards the concept of "pure experience" (Shimizu, 2022). According to Nishida, "pure experience" is the phenomenon of true consciousness, where "pure experience" is the unity of a unit of experience, without opposites or "complementary polarities" (Nishida & Kayama, 2005). Furthermore, Nishida explains that the qualification "pure" in this case is used to signify a condition of true experience without adding thought or reflection.

In this concept, "pure experience" refers to pure experience that is not formed by any concepts or categories. It is an experience before it is shaped by the separation of subject and object, or before it is structured in language or thinking concepts. Nishida argues that in "pure experience" the individual feels oneness with his or her environment, and the distinction between subject and object no longer exists. This creates a profound existential experience and merges with a broader reality. (Carter, 1989). Simply put, this can be exemplified when someone observes a flower, there is usually a separation between the observer (person as subject) and the flower (object). In a "pure experience", this separation disappears, and the observer experiences unity with the

flower, such as feeling the beauty of the flower without any separation.

In the context of IR studies, the concept of "pure experience" talks about the experience of actors (state and non-state) before there is a separation between the self as the experiencing subject, and other things as the experienced object. This means looking at the world and global issues in a more unified and deeply interconnected way, without separating oneself from external realities (Shimizu, 2022). For example, when looking at the issue of climate change, a "pure experience" approach would teach us to see humans and nature as part of an interconnected whole. Instead of viewing humans as separate from the natural environment, this view would underline that humans are also an integral part of the larger ecosystem.

Looking at global issues through the lens of "pure experience", provides an alternative view to better understand how the actions and policies of one actor can affect another (Shimizu, 2011). It opens up an awareness of how global issues such as climate change, international trade, or armed conflict have widespread and interconnected impacts. An understanding of "pure experience" also helps in avoiding an overly narrow or self-centred view of an

actor. Thus, this concept can open up a broader awareness in the study of IR.

Another concept offered by Nishida besides "pure experience" is "the logic of basho". "The logic of basho" is a logical concept developed by Nishida. It shows how reality and thought develop through the relationship of place (basho). Basho refers to the place or context in which things appear and exist. The logic of place attempts to go beyond conventional separations and dualities by understanding the interconnectedness of all things through the place where they appear. The logic of place involves combining various contradictions and dualities into a greater whole. It is an approach to understanding reality that focuses on the dimensions of temporality (place) and spatiality (time) (Haghshenas, 2019).

In the context of IR studies, Nishida Kitaro's concept of "The Logic of Basho" can make an important contribution to understanding and addressing some of the challenges and dynamics in interstate relations. Although Nishida's thinking was originally developed in the context of philosophy, the concept has relevant applications in the analysis of international relations. "The Logic of Basho" concept rejects the absolute separation or duality

between states in international relations (Shimizu, 2018).

In the Western tradition of thought, states are often seen as separate units that compete with each other (Cerny, 1997). In Nishida's "The Logic of Basho", there is an emphasis on the interconnectedness and unity of states within a broader "place". This can inspire a more inclusive and collaborative approach to addressing global issues. In addition, Nishida's thinking also emphasizes the importance of understanding temporal and spatial contexts in analyzing phenomena. In IR studies, it is important to understand the dynamic changes in global and regional contexts and how past events affect the current situation. By paying attention to these dimensions of time and space, analyses can avoid misinterpretations and make wiser outcomes or decisions.

The last concept of Nishida Kitaro's thought that is discussed in this article is the concept of "self-contradictory identity". The concept of "self-contradictory identity" or "Mujun" teaches that reality has the nature of paradox and complexity, which means that there are contradictory or conflicting aspects in a thing or situation (Maymind, 2014). In the context of IR studies, an understanding of the concept of "Mujun" helps avoid an overly simplistic

view of actors as wholly good or wholly bad entities. Instead, it opens up insights into the nuances and complexities behind actors' actions in international relations (Jones, 2003).

For example, a state could have a foreign policy that looks good and supports peace, but at the same time engage in policies or actions that cause conflict or injustice in other countries. Similarly, some countries may have serious internal problems but also contribute to helping other countries in emergencies. In this case, the concept of "Mujun" can build a more critical understanding in analyzing the actions and policies of actors. With this concept, the analysis no longer sees actors in only one dimension or one point of view but considers various aspects that are conflicting and interconnected.

This understanding makes it possible to better understand the broader dynamics in international relations and assess actors' actions more holistically. It can help avoid narrow views or over-generalization, as well as promote a deeper understanding of the complexities and realities that exist in the international world.

CONCLUSIONS

Nishida Kitaro's philosophical thinking, which includes the concepts of

"pure experience", "the logic of basho", and "self-contradictory identity", provides fertile ground for the development of a uniquely Japanese perspective on IR. IR scholars, such as Christopher S. Jones, Graham Gerard Ong, and Takashi Inoguchi, recognise that the ideas of Nishida Kitaro make an important contribution to the effort to build an IR perspective and theory that is different from the Western approach.

The concept of "pure experience" teaches about pure experience that merges with reality, helping to see global issues from a more connected and inclusive perspective. "The logic of basho" rejects separation and duality between actors, inspiring a collaborative approach to addressing global issues. Meanwhile, "self-contradictory identity" opens up insights into the complexities and paradoxes in reality, avoiding an overly simplistic view of actors' actions.

As such, Nishida Kitaro's thinking provides a unique and useful perspective in understanding inter-civilisational relations and global issues in the context of IR. These ideas offer a more holistic and complex perspective in analysing the dynamics of international relations by providing an interesting alternative to the Japanese perspective of IR that is different from the Western philosophical tradition.

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