

“Overcoming Modernity” and Beyond: Koyasu Nobukuni’s Critique of Shōwa Ideology

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Abstract

This essay investigates Japanese historian Koyasu Nobukuni’s analysis of Shōwa ideology and its post-war reflections, with the widely commented “Overcoming Modernity” symposium at its center. According to Koyasu, the (in)famous symposium held in July 1942 is both a symbolic condensation of Shōwa intellectual ideologies and the long history of “anti-modern” sentiments, where the concrete content must be found outside the symposium itself. He proceeds to examine the Shōwa ideology that both constitute the intellectual background for “Overcoming Modernity” and the subject of post-war reflection. Notably, Koyasu introduces the absent “China” question to reveal intellect’s self-validating effort and Kyoto School’s self-contradictory “Philosophy of World History.” These discourses made possible the unanimous war passion in December 1941 to start a “real” war against Britain-America. Lastly, he revives Shimomura Torataro’s viewpoint of “modernity is us,” which he identifies as absent both in the wartime symposium and post-war reflections. By reading Takeuchi Yoshimi’s post-war “duality” concept that re-interprets Japan’s war and his “ironic” writing styles, Koyasu sheds light on Takeuchi’s legacy in opening possibilities for a new conceptual “Asian identity.”

Keywords: Asian Identity, Anti-Modernity, Kyoto School, Takeuchi Yoshimi, Wartime Japan