
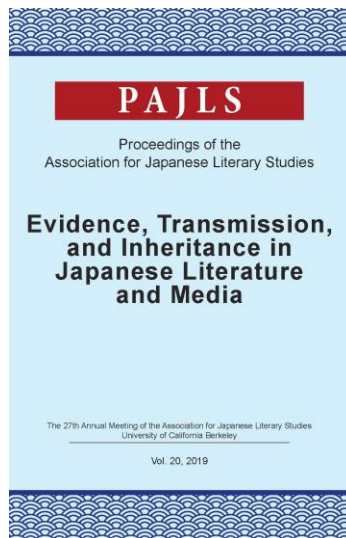


“Adaptation of the Tokyo Trial: Reading Kinoshita Junji’s *Between God and Man*”

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**ADAPTATION OF THE TOKYO TRIAL:  
READING KINOSHITA JUNJI'S *BETWEEN GOD AND MAN***

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A trial is recorded in a textual form, a stenographic record. The record can be referred to as evidence in other trials, so it functions as an authority not only at the time the record was written but also in the present and the future. Since no event repeats itself in the same way, the original text is inevitably reinterpreted, modified, and adapted.

If a play were written simply by quoting and repeating the court record with only minor alterations, could it play the same role as the above legal documents? The play based on the records is recreated on the stage. In other words, the trials are held repeatedly at various times in the form of art. Depending on the performers, the interpretation of the play changes, and the reception of the audience changes depending on the context in which the play is performed. It is reinterpreted, modified, and adapted in a different way each time.

This paper deals with Kinoshita Junji's *Between God and Man* (*Kami to hito to no aida*), which is based on the stenographic record of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East<sup>2</sup> (hereinafter referred to as the Tokyo Trial). It considers *Between God and Man* as an adaptation of the Tokyo Trial and clarifies how this theatrical performance acts as evidence in the recognition of the Tokyo Trial and what it means for contemporary and future justice.

**A COURTROOM DRAMA IN 2018**

*Between God and Man* was written in 1970 by Kinoshita Junji, a renowned Japanese playwright.<sup>3</sup> It consists of two parts: Part I, "The Judgment," and Part II, "Summer: A Romance of the South Seas." Part I, "The Judgment," is the one that borrowed some parts from the record of the Tokyo Trial. There are only a few changes, and most remain in the court records. However, Kinoshita selected only a part of the scene from a huge volume of records and edited them so that they could be performed

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<sup>2</sup> *International Military Tribunal for the Far East, Proceedings 1946–1948*.

<sup>3</sup> The English translation is quoted from *Between God and Man: A Judgment on War Crimes*, translated by Eric J. Gangloff (University of Tokyo Press, 1979). Except for that text, all translations from Japanese texts are mine.

in the form of a play. In contrast with “The Judgment,” Part II, “Summer,” is basically a fictional story focusing on a Japanese soldier who was deemed a war criminal on an island in the South Pacific. While both parts deal with war crimes trials, each part of the play is independent in that they do not share any characters and their storylines are not connected. Thus these two parts have been put on the stage independently.<sup>4</sup>

This raises two questions: Why did Kinoshita deal with war crimes trials in the form of a play and write its two parts in different literary styles? What dramatic effect could such a form could have? The answer is found in the various historical periods in which performances take place. Specifically, this paper examines the 2018 performance and the first performance of the play in 1970 by reading author notes and contemporary theater reviews.

*Between God and Man* was performed by Mingei, a theatrical troupe, from February 24 to March 10, 2018, at Kinokuniya Southern Theater. It should be noted that 2018 was the year in which these two were performed at the same time. What is more interesting is that *Macbeth below the Equator* (*Sekidō no shita no Makubesu*), a play by the Zainichi writer Chong Wishing that depicts Korean Class B and C war criminals, was put on the stage in March of the same year, in commemoration of the 20-year anniversary of the opening of the New National Theater. In addition, Inoue Hisashi’s *Scab of a Dream* (*Yume no kasabuta*), which is known as the trilogy of the Tokyo Trial<sup>5</sup>, was performed in June of the same year. In 2018, a few literary works dealing directly with the war crimes trials were revived on stage at the same time.

Among these plays, presumably the most difficult one for the contemporary audience to understand was Part I of *Between God and Man*, “The Judgment.” The dialogue was filled with legal technical terms. The audience must have been puzzled. By 2018, more than 70 years had passed since the Tokyo Trial ended. How many people could understand when the trial itself was being reproduced without any historical background or explanation?

The play eventually focuses on three scenes from the trial: 1) the issue of jurisdiction, 2) the atrocities committed by the Japanese army in Lạng Sơn Province, Vietnam, and 3) the atomic bomb.

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, each part was initially put on separately. The first part was staged in September 1970, but the second part was not performed until 17 years later.

<sup>5</sup> The other two are *Fissure of a Dream* (*Yume no Sakeme*) and *Tears of a Dream* (*Yume no Namida*).

The first scene, on jurisdiction, deals with the “crimes against peace” issues raised in the Tokyo Trial. The Japanese chief lawyer (the Chief Counsel) argues that this provision, which was created to punish the leaders of the war of aggression (known as “Class A” war criminals), is an “ex post facto law” created after World War II and cannot be applied retroactively. He described the situation: “It is as if we were made to doubt the existence of the very earth on which we must stand.”

In the next scene, direct questioning takes place concerning the atrocities that Japanese troops inflicted on French civilians during the war in French Indochina, especially the massacre at Lạng Sơn. To the question of whether the murdered Frenchmen were members of the regular French army under Vichy or part of de Gaulle’s Resistance, the lawyers argue the latter, in which case the Frenchmen cannot be considered prisoners of war.

In the last scene, the defense questions whether it is just that only Japan is being tried for violations of international law and treaties. They insist that violations of the treaty and law committed by the Allied Powers, including the dropping of atomic bombs, should be taken up. This scene ends with a statement by Defense Attorney H: “I was only wondering if the American attorney for the defense and the Soviet attorney for the prosecution have ever given any consideration to the tragic fate of those [Nagasaki and Hiroshima’s] victims.” However, his words were interrupted by the President, thus underlining the inequality between the victors and the defeated.

In summary, the three scenes that make up “The Judgment” seem to have been taken from stenographic records with some political intent. In 2018, when the foundations of Japan’s postwar legal system were about to change, including arguments mounting over constitutional revisions, these scenes could be used extensively. The crimes that the victorious nations defined ex post facto in order to punish the defeated Japan, the lack of standing for judging the atrocities committed by the Japanese army in the colonies of the Empire and the problems of court proceedings, and above all, the dropping of the atomic bombs by America can be used to deny the import of the Tokyo trial. Indeed, William A. Schabas, a famous scholar of international law, summarized three points on which people criticized the Nuremberg Trial and the Tokyo Trial as “victor’s justice,” and these points directly overlap with the summary of the above (2015: 8–11). And the rejection of the Tokyo Trial easily leads to the denunciation of what is called the “historical perspective of the Tokyo Trial” (Tōkyō saiban shikan) or a “masochistic view of history” (Jigyaku shikan), said to be brought about by unfair trials. It is also a convenient way to support changing the constitution, whose renunciation of war was also imposed by

the victors. After all, it is an argument that contemporary readers in 2018 are familiar with hearing from conservative politicians.

However, what makes capturing the message of *Between God and Man* so complex is the second part, “Summer.” It has a literary narrative and uses colloquial language, so it is easy to understand even without specific knowledge of the Tokyo Trial. The main character is an intellectual Japanese soldier, Kanohara. He was sentenced to death by hanging, although he had never been involved in the slaughter of natives; rather, he had been the only soldier friendly to the native people.

KANOHARA To be hanged—to be hanged. As far as they are concerned, anyone will do, just as long as there is a criminal. However, their logic applies to us as well. Besides—I did not do anything personally, but I do not have any proof that I was totally innocent either when I was in a situation where something had to be done. Isn’t that so? Isn’t it? Isn’t that so? To be hanged, to be hanged. That, however, I prefer to think of as a personally selected means of committing suicide—a means of suicide chosen on my own initiative. That is the best way to get any satisfaction from this—and I now am satisfied by this idea. Isn’t that so? Isn’t it? Isn’t that so? Ah, I feel dizzy.... My head is spinning. (Kinoshita 1979: 137–138)

KANOHARA But there’s something else. Because people forget, evil will always be with us in this world. Take the men who acted so badly in this war. However bad they may have been, some of them are sure to be spared because of oblivion. They’ll be spared and grow powerful once again, you watch. They’ll be the prime ministers and corporation presidents. They’ll start writing their outrageous statements again. (Kinoshita 1979: 170)

Kanohara voluntarily accepts his “sin” after being sentenced, although he is not personally guilty. Following quotation, near the end of the play, the ghost of Kanohara appears and sends out a more direct political message. He warns that war and war criminals will be resurrected by people’s “forgetfulness.” Kishi Nobusuke, who was held at Sugamo Prison as a suspected Class A war criminal, was left uncharged after the Tokyo Trial ended, and served as prime minister from 1957 to 1960, was an implied target of the play.

How was this quote interpreted by the audience, who had already decided that the first part, “The Judgment,” was representative of

revisionists? One thing is certain: from the perspective of 2018, it is difficult to understand why these two parts contradict each other. This fact urges the audience of 2018 to reconsider the first part and to think of the historical contexts at the time that this play was written. Accordingly, it is necessary to examine the author's intention as he stated it in 1970, and the comments written by the readers/audience at that time. In this way, a historical turning point that could not have been imagined in today's reading will be clarified.

#### DATING BACK TO THE 1970S

*Between God and Man* was published in October 1970. The Tokyo Trial started on May 3, 1946 and adjourned on November 12, 1948. This means that Kinoshita Junji made a play out of the Tokyo Trial 20 years after the actual trial. As Saeki Shōichi has pointed out, the Tokyo Trial has rarely been featured in literary works (1970: 245–259). *Between God and Man* is the first theatrical work to attempt to directly depict the Tokyo Trial. What made Kinoshita write about the Tokyo Trial? The form of theater might be one explanation.

THE MONITOR: (To Interpreter) Can you repeat what he said?

THE INTERPRETER: I cannot repeat it.

THE PRESIDENT: Unless he took a written record of what the witness said, he would be unlikely to be able to repeat it in a different form. That is obvious; but we cannot have these unofficial translators about the court who are unsworn telling you what was said and asking the Court to have it corrected. I suggest, Mr. Chief Prosecutor, that you put another question.

MR. KEENAN: I had that thought in mind, your Honor. Our minds are running in the same direction.

BY MR. KEENAN: (Continued)

Q In answering my last question, did you use this expression: "I did not have my own hand; I did not have my own mouth"?

A I meant that we have lost completely our freedom.

THE PRESIDENT: Major Moore.

LANGUAGE ARBITER (MAJOR MOORE): If the Court please. --

Figure 1: The record of the Tokyo Trial.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY F Next is Defense Document No. 518. I request that it be marked for identification.

CLERK OF THE COURT Defense Document No. 518 will be given exhibit No. 2330 for identification only.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY F I offer in evidence the excerpt therefrom which consists of the message of President Roosevelt to Congress in relation to Iceland.

PRESIDENT The court rejects this.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY F Next is Defense Document No. 562. I request that it be marked for identification.

CLERK OF THE COURT Defense Document No. 562 will be given exhibit No. 2331 for identification only.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY F This consists of excerpts from the book *Events Leading up to World War II* which relate to the Greenland matter.

PRESIDENT The court rejects this. Does this conclude your submission?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY F It does. My colleague will now take the floor.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY G My colleague for the defense argued that international law is defined not by the texts of treaties but by the acts of state of the signatory nations. To support his argument he then tendered a number of documents concerning the acts of state of several nations bound by treaties, and finally buried these documents in a tedious ceremony. I would now like to present one more document as a requiem to that ceremony. My right to do so is grounded on the motion of exception which I made before the recess. I tender Defense Document No. 553, an article from the *Nippon Times* dated the 20th of February, 1947, and request that it be marked for identification.

CLERK OF THE COURT Defense Document No. 553 will be given exhibit No. 2332 for identification only.

PRESIDENT . What does this concern?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY G And I offer in evidence the excerpt therefrom bearing the same document number.

PRESIDENT What is this article concerned with?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY G The article is entitled "America's Decision to Drop the Bomb."

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY B Your Honor—

Figure 2: Part of *Between God and Man*.

These two figures confirm that the form of literature most similar to stenographic records is a play. A stenographic record is a textual form for recording and recording in person what is said in court. On the other hand, a play is a text written on the assumption that it will be performed by an actor on stage. Therefore, these texts, which consist of the subject and content of spoken words, necessarily have similar forms. It can be said that there was a formal reason why literature based on stenographic records chose the genre of a theatrical play. In this manner, using this literary form is an adequate and effective way to adapt the record of the Tokyo Trial. The stage enabled the audience to experience the historical scene of the Tokyo Trial.

Kinoshita himself described his impression when he read the stenographic record of the Tokyo Trial in a short essay called "After Writing 'The Judgment'" (Kinoshita 1970): "To read the 10 pages that I

could hardly comprehend, but which I really wanted to understand, was by no means merely a task of reading with my eyes.” He is referring to the problems of interpretation and translation, language and expression, the complexity of discussions, and the difficulty of reading due to typographical errors. He continues:

In other words, the events dealt with there are, of course, historical facts. However, at the same time, they are being restructured here by means of materials other than stenographic records. I constructed the logic by which those materials are discussed and arrived at the conclusions drawn. After doing so, I applied the words of the stenographic record, which had been difficult to understand, to the structure, and corrected and supplemented the translation to my satisfaction. When I had finished the work, for the first time, I read the 10 pages, and I had acquired one of the materials for writing.

I am not trying to complain. What I mean is that it seems to me now that I have written the work, as the process of reading the stenographic record by chance symbolizes how much it means to understand the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, or war crimes trials in general. (Kinoshita 1970)

It is worth noting that after writing the play, the author recalls not the act of writing but the act of reading. This indicates that “The Judgment” was written in the process of reading and interpreting the stenographic records of the Tokyo Trial. Therefore, the reason “The Judgment” was written must be examined by considering why the author read the stenographic records of the war trials around 1970. It should be noted that Kinoshita Junji was not the only one who revived the theme of the war crimes trials and sought to give them a new meaning during this period. Kinoshita’s struggles to “restructure” and “understand” the war trials were carried out with contemporary people, and there was a decisive historical opportunity to get them to do so.

Critical reactions appeared as soon as Kinoshita published *Between God and Man* and “The Judgment” was staged in the 1970s. Those who reviewed or otherwise wrote about this play were not limited to the field of theatrical studies. The play also attracted historians, philosophers, and intellectuals in the general humanities. Sometimes their assessments of the play are diametrically opposed. However, it is significant that they shared



a recognition of how topical and politically important this play was in reconsidering postwar Japan.

Two themes recurred in the discussions of the 1970s: the Vietnam War and Japan's prosperity after high economic growth. For instance, Watanabe Tamotsu, a renowned critic of theater, including kabuki and other forms, paid attention to the protest of the Chief Prosecutor in "The Judgment":

The precise legal proposition presented to this court by the defense constitutes a clear challenge to the capacity of civilized nations to take effective preventative steps to save civilization by punishing the responsible individuals who brought the scourge of aggressive warfare to a great part of the earth. (Kinoshita 1979: 46)

In response to this citation, Watanabe writes, "His words start to depart from the restrictions of the stage momentarily and start to have an absolutely different meaning." He continues:

In addition to these words, every word of this play has a meaning within one political situation. If we do not consider the situation, the meanings of the words can be easily reversed. For example, the government of North Vietnam could likely criticize the United States by using the phrase I cited. (Watanabe 1970: 24–25)

It is noteworthy that Watanabe recalls North Vietnam and the United States here and points out that the reader or audience can adapt the same phrase into a completely different context. As an example of how a textual work can only have a meaning in a specific context, he notes that in 1970, this play reminded him of the Vietnam War. More importantly, Watanabe was not the only one for whom the play evoked the Vietnam War.

Ubukata Naokichi surveyed the research on the Tokyo Trial in his article "The Tokyo Trial and Human Thought," published in the journal *Shisō* (1972: 68–78). Citing Mori Kyōzō, he argues that Japanese people started to be aware of their role as aggressors in the Pacific War after North Vietnam was bombed in 1965. According to his discussion, this consciousness sprouted from the idea that in the past, Japanese militarists did the exact same thing toward Asia and the Pacific that the United States was doing against Vietnam. Ubukata also points out that, during the Vietnam War, people referred to the Nuremberg Trial and the Tokyo Trial as a way

of conceiving of the My Lai massacre in 1968. In other words, the Tokyo Trial functioned as evidence (or a reference) for considering the Vietnam War then in progress. Miyagishi Yasuharu explicitly states that the scene of “The Judgment” about the slaughter at Lạng Sơn Province, Vietnam, recalled the My Lai massacre and other massacres perpetrated against noncombatants in the Vietnam War (1973: 11). People living in 2018 often forget that *Between God and Man* was written by an author, and read and seen by an audience, who lived in the vortex of those political events.

Critics also mentioned Japan’s prosperity in the 1970s. Watanabe describes 1970s Japan, 25 years after the defeat, as a “falsity” (1970: 18–26). Isoda Kōichi asked skeptically: “Can postwar Japan, with its bloated economics and its stagnant nihilism beneath its prosperity, maintain its stability” (Isoda 1975: 191)? In fact, Isoda was one who severely criticized *Between God and Man*. He thought Kinoshita did not fully accept the meaning of the Tokyo Trial, given the final scene dealing with the atomic bomb. Isoda insisted that even if it was a flawed trial, Japanese should learn from it and remember its meaning. He might have feared that Japan’s awareness of its responsibility for the war would be diluted by the emphasis on America’s wrongdoing.

Thus “The Judgment” was generally viewed through the lens of the Vietnam War in the same period, read, and generally regarded positively, even though some critics maintained that the play was edited to emphasize the wrong parts of the Tokyo Trial.

#### REPRESENTING HISTORY IN DIFFERENT ITERATIONS

In the 1970s, when this play was first released, only the first part, “The Judgment,” was performed. It took 17 years for the second part, “Summer,” to be performed. However, “The Judgment” was not received in the way that it was interpreted in 2018. This is because in the 1970s, there was a shared context that limited the range of interpreting and reading it as a criticism of the Vietnam War. In other words, both the stenographic records and the edited version of the play are subject to different interpretations depending on the historical context.

On the other hand, what effect does “Summer” have? It is a story with a clear political message. It emphasizes the contrast between the leaders of the war (who evaded responsibility, and one of whom eventually became prime minister) and one innocent soldier (who was hanged). In one era, the “God” that judges the “sin” of people and the “justice” that is ruled by the law may be seen as the symbol of a mere winner. However, “Summer,” which deals with Class B and C war criminals as a story about ordinary people, presents war and sin as everyday matters, while also highlighting

the same themes of the will to resist war and the desire for peace. In this way, the form and content combine to make *Between God and Man* into a play, and “Summer” serves to limit the various ways of reading “The Judgment.”

The examination above has shown how Kinoshita Junji adapted legal texts and how the play was received in the 1970s and could have been received in 2018. *Between God and Man* is not simply an imitation of law or a representation of court records. Rather, it is a place where controversial and creative discussions are provoked. By situating *Between God and Man* in the historical context of 1970, this paper has shown that Kinoshita and contemporary critics considered the past trial as evidence for defining their urgent present, in which the Vietnam War loomed large.

This play will continue to be performed in circumstances under which a stage itself represents history. The onstage version of *Between God and Man* will continue to reproduce the meaning of the Tokyo Trial in different iterations through historical and political contexts. In other words, it will be adapted to reflect the political situation of the era in which the play is staged. The audience’s task is to resituate this stage in the context of the present political situation with the help of the clear message in “Summer,” since the play and its performance continue to ask its audience to seek evidence that redefines its meaning in the present.

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