

「Feticism: Existence and Imagination

**The Necessity of Mizoguchi Setting Fire to Kinkaku-ji in Yukio
Mishima's "The Temple of the Golden Pavilion" from the Perspective
of Feticism**

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Introduction:

As the German literary scholar Goethe once declared, "Humans are always in doubt. While in doubt, they are always seeking something." Human beings, inherently imperfect, persist in their pursuit of perfection (Shiratori 174). Goethe further asserted that the sought-after ideal must be perfect and absolute, with particular emphasis on aesthetic excellence (Shiratori 174-176). Yukio Mishima's "The Temple of the Golden Pavilion" portrays individuals who seek such an absolute aesthetic presence and are overwhelmed by it. The character Mizoguchi in this novel grapples with a congenital stuttering disorder during his formative years, finding his spiritual solace in the symbol of absolute beauty, the Kinkaku-ji (Golden Pavilion). However, Mizoguchi harbors multiple desires for the destruction of the Kinkaku-ji, ultimately setting it ablaze with his own hands. Yukio Mishima vividly demonstrates how Mizoguchi's psychological dependence on the Kinkaku-ji as an aesthetic idol was established, but the motives and reasons for his act of arson are left unexplained. This thesis examines the necessity of Mizoguchi burning "The Temple of the Golden Pavilion" from the perspective of Object Deification Theory. To analyze the motivations behind Mizoguchi's act of arson, this essay will consider the following four points to elucidate:

1. The impact of the Kinkaku-ji as a mental image and as a physical reality.
2. The basis for Mizoguchi's desire for the destruction of the Kinkaku-ji during wartime.
3. The influence of the end of the war and the conceptual Kinkaku-ji.
4. How Mizoguchi transitioned from changing perceptions to the act of arson.

In the subsequent sections of this essay, I will delve into the discussions in the main body. The idealization of the Kinkaku-ji within his mental imagery was fundamentally rooted in his profound admiration for its absolute beauty. Nonetheless, Mizoguchi's disillusionment with the physical reality of the Kinkaku-ji led to a stark disjunction between his mental image and its tangible existence. Amidst the wartime context, he fervently yearned for the obliteration of the authentic Kinkaku-ji, ardently believing that his mental image should stand as the exclusive and unassailable Kinkaku-ji. However, this fervent desire crumbled with the conclusion of the war. Even post-war, Mizoguchi found himself in a perpetual struggle, as he stood before the actual Kinkaku-ji, endeavoring to enshrine his mental image of it, safeguarding its unassailable status. In the pursuit of this endeavor, he inadvertently became ensnared by the deified Kinkaku-ji within his own mind. This dominion of the Kinkaku-ji stifled his real-life experiences, but the already-deified mental image of the Kinkaku-ji remained indomitable and irrefutable. Mizoguchi was profoundly tormented by Object Deification, and ultimately, in a desperate bid to ensure the absolute sanctity of his mental image, he resorted to setting the physical Kinkaku-ji on fire.

1-1: The Impact of the Mental and Existential Kinkaku-ji

Before delving into the reasons behind Mizoguchi's decision to commit arson, it is essential to discuss how his encounter with the Kinkaku-ji transformed him from the perspective of Object Deification Theory. To address this subtopic, this essay will set the following points of discussion:

1. The sequence of events leading to Mizoguchi's decision to commit arson.
2. Mizoguchi from the perspective of Object Deification Theory.
3. The impact of the mental and existential Kinkaku-ji.

1-1: The Sequence of Events Leading to Mizoguchi's Arson:

Yukio Mishima's "The Temple of the Golden Pavilion," written in 1956, is a literary work that depicts the relationship between the protagonist, Mizoguchi, and the Kinkaku-ji, which appears as an aesthetic symbol. While the work was inspired by the actual "Kinkaku-ji arson incident" that occurred in 1950, all details in the novel are products of Mishima's imaginative creativity, except for the background information (Mishima 362). Mizoguchi, the protagonist, had struggled with a congenital stuttering disorder and poverty during his childhood, leading him to be entrusted to the Kinkaku-ji as a temple novice. In his imagination, Mizoguchi had idealized the beauty of the Kinkaku-ji, but upon seeing the actual Kinkaku-ji for the first time, he felt disappointed by its lack of beauty. However, as the war intensified, he began to sense a shared fate, fearing that he and the Kinkaku-ji might both be destroyed in an air raid. Due to his arrogant lifestyle at university, his absences increased, and his standing within the temple declined. Falling into solitude, Mizoguchi's ultimate answer was to "set fire to the Kinkaku-ji."

1-2: Mizoguchi from the Perspective of Feticism:

Mizoguchi's excessive reverence for the Kinkaku-ji, a materially simple structure, can be explored through the lens of Object Deification Theory. Within the text, he proclaims, "It completely enclosed me and allowed my position within its structure" (Mishima 160), indicating his fascination with the Kinkaku-ji. Furthermore, an essay by Hiroichiro Isako of Kansai University, titled "Yukio Mishima's 'The Temple of the Golden Pavilion' Research," explains the Kinkaku-ji as a symbol of Mizoguchi's religious worship, clearly recognizing it as an object of devotion (Isako 301-316). However, while the mentioned essay defined the Kinkaku-ji as a pure object of devotion, this thesis will approach the subject from the perspective of Object Deification Theory, as proposed by the French philosopher Charles de Bross. This is based on the premise that in traditional idol worship, the object of devotion merely serves as a medium through which gods are projected. In contrast, Mizoguchi displays faith directly in the Kinkaku-ji as an object of worship itself. In other words, his recognition of the object itself as the object of worship aligns with the arguments of Object Deification Theory. Therefore, this thesis will expand on the claims made in "Yukio Mishima's 'The Temple of the Golden Pavilion' Research" by examining the relationship between the Kinkaku-ji and Mizoguchi from the perspective of Object Deification Theory.

1-3: The Impact of the Mental and Existential Kinkaku-ji:

Object Deification rooted in the mental realm has no inherent limitations. Object Deification Theory, as proposed by Charles de Bross, further allows for the division of the object of worship based on its material existence (de Bross 129-203). This chapter focuses on the Object Deification rooted in the mental realm, where the object of worship lacks tangible substance. As a preliminary point, fantasies about an object of worship with no physical existence are never conclusively denied, making all acts of faith reliant on the believer's imagination. In this novel, Mizoguchi, in his childhood, had never confirmed the existence of the Kinkaku-ji and had constructed all his fantasies about it from the idol of the Kinkaku-ji described by his father. In fact, his father described the Kinkaku-ji as having no equal in this world, exaggerating its beauty, and from this exaggeration, Mizoguchi came to recognize the Kinkaku-ji as being absolute and singular (Mishima 28). Moreover, since his father never uttered any words of denial about the Kinkaku-ji, Mizoguchi considered the mental image he had created of the Kinkaku-ji to be composed entirely of absolute beauty. Therefore, Mizoguchi's Object Deification of the Kinkaku-ji is defined as an amplified fantasy stemming from an excessive imagination of beauty.

Mizoguchi's Object Deification of the Kinkaku-ji emerged from his profound feelings of inferiority. In his book "What Does It Mean to Believe in Religion," philosopher Akito Ishikawa argues that the essential purpose of acts of faith is the search for a means to supplement one's imperfections by projecting them onto others (Ishikawa 21-172). Mizoguchi, who had been deeply aware of his own imperfections from a young age, struggled with congenital handicaps and poverty. Mizoguchi himself expressed that "solitude grew fatter and fatter, like a pig" (Mishima 13), indicating the depth of his feelings of inferiority. This statement, which likens him to a pig, is used to ridicule lazy individuals and symbolizes impurity in the Islamic world. Thus, the self-deprecating statement made towards himself becomes the basis for understanding Mizoguchi's self-deprecation and feelings of inferiority. His profound understanding of his own imperfections led Mizoguchi to seek the absolute beauty of the Kinkaku-ji as a means of overcoming his imperfections, as per the philosophical idea. It is because Mizoguchi, an imperfect being, could merge with the perfect Kinkaku-ji, allowing him to escape from himself. Thus, Mizoguchi adopted Object Deification of the mental image of the Kinkaku-ji as a means of conquering his feelings of inferiority.

On the other hand, Object Deification rooted in existence has its limits. Unlike mental Object Deification, the border between existence and imagination is clearly defined, leading to occasional conflict in discerning the difference. During his youth when he was brought to the Kinkaku-ji as a temple novice, Mizoguchi struggled with the overwhelming disparity between the idealized mental image and the real Kinkaku-ji. His statement, "Is beauty something that isn't even this beautiful?" (Mishima 33), reflects his despair in the face of the reality of the Kinkaku-ji's lack of beauty. He expressed the concept of 'beauty' with the implication of not being beautiful. Additionally, he questioned the illusion of the Kinkaku-ji, emphasizing his disappointment in the actual existence of the Kinkaku-ji. This despair is rooted in the idea that, just like himself, the Kinkaku-ji, seen as the perfect entity, is also imperfect. At the same time, even the idolized mental image of the Kinkaku-ji that Mizoguchi had relied upon for so long was

negated. Just as the philosopher Nietzsche referred to the betrayal of what one had believed in as nihilism, Mizoguchi becomes despondent in the face of the difference between the mental and the real (Nietzsche 13-232).

2-1: Why Did Mizoguchi Reject the Existential Kinkaku-ji?

This chapter, will explore why Mizoguchi desired the destruction of the actual Kinkaku-ji Temple during the war. To analyze this subtopic, this essay will consider the following points:

1. Why did Mizoguchi reject the actual Kinkaku-ji Temple?
2. How did Mizoguchi come to wish for the destruction of the Kinkaku-ji Temple?

The recognition of the difference between the mental and existential Kinkaku-ji promotes the separation of the object of Object Deification. Mizoguchi, who felt disillusioned with the existential Kinkaku-ji, grew to doubt whether the existential Kinkaku-ji was genuine by deepening his relationship with it. He explicitly expressed, "Make the real one look clearer and more beautiful than my mental image of the Kinkaku-ji" (Mishima 46). Consequently, Mizoguchi perceived the existential Kinkaku-ji as fake, an argument similarly made in the book "I Must Burn the Kinkaku-ji" by Ken Uchiumi. Of particular note is his statement about the existential Kinkaku-ji: "The Kinkaku-ji is like Eurydice; her form has been erased" (Mishima 47). Eurydice is a figure from Greek mythology known as the "forbidden beauty." According to the myth, gazing upon her would result in her being taken to the underworld and lost forever (Maetsue 11-20). In other words, as Mizoguchi continued to see the existential Kinkaku-ji, he implied that the Kinkaku-ji's existence was erased. This demonstrates that Mizoguchi not only rejected the existential Kinkaku-ji but also affirmed that the true Kinkaku-ji was the mental image of the Kinkaku-ji.

2-2: How Mizoguchi Came to Desire the Destruction of Kinkaku-ji

As the bombing of Japan's main islands commenced, Mizoguchi developed a mutual desire for the Kinkaku-ji's destruction. Firstly, Mizoguchi's separate perception of the Kinkaku-ji gave rise to the coexistence of the absolute mental Kinkaku-ji and the imperfect existential Kinkaku-ji. In worship with an associated existence, there is an inherent limit. Thus, it is inevitable that he wished for the destruction of the existential Kinkaku-ji, which is the source of this limitation. He indeed began to desire the destruction of the existential Kinkaku-ji through bombings, stating, "The Kinkaku-ji, bound by form, will easily release itself and appear somewhere else" (Mishima 61). By using personification, he portrays the Kinkaku-ji as a person constrained by its material form, suggesting that the destruction of the existential Kinkaku-ji, bound by these material limitations, is necessary for it to transcend constraints and reign as the absolute entity. In essence, the destruction of the existential Kinkaku-ji as a physical structure signifies liberation from the constraints imposed by its existence. Mizoguchi's phrase, "will easily release itself," means liberation from existence, namely that the mental image of the Kinkaku-ji will reign as the unique and absolute Kinkaku-ji. Therefore, Mizoguchi desired the destruction of the existential Kinkaku-ji to eliminate the hindrance it posed to the mental Kinkaku-ji as the sole and absolute Kinkaku-ji.

3: The Impact of the End of the War and the Conceptual Kinkaku-ji Temple

This chapter will consider how the end of the war influenced Mizoguchi's perception of the Kinkaku-ji Temple. When analyzing this subtopic, this essay will delve into the following key points:

1. Impact of the End of the War on Kinkaku-ji
2. The Basis for Mizoguchi's Idolization of the Conceptual Kinkaku-ji
3. Changes in Mizoguchi Following the Idolization of the Conceptual Kinkaku

3-1: The Impact of the End of the War

The end of the war brought about a fundamental breakdown in the prevailing social structure of the time, but the Kinkaku-ji Temple remained as a timeless entity. In contrast to the social upheaval accompanying the end of the era of the Greater Japanese Empire, the elegant Kinkaku-ji Temple became further idealized. However, Mizoguchi made a contrasting statement, saying, "After the war, people are consumed by evil thoughts under this light" (Mishima 90). According to an essay by Minami Aso, "Kinkaku-ji as a Central Element in Yukio Mishima's 'Kyoto' and 'Postwar,'" the Kinkaku-ji Temple after the war was beautified and idolized for commercial purposes by society as a whole (Minami 19-30). In other words, the societal perception of Kinkaku-ji Temple became constructed around interests and desires, which Mizoguchi characterized as "evil thoughts." Moreover, according to Kant's work "Critique of Pure Reason," the most unethical act is to use something for one's own purposes, and therefore, those who had been consumed by personal desires at the time can be seen as symbols of evil (Kant 19-187). In conclusion, Mizoguchi detested the way the Kinkaku-ji Temple had been corrupted by societal idolization after the war.

3-2: The Basis for Mizoguchi's Idolization of the Conceptual Kinkaku-ji

In contrast to the corrupt idolization of the Kinkaku-ji Temple, Mizoguchi sought to idolize the conceptual Kinkaku-ji. In the story, Mizoguchi sought in the conceptual Kinkaku-ji a way to address his own imperfections. He believed that he and the conceptual Kinkaku-ji were inseparable, representing a single entity. However, the societal idolization of the Kinkaku-ji Temple, driven by personal gain and unethical desires, weakened this connection. Mizoguchi himself constructed the idealized conceptual Kinkaku-ji within his imagination, but society was idolizing the physical Kinkaku-ji for unjust reasons. This meant that while Mizoguchi regarded his conceptual Kinkaku-ji as the absolute, it was society that was idolizing the Kinkaku-ji Temple for unethical reasons. In a similar manner, in the Christian world, despite worshipping the same God, different denominations historically considered each other as heretics (Hatano 489-503). Therefore, to counteract societal perceptions of the Kinkaku-ji Temple, Mizoguchi needed to maintain a steadfast belief in the absoluteness of his conceptual Kinkaku-ji.

However, the idolization of the conceptual Kinkaku-ji led to a shift in Mizoguchi's relationship with it. "Concerning the Concept of the Divine in Modern 'Folk-God-Actuality' Worship" defines idolization as a religious devotion to an absolute object, and Mizoguchi elevated the conceptual Kinkaku-ji as an absolute and transcendent entity (Bruno 129-203). This separation between the two entities became evident in his statement, "The connection between me and the Kinkaku-ji

Temple has been severed" (Mishima 81). In this quote, he did not specify which type of Kinkaku-ji he referred to, highlighting the severance of both the actual and conceptual Kinkaku-ji. In essence, Mizoguchi's shift from the Kinkaku-ji to the "conceptual Kinkaku" indicated that he regarded them as separate entities. Kant, in his work "Critique of Pure Reason," states that it is impossible for the knower to comprehend a transcendent entity, leading to an absolute negation of any relationship (Kant 61-701). Similarly, by idolizing the conceptual Kinkaku-ji, Mizoguchi ensured its absoluteness while recognizing its separation from himself as a conceptual entity.

3-3: Changes in Mizoguchi Following the Idolization of the Conceptual Kinkaku

When any entity is idolized, the devotee cannot avoid being mentally controlled by the object of worship. This is exemplified by Mizoguchi's statement, "It's strange. I don't even feel any solidarity with emptiness" (Mishima 287). He lacked any sense of solidarity, indicating that the idolized conceptual Kinkaku-ji restricted his sense of belonging. He was superficially affiliated with other communities such as the university and his family, but he did not recognize any sense of solidarity or belonging on a spiritual level. This lack of belonging was due to the fact that Mizoguchi regarded the conceptual Kinkaku-ji as his sole spiritual anchor, which resulted in narrowing his sense of belonging. Katsuaki Okada's work, "Fichte and Nishida's Philosophy: In Search of the Principle of Self-Formation," argues that any form of dependence leads to being controlled by that upon which one depends (Okada 12-200). In reality, Mizoguchi was bound to the Kinkaku-ji Temple in every aspect of his life, from his relationships to his university life, which illustrates his sense of being controlled. Consequently, Mizoguchi was both idolizing and being controlled by the conceptual Kinkaku-ji.

How Mizoguchi Transitioned from a Change in Perception to Arson

Mizonokuchi's choices concerning the deified Kinkaku-ji were limited to changes in perception or actions. Attitudes toward objects of worship can be separated into internal and external aspects, and this is because one can only be certain of the absoluteness of the object of worship by either changing their own perception or changing the object itself. In fact, in the middle of the story, Mizonokuchi engages in philosophical contemplation regarding "perception" and "action." Firstly, Mizonokuchi's change in perception is internal because he can achieve the absoluteness of the object of worship solely through his own change in perception. Therefore, Mizonokuchi's denial of the existence of Kinkaku-ji is a change in perception, which can be understood because it hasn't brought about any changes in the actual Kinkaku-ji. Furthermore, even Mizonokuchi's desire for destruction during the wartime, which he did not put into action, indicates that he clearly valued perception. On the other hand, actions are external because one can achieve changes in their attitude toward the object of worship by directly changing the object itself, not through self. In other words, the arson committed by Mizonokuchi directly changes the existence of Kinkaku-ji, making it an act. In conclusion, Mizonokuchi initially valued perception, but from the middle of the story onwards, he prioritized action.

Mizonokuchi found the importance of the destruction of the actual Kinkaku-ji in the significance of action. All of Mizonokuchi's worship activities toward the imagined Kinkaku-ji were centered on changes in perception, but eventually, he transitioned to the act of arson. In fact, when

preparing for the arson, Mizonokuchi stated, "This rusty key between my inner world and the outer world will open," using the contrast between the inner world (imagined Kinkaku-ji) and the outer world (actual Kinkaku-ji) (Mishima 312 pages). The act of "opening the key" is about overcoming the established differences between these two. This contrast between the two does not only limit itself to Mizonokuchi's spiritual conflict concerning Kinkaku-ji but also simultaneously establishes a contrast between the fallen deification of Kinkaku-ji in society (the external world at the time) and the legitimate deification of Kinkaku-ji in Mizonokuchi's inner world. In other words, he emphasized action not only to resolve the differences between existence and the imagined Kinkaku-ji but also to negate the fallen deification of Kinkaku-ji in society through action. Based on this evidence, it is clear that changes in perception can only alter one's own perspective, while actions can change the perspective of the entire society. Therefore, Mizonokuchi chose arson to make his imagined Kinkaku-ji an absolute object of worship.

Nevertheless, certain reservations arise in light of Mizonokuchi's radical and inhumane arson act. This act is conspicuously driven by his self-interest, and one would expect that, had he possessed ethical or moral convictions, he would have recognized the profound ethical predicaments intrinsic to his actions. To address this apprehension, it is plausible that Mizonokuchi, at the narrative's outset, harbored an incipient awareness of ethical considerations. Nevertheless, the core impetus underlying his actions, grounded in deification, appears to have hindered his ability to apprehend these ethical complexities. As evidenced by historical instances such as the Crusades and the Cultural Revolution, humanity has demonstrated a readiness to perpetrate egregious acts in the name of religious and ideological imperatives (Hatano, 489-503). Consequently, Mizonokuchi, who had exerted mental dominion and ascribed deification to his inner world and the conceptualized Kinkaku-ji, exhibited little hesitation in executing historically abhorrent actions with the intent of destroying the tangible Kinkaku-ji.

The Necessity of Mizonokuchi's Arson of the Existential Kinkaku-ji

Mizonokuchi actively carried out arson due to the excessive deification of the imagined Kinkaku-ji. He had absolute conviction in the transcendence of the imagined Kinkaku-ji and desired the destruction of the existential Kinkaku-ji, which he perceived as restricting this transcendence. From the moment Mizonokuchi laid eyes on the existential Kinkaku-ji, he recognized the disparities between it and the absolute imagined Kinkaku-ji. Thus, it is evident that the Kinkaku-ji that Mizonokuchi planned to destroy and actually verbalized the imperative "I must burn the Kinkaku-ji" was the existential Kinkaku-ji (Mishima, 243). Given the utilization of verbs in this quoted passage, the act of "burning" is inherently confined to existential reality, implying that the Kinkaku-ji he destroyed was indeed the existential one. The destruction of this existential Kinkaku-ji elevates the imagined Kinkaku-ji to a unique and absolute "Kinkaku-ji," rendering it capable of transitioning into a realm of divine worship where existence is absent, devoid of limitations. Any societal perceptions of Kinkaku-ji are negated due to the absence of existential reality, and "Kinkaku-ji" becomes solely his own imagination. In essence, this act of destruction marks the establishment of an absolute state in which the illusion regarding

Kinkaku-ji remains unchallenged. In conclusion, Mizonokuchi destroyed the existential Kinkaku-ji with the purpose of solidifying the absolute nature of the deified imagined Kinkaku-ji.

Conclusion:

Yukio Mishima's novel, "Kinkaku-ji," depicts a young man who becomes entangled in the worship of material idols, and Mizonokuchi's motive for arson is heavily influenced by this deification. Mizonokuchi grapples with the disparities between the excessive aesthetic idolatry built upon the imagined Kinkaku-ji and the imperfect existential Kinkaku-ji. Caught in the complexities of material idolatry and the societal zeitgeist, elements such as deification and alienation intermingle, ultimately leading to his decision to set fire to the Kinkaku-ji. The conclusion of this thesis is that the necessity for Mizonokuchi's arson lies in securing the absoluteness of the imagined Kinkaku-ji.

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