

A Study on Nikos Kazantzakis:
The Structure of Greek Nationalism and Literature and Philosophy as a Prescription

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This book sheds light on the image of Greece presented by Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957), one of the leading writers and thinkers of modern and contemporary Greek literature. This image does not necessarily match the idealized image of Greece as the source of Western spirituality and culture; rather, it is rooted in diverse cultural experiences and even contains non-Western elements, based on Kazantzakis' travels and writings in the non-Western world, including Russia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Far East.

Part I of the book will discuss the following points: Especially since being positioned as the source of Western culture in Western modernity, ancient Greece has tended to be seen as purely European and Western, without Asian and Eastern elements. However, because Greece is geographically and historically located between Asia in the East and Europe in the West, modern and contemporary Greece after the Byzantine and Ottoman eras was often considered by Western intellectuals as Eastern or Oriental. The Greeks were sometimes regarded as Easterners, people unworthy of being descended from the Western ideal of ancient Greece or even inferior to their Western counterparts. Hence, modern and contemporary Greece from the mid-19th century onward promoted Westernization and modernization, claiming that it did not belong to Asia and the East, to position itself as a descendant of classical Greece and a member of the advanced Western world. This led to the development of arguments to abandon Asia in favor of Europe and pro-Western, anti-Eastern nationalistic ideology; as a reaction, Greek-centered ideology, condemning excessive Westernization, developed as well.

Part II of the book will show that although most Western, modern, and contemporary Greek thinkers avoided Eastern elements in their ideal image of Greece, Nikos Kazantzakis evaluated the Eastern elements of Greece in a positive way and developed a view of Greece and Greeks that was not limited to the ancient world but included consideration and contemplation of various cultural spheres, including the non-Western world. Kazantzakis also overcame excessive Westernization, Western culture worship, and Greek-centered nationalism and produced his own idea of the world, human beings, and God in his work *Ascesis: The Saviors of God*. This book will show that in line with this worldview, Kazantzakis depicted Greece as an entity with two continuities, ancient to contemporary in time, and east to west in space, without falling into the worship of classical Greece or the delusion of the ties between modern and contemporary Greece and ancient Greece. Therefore, this book analyzes Kazantzakis's life and works up to the time of the Greek Civil War, particularly his experiences and works related to Greece and Eastern countries, from Pontus (the present-day Black Sea coast of Turkey) through Russia and China to Japan, as the main sources of information.

In conclusion, this book argues that, by the time of the Second World War, Kazantzakis's

depiction of Greece culminated in an exploration of “Greekness” which included Greek historical continuity (temporal aspect) and Greek geographical east-west continuity (spatial aspect), revealing a view of Greece and Greeks that has been insufficiently examined in previous studies both within and outside Greece. The book points out, in particular, that Kazantzakis' view of Greece and Greeks was characterized by his opposition to Western worship and his exploration of the "East" through his experiences and writings in the Far East and Russia. This led him to create an original view of Greece that positively acknowledges the country's Asian elements—something that had previously been considered taboo in modern and contemporary Greece.

The image of Greece depicted by Kazantzakis was a perspective that overcame historical conflicts with neighboring Middle Eastern and Asian countries, as well as ethnocentrism, in contrast to the Greek nationalism that had developed since the 19th century by importing the image of ancient Greece formed in the West, which included anti-Asian discrimination. Furthermore, in his book *Black Athena* published at the end of the 20th century, Martin Bernal explained and criticized the “fabrication of ancient Greece” by Eurocentrism in modern Europe and the image of ancient Greece that excluded non-Western perspectives. However, this book shows that Nikos Kazantzakis, through his own thought and literary imagination, had already provided a perspective to overcome this point about half a century earlier through his experiences in Asia, from Japan to Pontus. Moreover, a monograph entitled *Scandalizing Jesus?* was published on how Kazantzakis questioned the very foundations of Christianity, discussing the idea of Jesus Christ having a wife and the denial of his resurrection. This book reveals that Kazantzakis was not only “Scandalizing Jesus” by questioning Christianity, one of the foundations of Western civilization, but was also questioning ancient Greek and Western classical culture, another foundation of Western civilization, in what might be called “Scandalizing Greece.”