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Ernst Cassirer in Japanese Philosophy

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Abstract: The primary goal of this paper is not to argue for the “influence” of Cassirer, but rather to make known the reception of Cassirer in Japanese philosophy, illustrate the interconnection between Cassirer’s critique of culture and that of Japanese philosophy, and hopefully spark interest in what might be a fruitful dialog between Cassirer scholars and those working in Japanese philosophy. Historically, the paper defines Japanese philosophy and makes known its engagement with Western philosophy and the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism and its project of a critique of culture during its own self-development. Systematically, the paper points to the possible interconnection between Cassirer’s critique of culture and that of Japanese philosophy and makes the case for a mutually productive dialog between Cassirer scholars and those working in Japanese philosophy. Implicitly, the paper attempted to show that an engagement with Japanese philosophy from the perspective of a critique of culture forces us to question the Western dichotomy between philosophy and religion and the importance of this for the further development of a non-Eurocentric critique of culture. And by extension, that a critique of culture must be cognitive of the historicity of the culture from which it speaks.

Keywords: Cassirer, Japanese philosophy, Kyoto School, intercultural philosophy, Nishida

1 Introduction

The reception of Ernst Cassirer in Japanese philosophy remains largely an untold story. There are many reasons for this lacuna. Japanese philosophy is not taught in most programs of philosophy in North America or Europe and therefore is not widely known in the Western philosophical world. Courses on Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945) or Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990) are more likely to be found in Religious Studies departments than in Philosophy departments. This is telling of how “philosophy” is understood in the West. Philosophy is seen as an inherently

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scientific project and one that is essentially Western; whereas Japanese “thought” is seen as inherently “religious” and rooted in the Eastern tradition of Zen Buddhism. This dichotomy between “philosophy” and “religion” is, however, a Western one that does not necessarily translate into other cultural contexts. To fully appreciate Japanese philosophy, it is necessary to question the borderline between religion and philosophy, which requires us to inquire into the logical forms of meaning that determine philosophy and religion as cultural forms. Other Japanese philosophers, such as Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), Miki Kiyoshi (1897–1945), Nakai Masakazu (1900–1952), Kuki Shūzō (1888–1941), Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960), Hiromatsu Wataru (1933–1994), Shimomura Toratarō (1902–1995), Nishitani Keiji, Ueda Shizuteru (1926–2019), to mention but a few, are largely unknown in the West.

When Japanese philosophy is taken up by Western philosophers, it is primarily done in a comparison with “Continental” philosophy. Again, this is telling of how philosophy is understood in the West and how Japanese philosophy is framed. As a critique of the Western metaphysical tradition, Continental philosophy seeks to radically transform philosophy into “post-metaphysical philosophy” or to go beyond philosophy all together. From this horizon, Japanese philosophy is understood in terms of the project of overcoming Western metaphysics. As some of the early Japanese philosophers of the Kyoto School studied with Heidegger, there is no shortage of literature comparing Heidegger with the philosophy of the Kyoto School. As a result, the importance of neo-Kantianism to the formation of Japanese philosophy remains largely overshadowed.

Whereas much of Western philosophy has been translated into Japanese, only a handful of the seminal works of Japanese philosophy have been translated into Western languages. Japanese philosophy therefore remains largely inaccessible to many readers who would otherwise find a dialog with Japanese philosophy fruitful for their own area of research. This is particularly true, I believe, for Cassirer scholars. I say this not because Cassirer’s presence can be found in Japanese philosophy, but above all because I believe that each will find in the other a kindred spirit and that the encounter with Japanese philosophy cannot but challenge our understanding of Cassirer and further the project of a critique of culture. Thus, the primary goal of this paper is not to argue for the “influence” of Cassirer, but rather to make known the reception of Cassirer in Japanese philosophy, illustrate the interconnection between Cassirer’s critique of culture and that of Japanese philosophy, and hopefully spark interest in what might be a fruitful dialog between Cassirer scholars and those working in Japanese philosophy.

The paper is divided into three sections. Section 2 sets out the historical and cultural context of Japanese philosophy. This section addresses two questions: ‘What is “Japanese philosophy”’ and ‘How did Cassirer find his way into Japanese

philosophy?’ Section 3 provides a context for understanding the systematic interconnection between Cassirer’s philosophy of culture and Japanese philosophy. Section 4 demonstrates the presence of Cassirer in the margins of four of the seminal figures of the first generation of the Kyoto School: Nishida, Tanabe, Miki, and Nakai.

2 The Historical and Cultural Context of Japanese Philosophy

The term *tetsugaku* is a neologism in Japanese coined in 1874 by Nishi Amane to translate the Western term “philosophy.” Nishi sought to bring to Japan a mode of thinking he viewed as not only different but as superior to the Confucianism and Buddhism found in Japan in the middle of the 19th Century. Was there then no philosophy in Japan prior to 1874? And if philosophy is an import from the West, and if, as Heidegger and some today still argue, philosophy is in its very essence Western, then is there no Japanese philosophy properly speaking? These questions were the subject of much debate in Japan in the later part of the 19th century and they continue to be a matter of debate today. At a recent conference of the European Network of Japanese Philosophy, an *Auseinandersetzung* ensued around the question of whether Dōgen Kigen (1200–1253) could be read as a philosopher. The debate quickly brought out the problem of classification: Is Buddhism a “religion” or a “philosophy”? What is the relation between “religion” and “philosophy”? What, for that matter, are “religion” and “philosophy”? *The importance of this debate to a critique of culture is as clear as is the importance of a critique of culture to the debate.*

To better appreciate the debate, we need to return to the historical and cultural context of Japan in the mid-19th century. In 1867, the Tokugawa ceded power back to Emperor Meiji, thus ending the Edo Period. With this began the Meiji Restoration. The pressure exerted on the Tokugawa by the Americans to open Japan up to trade had placed the Japanese in an impossible position: open the country to trade which was synonymous with being colonized; or keep it closed and enter into an unwinnable war which would end in colonization. However, the presence of the Americans was only a catalyst that crystalized an already existing demand for change. The Tokugawa, and the socio-political culture on which it was based, were already being challenged by new creative forces from within. These creative forces would give shape to the Meiji Restoration as the project of constructing a modern Japan capable of taking its place in the world and thus being able to withstand the threat of imperialism and colonization. The modernization of Japan would require

the transformation of every aspect of Japanese culture. Young Japanese were sent to study modernity first-hand in every imaginable field: banking, agricultural science, medicine, science, engineering, fashion, cuisine, etc. It was, however, clear from the beginning that it was not enough to import modern engineering, science, technology, architecture, fashion, and cuisine, it was necessary to modernize Japanese thinking and for this it was necessary to import and implant modern thought. To this end, the Japanese Enlightenment turned to the study of Western philosophy.

In *An Outline of Theories of Civilization* (1875), Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) translated a number of Western works providing the Japanese reader with an introduction to the social, artistic, intellectual, and philosophical culture of the West. Fukuzawa clearly articulates the profound *cultural metamorphosis* taking place when he writes:

Contemporary Japanese culture is undergoing a *transformation in essence*, like the transformation of fire into water, like the transition from nonbeing to being.... Yet, as a result of the jolt to the mind of Japanese people, their sights are now being reset on the goal of elevating Japanese culture to parity with the West, or even of *surpassing* it.... We have the advantage of being able directly to *contrast* our own personal pre-Meiji experience with Western culture.... (Fukuzawa 2009, p. 3)

Fukuzawa clearly articulates the philosophical urgency of his day and establishes some of the main themes in Japanese philosophy: namely, the search for a philosophy of culture as world forming, an inquiry into ethics and anthropology, and a sustained reflection on the nature of cultural identity in a multi-cultural world. What is more, he is cognizant of the historicity of his project; of standing in the decisive alchemic moment of the metamorphosis of a culture no longer what it was, not yet what it will become. The Meiji Restoration, no more than the French Revolution, was a simple question of replacing one system of government by another: rather, it marked the end of the socio-political-economic framework of the Edo period and the cultural sense of identity that accompanied it. It is not surprising that as the French Revolution led to the question “what is the human?”, the Meiji Restoration led to the question of Japanese uniqueness as a non-Western answer to the question “what is the human?” and that this was no ivory tower inquiry, but an existential enterprise.

The Meiji Restoration undertook what Cassirer called a “renaissance” as a process of self-discovery and self-transformation. The aim of historical thought is to develop a “new understanding of the past” that “gives us at the same time a new prospect of the future, which in turn becomes an impulse to intellectual and social life” (Cassirer 1943, p. 178). Every true renaissance penetrates the historical works of the past in order to revitalize the creative energies that gave expression to them.

A historical reconstruction is not a passive transition and preservation of the past but a triumph of creative spontaneity and a moment of self-realization: “Whenever a subject – whether an individual or a *whole epoch* – is prepared to forget itself, in order to be absorbed by another and completely give itself away: then it always finds itself in a new and deeper sense” (Cassirer 2000, p. 112). The project of *constructing* a modern Japan begins by way of the forgetting of its medieval self, in order to be absorbed by the modernity of the West, only in order to reconstruct and realize itself in a new and deeper sense. Bret Davis defines Japanese philosophy as “any rigorous reflection on fundamental questions that draws sufficiently and significantly on the intellectual, linguistic, cultural, religious, literary, and artistic sources of the Japanese tradition” (Davis 2020, p. 60). Japanese philosophy is born through an *Auseinandersetzung* with Western philosophy in which it transforms its pre-Meiji world into a modern one *and* by consequence transforms philosophy.

Let us return to the question of pre-Meiji philosophy. This was the defining issue in the Japanese Enlightenment. When coining the term *tetsugaku*, Nishi considered philosophy to be essentially different to pre-Meiji thought. Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901) echoes this sentiment in 1901 when he writes that “from ancient times to the present, there has been no philosophy in Japan” (Nakae 1901, p. 564). Others, most notably Inoue Tetsurō (1855–1944), presented Confucianism and Buddhism as “*Nihon tetsugaku*.” For Fukuzawa, the project of the Japanese cultural enlightenment concerned the transformation of the essence of Japanese culture through a confrontation with philosophy: the goal was political autonomy through cultural equality in what Nishida will call “the worldly world” (NKZ 7, p. 452f.).¹ As Miki observes: “The question of whether or not there is a philosophy in Japan has to do with something more than just philosophy” (Miki 2016, p. 1). Philosophy, as the sphere of ideas and thought, was the new battlefield. The question was one of identity, and one of life and death as a world power. As Miki asks: “with which thought and what philosophy is Japan going to face this world” (NKZ 7, p. 452f.).

Inoue was the first Japanese to hold the chair of Philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University. His successor, Kuwaki Gen'yoku (1874–1946), was the most famous Kantian in Japan. Kuwaki studied with the neo-Kantian Aloisius Riehl in Berlin from 1907 to 1909. While in Europe, he met Cassirer in Berlin, where Cassirer was completing his *Habilitation* with Riehl and Wilhelm Dilthey, and again in Hamburg. However, Kuwaki also met with Henri Bergson in Paris. The confrontation with Western philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century in Japan will take the form of a confrontation with both neo-Kantianism, on the one hand, and with Bergson and *Lebensphilosophie*, on the other. However, Japanese philosophy

1 Cf. Davis (2006), pp. 205–245.

also undertakes a confrontation with its own tradition. This twofold confrontation was not undertaken by Kuwaki, whose work focused on reconciling philosophy and the natural sciences. Thus, his work must be considered as ‘philosophy in Japan’ and not yet as ‘Japanese philosophy’ in the technical sense defined by Davis.

We find in the first 25 years of the 20th century a comprehensive critical engagement with neo-Kantianism in Japan. The Southwestern school was known through Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, and Emil Lask. Rickert was very popular in Japan and had a large number of Japanese scholars come to study with him in Heidelberg. On the occasion of the Japanese translation of his *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*, Rickert remarked that he was more read in Japan than in Germany. This translation was prefaced by Nishida. From the Marburg school, Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp, and Ernst Cassirer were extensively read.

In the literature on the Kyoto School, one finds many references to the importance of “neo-Kantianism” in the initial formation of Nishida philosophy and by extension the philosophy of the Kyoto School. However, these references often speak of neo-Kantianism as a monolithic school and are rarely supported by a detailed analysis. The best detailed study on the importance of neo-Kantianism to the development of Nishida philosophy is Itabashi Yūjin’s *The Logic and Method of Nishida Philosophy: What Is Radical Critique?* (2004). Itabashi did not, however, include Cassirer because he was not familiar enough with Cassirer’s work.

The point repeatedly made in the literature is that having overcome the ontological dualism of Kant, neo-Kantianism remained entangled in an epistemological dualism between value and being, universal and individual, knower and known, subject and object, ideal and real. Overlooked is that Nishida’s interest gravitated towards those “neo-Kantians” who were pushing transcendental philosophy to its limits and who had arguably broken with the tenets of traditional neo-Kantianism. While Nishida is critical of Windelband, Rickert, and Cohen, he is sympathetic with authors like Lask who was distancing himself from Rickert’s pure logic, and Natorp and Cassirer who were read as having moved away from Cohen’s official scientism toward a primal unity prior to the subject-object dichotomy.

The reason for this is to be found in the historicity of Japanese philosophy. Japanese philosophy is often framed as a project that critiques the Western metaphysical theory of substance, articulates a non-dualistic account of world and self that overcomes the subject-object dualism of Modern philosophy based on pure experience as the experience of nothingness. Its primary aim, however, was not the overcoming of metaphysics. Such a project belongs to the historicity of the West. To frame the project of Japanese philosophy in this way is to overlook the historicity of the project of Japanese philosophy which was to transform Japanese culture through a twofold confrontation with Western philosophy, on the one

hand, and its own “pre-Meiji experience,” on the other. Part of this pre-Meiji experience is the co-existence of Buddhism and Shinto in Japanese culture where they have come to coexist as an organic whole. Buddhism and Shinto both express a holistic, nondualist view of nature, with humans as a single inseparable part of this dynamic and living unity. The pre-Meiji Japanese cultural experience, which is expressed in Shinto and which is in keeping with the fundamental experience of the practice-realization of *zazen* in Zen Buddhism, is the experience of the organic-wholeness of immediate living in the world in which there is no differentiation of mind-body, inner-outer, human-nature, I-thou, thought-being; where “the one is in the many, and the many in the one.” Japanese philosophy sought to give a new philosophical expression to this quintessential experience of interconnectedness and impermanence at the heart of Japanese existence.

3 The Systematic Interconnection of Cassirer’s Philosophy of Culture and Japanese Philosophy

Each of the authors examined in this paper have read Cassirer and their thinking about their own projects have in part taken form through what they have gleaned about their own project in the process of reading Cassirer. Why did they read Cassirer? No doubt because they sense that Cassirer’s critique of metaphysics and the concept of substance, his analysis of the function relation of mathematics, and his critique of culture were in some tangent way connected to their own.

To situate Cassirer in the project of Japanese philosophy, we can frame our understanding of Japanese philosophy in terms of the 1929 Davos debate with Heidegger. At Davos, Heidegger takes up Cassirer’s language of *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* to demark their differences. For Cassirer, the *terminus ad quem* is the whole of a philosophy of culture. The *terminus a quo* of Cassirer’s philosophy is, however, problematic for Heidegger. The reverse is the case for Heidegger. The *terminus a quo* of Heidegger’s project is found in the *facticity* of Dasein but its *terminus ad quem* remains both unclear and undefined. Heidegger’s observation marks out the irreconcilable opposition between them. Heidegger descends the Hegelian ladder into the existential ground of facticity on which the ladder rests, but as for the nature and being of the ladder on which he himself must stand he can say nothing: Cassirer follows the ladder up to its highest manifestation in ideas and thought, and ultimately to a philosophy of culture, but on what the ladder stands it can say nothing. A *transcendental* critique of culture is limited to determining the logic of sense that forms the factum of culture, whereas existential phenomenology is limited to the hermeneutics of facticity of Dasein.

In 1922 Heidegger wrote that “the very idea of a philosophy of religion was pure nonsense, particularly if it did not take the facticity of the human into account” (Heidegger 1922, p. 363). There is a direct line from Heidegger’s 1922 lectures on the Letters of Paul, through his 1923 lectures on the hermeneutics of the facticity of life, through his 1927 hermeneutics of Dasein in *Being and Time*, to his post-1938 rethinking of facticity as the *Ereignis*. Heidegger rejects the neo-Kantian conception of philosophy because it has no access to “an original complex of problems that is fundamentally inaccessible to the exact sciences” (Heidegger 1962, p. 214). The philosophical position of Cassirer and Heidegger thus appear as an irreconcilable opposition that finds expression in the irreconcilable opposition between philosophy and religion.

However, Japanese philosophy undertakes a critical appropriation and fusion of Cassirer and Heidegger. It is at home in Cassirer as it is in Heidegger, it goes both up and down the ladder of culture and can speak at once of the *facticity* and *factum* of culture. Japanese philosophy is situated in the region of thought opened by the irreconcilable opposition between Cassirer and Heidegger. For this reason, Japanese philosophy is situated on the borderline between religion and philosophy. As a critique of culture, it provides an analysis of how the reflective rational forms of culture emerge from more-concrete modes: this involves, however, the self-reflectivity not of reason, as in the case of Hegel, but of the self-reflectivity of culture. For the concept of culture (objective genitive) that conditions a cognitive theoretical sense of the lifeworld of meaning itself can be said to be a concept of culture (subjective genitive) – i.e., a concept that belongs to a historical cultural world of meaning. As a philosophy of culture (double genitive), Japanese philosophy is at once a transcendental and an existential project of culture. Japanese philosophy as a philosophy of culture seeks, to speak with Nishitani, the “self-realization” of Japanese culture in a twofold sense: its self-awareness and its self-actualization.

4 Cassirer and the First Generation of the Kyoto School

4.1 Nishida Kitarō

Nishida is the founder of the Kyoto School of Japanese philosophy. Some see Nishida philosophy as the first truly Japanese philosophy. Nishida philosophy is born from a confrontation with Western philosophy, Zen Buddhism, science, and mathematics. In *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy* (1933), Nishida provides an

analysis of the forms of culture of the classical periods of East and West from the perspective of the fundamental senses of life from which they originate and to which they give expression. Western culture is rooted in a Greek sense of being as ontological self-identity or substance that constitutes the horizon of the Western understanding of reality (Nishida 1970, p. 237); whereas Japanese culture is rooted in an Oriental sense of nothingness that constitutes the horizon of its understanding of reality. “The form of the formless, the voice of the voiceless, which lies at the basis of Eastern culture, transmitted from our ancestors for thousands of years” (NKZ 4, p. 6). Western philosophy, then, is the historical hermeneutical tradition of thinking being that works out the logic of the Greek sense of being as ontological self-identity. For Nishida, “Buddhist scholars have yet to clarify the logic of *soku-hi* (is and is not).... However, the logic of emptiness of Prajñāpāramitā tradition cannot be grasped by Western logic” (Nishida 1987b, p. 89). Nishida philosophy seeks to work out the logic of the “contradictory self-identity” (*soku-hi*) as the dialectical logic of the “place” (*basho*) of the historical world and the “place of absolute nothingness.” As a philosophy of culture, Nishida philosophy is a philosophical working out of the logic of nothingness that provides a dual analysis of culture as a factum and of the facticity of a specific historical culture, that of Japanese culture. To philosophically understand the sense of emptiness as the experience of non-thinking as it is found in Zen Buddhism, Nishida must transform Western philosophy into Japanese philosophy.

In *An Inquiry into the Good* (1911), Nishida gives an account of the unity of “thinking” and what he calls, borrowing the expression from William James, “pure experience.” Nishida’s description of pure experience makes clear that he is really speaking about the experience of emptiness found in the non-thinking of *zazen*. Heeding to the charge of psychologism, Nishida turn to transcendental philosophy to establish a logical ground for this unity that would be independent of the contingent mental processes of the psyches of individual subjects. To this end, Nishida studied the different schools of neo-Kantianism. Nishida quickly recognized the limitations of classical neo-Kantianism as it had been developed by Windelband and Rickert of the Southwest School and by Cohen of the Marburg School. Nishida thus focused on the later Natorp, Lask, and Cassirer. By 1915, Nishida’s project was situated between the irreconcilable perspectives of Lebensphilosophie and transcendental philosophy. In *Thinking and Experiencing* (1915), Nishida writes: “my thinking was initially based on the theses of the so-called school of *pure* logic, e.g. by Rickert, and the theory of *pure* duration of Bergson. Because I sympathized with them and reflected on them, I was able to benefit greatly from both. However, I do not just believe Bergson, nor do I think Rickert’s views are unproblematic; rather, I think that *the requirement of contemporary philosophy lies in the synthesis of these two modes of thinking*” (Nishida 1987a,

p. xxv). Ralf Müller argues that Cassirer and Nishida, “despite having seemingly opposing views on form, share a common philosophical aim: namely, to strike a balance between academic theory and the immanence of life” (Müller 2018, p. 195–216).

Nishida read Cassirer, especially his *Substance and Function* which was already available in Japan in 1910 and translated as early as 1912. Although there are no explicit references to Cassirer in Nishida’s published work, Nishida mentions Cassirer numerous times in his diary and lectures.² The Nishida scholar and translator Rolf Elberfeld is one of the rare commentators to draw our attention to the influence of Cassirer on Nishida’s work. Elberfeld argues that Nishida’s use of expression (*Ausdruck*) has been developed “primarily from his reading of Leibniz and Cassirer” (Elberfeld 1999, p. 157). The central difference between them, according to Elberfeld, is that for Nishida the relational structure of expression was not “unconscious” and “confused” as it was for Cassirer; but rather, it formed a “prereflective level of the actual foundation of thinking and life.” Elberfeld also contends that “Nishida was influenced by Cassirer not only by the motive of expression, but also by Cassirer’s conception of the ‘thou’” (Elberfeld 1999, p. 159) – which was important in his thinking about the historical world (Elberfeld 1999, p. 129). Finally, Elberfeld also suggests the interconnection between Cassirer, Heidegger, and Nishida that echoes our own framing above:

The extent to which Nishida, Cassirer, and Heidegger work on similar issues is demonstrated by looking at an early lecture by Heidegger where he says: “One must understand the factual (*Faktische*) itself as expression. Once you have looked at factual life in this way, you can no longer come across those old pseudo-problems (e.g., the relationship between the factual and sense), including that of individuation. The facts of life itself no longer lie next to one another like stones, but each have their own place....” All three thinkers are concerned with the overcoming of a philosophy that is fixated on the subject. They try to show a connection that always precedes being a subject and no longer shines through the objectivating consciousness. (Elberfeld 1999, p. 160)

A full comparison of Nishida and Cassirer lies beyond the scope of this paper.³ Their philosophical perspectives both grew out of a confrontation with mathematics and the shift from substance concept to function concept. Both begin by way of a critique of Aristotle’s concept of substance. Both develop a thoroughly relational philosophy based on their analysis of the function relation of mathematics. Both are critical of Rickert’s form of logic which they see as an expression of the subject-predicate logic of Aristotle. Both reject the position of logicism that

2 Cf. NKZ: 11, 133, 290; 12, 52, 132, 167; 14, 271; 18, 45, 89, 109; 19, 285, 286, 298, 315, 316; 20, 82, 427; 22, 145; 23, 353, 354.

3 For a more complete comparison see Lofts (2020b), pp. 98–124.

reduces mathematics to logic in part because it denies any role to intuition in mathematics and thus ends in an unbridgeable gap between thought and reality; in part because such a view leaves no room for the activity of the mind and the imagination in the development of mathematics. Although they reject the logicism of Russell and Frege, they nevertheless provide a philosophical justification, albeit a critical one, and development of Dedekind's "logical structuralism" that plays an important role in their respective philosophical perspectives. Both reject the position of formalism of Hilbert which ultimately reduces mathematics to an empty game of signs. We find in both a productive tension between logical structuralism and intuitionism that goes to the heart of their central philosophical concepts. The logic of place is developed from Nishida's understanding of mathematics and the problem of infinity. "When I discussed mathematics, I called it the 'contradictorily self-identical entity'" (NKZ, 11, p. 402–403). Cassirer's and Nishida's thinking are rooted in the *polemos* of Heraclitus, not in the dialectical sublation of Hegel;⁴ for Cassirer, the logic of the symbolic is "a dialectic unity, a coexistence of contraries" (Cassirer 1943, p. 222–223); for Nishida, the logic of place is "a dialectic unity of contradictory self-identity." Nishida employs the function relation of mathematics to speak of the whole of the infinite matrix of places. Cassirer's $\varphi(x)$ is expressed in Nishida as " $M(e_1, e_2, e_3, e_4, e_5 \dots)/A$: where M designates the medium of the place, e the individual, and A the universal law" (Nishida 1970, p. 162). Finally, in Nishida's later thought the relationship between the universal and the individual is understood in terms of a relational mediation of the two levels as in a function relation. Nishida thus understands the being of a thing in relational terms as a polar opposition belonging to a relational field to which it gives expression. Nishida philosophy is a philosophy of relationality. It is not surprising that Cassirer and Nishida both conceptualize the continuity of discontinuity of the subject and object within the world in mathematical terms as both have drawn much from their study of mathematics: in particular, their respective analyses of Dedekind and Cantor, but also of Cohen, and their concept of the continuum and the intuition of a given totality that is more than simply the sum of the parts.

In an oft-cited 1914 quote, Nishida agrees with Tanabe's critique of neo-Kantianism: the neo-Kantians "have clarified the cognitive form but have not given enough attention to the cognitive content; they have been unable to get rid of the difficulty that Kant's *Ding-an-sich* has raised" (Cited by Yusa 2002, p. 154). If we return to Nishida's lecture, the neo-Kantianism Nishida is critiquing here is that of Rickert. "The Southwestern School is too formalist, and the relationship between

4 This is not to say that Hegel was not important to Cassirer and Nishida. But their confrontation with Hegel is complex, critical, and is rooted in Heraclitus to which they both refer. For a consideration of Cassirer's *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel see Lofts (2020a), pp. 149–166.

form and content is not fully considered. In this respect, the Southwestern School can be said to be idealistic” (NKZ 15, p. 157). “Idealistic” means for Nishida “abstract” and not concrete. It is concern with an abstract logic of objects that still assumes the ontological self-identity of given substances. Nishida’s notion of place, like Cassirer symbolic, refers to a “concrete universal” and not to an abstract concept. Nishida, however, continues to insist:

The Marburg school (Cohen and Cassirer) considered the problem of the form and content more deeply and considered them in correlation. That is, the Marburg School considers that *das Gegebene* is *das Aufgegebene*. What is given is not simply given from the outset/outside, but the demand that thinking must solve. (NKZ 15, p. 158)

Nishida goes on to provide a detailed account of the of infinitesimal method and of the “*erzeugender Punkt*” (production point) which figures prominently in Nishida scholarship in accounting for the structure of place. Nishida emphasizes that the point is but a position of a field that it itself opens in opposition to other points of the field. And every field is but a point in another field. With references to Cohen and Cassirer’s views of differential calculus, Nishida concludes “the object is not given but *erzeugen* (produced) from thought, and thoughts are *erzeugendes Denken* (productive thinking). That is, in the Marburg School, the question of form and content must be considered dynamically and correlatively” (NKZ 15, p. 158). Nishida does not think that Cohen had gone far enough nor could go further given his scientism which prevents him from unifying thought and being. What is needed, Nishida maintains now, is the place of nothingness that would unite being and thought.

Nishida’s thought matured through a series of stages: the 1911–15 psychological period found in *An Inquiry into the Good* gave way to a voluntaristic period in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* (1917). Nishida philosophy begins to take its mature form in the late 1920s and early 1930s with a series of epistemological works such as *From the Acting to the Seeing* (1927), *The Self-Aware System of Universals* (1930), and *The Self-Aware Determination of Nothing* (1932). In the final phase, from 1934 to the end of his life, Nishida turned to a dialectical consideration of the historical world. *The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview* (1945) is in many ways the final masterpiece of Nishida philosophy.

The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview provides a transcendental and existential account of religious consciousness. Nishida begins by recognizing religion as a “given fact (事實)” and maintaining that it is the “task of philosophy” to establish the concrete logic of religion and to determine its role in the formation of the historical world and the “grounding of culture” (Nishida 1987b, p. 117). Throughout the text, Nishida speaks about the “fact” of religion (Nishida 1987b, p. 47): in his usage, however, he shifts meaning, sometimes

speaking of the *factum* of religious experience; at other times of its *facticity*. The Japanese term Nishida employs, 事實, can be used to translate either the neo-Kantian *factum* or Heidegger's *Faktizität* depending on the context. Nishida's project provides a transcendental account of the *factum* (事實) of religious consciousness as a cultural form, on the one hand, while at the same time providing a hermeneutical existential account of the confrontation with absolute nothingness as the absolute other that is the pure experience of existential facticity (事實) which constitutes the individual as a person who forms the "focal point" that is the production point of the historical world, on the other hand. The nature of religious consciousness as the "pure experience" of facticity *grounds, opens, and is* the experience of the historical world of culture and with it morality, science, art, and philosophy.

Nishida's turn to the historical world of culture was a response to his students (Miki, Itō. Yura, Kōyama, and Tanabe) who critiqued him for being too speculative. We find here an indirect influence by Cassirer on Nishida. While studying with Heidegger in Germany from 1923 to 1927, "Miki visited Mannheim every week and debated with German students about the direction of philosophy aimed at by Scheler and Cassirer" (Gülberg 1997, p. 51). In 1924, Kita Reikichi was establishing a research institute on European and Asian culture in Tokyo and asked Miki to help recruit a well-known German scholar. Itō recommended Cassirer. However, Miki "rightly guessed [that] Cassirer would not leave Hamburg where he had the Warburg Library for his research" (Yusa 1998, 64). Only then was the offer extended to Heidegger. In response to the 1933 "book burning," Miki wrote in protest in which he defends the Jewish thinkers Cohen and Cassirer as the leading figures of German philosophy (MKZ 19, p. 598). Yura, a close friend of Miki, studied with Cassirer in Hamburg. Tanabe wrote his PhD on Cohen and Cassirer and met with Cassirer while in Europe. Tsuchida was a prolific literary critic friend and classmate of Miki and Nakai Masakazu. One of his first works was an English book titled *Contemporary Thought of Japan and China* in which he emphasizes the importance of Cassirer and the Marburg School in "abandoning the former metaphysical tendencies" and argues that "Japanese philosophers are thinking along the line of combining radical empiricism such as Bergson's with transcendental idealism such as the Marburg neo-Kantianism" (Kyōson 1927, p. 65). Kyōson's own *Philosophy of Symbolism* (1920) and *Introduction to Cultural Philosophy* (1924) frequently mention Cassirer. Finally, Kōyama has acknowledge the "great influence" Cassirer had on him (Kōyama 1995, p. 111–112).⁵ Kōyama called into question the Western ethnocentric

5 The influence of Cassirer on Iwao, see Sugawara (2010), pp. 131–138.

framework of anthropology and sought to provide a hermeneutic analysis of the specificity of Japanese culture. Cassirer's philosophy contributed greatly to Kōyama's understanding of the "pluralism of culture" in his *Cultural Typology* (1939) (Sugawara 2010, p. 134).

4.2 Tanabe Hajime

Tanabe is often considered the co-founder of the Kyoto School and as an important thinker in his own right. Tanabe completed his PhD in 1918 under Nishida. Both Cohen and Cassirer figure prominently in his dissertation, *A Study of Philosophy of Mathematics*. Tanabe was the foremost specialist in Cohen in Japan. After Cohen's death in 1918, Tanabe postponed his trip to Germany to work with Cohen till 1922 when he left for Berlin to work with Alois Riehl before moving to Freiburg to study with Husserl. There he met Heidegger while giving a lecture on Nishida in Husserl's home. While in Germany, Tanabe also met with Cassirer.

Tanabe's philosophy synthesizes "*Lebensphilosophie*" together with a "philosophy of the *Geisteswissenschaften*." Although his project will take many forms, one of the constant threads in Tanabe's thinking is his use of the infinitesimal and the function relation. Beginning from a critical study of the theory of mathematics and science from the standpoint of Marburg neo-Kantianism, Tanabe developed a philosophy of action and social mediation that forms an ethical practice. From the beginning, Tanabe's interest clearly involved a comparison of different fields of culture and of different cultures. The importance of his initial work on the infinitesimal and the mathematical function can still be gleamed in his *Logic of Species*, which provides a social ontology in which the concrete singularity of the individual is situated in its mediatory relation to the universal and defined in and through its existential praxis of self-negating compassion towards the concrete finite other within the concrete place of a shared social reality. Tanabe writes: "that which led me in the background from the start to the end was the issue of continuity in mathematics" (THZ, 6, p. 301).

For Tanabe, the domain of mathematics and that of culture and ethics are intrinsically interconnected with each other and form a continuity, and the study of the infinitesimal and function relation provides us with the key to this continuity. Tanabe makes explicit what is only implicit in Cassirer: namely, the continuity between the two domains. The infinitesimal is not itself a point but a dynamic and productive process to which each point gives expression. For Cassirer and Tanabe life gains its visibility and reality by giving itself form. In his 1922 essay, "The Infinite Continuity of Reality," Tanabe argues that reality forms itself, expressing itself, producing the content at every stage of its activity and that only what

spontaneously produces the content of law of this activity is the infinitely successive reality.

Tanabe scholars locate the first germinal form of his project in his 1914 paper “The Limit of Logicism in Epistemology: A review of the Marburg School and Freiburg School” in which Cohen’s concept of the infinitesimal and Cassirer’s concept of the function relation are the primary focus. This paper provides a detailed account of Cohen and Cassirer as overcoming the dualism of Kantian philosophy and eliminating the empirical and realistic Kant but as lacking an adequate ground (Tanabe 2017, p. 5). This ground, he argues, is to be found in Nishida’s conception of pure experience. The infinitesimal and function concept do not create the object of knowledge but only direct the knowing subject in its formation of knowledge. Tanabe therefore posits pure experience as the non-thinking that grounds thinking providing for the continuity of the differentiation of subject and object. Tanabe is fusing the work of Nishida with a reading of Marburg neo-Kantianism in the context of his own project. Whereas Nishida sought to give an account of the place of absolute nothingness as a primal unity of life prior to the subject-object dichotomy, Tanabe begins from the subject-object dichotomy and seeks the continuity of this differentiated unity. We cannot unpack or assess Tanabe’s argument here. For our purposes it is sufficient to show that Tanabe’s philosophy takes form through that double confrontation with Marburg neo-Kantianism and, through Nishida philosophy, with the pre-Meiji experience of the Japanese tradition.

4.3 Miki Kiyoshi

Miki did not hold a permanent academic post but worked primarily as a literary critic and journalist. Miki, however, was a prolific philosopher and militant socio-political thinker. Miki’s philosophy undertakes a bold and original attempt not only to provide an account of the sense of the human but to transform the human to create a new world. Miki owes much to Nishida, Cassirer, Heidegger, Hegel, and Marx. Miki reads the currents of modern philosophy, neo-Kantianism, *Lebensphilosophie*, and existential phenomenology from the perspective of his confrontation with Hegel and Nishida. He understands Cassirer as a sort of “neo-Hegelian” (MKZ 7, 373). However, because of his commitment to the Marburg School, Cassirer was not, according to Miki, able to fully embrace Hegel and therefore was unable to ground his philosophy of symbolic forms in concrete history (MKZ, 10, p. 177). During the early neo-Kantian phase, Miki provides an idealistic conception of history and of the creative power of the individual human: a theme he will never abandon. While in Germany, Miki studied with Heidegger

between 1922 and 1924. Upon his return to Japan, Miki took up Marxism and his work transitions from a form of a hermeneutic ontology of life (Heidegger) to a historical social ontology (Marx), and then to his mature philosophy of the creative imagination and technical production (Cassirer, Hegel, and Nishida) in his *Logic of the Imagination* (1939).

Miki seeks to show how embodied historical subjects conditioned by their environment are nevertheless creative in *forming, reforming, and transforming* the environmental world that has formed them; and in so doing transform the human. For Miki the logic of action, as a logic of creation, must be understood in terms of the logic of the imagination, which is a logic of image-forms that are transformed *in* and *as* history. The imagination is an originary creative power located in the depths of human nature. Miki points out that the Eastern culture, like Western culture, is a culture of form. However, in contrast to the Western tradition, Eastern culture is rooted in the idea of the “formless form”; thus, what has form is an image of the formless. Miki writes:

What lies at the root of such forms and ties them together is not something like the laws of the modern science, it cannot be something objectively graspable; rather, it must be a form beyond form, a “formless form.” Even though I say that form is the unity of the subjective and the objective, the logic of the imagination does not stand upon the standpoint of the so-called union of subject-object but rather is thinkable only once the subjective-objective have been transcended. Only then can we say that it is a logic of action, a logic of creation. (MKZ 8, p. 35)⁶

For Miki, the idea-form that provides the ontological horizon in which something is understood as the thing that it is not the beginning of the creative process of history but its end point. If it were the beginning, as in Western ontology, all “history” would be little more than an unfolding of the idea and there would be no radical creativity, and thus, strictly speaking, no history: or more precisely, all history would be the history of the infinite (the unmoved mover, the Good, the One, God, the Absolute, Being), that which alone can be called pure act, and not of the finite. At the heart of world forming, we must think the creative imagination that is the unity of pathos and logos, but the imagination itself is an immanent transcendence that continually reaches out into the nothing and provides it with an image that in turn forms and transforms the world. As Cassirer writes: “the symbol hastens ahead of reality, showing it the way and initially clearing its path. It does not merely look back on this reality as being [*seiende*] and become [*gewordene*].... It reaches forward into the to come [*Künftig*] and outward into sheer possibility while placing both before itself in a purely symbolic act” (Cassirer 2021, p. 212). “Every creation must have the meaning of ‘creation from nothing.’ There must be

⁶ All quotes by Miki have been translated by John Krummel.

some place where Idee-like forms come out from within matter or nature, where the logos-element is engendered from within the pathos-element” (MKZ, 8, p. 248). The *poiesis*, of which Nishida and Miki speak, belongs not to the human alone but to all things: everything, nature and culture, are fundamentally and radically creative: thus, one has a history in that one is creative in the radical sense of a creation from nothing.

The nothing allows Miki to move beyond all dualism, not just the dualism between logos and pathos, but the dualism between form and existence. Miki shows how *historical forms* are produced in and through the creative power of the imagination as the unity of logos – the intellectual element of understanding – and pathos – affect, emotion, impulse, sensibility. The logic of creative existence is the process by which *historical forms* are produced. “The logic of the imagination is not something prior to creation but rather is the logic of creation itself. Moreover, the logic of creation must have a transcendental character. Without transcendence, creation is inconceivable” (MKZ, 8, p. 62).⁷ There are only “historical forms,” and these “historical forms” are both form and existence, or form-qua-existence, and existence-qua-form.

The gulf between form and existence, sense and facticity, at the heart of the Davos debate is a false dichotomy, an empty abstraction that is a logical consequence of an ontology of self-identity. Whereas Cassirer’s philosophy can explain the transcendental logic of the symbolic forms that form and configure the world of sense in which the subject and object are understood, it cannot speak to the facticity of a historical reality, to a *historical form*. Whereas Heidegger’s philosophy can explain the facticity and finitude of Dasein, it cannot speak to the form that provides Dasein with its visibility if not its reality, to its *historical form*. The *historical form* of which Miki speaks is both sense and existence: it is not an abstract universality nor a radically concrete existence, but both universal and particular.

At the core of this is Miki’s concept of “basic experience” of a given historical period (MKZ, 1, p. 5). This is not Heidegger’s anticipatory resoluteness, which is ultimately an a-historical experience, nor is it Nishida’s “pure intuition,” which is equally a-historical; and Cassirer has nothing that would be comparable. The “basic experience” is the basic experience of the form-existence of a historical conditioned reality that is that historical reality. The Cartesian cogito is a-historical, it is not the experience of a young French man of the 17th century. Niki’s basic experience is the experience of the *Dasein-of-das-Man* – which is a contradiction in

⁷ As Krummel points out in a footnote to his unpublished translation of *The Logic of the Imagination*, Miki is able to exploit the fact that transcendental and transcendence are rendered into Japanese by the same term, *chōetsu* (超越). Thus *chōetsu* strictly speaking means ‘transcendence’ but *chōetsuronteki* means ‘transcendental.’

terms. It is the sense of being that is unique to a historical moment of creative history, a sense that is both subjective and objective, objective and subjective. It is not the experience of an epistemological subject standing outside history, but the stance of a historically embodied self that reflects the historical moment of its being. As such it is pre-theoretical: the logic of the imagination as a logic of action is a logic of radical creativity, *a logic not of history but of the making of history*. All thought of the idea, all discursive thinking, is but an abstraction from the concrete image-form, the symbol of the image-form: thus, the images of the creative imagination are not the symbols of thought but rather thought is the symbol of the image-form. In this way, Miki's theory of the human (*Ningen*,) is one of the "*being-between*,"⁸ a being that is existence-(Heidegger)-as-form-(Cassirer), an immanent transcendence that is only in transcending itself in its own self-transformation. As a result, there is a co-conditionality between the individual and the world: "the human being is worked on by the environment, and inversely, the human being works on the environment" (MKZ, 8, p. 20). The contrast of this to Heidegger is clear, and Miki is closer to Cassirer here for whom there is also a co-origination between objective and subjective spirit (Cf. Lofts 2004, p. 61–77). A fact that Miki seems to recognize:

As the individual consciousness of each person, who is a member of the tribe, increases, the feelings of mystical symbiosis between the social group and the group of surrounding beings or things becomes less internalized, less immediate, less constant. Whether one side or the other, external connections, begin to replace immediate emotions of communion.... The ideality constituting the core of art works consists in this way in the symbolization of internal states by means of external figures and the enlivening of an external actuality by means of internal states. We can say that the logic of the imagination is the logic of symbols. What Cassirer refers to as "the philosophy of symbolic forms" needs to be rewritten in accordance with the logic of the imagination. (MKZ 8, p. 35)

There is a clear tension in Cassirer between his claim that there is no presymbolic reality and the lingering suggestion that there nevertheless is an objective reality that becomes symbolized. In Miki, "A true symbol is not a symbol of something [being or thought]. The essence of a symbol is to symbolize without something symbolized" (MKZ 8, p. 40). While Cassirer would agree to this, perhaps also the later Heidegger, this quote speaks to Miki's ability to move up and down the Hegelian ladder in one gesture.

Miki's account makes explicit what is implicit in Cassirer: namely, that the social-historical world is created through the technical actions of an embodied subjectivity. However, in that Miki seeks to provide a "human foundation for

⁸ The Japanese term for human, *ningen* (人間) is composed of person (人) and between (間). The human for Miki is that being that stands in 'between' totality and infinity.

historical materialism, indeed, from out of the same spirit” (MKZ 8, p. 1) there is a sense of materiality that I think is lacking in Cassirer. And it is here that a discussion of Miki’s concept of “institutions” and their relation to myth would be fruitful – but this would be the topic of another paper.

4.4 Nakai Masakazu

Nakai is a well-known aesthetician, film theorist, and social activist who has been influential within and without philosophy in Japan. Like his friend Miki, Nakai studied with Nishida and Tanabe. The influence of Cassirer and Heidegger on Nakai’s work is widely recognized in Japanese literature. Nakai is best known for his militant commitment to grassroots politics and his interest in contemporary mass culture and aesthetics. His work examines the logic of collective subjectivity. As an aesthetician, Nakai explores the aesthetics of power and fascism but also the beauty of machines and the aesthetics of the collective. As an activist, Nakai puts philosophy into action beyond the limited sphere of professional philosophy.

In the 1920s, Nakai participated in the anti-fascist cultural movement through the newspaper “Doyôbi” and the magazine “World Culture.” The language of articles in the Doyôbi was intentionally made accessible to the average person. The articles were contributions by anonymous readers, covering a wide range of concrete everyday topics from wages and contemporary film, to women’s issues: but with a clear anti-fascist message. The goal was to create a space for popular reflection and critical debate with an eye to a collective future through a collective voice. Both were quickly shut down and Nakai was arrested and lost his position. After the war, Nakai held the post of Deputy Director of the National Library in Hiroshima where he put into action what he had learned from Cassirer. First, he advocated to rethink the library in terms of a “functional concept.” Second, he provided a Cassirerian revitalization of the Cultural Enlightenment movement begun by Fukuzawa. In 1945, Nakai gave free public lectures at the library in Hiroshima on Kant and advocated for the need to understand Kant in order to understand and transform the condition that had brought about Japan’s self-destruction. Intellectuals, farmers, laborers, and shopkeepers were brought together to engage in an “immanent critique” inspired by a Cassirerian critique of culture. “Throughout Hiroshima Prefecture these men and women were engaged in an unprecedented experiment to *understand* their histories — and *restructure* their souls along with their social existence” (Pincus 1997). Like Cassirer, Nakai recognized the importance of immanent critique to a critique of culture, and that this immanent critique of culture began with a critical confrontation with one’s own history, which alone could forge a new prospect of the future that could act as

an impulse that could address the intellectual and social needs of the present. “To become aware of one’s own contradictions, one must first push one’s self to the side and critique that self. To engage in such a critique, one needs something like ‘a salon of the soul.’” The “salon of the soul” is thought itself as a form of collective subjectivity that could mediate between individuals and individual classes. This collective subjectivity was not an ethnic subjectivity as a substantial essence of an authentic culture, but a functional relationality of individual collective creativity. “In November of 1946, Nakai was elected as the first Chair of a 100,000-member Hiroshima Prefecture Workers’ Culture Association, an organization committed to creating a new politics of culture in an expanded public sphere.” (Pincus 1997)

In *The Logic of Reflection* (1932), Nakai composed an adaptation of a Buddhist story in which a King asks two artists to paint pictures on opposing walls. The first paints the most amazing image of the world and upon seeing it the King is ecstatic at its spectacle. Upon turning to the second painting the King is horrified to see “nothing.” “But why is there nothing?” To which the artist replied, “Look carefully.” After some silence, the King smiled – the wall had been polished like a mirror and reflected not only the radiant landscape pointed behind the King but the King himself. For Nakai, this tale illustrates two conceptions of art. The first is Romantic which was, for Nakai, associated with substance and by extension with fascism as the “logic of blood”; the second is a form of functionalism inspired by Cassirer and Buddhism. The logic of reflection of the wall contains the embryo of the nothingness of consciousness as the immanent light and is the logic of the symbolic.

The influence of Cassirer on the development of Nakai’s ideas was already clear in his 1930 article, “The Contribution to the Aesthetics of Functional Concepts” in which Nakai applies the “function concept” to various aesthetic problems. To make Cassirer’s mathematical presentation of function concepts more concrete, Nakai translates *Funktionsbegriff* into “function” through a terminological shift from “関数” (function relation) to “機能” (functionality). Things are therefore defined in terms of a nexus of interdependent functions. Nakai is interested in the intersection between the radical world forming creativity that we saw in Nishida and Miki, and the everydayness of common objects and tools. He gives the example of an ordinary window that is not produced from abstract mental representations of a circle or square but from actively combining the concrete function of air circulation, viewing, and lighting. Each of these functions is a basic need arising from the human interaction with the world and thus used in the process of creating a living environment. The window is not merely some external thing that can be grasped through substance concepts but rather it is a field of interconnected functions, a dynamic and even living form in which the subject actively participates by projecting the natural relations of air, nature, and light into

the form of a window. With Heidegger, Nakai understands the subject's fundamental existential comportment toward the window in terms of "care." However, with Cassirer and in difference to Heidegger, Nakai considers this fundamental involvement as a kind of projection and formative mapping (*Abbildung*). Unlike the useful thing of Heidegger or his conception of technology as enframing, Nakai's develops a creative notion of technology.

In *The Logic of the Committee*, which undertakes a critique of capitalism, Nakai is more critical of Cassirer. This is not surprising as Nakai's critique here is directed against the "intellectual mechanization" that takes place in modern capitalism in which "thought" becomes "an occupation" undertaken by specialist who speak an esoteric language such as mathematics that is meant to exclude the masses and stifle their creative and critical faculties, their ability for immanent critique. In his work as an activist discussed above, the goal was always to remove this barrier between professional thinkers speaking an esoteric language and the average person. This is precisely what the logic of the committee seeks to do: namely, to *transform the political* into a new politics of culture and with it the social technologies of capitalism. The committee would be a collective and critical subjectivity of collective work and an immanent self-critique rather than a centralized intelligentsia.

Nakai's work on Cassirer led to his conception of the aesthetics of functional concepts which in turn informed his understanding of the beauty of machines and the function of technology. This in turn informed his work on the logic of the committee which was the theoretical bases of his grassroots activism both in the Doyōbi and in the Hiroshima Cultural Enlightenment movement discussed above. Both aimed to overcome the alienation caused by the specialization and professionalization of intellectual mechanization that ended by negating creativity and critique in the masses and ultimately in culture. A full treatment of Nakai's theory of technology or his theory of the committee lies beyond the scope of our project here.

5 Conclusion

The primary objective of this paper was not to argue for the "influence" of Cassirer on the Kyoto School of Japanese philosophy. Historically, it defined Japanese philosophy and made known its engagement with Western philosophy and the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism and its project of a critique of culture during its own self-development. Our presentation of the Kyoto School of Japanese philosophy remains incomplete. The treatment of Nishida, Tanabe, Miki, and Makai were in no way exhaustive. The goal here was not to provide an exhaustive treatment but sketch out a field of future research. It is

also incomplete in that it limited itself to the first generation of the Kyoto School. There are many figures that could have been included. Shimomura, the historian and philosopher of science, critically read and engaged Cassirer. One finds traces of Cassirer in Nishitani's *On Buddhism* where he takes the distinction between substance-concepts and function-concepts to articulate his understanding of science. The post-war Marxist philosopher Hiromatsu, taught Cassirer at Kyoto University, wrote on Cassirer, and his own project of overcoming modernity and his theory of symbolic interactionism owes much to his reading of Cassirer. Finally, Ueda refers to Cassirer and Humboldt at the beginning of his 1993 paper, "Silence and Words in Zen Buddhism" and even a cursory reading of Ueda's theory of language calls for a comparison with Cassirer's. Systematically, the paper pointed to the possible interconnection between Cassirer's critique of culture and that of Japanese philosophy and made the case for the mutually productive dialog between Cassirer scholars and those working in Japanese philosophy. Implicitly, the paper attempted to show that an engagement with Japanese philosophy from the perspective of a critique of culture forces us to question the Western dichotomy between philosophy and religion and the importance of this for the further development of a non-Eurocentric critique of culture. And by extension, that a critique of culture must be cognitive of the historicity of the culture from which it speaks.

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