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ON TSUCHIDA KYŌSON'S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

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1/ THE DENOMINATION "KYOTO SCHOOL" IN THE WORK OF TSUCHIDA KYŌSON *CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT OF JAPAN AND CHINA* (1926, 1927)

In Western languages, if one looks at the volumes published from the 1990s onwards dedicated to the history of 20th-century Japanese philosophy, Tsuchida Kyōson's (1891-1934) is a minimally present figure, although the same does not happen if, instead of seeking his presence in books on the history of philosophy, one traces his relevance in studies on "social education" in Japan, where the scholars recognized him as the driving force of innovative forms of education. As Matsuda *et al.* explain:

> The Free University Movement was begun by Kyōson Tsuchida and the youth of agricultural villages in Nagano prefecture during the 1920s. At the time, universities were under the strict control of Japanese government and did not have academic freedom. The Free University Movement criticized the centralized universities of the day and tried to establish the Shinano Free University where people who were already working could continue learning. Depending on the idea of Shinano Free University, which was drafted by Kyōson Tsuchida, Shinano Free University opened its doors to all people, even women. Higher Education to women was limited at the time, however Shinano Free University tried to implement equality and impartiality of education through their movement (2016:262-263)

Beyond, or indeed alongside, his indispensable contribution to pedagogy, for instance, with this groundbreaking inclusion of women among university students, Tsuchida is essential in 20th-century Japanese philosophy, and for very solid reasons which I am going to explain below.

Until very recently it was claimed that it was Tosaka Jun (1900-1945) who, in 1932 and for the first time, left written testimony of the designation "Kyoto school" in his article "The philosophy of the Kyoto School" ("*Kyōto gakuha no tetsugaku*") (Heisig, 2002:25; Maraldo, 2019:293; Nakata Steffensen, 2016:54, and 2017:72; Ōhashi and Akitomi, 2020:367; Ōhashi, 2014:13; Fujita, 2018: 335; Crespín Perales, 2020:165). In a more extensive work published in Spanish language (Crespín Perales, 2023:41-86), I have demonstrated that six years before the publication of Tosaka's article, Tsuchida already included Nishida and Tanabe under the name "Kyoto school", surely echoing the

denomination that should run already through Japanese academic circles. The nomenclature appears in his book *Nihon shina gendai shisō kenkyū* ([1926], 1935), later translated into English as *Contemporary Thought of Japan and China* (1927).

Along the book, Tsuchida uses twice the name "Kyoto school." In what is the first mention, he alludes to the group of young philosophers who belong to the "so-called Kyoto school" (*iwayuru Kyōtoha*) (Tsuchida, 1927:94; *Cf.* Tsuchida, [1926] 1935:118), founded by Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), and credits that they have in Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962) as one of their representatives. The thinker, who was a contemporary of Nishida and Tanabe, says that the Kyoto philosophers share their claim to build a metaphysics that avoids the "logism" into which neo-Kantian idealism can end (Tsuchida, 1927:93). He also argues that Kyoto school philosophers want to find a "ground" from which to establish this new metaphysics, with the help of the transcendental psychology of Husserlian phenomenology (Tsuchida, 1927:93-94). It is important to note here that in his exposition around the development of contemporary Japanese thought, Tsuchida classifies the most representative Japanese philosophers of the period into schools or philosophical movements recognizable to the Western reader. Thus, for this author, the characteristics of this "new metaphysics", that would be represented by the "Kyoto school", emanate from neo-Kantianism and neo-Hegelianism. Tsuchida introduces both, Nishida and Tanabe, as Japanese representatives of these philosophical movements.

The second time that he names the school, Tsuchida characterizes it by saying that it adopts a "super-actualist" character (*ippan ni chōgenjitsuteki*) (1927:105; *Cf.* [1926] 1935:128). With such a description, he connects the approaches of thinkers close to Nishida's circle with the singular uses of the terms "act" or "actual" recognizable in a diffuse set of identifiable postulates in some philosophical voices of the twentieth century, such as Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) or A. N. Whitehead (1861-1947). In general terms, we can define "actualism" (or "activism") as a philosophical doctrine according to which there is no immutable, or substantial, being, but becoming —or processism—, events and occurrence (Ferrater Mora, 2004:59). So, existence, or reality, is defined as act or as concrete process. Gentile defines his "actual idealism" as an idealism that inverts the Hegelian problem "for it is no longer the question of a deduction of thought from Nature and principle of Nature from the Logos, but of Nature and the Logos from thought. By thought is meant present thinking in act, not thought defined in the abstract; thought which is *absolutely ours*, in which the 'I' is realized." (Gentile, [1916] 1922:254-255). And indeed, in Nishida's still best-known and widely read work, *An Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no kenkyū*) (1911) (Nishida, [1911] 1990), this said

"actualism" or "activism" plays an essential role within the central part of the book in which he studies "reality" (Nishida, [1911] 1990:35-83) and, later, as the ethical vertex of his attempt to systematize around the concept of "pure experience" (*junsui keiken*) that, as is well known, borrows from William James (1842-1910). Nishida calls his ethics, "action theory" (*katsudōsetsu*) or "energetism" (*energetism*) where "[t]he good is primarily a coordinated harmony—or mean—between various activities. Our conscience is the activity of consciousness that harmonizes and unifies the activities." ([1911] 1990:128) (see Crespín Perales, 2013:105-113).

Tsuchida puts Nishida and Tanabe together with a cohort of authors, nowadays almost forgotten, such as the ethicist Nishi Shinichirō (1873-1943) or Kihira Tadayoshi (1874-1949), a Hegelian scholar and a translator of his works, under his designation of the constellation around the "Kyoto School." The philosopher presents them according to the proximity or remoteness of their ideas in comparison with Nishidian postulates to, finally, classify them all under the label "metaphysical school" (Tsuchida, 1927:122). In this way, the name "Kyoto school" is there synonymous with "metaphysical school" because Tsuchida understands that the fundamental question that all these philosophers address is the is-ought problem. He argues, then, that "all the thinkers from Nishida to Kihira had in common the scheme to construct a new metaphysics from the viewpoint of the unity of 'is' with 'ought'." (Tsuchida, 1927:122).

Paraphrasing Nishida's texts, Tsuchida explains that the philosopher "combines" "is" and "ought" within the standpoint of "self-consciousness" (*jikaku*) (1927:77). As about Tanabe's own solution to the is-ought gap, Tsuchida affirms that the thinker would follow the same steps as his teacher Nishida when offering a metaphysical gradation of values (1927:94). Therefore, Tanabe would defend his idealist metaphysics, which adheres epistemologically to the Kantian transcendental constructionism, ensuring this way its realistic foundation (Tsuchida, 1927:94). Besides, and underlining the political dimension of the Kyoto school "super-actualism", Tsuchida affirms that the system of self-consciousness works as a matrix to overcome the separation between "is" and "ought", leading Nishida and Tanabe to "historism" (1927:113-114) and, as a consequence, to his proper end, "the State" (1927:116).

But Tsuchida will still use an additional qualifier to designate the "Kyoto school": "academic philosophy". When speaking of "academic philosophy", he does not refer only to the discipline that was studied, taught and transmitted in the institutionalized framework of the Japanese imperial universities, but to that which, beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, would extend the

predominance of German philosophy in Japanese universities' environment. The author maintains that the standard-bearers of "academic philosophy" follow Kant's thought, developing it in a Japanese "romantic individualism" manner, which stands out for its lack of interest in social problems, although, at the same time and without apparent contradiction, these "academic philosophers" criticize the excesses of modern "individualism" (Tsuchida, 1927:34-35). For Tsuchida, this "academic philosophy", epitomized by the Kyoto philosophers, is riddled with mistakes. He reproaches them for having distanced themselves from the unitary study of life, absorbed in epistemological problems, with a perseverant philosophical sight, but without conclusive results. Therefore, he argues that the "Kyoto school" represents an outstanding advance in regard to the analysis of knowledge, but, as about social problems, they are one-sided and retrograde, incapable of offering any sure affirmation about life and, therefore, alien to the concrete issues that citizens face: they lack "social character" (Tsuchida, 1927:34-35).

The thinker recriminates this "little interest in the problems of society" to the Kyoto school "academic philosophers" —Nishida, Tanabe, Nishi or Kihira— partly because they all ground their individualist systems on the axis of the transcendental ego, later transmuted in Fichte's conception of the absolute ego, or in voluntarism. Furthermore, with regard to the social, the only thing they offer is an image of society as a mere sum of its individuals (Tsuchida, 1927:114). Politically, here lies the natural continuation of the before mentioned "is-ought" synthesis that, as the philosopher argues, characterizes, in a way or another, Kyoto school metaphysical-and-academic representatives. We can describe it as a monadic society composed by individuals that retreat into a presupposed inner "self", continuously searching for their personal self-realization, but, precisely thanks to this self-confinement, open the way to an absolute-I, hypostatized as the State. Tsuchida describes how he see that these academic philosophers ground their ethnic nationalistic-statism:

> In the academic philosophies, almost without exception, the end of historism was the State. But we must inquire for ourselves the meaning of the State, whether it should be absolute or not. This is surely a great question. Among academic teachers it seems to be held that the realization of personality cannot be separated concretely from nature, nor, therefore, from the individuality of the Racial State. This means that those academic philosophers seem to combine the two specialities of a *race* and of *history.* (1927:116)

The parallel is clear enough: race represent the "is", and history, the "ought", unified into the "Racial State". The history of the State will depend on the race, and this will be understood, within, and through, the state's historical development (Tsuchida, 1927:116). This is something that Tsuchida clearly criticizes, not only questioning the supposed "natural basis" for this "speciality", but also

pointing at the variability of any social body (1927:117), concluding that he cannot comprehend this conception of the State as forever "absolute" or, in other words, racially essentialized.

Tsuchida's "social philosophy" or "culturalism", that he defines as a " new idealism of social problems" (1927:124), represents his own attempt to reconcile anarchism and socialism, and was a response and a reaction against the Japanese philosophical systems of his time, mainly, Kyoto school thinkers –Nishida and Tanabe–, that, in his view, had not been able to contribute much to the progress of social philosophy (1927:114-115). In what follows, I will reveal and analyse some of the characteristics of his distinctive "ethical idealism" that consists of fitting the Kantian "personal autonomy", which the philosopher understands as the power of the normative self to circumscribe the empirical self, and his strategy to channel the activity of the subject in a harmonizing game of two ideological "ideals": one, the socialist "spirit of service", that he takes from H. G. Wells' (1866-1946) *New Worlds for Old. A Plain Account of Modern Socialism* (1908), the other, the anarchist advantage as regards liberty, that he takes from Bertrand Russell's (1872-1970) *Proposed roads to freedom. Socialism, anarchism and syndicalism* (1919).

2/ TSUCHIDA'S "SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY": A JAPANESE FORM FOR "SOCIALIST ANARCHISM".

As previously shown, in a strictly philosophical context, Tsuchida is a voice that appears widely cited, although it often remains encapsulated in footnotes of academic reference works or scientific articles. Furthermore, Tsuchida plays a significant role in episodes that cannot be overlooked. For example, he is one of the thinkers who interviewed Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) when the British philosopher visited Japan in July 1921 after his tenure as a visiting professor at the university in Beijing (Miura, 2022:1). As Miura Toshihiko explains, Tsuchida was the one:

> [...] who discussed with Russell individually at Miyako Hotel for four hours on various topics including a possible war between Japan and the U.S., and guided Russell around temples in Kyoto the following day. Tsuchida had studied Russell's academic works as well as social writings, and described Russell as a paradoxical complex of the opposites, [...] (2022:5)

This assessment of Russell and his seemingly incongruous philosophical personifications contributes to highlighting one of Tsuchida's distinctive philosophical traits. He is noted for his refusal to submit to any doctrine or categorization (Soviak, 1990:84). This resolutely anti-dogmatic personality makes him an unclassifiable thinker within the always useful, albeit schematic, philosophical taxonomies (Crespín Perales, 2023:34). Nevertheless, he places himself within a precise yet blurry line of thought, which he calls "culturalism," defining it as a "new idealism of social

problems," in which he states that "culture" (*bunka*) translates German "*Kultur*." (Tsuchida, 1927:124).

Tsuchida gives the name "culturalism" to his irenic combination of idealism, socialism, and anarchism. As Piovesana points out, given its significance in the development of contemporary philosophy in Japan, it is essential to understand this "unofficial philosophy," or "*zaiya*," in which the author's advocated "culturalism" would be situated (1967:147). Tsuchida, by emphasizing the cultural and social aspects, sought to distance himself from the enclave of "academic philosophy," which was inclined to evade matters related to social philosophy. Tsuchida's "culturalism" is, then, a response and a reaction against the philosophical systems of thinkers, as Nishida and Tanabe, who, in his view, "have been unable to contribute much to the progress of social philosophy" on the one hand, and, on the other hand, have only helped in the construction of a "State philosophy" flooded with nationalism (1927:114-115).

With his "noble attempt," as expressed by Piovesana (1967:147), Tsuchida aims to rectify the "ivory towerism" by highlighting the characteristics of his distinctive "ethical idealism." This involves integrating Kantian "personal autonomy," which the philosopher understands as the power of the normative self to confine the empirical self, guiding the subject's activity into a harmonizing interplay of two ideological ideals: one, the ideal of socialist service, and the other, that of anarchist freedom. Tsuchida writes:

> H. G. Wells [1866-1946] saw the spirit of socialism as the spirit of service, while Bertrand Russell said that anarchism had the advantage as regards liberty, and socialism as regards the inducement to work; and I, for my part, can endorse both these opinions. After all, in my opinion, *the fundamental spirit of socialism is Service, and that of anarchism is Freedom.* […] the standpoint on which the thought may be combined is that of "personal autonomy" which means an activity where the normative self defines the empirical self, as was shown in Kant's Ethics. And if so, we can conceive the meaning of Service and of Freedom relative to this activity as follows: first, for the normative self in this activity to realize itself in the empirical self means Freedom in a really true sense; and next, for the empirical self, modestly to obey orders from the normative self, and thus eventually acquire its own right position means Service in a really true sense. In this way personal freedom is combined with personal service in one and the same activity of personal autonomy or autonomous personality (1927:184-186).

This form of social philosophy, whether we call it "ethical idealism" or, focusing on the irenic form, "socialist anarchism," it is the result of a combination of two distinct sociopolitical ideals.

The first, which Tsuchida took from H.G. Wells, is the line demarcated by socialism. In his *New Worlds For Old. A Plain Account of Modern Socialism* (1908), the book that Tsuchida quotes, Wells defines socialism as "a great intellectual process, a development of desires and ideas that takes

the form of a project –a project for the reshaping of human society upon a new and better lines" (1908:3). Within this process, Wells believes, operates a "Good Will," "working through the efforts of men,", and proved by a "secular amelioration of life" (1908:6). Wells' socialism, then, is tantamount with the very same idea in liberalism (Gray, 1992:11), that also sustains the belief in the improvement of any social and political institution, but that believes that, to reshape human society, first it is necessary to reshape humanhood. It needs, as Wells puts it, a "change in the circle of ideas" (1908:91), that is, "a general change in the spirit of living; it means a change from the spirit of gain (which now necessarily rules our lives) to the spirit of service" (1908:91). Considering the "spirit of service" as a virtue, the English writer tries to convince on how to transform modern societies –that are moved by "egoistical conceptions," the dominion of *homo economicus* over women and children, and the commodification of what we today call "public goods" (education, health, environmental protection, etc.) (Wells, 1908:91)– to construct a new "civilized State" where the spirit of service and the passion for common good will prevail: "the honourable competition not to get but to do" (1908:100).

The second, which Tsuchida took from Russell, is the way of anarchism, that he reads promptly as a defence of liberty that, by the same token, would be at risk with the "collective" spirit of service that Wells defends. The danger is, and that is exactly what Tsuchida took from Russell, that any orthodox or pure form of anarchism or socialism will fall into corrupted social institutions and governments. Therefore, the collectivistic "spirit of service" cannot suffocate men and women's "freedom". And, so, Tsuchida agrees with Russell in two propositions: that it seems that anarchism has an advantage over socialism regarding liberty, whereas socialism has it regarding the "inducements to work" (Russell, 1919:108), what proves a necessity to combine service with freedom, or freedom with justice. In other words, the philosopher defends a "social anarchism" that balance the individual and the communal; one's personal interests and identity within a society that is composed of individuals with their own personal interests and identities. We can say, though, that Tsuchida's culturalism, his name for his own social philosophy, aims to combine service and freedom, socialism, and anarchism, and, in his discussion intertwined with his critic of "academic philosophers," he defends his own "socialist anarchism" that he imagines as a form of "Association". Tsuchida writes:

> All men respectively have their various kinds of demands; accordingly, each demand of each man, respectively associating with the same kind of demand of other men, forms a functional

> society. This society is termed *Association.*[1] The richer therefore each man renders the content of his personality the greater are the number of Associations he may be able to form by means of the growing complexity of his demands; and these Associations, in their turn, combining with each other will so form complicated social relations. (1927:187)

Politically, as the philosopher adds later, the formation of more complicated "associations" will construct a regional societal system, not a centralistic one (Tsuchida, 1927:188), that will harmonize equality and difference, or justice and freedom, as previously said:

> At its limit, the elemental Association will shrink in the length of its radius to a mere point. In other words, each elemental Association will ultimately accord with each side of each man's individuality. On the other hand, however, each man will be so far differentiated that he can form any Association with any demand of any man to any individual degree. (Tsuchida, 1927:188-189)

In sum, Tsuchida's social philosophy it is clearly a form of socialist anarchism that, as Andrew Fiala argues, emphasizes "the point that human identity and flourishing occur within extended social structures—so long as it remains a free and self-determining community" (2021). It is relevant, as well, that Tsuchida is indebted to one of the precursors of anarchism, William Godwin (1756-1836), that he studied in detail, as Shirai Atsushi (1930-) demonstrated (1970:92), trying, again, to search a form of combination between Godwin's ideal society, Marx socialism and his own Culturalism, as it is clear when one reads the following phrase: "In the ideal society each should contribute his strength to his capacity, and should at the same time realize his life according to his inner demands" (1927:187).

3/ FINAL REMARK.

To conclude, first, Tsuchida's chronicle of the Kyoto School members in the 1920s offers a sharp contrast with some philosophical common places used today for referring to the Kyoto School circle. Today it is still necessary to re-examine how their contemporaries look at the "school" as neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian rooted "metaphysical school" (Tsuchida), or as subjective idealism, in which different sensibilities and accents coexisted, although all of them linked to a "a perfectly formed, socially existing entity" (Tosaka [1932] in Nakata Steffensen 2016:67). The inclusion of Tsuchida's unnoticed source contributes to the question about the historical significance of the designation of the "school" in the lifetime of its most famous members. And second, Tsuchida's culturalism, his own social philosophy, proposes a form of "socialist anarchism" which aim is to combine the individual and the communal through an associationist movement that, curious enough,

[1] Emphasis in the original.

not only has relevance within the 20th century political debates, but for today, when other Japanese philosophers, as for instance Karatani Kōjin (1941-) (see 2005, 2014, 2017), and his proposal of an associationist political and socio-economic model based on the idea of *isonomia*, represents his own irenic spirit that tries to combine Marx and Kant. We can say, then, that Tsuchida's social philosophy is a clear antecedent and that his proposal deserves more and detail attention.

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