

**THE DENOMINATION "KYOTO SCHOOL" IN THE WORK OF TSUCHIDA KYŌSON
(1891-1934) *CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT OF JAPAN AND CHINA* (1926, 1927)**

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This paper refutes that the first written document in which the name "Kyoto school" is found corresponds to the article written by Tosaka Jun (1900-1945) and published in 1932 with the title "The philosophy of the Kyoto school". It will be shown that it was another thinker, Tsuchida Kyōson (1891-1934), who in his *Contemporary Thought of Japan and China*, a book originally written in Japanese in 1926 and then in English in 1927, includes Nishida and Tanabe under the name "Kyoto school", thus years before Tosaka's text. The inclusion of this unnoticed source contributes to the question about the historical significance of the designation of the "school" in the lifetime of its most famous members.

Keywords: Kyoto School, Tsuchida Kyōson (1891-1934), Tosaka Jun (1900-1945), subjective idealism, actualism.

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), that I present here in a very brief, and mainly descriptive, form with the aim to share the finding with the occasion of this congress, I have demonstrated that six years before the publication of Tosaka's article, another philosopher, Tsuchida Kyōson (1891-1934), 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 sees that these academic philosophers ground their ethnic nationalistic-statism:

In the academic philosophies, almost without exception, the end of historicism 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.

To conclude, 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). Summing up, 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.

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