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## Russian and Japanese Philosophies: A Comparative Study

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**ABSTRACT:** Russia and Japan are not only successful reformers but also the first ‘non-western’ countries that develop a philosophy – in the ‘western’ sense – of their own and on a larger scale. Still it seems that, in spite of this striking parallel, no comparative research has been done on these two philosophical traditions. The objective of the study is to sketch the cultural similarities between both countries by concentrating on their philosophies and on some decisive stances in their intellectual history. I then look at some Common Themes of Russian and Japanese Thought. Both Japanese and Russian philosophies are engaged in the analysis of the relationship between faith and reason as well as in the critique of secularism. Concepts like ‘organicity,’ ‘person,’ and ‘totality’ are central in both traditions. Among the most popular philosophical themes discussed are reflections on the problem of personalism and philosophical developments of ‘intuition.’

### Introduction

**R**ussia and Japan are not only successful reformers but also the first ‘non-western’ countries that develop a *philosophy* – in the ‘western’ sense – of their own and *on a larger scale*. Both countries’ approaches towards modernization are similar because, as has said Marius Jansen, they had ‘responded strikingly to the challenges posed by the prior development of science and technology in the North Atlantic world.’<sup>1</sup> In Russia and in

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<sup>1</sup> Jansen (1979), 18.

Japan the old precepts of ‘spirit and technology’ could be reformulated in the 1920s not in terms of romantic, revisionist exaltation, but in the manner of a modern social theory. The combination of ‘Russian spirit’ and ‘Western technology,’ practiced at the time of Peter the Great, echoes the Japanese slogan of *wakon yōsai* (Eastern spirit – Western science) current since the beginning of the Meiji restoration and which could, in the 1920s, serve as a starting point for reflections not only on how to become ‘Western’ but also on how to escape Europeanization.<sup>2</sup> According to the Eurasianist Nicolai Trubetzkoy, Peter the Great has been fully aware of Russia’s distinctive cultural character but he first wanted to implant European technological thinking that, once this was done, Russia’s spirit would have to be maintained.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the striking parallels concerning these ‘philosophical’ achievements, it seems that no comparative research has been done on these two philosophical traditions. Studies on ‘Nishida and Heidegger’ are numerous while topics like, say, ‘Nishida and Berdiaev’ or ‘Watsuji and Trubetzkoy’ have never been taken up for examination. The objective of the present article is to sketch the cultural similarities between both countries by concentrating on their philosophies and on some decisive stances in their intellectual history. In principle, I examine the parallels between Russian and Japanese philosophies by crystallizing certain common concepts. Both Japanese and Russian philosophies are engaged in the analysis of the relationship between faith and reason as well as in the critique of secularism. Concepts like ‘organicity,’ ‘person,’ and ‘totality’ are central in both traditions. Among the most popular philosophical themes discussed are reflections on the problem of personalism and philosophical developments of ‘intuition.’ A further purpose of this article is to compare the respective rhythms of modernization in order to understand how the production of ‘local branches’ of philosophy has been possible at early stages of modernization.

Talking about ‘philosophy’ in these countries creates an exceptional situation. In both countries philosophy is not indigenous, and ‘Japanese philosophy’ or ‘Russian philosophy’ are products of modernization. In premodern Japan (before the Meiji period), Japanese thought was religious, influenced often by metaphysical Buddhist motives and a Confucian ethical system. The Western idea of the ‘philosopher’ as an independent thinker was almost absent, and if it existed, it was marginal and not influential. Since the Meiji Restoration, however, we assist an abundant introduction of Western philosophy into Japan which, though traditional components continued to occupy an important place. NISHI Amane (1829-1897), the father of Japanese philosophy, introduced Comte’s positivism and Mill’s utilitarianism and coined a large

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<sup>2</sup> The slogan *wakon yōsai* had actually first been launched in the 1840s by Sakuma Shōzan.

<sup>3</sup> Trubetzkoy (1991), 78. The Tsar died before the latter act could be accomplished.

number of philosophical terms in the Japanese language, among which is also the term ‘tetsugaku’ (philosophy). NISHI insisted on the philosophical ‘superiority’ of the West<sup>4</sup> and attempted to destroy Japan’s Confucian basis; however, his absorption of Western thought remains often superficial. Following generations of philosophers undertook an amazing adoption and assimilation of Western ideas into the native Japanese system. They seldom did this without thoroughly reworking these ideas and adapting them to the needs of Japanese culture. The Kyoto School of philosophy, centered around the most important Twentieth century Philosopher Nishida Kitaro, especially formulated these problems. Buddhism had a strong influence particularly on Japanese elaborations of philosophical aesthetics and psychology. The result is a philosophy that is Japanese and at the same time comparable with its Western counterpart.

‘Russian philosophy’ as a notion poses similar problems. It is difficult to say with certainty when it started – a problem that is the subject of the present paper – but it is certain that it started relatively late. Roughly, it is right to say that since the writings of the Slavophiles, Russia emerged as the first non-Western nation to challenge Eurocentric philosophical models. Paradoxically, this philosophical ‘particularism’ coexisted with ‘universalistic’ tendencies, which, often formulated through religious considerations, continued to be dominant in this branch of Russian philosophy as well as in Russian philosophical thought in general. Kireevsky’s critique of European philosophy’s rationalism (which sometimes reads like an anticipated antagonism of analytic and continental philosophy) or of ‘Eurocentric reason’ is interesting in itself. Kireevsky’s critique of Leibniz’ excessive ‘ratiocination’ (*rassudochnost*),<sup>5</sup> or his idea of (fully reasonable) ‘interior harmony’ that should be opposed to the ‘formal harmony’ or the law (*ibid.*) are reminiscent of certain contemporary ideas.<sup>6</sup> From there on, mostly through Russian nihilism and names like Herzen and Solov’ev, Russian philosophy could conquer a marginal place in the European philosophical landscape.

## 1. The Timeline

Looking at how ‘philosophical events’ and publications are distributed over the time axis, one could conclude that the temporal difference between Japan and Russia is

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<sup>4</sup> See Havens (1970), 129.

<sup>5</sup> Kireevsky (1911), 194.

<sup>6</sup> Kireevsky is convinced that “Rome reserved the monopol of judgment to its hierarchy” and the result was as follows: “The people should not think, it should not understand the lithurgy (...) but only listen to it without understanding and obey without discussing (*ibid.*, 229).” Like this was formed an “unconscious mass” of people that only consume religion.

simply too large and that comparisons are impossible. In Russia, ‘modernization’ began with Peter the Great (1672-1725), paralleling the Tokugawa seclusion. In both countries, reforms led to the strengthening of the inner situation of the bureaucracy and of the military. However, in Russia, philosophical critique of modernization processes could formulate only more than a hundred years after Peter’s death. The reason for this is that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century there simply was no Russian philosophy able to formulate such a criticism. In Japan the situation was different. Even though here modernization began only around 1855 (and officially only as late as 1867), critique and intellectual comment developed very quickly. 1867 is the date of the Pan-Slavist congress in Moscow and the date of the official beginning of the Meiji reformation in Japan.<sup>7</sup>

This is at least one way of establishing parallels. Another way of seeing both countries’ development is, as does Marius Jansen, to state that they began modernization at the same time. The Meiji Reform and the Great Reforms in Russia (liberation of peasants, several judicial reforms under Alexander II) began both in the 1860s and from there on one can note striking signs of development (Jansen 1979: 18). However, though Japan and Russia have generally been recognized as ‘late modernizers’ for just these reasons, one should not forget that, even if such a parallelism exists, the political development of Eastern Europe and Japan was far from being on the same level. The aforementioned time gap between Peter the Great and Meiji is responsible for these differences.

Comparisons of the Meiji Reform and the Great Reforms in Russia are only partially correct because the Meiji revolution was conservative and not progressive. Individualism (let alone democracy) was not among the main issues discussed by policy makers in the Japan of the 1890s.<sup>8</sup> In Europe (including Russia) the situation was different. One of the reasons is that here ‘modernization’ has had another meaning than it has had in Japan. Europe had by that time definitely relegated into the archives of history Romanticism, sentiment and idealism, and was working towards a more enlightened ‘science’ that would soon influence all domains of society; politics was now no longer determined by idealist principles of ethics and truth but by ‘material forces.’ The newly acquired scientific way of dealing with politics also entailed a critical attitude

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<sup>7</sup> William Naff has reflected upon the question if the Meiji revolution and the Russian revolution should be equated. He notes the remarkable “attempts made by [two] leading nations during the past century and a half to reconstitute themselves.” Furthermore he draws attention to similarities between a Russian and a Japanese novel. TōSON Shimazaki’s (1872-1943) *Before Dawn* (*Yoake no mae*) was written in the 1920s on Meiji Revolution. Naff compares this with Mikhail Sholokhov’s (1904-1984) *The Quiet Don*, written between 1928 and 1940 on the Russian revolution. Naff (1990), 92.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Pierson (1980): “No sense of individual duty or calling or responsibility. Unwilling to deviate from established norms of the groups and *community*, they were concerned mainly with adhering to formalities and with maintaining appearances,” 207. “Students were told that individualism and nationalism are incompatible,” 212.

towards democracy and phenomena like Pan-Slavism (which was a phenomenon of the 1860s) cannot be understood without taking into account this ambiguous tendency uniting scientific thought and romanticism.

It is impossible to find a parallel phenomenon in 19<sup>th</sup> century Japan. Such a constellation seems to appear only – and in a concentrated form – at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Here aggressive nationalism fostering pragmatic and cynical political methods *coexists* with a newly adopted intellectual attitude that is eager to discover ways of expressing Pan-Asian feelings through Western *idealist* concepts (cf. Okakura's *Ideals of the East*).

In Russia intellectual criticism of modernization took form relatively late because Russian philosophy had to be developed first. True, the Japanese had no 'philosophy' either; however, when looking at the degree of sophistication with which Okakura defines his 'Ideals of the East' in 1902, only 35 years after the Restoration, and at NISHIDA Kitarō's *Zen no Kenkyū* inaugurating, nine years later, a true Japanese tradition of philosophy, Russia's intellectual Pan-Slav machine appears to have had difficulties getting started. (Eastern European Pan-Slavism was perhaps philosophically more interesting at the beginning but declined later.)

True, in principle, both countries started to absorb Western learning at the same time (in the 1770s), but the conditions under which the learning took place were not the same. Russia had direct access to Western culture while Japan had been closed since 1640. The question is: how could Japan catch up so quickly? An indirect reason is certainly that in Japan, 'modernization' represented an official policy adopted by the government. Critical reflections of this policy were thus mainly made from outside the government. In Russia, both Slavophiles and Modernizers stood outside the government. Within the mixed discourse of modernization/anti-modernization that is so typical for the Russian 1840s and 1850s, a more streamlined philosophical conception of Pan-Slavism could evolve only very slowly.

If we consider Peter Chaadaev, who vacillated between Modernization and Slavophilism, as of the 'first original philosopher of Russia' (Mikhail Epstein), we might be tempted to think of NISHIDA Kitarō as his Japanese counterpart, because with his *Zen no Kenkyū* he arises, in 1911, as 'the first original philosopher of Japan.'<sup>9</sup> However, this parallelism is inappropriate, because the intellectual output of Slavophilism after Chaadaev is, in terms of philosophical quality, not comparable with that of the Kyoto School after Nishida.

It seems to be more accurate to establish a date around 1902 when Okakura's *Ideals*

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<sup>9</sup> In the words of NAKAMURA Yūjirō. (1983), title of article. See Maraldo (1995) on Nishida's status as Japan's first philosopher.

*of the East* inaugurated the ‘Asian Spiritual Renaissance,’ and 1901, when the Religious-Philosophical Society of St. Petersburg was founded by symbolist writers and idealist philosophers who claimed to inaugurate the ‘Russian Religious-Philosophical Renaissance.’ This Russian group was intellectually extremely far removed from Westernizing thought (Herzen’s ‘nihilism’ could not find their favor), but it did keep a link with Slavophilism: the ‘essence of Russianness’ remained a favored subject in their discussion.<sup>10</sup>

In Russia, once the more paternalist style of the Slavophiles is overcome, any hybrid forms of imperialism, culturalism and hidden imperialist intentions will *not* make their way forward to a first class intellectual plan. In Japan this tendency exists. At some point Japan falls back on the level of early Slavophiles by producing the genre of ‘Cultural Particularism.’ This concerns especially those students of Nishida (among them NISHITANI Keiji) who sought to influence national policy, and finally to justify a Pan-Asianism that justified leadership instead of partnership.

With which Japanese phenomenon then can the Russian ‘pre-philosophical’ phase be compared? With regard to the curious mixture of modernization and traditionalism that Russian thought developed after Chaadaev, it appears reasonable to compare the Russian 1840s and 1850s with KITA Ikki and ŌKAWA Shūmei. Kita’s ‘Japanese socialism’ is indeed more reminiscent of Alexander Herzen’s Russian version of socialism than of any of the philosophies developed by Kita’s Russian contemporaries. Herzen (1812-1870) was against all empty abstraction of progress, though also against revolutionary violence. Attacking all sorts of systems and dogmas, he was against oppression of human beings by reference to idealized abstractions such as freedom, progress, and the common good (for Lenin, Herzen even remained the founder of the revolutionary movement). Also the rightwing thinker ŌKAWA Shūmei sympathized with Bolshevik Russia and admired Lenin, which suggests a comparison with Nicolai Chernishevsky (1828-89). Being convinced that Russians should learn from the West, Chernishevsky continued the Westernizing line, though at the same time he remained

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<sup>10</sup> Another Japanese phenomenon paralleling more or less the foundation of the Religious-Philosophical Society of St. Petersburg could be the foundation of Inoue Enryō’s “Philosophical Institute” in 1887. INOUE Enryō (1858-1919) studied at the main temple of Pure Land Buddhism, earned a degree in philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University. He opposed the Westernization of Japan and the conversion of officials to Christianity. He founded his institute to promote the study of Buddhism. As part of his campaign to rid Japan of superstitions associated with folklore and mythology, he established the Ghost Lore Institute in Tokyo. One could also mention the vigorous defender of Buddhism, MURAKAMI Sensho (1851-1929) who was working on an intellectual recovery of Buddhism that had been suppressed by the Meiji Enlightenment. Which led to Japan’s more intense attempts, during Taihō and early Shōwa, to accentuate its role as the “disseminator of Buddhism to the world, especially between the world wars. This also had a certain “Pan-Asian flavor.” Cf. Stone (1990), 217. Meiji New Buddhism, on the other hand, tended to see Japan as “the sole heir to the spiritual and ethical heritage of the East precisely at a time of heightened imperial ambitions and military adventurism.” Sharf (1993), 5.

close to the Slavophiles.<sup>11</sup>

If we look at the cultural development of Russia and Japan in that way, the above mentioned time gap appears much smaller: only fifty-six years lie between Herzen's *From the Other Shore* and Kita Ikki's *Theory of National Polity and Pure Socialism*. The Russian Slavophiles, on the other hand, appear to be the conservative ingredient of Pan-Slavist thought that can be paralleled with Japanese 'Paternalists' like NITOBE Inazo, TOGO Minoru, MOCHIJ I Rokasaburo, and NAGAI Ryutarō (some of whom were involved in the creation of chairs of 'Colonial Studies' in Tokyo in 1908). The respective contemporaneity of KITA Ikki and Japanese colonialists on the one hand, and Slavophiles and Modernizers on the other, justifies this parallelism.

What about the philosophical phase in Russia? I am inclined to let the 'philosophical phase' of Pan-Slavism begin with Danilevsky's *Russia and Europe* or with the first writings of Solov'ëv (who was then still influenced by Kireevsky). Solov'ëv was the first to diagnose a crisis in Western *philosophy* and, similar to Nishida, he attempted what Western philosophy had so far been unable to do: to bring together religious and philosophical truth. The Slavophiles, though philosophical, keep a reactionary undertone in general. The Modernizers, though also philosophical, tend to see philosophical problems of identity, national culture and so on, in the light of social engineering and not of spiritual, psychological, and cultural transformation.

If we admit this scheme for Russia, the Russian philosophers appear to have an advance of thirty to forty years with regard to Nishida's *Zen no kenkyū*. However, the Japanese caught up quickly. Indeed, they caught up so quickly that one can speak in 1920, in terms of complexity and profundity, of an eminent parallelism between Russian and Japanese reflections.

## 2. Some Common Themes of Russian and Japanese Thought

Both Japanese and Russian philosophies are engaged in the analysis of the relationship between faith and reason as well as in the critique of secularism. Concepts like 'organicity,' 'person,' and 'totality' are central in both traditions. Among the most popular philosophical themes discussed are reflections on the problem of personalism and philosophical developments of 'intuition.'

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<sup>11</sup> Chernichevsky was in favor of collectivism, an unacceptable point for the conservative Slavophiles.

## 2.1. All-Unity

Comparative studies of the subject of All-Unity in Russia and Japan can very well pass under the heading: ‘Absolute Unity: Totalitarian or not?’ As totalitarian can be considered the philosophies of Danilevsky, Karsavin, and – with some restrictions, as we will see below – Watsuji, while others, like S. Frank or Nishida tend to depict All-Unity as an unsolvable philosophical conundrum.

In general, the idea of All-Unity is more ‘eastern’ than ‘western.’ C.T.K. Chiari points to the proximity between classical Russian ontology and Far Eastern thought<sup>12</sup> claiming that Solov’iëv’s ‘All-Unity’ is reminiscent of Swami Vivekananda’s *Hymn of Samōdhi*. Though we do not find concepts like those which hold that ‘the whole universe is manifest in every atom’ (Okakura on the ‘science’ of the Asanga and Vasubandhu period)<sup>13</sup> in Russian philosophy, a certain metaphysics of All-Unity (*useyedinstvo*) is central to a range of Russian philosophers such as A. Khomiakov, L.P. Karsavin, V. Solov’ëv, Lev Lopatin, Evgeni Trubetzkoy, Pavel Florensky, Sergei Bulgakov, Semën Frank, and Nicolas Lossky. Thoughts about All-Unity, often discussed in proximity with the quest for harmony of faith and reason, are not simply philosophical protests against the ecclesiastical ‘egoism’ of Protestants who are said to affirm a ‘multitude without unity,’ but most often represent direct attempts to overcome the entire intellectual machine of Western metaphysics by Eastern Orthodox means.

The Eastern Orthodox Church passed by several Neo-Platonic dichotomies that are binding for Western metaphysics and All-Unity as a philosophical subject did not develop along the same lines in both cultural spheres. In a schematic way one can say that in Western philosophy the subject of All-Unity has never been assumed as a philosophical end but has been transformed, by Spinoza, Bruno, Eckhart, Hegel, and others, into sophisticated dialectical, cosmological, or monadological systems.<sup>14</sup> Nishida’s ideas about the whole and its parts as they exist in a ‘place’ (*basho*), on the other hand, emphasize a contradiction. The place is not an organically defined whole (like Hegel’s ‘nation’) but a horizon determined by self-negation and nothingness. Nishida writes: ‘What I mean by the self-determination of absolute nothingness, even though I said that it is the all-encompassing basis of all self-determinations of

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<sup>12</sup> Chari (1952)

<sup>13</sup> Okakura (1905) on the Asanga and Vasubandhu period: “That the whole universe is manifest in every atom; that each variety, therefore, is of equal authenticity; that there is no truth unrelated to the unity of things; this is the faith that liberates the Indian mind in science, 110.”

<sup>14</sup> See Henrich (1985) and Botz-Bornstein (2005).

universals, does not simply mean Plotinus notion of the ‘One’. My notion of the self-realization of nothingness is not at all the idea of religious *ekstasis*.<sup>15</sup> Nishida sees All-Unity as an original unity of things and the Absolute One is absolute only because it is the self-negation of itself. This is very different from Watsuji’s more ‘totalitarian’ totality ‘in which parts are synthesized into an organic whole and in which parts are proper to themselves’ (Naoki Sakai). In the end this totality is able to depict the emperor as a ‘living totality.’<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2. The Myth of Uniqueness

Large parts of Russian philosophy are occupied with the *samobytnost*’ (originality) of Russian culture and read like a Russian adaptation of Japanese *nihonjinron*. According to ANNO Tadashi, the ‘resurgence of discourses on the ‘nation’ and its alleged ‘uniqueness’ has been ‘one of the most conspicuous developments in the intellectual history of both Japan and Russia since the 1960s’ (Anno 2000: 329). It has been pointed out that one of the reasons is the common use of an ancient written work for the establishment of identity and nationalism. The Japanese *Kojiki* (the earliest historical record of Japan) and the Russian *Primary Chronicle* (a medieval Kievan Rus historical work) both represent (mythical) starting points of cultural traditions.<sup>17</sup> Marius Jansen writes that both rely ‘on the written and cultural tradition of an ancient empire (...) combined with a need for national identification and distinction and this is resolved through the assertion of a special origin and a mission for the fledgling state’ (Jansen 1979: 30).

In Japan, there is a kind of nativist thinking deeply involved in items like the Japanese’s pantheistic love of nature that is said to linger at the bottom of Japanese culture in the form of a unique and unchanging essence. This thinking can also be encountered in academic philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Through ranges of cultural reductivism, particularism, and determinism, ‘social, economic and political phenomena are often seen as symptoms of immanent culture,’ has said KOSAKU Yoshino (1992: 10). While popular writings on the uniqueness of Japanese culture are dismissed by serious scholars, numerous genuinely philosophical projects dig into Japanese identity in order

<sup>15</sup> Nishida NKZ 6. Quoted from Arisaka (1996), 80.

<sup>16</sup> Sakai (1997), 66.

<sup>17</sup> The *Kojiki* was completed in 712 but purportedly records the events dating back to 660 BC and the creation of the Japanese Imperial line. The *Primary Chronicle* was compiled in Kiev about 1113 and gives an account of the early history of the eastern Slavs.

<sup>18</sup> See for this problem Dale (1986).

to formulate particularly Japanese approaches. By contrasting typically Japanese intellectual models with conventional Western ones, one hopes to produce insights into subjects that are of wider interest. NISHITANI Keiji's or KIMURA Bin's works are examples of the latter category.<sup>19</sup>

Also Russian philosophy is marked by recurrent allusions to its cultural uniqueness, many of which evolve along lines that separate east and west.<sup>20</sup> Since the mid-1960s, a new Russophilism began to supplant neo-Leninism (Anno 2000: 330), borrowing from older Russian discourses on the *russkaia ideia*.<sup>21</sup> The idea that the European mind is violent and should be contrasted with a 'Slavic mind' that is cooperative, tolerant, and selfless is expressed by Nicolai Danilevsky (1822-1885) as well as by Alexei Khomiakov (1808-1860).<sup>22</sup> While Chaadaev (1794-1856) still contented himself with reproaching Russia for its absence of any spiritual tradition, his outspoken anti-messianic cultural critique of Russia<sup>23</sup> was quickly replaced with the Slavophiles' 'locally minded particularism' (Suvchinsky)<sup>24</sup> that attempts to establish Russia as a superior culture.

Russian philosophy itself arose from the insight that 'Western formulas were not applicable to us; [that] in Russian life there was some kind of particular beginning foreign to other people; here development proceeded by another law, as yet undetermined by science.'<sup>25</sup> The style of philosophizing as well as the ideological direction not only of the entire Slavophile project but of much of Russian philosophy in general, are marked by a constant wondering about the character of Russian culture. Still in 1922 Gustav Shpet could write that 'Slavophile problems are the only original problems of Russian philosophy.'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Nishitani (1982) and Kimura (1972, 1995, 1975, 1992). The anthropological writings of Takanori IRIE, who suggests an "Edoization" of the world in order to combat Western "rationalism," are examples for the former category. There is an apparent resemblance with Russian thinkers like Dugin or Gumilev. For Irie see Tessa Morris-Suzuki (1995), 774ff.

<sup>20</sup> For a good account of the "uniqueness" of Russian philosophy see van der Zweerde (2006).

<sup>21</sup> Anno points out that Leninism was a successor to the "populist" version of Russian nationalism—for Leninism combined the claim of superiority of Soviet Russia over the capitalist West (transvaluation) with the populist theme of antipathy toward Westernized elites of tsarist Russia (2000), 337.

<sup>22</sup> Recurrent in Danilevsky's *Россия и Европа* [Russia and Europe] (1867) for example 57-58. Also Khomiakov holds that Slavs have communal qualities while Germanic peoples are conquerors and exploiters.

<sup>23</sup> Petr Chaadaev: "Nous ne vivons que dans le présent le plus étroit, sans passé et sans avenir, au milieu d'un calme plat." Chaadaev (1978), 78, quoted from Koyré (1976), 22.

<sup>24</sup> Suvchinsky (1990), 66.

<sup>25</sup> The Slavophile Yuri Samarin relates this about his professor of history, Pogodin, who decided to take the at that time unusual turn towards an appreciation of Russian culture. [He declared that] Slavophilism itself is unable to exist without the conviction that Russian thought is different from any other culture in the world, (Quoted from Milojkovic-Djuric (1994), 55. Cf. Scanlan who affirms "that Slavophilism distinguishes *Russian* thought from that of any other culture; this is the basis of the philosophical *uniqueness* of Slavophilism." Scanlan (1994), 35.

<sup>26</sup> From Scanlan (1994), 36.

There is a Slavophile concept of the ‘chosen people’<sup>27</sup> that affirms ‘the idea of God that placed Rus’ higher than any other state and that the center of world history had shifted to Russia’ (Barabanov 1992, p. 30). In spite of this, Russian philosophical styles are less narcissistic than those of the Japanese *nihonjinron*. Having been led by the intention to find a philosophy appropriate for Russian culture, Russian philosophy was able to preserve some of its cultural particularity by clinging to this ‘Slavophil’ project only in the largest sense, which prompted V.V. Ivanov to say that ‘Russia has preserved the spiritual strength that distinguishes it from most big countries.’<sup>28</sup> The reverse of the coin is that such discourses might also turn out to be the major obstacle for Russian mature philosophizing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as writes Valentin Bazhanov: ‘Still many obstacles are on the path. The main one (...) is to underscore Russian exceptionality and uniqueness, to insist on the originality of Russian culture.’<sup>29</sup>

### 2.3. Personalism

Personalism is a philosophical movement that developed numerous branches on almost every continent. It establishes the person as the ultimate explanation for being and combats all attempts at objectification of subjective life, be it that of a society, of a culture, or of a person. Though influenced by religious motives and theological tradition, Personalism inherited also much from Hegel and his emphasis on dialectical movement toward wholeness. With regard to the Russian and Japanese authors discussed here, Personalism can also appear to be a product of the above described philosophical culture that centers its reflections simultaneously All-Unity and cultural uniqueness.<sup>30</sup>

The subject of personality occurs strikingly often in modern Russian and Japanese philosophy.<sup>31</sup> Robert Bellah identified the ‘type of fusion of culture, society and personality which seems to be present in Japan’ with a ‘normal feature of primitive society and archaic cultures [that] was found quite generally in the bronze age

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<sup>27</sup> Boro-Petrovich (1956), 46. Cf. also Solov’ëv: “Mais le danger de ces doctrines religieuses est le messianisme. Dès l’instant où l’on déclare qu’un seul peuple est appelé à réaliser la vérité, on quitte le domaine chrétien pour rentrer dans la tradition juive. La Russie n’échappera pas toujours à ce danger.” (1950), 15.

<sup>28</sup> Ivanov (1994), 405.

<sup>29</sup> Bazhanov (1999), 240. Cf. Marina Bykova who detects the superiority complex in Russians even today, “insofar as Westerners supposedly cannot grasp the depth and complexity of the Russian soul.” (2004), 29.

<sup>30</sup> In the case of some Russian philosophers one can even say that the idea of personality flows immediately out of their philosophy of All-Unity. This is especially true for L.P. Karsavin who has been working much on personality as a cultural phenomenon. Cf. Mehlich (2000).

<sup>31</sup> Japanese aestheticians like ONISHI Yoshinori read the Austrian personalist philosopher Friedrich Kainz (1897-1977) who wrote *Personalistische Ästhetik* in 1932. See Ueda (1990).

monarchies which existed throughout the civilized world until the first millennium BC.<sup>32</sup> In Japan and Russia the personalist theme recurs as a kind of remedy against a modern strain of thought which tends to disintegrate the personality by rationalism. ABE Jirō,<sup>33</sup> Watsuji<sup>34</sup> and Nishida<sup>35</sup> are personalist philosophers as much as Danilevsky, Kireevsky, Pavel Florovsky<sup>36</sup>, Berdiaev, Karsavin, and Trubetzkoy. The project that these philosophers advance is not so much to define personhood as an evidence of individual thought (against functionalist views that interpret the person in terms of agency) but, paradoxically, to discover a hidden, immediately functioning principle that unifies the individual and his/her environment *in personality*. Rejecting the Kantian notion of a ‘universal Self,’ ideas like the Eurasianist ‘symphonic personality,’ Khomiakov’s ‘free unity,’ Danilevsky’s ‘collective personality’<sup>37</sup> or Nishida’s ‘concrete personality’<sup>38</sup> are attempts to produce an integral, collective, supra-individual and internalized vision of the human mind that transcends pure ratiocination.

Berdiaev holds that personality, though still being something social, is not determined by society.<sup>39</sup> Nishida’s project to ‘actualize individual aspirations beyond society’ (ARIMA Tatsuo<sup>40</sup>) bears similarly contradictory traits. Nishida defines experience as something which precedes the individual (which is thus not determined by society), though the self which is formed through this experience is supposed to be

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<sup>32</sup> Bellah (1965), 592.

<sup>33</sup> For ABE Jirō’s personalism see Dilworth (1974).

<sup>34</sup> See Sakai’s explanation of Watsuji’s distinction between person and personality: “Therefore, person is partly being (*yu*) as opposed to personality (*mu*). Yet, person and personality are always combined in the human being as *jikaku sonzai* or the being aware of itself. Sakai quotes Watsuji: “The ‘I’ who is conscious of the objectified ‘I’ according to the form of inner sense, that is, according to the ‘I’ in itself, is nothing but the I of the ‘I think’, that is, the subjective ego. Furthermore, the ‘I think’ is empty, without any content, and is the ‘transcendental personality,’ but is never a ‘person.’ Therefore, person is neither simply identical to the ‘I’ as an object nor identical to the subjective ‘I’ (*shukan ga*). [WTZ vol. 9, 332-33]. From Sakai (1997), 82.

<sup>35</sup> See Nishida: 実在の根底としての人格概念 NKZ 14.

<sup>36</sup> Pavel Florensky (1997) opposes the “Western” logic of things and attempts to create an epistemology of consubstantial (gr. *homoousios*) persons.

<sup>37</sup> “Each type has a character. Its collective personality, style of life, particular process of development result from the character’s inevitable unfolding.” Danilevsky (1867), 50.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Jacinto Zavala: “The early Nishida wrote about three characteristics of God’s personality in the essay “Kami no jinkakusei 神の人格性” [The Personality of God, NKZ 15: 354ff] in which, just as in *Zen no kenkyū*, we can see the influence of John Richard Illingworth’s *Personality: Human and Divine* (1894). (...) But the late Nishida’s view of God is not a mere regression to an earlier stage. After his middle period, in which he talks primarily about absolute nothingness even in reference to religion, Nishida viewed the absolute as personal in nature, both with regard to Christianity (which he saw as personalist) and Shin Buddhism. In his exposition he goes back again to Kant for the characteristics of personality (NKZ 11: 388). He mentions that personality is unique in history and does not repeat itself, that it is creative, and that it has will and freedom...” Zavala (1998) 42.

<sup>39</sup> From Edie (1966), 156-157.

<sup>40</sup> Arima (1969), 6.

social. Also Nishida wants to prevent what Berdiaev saw as an imminent danger of modernity: that ‘personality is submerged in the general, man is socialized, determined by natural laws, true communication of persons becomes impossible, and only mediated approximations through concepts are left.’<sup>41</sup>

A further apparent contradiction contained in these philosophies is that ‘personality’ is laid out as a closed system (in the most extreme case an ‘autarky’ [*pravitel'nitsa*] for the Eurasianists)<sup>42</sup> but that it is at the same time supposed to be compatible with supra-national perspectives. A closer look shows that the contradiction is only apparent because what is at work is rather a sophisticated interlocking of individuality with All-Unity. In every society personalism is necessary for the emergence of human individuality; but individuality is not ‘egocentric;’ rather it is determined by communality that can be defined in a supra-national fashion.

Similar to the Eurasianist elaboration of *pavitel'nitsa*, Nishida links personalist philosophical ideas to the old Japanese notion of ‘national polity’ (*kokutai*).<sup>43</sup> The important point is that he suggests that *kosei* 個性 (personality)<sup>44</sup> as the manifestation of Japan’s cultural characteristics should remain open to the world. Quoting from Nishida’s diary, YUSA Michiko writes: ‘[the *kokutai*] should harbor within itself the universality of the human spirit and history.’<sup>45</sup> This is not an appeal to abstract universalism in the form of a categorical imperative because that would be, once again, contrary to the idea of personality. Like the Slavophiles who strongly opposed ‘universal uniform law, universal equality, universal life, universal justice, and universal prosperity,’<sup>46</sup> Nishida writes in the article ‘On the National Polity:’ ‘We human beings are born as creative elements of the creative world. The life of our self, expressing unique personality lies herein.’<sup>47</sup> And later: ‘This is the reason why that which is uniquely creative as a historical individual is truly personal. Such a merely formal imperative, on the contrary, is rather the negation of true individual personality.’ Kant’s kingdom of ends ‘only expresses the abstract form of the self-determination of the creative universal (p. 84).’

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted from “Nicolas Alexandrovich Berdiaev” in Edie (1966).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Antoshchenko on the Eurasianist autarky: “Meaning the well-being of the group of peoples inhabiting this particular autarkic world, and provided peoples with the same level of life while preserving the variety of their national cultures.” Alexander Antoshchenko: “On Eurasia and the Eurasians: Studies on Eurasianism in Current Russian Historiography” <http://www.karelia.ru/psu/chairs/PreRev/bibleng.rtf>

<sup>43</sup> See below more on *kokutai*.

<sup>44</sup> Nishida uses *jinkakusei* on other occasions. See note on Jacinto Zavala.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Yusa (1991), 207.

<sup>46</sup> Christoff (1961), 280.

<sup>47</sup> Nishida: ‘哲学論文集第四補遺’ NKZ 12. Engl. transl. (1998), 78.

## 2.4. Immediacy: Bergson and Fichte in Russia and Japan

In both Russia and Japan various forms of philosophical intuitionism have developed outspoken reflections on the subject of immediacy. Some of them are used in order to design philosophical models of human communities. Kireevsky's and the Slavophile's *narodnost* (= 'nationhood' as opposed to *obshchestvo*, 'society') is supposed to establish a natural immediacy between members of a society. In Japan, Nishida defines a 'place' in which interaction between self and object is *immediate* because prior to any subject-object distinction (concepts like 'seeing without a seer,' 'active intuition' are in agreement with these attempts). Later Nishida extends these reflections on models of intercultural communication.

In Russia, 'intuitionist' philosophies moved to the center of philosophy during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since Soloviëv's death, an 'intuitionist school' evolved around its founder Nicolas Lossky (1870-1965). Lossky suggested a system of logic based on intuitionism,<sup>48</sup> an attempt paralleled by Nishida's efforts to give 'intuitionism a logical foundation in terms of a completely original logic of 'place'.<sup>49</sup>

Most obviously, Bergson's intuitionist philosophy is highly compatible with these approaches. While Bergson's idea of intuition does not necessarily overlap with that of Lossky, it remains a fact that both Lossky and Nishida attempt to grasp reality through intuition *immediately* in all its originality. While Bergson declares that we need intuition in order to overcome models of typically spatial understanding or of spatial logic, Lossky tries to show that understanding itself is intuitive and able to grasp reality.<sup>50</sup>

However, Bergson's intuition is also highly compatible with Buddhism. SAIGUSA Mitsuyoshi found that Bergson bears a 'close resemblance to the so-called *yuishin-ron* (idealism) expounded in such sections of the Buddhist canon as the Sarvāstivādin of Mahāyāna Buddhism'.<sup>51</sup> In *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* (1913-1917)<sup>52</sup> Nishida extensively uses Bergson's models of internally unified and immediate experience (*durée pure*). At the same time, Nishida criticizes Bergson because his focus

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<sup>48</sup> In the preface of the German translation of his *Logika* (1922) Lossky declares to represent "Intuitivist Idealism." (German translation from 1927).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Abe (1988), 356.

<sup>50</sup> See Lossky (1914).

<sup>51</sup> Saigusa (1969), 80.

<sup>52</sup> Nishida NKZ 2.

on time and intuition does still not overcome the object-subject dichotomy.<sup>53</sup> Nishida holds that intuition is not abstract and dissociated from actual facts but takes place within a real socio-historical world or a 'place.' Within intuition, general and particular truths are not opposed to each other.

Lossky's intuitive logic brings forward similar points. For Lossky there is a universal consciousness in which subjects participate and real objects are present in the consciousness.<sup>54</sup>

In both countries an idealist conception of a non-objectified consciousness as sole reality produced what can be called a Bergsonian interpretation of Fichte. 'Experience as consciousness' or 'consciousness as experience' is a topic that can be rendered in terms of Bergson's *élan vital* as much as of Fichte's *Tathandlung*.<sup>55</sup> *Tathandlung* can be translated as a 'creative act' through which the 'I' establishes its own identity. In this activity there are no established facts, no substances and no being, but only the auto-productive activity of the *Tathandlung* itself. The *Tathandlung* is a self-producing, self-evident certainty that cannot be found but can only be reconstructed.

The above parallels must be considered as surprising because there are no concrete links between Fichte and Bergson (as a matter of fact, Bergson hardly ever took note of Fichte). In a lecture manuscript on Fichte, Bergson puts forward Fichte as an example of an outdated philosopher whose mistakes his own brand of 'spiritualist positivism' is supposed to avoid.<sup>56</sup> At the same time it is possible to perceive Bergson's critical reading of Fichte as a quasi neo-Platonic interpretation of Fichte's intellectual intuition as a kind of 'pensée pure' and the *Tathandlung* as an unthinkable One.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "But Bergson's duration, too, belongs to the world of objects, and is based on an a priori. In absolute free will, which moves freely from one a priori to another, no fact can leave any trace whatever. (...) If we speak of absolute will as determining itself in an act, we have already objectified it." (163).

<sup>54</sup> The reader is invited to compare these two passages by Lossky and Nishida respectively because they show how the idea of a certain form of intuitivism is born out of similar experiences. Both Nishida and Lossky are born in 1870 and refer to an experience that can be dated to approximately the same date (Lossky indicates 1898). In an autobiographical passage in his *Sensory, Intellectual and Mystical Intuition* (1938) Lossky tells how, while driving through St. Petersburg in a cab one foggy autumn evening "I was thinking that there are no sharp boundaries between things, when suddenly the thought flashed into my head: 'Everything is immanent in everything.' I sensed at once that the riddle was solved, that the elaboration of this idea would provide the the answer to all questions that disturbed me." (Quoted from Scanlan 1998, 835). Nishida writes about the time when he was a high school teacher in Kanazawa: "I have had the idea that true reality must be actuality as it is, and that the so-called material world is something conceptualized and abstracted out of it. I can still remember a time in high school when I walked along the streets of Kanazawa absorbed in this idea as if I were dreaming." NKZ 1 Engl. (1990), 7.

<sup>55</sup> On Nishida's Fichte interpretation see: John Maraldo: "Translating Nishida" in *Philosophy East & West* 39(4), 1989, p.479-480; David Dilworth: "Nishida's Early Pantheistic Voluntarism" in *PEW* 1970. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Within the context of the university curriculum Bergson had been obliged to design a lecture course for the level of *agrégation* on Fichte. Cf. Vieillard-Baron (1997). Bergson's lecture has been published as *Fichte* (1988).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Goddard (2001), 471.

A quasi-Bergsonian reading of Fichte that concentrates on consciousness as a temporal phenomenon seems to have inspired not only Nishida but also Lossky, Berdiaev, and Lossky's student George Gurvitch.<sup>58</sup> Fichte's metaphorical way of establishing (absolute) knowledge, intuition, and action is reminiscent of Bergson as much as of other representatives of French and Russian spiritualist intuitivism. The *Tatbandlung* itself aspires wholeness (unity) and organicity (since Absolute Knowledge is organic).<sup>59</sup> As it hovers (*schwebt*) between being and non-being (WL, p. 51), Absolute Knowledge is knowledge neither of something nor of nothing (WL, p. 14).

Nishida's intellectual intuition (or 'acting intuition' (行為的直観, *koiteki chokkan*)<sup>60</sup> is a reinstatement of his earlier developments of pure experience and can appear, as it eludes the cognitive moments of the Kantian intuition, as Fichtian. Fichte's *Tatbandlung* remains Nishida's grounding concept between 1917 and 1927.<sup>61</sup>

In Russia, Berdiaev develops a notion of personality that comes close to Fichte's 'Absolute Self.'<sup>62</sup> Gurvitch is fascinated by Fichte's synthesis of individualism and universalism<sup>63</sup> that is, of personalism and transpersonalism, which leads him to an extensive study of Fichte's idea of the concrete-ideal.<sup>64</sup> For Gurvitch, Fichte's 'concrete ethics' bears an anti-intellectualist trait because ethic purity is irrational and opposed to theoretical reason (see *Fichtes System*, p. 65). Gurvitch understands Fichte's philosophy as the development of a primordial intuition that he opposes to Kantian formalism.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The French sociologist Georgii Davidovitch Gurvitch (1894-1965) was born in Russia, studied Law and Philosophy in Petrograd from 1912 to 1917 and was Assistant Professor at Petrograd University during 1918. According to Lossky, he had been attracted in his youth by "transcendental-logical idealism," which brought him in contact with Russian Neo-Kantian philosophers. He worked in Tomsk until his emigration to Prague and lived in France from 1921 on, and is today recognized as an eminent French sociologist of Russian origin.

<sup>59</sup> Fichte (1845), 22.

<sup>60</sup> Nishida: NKZ 9: 112.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. David Dilworth in his postface to Nishida's *Last Writings* (1987), 128.

<sup>62</sup> See Gaidenko (1994).

<sup>63</sup> Gurwitsch [Gurvitch] (1924).

<sup>64</sup> Gurvitch's Russian contemporaries excelled in existential analyses of the concrete-ideal foundations of the world. See Lossky's review (1926) of Gurvitch's book: "Fichtes konkrete Ethik im Lichte des modernen Transzendentalismus."

<sup>65</sup> See Alexis Philonenko's comment on Gurvitch (1966), 33-34. For Gurvitch's later sociology these Bergsonian themes remained important, as shows a quotation from his important study on time and society: "Pour préciser ce que nous comprenons sous le terme de temps, dans l'optique où nous nous plaçons, il suffit de le décrire tantôt comme une coordination, tantôt comme un décalage de mouvements, coordination et décalages qui durent dans la succession et se succèdent dans la durée." (1969), 329.

## Conclusion

The present article can also be read as a reflection on the place of philosophy within a 'globalized' world and its status as a phenomenon, which is potentially linked to a 'local' culture. The existence of 'Japanese philosophy' and 'Russian philosophy' questions the authority of 'general' truths and forces us to integrate 'local discourses' into the overall construction called 'global philosophy.' These philosophies did not develop in isolation from life but are intellectualized forms of practice as they emphasize the existential outlook of philosophy as well as the values that are based on a certain system of beliefs and aesthetics. One of the negative undertones clinging to the term 'globalization' is linked to it being seen as a uniformizing and flattening power eliminating existent cultural differences. However, there is an important side effect of globalization represented by those movements acting against it, stressing the importance of 'localization' or 'regionalization.' These approaches, when formulated in a radical fashion, have to face the reproach of relativism, and of enclosing themselves in a cultural sphere supposedly inaccessible to others. The Russian and Japanese examples show that a 'middle course' is possible. Localism and globalism can be combined and produce useful additions to our mainstream philosophical spectrum.

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