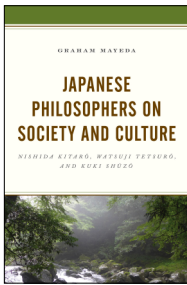Book Symposium

Graham Mayeda, *Japanese Philosophers on Society and Culture: Nishida Kitaro, Watsuji Tetsuro, and Kuki Shuzo*

Steve Lofts

The Historical Task of a "Philosophy *of* Culture"

The central aim of Graham Mayeda's study, *Japanese Philosophers on Society and Culture*, is to examine Nishida Kitarō's, Watsuji Tensurō's, and Kuki Shūzō's respective accounts of "social and cultural philosophy." Mayeda is critical of what he perceives to be an inherent "tendency" toward "cultural essentialism" and "Japanese chauvinism" in their respective accounts of culture that, unchecked, can lead to a problematic form of nationalism that can be "coopted for political ends"[1] and that ultimately conflicts with the "cosmopolitan goals"[2] of their respective philosophical projects. Mayeda seeks to separate the non-essentialist from the essentialist aspects that could contribute to constructing a "social and cultural philosophy" that would be in keeping with "our modern liberal democratic views, which value differences and assert the importance of maintaining them."[3] Nishida, Watsuji, and Kuki are struggling with the issue of rethinking and preserving their tradition in a rapidly changing world. Mayeda believes we can draw lessons from them that could help us with "the push and pull that goes on within multicultural societies as we struggle to decide how to live together when we have different concepts of marriage, romantic and sexual relationships, family, privacy, ethics, and law...."[4]

While I am sympathetic to Mayeda's project, I was struck by several differences in our respective readings of Nishida, Watsuji, and Kuki and by what appeared to be a series of *lacunae* in his treatment of the problematic and his reading of each of these philosophers. This was all the more puzzling, given that I, too, read Japanese philosophy from the perspective of the historical task of a "philosophy *of* culture" and the construction of what I

1. Mayeda 2020, 257.
2. Mayeda 2020, 9.
3. Mayeda 2020, 25.
4. Mayeda 2020, 27.

have called an "open cosmopolitanism."[5] While we may agree that the historical task of philosophy is found in the project of a philosophical account of culture, our differences stem, I believe, from the different frameworks by which we understand this historical task and thus pursue it, which accounts for our different readings of Japanese philosophy. Let me first clarify what I see as the different presuppositions of our respective standpoints and then illustrate this through reference to some concrete points in the text where our different framing of the project of a philosophical account of culture results in different readings of Watsuji, Kuki, and Nishida.

If I have understood correctly, the interpretative lens of Mayeda's study is largely informed by critical theory in the lineage of the Frankfurt School that sees cultures primarily as a product of "power structures,"[6] to speak with Foucault, such that today it is "impossible to naively accept cultural products and practices as simple facts; rather, they must be seen as the result of particular social, political, or economic conditions, and they should only be studied from a specific standpoint rather than from an unproblematic objective one."[7] Throughout his study, Mayeda is critical of universal claims about culture, which "can very easily slip into both cultural essentialism (the tendency to reduce particular cultures to a few key features) and cultural comparison (the tendency to compare different cultures with one another and create a hierarchy)."[8] The recognition of diversity and a non-essentialist outlook has, according to Mayeda, made "'culture' a problematic category."[9] Because Mayeda approaches cultural institutions and practices from the perspective of critical constructivism, cultures are understood to be "constructed and contingent," "eclectic and dynamic," and "can be studied philosophically."[10] Although Mayeda is speaking here about Watsuji's early non-essentialist conception of culture, it is evident that it is the ideal of culture assumed throughout his book. And while Mayeda says that "this book does not identify where to draw the line beyond which non-essential-

5. Cf. Lofts 2019; Lofts nd.
6. Mayeda 2020, 11.
7. Mayeda 2020, 10.
8. Mayeda 2020, 22.
9. Mayeda 2020, 25.
10. Mayeda 2020, 33.

ism slips into essentialism,"[11] it would seem that whenever a philosopher deviates from this ideal of culture, they are said to have crossed over into some form of essentialism.

While the perspective of critical theory cannot be ignored, it cannot be the only, let alone the primary, lens by which we understand the human or the cultural world. Such a view would fail to see that the critical theorist is always situated in a cultural world they critique. True critique, I would argue, must always be an immanent self-critique; otherwise, it slips into the ideological subjugation and hegemony it opposes. While cultural objects are the products of political and economic forces, such production operates within a given culture that determines the historical mode of these political and economic forces, and there are other, more essential critical forces at work in the construction and reconstruction of historical life than those of politics and economics.

In short, I would argue that "culture" is the productive principle of historical life as the self-expression of the objective historical world. It is, thus, quite literally a "way of life" and not just "a way of living together." Culture is the *entelechy* that forms the inner actualizing power, the vital principle guiding the development and functioning of a social-political world. It is a unitary experience of life that forms a common *ethos* of the life of a *Gemeinschaft* as a social and historical process of formation (*Bildung*), an *ethos* that animates the *polis* that is its objective expression. Thus, for me, the political is an expression of culture and not its product, and a philosophy *of* culture is always at once a philosophical account of culture that seeks to determine the nature of culture and a philosophical project *of* a particular historical culture that forms the self-awakening of a concrete historical culture that must return to the fundamental experience of life that animates it and establish the existential embodied realization of that culture in the twofold sense of its self-understanding and self-actualization, to speak with Nishitani.

This different view of the relation between politics and culture has consequences, I believe, for how we view the project of a philosophy *of* culture and, thus, how we read Japanese philosophy. Because there exist only concrete historical cultures, one dimension of a philosophy *of* culture takes the form of what Mayeda calls a "social and cultural philosophy"—which

11. Mayeda 2020, 257.

Mayeda states is akin to the concept of the *Kulturwissenschaft*[12] and the more contemporary project of "cultural studies"[13] in which concrete cultures are the objects of study. For Mayeda, a "cultural philosophy" accounts for "the things that people do and make: the cultural activities in which they engage, the language they use to express themselves, and the cultural objects they produce."[14] However, I would argue that such an account of concrete cultural objects and activities undertaken by the *Kulturwissenschaft* is part of the more general human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), which requires a philosophical grounding in a philosophy *of* culture, a project Cassirer called the "critique of culture" that determines the internal logic of the different sense-bestowing horizons of objective spirit that are world-forming and establishes their logical function in the construction and reconstruction of culture. From the perspective of such a transcendental philosophy *of* culture, the cultural forms that open the "historical world" are *universal* to every event of worlding, though the historical shapes and manifestations of these forms of objective spirit radically differ in every historically concrete culture. Language, to take one example, is essential to every event of worlding, and thus, there is no cultural world that does not posses some form of language: no language, no world. What language *is* and its function in the formation of cultural worlds is assumed by the cultural sciences (*Kulturwissenschaften*) and cultural studies in examining cultural objects and practices as the expressions of historical systems of power. While there is a universal function of language in the opening and configuration of the world, there is no universal language independently of concrete languages that would determine the nature of any given historical language. What exists is not "language" but languages spoken in concrete historical contexts by individual concrete beings. The same can be said of other objective forms of spirit, particularly art, philosophy, and religion. We can say with Cassirer that the human spins culture out of itself and simultaneously spins itself into culture—so that in the end, the human communicates and lives with intuitive objects in no other manner than that shown by the medium of culture. All seeing (*Sehen*), therefore, takes place in and through the sight

12. Mayeda 2020, 19.

13. Mayeda 2020, 259.

14. Mayeda 2020, 1.

(*Sicht*) of spirit (*Geist*) by which life gains its visibility (*Sichtigkeit*) and reality. Mayeda would, I believe, agree: "Experience is … always 'cultural' experience—we interpret our experiences of the world through our language, art, religion, customs, and so on"[15]—and I would add "philosophy" as the critical self-critique of a culture which seeks to know and live the ultimate, that forms that culture's self-realization in the sense of its self-understanding and self-actualization. When speaking of Watsuji's account of "Buddhist art," we must ask: "What is the nature and function of 'art'"? Is this "Buddhist art" the same as a painting by Caravaggio or the graffiti of Banksy? Is, for example, a Christian icon a work of art before it is placed in a museum or classified by an art historian? Although it may not have been the central aim of their respective projects, I would argue that we find in Watsuji, Kuki, and Nishida statements that determine the universal function of the different objective forms of spirit that are world-forming and that this cannot be separated from their account of the human and our being in the world, and of their accounts of the unique character of the Japanese event of worlding. I would also argue that when Mayeda argues that cultures "can be studied philosophically," he has not adequately accounted for the fact that his own philosophical account of culture is internal to the culture it seeks to understand and functions in the constitution of that culture.

However, a philosophy of culture thus defined can still only account for the historical *factum* of concrete cultures and not the *facticity* of a particular cultural world: it can grasp the objective dimension of culture but not its subjective dimension. A philosophy of culture must, therefore, also be an existential project of self-realization in the sense of a lived, embodied self-understanding and self-actualization of a specific culture. It must determine not just the function of language in the event of worlding but the unique nature of the world that is opened up such that language can be said to be the house of being, to speak with the later Heidegger. And, to speak with Nishida, this revitalization of culture requires a return to the "infinite potential"[16] of a creative nature situated at the bottom of the historical world, an infinite potential found in the "deepest essence of human

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15. Mayeda 2020, 77.
16. Nishida 2012, 50.

culture."[17] Only this return to life at the limit of the historical world can give birth to a new historical life of a historical world. This internal critique of culture is found in every culture by which it reconstructs itself. Thus, when Mayeda says that "Nishida, Watsuji, and Kuki lived in an era in which such cultural critique was emerging but did not yet dominate, at least not in Japan,"[18] he is speaking of his particular historical perspective of "critical theory" and its "liberal democratic values" and not of the critical forces that are inherent to every culture.

In short, I would argue that Watsuji, Kuki, and Nishida are not primarily "interested in both social and cultural philosophy" in the sense of the *Kulturwissenschaft* or cultural studies. Rather, their projects must be read from the perspective of the existential project of the self-realization of a unique historical life in and through a philosophy of culture in the full sense of the term set out above. Again, Mayeda would, I believe, agree: "Why do cultural practices differ in different places? What makes a culture unique? If it is unique, why is this so? These questions preoccupied Japanese philosophers … during the first half of the twentieth century."[19] However, I would argue such is ultimately the historical task of philosophy.

Let me now consider some of the specific issues in Mayeda's study. Although Mayeda argues that the philosophical perspectives of Watsuji, Kuki, and Nishida each tend to cultural essentialism, the term "essentialism" only seems to appear in the chapters on Watsuji and is absent in the chapters on Kuki and Nishida. Mayeda understands "essentialism" as "the tendency to reduce particular cultures to a few key features." However, given the importance of this concept within Mayeda's reading, a more developed discussion of what cultural essentialism means would have been helpful, especially given the fact that it could be argued that the critique of "essentialism" is inherent to a self-critique of the Western ontological tradition of substance in which something is said to be if it is self-identical with itself and can be conceived only through itself and that the tradition Watsuji, Kuki, and Nishida are drawing on, namely Zen Buddhism, is from the beginning a critique of *sabhāva* (own-being) as a permanent and unchanging identity

17. Cf. nkz 12: 329; 391; 14: 205.

18. Mayeda 2020, 11.

19. Mayeda 2020, 61.

or substratum and thus is inherently anti-essentialist. All beings (and thus culture) are "empty" because they lack independent existence as *sabhāva*; they arise and are only in the process of interdependent cooirigation. Recognizing that the Buddhist notion of emptiness (空) or nothingness (無) is central to Watsuji, Kuki, and Nishida, Mayeda seems forced to argue that their essentialism is "in large part due to the influence of the Europeans,"[20] though I would argue they are very critical of this substantial ontology. Finally, it should be noted that in the chapters on Watsuji, Mayeda does not return to his claim concerning the importance of emptiness for Watsuji.[21]

Watsuji is said to slip into cultural essentialism not simply because he takes Japanese culture as a topic of study but because he takes Japanese culture as a general model of culture *tout court*, and, at the same time, "overlooks other important influences on cultural development, for instance, political forces such as colonialism, economics, and so on."[22] Mayeda illustrates this through Watsuji's Japanese concepts of *fūdo* and family, which he argues are not found in every culture.[23] "Watsuji's choice of the relationship between climate and culture as a phenomenon from which to derive the universal element of human experience and existence betrays a Japanese cultural bias."[24]

Agreed, we cannot take one concrete historical culture as the paradigm for all cultures. However, while we must be vigilant against cultural hegemony in all its forms, the concept assumes a plurality of cultures and modes of being human and thus assumes something like "the" human as a cultural being. It maintains that one historical-cultural world cannot function as the paradigm for culture and that one historical mode of being human cannot be the model for all modes of being human. *However*, to recognize the culturally other in their difference, we must be able to recognize the humanity we share with them. The issue here is not one of adopting a standpoint of political correctness that attributes equal dignity to every culture as an autonomous sphere of being; rather, it is a question of taking the claim to this

20. Mayeda 2020, 6.
21. Mayeda 2020, 5.
22. Mayeda 2020, 101.
23. Mayeda 2020, 102–4.
24. Mayeda 2020, 104.

uniqueness seriously and recognizing a certain incommensurability between cultural worlds as unique historical forms of culture *while at the same time* establishing what they have in common and thus universal to all events of worlding. However, this is easier said than done, and I wonder if Mayeda himself has been cognisant enough about the cultural presuppositions of his understanding of culture and, thus, his reading of Japanese philosophy, though, again, it must be said in his defense that this is no simple task.

I was surprised, for example, that when he turned to consider "what 'culture' meant in the period in which Nishida, Watsuji, and Kuki lived and wrote,"[25] it is not what "culture" meant for these philosophers living in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century, but only what it meant in Europe. There is no consideration of the difference in meaning between the European notion of "culture," which, like the word colonialization, is derived from the Latin root *colere*, and the Japanese term *bunka* (文化) which etymologically can be traced back to the character *mon* (紋) from the Chinese *wèn* for pattern and signified a "beautiful intricate pattern," a "tattooed or carved figure." Moreover, it would seem that a European taxonomy of the forms of culture, such as art, religion, philosophy, etc., serves as the model for speaking about culture. For example, the Japanese terms for religion (宗教) and philosophy (哲学), along with a great number of philosophical terms such as experience (経験 and 体験), are neologisms coined to translate European concepts. And as is well known, there was some debate about whether there was Japanese philosophy in Japan before Nishida. And as Nishitani points out, the science of religion and religious philosophy were created in the West with Christianity as a model of religion, and the division between philosophy and religion has a long history in this tradition.[26] Thus, rather than speak of Buddhism as a philosophy or religion, might we not try to ask whether philosophy or religion is the Buddha way? And do so by taking up the language of the Buddha way—after all, this is what Japanese thinkers have done; they are trying to speak of their tradition in a foreign language. The point is not to adopt one over the other but to be cognitive of the historicity and culturicity of the concepts we apply when speaking of "culture" or "*bunka*." The concept of culture is thus always a

25. Mayeda 2020, 9.
26. Cf. Nishitani 1999, 208.

concept of a culture. Mayeda critiques Watsuji for believing that "to understand oneself requires understanding the uniqueness of one's culture. Once one goes down this path, a philosophy of culture in general is quickly transformed into the philosophy of a particular culture."[27] But this is, I would argue, precisely the role of philosophy within culture, and it is the role Mayeda himself has undertaken. I would add that for Watsuji, Kuki, and Nishida, the understanding of the uniqueness of one's culture comes about through a genuine confrontation with another culture, with a struggle to speak another language. As Nishida writes, citing Goethe, "those who know nothing of a foreign language know nothing of their own."[28]

Throughout Mayeda's reading, I was struck by the fact that he speaks of "society" (*Gesellschaft*) and not of "community" (*Gemeinschaft*). There is, in fact, no discussion about the debates on these terms at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is surprising for many reasons. First, it could be argued that the issue of a "multicultural society" is one of a multi-community society." Culture is the historical life of a concrete community based on a common *ethos* that expresses their tradition as a common identity. Mayeda speaks more often than not of "culture [as] a *shared* way of living,"[29] as a "*shared* cultural life,"[30] as "a way of living together based on the traditional *shared* system of values,"[31] etc. How we understand this term "*shared*" here depends on whether this sharing takes place on the level of society (*Gesellschaft*) where the taking part in an activity is a choice made by an individual, or whether it takes place on the level of community (*Gemeinschaft*), in which case it is not so much a choice we make or something we do, but who we *are*: in the one case, what is "shared" is external to our being, in the other it defines our being. As Mayeda states, the answer to the question, "Who am I?" involves the answer to a second question, "Who are we?"[32] Second, Watsuji, Kuki, and Nishida are not concerned with Japanese society as much as with Japanese culture, opening a world that is unique to and

27. Mayeda 2020, 23.
28. nkz 12: 281.
29. Mayeda 2020, 10.
30. Mayeda 2020, 92.
31. Mayeda 2020, 126.
32. Mayeda 2020, 1.

thus defines the Japanese way of being a community. They explicitly define their approach to culture in terms of Ferdinand Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* dichotomy. For Watsuji, the *Gesellschaft* is a "state of privation" of community (*Gemeinschaft*):

> *Ningen sonzai* makes its appearance in a defective form of solidarity. Here, societies of mutual interest arise (*Gesellschaft*), or what could be called ego- istically connected societies. These societies, although drawing lessons con- cerning communal structure from the community of *sonzai*, do not make *sonzai* communal.[33]

And for Nishida:

> A historical society that actually exists does not arise in the manner of "from many to one." It develops in the form of a transition from a communal society to a profit society. To use Tönnies's term, it arises from an essential will, *Wesenswille*. And an actual existing society is always comprised of both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* dimensions. It begins as a center that is a con- tradictory identity.[34]

Nishida's logic of contradictory self-identity of the many and the one could have thus been employed to speak about the relation of a multi-cul- tural (and thus multi-*Gemeinschaft*) society (*Gesellschaft*).

When I first read Mayeda's claim that the viewpoints of cultural essentialism and cultural chauvinism were "incompatible with *our* modern liberal democratic views, which value differences and assert the importance of maintaining them," I was struck by the inclusive and universal nature of this "our." It introduces a sense of community based on a set of values that are said to be universal, which form the foundation of a legal society in which other communities with competing values co-exist. However, I am unsure if I am as committed to these values as Mayeda. I would contend that a communitarian discourse of duties, agape, or compassion must coun- terbalance our current political discourse about individual freedoms and rights. The African value of *ubuntu* ("I am because we are"), for example, has been argued to be incompatible with a modern liberal democratic view that promotes individualism, or perhaps more correctly, the modern liberal

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33. WATSUJI 1996, 25.

34. NKZ 12: 425.

democratic view that promotes individualism is incompatible with *ubuntu*. My point is that the critical theory lens places too much emphasis on society and the individual at the expense of the community and that this is one of its inherent limitations.

In the chapters on Kuki, I was struck by a few things in Mayeda's reading that I believe are a result of our different understandings of the project of a philosophy *of* culture. First, Mayeda states that the traditional Japanese value of *iki* is represented by *Bushidō*, *Shintō*, and Buddhism for Kuki. I was surprised, however, given his insistence on the importance of the role of the political in the construction of culture, that Mayeda does not acknowledge that *Bushidō* and *Shintō* were the objects of a political-ideological construction at the beginning of the twentieth century. A consideration of the *Bushidō* as the "national ethics" of Japanese culture has been widely argued to be a complete fabrication for political purposes. Thus, it was surprising that Mayeda does not consider the importance of Nitobe Inazo's *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, published in 1900 following Japan's victory over China, for our understanding of Kuki's choice to provide a grounding for *Bushidō*. Likewise, one would have expected Mayeda to draw on such scholars as Kuroda Toshio, who argues that "Shinto, as the distinct and autonomous religion as we know today, is an invention of nineteenth-century Japanese ideologues."[35] From the perspective of a philosophy of culture that sees the historical life of a historical world as grounded in and through the philosophical project of knowing the ultimate and the religious project of living the ultimate, the politicization of religion or the religionization of politics can be understood as an inherent mechanism found in every culture. However, the ideological construction of philosophy or religion to serve as a mechanism of the political economy of power that is part of modernity, which critical theory rightly critiques, must be distinguished from the poetic opening of a world and the grounding of a polis in a common ethos of which Watsuji, Kuki, and Nishida are speaking.

The second difference in our reading of Kuki concerns the term *iki* (いき) itself and its relation to *Bushidō*, *Shintō*, and Buddhism. I would argue that rather than thinking of *iki* as embodying "*a way of living together* based on the traditional shared system of values of *Bushidō, Shintō,* and

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35. Iwasawa 2020, 97.

Buddhism,"[36] that we consider *Bushidō*, *Shintō*, and Buddhism as the embodiment and expression of *iki* as the core fundamental experience that opens up a unique event of worlding that grounds and serves as the "living form" (生ける形態) of the historical life of the Yamato people as a community. *The Structure of Iki* is about the function of language in opening a world. I would argue that Kuki is descending through modern Japanese back to the Yamato language, considered the "original" Japanese language that provides modern Japanese with its grammar and basic linguistic notions. The term *iki* is written in hiragana and is always in scare quotes. It is the original sense of life, the historical life that opens a historical world, that echoes through the ideograms of kanji of modern Japanese analyzed throughout *The Structure of Iki*. Both Watsuji's return to Nara (to Yamato as the birthplace of ancient Japan and Japanese culture) and Kuki's return to *iki* are revitalizations of the Yamato-heart/mind (大和心) as the *entelechy* that forms the inner actualizing power, the vital principle of the Japanese spirit (日本精神) that creates the cultural products and activities of a socio-political world. What I found missing in Mayeda's account of *iki* was a consideration of the sense of "duality that excludes plurality" that seems to define the experience of *iki* that opens the Yamato world and distinguishes it from the European world.[37] For Kuki, culture is a "mode of existence"[38] and not a competency.[39] And because our experience is always a cultural experience, and because there is no European word for *iki*, there can be no European experience of *iki*. As Heidegger says, we can only hear the word "without experiencing what is said in it."[40] We encounter here the incommensurability between cultural worlds spoken above, the point where all translations necessarily fail, the point where a true dialogue between cultural worlds must begin and be undertaken. But as Heidegger says in his dialogue with Kuki over the nature of *iki*: in speaking about *iki* in a foreign language, the "spirit of the Japanese language remained closed.... The language of dialogue constantly destroyed the possibility of [even] saying what

36. Mayeda 2020, 126: italics added.
37. Kuki 2004, 14.
38. Kuki 2004, 16.
39. Cf. Mayeda 2020, 10.
40. Heidegger 1982, 13.

the dialogue was about."[41] The "essential nature" of this world remains closed to the European world, such that "a dialogue from house to house remains nearly impossible."[42] Mayeda, unfortunately, does not explore Heidegger's comments on Kuki in *On the Way to Language*. It would have enriched our understanding of Kuki's views of language and culture and contributed to Mayeda's main problem of establishing a "dialogue" between different cultures trying to coexist within a single society or world.

Finally, I must limit myself to highlighting four differences in our reading of Nishida. First, I would have focused on the consequences of the contradictory self-identity of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* for us today. Second, I would have emphasized that while Nishida sees Western and Eastern cultures as inherently different, he searches for a common logic of reality. As Nishida writes: "I am not saying that there are two kinds of logic, Western logic and Eastern logic. Logic must be one. It is only a form of self-forming action of the historical world that takes different directions in its development."[43] Thus, Western and Eastern cultures are but two of the many branches of the same tree, two expressions of the "originary morphological structure" of the "*Urkultur*."[44] Nishida's concept of the "*Urkultur*"[45] is the primal or archetypal culture (原文化) from which all specific cultures are derived, understood, and compared but which no single culture can be.[46] Third, I would have brought out the nature of community (*Gemeinschaft*) as the self-determination of the universal and individual, a horizontal dimension of determination of the social environment of *a unique place,* and a vertical dimension of indeterminate individuals existing-in-time.[47] Each historical *Gemeinschaft,* is the epochal expression of the self-determination of the eternal now. And "when a single epoch determines itself, various cultures are established."[48] In this way, each *Gemeinschaft* (and not society) is a "species" of the historical world constituted by the historical life that reflects

41. Heidegger 1982, 5.
42. Heidegger 1982, 5.
43. nkz 12: 289.
44. Nishida 2012, 124.
45. nkz 14: 405.
46. Cf. nkz 12: 283–4.
47. Nishida 2012. 121.
48. Nishida 2012, 128.

its era: "species" should not be understood as Mayeda does as a "biological term,"[49] but in the sense of Tanabe's logic of the specific that is situated between the universal (genus) and the individual. Finally, I must disagree with Mayeda when he writes that "the relationship between 'I' and 'you' has a similar dialectical relationship to the relationship between the self and the absolute."[50] In 1938, Nishida introduced the concept of "inverse correspondence" (逆対応) to distinguish this symmetrical relation with the "other" in the world from the asymmetrical relation with the absolute other as absolute nothingness.[51] As has been said, a philosophy *of* culture must not only speak about culture but about the place from which it speaks of culture, and this involves a return to origins or *poiēsis* that is situated beyond critical theory and politics, subject and object, a return to a point where culture would become conscious of itself in its ultimate ground of itself. For Nishida, this is an existential confrontation with "absolute nothingness"—which cannot be equated with what Mayeda calls "'the absolute' in nonreligious language," which is an abstract term without transformative value. "The content of this self-formation of the historical world in the absolute present is culture, at whose ground there is always something religious at work."[52] "Religion" is the standpoint of absolute-contradictory self-identity, a confrontation with absolute nothingness, such that culture as the self-determination of the expressive world emerges from it.

In closing, it should be emphasized that my observations should not be taken as a critique of the quality of Mayeda's work. Though we no doubt agree on much, our approaches begin from almost opposing perspectives that must be brought together. Mayeda reads Japanese philosophy from the perspective of the relation between society and culture, I from the perspective of the relation between community and culture.

49. Mayeda 2020, 229.
50. Mayeda 2020, 215.
51. nkz 9: 69–146.
52. nkz 11: 456.

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Abbreviation

NKZ 旧版『西田幾多郎全集』[Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō, 4th edition] (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1978–1980). Pagination in this work refers to this edition unless otherwise noted.

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