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Philosophical Conceptions of Cultural Space in Russia and Japan: Comparing Nishida Kitaro and Semën Frank

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*Jean-Luc Nancy notes that the community, since it is no absolute subject (self, will, spirit), is by its nature not inscribed in any logic metaphysics. In spite of this, or indeed because of this, Western philosophy has persistently tried to interpret the community through precisely these metaphysical terms (Nancy, 1986, page 18, *La Communauté désoeuvrée*, Christian Bourgeois, Paris). Some thoughts about Russian and Japanese notions of community and space will show that characteristics pointed out by Nancy and Kant are binding only for societies that function within a Western intellectual framework. I want to introduce and compare the thought of Nishida Kitaro. (1870 – 1945) and Semën L Frank (1877 – 1950), who develop the notions of *basho* and *sobornost'* as alternative philosophical concepts of space. Both Nishida and Frank attempt to overcome what they consider a typically 'Western' idea of individual 'I's as materialized 'objects'. Procedures like *Einfühlung* or intuition are inefficient because all they do is to transform the other, from the point of view of the 'I', into an object. Finally, for the Eurasianist, the state organization had at its center a personal god, and the 'symphonic personality' of Russia-Eurasia represented a nonegoistic, communal consciousness.*

Keywords: Nishida Kitaro, Semyen Frank, Basho, sobornost', philosophy of space, comparative Russian and Japanese philosophy.

Introduction

In the 1960s, Hugh Seton-Watson explained to all reformers of Africa and Asia that what is “more beneficial to them than the ritual invocation of Asianism or *négritude*” is the “the study of Russian and Japanese experience [of reform].”¹ As a matter of fact, 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.

In general, 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 and among the most popular philosophical themes discussed are reflections on the problem of personalism and philosophical developments of “intuition.” Still, while studies on “Nishida and Heidegger” are numerous,

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