

Kuki Shūzō and the Idea of Metempsychosis: Recontextualizing Kuki's Lecture on Time in the Intellectual Milieu Between the Two World Wars¹

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Shortly before his departure from Europe, Kuki Shūzō held two public conferences at the Pontigny gathering of philosophers in 1928. One of the themes he addressed in one of them was the “Oriental” notion of time. It was not until recently, however, that the meaning of this presentation, which was given in French, was seriously taken into account by philosophy scholars in Japan.

This paper will first show the significance of the idea of “metempsychosis” in modern intellectual history between 1890 and 1930, and then focus on how Kuki presented it. In closing, this paper will consider the relevance of Kuki's proposal from a fresh perspective. His reflections shed light on the metaphysical relevance of the idea of metempsychosis. Despite its basic incompatibility with Christian doctrine, the idea of metempsychosis opens up to us a new insight into the spiritual dimension of the world.

Far from being a simple case of superstition, the idea of metempsychosis may suggest a rational way of radically redefining individuality and multiplicity in subject-formation, which Kuki was aiming to do on the fringes of theosophical thought in the global context of the late 1920s.² The paper has no pretention to be a philosophical treatise or a philological study of Kuki Shūzō's philosophy. Rather than demonstrating any linear connections with theosophy, it tentatively circumnavigates and maps, searching for a potential intellectual web concocted around the idea of “metempsychosis.”

1 This paper was originally presented as “Kuki Shūzō and the Idea of Metempsychosis: On the Fringe of Theosophical Thinking?” at the international conference “Theosophy Across Boundaries” (Heidelberg Center for American Studies, Curt und Heidemarie Engelhorn Palais, Heidelberg, Germany, 24–26 September, 2015). The author would like to thank Hans-Martin Krämer for the invitation to this symposium. The author also thanks Dylan Luers Toda for manuscript editing as well as two anonymous peer reviewers who provided insightful and careful comments on the original draft.

2 On theosophy per se and its resonances across cultural boundaries, refer to the post-conference publication of the above-mentioned international symposium (note 1 above). In this paper, I will refrain from providing any further explanation of theosophy and its ramifications in Japan and elsewhere. Suffice it to note, however, that in theosophy the idea of metempsychosis plays an important role, and that Kuki's hereafter-analyzed discussions are worth being treated in parallel as a constituent part of 1920s intellectual history. I believe that Okakura and Mishima, who have not been treated in connection with Kuki, can help elucidate his position in the intellectual milieu of the time.

Keywords: *advaita*, Indra, Martin Heidegger, metempsychosis, Okakura Kakuzō (Tenshin), Paul Carus, Suzuki Daisetsu, Tao, transmigration

Introduction

Kuki Shūzō 九鬼周造 (1888–1941) is best remembered for his “*Iki*” *no kōzō* 「いき」の構造 (Structure of Iki, 1930). His *Gūzensei no mondai* 偶然性の問題 (The Problem of Contingency; 1935) was translated into French by Omodaka Hisataka 澤瀉久孝. In this paper, however, I will consider his lesser known papers, focusing on the notion of metempsychosis. By so doing, I aim to demonstrate tentatively the relevance of Kuki’s reflections on this idea in the intellectual milieu of the era.³ His metaphysical preoccupation with the idea of reincarnation has also begun to attract academic attention in recent studies on Japanese philosophy.⁴ In this context I hope to contribute modestly to our understanding of the encounter between Western and Eastern ideas from the hindsight provided by an intellectual history perspective.

One circumstantial reason that I am considering Kuki is that his name is engraved in the intellectual history of the university town of Heidelberg: when he was staying in Heidelberg, he asked Heinrich Rickert to teach him personally at home. Furthermore, Eugene Herrigel was Kuki’s tutor, and Jean-Paul Sartre later became his French tutor when he was in Paris, where he met Henri Bergson and Leon Brunschvicg. I omit Kuki Shūzō’s bibliographical details, as one can easily access them. Indeed, Kuki is one of the rare Japanese philosophers whose main writings are available in major European languages. I would also like to mention here that le Baron Kuki jokingly explained to Rickert that his name means in German “Neun Teufel” (that is, nine demons), a fact that will be relevant later.

1. From Okakura to Kuki

Shortly before his permanent return to Japan after spending more than eight years in Europe, Kuki delivered two lectures in French at Pontigny, on the outskirts of Paris, in 1928. Let us begin with his second lecture: “L’expression de l’infini dans l’art japonais.”⁵ Kuki’s text begins with a citation from the book by Okakura Kakuzō (Tenshin) 岡倉覚三 (天心) entitled *The Ideals of the Orient* (translated into French as *Les Ideaux de l’Orient* in 1917): “l’histoire de l’art japonais devient l’histoire des idéaux asiatiques.”⁶ Okakura’s original in English states, “The history of Japanese art becomes thus the history of Asiatic

3 Sakabe (1990, pp. 109–34) is one of the few scholars who has discussed the importance of Kuki’s Pontigny lecture. However, he does not fully develop its potential, as Furukawa (2017, pp. 129–40) and Mori (2017, pp. 118–19) critically point out. Indeed, Sakabe does not take the idea of metempsychosis into account in his paper. (He does, however, provide a fine analysis of “possession” in Sakabe 1988.)

4 Since the above-mentioned symposium and the submission of this paper, two special issues on Kuki have been published in periodicals in philosophy: “Kuki, Contingence, Iki and Time” in *Gendai shisō* 現代思想 44:23 (January 2017), and also “Kuki Shūzō” in *Risō* 理想 698 (2017). Several papers in these volumes converge with the interest of the present paper. While relevant observations are referred to in the notes, I have refrained from modifying my argument, as the present paper was prepared prior to the publication of these two special issues.

5 “The Expression of Infinitude in Japanese Art” (Kuki 1928). Refer to Obama (2012) and Obama (2013) for a detailed analysis of these texts. Here I will not provide a full explanation of this lecture.

6 Okakura 1917, p. 36.

ideals, the beach where each successive wave of Eastern thought has left its sand-ripple as it beat against the national consciousness.”⁷

Though Kuki does not quote from the following phrase, Okakura continues: “Yet I linger with dismay on the threshold of an attempt to make an intelligible summary of those art-ideals. For art, like the diamond net of Indra, reflects the whole chain in every link.” Obviously, Okakura is referring to the metaphor of the “infinite net” found in the Huayan Sutra (Ch. *Huayanjing* 華嚴經; Jp. *Kegongyō*). Each jewel that composes the whole garland reflects and is reflected by every other jewel, which extends to the infinity, in space as well as in time. We shall see that the same metaphor is also alive in Kuki’s two lectures.

Also noteworthy is the fact that in a previous paragraph Okakura states, “Thus Japan is a museum of Asiatic civilizations; and yet more than a museum, because the singular genius of the race leads it to dwell on all phases of the ideals of the past, in the spirit of living Advaitism which welcomes the new without losing the old.”⁸ Three remarks must be made. First, the idea of *advaita* or non-duality comes from Shankar, and was renewed by Vivekananda in the footsteps of Ramakrishna as part of modern neo-Hinduism reform. Second, at the same time the same principle of *advaita* is already evident in the esoteric Shingon 真言 Buddhism propagated by Kūkai 空海 in ninth century Japan, to which Okakura has been closely linked.⁹ In one of his books, *Shōryōshū* 性靈集, Kūkai asks how mosquitos, worms, and serpents could not have Buddha-nature (*gigyō zendō nanzo bussbō nakaran* 蚊行蠕動なんぞ仏性なからん). Here is an implicit statement of *advaita*: he claims that all these creatures share the same Buddha-nature, and that there is not any duality between them. Third, this quote from Okakura already anticipates the outline of another Kuki lecture on the “Oriental” notion of time. Indeed, “welcoming the new without losing the old” is a key concept for his reflection on “transmigration,” or *temps identique qui se répète à perpétuité* (identical time which repeats itself in perpetuity), as we shall see soon.

Incidentally, there was a rumor that Kuki Shūzō’s real father was Okakura. Though this is not biologically true, Okakura’s love affair with Kuki Ryūichi’s 九鬼隆一 wife, Hatsu 波津, was a well-known scandal, which led to Okakura’s forced resignation from all the positions he was occupying as a high ranking civil servant, including director of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Kuki’s mother would die in a mental hospital in 1931. Kuki as a child did remember Okakura well. Whenever Kuki visited his mother, Okakura, with his red drunken face, delightfully embraced the boy.¹⁰ In a sense, Kuki was the spiritual son of Okakura. Let us briefly investigate this spiritual tie that connects the two eminent thinkers to which Japan’s modernity gave birth.

7 Okakura 2007, p. 13.

8 Okakura 2007, p. 12. On this statement and its connection with the idea of *advaita*, see Inaga 2014, pp. 138–40.

9 See, for example, Shinohara 2012. However, Shinohara does not directly mention Okakura in this book. See especially pp. 151–61. *Gigyō zendō* is usually understood as a conventional Buddhist expression referring to “all sentient beings.” However, here I have restored its etymological meaning according to the original Chinese characters. The connection between non-duality and metempsychosis obviously needs further consideration, which would require a book-length study. On the interconnectedness of entities in the universe, see Inaga 2016, part I, chapter 1. Regarding the philological critique of the idea in Japanese thought that Buddha-nature is universal, see Sueki 2015.

10 Kuki 2001a; 2001b.

2. “Unité extatique”

This brings us to another lecture by Kuki Shūzō, delivered one week earlier: “la notion du temps et la reprise sur le temps en Orient” (“The Notion of Time and the Recurrence of Time in the Orient”).¹¹ Its main topic is the notion of the “transmigration of the souls.” In contrast to Martin Heidegger’s “unité extatique”¹² (that is, transition from the past to present and to the future), which Kuki qualifies as “horizontal,” Kuki presents another moment of ecstasy which he calls “vertical,” in which the three phases of time are directly superimposed: “Each present has identical moments, on the one hand in the future, on the other hand in the past; here is an instant the depth of which is infinite” (*Chaque présent a des moments identiques, d’une part dans l’avenir et d’autre part dans le passé; c’est un instant dont l’épaisseur est d’une profondeur infinie*).¹³ Thus is the definition of “le temps de la transmigration,” according to Kuki.¹⁴

The recurrence of time is a mystical experience which causes a *profond éclat* (a profound lightning or splitting), “where the ‘I’ recognizes oneself with shuddering astonishment-fissure” (*où le moi se reconnaît lui-même avec un étonnement frémissant*). “The ‘I’ exists and at the same time it does not exist” (*Le moi existe en même temps que le moi n’existe pas*).¹⁵ We can easily recall here a phrase in the “Art Appreciation” chapter of Okakura’s famous *Book of Tea* (1964): “At once he is and is not.” In a moment of ecstasy in art appreciation, the beholder at once does exist and does not or no longer exist. “He catches a glimpse of Infinity, but words cannot voice his delight, for the eye has no tongue. Freed from fetters of matter, his spirit moves in the rhythm of things.”¹⁶ To this ecstasy Kuki gives an etymological explanation of “being out of oneself” (*d’être hors de soi*), clearly referring to Heidegger’s *Dasein* analysis of “ex-ist-ire” in *Sein und Zeit*, published shortly earlier in 1927.

In one of his Chinese poems, Okakura describes this experience of enthusiasm as follows: “When one contemplates the Thing, the self is already lost; The spirit of the star vibrates the autumnal sword, And the frozen heart breaks the jade bowl” (*mono ni kanzureba tsui ni ware nashi / seiki shūken o yurugase / hyōshin gyokko o saku* 物ニ観ゾレバ 竟ニ吾無シ/星気秋剣ヲ揺ガセ/氷心玉壺ヲ裂ク).¹⁷ The common use of the terms, like *éclatement* and *étonnement frémissant*, shows the strong affinity between the two authors. Here the term “enthusiasm” must be taken literally in Greek definition: possessed by a god—“theos.” The ecstasy in artistic appreciation spoken of by Okakura is retranslated by Kuki into that of the encounter with one’s own past in the process of the transmigration of the soul (Jp. *rinne tenshō* 輪廻転生). To the best of my knowledge, nobody has pointed out this similarity between the two thinkers. Perhaps we could see here a kind of transmigration of ideas which takes place from Okakura, the father, to Kuki, the son.

11 “La notion du temps et la reprise sur le temps en Orient.” Reprinted as Kuki 1928. (We have followed the capitalization of the French original, while the capitalization in English follows the style of *Japan Review*).

12 Kuki notes that the term comes from Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 329. On Kuki’s interpretation and criticism of Heidegger’s idea of “ecstasy” and the latter’s response to the former, refer to Sakabe 1990, pp. 116–18; Takada 2002; Mori 2017, pp. 129–30; Kioka 2017, pp. 203–208; and Mine 2017, pp. 35–37.

13 KSZ, vol. 1, p. 58.

14 KSZ, vol. 1, p. 59.

15 KSZ, vol. 1, p. 61.

16 Okakura 1964, p. 45.

17 Okakura 1905, p. 3.

3. Karma and Nirvana

Why is Kuki obsessed by the idea of transmigration, or, to use a Greek term, metempsychosis? What are the philosophical or metaphysical implications of his reflection? Let us examine Kuki's discussion on the state of *le moi existe et en même temps le moi n'existe pas*. Immediately after this phrase, Kuki quotes from the famous conversation between King Menandar (Milanda) and Nagasena. Is the fire that burns all night the same fire as the day before? Or is the light of this fire in the evening not identical with the light in the morning? To this question, the king is obliged to reply that the two fires are different but the two lights are identical. So long as the two entities are strictly identical, continual burning could not take place. Conversely, the light can be held to be identical in this span of time only on the condition that the provided fuel is consumed and inevitably replaced.¹⁸ The idea of identity is guaranteed here by its very loss.

The logic of transmigration is concomitant with this parable. In this story, Kuki overlaps the Greek notion of *aion* with “Grandes Années”/“Great Years” (*meḡas enautos; Thimaius-Timaeus*, 39D).¹⁹ According to this circular calendar, Socrates would once again marry Xanthippe in the next turn of the mega-time-span in the Cosmic Period. Yet by their next marriage they will have gotten older due to the scale of this mega-time-span, and it turns out that Socrates and Xantippe at this time are no longer identical with the previous couple. In this discussion, Kuki refers to Friedrich Nietzsche (*Zarathoustra* is clearly mentioned) and implicitly to his idea of *Wiederkunft*, or eternal return.²⁰

If one believes that one is a reincarnation of one's precedent self, this very consciousness of one's reincarnation makes one no longer identical with one's previous self, for the previous self could not be aware of the identity of its next reincarnation. Here is the paradox of the *ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen* (eternal return of the same). In other words, transmigration or metempsychosis can be realized so long as the concerned agent is not aware of the fact; and once one is aware of one's reincarnation, one can no longer be identical with one's former self.

Thus Kuki insists that there is a contradiction between the notion of *karma* (Jp. *gō* 業) and that of nirvana (Jp. *nehan* 涅槃).²¹ If, indeed, the identity between the precedent self and the current self cannot be established in the process of reincarnation, the notion of *karma* itself would no longer be valuable, for there is no guarantee of continuity between the two. On the other hand, if the notion of *karma* were accepted, then, rejecting the transmigration of the identical self/selves would be logically indefensible. As Miura Toshihiko 三浦俊彦, a scholar of aesthetics and logic, judiciously points out, formal logic cannot demonstrate that transmigration is logically impossible, though its logical necessity cannot be demonstrated either.²²

18 Nakamura and Hayashima 1963–1964.

19 In note 1, Kuki declares that he will not discuss the relationship between transmigration and the cosmic period, though he does recognize that the Buddhist idea of *kalpa* may be identical with the cosmic transmigration. K SZ, vol. 1, p. 64 (French), p. 285 (Japanese).

20 K SZ, vol. 1, note 3, p. 64 (French), p. 285 (Japanese). My view regarding this problem is developed in detail in Inaga 2016, part I, chapter 4, especially pp. 131–36.

21 Note 6. K SZ, vol. 1, p. 62 (French), p. 287 (Japanese).

22 Miura 2007.

An academic debate was developing on this question in Japan while Kuki was in Paris in 1927. A close colleague of Kuki, Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎, in his refutation of Kimura Taiken 木村泰賢, insisted on this point, stating that the notion of transmigration could not have existed in primitive Buddhism (despite Kimura's claims), so long as there was the doctrine of the non-existence of the self (Jp. *muga setsu* 無我説). In fact, without the guarantee of self-identity via *karma*, it would be no use to assert the existence of transmigration.²³ Lack of identity between my previous "self" and my next "self" would invalidate the notion of eternal return. Yet, by following this logic one may say that inversely it is also logically possible to doubt the existence of the "self," in so far as the notion of "self-identity" is not reliable enough to sustain the logical probability (or at least logical non-refutability) of transmigration. (However, Buddhism's doctrinal debates throughout history on the Indian subcontinent did not follow this path.)²⁴

4. *Le Mythe de Sisyphe Reinterpreted*

Then, how can one realize, that is, put into reality, one's own transmigration? Replying to this question, Kuki proposes not remaining a passive victim of *karma* but rather becoming "a clever magician who creates anew on one's own account the time itself" (*un habile magicien qui crée lui-même à nouveau le temps*). He continues, "This magician has the tour de force or rather tour of will to put an end to his own existence and to be reborn anew. Between one's death and rebirth one's will probably does not exist in its *actuality*, but it does exist for sure in a state of *potentiality*" (*Alors ce magicien dans la solitude absolue est un véritable démon* (Teufel!!), *qui possède le tour de force, ou plutôt tour de volonté, de pouvoir terminer son existence et renaître à nouveau. Sans doute, entre sa mort et sa renaissance, sa volonté n'existe pas actuellement, elle n'en existe pas moins potentiellement*).²⁵

It seems that Kuki here is mainly thinking of tragic heroes in the samurai tradition (Boushido-les vois des chevaliers) like Kusunoki Masashige 楠木正成, an historical and legendary figure of the fourteenth century, who committed suicide on the defeated battlefield so as to be reborn seven times to serve the *patria* and the emperors in the future (*shichishō hōkoku* 七生報国).²⁶ Yet this rebirth may be also logically applied to the past as well: so as to assume the role of a reincarnation in terms of the metempsychosis, one also has to claim one's identity with one's previous life in the past. This reversibility or *die Rückwirkung-Rückkehr* is thereby indispensable, which Kuki calls *volonté en puissance*. It is only by way of this will that one can "overcome *samsāra*" (Jp. *rinne*) and thereby "attain nirvana."²⁷

It is in this context that Kuki proposes a new reinterpretation of the myth of Sisyphus. Kuki disagrees with the prevailing opinion that sees this mythological figure as a victim of eternal punishment who repeatedly has to push a huge rock to the top of a mountain only to see it fall down a cliff. On the contrary, Kuki finds Sisyphus a happy man with a

23 Itō 2014, pp. 127–29.

24 For an historical overview, see the explanation by Hayashima in Nakamura and Hayashima 1963–1964, vol. 3, pp. 339–64. For my detailed demonstration of this crucial point, see Inaga 2016, pp. 134–36.

25 KSZ, vol. 1, p. 60 (Japanese translation), p. 289 (French original).

26 KSZ, vol. 1, p. 62 (Japanese), p. 287 (French).

27 KSZ, vol. 1, p. 60 (Japanese), p. 289 (French). "Volonté en puissance" may be literally translated as the "will in its potent state."

good will, as he is “capable of perpetually repeating [his job] out of his un-satisfaction” (*capable de la répétition perpétuelle de l’insatisfaction*).²⁸ One of the reasons why Kuki was led to this nontraditional view of Sisyphus was the Great Kantō earthquake, which had devastated Japan’s capital area on 1 September 1923, “*il y a 5 ans*” (five years ago). As Kuki recalls it: “People asked me: why do you, the Japanese, construct an underground metro system, certainly destined to be destroyed by another huge earthquake which you have regularly at almost one hundred year intervals?” (*On m’a demandé: pourquoi construisez-vous le metro destiné à être toujours détruit à nouveau par un grand tremblement de terre, que vous avez périodiquement presque tous les cent ans?*).²⁹ Here we can see his nationalist profile *d’entre-deux-guerres*; an intellectual frustrated by the European negative view of Japan’s efforts for reconstruction. Kuki claims that without suffering, the will to overcome would never be actualized. In other words, without *samsāra* or metempsychosis, the fate of eternal repetition, there will be no attainment of enlightenment or *nirvana*. To put it another way: there is no enlightenment without eternal transmigration.

Curiously, within two years after Kuki’s premature death (1941), Albert Camus would publish his *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942). One may wonder if Camus’s Sisyphus was not the reincarnation of Kuki’s philosophical figure partaking in the same existentialist “will” of positively assuming the *ewige Wiederkehr-Wiederkunft*, which Karl Löwith, Kuki’s close friend, studied around 1935–1936.³⁰

5. Okakura’s English Reinterpretation of Daoism

We began this paper with Kuki’s reference to Okakura. Okakura sees in Japan a “museum of Asiatic civilization” where “all phases of the ideals of the past” constitute a constellation “in the spirit of living Advaitism which welcomes the new without losing the old.”³¹ The same would be true of Kuki’s intellectual web, a network of Eastern wisdom constituting the very idea of the Eternal Return of Time. The thought of ancient Greece, such as that of the Pythagorean school, shows a high affinity with the circular structure of the recurrence of the soul, and it influenced Plato and Aristotle. Let us re-contextualize Kuki’s lecture on time in the intellectual milieu between the two world wars. By so doing we shall see the implicit relationship Kuki has entertained with contemporary Western philosophy by crossing cultural borders.

In his *The Book of Tea*, Okakura is indebted to Paul Carus, as the citation from the *Daode jing* 道德經 is taken from Carus’s English translation published in 1898 by the Open Court Company, Chicago.³² The Chinese-English bilingual edition must have been

28 KSZ, vol. 1, p. 63 (Japanese), p. 286 (French).

29 KSZ, vol. 1, p. 63 (Japanese), p. 286 (French).

30 Sugimoto Hidetarō and Mori Ichirō, among others, thought it possible that Camus read Kuki’s treatise. See Sugimoto 1981; Mori 2017, p. 131. In fact, it was Kuki himself who helped Karl Löwith escape to Japan from Nazi Germany, shortly after Löwith finished his manuscript on Nietzsche’s eternal return in Rome in 1936. Löwith could no longer return to Germany because of his Jewish wife, and stayed in Japan for five years from 1936 to 1941 as lecturer at Tōhoku Imperial University before moving to the United States because of the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States. Let us also remember the fact that Jean-Paul Sartre knew of Kuki. On the implications of the similarity of Camus and Kuki’s interpretation of this myth, see note 52 below.

31 Okakura 2007, p. 13.

32 This note does not remain in the Dover 1964 edition. See Kinoshita Nagahiro’s critical edition of *The Book of Tea* (English, p. 23) and the editor’s note in Japanese, p. 41 (Kinoshita 2013).

extremely helpful for Okakura, as he could easily check the original Chinese. In chapter 11 of Carus's translation, "The Function of The Non-Existent," we read:

Clay is moulded into a vessel and on that which is non-existent [on its hollowness] depends the vessel's utility. By cutting out doors and windows we build a house and on that which is non-existent [on the empty space] depends the house's utility. Therefore, when the existence of things is profitable, it is the non-existent in them which renders them useful.³³

In *The Book of Tea*, Okakura paraphrases this as follows:

This Lao Tzu illustrates by his favorite metaphor of the Vacuum. He claimed that only in vacuum lay the truly essential. The reality of a room, for instance, was to be found in the vacant space enclosed by the roof and walls, not in the roof and walls themselves. The usefulness of a water pitcher dwelt in the emptiness where water might be put, not in the form of the pitcher or the material of which it was made. Vacuum is all-potent because all-containing. In vacuum alone motion becomes possible.³⁴

Our existence in this world is like an empty vessel in which the soul of the ancestors takes its seat, to transmigrate, or navigate metempsychosis. The passage leaves behind a trace of the soul's movement and transition, which reveals the way. Okakura formulates this by stating "[t]he Tao literally means a Path." Then Okakura quotes directly from the original:

There is a thing which is all-containing, which was born before the existence of heaven and earth. How silent [*ji* 寂]! How solitary [*liao* 寥]! It stands alone and changes not. It revolves without danger to itself [*zhouhang er budai* 周行而不殆] and is the mother of the universe [*tianxia mu* 天下母]. I do not know its name and so call it the path [*dao* 道]. With reluctance, I call it the Infinite [*da* 大]. Infinity is the Fleeting [*shi* 逝], the Fleeting is the Vanishing [*yuan* 遠], the Vanishing is the Reverting [*fan* 反].

According to Kinoshita Nagahiro, who recently published a critical edition of *The Book of Tea*, the corresponding part of Lao Zi's original is chapter twenty-five, "Imaging the Mysterious." A comparison with Paul Carus's translation reveals how Okakura modified Carus's direct rendering:

There is Being that is all-containing, which precedes the existence of heaven and earth. How calm it is! How incorporeal! Alone it stands and does not change. Everywhere it goes without running a risk, and can on that account become the world's mother. I know not its name. Its character is defined as Reason [*dao* 道]. When obliged to give it a name, I call it Great [*da* 大]. The Great I call the Evasive [*shi* 逝]. The Evasive I call the Distant [*yuan* 遠]. The Distant I call the Returning [*fan* 反].³⁵

33 Carus 1898, pp. 101–102.

34 Okakura 1964, p. 24; Kinoshita 2013 (English part), pp. 28–29.

35 Carus 1898, p. 109.

These two translations are quite divergent in their choice of terminology found in the second half of the passage. (In the following, P.C. refers to Paul Carus's translation, O.K. to Okakura Kakuzo's rendering). "Great" (*da* 大) in Carus's is replaced by "Infinite" in Okakura's; "Evasive" (P.C.) (*shi* 逝) by "Fleeting" (O.K.); "Distant" (P.C.) (*guan* 遠) by "Vanishing" (O.K.); and "Returning" (*fan* 反) by "Reverting." Thereby Okakura seems to be trying to convey a more coherent image of the idea to an ordinary readership. Okakura avoids terms with negative connotations ("evasive") in their English rendering. He also uses "Infinite" instead of "Great" and "Vanishing" instead of "Distant." These terms seem to be chosen to articulate the cosmic dimension with more precision. "Reverting" in place of "Returning" emphasizes "returning to a previous state" and also evokes the biological notion of "reverting to a former or ancestral type," that is, atavism, and the juridical idea of "possess[ing] or succeed[ing] to property on the death of the present possessor" in the sense of "reversion."³⁶ Curiously, Okakura's translation choices make it easier to connect these basic Taoist ideas with the Buddhist idea of reincarnation or transmigration. Okakura then develops his own idea in the following passages, putting more emphasis on movement rather than a static state of things:

The Tao is in the Passage rather than the Path. It is the spirit of Cosmic Change,—
[sic] the eternal growth which returns upon itself to produce new forms. It recoils upon
itself like the dragon, the beloved symbol of the Taoist. It folds and unfolds as do the
clouds. The Tao might be spoken of as the Great Transition.³⁷

"The Great Transition" seems to be reinterpreted or, better, taken back (*repris*) by Kuki to develop his own idea of metempsychosis. This is not mere speculation: it is known that during his nine-year stay in Europe Kuki confessed to having "read with absorption" English original editions of Okakura's *Ideals of the East* and *The Book of Tea* and is said to have been "deeply moved."³⁸ In light of our foregoing discussion, it must be said that there are undeniable traces of Okakura's writing recurring in Kuki's paper on "La notion du temps et la reprise sur le temps en Orient." The French term "la reprise" even has a hidden connotation that Okakura's *Ideals of the Orient* was *repris* or "taken back" by Kuki for his own benefit. We could also recognize that not only Okakura's English books but also Kuki's lectures in French have made positive contributions in the "migration" and "reversion" of ancient Eastern wisdom to Western modern scholarship.

6. The "Diamond Net of Indra" Around Kuki

When Okakura was consulting Paul Carus's translation of Chinese Taoist classics, Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙, a famous theosophist and future Zen Buddhist master, had already arrived in Chicago in 1896 and would stay there until 1909. Prior to his stay in the U.S.A., Suzuki had already published a Japanese translation of Carus's *The Gospel of Buddha* (1894)

³⁶ See, for example, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th edition, 2006. The historical context of the lexicology must be further taken into account, especially in the biological terminology of contemporary literature at the end of the nineteenth century.

³⁷ Kinoshita 2013 (English transcription), p. 24.

³⁸ Kuki 2001a, p. 15; Kuki 2001b, p. 21.

in 1895 and 1901,³⁹ and he also translated into English *Açvaghosha's Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* (Jp. *Daijō kishinron* 大乘起信論).⁴⁰ Carus's translation of the *Daode jing* was also in reality done by him.⁴¹ Though we are not sure whether Okakura and Suzuki were in direct contact, we should note that they shared many personal connections. Recent scholarship in Japan suggests the relevance of this approach. It is also well known that Paul Carus had close ties with William James and Charles Sander Peirce. Itō Kunitake, professor emeritus of Kyoto University, has thoroughly investigated Peirce's ideas of Cenopythagoreanism and continuum and William James's concept of the pluralistic universe, seeing them as related to Kuki Shūzō's notion of transmigration-metempsychosis.⁴² Theosophy and American transcendentalists were closely related, and the young Suzuki was working in this circle, from which came part of Okakura Kakuzō's thought as well as that of his spiritual son, Kuki Shūzō, thus constituting a constellation evoking Indra's Infinite Net.

Andō Reiji, an intellectual historian and critic, has reconstructed the webs of intellectual life around the Open Court Publishing Company. Paul Carus translated Ernst Mach, and Andō convincingly demonstrates the influence of Mach's analysis of *Schielen* or strabismus (Jp. *shashi* 斜視) on Orikuchi Shinobu 折口信夫, a modern Japanese national studies scholar.⁴³ Mach's *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen* (1886) was edited and translated into English as *Contributions to the Analysis of Sensation* (1897) by the Open Court Publishing Company. Mach's idea of strabismus of the visual perception, *Augenmuskelgleichgewichtsstörung*, or the trouble with focus fixation in the eyes' binocular vision, were applied and extrapolated by Orikuchi to auditory perception to give birth to the new idea of *shachō* 斜聴, a sort of "auditory strabismus," in Orikuchi's Shinto studies graduation thesis at Kokugakuin University in 1910.⁴⁴ In Orikuchi's understanding, *shachō* means unconscious or subconscious auditory perception.⁴⁵ He further connected his idea to "atavism" and "nostalgia," a curious amalgam of Ernst Haeckel, and the auditory memory of the ancient soul transmitted through poetry by way of rhythmical rendering of the sound.

Kuki was also of the opinion that rhyme (Fr. *rime*) in poetic language can convey and transmit "nostalgia" (which stems from the German neologism of *Sehnsucht*) for one's lost previous life, just like "past life regression" in psychiatry. This association also suggests the reason why Kuki in his final years before his premature death concentrated on the problem of contingency (also the topic of his PhD dissertation).⁴⁶ Let us limit ourselves to just three points. First, in his paper on "rhyme in Japanese poetry," Kuki declares that to regenerate

39 Carus 1894. Japanese translation appears in SDZS vol. 25 as *Budda no fukuin* 仏陀の福音. The same volume of SDZS also contains Suzuki's translation of Emmanuel Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom* (1889; *Shinchi to shin'ai* 神智と神愛) as well as Paul Carus's *Amitabha* (1906; *Amida butsu* 阿弥陀仏).

40 "Translator's preface" pp. x–xiv (Suzuki 1900). Japanese translation: Suzuki 2002.

41 Suzuki was the only person who could have assisted Paul Carus's Open Court translation work by directly referring to the Chinese original. Refer to the highly philological study by Yoshinaga (2014).

42 Itō 2006; Itō 2009. The idea of a parallel world in space may be logically interchangeable with that of reincarnation in time. For a detailed argument regarding this point, see Inaga 2016, pp. 132–33.

43 Mach 1886. English Translation: Mach 1897. Japanese translation: Mach 1971.

44 Orikuchi 1996, pp. 120–36.

45 Andō 2010, pp. 237–56.

46 See Itō 2014; the book review by Tanaka 2015; and Obama 2015.

and recall the tradition which we tend to forget (echoing *aletheia*, or *Verborgenheit* in Heidegger), “we only have to seize ourselves and secure our words through retrospection of our own tradition, by developing given possibilities into realities, by making a passage to put the hidden potentials (*dynamis*) into actualities (*energeia*).”⁴⁷ Clearly Kuki’s argument, based on Aristotelian terminology, is the same as his own discussion in “La Notion du temps et la reprise sur le temps en Orient” that we have examined above.

Second, Kuki states that the recurrence of the same rhyme in a poem repeats by its very recurrence the genealogy of the poetic tradition. Undoubtedly here is a circular structure which generates *poiesis*, resulting in a *répétition infinie*. This infinite repetition “put a poem in the present place, stepping on the same place as if in a standstill. Yet this enables the poem to concentrate itself on a moment of infinity which can be described as eternal present.”⁴⁸ Once again this is what he has formulated in French: “Vivons dans le temps perpétuel, dans *l’Endlosigkeit* en termes de Hegel. Trouvons *l’Unendlichkeit* dans *l’Endlosigkeit*, *l’infini* dans *l’indéfini*, *l’éternité* dans *la succession sans fin*” (Let’s live the perpetual time in “endlessness” to use Hegel’s term. Let’s find out the “unendness” in the “endlessness,” the “infinity” in the “indefinite,” the eternity in the endless succession).⁴⁹

Third, and finally, Kuki sees in this repetition of rhyme “contingency converted into necessity”: what emerges as a chance image is fixated into a stable formality. To explain this recurrence in *poietic*, Kuki makes use of the Greek term *palingenesia* (palingenesis; Fr. *palingénésie*).⁵⁰ According to Stoicism, the term means *retour périodique éternel des mêmes événements* (periodical return in eternity of the same events) or didactically *renaissance des êtres ou des sociétés conçue comme source d’évolution et de perfectionnement* (renaissance of beings and societies conceived as the source of evolution and of accomplishment);⁵¹ in brief, metempsychosis.

7. “Plagiat par anticipation” or Affinity with Mishima Yukio⁵²

“Each drop of time that flows past seems to me as precious as a sip of good wine, and I have lost almost all interest in the spatial dimension of things.” Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫,

47 See “Nihonshi no ōin” 日本詩の押韻 (1931), in KSZ, vol. 4, p. 449. Handwritten revision of printed draft. Obama 2015, p. 200.

48 Kuki Shūzō, “Bungaku no keijijōgaku” 文学の形而上学, in KSZ, vol. 4, p. 51. Obama 2015, p. 203.

49 Kuki 1928, p. 26; KSZ, vol. 1, pp. 62–286. Obama (2015, p. 204) comes to the same conclusion as mine. Obviously, Kuki here implicitly refers to Immanuel Kant’s *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797). See Takada 2002, p. 146.

50 It is an open question whether Kuki had access to Pierre-Simon Ballanche’s (1776–1846) *Essai de palingénésie sociale* (1820) while he was in Paris. See also McCalla 1998. My thanks to Julian Strube who directed my attention to this point. Ballanche’s volume is not included in Kuki’s library that is preserved in Kōnan University Library.

51 See, for example, Robert 1978, vol.1, p. 1344. For literature contemporary to Kuki that elucidates the idea of *palingenesia*, refer to Chisholm 1911.

52 The author owes the term “plagiat par anticipation” (plagiarism by anticipation) to Pierre Bayard (2009). The pejorative connotation of “plagiat” in fact stems from a mistranslation of the classical Roman jurisdiction by the encyclopedists of the eighteenth century. See Maurel-Inder 2011, pp. 20–21. By referring to these metaphors, I wish to avoid the false question of plagiarism, seeing it as worthless. Consequently, Kuki’s possible influence on Albert Camus or Yukio Mishima is not the matter here. More important is the fact that Japanese authors like Kuki and Mishima repetitively returned to the idea of metempsychosis and relied upon it whenever they wanted to explain the phenomenon of transmigration to the Western public and its readers (among whom we can potentially count Albert Camus, if we are allowed to follow the tricky wordplay practiced by Kuki).

shortly prior to his sensational hara-kiri suicide, wrote the previous sentence to his colleague and Nobel Prize winner in literature Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 on 4 July 1970. Almost the same phrase can be found in the last volume of Mishima's final tetralogy, *Hōjō no umi* 豊饒の海 (*The Sea of Fertility*). Needless to say, the tetralogy is based on the idea of the metempsychosis-transmigration of the soul.

A pluralistic universe and metempsychosis are not logically incompatible with each other.⁵³ A pluralistic universe supposes that the same individual as “I” would also exist somewhere in the universe. If the distance separating the “I” and the other “I” is in the scale of several millions of light years, the notion of simultaneous coexistence practically loses meaning. One may well speculate regarding simultaneity beyond the velocity of light, and yet we shall see the limit of this speculation: ultimately, the possibility of a spatial coexistence of the “I” in plural parallel worlds jeopardizes the relevance of metempsychosis of the same soul scattered, here and there, on the vast lapses of time.⁵⁴ Indeed, if “I” does exist in different places in the universe, it is no longer meaningful whether or not they exist simultaneously or in a different phase of the time span. Unless one can communicate with one's other “I” (in synchronicity beyond the velocity of light, by way of telepathy, if you like), the reality would not change in any sense. However, what does it mean to “communicate” with one's own identical self?

At the same time, we have already made it clear in examining the Nietzschean *ewige Wiederkunft* that the identity of the soul in transmigration cannot be guaranteed so long as the soul in question is conscious of its own reincarnation. If one is conscious of one's reincarnation, one would no longer be strictly identical with one's ancestral existence because of the presence of this awareness. Honda Shigekuni, one of the protagonists of Mishima's trilogy, clearly states this fact: “It seems as if transmigration consists of a sterile effort of proving what you can never verify.”⁵⁵

What is at stake here is no longer the relevance or irrelevance of the idea of metempsychosis. Rather, it is the very notion of identity (which has been taken for granted, and heretofore unconditionally posited) that should be questioned. Let us set up a (pseudo-) syllogism. Primo: logically (in the sense of formal logic) we cannot negate the probability of metempsychosis. Secundo: metempsychosis puts the presupposed notion of identity in question. A conclusion that can be deduced from these double premises is that the very identicalness of the notion of “identity” must be reexamined.⁵⁶ In fact, the logical and ontological foundation of this “sameness” is questioned here. Following the same line of

53 For a detailed demonstration, see Inaga 2016, pp. 122–36. I hereafter limit myself to the core argument of the question while leaving aside the remaining debatable problems.

54 “[V]arious reincarnations extending over a period of time are no more significantly linked to one another than the lives of all the individuals who happen to be alive at the same given moment. In other words, I felt that in such a case the concept of reincarnation would be practically meaningless” (Mishima 1972, p. 230). Original Japanese: Mishima 1977a, p. 246.

55 Mishima 1977a, p. 246. “And so it's obvious that it would be pointless to try to produce any proof of transmigration” (Mishima 1972, p. 230).

56 Here I am intentionally bridging a logical question and an ontological question. The logical evidence regarding the idea of “identity” is sapped by the ontological uncertainty of the identical self. The latter cannot be guaranteed in front of the non-verifiable yet imaginable possibility of transmigration. Kuki himself concentrated his thinking on this enigma in his final PhD dissertation, *The Problem of Contingency* (1935) (Kuki 1935). A discussion of this work belongs, however, to another study. Refer to the recent publications mentioned in note 4.

thinking, Mishima comes to the conclusion that reincarnation/paligenesis/metempsychosis *must* exist *de juri*; otherwise—and obviously this is a tautology—humanity would not be able to liberate itself from its passive destiny.

Everything exists through *alaya*, and since it does, all things are. But what if *alaya* is extinguished./But the world *must* exist!./Therefore, *alaya* consciousness is never extinguished. As in the cascade, the water of every moment is different, yet the stream flows in torrential and constant movement./Thus *alaya* consciousness flows eternally in order to make the world exist./For the world *must* at all costs exist! [*sic*]/But why?/ Because only by the existence of the world—world of illusion—is man given the chance to enlightenment.⁵⁷

This conviction shows a striking affinity with the “will” that Kuki proposed (in his reinterpretation of Sisyphus): “Without *samsāra* or metempsychosis, fate of eternal repetition, there will be no attainment of enlightenment, nirvana.” There is no enlightenment without eternal transmigration. I wonder if Mishima referred to Kuki’s reflection on metempsychosis when writing his final trilogy. Whether this is the case or not, a kind of transmigration of the idea is potentially (that is, beyond the realm of verification, by nature) taking place from Kuki to Mishima.

8. Rhyme in the Ise Shrines: In the Guise of a Conclusion

One typical case of metempsychosis is practiced not in Japanese Buddhism but rather in the ritual succession of the Ise Shrines. Every twenty years, the old wooden structures are torn down and replaced by the next generation, identical in form and located next to them. At the interval of twenty years, the old buildings disappear and the new buildings appear, composing an oscillation with a rhythmical undulation. The metaphor of the *rime-rhyme* that Kuki imagined in the poetry may find its physical reincarnation in this ritual replacement of the *shikinen sengū* 式年遷宮. The soul of the collective spirit of a nation is supposedly transmigrating through this interminable abolition and reconstitution, putting into question the materialism of the physical idea of conservation. The chrono-political manipulation of identity lies at the core of this cosmic idea of transmigration.⁵⁸

57 Mishima 1977b, pp. 160–61. Mishima 1970, p. 126.

58 Inaga 2012. It should be noted that Kuki was among the faculty members of Kyoto University when Bruno Taut, the German architect, came to Japan to visit the Ise Shrines at the suggestion of his acquaintances at the university in 1934. After this visit, Bruno Taut would become the main proponent of ideas regarding the Ise Shrines, such as metempsychosis and eternal permanence in impermanence. Connecting Kuki’s discussion of regeneration through rhyme with recurrence of the past at the Ise Shrines is relevant in light of the analyses of Kuki’s poetics by Gōda Masato (2017) and Kushida Jun’ichi (2017). A full discussion of this issue will be left for another study. I would like to stress that not only Kuki but also Karl Löwith and Bruno Taut all took special interest in the idea of “ewige Wiederkunft” in their contact with Japan, and that an intellectual constellation—or a kind of “web”—had been formed by the relationships among them in the “magnetic field,” which Japan constituted in the late 1920s and early 1930s as a cultural and geopolitical “topos.” It must also be added that the question of metempsychosis as well as that of contingency undermines the logical distinction between simultaneous and independent events, thus dangerously sapping the very foundation of rational thinking. Sakabe (2002, pp. 1–17), Washida (2002), and Matsuoka (2017) among others see in this perilous zone (which destroys stable categorical thinking, indicates the limit of the Reason-Vernunft, and opens up the field of poetics composed of uncontrollable word play and rhyme), a yet-to-be-explored aspect of Kuki’s writing, a zone which obviously lies beyond the reach of the present paper.

We have thus far sketched in haste the case of palingenesis in and around Kuki Shūzō. This story serves as one of the parallel worlds located at the fringe of a border-crossing history of ideas. Like the pluralistic universe defined by William James, or the infinite web of Indra, these parallel worlds reflect each other and mutually elucidate the notion of metempsychosis which transmigrates not only within the circle of a particular school of philosophical thought, but also in its unlimited extension—as Kuki himself put it—beyond this closed cycle.⁵⁹

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59 See also Takada 2007. The paper brilliantly examines the relevance of an Italian translation of Kuki's writing and presents the possibility of understanding Kuki at the intersection of philosophy and poetics, as suggested in note 58 above.

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