

Miki Kiyoshi's Philosophy on Technology and the Application to Modern AI

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Miki Kiyoshi, a Japanese philosopher born in the 1890s. He was not only one of the prominent students of the renowned philosopher Nishida Kitarō but also a contentious figure of the Kyoto School. During his formative years and academic journey, he was deeply influenced by Buddhism. Additionally, his studies in Europe exposed him to the ideas of Western philosophy and Western technology developments. He not only lived through the era of World War II but also witnessed the period when technological advancements in Europe, along with Western ideas and innovations, were introduced to and influenced Asia. Those experiences prompted him to reflect on and examine human relations and the role that technology plays in our society. Miki's reflections on technology, imagination, and human activities provide a framework for understanding how technology intertwines with and influences the essence of human beings. However, the potential and impact of artificial intelligence (AI) are far greater than those of almost any technology invented by humanity in the past. Its development is progressing at an unprecedented pace, accompanied by even greater uncertainty. With the advent of AI, one might wonder: are Miki's ideas still relevant and applicable? This essay contends that, by examining the interconnected themes of technology, imagination, creativity, and human

activities as developed in Miki's philosophy, his insights remain prescient and applicable to the modern invention and use of AI.

To discuss Miki's philosophical ideas, introducing the idea of nihilism is essential in this essay, which directly and clearly presents his main idea on the relation between human beings and the world. In the discussion of nihilism and human life, Miki (1939) claims that "Nihilism is nothingness as the extreme limit of the objective and subjective existence of the human being", allowing it to transcend both the internal and external (p.189). Thus, nihilism is something necessary to reach the real state of nothingness. This account led him to argue that nihilism is the pre-condition of the world and human existence. From such theory, Miki then discussed that life is not only the formation of the world but also the formation of the self. Our existence, as something distinct from the world, is simultaneously interconnected with everything within it, since the formation is always from nihilism. The indefiniteness inherent in this process stems from nihilism itself. The mix of indefiniteness is a creation of form, meaning that such dialectic of mixing is a formation from nihilism. The mixing, of subject and object, existence and non-existence, science and history, is what Miki calls the "logic of imagination". Miki believes that the combination of indefinite elements is rooted in the dialectic of mixing, which is where creativity emerges from. Thus, under his framework, creativity or the creation of forms is a process that transcends constraints, deriving its transformative power from the inherent potential of nihilism.

In the process of forming creativity and then driving technological innovations, Miki paid special attention to the discussion of pathos and logos, which is also where he challenges the Western mind-body binary theory. For him, logos represents reasoning, logic, and rational framework. On the other hand, pathos stands for the body, emotions, affective dimensions, and

subjective experiences. Instead of being independent and separate from each other, pathos and logos are interconnected for Miki. Logos establishes a foundation of structure and logic for creativity, while pathos fuels it with emotional aspects and subjective resonance. They together are embedded in imagination. And Miki's (1942) word "technology demands a synthesis between human will and objective natural laws" which explains why he thinks claimed that technology is a unification of logos and pathos (p.334). At this point, we should already have an insight into the fact that modern innovation and the use of AI are not only similar but also applicable to Miki's account. AI, as a new form that emerged from human creativity, still shares the characteristics of technology. From the logos perspective, AI operates based on code written by scientists. At the same time, the way AI, for instance, ChatGPT communicates back to humans and its ability to generate new things gives us the pathos perspective of this technology. Given the combination of pathos and logos, thus creativity, AI in itself is not only something invented by human beings but at the same time has the potential to generate new forms that expand beyond human capacities.

After understanding Miki's logic of imagination and what composes the pathway to creativity, this essay will then, based on these discussions, move on to the next topic derived from imagination: technology. While Miki's view and definition of technology are sophisticated and multifaceted, it would be essential to start this paragraph with an analysis of his most fundamental and significant theoretical account of technology. Miki describes technology as being both a tool used and serves as a means to an end in itself at the same time. He specifically highlights that "technology is simultaneously a means and an end, and therefore autotelic" (Miki 1942, p.327). From such a standpoint, he highlights the risks and dangers of merely viewing technology as a tool, as it would lead to the result that the world is then viewed as being opposed

to the subjects since it serves as a means to an end. What makes technology distinguishable from other things, such as tools, in the world is that its characteristic as something mediated. This means that technology mediates between a subject and its environment, an object, involving both human will and natural laws. In Miki's text *The Ideal of Technology*, he explains the difference and relation between production and technology, as oftentimes they are misunderstood as synonyms to each other. The methods of production are tools and machines, and technology is making things. This prerequisite then drives us to acknowledge that "production is the fundamental determination of technology" (Miki 1942, p.335). Through the above description, we could analyze that the current use, function, and underlying operational logic of AI still align with Miki's view of technology. The idea of artificial intelligence goes back to a very early time when the ancient inventors were aiming to innovate something called "automatons", meaning that such things were to be mechanical and function independently of human intervention. Such technology not only mimics and learns from human capabilities and knowledge, allowing machines to perform tasks that require human intelligence, but also independently augments human abilities. This autonomous nature of AI proves that it fits into Miki's description of technology since it does not only function or is being used as a tool in the world, rather, itself serves as an end.

Another important aspect of technology that Miki highlighted in his works is its interconnection relationship with spirits. As mentioned before, Miki sees technology as a mediator between a subjective and its environments. Meanwhile, much of the technology and knowledge Japan possessed was directly derived from or influenced by Western culture. However, this situation contradicts the essence of technology as discussed by Miki. Therefore, he proposed that "technology must be imbued with the forms of the culture that created it" (Miki

1942, p.328). The technology that Japan received from the West needs to be reshaped to comply with the Japanese spirit. By combining the advantages of the West and Japan, such an act allows Japan to actually surpass Western's framework of technology. Such an idea is significant in the discussion of technology in a way that by uniting the spiritual culture, it could then overcome the issues such as depersonalization and materialism that came with Western industrialization. We may not yet clearly see how AI achieves this or whether it truly accomplishes this remains to be verified. However, we do know that due to its vast worldwide and the continuous improvements made by global researchers and scientists, we can, to some extent, acknowledge that when AI interacts with humans, it adjusts its output based on the individual's background and culture, thus achieving Miki's description of technology in this aspect as well.

Nonetheless, despite the thoroughness and maturity of his arguments, it is still necessary to discuss the shortcomings in his theories. In Miki's article *Technology and New Culture*, elements such as history, arts, economy, human societies, and science were mentioned and were all categorized under the idea of technology. It must be acknowledged that, within Miki's framework, technology does not merely refer to a single entity but represents a broadly defined concept encompassing many diverse elements. However, we should consider this idea with caution, as categorizing all things into a single term appears to be an overly simplistic and effortless approach, which may hinder a deeper understanding of the definition of technology as well. Therefore, what needs to be questioned here is: if all things are categorized under the concept of technology, why is it still referred to as technology and not something else? Moreover, if we are to take this approach, how can we ensure that our understanding of the concept of technology remains accurate and precise?

In conclusion, Miki Kiyoshi's profound philosophy of technology, even written in the 19th century, remains applicable to modern AI technology and its role in our society. He offers insights into the interconnection between nihilism, human creativity, imagination, and culture. Simultaneously, modern AI still resonates with what Miki has emphasized about technology, including the integration of logos and pathos, meditating, and the necessity to perform cultural contextualization.

Bibliography

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