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## 1912-1945, or the Taisho and Showa periods for Husserl and Nishida:

A reflection on the cultural problematic in Husserl's essays for *Kaizo* journal and Nishida's "Issues in Japanese Culture"

### Osamu MORIMURA

I

Between *Ideen I*, published in 1913/Taisho 2, and *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, published in 1929/Showa 4, Husserl did not publish any major works. In the Japanese context, this blank in production almost exactly overlaps the Taisho period (July, 1912 to December, 1926). Undoubtedly for Husserl it was just a contingency that his moment of silence overlapped with the period in Japan called Taisho. But if we consider his rather unknown commitment to Japan, his silence begins to speak to a problematic nature that requires further scrutiny. That is, despite his failure to publish in German, Husserl contributed three essays to a Japanese journal, the then intellectually vanguard *Kaizo*, during 1923/Taisho 12 to 1924/Taisho 13. Furthermore, five essays—including these three—all written under the thematic taken from the name of the journal, "renewal [*Erneuerung*]" in Japanese, assumed an important part of his systematic work concerning ethics and cultural philosophy. This engagement of Husserl's should now be given proper attention.

Why did Husserl attempt to publicize his ethical and cultural philosophical project, if only a part, at this particular moment? In addition, why did he dare to publish his essays in the journal of a developing nation rather than in his homeland? In tandem with these questions, my presentation is an attempt to shed light on the relation of Husserl's phenomenological project of cultural philosophy, as seen in the *Kaizo* essays, with Japan. My premise is that in his engagement Husserl had the intention of "universalizing" phenomenology as well as "Europeanizing" Japan—a concept that later developed into the "Europeanization of the world" as expressed in his work of 1936/Showa11, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*. In fact, in a draft for one of his *Kaizo* essays, Husserl spoke of Japan as a "young, fresh, green branch" of European culture. This

perspective of European superiority derived from his privileging of Greece as the origin of philosophy. This well-known stance is evident throughout his *Kaizo* essays, as well as in *The Crisis*.

Why should Japanese culture—not rooted in Greek thought—be Europeanized by accepting philosophy as it is? It was Nishida Kitarō who answered this question indirectly by posing his own Japonism against the Europeanization of Japan. This position is manifest in his lecture entitled "Issues of Japanese Culture" held at Kyoto University in 1937/Showa 12, and a book related to the lecture published in 1940/Showa 15.

According to John C. Maraldo, Nishida attacked what is today known as Eurocentrism by promoting a Japonism that shares the same structure but contains different ingredients<sup>[1]</sup>. Nishida's position is expressive of the dilemma of Japanese modernity itself: after the wake of the Meiji Restoration, Japan quickly made itself into a Europeanized/modernized nation so that it could resist the colonialism of the West; but it followed that Japan, at the same time as being equipped with Western culture, had to confront it. It should be noted that Nishida had to shoulder a dual role: while adopting Western philosophy, he attempted to overcome it in order to construct a philosophy original to Japan. Against Nishida's intention, however, his Japonism came to lead a later tendency of the Kyoto School, that is, it offered a philosophical ground for the ideology of the "Great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere" before World War II.

I propose to compare Husserl and Nishida in order to investigate how their ed recognition of time functions apart from their intention. That is to say, the "politicality" of philosophers is often exposed in the way that they are not aware of in their political naiveté. And consideration of Nishida's "dual role" inexorably provokes the question of what it is for a Japanese to philosophize in the non-Western cultural domain.

What is it for a Japanese to philosophize?

Or, is it possible for a Japanese to philosophize in Japanese?

If yes, is the philosophy a Japanese philosophy? Or can it be deemed a universal philosophy that contributes to Western philosophy since the Greek period?

My presentation is contextualized by the above questions.

## II

What did the concept, "renewal"—Husserl's theme for his *Kaizo* essays—intend to renew? In his letter to Albert Schweitzer, dated July 28, 1923 (Taisho 12) Husserl touched upon the theme "renewal." For him, this meant "renewal in the sense of an ethical

turn and an universal, ethical, human culture [*Erneuerung im Sinne ethischer Umkehr u. Gestaltung einer universalen ethischen Menschheitskultur*]." <sup>[2]</sup> Husserl's concern with ethics was directly motivated by the cultural devastation that he experienced firsthand after World War I. He emphasizes this point in the beginning of his first *Kaizo* essay, "Renewal: its problem and method."

Renewal is the universal call in our present, sorrowful age, and throughout the entire domain of European culture. The war, which has devastated Europe since 1914, and which since 1918 has merely chosen to employ the "refinements" of psychological tortures, of moral devastation and economic need, instead of military force, has revealed the internal untruthfulness and senselessness of this culture. And it is precisely this revelation which drains it of its vital energy. <sup>[3]</sup>

At the time Husserl wrote this he thought that the task of phenomenology was to rescue the "crisis of European culture" as a reality, and to fight an ethical struggle [*ethischer Kampf*] against the decadent culture, promoting *The Decline of the West* as represented by Spengler. "The idea that only rigorous science can create the ground for a departure for both individual renewal as well as communal renewal" is consistent throughout all *Kaizo* essays. Therefore, phenomenology as a rigorous science amounts to the "mathesis of spirit and of humanity [*die matheisis des Geistes und Humanität*]" that can ground the ethical renewal from individual to communal levels. According to Husserl, ethical renewal seeks to reform this "worthless cultural life" into "one rational life [*eines Vernunftleben*]" ; this is thanks to the rigorous science leading spirit with reason. <sup>[4]</sup>

For Husserl, the essence of the ethical life lies in conducting a practical life conforming to the norm of reason, that is, a continuous realization of the teleological idea of rational life via a constant renewal of ethical life. Conducting a reasonable, rational ethical life on the individual level leads to a reform of community (to which the individual belongs) into an ethical community. For 'individual,' in Husserl's term, implies conducting an ethical life as a communalized individual, and a community as a collective of individuals who conduct ethical lives can be established as an ethical community. In sum, it can be said that Husserl thought it possible for an individual ethical life to be continuously expanded into an ethical community. Furthermore, it should be noted that what makes this expansion possible is the concept of spirit [*Geist*]. It is by introducing *Geist* that a close link between community and individual can be established.

In the second *Kaizo* essay, "The Renewal of the Ethic Problematic of the

Individual," from 1924/Taisho 13, Husserl says: "community [*Gemeinschaft*] is, so to speak, multi-headed [*vielköpfig*], yet, united and combined, it is like a single personal subject. In a sense, individuals form the community's limb [*Glieder*] which is functionally and mutually textured by multi-faceted social acts [*soziale Akte*]—I-you-acts [*Ich-Du-Akt*] that unite person with person spiritually by command, agreement, affectionate act [*Befehle, Verabredung, Liebestätigkeiten*] and so on."<sup>[5]</sup>

For Husserl, community is nothing other than a spiritual community united on the spiritual level by the I-you-relation or love, and the individual rational subject is nothing other than an organic member [*Glied*] to be spiritually united to the community. It is for this reason that "a community can be multi-headedly, or in a deeper sense, even non-headedly collective to be a single willing subject." In this manner, individual and community form an organic rapport as part and whole that cannot be separated. Inasmuch as an individual achieves ethical renewal, society as a collective of individuals is automatically ethically renewed. Culture is the fruit of the ethical renewal of an individual, and the sum total of individual renewals forms the culture of the community. "What we understand as culture is the sum total of various fruits containing a spiritual existence- that which is realized in various activities of communalized humans and that which remains in the communal consciousness and its continuing tradition."<sup>[6]</sup> Thus we reach the "ideal of the universal ethical human" in such a way that the humanity that is achieved in culture continues its ethical renewal.

In Husserl's epistemology, the current from "individual to community" is further linked to that from "community to world." The individual is just a "partial spirit" of an intentional subject of community, or an organization of colossal "spirit." However, when the individual spirit persists in ethical renewal and the communal spirit as a collective of the individual spirit persists in ethical renewal, community or nation no longer sustains its conventional shell. Even though each individual who strives for an Idea belongs to a community or a nation in actuality, a "universal ethical man," inasmuch as it exists as an Idea, no longer belongs to any real community or nation, and community or nation no longer exists in a concrete sense for the "universal ethical man." According to Husserl, "cultural humanhood [*Kultur Menschheit*]" in the complete sense that is intended as an ideal being is a "supernation [*Obernation*] beyond individual nations," existing only in the form of the "superstate [*Oberstaat*] beyond individual states." Therefore, the final target of the Husserlian project of spiritual "renewal" is to reach the "ultimate ideal of universal ethical man," that is, to reach "the superrace comprising every individual race, a truly humane world nation [*Weltvolk*] beyond individual cultures, and a world state [*Weltstaat*] beyond

individual states and their systems." [7]

### III

But, when Husserl insists that the "ultimate ideal of the universal ethical man" is going to be concretized in the particular territory of Europe, his Idea begins to appear saturated with a certain politicality. In Husserl's belief, phenomenology as a rigorous science can ground ethical renewal only because phenomenology considers itself to be the true heir of the philosophical tradition lasting since Greece. Furthermore, for Husserl the universality of philosophy can be a common wealth for all nations—beyond the difference between this and that nation and state—because of its "super nationality [*Übernationalität*]." In his lecture in Vienna in 1935/Showa 10, Husserl proudly claimed that the philosophy that sprang from Greece was the culture that could spread beyond the differences of nations and ages. When he took pride in the fact that the origin of Europe equals that of philosophy, he unintentionally spoke of the privilege and superiority of "Europe" to other regions. Despite the dissonance between the individual nations, "Europe" as a whole could sustain a "familiarity/sibling relationship [*Geschwisterlichkeit*]" of the "particular inner kinship of spirit [*eine besondere innere Verwandtschaft*]" that permeates and goes beyond the individual nations. Sharing the "consciousness of homeland and other [*Heimatlichkeit*]"<sup>[8]</sup>, European nations sustain a unity which is the very "spiritual shape of Europe [*die geistige Gestalt Europas*]"<sup>[9]</sup>. For this precise reason, the "spiritual shape of Europe" comes to exist as the "home of spirit."

However, the existence of "Europe" as a "spiritual community," supported as it is by the "consciousness of homeland," appears to me, a non-European, as nothing other than an exclusive domain. Except for the "Europeans" mentioned in *The Crisis* as well as in the Vienna lecture, non-European people—Eskimo, Native American, Gypsy, and so on—do not belong to the "spiritual community." Furthermore, the "European man" is not as much an anthropological type which is empirically grasped as Chinese or Indian are. In Husserl's discourse, the privilege of the "European man" is taken apriori as a premise. For him, the "phenomenon of the Europeanization of all humanity" was a historical necessity: other areas could be inscribed in the historical signification only by being Europeanized, and all other cultures should develop following Europe as their model. Husserl's "Eurocentrism" appears to be almost definite in the following passage:

There is something unique [*etwas Einzigartiges*] here that is recognized in us by all

other human groups, too, something that, quite apart from all considerations of utility, becomes a motive for them to Europeanize themselves even in their unbroken will to spiritual self-preservation [*geistige Selbsterhaltung*]; whereas we, if we understand ourselves properly, would never Indianize [*indianisieren*] ourselves, for example. <sup>[10]</sup>

It is not my point, however, to accuse Husserl's phenomenology of being a Eurocentric philosophy. Taking into consideration his life as a Jew in the 1930s (early Showa), I have to acknowledge his courage in advocating a certain "universalism"—even if tainted with Eurocentrism—in Vienna in particular, without mentioning a word about Nazi Germany. Still, the problematic is that it was not in the 1930s that Husserl began to develop this view of the world. Already right after World War I, he had taken this Eurocentric stance with respect to culture. This position—especially when seen by us non-Europeans—reveals an aspect of "imperialist philosophy" to rule non-European regions as colonies. For instance, he had already made the following statement about the significance of phenomenology and European culture with respect to the Idea of philosophy and other sciences at the time of *Kaizo* essays:

I acknowledge that I am more and more interested in the Japanese nation, inasmuch as I believe that I can graft its young, fresh, green branch onto European culture. If the Japanese nation seriously engages in European sciences and philosophy, and when the engagement is successful, as we shall see, various difficulties particular to European culture-internally related to the sciences and philosophy-will no longer be unconcerned with the Japanese nation. Various renewals of the Japanese nation should share the most inner motive resource of our renewals as well as the phenomenological renewal that which supports our renewals at its most profound. <sup>[11]</sup>

For Husserl, Japan should be Europeanized, too; and as long as it is Europeanized, it cannot be indifferent to the crisis immanent in "European rationality." Therefore, it is a historical necessity for Japan, as a late-comer, to face the "crisis of European culture" revealed by World War I. But if we Japanese have to learn philosophy from Europe to Europeanize us, knowing that we will face the same crisis in the future, it is nothing if not ironic. Not belonging to Europe, why should Japan have to accept the "crisis of European culture" as a fate of historical necessity? This can only be Husserl's selfish determination. Is there any way

for Japan to avoid Europeanization?

The easiest and most direct way to avoid it is to oppose the uniqueness of our own culture against "European culture." Needless to say, this path can easily lead to nationalism or statism of the most obvious kind. In a sense, Nishida Kitarō was inexorably led down this path, even though it was not his intention. Nishida's point was to universalize and globalize "Japanese culture" in order to counter "European culture." For this purpose, it was necessary to absorb European culture fully while at the same time to look to the true universal spirit in "Japanese culture." If not for the universalizing of Japanese culture, it would be impossible to resist the imperialist domination of "European culture." But Nishida could not agree with dogmatically raising Japanese culture by evoking "Japanese spirit." This is "the most thoughtless, indecent way of thinking," which narrow-mindedly emphasizes Japanese peculiarity too much<sup>[12]</sup>. For Nishida, the most important thing to avoid was "subjectivizing Japan," for "it is nothing but imperialism for a subject to deny an other subject and domesticate it"<sup>[13]</sup>. That is to say, for Nishida, Husserl's intention of Europeanization amounted to imperialism par excellence.

Therefore, in Nishida's "Issues in Japanese Culture," the world in the 20th century no longer consisted of the dichotomous scheme of West and East, but a world culture formed by their mutual supplementation. The question was thus how Japanese culture could open itself to the world in order to participate in forming world culture, that is, how it could engage in constructing world culture while keeping its tradition and cultural singularity. In this context, Japanese culture was neither spiritual nor theoretical. For Nishida, science should accompany spirituality while Japan could not be independent as a culture with spirituality alone.

It is reactionary to deem Asian culture central/primary from now on, simply because since the Meiji Restoration there has been devastation wrought by Threckless importation from abroad. It is not enough just to speak of expelling foreign cultures and employing the Japanese spirit to digest the world culture if there is not a consideration of how it would be possible. In our country, in every discipline, fundamental theoretical research is still weak.<sup>[14]</sup>

This passage from "Scholastic Method" was written in 1937/Showa 12 as an addendum to "Issues in Japanese Culture." Nishida evidently thought that Asian and Japanese culture should become theoretical in order to confront Western culture, because simple-minded spiritualism cannot open itself to world culture. For Asian and Japanese culture to



form world culture they needed theoretical armament. It should be noted, however, that making Japanese culture theoretical requires grounding the Japanese spirit philosophically on the one hand, but also necessitates a certain assessment to "the dogmatic ideologue of Japonism," which Nishida himself denied as thoughtless. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that at the precise moment that this assessment came to be linked to the ideology of affirming imperialist domination, a symptom that allowed Nishida to be interpreted as a war collaborator surfaced. In the text entitled "The Principle of New World Order" written in 1943/Showa 18, Nishida explained how an individual nation can open itself to world culture by being conscious of its own historical task.

Every nation-state is constituted upon its own historical ground and has its own historical task; it is here that each nation-state owns its own historical life. Each nation-state composes a worldly world by conforming to itself at the same time as going beyond itself. That is to say that, first, each nation-state should compose a particular world by going beyond itself and following its regional traditions. It follows that the particular worlds composed by various historical grounds join together to form a worldly world. That is, the world becomes the worldly world in which each nation-state, living its own unique historical life, takes part in forming the worldly world as its own historical task. This is the ultimate ideal of the historical development of humanity, and the principle of the new world order required by the world war today. This is precisely what is meant by the classical ideal of our nation, *Hakko-ichiu*—various worlds under one roof.<sup>[15]</sup>

For Nishida, what the particular world meant in actuality was the "Great East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere," where each nation in the various regions of Asia, conforming to its own traditional culture at the same time as going beyond it, was supposed to join together to form the particular world. Isn't it thus akin to Husserl's vision of "Europe as a spiritual community," where various nations internally link to each other with familiarity beyond difference? Isn't what the "Great East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" meant to Nishida the same as what Europe meant to Husserl? Although Nishida denied the "European imperialism" immanent in Husserl, it seems that he himself tacitly spoke of an "imperialist philosophy." They both fell prey to the same result because of a shared premise, that is, this notion of "spirit as a ground of culture," with which they could take for granted that their own culture could expand itself over other regions in concentric, circular movements. It is not so fruitful to compare their philosophies in such a short-circuited manner, yet there

is undeniably a common element—their view on culture. Neither of them thought that culture could be reduced to the import/export of techniques and tools; they thought culture to be a product of "spirit" through and through. Both the "Europeanization of Japan" and the "Japanization of Asia" assume a Europeanization and a Japanization of spirit. Therefore, what is at stake here is the problematic of "spirit" in the epistemology of culture.

Husserl and Nishida are not in accord but rather severely contradictory inasmuch as they ostensibly insist on the centrism of their own cultures. But, precisely as Maraldo claimed, both the "Europeanization of Japan" and the "Japanization of Asia" share the "same structure with different ingredients." A certain abstraction that inevitably accompanies the universalization of autonomy and independence of one's own nation tends to erase the difference between nations and homogenize the alterity. It is precisely this abstraction that I would call the "imperialist domination of culture." What we have to be sensitive about is the singularity of individual culture and national difference, and further the possibility of their cohabitation; absorption and homogenization of one culture into another is out of the question. Husserl, who privileged "Europe," and Nishida, who privileged the "Great East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere," are like the head and tail of the same coin, for both assumed the homogenization with abstraction. All in all, it was because of their sharing of the notion of "spirit" that they ended up deeming various cultures homogeneous. To say it in reverse, they both tacitly admitted that nations and cultures which do not share a common spirit cannot communicate. Now we have to ask the same question to ourselves. Is it possible for various cultures to communicate, as they sustain their singularities, that is, without sharing a common spirit? Perhaps this is related to the question posed by Charles Taylor in "The Politics of Recognition."<sup>[16]</sup> But, there is also a danger in representing today's world as a "multicultural world": it could fall prey to an "imperialist" or "colonialist philosophy."

As Kojin Karatani points out,<sup>[17]</sup> what forms the conjuncture of the present seems to be splitting into two tendencies: either a globalization that collapses nation-states and nullifies the borders tending towards international unification; or an ethnocentrism that decomposes the nation-state towards extremes of minute differentiation. Both Husserl and Nishida are categorized as models of the former tendency. In contrast, the latter might be represented by so-called "multiculturalism" that stresses the cohabitation of different ethnicities without enforcing an unification. Seen by us Japanese, however, to sustain the minutely differentiated cultures of minorities, to guarantee their independence under the title of multiculturalism is somewhat of a reminder of the Japanese pre-war attempt to unify Asian nations under the name of *Gozoku-kyowa* [Republic of Five Nations] or *Hakko-ichiu* [Various Worlds under one Roof]. The problematic nature in the nuance of multiculturalism

is that it inevitably contains the flaw that the mutual exchange between majority and minority cultures can only be asymmetrical, while it promotes a transversal communication over the border of nation-state and international exchange. Simply said, there is no way to ignore the basic dilemma that admitting the rights of minorities amounts to restricting the rights of the majority: if not for some "sacrifice" as well as "tolerance" on the part of the majority to acknowledge the rights of minorities, cohabitation is impossible. When the tolerance is exceeded, the possibility of an "imperialist domination" by the majority threatens. In the Japanese context, this has been seen symbolically in the relationship between the Japanese constitution and the Ainu and Okinawan nations. That is to say, the domination of cultural imperialism we have been seeing with Husserl and Nishida actually exists everywhere to various degrees. When we debate about culture today, we inevitably encounter the problematic of the possibility of cultural exchange in the post-colonial situation. It should be remembered that such political aspects of cultural and philosophical problematics repeat in history.

When we criticize political commitments, it is customary to judge collaborators and pro-war ideologues for their actions. It is indispensable to elucidate their actual commitments historically, but also what functions behind their actions-the "political unconscious" or "political collective unconscious-should be psychoanalyzed. If not, the same disaster will continue to repeat in various forms. But, as concerns Husserl and Nishida, just to point out the naiveté in their sense of reality and accuse their political unconscious would not be enough, especially for the fundamental solution of the "imperialist domination of culture," because their "spirits" are still living.

Now we are facing the question if inter-cultural communication is possible. I have to confess that I can answer only negatively at this moment, though I would not say that it is totally impossible. My reluctance is inscribed in my position of being a non-Western philosopher, that I always have to be conscious of the asymmetry of communication in the domain of "philosophy" as a form of Western culture. In this case as well, the major culture is privileged in relation to the minor culture. Therefore, if, as a Japanese philosopher, I am allowed to say something about Western philosophy, I will have to consciously stand in-between Husserl and Nishida. That is to say, I have to assume the same "dual role" as Nishida-receiving Western philosophy, at the same time as constructing one's own philosophy. But in the new context, I have to assume a path that, swerving away from the Japonism in which Nishida was entrapped, resists "Europeanization" as well as "Americanization" of spirit. As John Maraldo argues, if we have to abolish Nishida's Japocentrism, we will also have to abolish reading Nishida as an "Asian philosopher."<sup>[18]</sup>

Therefore, my primary question——if Japanese can engage in Western philosophy——is really embedded in another question: if philosophy can be constituted as a truly universal science beyond the enclosure of Western philosophy. And this question can really only be answered when we deconstruct the arbitrary division of West and East.

【附記】

本稿は、日米現象学会 (Japanese/American Phenomenology Conference) (1996年9月18日～21日、東北大学)「異文化コミュニケーションの可能性 (The Possibility of Cross-Cultural Communication) において発表された英文原稿である。英訳については、高祖岩三郎 (Sabu Kohso) 氏に大変お世話になった。記して感謝したい。また本稿に加筆した日本語版は、法政大学教養部「紀要」第104号「人文科学編」(1998年2月)に掲載されている。

25年以上も前の旧稿を掲載することは憚られたが、21世紀も20年以上も経過してもなお、本稿が論じている点について考察の意義があると考えて載せることにした。ご寛恕を請いたい。

▶注

- [1] John C. Maraldo, "*Sekai-bunka no Mondai* [Problems in World Culture]," *Shiso*, Vol. 857, 1995, p. 176.  
(Trans. to Japanese by Seisaku Yamamoto)
- [2] E. Husserl, "Husserl an Schweizer, 28. VII. 1923" in *Briefwechsel* Bd. VII: *Wissenschaftlerkorrespondenz*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994. S. 253. [translated from Japanese to English]
- [3] E. Husserl, "Renewal: Its Problem and method," translated by Jeffner Allen, in *Husserl Shorter Works*, edited by Peter McCormick and Frederick A. Elliston, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) p.18
- [4] Cf. *ibid.*, 10.
- [5] E. Husserl, "*Kojin rin-ri-mondai no Saishin* [The Renewal of the Ethic Problematic of the Individual]," *Kaizo*, 1924. [translated from Japanese to English]. Hua27/22
- [6] *Ibid.*
- [7] Hua27/59
- [8] Cf. VI/320
- [9] *Ibid.*, 336
- [10] E. Husserl, "The Vienna Lecture" in *The Crisis of European Science and the Transcendental Phenomenology*, translated by David Carr, (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970) p.275.
- [11] E. Husserl, a *Kaizo* Essay (XXVII/95-96) [translated from Japanese to English]
- [12] Nishida, *Zenshu* XIV/400
- [13] Nishida, *Zenshu* XII/341

- [14] Nishida Kitarō, "*Gakumonteki Hobo* [Scholastic Method]", in *Zenshu*, XII/393
- [15] *Ibid*, XII/428
- [16] Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism* (Princeton University Press) 1994.
- [17] Refer to Kojin Karatani, "*Teikoku To Nation* [Empire and Nation]" in *Senzen No Shiko* [Thinking Before the War], Bungei Shunju, 1994, pp.11-15
- [18] John Maraldo, *op. cit.*, p. 179.