

# Watsuji Tetsuro on American Civilization

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## 和辻哲郎のアメリカ文明論

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SUMMARY IN JAPANESE：和辻哲郎の『アメリカの国民性』は、『日本人のアメリカ論』（研究社）に抜粋が収録されてはいるが、日本の和辻研究者があまり触れない小著である。米国ではわずかにロバート・ベラーが、日本知識人の文化的アイデンティティの問題の枠内で取り上げている。ベラーの論文は、1965年、アメリカの価値観が揺らぐ直前に書かれたもので当時の思潮を反映している。しかもこの小著だけを対象にしたものではない。本論文は和辻のアメリカ観を、彼の自然理解と対比しながら、西欧の自然観の背後にある黙示思想との関連で論じ、和辻のアメリカ観の特質と限界は何か、また彼の思想的背景である世界志向と日本人の自我性への回帰がどう結びつくかを探ろうとしたものである。東西で機械文明の終焉が言われている今日、敗戦直前に書かれたこの小著がもつ今日的意義は、もっと評価されてもいいと思われる。

### I

Although known abroad only among those few interested in modern Japanese philosophy and speculation on Japan's cultural identity, Watsuji Tetsuro (和辻哲郎, 1889-1960) has among the Japanese a stature comparable with his contemporaries like Nishida Kitaro (西田

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幾太郎, 1870-1945) and Tanabe Hajime (田辺元, 1885-1962). He associated personally with these philosophers, but was different from them, for the range of Watsuji's interest was wider and, with his cultural taste, he tended toward the field of imaginative creation (湯浅泰男, 『和辻哲郎——近代日本哲学の運命』, 京都: ミネルヴァ書房, 1981; 山田光, 『和辻哲郎論』, 東京: 花伝社, 1987). That can be seen by reading some representative works of his impressively enshrined, as it were, in his 20-volume complete works. The manner of his scholarship and his style indicate geniality rather than concentration characteristic of his two philosophical friends.

Watsuji's strength did not lie in metaphysics but in practical philosophy such as ethics and philosophy of culture. Trained as a philosopher, he was probably the first Japanese who wrote a systematic study on Nietzsche (『ニイチェ研究』, 1913); he published a pioneering work on Sören Kierkegaard in Japan (『ゼエレン・キエルケゴオル』, 1915: both in *The Complete Works*, vol. 1, 東京: 岩波書店); and during his stay in Germany, he heard lectures by Martin Heidegger, and learned Husserl's phenomenology as well as Dilthey's hermeneutics. It would become a commonplace observation to remark that the writings of these philosophers are more relevant than ever in today's Anglo-American intellectual, critical climate—of course, in the light of interest and interpretation entirely different from Watsuji's days.

We may expect, from such training, preoccupation in his career with purely philosophical problems in the framework of Western philosophizing. However, Watsuji started, immediately upon his return, working toward the systematization of his ethics rooted in Japanese culture, philosophical climatology and search for the Japanese spirit. He was to write on Western philosophical themes as well as on Buddhism mostly in terms of intellectual or cultural history. Watsuji's studies on the cultural-historical significance of primitive Christianity (『原始キリスト教の文化史的意義』, 1926), ethics of man in the Greek city-state (『ポリス的人間の倫理学』, 1948: both in vol. 7) and the practical philosophy of primitive Buddhism (『原始仏教の実践哲学』, 1927, vol. 7) suggest his psychological drive for the *Ur-*, the original stratum of human spirit and culture, from which he seems to have aspired to reconstruct a system of spiritual values in order to overcome

stagnation brought by the modern spirit and civilization of the West.

The symbolic fact is that his first work after his return from studies in Germany was "The Understanding of Existence (存在) in the Japanese Language" (1929). The same year saw the publications of "Climate (風土)" and the annotated edition of *Shobogenzo Chomonki* (『正法眼藏聽聞記』), a sequence to celebrated *Shobogenzo*, oral teachings taken down by a disciple of the famous Zen priest, Dogen (道元, 1200-53), the author of this famous Zen work. Watsuji's return was no simple awakening to Japanese uniqueness in terms of nationalism. Recruited from a rich country-doctor family, as he tells us in his autobiographical fragments (vol. 18), he received an elitist education and cultural experience. In the time he grew up as a gifted boy and reached the most respected intellectual status in society—from the late Meiji through the Taisho to the first decade of the Showa era—Japan saw the emergence of a culture-conscious intellectual middle class. It was to this class's liberal humanism that Watsuji catered his thought on philosophy and culture. Out of diverse problems and discussions a major theme took its shape: national cultural identity. Two other scholars who have been immortalized by their complete works were also actively publishing in the period in which Watsuji was most energetically producing his works—Tsuda Sokichi (津田左右吉, 1873-1961), a celebrated historian of Chinese and Japanese ancient culture and thought and Yanagita Kunio (柳田国男, 1865-1962), charismatic founder of Japanese folklore studies. With the areas of his interest and topics often overlapping theirs, Watsuji developed his own thought on Japanese cultural identity.

Pre-World War II intellectuals' national cultural consciousness was not identical with militarists' and extreme rightists' nationalism. But with pressure mounting from the climate of nationalist-rightist public opinion, those whose works we can now see in impressive volumes were obliged to veer their courses to the right. Of course, the degree of the individual commitment was often to decide post-war chance of survival as a respected writer. All depends on how tactically far the particular scholarly writer went in supporting the rightist cause without compromising his position. The library now contains in a mausoleum-like manner the tomes of Watsuji's work, but his survival as a credible

writer in post-war Japan is the result of his foresight. No doubt, the fact that he was a prestigious Iwanami-affiliated author helped his survival. We now tend to read his texts as if they were dissociated from the scheme of time, disregarding the occasion and the atmosphere for writing the particular text.

Watsuji's short but only systematic reflection on American culture, "American National Character" (「アメリカの国民性」 February, 1944), is now to be found in the 17th volume of his *Complete Works* (『全集』) published by Iwanami Shoten, together with two other short treatises, "The Restoration of Idol-Worship" (「偶像の再興」), and "Mask and Persona" (「面とペルソナ」). "American National Character" originally appeared in *Shisou* (『思想』) and within a year it came out in a book form with "How the Emperor's Subjects Should Behave" (「日本の臣道」, vol. 14). Such a background might make us misconstrue Watsuji's position at this time as something like near-jingoist opportunism. In 1944 Japanese started having some premonition on the unfavorable course the war was taking for their country. But it remained within their private, unexpressed mind. In the article we are to be concerned with, Watsuji discusses in a style surprisingly unemotional for wartime the origins of American national character. As is to be naturally expected, he dismisses American culture as something superficial. Nevertheless, his explanation of the reason for it in terms of America's cultural origins is by no means stereotypical. Starting with a long quotation from George Bernard Shaw's *Man of Destiny*, in which Napoleon with typical Shavian cynicism refers to the Englishman's self-justifying tendency through "juristic principles" even in the act of stealing(!), Watsuji offers his speculation on the nature of American civilization in terms of the two spirits of Bacon and Hobbes; the seventeenth-century Puritans who came to the North American continent were characterized by him as having the typical Anglo-Saxon utilitarian, legal frame of mind. Watsuji scarcely pays attention to their religious motivation and its practical consequence on their life in the New World. He emphasizes "experiment" as the major factor of American life on the premise of virgin nature. But experimentation has brought change to the original Anglo-Saxon character. It is the new spirit that does not see any value beyond statistics and mechanical

achievement.

To apologize for a famous writer's past conduct is beside the point. But Watsuji was no advocate for the militarist cause, to be sure. In 1943, he was severely rebuked by two extreme rightist critics for his way of thinking and his disrespect to the emperor. Some kind of pro-national, pro-war, if not outright militarist, expression of thought was expected from any intellectual or writer, regardless of his previous position. It was a general atmosphere. If we may take up an ephemeral expression of such a view, who will be a better example than Miki Kiyosi (三木清, 1897-1945) a rather sharp-minded, convinced Marxist philosopher from among Watsuji's contemporaries? Miki is now well-known among students of modern Japanese philosophy. Miki went to the Philippines on a military-sponsored cultural mission and sent to the *Asahi Shimbun* brief commissioned articles now included in the 17th volume of his *Complete Works*. Miki was another Iwanami-sponsored academic. One article is provocatively entitled "The Defeat of American Thought and Culture" (「アメリカ思想文化の敗北」). In this scanty three-page article, Miki denied the influence of American culture other than on the surface; Americanism had never really penetrated into the rural area and the deepest layer of the Filipino farmer. American culture was, to this philosopher, sheer hedonistic consumer culture that had taken root in the urban intellectuals. It had only encouraged urbanism and materialistic tendency to enjoy civilization, but now the growth of sound farmer spirit under Japanese leadership meant the defeat of American culture in the Philippines. "After all," he continued, "American culture in the Philippines is nothing but clothes the Filipinos had taken up to wear temporarily. . . . The day is approaching when the Philippines, once called 'America in the Orient', completely recovers her self-identity as a member of the great Asian Mutual Prosperity Sphere" (vol. 17, 東京: 岩波書店, p. 796). The question would be to what extent Miki was sincere. But should he have been only buying time with such remarks, that would all the more harm his credibility.

Our present concern is, however, not Miki's view on American culture. But I believe that Miki represents more or less stereotypical views held by Japanese intellectuals, leftist or otherwise, when the war

against America was imminent and when it broke out. It is curious to observe the general lack of interest in American culture or gross miscalculation of the degree of spiritual force of America. Why did this happen in spite of the fact the United States was the first nation to break down Japan's isolation and give impetus for modernization? The U.S. is the nearest Western nation and more Japanese had experienced America than Europe by studies abroad. Soon after the initial stage of modernization, the United States had ceased to be Japan's political, military, intellectual and cultural model. Only a fraction of intellectuals could afford to go to Europe for studies abroad. But upon their return, they formed an elite leadership group. Or, as in Watsuji's case, they were sent to join later such a select few.

Especially in the field of philosophy in which Watsuji had specialized, the impact of German philosophy was the strongest. And we must realize that any philosophical system is simply no discourse of logical reasoning but that it presupposes a lot of cultural consciousness. American studies in pre-World War II had been virtually nonexistent. Nitobe Inazo (新渡戸稲造, 1862-1933) had already in 1916 pointed out the urgency of quick development of American studies (originally appeared as 「実業之日本」, April 1, in 亀井俊介編『日本人のアメリカ論』, 東京: 研究社, 1977, pp. 170-75). In the words of the late Dr. Takagi Yasaku (高木八尺, 1889-1984), the only renowned pre-war specialist in American studies, there existed a "general tendency to underestimate American academic achievements in comparison to European." Takagi continues to say that pre-war Japanese scholars themselves failed "to grasp the true meaning of American civilization" (*Collected Works*, vol. 5, 東京大学出版会, 1971, p. 251).

Japanese students of Watsuji's works even today pay almost no attention to "American National Character." Robert Bellah discussed it within the framework of a lengthy discussion of all Watsuji's works ("Japan's Cultural Identity: Some Reflections on the Work of Watsuji Tetsuro," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24, 1965, pp. 573-94). Watsuji definitely saw American culture through European eyes, and that was the view of most pre-war Japanese scholars. American culture was then an inferior branch of European culture; American national character was a dwarf European character; it was to manifest only the superficial,

end results of European culture. Here we may recall that culture is sharply distinguished from civilization in the German language. In other words, Watsuji's philosophy of culture reflected even unconsciously the adoration of humanist culture cultivated by generations of German philosophers regardless of their respective positions. But another tendency existed in the European view of America. This was the myth of America where one can find pure nature; a sort of cultural primitivism that Europeans had toward the American continent (Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: the History of a Polemic*, 1750-1900, revised and enlarged edition tr. Jeremy Moyle, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973; Fredi Chiappelli, et al. ed., *First Images of America: the Impact of the New World on the Old*, 2 vols., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). Of course, the concept of pure nature in Western culture is a highly ambivalent one. But it is natural that as civilization advances man aspires to live completely in unspoiled nature. This aspect of nature was romanticized in the presentation of the America as the New World, a new Europe that stood in contrast to the old, degenerate one. It was hoped America would bear a new mankind and a new ideal society. The basis for such an ideology lay clearly in the biblical eschatological expectation of the kingdom of God that is to come at the end of the world. But the new mankind is possible only when it builds new community, and the new community is to be built on/out of pure nature. Man and nature, nature and civilization are entangled in the ambivalence of dependence and exploitation, freedom and necessity.

George Berkeley wrote a poem on the Western migration of learning from Europe to America and on the celebrated theme of the renaissance of learning—only this time in America (Frank Kermode, *The Classic*, London: Faber, 1975, p. 87). William Blake is known to have had a great hope on the eve of the American Revolution for a new Albion in New England, an ideal England resurrected in the New World. When the Puritans came to America, they came with the same idea but with more eschatological religious fervor for the restoration of true England. Their ideological break from the old religious establishment was complete, but it must be remembered that cultural intellectual ties with old England were still alive. In order to build New England, with genuine

religion and community, they had to exploit "pure nature" and for such a purpose another ideology was necessary. Certainly the Puritans had as a powerful ideological weapon the doctrine of divine election. Another aspect of what nature meant in the intellectual history of the West has an essential connection with this doctrine, for the two are of the same origin. In this view nature is fallen nature, with all its animosity toward Christian humanity. In this Augustinian-Calvinist notion, nature is an enemy to mankind, especially baptized, elected humanity. It will tempt man, circumvent his way, and fight against the baptized and elected. The image of nature taken in this aspect is wilderness, and its denizens are the devil's agents, perverted human beings. The way for the elect is to overcome them. We tend to separate mankind from nature, but the original idea of nature includes both man and the world outside man: both are taken as one thing. Nature was fallen from purity together with man's fall. Restored nature is possible by Christ's Redemption. From the time of discovery, the New World had been propagandized as preserving the purity of the Garden of Eden left outside the traditional Christian scheme.

The New World had also been idealized as nature restored to the Garden of Eden in the last day of the world as foretold in the Isian and Johannine apocalyptic vision. It might have been that when the Puritans immigrated to the North American continent, they had far back in their minds this bright vision of nature in the New World. But the idea of creating a true England away from religiously corrupt, morally hopelessly British society, necessitated them to find support in the doctrine of *their* election and therefore God-given mission, and the potentially pessimistic view of nature as the fallen one. When the conviction of the realization of true England became less strong, the skeptic Hawthorne described fatalistically in *The House of the Seven Gables* an irreversible dwarfing, midgeting process of humans and animals brought from Europe through the passing of time and generations. Hawthorne reflected one side of the ambivalent European vision of America with his historical experience. However, the earlier generations of Puritan immigrants set themselves against nature and the original inhabitants of the New World in orders to form new Christianity and true mankind, to turn wilderness into the ideal garden and



to realize that Johannine, apocalyptic vision of the unity of city and garden (references are numerous, but I base my argument especially on two works: Peter Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness: the Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier, 1629-1700*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1969; Bernard Rosenthal, *City of Nature: Journey to Nature in the American Romanticism*, Cranbury: University of Delaware Press, 1980; other references are Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: the American West as Symbol and Myth*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950; Perry Miller, *Errand into Wilderness*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956; Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American Literature and the American West*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

Takagi Yasaka, pioneer specialist in American studies, too pointed out an experimental tendency in American national character that can be traced to the Puritan origin,—together with its tendency to emphasize the contract (『米国政治史の研究』, 東京: 岩波, 1960, p. 3). The contract can be seen in religious biblical terms, through which a totally new relationship is formed between God and the community, and a new people is formed to go into the wilderness. Therefore, a new beginning is formed for experimentation. Watsuji, too, takes up contract and experiment as significant elements in American national character. He recounts the significance of the Puritan immigration to the New World. But the difference is that Watsuji tends to take them in a more secular sense corresponding with the scientific habit of mind, for he sets the beginning of American national character in the seventeenth century against the background of emerging natural science represented by Bacon's philosophical justification of scientific experiment and Hobbes' political idea of statehood based on the contract. It may certainly be pointed out that by taking up the Baconian and the Hobbesian elements as fundamental in American national character, Watsuji posits the ambivalent notion of nature from which the two philosophers evolve their theories in two different fields.

## II

Watsuji sees in Hobbes' political theory the transference of the Baconian idea of experiment from natural science to political science.

Both Bacon and Hobbes had some common starting-point in ambivalent nature. Bacon saw before him the opening of the immense world of knowledge for mankind through experiment. He compared it to that of the geographical world through discovery and commerce (Franklin L. Baumer, *Modern European Thought: Continuity and Change, 1600-1950*, New York: Macmillan, 1977, p. 47). Nature would be made into a new nature through experiment and discovery. Implied in this view was the idea of mankind given power and glory through new knowledge. Yet Baconian nature is something to be conquered and by conquering to be known and transferred to the world of knowledge. Knowledge of nature immortalizes mankind; by turning nature into knowledge mankind experiences its own apotheosis. Hobbes' starting-point lies in the primitive state in which man and nature were not separated. Hypothetically he traces transition from this state to the first stage of the separation through the emerging consciousness of the rights of property. Underneath Hobbes' theory we may see the doctrine of the fall and idea of fallen nature, which was in his case concentrated on *human* nature. So a contract, a kind of horizontal, worldly covenant, was necessary to guarantee safety instead of the condition of *bellum omnium contra omnibus*, that is, the state of nature, and that of sin. And so was born Leviathan, the state above the state of nature as "Mortal God." The state, which is the body politic, was for Hobbes "an artificial man," a rational construct, made neither by God nor history but by man—a mathematical body, an automaton or engine, moving itself by means of springs, strings and wheels.

Hobbes did not speak of experiment in the field of political theory. The core of his political theory is contract. But through Bacon and Hobbes the radically new consciousness came into being. We may thematicize it as the consciousness of modernity, and with it that of man's power and transcendence over nature. With his power mankind can almost literally create new things, new situations and new conditions. Experiment is symbolic of this power of creativity. It is not simply to discover laws in nature, but to remake it. So we may see a fusion of the apocalyptic vision and the idea of creation in Bacon's philosophy for experimental science. "Mortal God" is a paradoxical term, but the Mortal God is not only the body politic but man himself,

or rather the experimenting man. The purity of nature is now reduced to mathematical abstraction. Out of such nature mankind is to build the kingdom of man; the world of knowledge is not simply to remain a metaphor taken over from geographical discovery of the New World, but the empire of knowledge is to be actualized all over the geographical world as the real empire. If we take the seventeenth century as a historical juncture and look at the advance of several empire builders, the most successful of which were England and its successor America, the position of American Puritanism—recognized by Watsuji and, for that matter, by Takagi in a more appreciative way as the starting-point of American national character—must be looked at as the point where modern religious ideas join the stream of modern intellectual history behind the growth of natural experimental science and secular political theories.

Watsuji simply sets the framework for the birth of the American nation in seventeenth-century England with its utilitarian world-view with which he comprehends the Puritan spirit, Baconian experimentalism, and Hobbesian statecraft ideology. It was far from his understanding to be able to see even dimly the complex net of relations Puritanism had with these two tendencies. In a larger measure it was his limitation not to be able to perceive the animosities and close collusions between religious ideas and secular orientation or to be able to understand how what we may call millenarian apocalypticism generates almost all secular aspirations and movements in the history of the West. Takagi, on the other hand, being a practicing Protestant intellectual, seems to have seen in nineteenth-century American progressivism a secularized version of apocalyptic motivation in Puritanism (『米国政治史の研究』, p. 126). We are much more conscious of natural science's religious background, its quasi-messianic motivation with its secular doctrine of salvation and, at least in its initial stage, with all the metaphors and imagery borrowed from the Bible and theology. Science claimed to bring happiness to mankind, it proclaimed the gospel of universal happiness. But the latter nineteenth century cast serious doubt on such a messianic hope. With mounting social tensions the leading intellectuals started to realize that natural science cannot save mankind; it creates division in society, and alien-

ates man from his fellow men, from nature and from himself.

Nineteenth-century humanism, with all its limitations and shallowness, tried to bring to society cultural harmony and spiritual integration. In simplified terms, its message was: culture saves all; it is noble sentiment that counts. It also envisioned humans in friendship and amity with nature: it was a post-romantic phenomenon and reaction against excesses brought about by industrialism. German Idealist philosophers tried to bring harmony between cultured intellectuals and states, between them and nature, sublimating every conflict into the realm of the Spirit. Hegel, for instance, created a sweeping vision of total reality with ongoing dynamism from the past to a future which will see the eschatological consummation in the absorption of all that has been in the Spirit. From the point of view of achieving perfection, be it in the realm of the Spirit, of knowledge, or of nature, the Idealists all highly valued the category of future. In Hegel's enormous span of historic vision, the contrast between the Old World and the New World was revived; for him, "America is... the land of future. It is a land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical lumberroom of old Europe." But it was when Hegel was talking about the future possibilities of America because of infinite natural resources and untouched nature that he uttered such prophetic words on the coming golden age.

However, the kind of romantic gloom regarding old Europe, though repeated thousands of times, is rather important, particularly when we connect it with another current idea: organicism. Hegel's philosophy of history is simply a phenotype of this mode of thinking, and gives a narrative of the original ideal state, the fall and the journey back to the beginning by reaching the end. The original state is not lost in the process, but grows, unseen in the world of surface phenomena and consciousness. Hence it is important for philosophers to search for the original ideal of man, society and race. The surface world is that of modern mechanical, material civilization; culture is the heritage of noble, though unspecifiable in quantitative measurement, life and spirit. Organicism contains within itself "the tradition of return," and that is not always contradictory to a futuristic vision. It must be remembered that all such philosophies were collateral phenomena with a lot of mythological, folkloristic efforts to unearth the original

national and racial identities.

Hegel writes in the same passage already quoted:

It is for America to abandon the ground on which hitherto the History of the World has developed. What has taken place in the New World up to the present time is only an echo of the old world. (William H. Goetzmann, ed., *The American Hegelians: An Intellectual Episode in the History of Western America*, New York : Knopf, 1973, p.20)

Expectation for the future and search for the traditional values are not contradictory. They represent dissatisfaction with the present stage of civilization that has dissociated humanity from nature and itself. Dissatisfaction with old Europe, of course, generated hope for the New World, but ambivalence of the myth of abundant nature showed itself in another aspect. The utilization of its resources by conquering and exploiting nature was made possible by industrialism on a scale on American soil far more gigantic than in the Old World. In a sense it was the old Europe magnified with all its ills and corruptions, and expanded on an unimaginable scale. On the other hand, European thinkers and writers saw a stark imbalance between American industrial success and the pejoration of the human spirit. The myth of America as an industrial giant but an intellectual dwarf was thus born.

It was not with a sense of depreciation alone that America was regarded by European thinkers and writers, but American civilization, with its tendency to spread and influence globally, was considered to be a threat to culture. The poverty of American intellectual life has been a constant topic among European thinkers and writers, but Americans themselves have dealt with the topic under different circumstances and frameworks in conjunction with different problematics. We may think of the recent example of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York : Simon and Schuster, 1987).

Watsuji spent two years in Germany on government-sponsored studies abroad. But he never set foot on the North American Continent. Japanese intellectual travelers to America had a plurality of views on American culture; first of all, whether America had a culture was a

problem to them. To many of them, the “Americanization” of the world seemed the inevitable future. Most of them did not welcome such a future; it would create a world mono-culture, destroying the existing regional uniqueness and uprooting people from their organic *life-worlds*. But this had happened already within their own country, with urban culture imposing itself on local cultures. Reflection on this worldwide tendency led them to the awareness of what had been going on in their own country.

Cultural nationalism must be distinguished from political nationalism, which is of different origins. But it sometimes creates an atmosphere which political nationalism can exploit. That was the situation in Japan between the two world wars. The theme of the need to base one’s identity in tradition was elevated to the problem-complex of the merits of the respective cultural values of the East and the West. Upon his return from studies abroad, Watsuji’s attention was more and more centered on the task of discovering the Japanese spirit and national identity, but he was more an international nationalist than a simple nationalist. We must recall that against the background of education he had received and the philosophical currents he had assimilated. He tried to apply the methods inculcated in the tradition of return; his highest estimate was always laid upon the oldest stratum of any tradition, which was to be appreciated not for the sake of age alone but for the purpose of bringing its permanent value to light by formulating and systematizing. We might better recall too his life-long concern with the problem of the individual in tension with society. His philosophical orientation was directed from the beginning toward the clarification of the significance of the individual and that of the role and constitution of spiritual as well as physical climate.

In 1930, Ikesaki Tadataka characterized Americanism as “the Gospel of the machine” (池崎忠孝, 『世界を脅威するアメリカニズム』, 天人社: quoted in 『日本人のアメリカ論』, p. 190). It is important for us to situate Watsuji’s view on American culture, its origins and characteristics in the overall agenda of climatological pursuit that was in reality a quest to discover his own genuine self (『風土』 in vol.8: *A Climate: A Philosophical Study*, tr. Geoffrey Bounas, Tokyo: Printing Office of Japanese Government, 1962). In the earliest part of his career as a

philosopher Watsuji published two pioneer works on respected philosophers, *Studies on Nietzsche*, 1913, and *Søren Kierkegaard*, 1915. It must be said that, at this earliest stage as a professional philosopher, he learned personalism from both of them. Nietzsche prophesied the end of the modern Western world before Spengler. He rejected the world-view based on the mechanical interpretation of nature. Watsuji summarizes Nietzsche's thoughts on nature:

Physics cannot reveal the real movement of the world. One may think that by discovering many laws of nature, natural science has facilitated the conquest of nature. But those laws were not discovered from within nature. They were human fabrications. (*A Climate*, vol. 1, p.107)

Beyond that interpreted by man, there exists deeper reality. It is a kind of the sphere of real being. It is superexperiential, it has to be directly lived. (*A Climate*, vol. 1, p.109)

Watsuji's personalism was born out of his own problem of discovering what he was. And this he took up not as a metaphysical problem but as a problem of the ego's evolution in involvement with climate, culture, and society, e. g. other men and women. He sought the answer to his question, *What am I ?* through his existence among other men and women. The merit of a particular culture or age is measured by the degree it can be realized. It is interesting that he always referred to Greek culture as the norm when he took up the subject of European culture.

That Watsuji put greater emphasis on spiritual, aesthetic, and contemplative values is widely known. His ethics is that of social relations, but it is that of human relations based on the scale of aesthetic values implicitly regulating human social conducts. His philosophy of life is the absorption of aesthetic values through conduct. After pointing out Kierkegaard's meaning when he tried to answer the question of how to live, Watsuji concludes his book on Kierkegaard by describing his own life in terms of the realization of three attitudes:

“Steps” reflects his idea of progress. The ladder becomes higher as you climb the steps. The question of how we are to live can now be answered. The meaning of life lies in efforts to climb these steps. It is thoroughly self-objective, but at the same time the absolute object. One has to start from egoistic fragmentary sensuous love and climb toward the religious love of God and mankind. And he has to practice it not only on the path of thinking but on the difficult path of a person filled with self-tension, suffering and leaps. That Kierkegaard has taught us in the manner of dialectics that does not know any harmonizing. (*A Climate*, vol. 1, p.665).

We may notice in Watsuji's personalism a strong animosity against civilization taking the path of mechanization, superficiality and the production of a mass mentality; it produced isolation of the self from others, fragmentation and division. For Watsuji, who set spiritual values above utilitarian ones, and sought in higher culture and humane ethics the ultimate answer to the problem of life, the Anglo-American utilitarian world-view was not acceptable. In “American National Character,” he praises the American frontier spirit, but it is the combination of the Baconian and Hobbesian characteristics. Both presuppose in their outlooks exploitable, untouched virgin nature in abundance; in the Baconian case nature is a resource to build civilization, and in the Hobbesian case the situation surrounding nature is the occupation of the land through contracts, as natural law commands. In the former case experiment requires inventiveness, while in the latter it turns into calculation and cunningness. The American political experiment started with concluding contracts with the Indians and excluding them from that experiment. Watsuji sees in Benjamin Franklin the combination of the two elements. The Hobbesian is reflected in his rather callous opinion on the fate of the American Indians, and the Baconian in the fact that this diplomat statesman was a mechanic and inventor. To answer the demand of the time he exaggerated the rule of the machine instead of the humane, ethical values in American culture.



### III

Work in the American frontier is characterized by Watsuji as having been a struggle against nature and the indigenous. The frontier was the Hobbesian natural state. But although Watsuji never seems to have been aware of it, the essential difference was that the Indian natives were the only men in such a natural state, and the Western marauders were civilized men organized by contracts, whether in the form of religious covenants or commercial charters. The late comers to the American continent simply exploited, should we follow Watsuji's scheme, Baconian nature and the Hobbesian natural state of *bellum omnium contra omnibus*.

The combination of Baconian and Hobbesian characteristics has created a new type of man in America with the vigor typical of youth on the one hand and the combative characteristic which usually comes with maturity. Against the background of his theory of climate as the major determining factor for national character, Watsuji intones that the phlegmatic, patient, rather heavy original Anglo-Saxon character went through a course of transformation and became something which is superficial, devil-may-care and likes above all speed. This, he says, can be seen in the change in the idea of happiness. The American concept of happiness is intense excitement and the exhaustion of energy, and therefore the joy of action and tension. So Watsuji characterizes life in America as "a series of explosions." Experiment has become gambling. The two characteristics necessary for the cultivation of the New World now transform the American character. It is to be remembered that he once put the American people in the same category with the Romans, who built an empire as a visionless, practical race in contrast with the aesthetic Greeks (『ポリスの人間の倫理学』, 1948, vol. 7, p.333).

The story of Roman imperialism and subsequent forms of imperialism based on the Roman model and on the crossing of pagan ideology with the various types of Christian eschatologism is interesting enough in itself. American imperialism has layers of ideologies, but its origin is the Puritan apocalyptic idea of the kingdom of God expanded into that of ideal empire. Watsuji sees in the idea of American democracy

the ambition of world conquest without moral idealism. It is the consequence of that first moment in American history, in which the combination of the two elements produced American national character in the physical climate of the New World or rather the state of nature, and in turn inevitably—to use an idea in his climatologico-psychological argument—became the mental framework for American behavior, national or private. Watsuji's anti-American sentiment—which was relatively subdued compared with most of the rabid parlance during the war — is a product of that particular occasion. But he associates the American spirit with “number” and “quantity.” He suggests the supremacy of moral spiritual power would vanquish ultimately the spirit of quantity. Watsuji endeavored, as we may recall, to distinguish the true Japanese spirit from that inculcated by shallow-minded militarists; he tried to clearly formulate it—and the effort continued even after the war in a democratic climate of opinions— but he never succeeded in arriving at the concrete formulation of moral spiritual energy coming from the bottom of the populace's heart.

One thing is certain; Watsuji was to continue his search for the Japanese national character and intensify his efforts in the face of the historical fact of Japan's defeat. In the debacle, he started to reconsider the significance of modern times. And at the conclusion one of such effort, “Japan's Isolation Period”, 1950(『鎖国』, vol. 15, p.548), Watsuji remarked: “For this single defect, the Japanese remained isolated from the movement of modern times in these two hundred fifty years after the appearance of Bacon and Descartes, while the English Puritans migrated to the New World, established a small colony, and started the Westward movement until finally they have reached the Pacific coast.” Japan, he further says, seems to have completely lost creative energy for the new age because of its national isolation. Now, he rather positively approved of the spread of American culture all over the world as something to bring unity to human culture. Every national culture has its weak points as well as strong points, so it must be supplemented by a worldwide culture. Recently Japanese historians have started revising the image of Japanese in the Edo period and see them as a more creative and optimistic people not so much closed up to the outside world.

Robert N. Bellah took up "American National Character" in 1965, but as a part of his lengthy discussion and evaluation of Watsuji's works as a typical Japanese intellectual's search for cultural identity vs. the West. Is it too far off the mark to say that despite Bellah's genuine appreciation of the problems Watsuji faced in terms of the contemporary political situation and in his pursuit of self-enlightenment, as well as the effect of the overall framework of skepticism for Japan's modernization drive by means of Westernization, the article, written just before the stormy, late sixties and seventies, seems to us permeated with confidence in American democratic values? After all, the problem of cultural self-identity is universal: it remains the fundamental, perhaps insoluble problem for the intellectuals of every nation. And the issue of self-identity appears always with the formation of an intellectual class, who face a wider cultural frame of reference. The problem arises: are we in or out that frame, and if out, why?

Questions appear endlessly one after another, eliciting more self-reflection. In Germany where Watsuji studied, the question from the nineteenth century has been the relation of Germany to Western Europe. German philosophical efforts up to Heidegger had this problem as their background. In America, it was the question Emerson and Henry Adams wrestled with. The American self from the Colonial period is a celebrated, flourishing topic in the studies of American literature (e.g., Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origin of the American Self*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). The problem has different nuances, different connections and emphases in different cultures and political situations, but it remains. The merit of the humanities is that one must read the past texts of such reflections time and again, and can discover insights and lessons from the texts that those in the past may not have been aware of or had rejected.

Watsuji, Yanagita and Tsuda belonged to the same generation of academic giants who sought to particularize the Japanese way of life as the alternative to the Western way of modernization. Yanagita has become the favorite of those who look for another road to modernization, since he emphasized more clearly than others the indigenous wisdom of the common people. But he had at his back thinkers like Edmund Burke and James Frazer. In Watsuji's case Western influence

is more obvious. Tsuda is probably the only exception in that being a student of Chinese history, he immersed himself in the classical world of China. In the manner of analyzing structurally Japanese culture, Ruth Fulton Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) is similar to Watsuji's structural explanation of the genesis of the American mind, and what she points out regarding Japanese national character seems not too far from Watsuji's systematization of the Japanese *ethos* (「倫理学」 in vols. 10 and 11 or "The Significance of Ethics as the Study of Man," translation of 「人間の学としての倫理学」, tr. David Dilworth, *Monumenta Nipponica*, 26, 1971, pp. 395-413), though she presents the characteristics in a negative perspective.

Watsuji's summary of the earliest part of American history at least can be deemed as a rather sound, accurate one; his value judgment is based on subsequent speculation on the two principles, the Baconian and the Hobbesian. It is well known that our three scholars (Watsuji, Tsuda, Yanagita; Watsuji's criticism appeared together with Yanagita's in 『民族学研究』, 14, 1950; Tsuda's in 『展望』, 東京: 筑摩書房, May, 1951) reacted negatively when they read *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. We have the evidence of Watsuji's violent reaction; he cast doubt on the scientific value of Benedict's cultural anthropology, whereas Tsuda, for instance, rather mildly pointed out the limitations of the book deriving from the difficulties in gathering material because of the war situation. We may learn a lesson when we read and critically assess Watsuji's "American National Character" at this juncture of history in which the Japanese are becoming more conscious of their national power, while with the dwindling of theirs, the American public is becoming more jealous of Japan's growing global role.