

Philosophy Live : A Perspective from Japan

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CHAPTER 10

DISCRIMINATION AND EQUALITY

In the beginning, woman was truly the sun. An authentic person.

Now she is the moon, a wan and sickly moon, dependent on another, reflecting another's brilliance.¹⁰⁴

—Hiratsuka Raichō

The greatest historical event in the last several decades was probably the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union and the resulting collapse of the communist bloc. The Soviet Union had been founded in 1922, and the birth of the first socialist state based on Marxism had filled the world with dread. It was not a matter of the Soviet Union alone. The shift from capitalism to socialism through revolution was declared historically inevitable, and students and intellectuals burning with zeal throughout the world gathered under the banner of Marxism led by communist party leaders. The labor movement of workers suffering from exploitation went beyond calling for improvement of labor conditions and instead aimed at revolution. “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism,” said the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, and that specter frightened rulers not just in Europe but throughout the world, including Japan. The fear can be said to have accelerated fascism.

Caricature of “Justice”

After World War II, nationalist movements led to the founding of socialist regimes in various parts of the world, including Eastern Europe, China, and North Korea. They entered into open confrontation with the U.S.-led capitalist camp, ushering in the Cold War. The socialist countries had set their aspirations, despite the problems they faced in reality, on creating the ideal of the equal and non-discriminatory society.

The potential strength of Marxism lay in its claim, as advocated by “scientific socialism,” that the inevitability of socialism would be scientifically “proven.” Marx and Engels, both converts to nineteenth-century scientism, criticized conceptual metaphysics,

¹⁰⁴ Hiratsuka 1911, an article written for the inaugural issue of the journal *Seitō*; for English, see Heisig et al. 2011, pp. 1, 148.

declaring that the material world was the only real world and that science would elucidate its laws. As expressed in their theory of dialectical materialism, they advocated a Hegelian-influenced dialectic approach and believed the material world moved not simply mechanically but followed more dynamic dialectical laws.

Following the tenets of the materialistic view of history, or historical materialism, Marx and Engels thought that since human history underwent an inevitable process of development, like that of the natural sciences, it could be explained in strictly scientific terms. Economic principles underlay that historical process. Contradictions between the forces of production and the relations of production were the prime movers of historical development. Marxists regarded as historically inevitable the process of development in the history of humanity from the slave society of ancient times to medieval feudalism, to modern capitalism, and finally to a socialist society in which all people would be equal.

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the 1989–1991 period signaled the collapse of the Marxist paradigm. Of course, the authorized “Marxism” of the communist bloc had deviated from the thought of Marx himself and had become ossified, so the ideas of thinker Marx himself cannot be dismissed as meaningless. However, once his thought had ceased to function politically and economically as Marxist ideology, it no longer wielded the power of the “specter” that had once frightened the world.

The collapse of the communist regimes was a major blow to Marxists but also to the whole progressive movement that had believed in the advancement of society and in a hopeful future for humankind. The rapid progress in science had led to phenomenal increases in production capacity, aggravating all the more the contradictions felt in society. Still, the hope had remained that, as science and society progressed, those contradictions would eventually disappear and a free and equal society would be attained. The Marxist vision had convinced people that they could create a roadmap toward that goal. The ideal society to be aspired to would eliminate discrimination and achieve equality for all.

Following the breakdown of the communist bloc, however, such optimism quickly dispersed. The politico-economic systems of the communist regimes had been part of a grand experiment toward creating a more ideal, nondiscriminatory society to replace the capitalist system. Once the experiment ended in failure, it was easy to criticize, but the question was, what other system of thought could inspire an experiment on a similar scale? The answer was probably “none.”

Only the most naive, however, would ascribe to the “end of history” theory that concluded that capitalism, because of its triumph over communism, is the best system humankind will ever achieve. The end of the Cold War, far from ushering in peace, on the contrary led to the intensification of conflicts in various parts of the world. With the balance of power lost, the “imperialist” United States emerged as the only superpower, and “justice” became nothing but a caricature of state egoism. With idealism now dead,

responses to problems in all kinds of spheres in the world tended to be spur-of-the-moment and lack any sense of vision or ideals. All grand narratives having evaporated, no alternative outlook has been found to take its place.

Let us consider the case of Japan. Japanese postwar policy was not classical capitalism based on the *laissez-faire* principle of the market but started instead by aiming at economic equalization through such measures as the dissolution of *zaibatsu* (financial cliques) and the emancipation of farmland. It removed institutionalized forms of discrimination by abolishing the peerage system and the patriarchal family system, as well as by introducing female suffrage, and so forth. The Constitution of Japan that came into effect in 1947 states that “All of the people are equal under the law” (Article 14) and guarantees them “the right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living” (Article 25). Japan thereby sought to improve its public welfare institutions toward a cradle-to-grave social security net. This followed a Keynesian-type of modified capitalism. The notion of a middle-class nation—“the 100 million middle class” (*ichioku sōchūryū*)—may have been a sham, but Japanese placed their trust in the dream of finding happiness in more-or-less equality through the attempt to eliminate the extreme rich and the extreme poor.

After the dynamic period of rapid economic growth beginning in the 1960s and the hubris of the asset-inflated bubble economy, the bubble burst and prolonged recession set in. Progressive intellectuals, whether of leftist or liberal leanings, had led society in academia and journalism since the end of the war. When their influence began to wane, society lost sight of ideals that could guide and inspire it. Cloaked in the guise of neo-liberalism and advocacy of “self-responsibility,” the law of the jungle returned, rationalizing neglect of the weak and a return of a society of glaring disparities. What system of ideas is there that could serve as alternative to this state of affairs? The outlook is far from certain.

Sources of Bias

Religions have played an important role in fostering the idea that all people are equal. Christianity teaches that all are equal under God, and Buddhism says that every individual is endowed with the buddha nature. Teachings like these, however, do not necessarily produce equality in reality. The modern idea of equality emerged, rather, out of opposition to the privileged position of the Catholic clergy and other aspects of established class systems. The idea of equality was extolled in the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789) issued at the time of the French Revolution. In the twentieth century, the idea ultimately bore full fruit in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted at the United Nations in 1948. Article 1 of the Declaration provides: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

One of the sources of the modern idea of equality is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755). Rousseau posits human's primitive, natural state as contrasted with their state in society. His conclusion is: “we shall easily conceive how much the difference between man and man in the state of nature must be less than in the state of society, and how much every inequality of institution must increase the natural inequalities of the human species.”¹⁰⁵

In the natural state Rousseau described, the human creature's life is not social. It is the state in which he is “wandering about in the forests, without industry, without speech, without any fixed residence, an equal stranger to war and every social connection, without standing in any shape in need of his fellows.” A man and a woman may have sexual intercourse and produce offspring, but that is about all the relationship they have. They don't form a family. In other words, Rousseau's humans in their natural state are isolated individuals without any social nature. Even when one individual happens to relate to another, it is no more than a temporary, accidental encounter.

Rousseau does not consider it inevitable that isolated individuals should depart from their natural state and enter into social life. Rousseau states, “The first man, who, after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, ‘This is mine,’ and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.” What distinguishes the human's natural state from their social state is the claim to private property. In his view, the development of society out of natural state derives from an almost nonsensical, accidental, spur-of-the-moment kind of idea. Why are people attached to things they consider their own? The inevitability of that impulse cannot be explained. For some unknown reason, people are attached to whatever they consider their own, and that attachment complicates human relations.

As long as a human being is isolated, he or she has no language, no self-consciousness, and is completely part of nature. Encounter with another is simply accidental, and when the two part they return to peaceful isolation. The isolated natural state might not seem very “peaceful,” but we can consider it as a hypothetical, not realistic, state. But, once human beings become conscious of coexistence with others they become attached to what they possess, inequalities arise, and conflicts erupt. In other words, inequality and conflict are the inexorable result of coexistence with others. If man is assumed to live with others in the first place, then inequality and disparity are inevitable from the outset.

Rousseau was not necessarily critical of early society on a small scale. He regarded the intermediate stage of society between its natural condition and its complexity when it takes the form of a state as the developmental period of humankind—“the happiest

105 This and following quotes are from Rousseau 2004.

and most durable epoch.”¹⁰⁶ But, eventually, with the inception of agriculture and metallurgy, the peace came to an end and “slavery and misery” began. What happened was that “the origin of society and of the laws, which increased the fetters of the weak, and the strength of the rich irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, fixed forever the laws of property and inequality . . . [and] subjected the rest of mankind to perpetual labour, servitude, and misery.”¹⁰⁷

Against on-going discrimination and despotism, Rousseau, in his later work, *The Social Contract* (1762), sought to rebuild a community based on popular sovereignty. This idea had a great impact on the French Revolution as well as on Marx and other thinkers. The ideas therein were also a chief motivating force of the Japanese popular rights movement in the 1870s–1880s. Rather than going into the developments it set in motion, I would like to confirm here that where people have relations with one another and live in communities, problems of inequality and discrimination will inevitably arise, and coping with them becomes a major issue. One might think that progress in civilization would cultivate reason and foster rational human relations, but things do not necessarily work that way; its advance more often introduces irrationality and violence into human relations. In the twentieth century German philosophers Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer addressed the gravity of this problem.

If we follow the views presented so far in this book, we might say that relations with the Other cannot always be contained within the scope of rational, ethical rules of relations with others but may fall outside of them, into the always irrational, unpredictable relations with the Other. In order to understand the dynamism of those relations with the Other it is necessary to look at the fluid nature of the self, or the self’s dissolution into (identification with) and alienation from the Other.

Gender Bias and Conflict

The critique of discrimination and argument for equality, as made first by Rousseau and carried on by Marx, scrutinized the ruler-ruled relationship with a focus on production and labor. The issues of discrimination or bias, which involve many complicated factors, however, cannot be understood from that perspective alone. The weak are targets of discrimination, including children, the ill or injured, people with disabilities, and the aged. Some of the old prejudices against outcast groups remain alive in hidden or covert ways. Discrimination on the basis of gender is probably the largest in scale and is very difficult to solve. Gender bias also encompasses that against homosexuals, transgender people, and so forth. Here let me discuss the now-classical discrimination against women.

106 Rousseau 2004.

107 Rousseau 2004.

Gender relations involve important matters of the succession of generations through childbirth and childrearing. Gender discrimination, therefore, is on a different level from discrimination based on the relations of production. In the sense of the production of the next generation and the continuation of the species, gender relations have far greater significance than the production of goods. Sexual intercourse and the birth of children not only hold the promise of prosperity for one's posterity but also symbolize the bounty of the harvest, as often found in traditional folk events. Indeed, the greater the number of descendants the larger the labor force that can be used to increase the power of production.

As far as the creation of descendants is concerned, a division of labor naturally occurred between men and women and some aspects of their roles are not interchangeable. Especially, giving birth to a child is a major role that only women can perform. The physical burden entailed in pregnancy and birth is tremendous, and by bearing such an important burden, women might be thought to have superiority over men, but in reality, they are subordinate to men. This is similar to the case of producers and non-producers, in which the class that does not engage in production is positioned over the class that labors for production (e.g., slaves). Those of the class not engaging in production have access to free time removed from the fetters of production, and this allows them to establish superior-class status and the power to rule, as well as to explore new aspects of culture. When men monopolize advanced culture, women tend to be pushed to an inferior position. Even in the case of Rousseau or the leaders of the French Revolution, both advocating equality for "all people," equality only applied to men, and it was taken for granted that women would be bound to the home and were inferior to men.

The realms of religion and philosophy, too, are premised on the superiority of men. Virtually all prominent philosophers were and are men. This is not because women's abilities in this area are inferior but because men monopolized the public sphere, forcibly confining women's sphere of life to the private dimension, and despising and hiding their contributions to civilization. In this way the problem is multi-layered. In terms of reproductive systems men and women are different by birth and have different roles to play from the outset, and later their social differences and roles became rigidified creating discriminatory patterns.

Male and female relations are not fixed or always premised on the superior-subordinate relationship. For instance, the concept of yin and yang of Chinese tradition recognizes the dichotomy of the male and female principles. In Buddhism there is the Mandala of the Two Realms—the Diamond Realm and the Womb Realm, the former symbolizing men and the latter women. But these teachings do not mean that the two are therefore equal. Indeed, contrary to the teachings, discrimination against women has been a deep-seated part of Chinese culture.

Another example is the flourishing of the *kana* literature of court women during Japan's Heian period (794–1192). The writings of Heian women not only marked a

distinct epoch in the history of Japanese literature but also became central models and part of the canon of Japanese literature and culture as a whole. *Tosa nikki* (Tosa Diary), a 935 work that laid the foundation of the Heian women's literature, begins with these words: "Otoko mo sunaru niki to iu mono o, onna mo shite mimu tote, surunari" (Men write diaries, I am told, so let us see if a woman can do the same"). In fact, the diary was written by a man—well-known *waka* poet and courtier Ki no Tsurayuki—in the style of a woman imitating what men do. This illustrates a case of breaking away from gender stereotypes.

Looked at this way, relations between genders cannot necessarily be seen as perpetually fixed. But it is true that the basic structure in which men work in the public space of society with women giving support from behind the scenes was maintained in Japan, as elsewhere. Especially, in modern Japan the structure was further strengthened when the patriarchal system was incorporated into the institutional framework, and women were forced to follow the "good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*) model.

Women's struggle for equality continued amid these conditions. Publication of the first feminist magazine in Japan, *Seitō* (Bluestocking; 1911–1916), despite being banned more than once and serving as the target of various scandals, was a lodestone for women who aspired to be "new women." In its inaugural issue, Hiratsuka Raichō (1886–1971), one of the core members of the magazine, wrote an article proudly titled, "Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta" (In the Beginning Woman was the Sun). Yosano Akiko, another pioneering feminist, contributed a poem in the same issue that starts with "Yama no ugoku hi kitaru" (The day is coming when the mountain will move). The article and the poem vividly conveyed the ideals and aspirations of women of the time.

The famous article by Hiratsuka is not that easy to understand, however. She writes, for example, "Discrimination between men and women belongs to the self that is, in terms of spiritual focus, of the middle or lower stratum. It belongs to a provisional self that is destined to die, to perish. For the self of a high level, the undying, unperishing True Self, no such discrimination could possibly exist."¹⁰⁸ She goes on, "I did not know that there had once been women in this world, nor did I know that there had been men."¹⁰⁹ Reading such passages, we may feel thrown into a metaphysical maze and feel that such argument is too roundabout for a treatise on women's liberation, which has a very straightforward agenda.

*Hiratsuka calls for recognition
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beings that goes beyond
phenomenal gender biases.*

108 Hiratsuka 1987, p. 11.

109 Hiratsuka 1987.

Hiratsuka's piece reflects a combination of the Theosophist mysticism that was popular in those days and that she herself admired, as well as ideas from Zen Buddhism, Nietzsche, and other philosophies that influenced her. It was distinct from the arguments for women's liberation that fell within the boundaries of social thought. The Hiratsuka article was attractive for the very reason that it was more than a formalistic discourse on liberation. She declares that there should be recognition of the authentic nature of human beings that goes beyond phenomenal gender biases. But in reality, because of such gender biases, she says, women's potential for displaying their original, true human nature is thwarted. Women, like men, should be able to demonstrate their inherent selves, overcoming the constraints of gender.

That does not mean that women should imitate men. Hiratsuka writes, "I cannot bear seeing women thoughtlessly envying men and, in imitation of them, walking a little behind on the same path."¹¹⁰ Women have their own path, which they should walk. Hiratsuka, however, does not specify what that path is. In the article she was not clearly conscious of that path.

Hiratsuka's thought deepened as she lived with a lover five years younger than herself and experienced childbirth and childrearing. She was confronted for the first time with "the question of how to liberate women not only as human beings with individuality but also as females,"¹¹¹ as she writes in an article titled "Kojin' to shite no seikatsu to 'sei' to shite no seikatsu to no aida no sōtō" (Struggle Between the Life of an "Individual" and the "Gendered" Life).¹¹² As a mother/partner she discovered "the life of a woman who builds a household for living a life of love, who gives birth to and brings up children."¹¹³ She considered that life to be the "calling of women" and set out to explore how to accomplish it.

But, might such a life not lead women back to the baby-making gender and force them back into the home as "good wife, wise mother"? Indeed, in response to a female feminist who argued, "Women should be relieved of household duties and gain economic independence as [responsible] members of society," Hiratsuka said she sympathized with Swedish philosopher Ellen Key, and called for "discovery in being a mother of the genuine life of a most noble, beautiful, and integrated woman."¹¹⁴ This was the source of what was to be the maternity protection debate between Hiratsuka and prominent poet Yosano Akiko. While Hiratsuka called for state protection of women during the entire period of pregnancy, childbirth, and early childrearing, Yosano criticized her and insisted

110 Hiratsuka 1987, pp. 20–21.

111 Hiratsuka 1987, p. 63.

112 *Seitō* 5:8 (1915).

113 Hiratsuka 1987, p. 65.

114 Hiratsuka 1987, p. 77.

on women's independence. With the feminist critic Yamakawa Kikue's socialist view of women liberation also involved, their debate burgeoned into a major controversy.

In this way, the gender issue involves not only male-female problems but also the broader issue of how women relate to newly born children through childbirth and child-rearing. This means that the issues that had been pushed into the private realm can no longer remain private. Gender issues must be understood not in the fixed terms of the simplistic male-female, parent-child, public-private dichotomies but in a more flexible manner and perspective.

Dissimilation and Assimilation Between the I and the Other

Why does discrimination arise? From where does the demand for equality arise? Let us examine these questions from the most basic perspective possible. They have to do with the question of relating to the Other. So, let us look once again at the issue of the Other.

The sphere defined by the rules of rational dialogue and mutual behavior is that of ethics, which is part of the *ken* (thisworldly) realm. It is a public sphere. By contrast, the sphere without such rules is that of the Other, or the *myō* (otherworldly) world. The person you are talking to right in front of you is there following the rules of the *ken* realm, as long as both of you are talking. But you cannot possibly understand everything of the other person. That is to say, only the surface of that person appears in the *ken* realm, and beneath that surface lie shadowy aspects of the other person that belong to the realm of *myō*.

Not only the other person, but you yourself cannot understand most of yourself, although all of your "self" at first seems to you to be transparent and easy to understand. Most of your "self" lies in the shadowy world of *myō*. In this way, the *myō* realm covers that part which lies behind what is visible; it also embraces the dead, the divine, as well as spirits and ghosts, which do not appear in the realm of *ken*.

Considering the way the self extends beyond the realm of *ken*, we can never say that the self is clearly outlined, as was once claimed in Western philosophy. The self is fluid; it is elusive and elastic like an amoeba. No scheme is possible in which the self stands out clearly from the Other. The border between the two is ambiguous; sometimes they merge and other times become separate.

Based on the reasoning presented above, let us further explore the relationship between the self and the Other and the issues of discrimination and equality. The self moves in two directions vis-à-vis the Other—one direction is an "assimilation" with the Other and the other direction a "dissimilation" from the Other by erecting a barrier against it. The "assimilation" is, of course, not physical bodies merging into one, but the shell of the self melting and merging into the Other. To give an example from the anecdote described in Chapter 7, when Hanshin Tigers fans are standing together in a professional baseball stadium cheering for their team, the distinction between "I" and "you" disappears. Because all Tigers' fans at the stadium are united in their fervent wish for the team's

victory, they do not have to be wary of one another as the Other. People who are perfect strangers stand shoulder-to-shoulder, singing the popular team song “Rokkō oroshi” (The Winds of Mount Rokkō). Thinking at that moment about what kind of relationship you have with the Other would be nonsensical. Removing the fences around you

Removing the fences around you and becoming one with the Other is a pleasant thing for the self.

and becoming one with the Other is a pleasant thing for the self, for there is no need to put yourself on guard against the Other. The self dissolves itself into the “totality” and into “we.”

The fervid enthusiasm of sports fans, fans of a band, and the like, may be exceptional, but people often feel a sense of security within a homogeneous

group. For instance, those who experience something unpleasant at school or in the workplace, might find relief to return home and hear the voices of family members (assuming, of course, that one gets along well with one’s family). That relief comes not just from being in the known and understandable world of *ken* but also because the family provides a world of shared experience and identity. If the “I” shares the past and routine daily life with others, then “I” and others can more easily become “we.” It is often pointed out that the Japanese tendency to form groups abroad is a bad trait, but even so, a Japanese like me, who is not accustomed to life abroad, finds great relief to be with someone just because that someone is from Japan.

When you are enthusiastically cheering for a sports team or a band, the walls surrounding the “I” fade away, if temporarily. In the normal case, however, even when “I” and others become one—become “we”—the difference from the Other does not disappear. When you are with a fellow countryman in a foreign land, the Other is still the Other. Even among family members, as a child grows into a teenager differences emerge between the parents and the child. In other words, there is always a portion that cannot be dissolved into the Other and stays different from it. The portion that is dissolved and the portion that stays different are not fixed but fluid. In some cases, one is almost completely dissolved into the Other, but in other cases, conversely one is almost completely alienated, rejected, and forced to be the Other. In an extreme case, a woman sexually harassed by a man probably rejects that man’s very existence. Should a problem become acute, one might harbor such enmity against the other that, should such feelings grow out of control, one might want to get rid of the other physically. Letting that urge be fulfilled could end up with committing a crime.

Even when “I” wants to assimilate into the Other, the “I” may be rejected by the Other in an act of dissimulation. Such a case occurs all too often in male-female relationships. A certain behavior is no problem at all when both sides accept each other and are dissolved into “we,” but the same behavior can be sexual harassment or stalking if refused by the other. A gap between the degree of assimilation and dissimulation can be

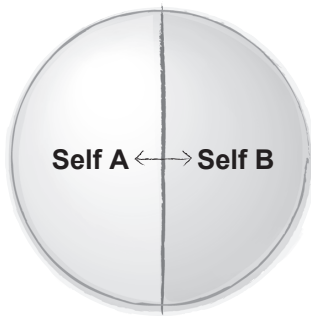


Figure 7 Conventional view of the self and the other

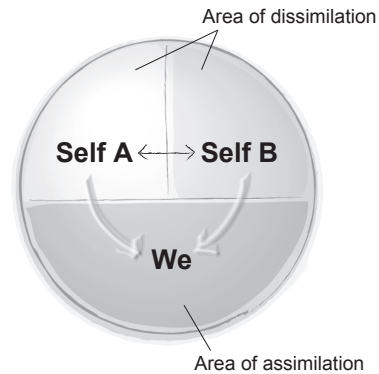


Figure 8 The self and other depicted in this book

significant, and normally that gap is mendable, but when the gap is too wide to mend, trouble occurs.

The fluid nature of the assimilation and dissimulation of the self and the Other we have just seen cannot be understood from the conventional perspective of Western philosophy. The Western perspective makes a clear distinction between the self and the Other, so it cannot explain the aspect of assimilation. Consider, for example, the question of how, at the scene of nursing or caregiving practice, a nurse or caregiver should relate to the recipient of nursing or caregiving. From the conventional perspective of Western philosophy, the nurse/caregiver and the recipient of nursing/caregiving are distinctly separate individuals and the question is how the separate individuals relate to each other. One might say their relationship should be one in the second person, not in the third person, but, since only three options—the first-, second-, and third-person relationships—are available there, Western philosophy cannot distinguish between the second-person relationship in the case of nursing/caregiving of one's own family member and that in the case of professional nursing/caregiving.

On the other hand, from the assimilation/dissimulation perspective presented in this book, we can deal with the same question more precisely, that is, in what regard and to what degree one is identified with or differentiated from the Other. Of course, we do not necessarily do this consciously. Assimilation takes place on an almost unconscious level. It can be so intense that the pain of the other is directly one's own pain. When a child is suddenly taken ill, for example, the parent cannot look objectively at the situation and dissolves her/himself into the child, feeling the same pain as the child does. The professional medical staff, on the other hand, while sensible to the pain, can deal dispassionately with the child patient by dissimulating, distancing themselves from the patient.

Religion may consider assimilation/identification to be the ideal. That is the standpoint of mysticism and a strong tendency in Asian religion. Judaic monotheism does not necessarily regard mysticism as orthodox and sees the Absolute God consistently as the transcendent being, as discussed earlier.

Now, how can we understand the issues of discrimination and equality, the theme of this chapter, from this assimilation/dissimilation viewpoint? Thorough dissimilation from the Other is removal of the Other. It sometimes involves violence. On a person-to-

The mechanism of assimilation and dissimilation is structured on one hand, and not fixed but fluid and changeable on the other.

person level it can culminate in murder. Between two assimilation-based groups (deeply identified communities) it may develop into conflict, ranging from a small conflict to a full-fledged war between states.

In an extreme case of dissimilation, one side might try to completely eliminate the Other. Committed on a large scale, it takes the form

of mass killing. The most systematic form seen in recent times was the Nazi program to exterminate the Jews. In a less extreme case, dissimilation is established as a fixed relationship between the conqueror and the conquered, or the ruler and the ruled. In the eyes of the conqueror and the ruler, the conquered and the ruled are often seen not even as human beings. Direct contact with them is taboo and talking about them is shunned. A most finely structured system of this taboo was the caste system of traditional India. The same is true of Japan's *burakumin*, the descendants of outcast communities formed in the feudal era. In such cases, the class is determined depending on whether there is intermarriage or not. That in turn may open the possibility of assimilation.

If one is dissolved into the Other, are the identified portions of the two homogeneous? Not necessarily so. The self and the Other are not dissolved always on the same level. This is evident in the case of the parent and child. The parent assimilates him/herself in the form of incorporating the infant child into him/herself, whereas the child is assimilated by being incorporated into the parent. So, assimilation involves a difference between those who incorporate and those who are incorporated. As the child grows older, the identified portion may be smaller and the differentiated portion larger. When the parent, finding it difficult to deal with the change, tries to keep the assimilation the same as before, the gap between parent and child widens.

Let us consider the case of bullying among school children. A bullying group is formed through identification among its constituents. There is a hierarchical relationship among them. In order for the assimilation to take place, a target of bullying has to be specified, thoroughly dissimilated, and rejected. Such a target is always needed to maintain and strengthen the bullying members' group identification. This is similar to the way the presence of an enemy promotes the national solidarity of people of a certain country.

In this way, the assimilation and dissimulation mechanisms have a multi-layered structure. This mechanism is most intricately complex with the problem of gender relations, which cannot be solved simply in terms of power relations. If problem solving is to be made simply through assimilation, it may be when men relate to other men alone or women relate only to other women. Indeed such groups are actually formed at various levels, but when the element of reproduction comes into play, opposite-gender couples come into being, and a different principle of identification is at play, with complex structures involving physical strength and mental factors as well as cultural and historical factors.

The mechanism of assimilation and dissimulation is thus structured on the one hand and is not fixed but fluid and changeable, on the other. In the meantime it produces various kinds of discrimination and distortion. It cannot necessarily be said that such discrimination will diminish or disappear as historical inevitability. Neither can it be said that human relations on an equal footing are the most basic or are the way they should be. It is rather natural that amid the fluidity of dissolution and alienation there should arise discrimination, bullying, and rejection of the Other. Yet, leaving such developments as they are could lead to dangerous consequences. “Artificial” efforts are needed to coordinate the assimilation and dissimulation mechanisms. The *ken* (open, visible, thisworldly) realm emerges by integrating these efforts into rules. The stability of the realm of *ken* is not fixed either, and efforts are always required to sustain it.

Now that the grand narrative of communism is over, what is really needed is not another story that stirs up people’s passions. Rather, what we need to do is to look squarely at the self—the self that is bewildered by relations with the Other and put at the mercy of the movements of assimilation and dissimulation that take place beyond our conscious will, the self that is fluid and elusive like an amoeba—and ask ourselves what we can do about it.

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