

## Narratives of "Internationalization"— A Critical View

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First of all, I must apologize for the awful English I am forced to use in my presentation. I wonder why it is awful. First of all, it is because I am ashamed of my English language ability. Yet why do I need to feel so ashamed? Because most people believe that English is an international language and that it is necessary to learn the language for use in such an international meeting as this. I have a duty, and I have not met it.

There is another reason, however, for why I am ashamed, and that is because quite a few of the other people in this room today are Japanese like me. Some are able to speak English perfectly and fluently. Others cannot. I am embarrassed about this. No doubt, my Japanese friends will tell me later that I at least made myself understood. And I will, of course, respond that no, I was not able to express what I really wanted to say at all. On and on it goes.

Speaking a foreign language is, in itself, a border crossing as well as an unusual and unnatural experience during which one must jump into the guise of a different self. Additionally, when there are people who speak the same native Japanese as I do among the group, the situation can become more complicated. Since at least two cultural environments are at hand here, one must use both cultures appropriately, as the case may be.

This is not only difficult for me, but also embarrassing because in switching languages one must also switch one's personality and communication style. Expressions that one would never use in Japanese become possible in English. For instance, instead of "*Inaga-kun genki?*" (Mr. Inaga, my friend, how are you?), I must say "Hi, Shigemi! Fine?". I can't help but feel reluctant to do this. Depending on the situation, I must use what seems to me to be unnatural and inconvenient expressions. My embarrassment stems from having to use two languages simultaneously in one place.

If such is the case, why then don't I quit my job? Because, such an experience as this might provide some new insight for me, some new knowledge which might invade the code system to which I belong, interfere with knowledge I've had previously, until new and different code(s) are born. After all, to know something is nothing other than the process of de-territorialization and re-territorialization of a certain code system. Although the possibility of betrayal exists, I can abide the embarrassment for

the sake of what I stand to gain.

So, what I want to confirm here is that using foreign languages and learning new knowledge amount to an act of crossing cultural borders. Each language has its own code. Using any one of many foreign languages involves accepting its code system. By accepting, I mean a process whereby one's own code is tentatively abandoned until interference or invasion by an external code becomes permissible.

Does this process need occur, however, only when we speak a foreign language? I think not. Even when we are using our so-called 'mother tongue,' we are put fundamentally in a similar situation. To be sure, I am not speaking in this case of the difficulty of learning foreign languages. When one attempts to communicate with groups whose code system differs from ones own, groups **within** ones own culture, for example, with differing gender or class bias, or even when we talk with friends or family, we find similar difficulties.

If this is the case, then I want to assert that culture itself is always crossing borders, has already crossed borders, is fluid and mobile and cannot become fixed. Culture changes in the manner of meteorological phenomena. Is it just an illusion that what seems to be a singular culture, or multi-cultured setting with a fixed structure, is not at all, particularly when interactions and crossovers take place?

## **1. What is "Internationalization" in Japan?**

In Japan, people firmly believe that speaking English means being "international." This has been true for a long time. Though speaking German and French once meant being international as well, their popularity has decreased remarkably. The reason is related to the historical fact that Japan had been under occupation by the United States, acting on behalf of the Allied Powers, and has been strongly influenced by American culture in the cold war period. Post cold-war developments have spelled greater power for English.

Japanese television overflows daily with commercials for language schools. I was a little shocked when I saw a commercial for a language school named "NOVA" in which a co-ed is talking confidently about wanting to be an 'international woman.' What, I wondered, is an 'international woman'? If so, could there be an international man? Yes, of course. The word *kokusaijin* in Japanese means precisely that--an 'international man.'

In this case, the word 'international' is imbued with mythological power. The reason why is not difficult to comprehend. Briefly, it is an expression connected to the desire to assimilate to the West as the standard mode of behavior. In fact, Japan has

been colonized by the West, or self-colonized in cultural terms, even though it has not been colonized in fact or as a political reality. The process continues every day. Thus, the term 'international woman' means a woman who is like a Westerner. She doesn't need to be cosmopolitan or anything else at all.

Since the Meiji Restoration, Japan has advanced the process of modernization with the model of Europe and America in its eyes. Not only were new industrial and political systems modeled after institutions abroad, modern systems of art and education were also based on European and American models. And it must be said that the Japanese themselves did not carry out modernization voluntarily. In the first place, the idea of "the Japanese" as a people had not previously existed. Accordingly, Japanese culture did not exist in any concrete way. The Tokugawa shogunate which was suddenly approached about opening the country as if it were about to be raped by American black ships, was not a central government and acted effectively only as the coordinator of many feudal lords. As is often said, the idea of Nation did not exist in Japan. The Meiji government was an artificially made up central government constructed to compete with such empires as America and Europe. Its aim was, first of all, to establish a first-class country on the model of European empires as its external face, while constructing a "nation" centering on the emperor as its domestic face. Modern Standard Japanese as the national language was invented, the school system and the National Army were established, and many students studying abroad brought back knowledge of the various systems which were later to be incorporated into what Japan was to become.

Certainly, some problems of acculturation caused by the importation of so many differing codes brought its share of confusion and misunderstanding. However, as a whole, consciousness that European countries were much more advanced than Japan was widely shared among the Japanese, while the majority was quite active in learning the systems and knowledge from the West. Shu Kishida has remarked that it derived from the trauma of being raped by black ships.

The introduction of Western codes for new systems brought some reaction to the various cultural changes that were going on. Japanization of the various codes was no simple task. However, by and large, problems were far outweighed by the smooth modernization/Westernization that proceeded apace in most areas of Japanese life. Mainstream Japanese society was actively disposed to westernization.

While this is true, it must also be said that the encounter with foreign countries for the Japanese involved formation of a double ego based on contradictory feelings of hatred and yet yearning for the same strong West that had raped us and forced our country to open. This dynamic of ambivalence has formed the basis of a complicated

consciousness among the Japanese, one that puts the idea of a nation that is positioned in the East to behave, at times, as the imperialistic ruler of neighboring countries, while, on the other hand, as a nation feeling rejected by the West as well as being coercively assimilated.

Such a double structure of ego is found ubiquitously in Japanese culture. For example, the way in which the Japanese style toilet is put side by side with Western style commodes in public rest rooms in such places as hotels.

University culture and intellectuals in Japan have rather strengthened such a dualistic structure. It is admittedly cultural to study Renaissance Art, but not so to do the same for the *ukiyo-e* woodblock print. The latter is dilettantism, while the Renaissance is serious study. Western classic music is a culture, but traditional Japanese music is no more than ethnic music. In general, Japanese intellectuals dislike Japan and Japaneseness. The same can work in reverse, it must be said. So many example abound of the ways in which Japanese intellectuals, when they become old, have suddenly turned to Japaneseness, and away from the West.

It is well known that the Japanese uniformly call foreigners of identifiably American or European background *gaijin*, the 'people from the outside,' 'Others.' Few people of Chinese and Korean background are ever called *gaijin* because it is very difficult to distinguish them from the Japanese by their appearance. That is, the notion of a foreign country means, for the Japanese, mainly the West. The Japanese have little interest in any other countries. Therefore, the word 'international' has been used as a synonym for Western. For instance, when we say international actor or singer, we mean only that he/she has been in the West. A Japanese person who is very famous in Taiwan or in Hong Kong, for example, would never be said to be 'international.' At best, the person would be referred to as being 'famous in Asia.'

## **2. Narratives of "Internationalization"**

In the last decade, some things have been changing. In this post Cold War era, powerful nation states have turned into weak ones, borders have come down across the board, a telecommunications revolution has broken out, and the movement of information and people has drastically increased. The framework of East and West, North and South that the Cold War once imposed on the world, no longer is effective.

Japan achieved its desire for assimilation to the West during the Cold War period when it was taken into the power structure of Western democracies. I must confess that I believed that I was thinking in a completely free way when I was young. I now think that this was an illusion, or an effect, produced by the structure of the Cold

War itself.

Frameworks of all sorts have been broken in this post Cold War period. Scattering and diversification have increased. In such a new situation, the 'nation state' as a unit has stopped working well in almost all its aspects. We seem to be groping at strategies for survival. I think that renewed demands for Japan to become more international are now meaningless and troublesome. In a new globalized world, the word 'international' has almost lost its meaning.

The word 'international' in English refers to the interrelationship between nations, and is naturally based upon the premise of an autonomous unit called the 'nation state.' If concepts like 'inter-cultural' or 'cultural borders' make reference to such fixed and stand-alone cultures that somehow is contained within the notion of 'nation state,' then 'internationalization' must be another form of repression. It is not fluid. As I mentioned above, culture is akin to meteorological phenomena that are always changing shape. It is nonsense to try to pin it down as a fixed substance.

By the way, when was a fixed concept of 'culture' born and attached to the notion of nation state? Both have been derived from the waves of industrialization that have spread the length and breadth of the earth.

In his famous book *The Third Wave* (1980), Alvin Toffler mentions six principles that have governed "the second wave of industrialization" as it has expanded throughout the world. They are: standardization, specialization, synchronization, concentration, maximization and centralization. People have been tied to them in industrial societies. Although these principles all stem originally from the demand for efficiency in mass production in the factory, they have spread throughout industrial society as a universal moral, and bound peoples' behavior patterns and worldview. It has become advantageous to identify oneself with a standard, which has come to increase human uniformity. Additionally, standardized public education, also based on such principles, was begun in order to constitute a homogenous nation.

If we Japanese feel that we belong to a homogenous culture by virtue of the fact that we live in Japan, this can only be an illusion, or even fantasy, born of such principals of industrial society. And the fact that most Japanese men seem to be tied to their companies, as is often mentioned, is not an inheritance of the culture of the samurai—the percentage of the population who belonged to the warrior class in its heyday was always quite small—but the legacy of a hundred years of industrialization that has been so rapidly advanced in Japan.

National cultures and cultural identities formed rapidly through such processes of industrialization are neither universal nor natural. As Toffler's *The Third Wave* suggests, as we move into an information society, such ideas are fast losing their

meaning.

Any discourse regarding communication between so-called 'different cultures' which is based on the premise that all individuals belonging to a certain nation state have a common and homogeneous culture, can be meant only as a book of etiquette for students studying abroad, or for tourists. What need for ethics is there in such a discourse? I am reminded of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogue in which he says that collision, friction, opposition and sympathy are the essentials of human communication in general, and that it makes no difference whether this occurs from within the same culture or among various cultures. The process is the same.

The real problem lies in the belief that dominant Western rules are the international rules. Most problems arising from crossing cultural borders relates to the dominance of these rules.

At the present moment, a dominant group of nation states is accepting the rule of the West as the standard for global society. This is seen as somehow inevitable, a kind of necessary evil. And this must be because without common rules, the basis for communication will have disappeared. A conference such as this, without rules, only causes confusion.

A problem arises as to how seriously to take enforcement of common rules, for if we believe that by adopting common rules, they are universally right, we risk despising or boycotting those who do not accept or defend such rules. Such is the case with so-called ethnocentrism or a Eurocentric attitude in which many Westerners, including intellectuals, have a tacit interest. Such attitudes have been known to lead to suppression, discrimination, and persecution of people who fall outside of such rules. Such attitudes may lead conversely to ethnocentric repulsion of Eurocentrism from the outside. Indeed, ethnic identity in general is forged from external suppression and persecution.

A second alternative to the above is the attitude of cultural relativism. It asserts that each culture has differing values and such should be mutually respected without resorting to codification of rules. However, a problem arises similar to that for the case of multi-culturalism. There is a double difficulty. One is that has a tendency to fix culture and identity, originally fluid and mobile concepts, on ethnicity or the nation as I mentioned before. Another problem is that such a society must make as many sets of common rules as it has groups, as long as it refrains from policies of complete isolation and noninterference.

It might be inevitable, in the practical view, to have a common language and code in a increasingly globalized world. Such conventionally dominant codes as the English language and Western dominance may become the *de facto* standard, despite

numerous problems that would arise. We should never settle on anything as a fixed standard. Codes must be flexible enough to be rewritten through the participation of many people. I believe, therefore, that both ethnocentrism and cultural relativism should be overcome. I call this viewpoint the "meteorology of culture."

I would like to make some comments here regarding the problem of anthropology and the museum that are being treated at this conference.

First of all, anthropology and art history are not a universal way of knowledge that is valid anywhere in the world. They are modes of organized discourse closely related to the political, cultural and economic condition of modern industrial society.

For instance, it is not a universal question to ask about the "correct way of representing culture." Rather, it is a question that has meaning only within some regular social structure where it has some value in representing the other in scientific language, or to exhibit art works or artifacts in a museum.

The desire of representation is motivated by specific interest. In modern society, as Jan Neederveen Pieterse says (1995), the ethnographical museum and the national history museum have been deeply related to the formation of the nation, and even the art museum as the sanctuary of national culture has worked in a similar fashion. However, even if we disregard these two motives, two extremely modern motives will take their place. One is faith in Science as an external knowledge database, infinitely expanding, and the other is Romantic yearning for an unknown world. It is these two motives that have made possible the development of modern science, which needs to represent everything, and tries to collect the whole universe into its language.

Such motives are not a perfect overlap within the field of culture. Science and Romantic yearning are only a part of a more total picture formed by fairly local cultural and meteorological phenomena that encompass the whole world. The desire to produce the ultimate database as a spatial arrangement of knowledge is a typically Western idea. It is obvious that this desire corroborates with the desire for imperialistic spatial control of the world in the nineteenth century.

Therefore, it is unreasonable to believe that a correct, fair and reciprocal attitude is possible in the domain of anthropology and art history. The museum and the exhibition were devices formerly employed in the formation of the 'Nation', but which has become an event directed by the audience who currently consumes it. There are no representations that are fair to everyone and that all will be satisfied with. This is because every representation is nothing but a discourse.

There is a struggle in discourse for living knowledge, but at the same time there is interference, violence and resistance within it. One cannot avoid such effects. They

are, rather, a chance for new knowledge to be born. Historically speaking, new culture has always come, not from the ruler's side, but from the likes of refugee camps. The main problem here is with such attitudes as would try to make a fixed and canonical system of representation. Such an attitude can bring forth only a new and stifling prison.

No problem exists in the fact that there cannot be a representation or a discourse that is not full of prejudice and incorrectness. Nor it is a crime to become a researcher or artist infused with Romantic enthusiasm or the yearning for an 'Orientalism' in the sense that Said notes. Ordinary human relations between lovers or friends contain the same impulses. The important thing is to break through to the dialogical space in the representation system itself.

For this reason, a vision of the world in which the different cultures can live symbiotically is almost meaningless. This is like trying to fix meteorological phenomena to the same place. When applied in too strict a manner, the multi-cultural principle of mutual respect for different cultures has the danger of becoming simply the 'protection of homogeneity.' Without friction, life would be so boring. A culture in mutation that is the combination of fragmental modules might be the original form of culture after all. It is important to be free from such spatial systems of representation as the nation, a standard, race, ethnicity and even science. Any new culture can only be born from such new beginnings.

I have misgivings about not writing in these pages a critical analysis based on anthropological methods, or having addressed the problems of the museum as though I believed that the answer could be found in those terms. I do not believe there is a way there. In the first place, the existence of anthropology and the museum is neither universal nor correct in itself. There can only be endless trial of open dialogues. To pretend to stand on the side of correctness is tantamount to ethnocentric behavior.

What we must do is recover living knowledge that does not adhere to such fixed frameworks as ones' own culture or different cultures. It is necessary to release the heterogeneity within us as well as recognize and welcome it on the outside. In bringing heterogeneity to one's own discourse, one can crack the eggshell of a fixed identity of the self. In this sense, the self is like a meteorological phenomenon, and the new self and new communication will result only from furious storms and foaming whirlpools.