

# The spirits of the age in modern Japanese art and its philosophical significance

Some remarks on Yuichi Takahashi, the “Shirakaba” school,  
and Ryūshi Kawabata etc.

ITO Toru

日本近代の芸術の時代精神とその哲学的意味  
— 高橋由一、『白樺』派、川端龍子などをてがかりとして —

伊 藤 徹

本稿は、2010年5月7日ロンドン大学東洋アフリカ学院（School of Oriental and African Studies）での講演のために準備されたテキストに若干筆を加え、論文として仕上げたものである。テキストは、当初日本語で書かれたものを、著者のコントロールのもとで、薄井尚樹博士（シェフィールド大学）が翻訳するというかたちで成立した。

本論が問題にしたのは、明治維新以来の日本の近代化を支えた基本的な虚構的言説の交替である。高橋由一の造形活動を支えた国家の神話は、森鷗外にも触れつつ論じたように、明治後半以降旧来の家共同体との連結を失うことによって、空洞化していったが、その後『白樺』派やその周辺の芸術家・知識人などによって語られた大正期の個人の理念も、同時期の西洋文化の模倣という性格を脱しきれず、昭和期にはまた別な国家という虚構に吸収されていった。新たな神話の形成に参与した日本画家・川端龍子の作品に見られる国家の過剰な美化は、かえって根を失った人間存在を際立たせている。そうした喪失感は、同時期の保田與重郎の民族的伝統の称揚の背後にも見られるのだが、この批評家と同世代に属する戦後美術の旗手・岡本太郎においても、その「主体性」の神話のなかに身を潜めつつ、受け継がれていった。本論で「主体性」は、independency と訳されているが、それは人間存在の基盤喪失を際立たせようと意図してのものである。論究は、この喪失によって開かれてくる場所、いってみれば independency の in が、

有用性の徹底化としての近代化の必然的帰結であり、私たち自身に課せられた歴史的問題でもあることを示して、結びとした。

最後に上記講演を実際に準備してくれた Lukas Nickel 博士（ロンドン大学）、ならびに、もともとの機縁を与えてくれた Chia-Ling Yang 博士（エジンバラ大学）の名前を挙げることによって、二人に対して感謝の意を表わしておきたい。

## 1.

Art lives within reality, but deviates from it. The deviation leads to the construction of fiction. Yet, even if art were unreal, it would not be meaningless. For, even in this case, the confrontation with reality itself would include the intention which the author's life actually had. Such intention is inseparable not only from the author's personal encounters but also from the historical situations which develop under the multi-faceted dimensions beyond or behind art. The fiction effected by the deviation from reality serves as the base even for people foreign to art in that age, which can be described by "Zeitgeist" in German. In this paper, I shall examine some art works which appeared in Japanese modernization since the Meiji restoration, and consider what spirits of the age in Japan at that time were and how they underwent changes. It does not merely intend to demonstrate the intellectual history of a particular ethnic group of an island in East Asia. If, first of all, modernization is the fundamental movement leading to the present, then the mark it leaves in the human mind should indicate a universal problem for modern people both in developing and developed countries.

Japanese modernization radically changed the society governed by Tokugawa shogunate. The spirit of the age is what underlies the life of people or the production of artists embedded in a change. Looking back on the 70 years leading to the defeat in World War II, it seems that there are roughly three spirits of the age, namely, the Meiji nation, the Taisho individual, and the Showa nation. Such spirits of the age are not substances at all, but rather collective illusions or mythical fictions constructed by the contemporaries including artists. Max Weber stipulated modernization as the process of disenchantment, but modernization acquired new enchantment which was different from what it denied. In the end, I shall consider the relation between mythical enchantment and modernization, and what underlies the relation.

I will mention some examples to confirm the three changes in the spirits of the age. Yet, first of all, I

should admit that the differentiation of the spirits of the age into three stages is an oversimplification. For, there are uncountable variations which do not fall under this differentiation. Furthermore, the change in the spirits of the age developed gradually rather than at a well-defined point. Thus, it goes without saying that the separation into three stages itself is far from the case. The story would be more precise if we took into consideration some deviant cases and the gradation in the changes while assuming the separation as a working hypothesis. I talked the same subject at Hochschule für Technik Stuttgart in October 2008, the content of which can be browsed on the Web.<sup>1)</sup> In Stuttgart, I attempted to discuss generally about the myth of Japanese modernization. Yet, postulating the three-stage differentiation schematically resulted in losing the dynamics. In this paper, therefore, through looking back some examples which I did not mention in Stuttgart, I shall examine especially the difference between two spirits of the age, namely the nations of Meiji and Showa, which was not sufficiently considered in Stuttgart<sup>2)</sup>. This should make clearer the connection in the context of the intellectual history between the difference in question and the art in the restored postwar society.

## 2.

Before and after the Meiji restoration (1868), Japanese artists were exposed to European paintings. In particular, they were astonished at the precise representation of European oil paintings which could not be found in Japan, and began to learn the techniques. Takahashi Yuichi (高橋由一), whose representative work was *Salmon* (《鮭》) around 1877, became a member of Bansho-Shirabedokoro (蕃書調所), in 1860's, when most of the Japanese did not know what Western culture was. This research institute was established by the Tokugawa shogunate in order to receive Western culture. The mere encounter with an oleograph led him to pioneer Japanese oil painting called "Yōga" (洋画). As there were no tools for oil painting at that time, Takahashi used a sashimi plate in place of a pallet and obtained the help from a British, Charles Wirgman<sup>3)</sup> in the foreign settlement of Yokohama.

---

1) See ITO, T., *Die Industrialisierung und die Kunst in der japanischen Moderne—Die Mythen im technischen Zeitalter* (<http://repository.lib.kit.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/10212/1962/1/03-ito.pdf>)

2) In Stuttgart, I made a distinction between the "naturally occurring" Meiji nation that was based on the traditional community of "ie" and the "artificially made" Showa nation. This stipulative distinction between natural and artificial is vague. As mentioned in the talk, even if Meiji nation "naturally occurs," it is constructed by humans. The characterization of the "artificial" Showa nation is, therefore, merely a stipulation that is based on an impression.

3) Wirgman lived in Yokohama as a newsman of *The Illustrated London News* since 1861 and died there in 1891.

Since his samurai family background was related to the ruined Tokugawa shogunate, Takahashi could not obtain a good political position in the Meiji restoration. Yet, he established a private art school, Tenkaisha (天絵社), in which he made the greatest effort for popularizing art education through receiving and developing oil painting techniques. He devoted his 35 oil paintings to Shikoku-Kotohira shrine (四国・琴平神社) in 1879, which has the largest collection of works by Takahashi. In his autobiography, “The curriculum vitae of Takahashi Yuichi” (「高橋由一履歴」), however, the religious motivation for the devotion is not found, but only the reward for the devotion is described. In other words, the aim of his devotion was to obtain financial support from the rich religious organization at that time. Besides, Takahashi was commended for his work in the National Industrial Exposition in 1877 by Ōkubo Toshimichi (大久保利通), who was the central figure of the government at that time. Although Okubo was assassinated in the following year, Mishima Michitsune (三島通庸), who assumed the governor of Fukushima and Yamagata prefectures by gaining Okubo’s favor, placed an order for the oil paintings of civil engineering works with Takahashi. The products are *The Tunnel of Kurikoyama* (《栗子山隧道図》, 1881, Fig. 1) and *The City of Yamagata* (《山形市街図》, 1881-1882). In this way, Takahashi expected to obtain financial support by approaching the political powers. Yet, his approach was also what embodied the fundamental motivation behind his passion for mastering oil painting techniques. For, even in the late Tokugawa period, when he put forth before his colleagues his aim of mastering oil painting techniques, he recognized that the realism of these

Fig. 1 Takahashi Yuichi, *The Tunnel of Kurikoyama*

techniques could contribute to national administration. He said: In the West, the reality has primordially been valued. Its usefulness is indicated in the fact that Western books include not only letters but also figures so as to make the information accurate. The realistic pictures “are not irrelevant to the national or mundane matters”. They can precisely convey the posture of people in the peaceful time, the scene of a hard fighting, the distant landscape, and the event which occurred there. In addition, they can also address the moral significance demonstrated by the portraits of sages, wise men and heroes.... This function can be found in the oil paintings depicting the “the accomplishments” of Mishima.<sup>4)</sup> It seems that Takahashi had never abandoned the conception of painting as a technique for contributing to the nation. In 1885, Takahashi submitted a report to Sano Tsunetami (佐野常民), the past chairman of Senate, in which Takahashi proposed to establish an art museum with the following aims: “If an impression induces a person to study, he or she should make an effort to pursue his or her study, and respect it. The thus acquired knowledge would progress day by day, and could serve the nation. Yet, first of all, we should establish a museum in order to effect an impression.”

It seems that the oil paintings by Takahashi, regardless of their qualities, were not in step with the contemporary movement in Europe from realism to impressionism, that is, from Gustave Courbet to Claude Monet. In addition, it should be said that his understanding of art as a political technique was irrelevant to the conception of “art for its own sake” which was derived from Kantian distinction between art and handicraft, where art was contrasted with play. At that time, Japan was in the middle of industrialization or “encouraging new industry” (殖産興業). It was inevitable that the backward homeland in Asia should be defended against colonization and nurtured towards a modern nation. Art was no exception. Indeed, figurative arts, in particular traditional crafts, became a main export earning foreign currency by responding to exoticism exemplified by Japonism in the eighteenth century. So, they were expected to help the vulnerable modern industry of Japan at that time. Given this perspective, traditional Japanese-style paintings were more demandable than oil paintings to which Takahashi devoted his life. Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, who initially communicated with Takahashi via oil paintings, had put forward the reactionist movement with

---

4) Mishima was called “the ogreish governor” (鬼県令) for his aggressive requisition for workers. In addition, he clamped down on the movement toward democratization in the Fukushima case.

Okakura Tenshin (岡倉天心) around 1890. It can be said that this movement directly embodied the idea of “art for the nation”.

Now, what was the “nation” on which Meiji artists like Takahashi based their production? The Meiji nation was built upon the integration of the political units called “Han” (藩) in Edo era. And “Han” was composed of smaller units called “ie” (家), which originally meant a house as a building and the family that lives in it. Hence, “ie” was the smallest community united mainly by blood ties, which was not necessarily a closed space as opposed to the civil world. From the internal perspective, “ie” included people without blood ties, called “ie no koroutou” (家の子郎党) or “Syokkaku” (食客), and it formed a moral microcosm regulating the behavior of members including such people. From the external point of view, “ie” formed a network through connecting with other “ie,” and then finally molded a larger cosmos called “Han.” The political reform established Japan as a modern nation through dismantling Han which was formed by “ie”. The leading force of the Meiji restoration, however, were not the modern citizens based on their individuality or personality but rather a specific class of Han, in particular Satsuma (薩摩 Kagoshima) and Chosyū (長州 Yamaguchi), which could be alternatives to Tokugawa shogunate. Key figures of the new government were also mostly occupied by people from these Hans. Thus, the Meiji nation inherited the characteristics of the ie-community. Mori Ōgai (森鷗外) was a writer representing modern Japan who was eventually promoted to Army Surgeon-General. In his novel, *Maihime* (『舞姫』), when Ōta Toyotarō (太田豊太郎), a bureaucrat of the Meiji nation who grew up with the background of “a strict family education”, receives an order to go to Berlin, he says “it is the time to make a reputation and launch my *ie*”. A similar mark can be found in Takahashi Yuichi, who held a belief that art was for the sake of nation. His autobiography, “The curriculum vitae of Takahashi Yuichi” is based on what his son, Genkichi (源吉) recorded his words while he was laid up. It is written in this document that the aim of the narration is to convey the life history to his family. Genkichi recorded that Takahashi said as follows: He had nothing special except for his skill for martial arts and painting. By recording his life in words, “I only hope that the descendants of my family have a rough idea of my life. These documents should not be accessed by others, as it would make me feel ashamed”. The expression of “my family” here refers to a micro-cosmos which was a part of Sano (佐野) Han. Since Sano Han was sympathetic to the Tokugawa shogunate, his family was put into hardship after the Boshin War (戊辰戦争), and its official relationship with the Tokugawa shogunate was lost. Still, Takahashi formed a new “ie”,

Tenkaisha, through the education of oil paintings. As his disciples belonging to this “ie” requested, he allowed them to read his reminiscences written in his sick bed, which was later published as “The curriculum vitae of Takahashi Yuichi.” Yuichi as well as this newly established “ie” were affiliated with the nation, Meiji Japan.

Although the continuity between “ie” and “Han” was preserved, modernization had hollowed it out drastically. An elite intellect, Ōgai, who assumed a medical officer of the army at the age of nineteen, was ordered to study medical hygiene in Germany in 1884. He is a person who expressed his experience of such hollowing out. His alter ego, Toyotarō in *Maihime*, is ordered to go to Berlin by the nation, where he falls in love with a poor actress, Elis. Yet it causes him to be separated from the nation. Through the mediation of a Japanese friend, he obtains an opportunity for reconnecting with the nation. By knowing this fact, Elis goes crazy while carrying his baby. Although Toyotarō finally returns to Japan, it is not due to the strong sense of belonging to the nation. Rather, he realizes the “fragile mind” that is induced by the tension between “nostalgia and the desire for success” and the “love” for Elis. His mother who waited for him with an expectation has already passed away. As a result, the determinant of Toyotarō’s code, namely the nation as the “ie” community becomes hollow in him. Such feeling of hollowing out seems to be taken over by the gloom of passive intellects appearing in Ōgai’s later works. For example, the protagonist of his novel, *Mōsō* (『妄想』, 1911), also stays in Berlin, imaging the possibility that he may die there. Then he says as follows: “the idea of social relations varying from wide one to narrow one” occurs as nonabstract feelings, and it is connected with his family in his hometown which would mourn his death. Yet, such feelings amount to an “individual self” after all. In other words, although the reverberation of the “ie” community remains, the self as the ultimate unit cannot be aligned with it. Nevertheless, at the same time, he expresses the sense of discomfort to western civilized people who fear death. This discomfort is opposite to the fear of death. Namely, it is the sense that he does not have any personality which can be permitted to persist. All he can do is to find the shaky self like “an actor on the stage.” In 1912 when Japanese era changed from Meiji to Taisho, Ōgai began to write a sequence of historical novels from *The Last Testament of Okitsu Yagoemon* (『興津弥五右衛門の遺書』) to his great work *Shibue Chyūsai* (『渋江抽斎』). The latter novel depicts the history of “ie” of Shibue Chyūsai who was a medical doctor in Tsugaru (津軽) Han. It begins with Ōgai’s great “affection” toward Chyūsai, which is shown in Ōgai’s expression that “if he were mon contemporain, we would get acquainted with each

Fig. 2 Takahashi Genkichi, A piece of  
*the anniversary of the Meiji Emperor*

Fig. 3 Kobayashi Kiyochika, A piece of  
*Kobayashi's Ukiyoe*

other on a street". This novel takes on the same tone as "The curriculum vitae of Takahashi Yuichi," although the length is different. Yuichi's son, Genkichi, who is the interviewer in "Curriculum Vitae," recorded the air of Tokyo in 1894 in an oil painting where people celebrated 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of the Meiji Emperor (Fig.2). The vanishing vestige of Edo appears in this painting. It is similar to Ukiyoe by Kobayashi Kiyochika (小林清親, Fig.3) who learned painting techniques from the same person as Yuichi's teacher, Wirgman. Such recollection, however, indicates the occurrence of the distance from what is retrospected. When Ōgai responded to the hollowing out and recorded his retrospection in a detached tone, the myth of individual which Ōgai could not affirm had already begun to be told.

### 3.

Kuroda Seiki (黒田清輝), after returning from France, attained a certain stage of the history of Japanese oil painting, which originated from Takahashi Yuichi. As a son of a member of the Satsuma Han, Kuroda went abroad to study law. He then became to an artist in France and was invited to be the first professor of the department of western oil painting in Tokyo Fine Art School upon his return to Japan in 1893. Since then, he had dominated the field of western painting in Japan. He learned oil painting techniques from Louis-Joseph-Raphael Collin who began to receive impressionist paintings. His techniques brought a new perspective to Japanese art in Meiji, which began with the trend induced by a Barbizon school painter, Antonio Fontanesi, from whom Takahashi had also sought for advice. And, as seen in his work, *Morning Toilette* (《朝妝》), he challenged Japanese society, which



Fig. 4 KurodaSeiki, *Lakeside*Fig. 5 Aoki Shigeru, *Selfportrait*Fig. 6 Takahashi Yuichi, *Selfportrait*Fig. 7 Aoki Shigeru, *Selfportrait*

tended to consider nude painting as a mere pornography. In this sense, his works entailed a kind of innovativeness. On the other hand, as indicated in *Lakeside* (《湖畔》, Fig.4), which is taken as a national oil painting, and *Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment* (《智・感・情》), which was awarded a silver medal at the Paris Exhibition, it seems that the foundation of his creation remained a kind of reliance on the national community. But the generation following him displayed a different mentality.

A portrait drawn in 1904 (Fig.5) marks a turning point. The suspicious gaze depicted in the painting heralds the emergence of the mentality resisting the authority. This *prima facie* hubris mentality does not have the rigid root in home soil which is shown in “the selfportrait” of Takahashi Yuichi (Fig.6). Rather, as “the portrait” drawn by the same artist one year before (Fig.7) shows clearly, the

mentality puts “hubris” and “anxiety accompanied by independence” together. The artist, Aoki Shigeru (青木繁), is a graduate of the department of oil paintings in Tokyo Fine Art School, where Kuroda served as the first professor. Although he suddenly appeared in the field of Japanese oil paintings, he immediately ended up his disruptive life including debauch, disease and vagrancy. As such an artist, he left an image of young “genius” to the people in those days. His representative work in line with the contemporary Fauvisme, *Fruits of the Sea* (《海の幸》) makes us feel the tension that goes beyond the aim and the production framework required to complete Japanese-style oil painting which Kuroda pursued on the ground of what he learned from Collin. The emergence of this kind of mentality was not a special phenomenon peculiar to Aoki. A teenager, Fujimura Misao (藤村操) who jumped into Nikko Kegon Falls, left a message, “Life is inexplicable” (「人生不可解」). Natsume Sōseki (夏目漱石), who had taught Fujimura, mentioned his name with regret in *Theory of Literature* (『文学論』), *I am a Cat* (『吾輩は猫である』), *Kusamakura* (『草枕』) and etc.. His suicide caused a social phenomenon which was described as “agonizing teenagers (煩悶青年),” indicating that the Japanese mentality lost its support while encountering modernization.

This kind of individual mentality, which emerged at the end of Meiji era, was molded into a myth of the new era through veiling the anxiety and weakness associated with the separation from the past. “Naturalism” in the Japanese literary field was ignited by the influence of Émile Zola, and was developed by the works, *The Broken Commandment* (『破戒』) by Shimazaki Tōson (島崎藤村) and *Futon* (『布団』) by Tayama Katai (田山花袋). It was a representative thought at that time, depicting explicitly the “facts” from which people had turned their eyes away, in particular the social misery and the suppressed sexual lust. A contemporary critic, Uozumi Setsuro (魚住折蘆), found in this movement the intention to use “the realistic and scientific, hence banal and fatalistic thought” to “amplify the self” (「自己拡充」) against the national authority. Although naturalism *prima facie* seemed to expose the weakness of self, Uozumi tried to affirm that naturalism liberated the self from the national power by regarding “the weak self” as a “scientifically” determinable fact. Even if, as Ishikawa Takuboku (石川啄木) criticized, this “resistance” was self-deceiving, the myth different from the national one was told in this way, and the existence of an individual beyond the reach of the power was highlighted.

Although the mentality of “self amplifying” can be also found in the contemporary anarchist

Fig. 8 Takamura Kōtarō, *Hand*Fig. 9 Takamura Kōun, *Niō*

expression, it was the Shirakaba school that described more explicitly about the myth of an individual or personality in the artistic area. This art group was grounded on the magazine “Shirakaba” (『白樺』) first published in 1910 (Meiji 43), which opposed to naturalism by advocating the optimistic trust of personality or humanity. Moreover, it abandoned the older generations’ dependence on the nation by veiling the individual anxiety associated with the separation, which Ōgai had hold till the end. The artistic ideal is accurately demonstrated in the following statement of a central figure of this group, Musyanokoji Saneatsu (武者小路実篤): “The existential value of the self emerges only if the personality is exploited”. Musyanokoji compared Gogh’s suicide with the martyrdom of Nogi Maresuke (乃木希典) for Meiji emperor. Nogi had sacrificed his sons for the Meiji nation. Musyanokoji criticized that there was no “humanity” to the latter. The protagonists in his writings are also loath to devote themselves to the nation, and try to contribute directly to human beings via artistic creations. An artist-cum-carver, Takamura Kōtarō 高村光太郎 (Fig.8), who was connected closely to “Shirakaba,” stated in his essay, “*The Green Sun*” (『緑色の太陽』, 1910) that, “I am looking for the absolute freedom in the artistic field. Hence, I allow artists’ *PERSOEHNLICHKEIT* the infinite authority”. This is also an expression of the idea of the art relying on an individual. Takamura Kōun (光雲, Fig.9), the father of Kōtarō, was born in 1852. He was a famous carver who belonged to the reactionist movement led by Fenollosa and Okakura. Since he grew up with the Meiji

nation, his works, unlike his son's ones, show clearly that there is an underlying cultural tradition which should be ascribed to the Japanese.

This insistence on personality was linked to globalization accompanied by technical innovation at that time. On the one hand, Takahashi Yuichi had spent time at the foreign settlement in Yokohama, so as to get acquainted with foreigners who had a talent at painting. On the other hand, the youngsters at that time could study art in Europe and America. Even if they could not study abroad, they could immediately obtain information about the mode in Europe through Western art magazines available in Japan. Indeed, the magazine "Shirakaba" played the role of introducing the late impressionism like Vincent van Gogh or Paul Gauguin, and Auguste Rodin to Japanese intellectuals. Kishida Ginko (岸田吟香) was the person on whom Takahashi Yuichi relied when he spent time at the foreign settlement in Yokohama. His son, Ryūsei (劉生), first met Gogh through the mediation of the "Shirakaba" school and drew Gogh-style oil paintings in the early stage of his career. Whereas it was, at most, western art before the first half of the nineteenth century that Takahashi followed, Japanese art in the Taisho era began to be synchronized with European art. An important artist in the Taisho era along with Ryūsei, Yorozu Tetsugorō (萬鉄五郎), drew an abstract painting *Without Title* (《無題》, 1912, Fig.10) while Wassily Kandinsky embarked on non-objective painting in the south Bavaria. His work *Leaning Woman* (《もたれて立つ人》, 1917) was considered to be the

Fig. 10 Yorozu Tetsugorō, *Without Title*

Fig. 11 Yorozu Tetsugorō, *Selfportrait without eyes*

pioneer work of cubism in Japan. Although Yorozu had not seen Kandinsky's paintings, it is thought that there is evidence that he read *The spiritual elements of Art (Über das Geistige in der Kunst,*, 1912).

This situation, however, also refers to the hollowing out of individualism at issue. The art of "the insistence on personality" was haunted by the possibility that it was merely a copy of the contemporary western art. A contemporary critic in Japan, Uchida Roan (内田魯庵) criticized that "although you suppose your works to be your own shouts," most of them were just "imitations of the works by Gauguin, Matisse, and Cezanne". In addition, the artists themselves did be aware of that. As far as artists imitate western pioneers who denied the tradition and expressed their personalities, they cannot arrive at the expression of their own personalities. Who am "I" while drawing a painting? The artists could not help turning back toward themselves separated from the root again, which the "Shirakaba" had veiled. Such anxiety is shown in the portraits of Yorozu (Fig. 11).

#### 4.

There are various possibilities to bury this re-disclosed anxiety. Kishida Ryūsei attempted to secure the self by recovering the tactile impression of materials. As a way to recover it, he went back to the origin of oil painting, that is, the later Gothic. On the other hand, Yorozu was concerned with the tradition of Bunjinga painting (文人画). Communism which served as the possibility for supplementing the vulnerability was also one of attractions for the intellectuals at that time. In the late 1920's, communism blossomed in art with a focus on literature. *Kanikousen* (『蟹工船』) by Kobayashi Takiji (小林多喜二) is taken to be the work that represents the proletarian art movement at the beginning of Showa periode. Its story goes like this: The labor is exploited in a fish boat in the north area. Workers think the navy on their side. Yet, just at the moment when they are recollecting their classconsciousness, the navy exposes its imperialist essence and attacks them. ... However, the crackdown on communism, which was depicted in another representative work of Kobayashi, *15 March 1928* (『一九二八年三月一五日』), was gradually tightened. Accordingly, the possibility of communism was crashed down in a second. Yet, most of the intellectuals who turned to nationalism in the 1930's, were originally baptized by communism. As a kind of substantial phenomena, it is called a "conversion" (『転向』) from the left wing to the right wing. I think that this indicates the commonality shared by these two distinct movements, communism and nationalism. The proletarian literature

movement denied individualism in the Taisho era as bourgeois, and regarded the artistic expression as the means to express thoughts of the communist party and feelings of the working class. On the other hand, the nationalistic movement that took place in the Showa period, viewed the culture of individualism as vulgar. In order to overcome this, it upheld the homogeneous ethnic group based on blood ties, the symbol of which was the emperor. Both communism and nationalism, therefore, originated from the awareness of the vulnerability of the self which underlay the Taisho period. And they exploited the collective to fill the gap which the vulnerability brought about, albeit in different ways. Therefore, I think that the “conversion” is the event parallel to the transition from the myth of individual to the myth of collective.<sup>5)</sup>

I here would like to show a Japanese-style painting (Fig.12) which expresses the mentality in that era. Its author, Kawabata Ryūshi (川端龍子), is a painter who originally started his career as an oil painter but “converted” to Japanese-style painting. This painting depicts the appearance of hardy workers, which is radically different from traditional Japanese-style paintings, both in terms of its subject and color. It would not be strange to say that the aim for which they work so diligently is underpinned by communism. However, as shown in its title, *Conquerors of the Sea* (《海洋を制するもの》), this picture belongs to “a sequence of Pacific Sea works,” which are motivated by “matters pertaining to the Pacific Ocean between Japan and US at that time”. In 1936, Japan was liberated from the constraint on capital ships ratio by withdrawing from the London Naval Conference, and decided to

Fig. 12 Kawabata Ryūshi,  
*Conquerors of the Sea*

Fig. 13 Kawabata Ryūshi, *The gods of torpedo*

---

5) It is myopic to mention the personality weakness of converted intellectuals and to deify the communist party executives who acted up to “nonconversion” in prison, as claimed in the postwar period. It is because such consideration is based on the nature of individual existence without doubting it.

have many warships. Ryūshi was granted an exceptional permission to observe the shipyard in Kawasaki, so that he made sketches of the warships. The military coup called February 26 incident led Japan further to become a regime of fascism. Riding on this tide, Ryūshi went to China and the South Ocean, where he drew a number of paintings that were based on the spirit of the age of the nation. The painting, *Kōrohō* (《香炉峰》, 1939), for instance, depicts Lushan behind Japanese bombers. And *Echigo* (《越後》, 1943) paints the portrait of Yamamoto Isoroku (山本五十六), who was given a state funeral as a hero of the Pacific war in 1943. Ryūshi did not abandon the idea of “the allegiance to the nation by painting” (彩管報国) till the defeat of the war. For example, a piece drawn in 1944, *The gods of torpedo* (《水雷神》 Fig. 13) expresses the so-called “special forces” (特別攻撃隊). The “gods” with torpedo rushing into the enemy also signifies the nation to which individuals devoted their lives. This piece of work embodies the third myth, namely the sense of belonging to the nation, which occurred not only to Ryūshi but also to various artists. The so-called “war art” which declares blatantly the intention to elevate the morale is a typical example, which includes, for example, *The Meeting of Gen. Yamashita and Gen. Percival* (《山下、パーシバル両司令官会見図》) by Miyamoto Saburō (宮本三郎) and *Departing for the front* (《出陣》) by Sugimata Tadashi (杉全直).

In these paintings, the nation as the object to which they belong is so glamourized that it entails an “artificial character.” In my talk in Stuttgart, I compared the paintings of Fuji drawn in the Meiji era, including those by Goseda Gisyō (五姓田義松) and Goseda Horyū (五姓田芳柳), with *Fuji* (《富士》) and *Schining all Around* (《耀八紘》) by Yokoyama Taikan (横山大観) who was a central figure of Japan Art Academy (日本美術院) to which Ryūshi had also once belonged. In the talk, I acknowledged the aura that was emphasized in the latter paintings, but suggested that they entailed the “artificiality” of the Showa nation. The “artificiality” can be paraphrased with “the excessiveness of glamourization which illuminates the fictional nature of the very glamourized object.” Compared with the Showa nation, it might be that the Meiji nation had less awareness of its fictional nature, despite it being also a fiction. Anyway, we can find the vulnerability of the nation through glamourization in the above works by Ryūshi as well as Taikan. *Bakudan sange* (《爆弾散華》, 1945, Fig. 14) was drawn at the time of the termination of the war. It is supposed to depict the situation that Ryūshi’s home was burnt on August 13, two days right before the end of the war. It does not, however, depict the explosion and the damage realistically, but only sketches the dainty plants that

Fig. 14 Kawabata Ryūshi,  
*Bakudan sange*

Fig. 15 Kobayakawa Syūsei, *Shield for the nation*

were tossed by a bomb blast. However, the subject of this picture is much more glamourized than the fallen covered by the national flag depicted in *Shield for the nation* (《国の盾》, Fig.15) by Kobayakawa Syūsei (小早川秋聲.) The glamourization in the piece by Ryūshi is so excessive that Kobayakawa's depiction of the hidden death mask might be rather viewed as the blaming the deformity of death. When the piece was exhibited some years ago, the title was translated as "Bomb Explosion." However, "Sange" does not merely mean explosion. It normally refers to mourning the dead as the sacrifice of a lofty aim, rather than leaving them in the desolation of aimlessness. Taking it into account that the piece was drawn right after the end of the war, what is lamented there is not, of course, the plants themselves torn by a bomb blast but might be the myth of the nation itself Ryūshi held.

## 5.

After the World War II, the sense of belonging to the nation was supposed to be the absence of the responsibility of an individual. Moreover, this absence was criticized because it was thought to lead to the inclination towards war and towards the suppression inside and outside the army, which was often transferred to weaker people, for example, to the occupied Asian people. As a result, one was required to act upon one's own judgment. Yet, as long as a "real" person belonged to the nation and transferred the suppression to weaker others, the notion of individual was not vacuous. In truth, what existed there was neither the rational self conceived by the modern mentality nor the universal personality created by the "Shirakaba" school. On the other hand, it was not an impotent existence,



although it devoted itself to the fiction of the nation. Rather, it created and supported the fiction by being immersed in the fiction. Since it denied its own self and glamourized the nation, one may discern that a strong will of self-destruction underlay it. Such a will pushed on the production of the national myth and the excessive glamourization. At the same time, it tried to forget to be such a will itself, and did forget that. Yet, it sometimes emerged from the oblivion. A critic, Yasuda Yojoyūrō (保田與重郎), who was blamed after the war as a narrator of the national myth, had talked before the war about the tradition on which Japanese should rely, as follows. “The classic is not something past, but something present and ultimately something for the determination in the future”. The question is, however, what the self shown in such “determination” is.

I think that it is what cannot discover its foundation as a substance. In other words, it is the awareness of being unable to depend on anything, namely the independent self-awareness. It is the self which is forced to create the foundation because it gives up discovering its own foundation. Noting this point enables us to find another kind of mentality which does continue to exist despite of the historical separation by the defeat and the occupation. The reason is as follows: A lot of intellectuals that appeared in the postwar chaotic period shared a Japanese term, “syutaisei” (主体性). And its referent - the self-existence - was also the existence which was thrown into the chaotic reality after the collapse of the national myth and pondered “the darkness within the self.” One of pure manifestations of such “syutaisei” is Okamoto Tarō (岡本太郎) who is representative of the postwar art. The artistic posture which he named “opposite-ism” (対極主義) had the following intention: To find the self-identity by radically setting, for example, abstract against concrete, or modernistic rationality against mysterious chaotic emotion, so as to lead to denying oneself and one’s own works. Okamoto joined the Abstraction Creation and surrealism movement in Paris in the pre-war period, and returned to Japan when Nazi German invaded the city. His “opposite-ism” had basically been consistent from the prewar through the postwar period. In passing, Okamoto belongs to the same generation as Yasuda. Given the historical continuity from Yasuda to Okamoto, the same notion of “syutaisei” was required to produce a new myth in the postwar blank period, which was different from the national one. It is in this stream that Kawabata Ryūshi mentioned democracy. We often tend to criticize that this is a kind of “apostasy.” Such stipulation, however, takes the self-identity responsible for thought as substantial. This would prevent us from asking about the necessity for “syutaisei” to construct a fiction, and its condition. The same problem lies in translating syutai (主体)

into “subject” which refers to the modern self. It is true that the term “syutaisei” mentioned in the postwar period was connected with the terms “freedom” and “responsibility.” However, the self-awareness that persists through the prewar and postwar periods is connected with the recognition that the modern European conception of “unshakable foundation” is absent. Thus, if we translate “syutaisei” into “subjectivity” in English, it might veil this absence which requires the creation of a new myth. Therefore, resisting the common translation in Japan, I would like to translate “syutaisei” into “independency” rather than “subjectivity,” in which my intention is to emphasize the absence of dependency.

The place where the independency emerges, namely the “in” indicated in “independency,” may refer to the “fragile mind” of Ōgai and the bleak eyes of Aoki. In closing this paper, I would like to examine the philosophical significance of the place where the absence is obtained, and to express my view on this problem. I think that *syutaisei* as independency is, in the case of Japan, a consequence of modernization since the Meiji restoration. Modernization is nothing but what thoroughly deprives us of the aims regulating human lives. Why? The fundamental trend of modernization or the progress of scientific technology is to make everything useful. Making everything useful, however, induces the self disintegration of usefulness itself. The useful things or the means need to represent their aims, in order for them to subsist. To thoroughly make everything useful, however, we have to go through an infinite process of transforming the aim for a means into the means for another aim. Since the chain of means and aims continues infinitely, it implies that we could not fulfill the aims. Even if each means seems to be useful, it is at most a tentative appearance. In principle, it lacks the aim as the condition for usefulness. Hence, everything fundamentally loses the feature of usefulness. Accordingly, modernization, namely the movement toward thoroughly making everything useful, opens up the aimless space as the human place. As long as human beings live in such place, they are permanently forced to create a myth that provides an aim.

Since the Meiji era, Japan has formed the nation as such a myth in a manner that inherits the “ie” community. After “ie” declined in line with this formation, the Japanese dreamed of the universal self. Furthermore, in order to fill the gap caused by such ungrounded self, the Japanese created the Showa nation. Yet, what emerged there was the rootless self which undertook such creation. It is true that humanism treats the human existence as the ultimate aim, which in fact is repeatedly

mentioned in politics and so on. Yet, the human itself is also not exempt from the process of making everything useful, as far as the scientific technology is concerned. The entity of the human being becomes a means which is derived from another aim. The same “artificiality” as the national myth is discerned for humanism. It seems to announce that the fundamental aim is, in principle, absent. How can we cope, in any sense, with this inevitable paradox that thoroughly making everything useful hollows the notion of usefulness out? The Japanese have held this problem which is worth being called the historical fate, since the modern industrialization in the second half of the nineteenth century, in which the United Kingdom was taken as a typical reference. And now, this historical fate is passed to us.

(translated by Dr. USUI Naoki)