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Article

Tetsuro Watsuji's Discourse on Fudo

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Preface

When I proposed a preliminary study of the Kyoto School's legacies, especially with no capacity to read the Japanese language, I wasn't prepared to concentrate on a single thinker. After surveying the existing materials available, Tetsuro Watsuji's discourse on Fudo 風土 stood out as a conceptual scheme worth studying and even with the potential to evolve into an analytical framework. Unlike other members of the School, Watsuji's sources of thought and intellectual mode seem to be more "locally" grounded, while others were more derivative of modern "western" theory or philosophy. When his notion of "fudo" was translated as "climate", one realizes that his system of thought is now profoundly twisted. True, climate is part of the "fudo", but not entirely so, the latter is a wider concept. In my view, clarifying the difference is a useful strategy to bring out fuller implications of Watsuji's ideas.

In the 1990s, when I was in the process of writing the book, *Towards de-imperialization: Asia as Method*, a "geo-colonial historical materialism" was developed to account

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for cultural formation in the local conditions of world history. I borrowed the concept of "base entity 基體" from Mizuguchi Yuzo to highlight what I was getting at. At that time, I did not run across Watsuji's "fudo", and missed out the chance to incorporate an important component of a fuller formulation. My own attempt was to "historicize" (time) and "spatialize" (space) the object of analysis, but a concept like "fudo" allows wider concerns to come into the picture, such as Lu Xun's "national characters 民族性" and further connecttions with other useful notions such as "renqing 人情, or human feeling", or in other direction linking with "renjian 人間". These directions of thought in my view would allow us to break the impasse of contemporary university-based knowledge and cut closer to humanly situated social reality of everyday life as well as historical-structural conditions of existence and can perhaps open more spaces of contemporary modes of thought.

Why Fudo?

Watsuji opens his text by saying that the purpose of the book is to clarify the relationship between human existence and fudo, not to discuss how natural environment conditions human life. He argues that, generally speaking, the natural environment is based on human fudo, and becoming its object of study. But for him, the human as subject cannot be seen as natural environment.

He goes on to indicate that when he began to think about fudo, it was in the context of reading Heidegger's *Being and Time* during his time in Berlin around 1927. He was inspired by Heidegger's use of time to grapple with human existence, which also generated a problem, that is, if time can be used to tackle the way subject exists, why can't space be a means to access the existence of the same origin? He therefore thinks this is the limit of Heidegger: time that is not articulated to space is not real time. In other words, human existence is understood as individual existence, that is the abstraction as if existential individual and society as a double structure. Therefore, to concretely grasp human existence one would discover that time cannot be separated from space. At the same time, history and fudo are interconnected.

It is against this background Watsuji discovers that fudo and history cannot be separated. In other words, it is in dialogue with *Being and Time* that Watsuji's own formulation emerges. Further, the translation of the book is subtitled "A Philosophical Study". It seems that Watsuji confines himself to this sphere thought, limiting fudo's open-ended potential beyond the realm of "European" philosophy. That's why in the end he finishes the study in dialogue with Herder and Hegel. Perhaps, in this sense, Watsuji has been considered as a member of the Kyoto School.

The question becomes: is it possible to re-open Watsuji's fudo to wider concerns

not on a theoretical or philosophical level but by empirically connecting it with local and/or regional history? Only by so doing, can we keep "fudo" alive and carry with strong explanatory power. With this in mind, that's how we will proceed: to try to reach a limited set of possibilities by re-reading his text.

What is "fudo"?

In the first chapter on the theoretical foundation of fudo, Watsuji suggests it's the overarching name given to a place, encompassing climate, meteorology, geology, soil strength, terrain, landscape etc. Used to be called "water soil", he goes on to say the reason why we don't call it "nature" must have its reason. Here, what is unclear is the concept of nature versus fudo, since the key terms he points to seem to be considered natural environment. He then makes a distinction between natural environment and natural phenomenon so that "we" (humans) enter the picture, since we exist in a piece of land and its natural environment surrounding us. For him, the question becomes whether those to do with fudo can be seen as the same as natural phenomenon. He tends to doubt that fudo belongs to natural science.

To tackle this issue, he cites the example of "feeling cold" as a common sense of climate. His essential point is that "feeling cold" involves a "subjective structure", and it is through this structure we discover ourselves in relation to the outside, and therefore not an individual self but a shared intuition. In extension, "feeling cold" is not an isolated instance, but exists in relation to warmth, summer heat, experienced in wind, rain, snow, and sun to experience the differences and through different means we created such as clothing, housing, food etc. He gives the examples that it is because of fudo that we want to eat fish or meat or creating jobs like fishing or livestock raising. Preparing food in specific ways is the long term summary of fudo. Here, one can cite many examples, such as Korean kimchi, Japanese sashimi, Northern Chinese dumpling or noodle, etc.

Having given us a sense of fudo, Watsuji proceeds to discuss the roles fudo plays in conditioning human existence. By human, he does not mean pure individual, but association or community of wo/men. In this sense, he thinks neither anthropology nor sociology can fully capture the nature of man, which is both individual and as a whole. He sees human existence as a movement process, separating and/or integrating is precisely the practice of the subject. Therefore, time and space for the human subject form the basic structure of the movement. Since it is not a static social structure, but a systemic active movement, history is thus formed, fudo expresses itself. For Watsuji, how exactly does fudo express itself?

Rather than dwelling on concrete instances, Watsuji methodologically uses three "ideal types" to categorize fudo: Monsoon, Desert and Meadow. This is where I think

Watsuji makes what I consider a non-productive move by attempting to universalize from the outset, superimposing categories onto world history and fudo. One possible reason for him to do so may have to do with his concern with the location of Japan, which he addresses in the following chapter in relation to China.

Before making other claims, let's follow Watsuji's footsteps to see where different moves can be made to advance our understanding on and of fudo.

In the long chapter on the three types of fudo, he explains the monsoon. He suggests the term originates from the Arabic word meaning "season". Because the peculiar relation between the Asian continent and Indian Ocean, in the summer season, the sun crosses the equator northwards, then turns south and crosses it again, the monsoon blows landwards from southwest, and in the winter season, it reversed, blowing from northeast towards the sea. Particularly during the summer, very humid winds blow toward the land, creating a unique fudo in the world. He argues that the coastline of East Asia, including Southeast Asia, China, and Japan, belongs to the monsoon (seasonal wind) zone.

One peculiar characteristic of the seasonal wind is humidity, which is very difficult to handle, but it does not arouse human beings to struggle against it largely because humidity also means the blessing of nature: the unbearable seasonal wind on the sea is in fact the express train sun pushes towards the continent. With water, soil would be covered, especially for those plants. Therefore, the relation between the world and human beings is mutually receptive; this marks the difference from desert and dryness.

In short, "the distinctive character, then, of human nature in the monsoon zone can be understood as submissive and resignatory. It is the humidity that reveals this character" (Climate, p. 20). Here one sees the tendency for Watsuji to quickly generalize. Haven't done the work to detail the other two types, as well as to historicize, the legitimacy of such claim can easily be challenged.

But Watsuji goes on to suggest that humidity can be further divided into different categories. Here he picks Japan and China as examples. He sees Japan's rainy season and typhoon (as well as snow) as particularly humid, hence submissive and resignatory. He then contrasts this with South China's Yang-tse River region as a humid area, but because the desert in the north seems to balance up, so it's quite different from Japan. Since both cases are not "typical" enough, he argues, the "true and typical" humidity is in South Seas and in India. This is where ideal type is at work where the specificity of fudo seems to lose the chance to express itself.

From Watsuji's (Japanese) experience, South Seas zone is different since "we" discover summer for the South Seas is not simply "summer" but only a simple summer without winter, fall and spring, a "pure summer", a simple climate (fudo). In other words, for people living in the South Seas, they do not have a sense of seasonal change.

From here, Watsuji makes a leap to suggest that's why South Sea people are not

interested in cultural development. Fudo here already provides rich enough stock for people to live, and the relationship between human and nature does not require change. "South Sea has not created something cultural, therefore would be easily conquered by Europeans after Renaissance, and became their slaves" (Fudo, p. 23). This observation and argument would sound unbelievable to the people in the south sea and beyond. He even goes one step further to say that it's not European but Chinese who can handle the monotony of Fudo in South Seas and therefore fall into the hands of Chinese businessmen, and this can be easily understood if one knows the Chinese character.

For Watsuji, the real masters of resignation are actually Indians. He describes India as lacking a sense of history but "astonishingly rich" in the insights into human nature. This Watsuji sees as architype of Monsoon. He offers three reasons: "a comparatively cool and dry period, a hot and dry period, and a rainy season" (Climate, p. 24). Through these examples, he comes to the conclusion: "This is indeed a land of eternal summer in the eyes of the northerner" (Climate, p. 24). By now, we can see clearly a (self-conscious) self-centric position (Japan?) from where to see the world. Of course, one can argue that this is unavoidable since no one can experience from all locations. But the key question goes beyond a matter of location, a kind of reductionist, non-inclusive understanding of fudo is at work. What was promised before on the relation with human being seems to all out of the picture. For instance, rituals still exist in the peasantry to pray for heaven for better harvest, and there are cultivated lessons about how to forecast the weather to protect agricultural production. The wisdom accumulated over the centuries does not and cannot be part of the story. But let's not move too fast, continue to listen to what Watsuji has to say.

At one point when Watsuji evokes the *Vedas*, in particular to bring out Indian sensibility, things become interesting. He writes: "It is the theory of transmigration that gives by far the most vivid picture of Indian strength of imagination" (Climate, p. 29). By which he means all "multitudes" share the same life. Anything that comes out of mythic imagination is living with us. We may well be human in this life-world but can be a cow in a future world or a snake in a past life. Therefore, "all such living beings, although they may well differ in respect of their phenomenal form, must all be of the same basic nature" (Climate 30). In my view, at this moment, the notion of reincarnation has come into being. If this line of thinking occupies a central role in Watsuji's thinking, then fudo can be a powerful analytical tool for integrating human and non-human elements of the universe.

Instead of bringing this to the center of thought, Watsuji seems to place this in the realm of the arts (Climate, p. 31). He takes Mahayana sutras as an example. There, "sensuous images are exhibited one after another without limit and there are pictures of the exploits of myriad *Bodhisattvas* complete to the last detail" (Climate, p. 31). I guess I'm suggesting that, rather than seeing all these in the domain of the arts, but the sphere

of gods, then fudo takes on a completely different meaning, that's precisely where history of the god-human-non human enters domain of fudo; or, without these components, fudo does not have real life, and action-movement of history-human misses the chance to occupy the center space of fudo.

This is perhaps one of the most important lessons in dialogue with Watsuji. It's of course too late to pose the question to him, but if we hope to revitalize fudo studies, one cannot miss out this level of analysis.

The second type of fudo is the "desert". Watsuji uses it to cover the climate of Arabia, Africa, Mongolia etc. The notion of desert 沙漠 came from China; according to Watsuji, Japanese never understood what is desert. In classical Chinese 沙 means 流沙, the same as 漠, it means gigantic sea of sand (Climate, p. 36). Han Chinese live by and outside of it, watching it in a distance, understand its fudo as sea sand. For Greeks and Romans, it means more than sand-sea, but a place no-one lives and no life, "a violent and hateful place" (Climate, p. 40). But of course, human beings live in the desert and the fudo attributes to it as dryness. For humans to deal with dryness, there has to be water. "If it were not for the few oases where grass grows green, fed by the spring rains, or rock-springs and human-dug wells, man in Arabia—man of the desert, that is—could never exist" (Climate, p. 45). Under this condition, several characters emerge. Men are unified in struggle together for survival to deal with water, and therefore have to confront death and hence self-conscious about life, a battle between life and death. On the other hand, one group fight with another for survival; any resources fall into the hands of other group can mean survival crisis; oppositional struggle hence defines life. "The mental structure of desert type in the double senses becoming oppositional and struggling" (Climate, p. 42), a result of history. In short, strong opposition and struggle define the main character of desert people.

For Watsuji, the most typical example of struggle expresses in the mode of production, "desert nomadism" (Climate, p. 49). It boils down to active intervention into nature, also to fight other men. "This factor of struggle was constant feature of desert life from early antiquity until the Age of Islam" (Climate, p. 49). He cites history of Israel as a concrete example. The discovery of Canaan was a paradise. After fighting a long battle, they acquired this sacred land and began to farm. In such conditions, its population grew rapidly. Other branches of tribes were formed and alliances built. The conditions of a kingdom were finally there. In other words, with reaching Canaan, their religion was possible to grow. The important point Watsuji is making is that "Except for India, which has its own religion, others like Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are all products of the desert" (Climate, p. 47). "Desert type of men educate many people, this is due to their special character making them know more deeply about themselves than others" (Climate, p. 48). This is an outstanding observation, probably due to the fact that for the difficulty

for survival, people living here have to be highly conscious about what they are doing. He continues that "the achievement of man in the desert reached its sublimest point when he gave man a god in his own image. The only achievement to match this was perhaps that of India—his gift of the absolute" (Climate, p. 53).

Moreover, he remarks, "it was Mohammed who showed most forcefully of all to what extent this god in man's image is of desert" (Climate, p. 55), and most importantly and amazingly, "the whole Arab people reached the goal of unity in Islam (submission)" (Climate, p. 56), and further aggressively reached the parts of the civilized world. Thus, Watsuji sees submission and aggression as the dry characteristics of desert fudo.

What seems to be contradictory is Watsuji's discovery of major "religions", besides Buddhism, were all growing out of dry desert, but in actual account of fudo, they stay in the background or out of the picture. To study fudo properly, there is no way to avoid this dimension of life. As noted before, until today, peasant lives take seriously the existence of god in their daily life and constitute a major component of their survival. Hence, we need to bring it back into the center of fudo studies.

The third type of fudo is meadow, a pasture, which is "synthesis of humidity with dryness" (Climate, p. 61). Here, Watsuji points to Greece and Rome, also into norther Europe. The discovery of this character is from traveler's experience rather than historical. If humidity is the basic character of monsoon, and dryness that of desert, then meadow seems to be the combination of the two. According to his experience, he started the trip in Japan, the first encounter was intense humidity of the monsoon zone, and then the opposite of humidity of the desert dryness. When reaching Europe, it's neither humid nor dry, but a combination of the two (Climate, p. 61). So, the fudo can be "defined as synthesis of the humid and the dry".

The peculiar thing about Southern Europe is the Mediterranean, the only sea surrounded by three continents. Different from any ocean, the water temperature is high; the tidal ebb and flow is also slight; wind is dry. With such a condition, the Mediterranean has become the "route of communication" (Climate, p. 65). He then contrasts this with Japanese sea, where acquiring food has been more important, hence a barrier separating out the island kingdom from continent. Therefore, the Mediterranean is truly a space of communication, almost playing the role for the integration of European continent. For Watsuji, for meadow fudo in Italy "was the cradle of modern Europe, the cot in which the child with all the European attributes lay" (Climate, p. 74), largely because nature was subjugated, and attractive meadows made their appearance. To put it differently, "the Latin language, born here, spread to a corner of Europe; Roman law, codified here, became legal system of every European country (Climate, p. 74).

The basis for Italy to become the cradle of Europe was due to its Greek education. For Watsuji, "the Greek peninsula and in in particular the Aegean Coastline—the stage

of ancient civilization, is protected to the west by mountain screen and isolated from the open sea to the south by the slim island of Crete" (Climate, p. 75). This makes dryness more intense and no humidity constituting its special fudo. Then gradually Greek settlement slowly in Italy took place since eight century BC, and became part of Italian life. "In religion, in art, in philosophy, in language, in writing, in fact in almost every walk of life, Rome merely absorbed the Greek original and failed to find any way to give expression to herself. But in subjugating nature by reason, Rome succeeded where even Greece had failed" (Climate, pp. 96–97). Here one sees the instance of Italy as mixing of two distinctive characters.

For Watsuji, the main constituting element of Western Europe is the lack of sunshine in half the year during winter days. Only in the springtime, one finds full of sunshine. In contrast, Northern Europe is obviously even worse; that's why many residents have to escape to the southern part of Europe to find sunshine. In short, "the gloom in the climate leads directly to the gloom in man" (Climate, p. 110), between ancient Greek and Western Europe, and between Southern and Northern Europe. Here Watsuji runs the risk of climate determinism, though there is degree of truth to it, but to claim climate directly leads to the character of men without considering other forces simplify the analysis.

Watsuji thus concludes his study. It is through historical and climatic methods man discovers his root of being and express it objectively. Though there needs to be a spiritual awakening, "climatic limitation is the superior, for by it the more percipient self-realisation can be achieved." (Climate, p. 117). Meadow's type is most rational; seasonal type is full of feeling. It comes to the realization that "if fudu conditions all the specialty of different nations, it makes us realize our own insufficiency and promotes mutual learning. This way, we can overcome the limits of fudo, elevate our own quality" (Climate, p. 103).

With this understanding, Watsuji brings us back to Japan. To begin with, it is Christian invasions, meaning desert type, making us realize we lack its character. Next, though locking the country, European sciences slowly became the enthusiastic concern. It reveals our desire to learn from the meadow type what we lack. Such strong intuition proves that our fudo will become neither meadow nor desert type. These are precisely the problems facing us.

By now, it has become clear that Watsuji's central concern is Japan. Therefore, in the next chapter concentrates on the monsoon type exemplified via China in relation to Japan. There is nothing wrong with centering on Japan, but in the end, he was not capable of developing with general perspective on Fudo. The key reason is that he focuses too much on the "natural" "climate" which has shaped human societies, but not the other elements around to see what the later even shaped by the former, but interact with it, and different human and non-human forces interact together, generate the specificities of Fudo.

Is it possible at this point to reopen Watsuji's fascinating notion of Fudo grounded in

global history? I think it needs to be discussed collectively. If we can generate a wave of intellectual concerns, the outlook of human sciences will be entirely different. But it requires a different mode of knowledge and sentiment of thought for us to even imagine an alternative.

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