

Can We Find an Alternative to Mainstream of Modern Education in the Ideas of the Kyoto School?

TAKUO NISHIMURA

Nara Women's University

In Japanese school education, the trend of setting numerical targets and stating what should be formed in children and assessing their attainment is growing. What should be questioned is the quite naïve concept of education that it is based on a philosophy that education is activity to form others based on a purposive-rational causal relationship: children acquire certain knowledge and skills and these are assessed because the child is regarded as a substantial self and education as the activity to form the child's attributes. We can find a possible alternative to such a trend of contemporary education in the Kyoto School's philosophy of education. Motomori Kimura's concept of "practice" shows us an alternative frame of thought when we realize what educational practice is. In Kimura's theory of expression, the Idea as "the figure to be formed" exists neither transcendently "in heaven above," like Plato, as the goal to be arrived at in the end, nor "in the intelligible world," like Kant, as the principle preceding and guiding the activity of expression. It is rather a self-generating Idea that emerges in the dialectical interaction of the inner and the outer in the activity of expression. If we accept the concept of an educational practice based on Kimura's theory of expressive-formative existence, we do not need to presuppose a certain given and fixed object outside the teacher's practice that provides the foundation of the practice and guides it because the object generates as a self-generating Idea in the midst of the process of educational intercourse. The philosophy of education of Kimura and the Kyoto School enables us to talk about the educational experience that cannot be talked about in the language of functionalism and positivism.

WHY ARE WE DISCUSSING THE KYOTO SCHOOL'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION TODAY?

1.1. The subjugation of education

One week before the Kyoto School colloquium, we had the annual conference of the History of Educational Thought Society at Keio University. I was sorry that I could not participate in the colloquium on Professor Standish's book *Beyond the Self* because I was chairing another colloquium on "Higher Education and the History of Educational Thought" at the same time. In the colloquium, we discussed the current situation of universities in Japan. One participant tried to characterize the situation as the rule of functionalism over higher education. In his report, *functionalism* referred to how reasonably and efficiently given purposes are attained. For example, the Ministry of Education recently stressed the PDCA cycle in universities. We discussed how we can resist such functionalism and find alternatives.

On listening to the discussion, I was reminded of one of Professor Standish's papers, "Toward an Economy of Higher Education," which was published as Chapter 9 of the

Japanese translation of *Beyond the Self*. He criticized the “closed economy” in higher education and suggested an alternative “economy” based on Levinas and Nietzsche. In the previous chapters of the book, he also found positivism in language and the idea of the individual agent, the “autonomous self,” as the basis of the closed economy. He called such a situation the “subjugation of education.”

1.2. The possibility of an alternative

The rule of functionalism or the subjugation of education is not limited to higher education. Our education in general is ruled by the positivism and closed economy suggested by Professor Standish. I will mention the situation in Japan again later. In such a situation, I find one reason to discuss the Kyoto School today. I would like to say that we can find a possible alternative to mainstream of contemporary education in the Kyoto School’s philosophy of education. Though I am afraid that I may be naïve, and I realize that the intention of the editors of our Kyoto School book was not so simple, today, I will discuss the thoughts of Motomori Kimura, a philosopher of the Kyoto School, as an alternative.*

THE CONCEPTS OF “SUBJECT,” “PRACTICE” AND “IDEA” IN KIMURA’S THEORY OF EXPRESSION

2.1. Kimura’s theory of expression-human existence-human transformation

Motomori Kimura (1885-1946) was a leading student of Kitaro Nishida. He studied Fichte and was very interested in aesthetics; however, he turned to the philosophy of education when he became the chair of pedagogy at Kyoto Imperial University in 1933. After World War II, he was chosen a member of the National Educator Commission that worked with the US education missions to Japan. However, he passed away suddenly before starting the activities of the commission. Because of his premature death and the exiting of the Kyoto School from center stage after the war, Kimura is not well-known today, but he merits close attention, not only because he led the philosophy of education in the “intellectual network” of the Kyoto School but also because we can find a representative example of the thought of the school in his theory of aesthetic education.

I find possible alternative to the principle of mainstream of contemporary education in Kimura’s theory of expression. The meaning of *expression* in this context is extremely broad and is not limited to aesthetic or artistic expression: “The human being is a form of existence that expresses itself formatively and is aware of its own formative expression.” This is one of the definitions of human nature provided by Nishida and Kimura. The aesthetic and the arts are important as the phenomena that most straightforwardly represent essence.

The outline of my presentation of Kimura’s thoughts is as follows: Who or what is expressed here is not an individual subject. The expression of an individual subject is a point of self-awakening (*jikaku* in Japanese) of the absolute entity, called “absolute nothingness” (*zettai-mu* in Japanese), which is a dynamic process and a locus (*basho* in Japanese) where everything is generated and becomes. Considering the essence of human beings as “expressive-formative existence” in this meaning, the idea of beauty in aesthetic expression is identified with the value-intentionality in the general acts of human beings. And the thesis of the oneness (*sōsoku* in Japanese) of praxis and poesis is derived from such an understanding of

human existence. Therefore, we can find therein a structure of thought whereby the theory of aesthetic expression quickly turned into a theory of human existence and human transformation.

I will focus on one of Kimura's major works, *Hyōgen-ai* (*Expressive Love*, 1939), and I will present a few essential excerpts from it and a few of his other works and paraphrase what he said as simply as possible. The following (2.1.1-10) is quotations from an already published paper of mine in *Concepts of Aesthetic Education: Japanese and European Perspectives* (2007, ed. by Y. Imai and Ch. Wulf).

2.1.1 The human being as "expressive-formative existence"

"Expression" refers here to all life activity that exists concretely through the formation or realization of something. The human being is a form of existence that expresses itself formatively and is aware of its own formative expression. (*Hyōgen-ai*, 10)

In Kimura's theory, "expressive-formative existence" is the ontological definition of a human being. We must immediately emphasize that the meaning of "expression" in this context is extremely broad and is not limited to aesthetic or artistic expression. The aesthetics and the arts are given importance, in thinking about human existence, as phenomena that most straightforwardly represent essence.

"Expression" also means the formation of the self and the world. Even the case of pure aesthetic contemplation is taken as having the nature of such "formation."

2.1.2 The "dialectical" structure of expression-formation: "the inner" and "the outer"

The human being, which is essentially formative-expressive existence, comes into being through the dialectical relationship between the inner and the outer. Intrinsically, it cannot remain in the inner, but realizes and awakens its concrete self in the outer which dialectically confronts the inner. (*Hyōgen-ai*, 66)

The inner and the outer are mutually other... The "expressive world" contains the principle of dialectical negation within itself. The inner and the outer relate to each other expressively mediated by negation. Through this process, the "expressive world" operates. It is intrinsically a dialectical world. The inner cannot be the inner without the mediation of the outer, and the converse is also true. It is here that the dialectical identity between the inner and the outer is formed. (*Hyōgen-ai*, 33)

Kimura defines expression as the "working of the subject upon the outer world to form something meaningful." In this context, "the outer world" or "the outer" is the "material" of expression in a double sense. First, material is the hinderer or the obstacle of the action of formation. And "forming" means that the subject overcomes the obstacle of material in order to really see the figure which is to be seen but is not yet apparent. At the same time, "the inner" of the subject "solidifies itself, overcomes its inner-conceptual abstractness, uncertainty, and mobility, and obtains concrete substantiality only by being found in the material." In other words, "the outer" is an obstacle for "the inner," and at the same time only through the determination of "the outer" is "the inner" established. Therefore, "the inner" and "the outer"

are taken as “dialectical identities that mediate each other negatively.” The phrase “dialectical identity” is one of the key terms in Kimura’s theory.

2.1.3 Historicity of “the outer”

“The outer” is not merely physical material but is always and already “something that has been produced historically.” “The outer” is “the mind that has become the object” and “always speaks to the subject.”

2.1.4 The Idea that becomes “the inner”

What is “the inner”? It refers to the “inner movements of our mind” and “does not mean the chaotic stream of mere images, emotions, or impulsive desires.” Such “psychological facts” are considered no more than methodological abstractions from the “inner life.” In contrast, it is emphasized that “such a stream is penetrated and ruled by self-awareness of the need for some kind of value.” “The inner” is understood as something intending some value or Sollen (“ought”). Kimura directly describes it as “seeing the Idea formatively.”

Now the subject “responds formatively to the outer that speaks to it.” Then “what the subject sees in itself as the figure to be formed is none other than the Idea.” The Idealistic point of view represented by Kant and Fichte emphasizes the momentum of the subject “which realizes the inner Idea by overcoming the outer.” But Kimura contrasts his own view with such Idealism and emphasizes that “the inner” and “the outer” are in a “dialectic relationship” in the structure of expressing-forming and therefore “the inner” of the subject is determined by “the outer.” Because of this mutual “negative mediation,” “a specific transcendency” that is peculiar to the Idea of art (which is different from ordinary Platonism or Idealism) is recognized in the Idea in Kimura’s context. Kimura uses the phrase “immanent transcendence/transcendent immanence” of the Idea to describe this specific transcendency. This phrase is unique to the Kyoto School.

2.1.5 Self-generating Idea: “immanent transcendence/transcendent immanence”

The Idea neither exists in heaven above nor directs the real world from the intelligible world as the regulative principle of universal reason. It stays, rather, inside the mass of stone in front of the sculptor, as an intrinsically aesthetic form. (Bi no katachi, 39)

The Idea generates itself at the point of dialectical contact between the inner and the outer in historical existence ... from the ground of historical nature. (Hyōgen-ai, 76)

The term “Idea” reminds us immediately of Platonism and Idealism, from which Kimura desires to differentiate his own position. But, if we are to interpret Idea as “the figure to be formed” in the process of expression, it is difficult to imagine an activity of expression which has no such figure orienting the process, even if unintentionally. In other words, Kimura insists that the Idea as “the figure to be formed” exists neither transcendently “in heaven above” like Plato—as the goal to be arrived at in the end—nor “in the intelligible world” like Kant—as the principle preceding and guiding the activity of expression. It is rather “inside the mass of stone in front of the sculptor,” and it is not until “the inner” and “the outer” dialectically interact in the activity of expression that the Idea emerges. It is, as it were, the process of self-generation of

the Idea.

Kimura uses the example of a sculptor to describe this process. "What drives each stroke of the chisel of the sculptor from behind" is the Idea of beauty that is already seen latently but not yet realized. But, because it has not yet been realized, it is "impossible for him to know objectively toward which direction the next stroke should go." Therefore, the sculptor is "destined to wander about in the conflict between impulse and hesitation toward expression among infinite possibilities." It is a leap of "expressive subjective will," accompanying "attempt and adventure," to overcome the conflict and determine the next stroke. The will of the subject can achieve such a leap "mediated by determination from the traditional outer." Then the Idea is not far away from the activity of expression but is immanent within each stroke of the chisel. Therefore, it is "the Idea that is seen immanently/transcendently in the subject." Kimura insists that the Idea "self-generates" and "is formatively realized" in each stroke of chisel in contrast to Platonism that see the transcendent Idea "in heaven above."

2.1.6 Idea-intending "Eros"

Because of intention for an Idea, finitude and incompleteness must shape the laws of fate that the human being must overcome. That amounts to "sin" in a broad sense. (Hyōgen-ai, 77)

The more earnest the pursuit of Good is, the profounder the human being's despair regarding his nature is. (Hyōgen-ai, 87)

Kimura uses the word "Eros" to refer to the momentum of "value-intending pathos" to seek an Idea. Needless to say, this concept derives from Plato's Symposium. This is the love towards beauty that exists eternally, and it drives the human being toward beauty because that beauty has yet to be achieved. However, "the ultimate Idea is the perpetual goal that can never be achieved in reality." Therefore, from the perspective of Eros alone "the expressive world is tragedy" for the human being. It brings about the concepts of sin and despair. At this point, Kimura's discourse shows the unique characteristics of the Kyoto School that unites the aesthetic to the religious. Eros self-awakens to its own limitations but cannot "save" itself through its own power.

2.1.7 Agape "transcends-embraces" Eros

(Agape is) the principle which resurrects the individual subject from the depths of despair, approving the subject absolutely and unconditionally. (Hyōgen-ai, 87)

By the spontaneous operation of the principle of Agape, all individual subjects are approved and affirmed unconditionally as meaningful in their existence. (Hyōgen-ai, 88)

But Eros "negate itself," transcending its own limitations, when it awakens to its own limitations. Then "the will discovers itself in the dimension of Agape by negating itself at its foundation." Here Agape means Christian love in contrast to the ancient value of Eros in the history of thought. It is the principle of "absolute affirmation of the individual existence despite its incompleteness" in contrast to the "upward, value-intending love" of Eros. In this

sense, the world of Agape “transcends-embraces” the world of Eros.

Kimura explains this using the metaphor of sketching an apple. To correct the line already drawn, the artist draws another line. He continues to draw lines until he is satisfied. “He does not stop drawing until the Idea of the apple seen in the inner is seen expressively with his own eyes.” This is “the activity of expression in the dimension of Eros.” At the same time, however, the line drawn first and the line drawn second can be seen as “respectively expressing two different apples with different aesthetic characters.” Both are “respectively complete forms and transcend a superior-inferior comparison with others.” This is nothing other than “the expression of an apple in the world of Agape.”

2.1.8 “Expressive love” as a “dialectic” between Eros and Agape

If Agape, which is downward love as against the upward love of Eros, can be called “absolute love” because of its absolute affirmation of the individual despite its incompleteness, the principle of expressive being, which is formed in such a dialectical identity, can be properly called “expressive love.” (Hyōgen-ai, 92)

Here we must note that in Kimura’s theory Agape is not regarded as simply a higher love than Eros. As Eros reaches the world of Agape through “self-negation,” so Agape also requires “something that cannot but need Agape itself” (i.e., Eros) in order to be Agape. Therefore “Eros is none other than the dialectical negation of Agape itself.” Both “are completely opposite in direction but are dialectically one and constitute dialectical synthesis.” Here the term “dialectical” is used to describe “a dynamic structure” of two momentums that are mutually mediated by “self-negation.” It is this “dynamic structure” that Kimura calls *hyōgen-ai* (expressive love).

When discussing the dynamic structure of expressive Love, Kimura repeatedly emphasizes that it is different from the “oneness of Identitätphilosophie (identity philosophy).” He insists that what has emerged from his analysis is “not the synthesis of contradictory, opposing principles as ‘oneness’ in the sense of Identitätphilosophie.” Eros and Agape “do not fuse in a mystical union.” It is a “dialectical identity” mediated by “negation,” where both momentums completely “differ from each other but are one and never divided.” “If one vanishes, the other also vanishes.”

2.1.9 Who (or what) self-awakens? The meaning of the subject

The points of the creative awakening of “expressive life” are located in each individual subject. (Hyōgen-ai, 40)

If the point which transcends the dichotomy of subject and object dialectically is called “the absolute,” then what exercises the absolute in a self-aware fashion within the absolute entity is none other than the human being. (Hyōgen-ai, 75)

In the “dynamic structure” of expressive love, “the inner” (the self) and “the outer” (the world) are inseparably bound in a “dialectical” relationship. In that sense, the subject and the object have never been separated, and the distinction between subject and object is a mere “abstraction” of such reality.

This premise fundamentally defines the understanding of the term “self-awakening.” “Self-awakening” is not limited to an “individual” subject. Rather, the dynamic structure of expression-formation itself, which is called expressive love, is the process of the “self-awakening” of the “absolute entity,” which Nishida calls the “self-awakening determination of nothingness.” An “individual” subject is a “point of self-awakening” in the process.

2.1.10 The “oneness” of praxis and poesis

If the concept of “expression” has such a broad meaning, both practical acts and artistic productions must both belong to the realm of expression. The universal principle, which consistently directs both “praxis” and “poesis,” must be recognized as underlying their distinction at a deeper level. (Hyōgen-ai, 10–11)

Such a dynamic structure of “expression” that is observed in artistic production (i.e., poesis) is seen as the fundamental structure of human existence, where poesis and praxis have not been distinguished yet, and which includes the religious dimensions of sin and salvation. Therefore the Idea of beauty in aesthetic expression is identified with the value-intentionality in general acts of human beings. The thesis of the “oneness” of praxis and poesis is derived from such an understanding of human existence. This thesis is found not only in Kimura’s work, but is common to the philosophers of the Kyoto School, including Nishida and Miki.

2.2. Kimura’s concept of “subject”

We can find in Kimura’s theory of expression, summarized above, alternative concepts of “subject” and “practice” that are quite different from the mainstream of contemporary education. At the basis of Kimura’s concepts of subject and practice lies his concept of “Idea,” which I call self-generating Idea.

Kimura’s theory of expression explains how a subject can be formed and constructed without Idea, which has been given in advance. The dialectical relationship between the inner and the outer, the self and the world, and the subject and the object corresponds to the fact that such a construction of the subject is a unique mimetic process that is quite different from European mimesis based on Platonic thought. This Japanese mimesis is frequently expressed by the word *shu-kyaku-mibun* (i.e., never divided subject/object), which emphasizes the momentum of the oneness of the subject and the object. But Kimura’s concept stresses the momentum of mutual negation. Any confusion with the “oneness of *Identitätsphilosophie*” is founded in a misunderstanding of Nishida’s nothingness as something substantial. Kimura calls it “absolute Noesis,” which is never substantial. He repeatedly emphasizes that his dialectic of expression differs from the oneness of *Identitätsphilosophie*, or “mystical union,” of the subject and the object. Kimura’s dialectic of expression is a theory that clarifies the conditions whereby the subject can be subjective, avoiding the force of identity or oneness that represses subjectivity by means of stressing the momentum of negation.

In Kimura’s theory of expression, the subjectivity of the subject is merely one side of the dialectic of the human being as expressive-formative existence. Although the subject forms and constructs itself, the *kata* (i.e., form) of this construction is never outside the subject and unilaterally selected by the subject. Although Kimura himself does not use the term *kata*, if we look for the corresponding concept in his theory, it is not the historical-cultural outer but

rather the Idea that self-generates at a point of contact between the outer and the inner. In Kimura's thought, the subject is originally and from the first located in the dialectical relationship between the inner and the outer. The subject expresses and forms itself concretely in this dynamic relationship. The self, which objectively concerns itself with *kata* as an object, is just an abstraction of such a concrete existence of the subject.

We can regard this concept of expressive-formative existence as an alternative to the concept of autonomous self and independent learner, which Professor Standish sees at the bottom of both the contemporary situation of education and the invalid criticism of the liberal philosophy of education towards the situation.

2.3. Kimura's concept of "practice"

In the same way Kimura's concept of "practice" shows us an alternative frame of thought when we realize what educational practice is. In Kimura's theory of expression, the Idea as "the figure to be formed" exists neither transcendently "in heaven above," like Plato, as the goal to be arrived at in the end, nor "in the intelligible world," like Kant, as the principle preceding and guiding the activity of expression. It is rather a self-generating Idea that emerges in the dialectical interaction of the inner and the outer in the activity of expression. The same can be said of the formative activity of education. Saying *the same* in this context is not just a metaphor; each formative activity of both fine arts and education is nothing but a concrete realization of expressive-formative existence.

Professor Masamichi Onishi of Otani University, who is the leading researcher of Kimura, characterizes Kimura's concept of education as "self-generating education driven by the self-generating Idea." Ordinarily, in school education, certain contents and objects to be attained are given. The process in which a teacher guides children towards the object is supposed to be there. But, if we accept the concept of an educational practice based on Kimura's theory of expressive-formative existence, which regards an individual subject as a point of self-awakening in the process of the self-awakening of the absolute entity, which Nishida called "absolute nothingness," we do not need to presuppose a certain given and fixed object outside the teacher's practice that provides the foundation of the practice and guides it because the object generates as a self-generating Idea in the midst of the process of educational intercourse.

Is this a difficult and unrealistic thought? I don't think so. For example, I reflect on my experience when I lecture at the university. I say something. I express something. I listen to the remarks and read the facial expressions of my students. I may pick up on one of them and reply. Or I may feel the cloudy looks or atmosphere and explain further. Or, inspired by an unexpected response, a thought may develop suddenly. A certain truth may be disclosed to us, just like a light ignited by a flying spark, as Plato describes in the *Seventh Letter*.

Not only university teachers but also teachers in general must have had such experiences. These are definitely different from the teaching-learning process in which students are guided efficiently towards a given objective. Although we have surely had such experiences, these are only rarely talked about. In statements about education, the language of functionalism and positivism is overwhelming. The experiences that cannot be talked in functionalistic, positivistic language seem not to exist. But, with Kimura's theory of expression, we can talk

about such experiences. Conversely, we might say that it is evidence of how fettered we are by functionalism and positivism that the thoughts of Kimura and the Kyoto School are difficult to understand.

AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE METAPHYSICS OF MODERN SCHOOL EDUCATION

In Japanese school education, the trend of setting numerical targets and stating what should be formed in children, using a suffix “-ryoku” (a suffix in Japanese to denote ability or power) and assessing their attainment is growing. For example, schools nervously anticipate the results of PISA and the National Scholastic Ability Survey. Recently a prefectural governor declared a policy to make public the names of the principals of 100 schools that ranked the lowest in the national survey. Universities are no exception. We are forced to speak of *gakushi-ryoku* (the abilities of a bachelor’s degree holder), which lists the abilities that university students should attain. Such a trend may have been caused by the globalization of capitalism, but what should be questioned in principle is the quite naïve concept of education that it is based on a philosophy that education is activity to form others based on a purposive-rational causal relationship: children acquire certain knowledge and skills and these are assessed because the child is regarded as a substantial self and education as the activity to form the child’s attributes. Professor Onishi calls it the “metaphysics of modern school education” in contrast to Kimura’s concept. There underlies the metaphysics that realizes existence in the scheme of substance-attribute.

On the contrary, in Kimura’s philosophy of education, the substantiality is swept away from both the universal and the individual. Expressive-formative existence is an absolute Noesis that is never substantial. An individual self emerges as nothing but an awakening point of the expressive-formative existence. Substantiality of an individual self is rather made *kuh* (a Buddhist term that denotes un-substantiality) in the process of expression-formation. Such a theoretical scheme radically confronts the metaphysics of modern school education that intends to reinforce the attributes of the child as the substantial self. That is why Kimura’s philosophy of education can be reliable grounds for resisting the contemporary trend in education.

I know that it’s not enough to show a theoretical alternative, but at least, what we need first is to determine the language to be able to talk about the educational experience that cannot be talked about in the language of functionalism and positivism. I have learned about focusing on language to talk about education from Professor Standish. As I come to the end of my report, I would like to quote the conclusion of Professor Standish’s paper to emphasize my full agreement with it: “Above all it is important to remember and resist the tendency of economies of exchange to colonize our thinking at all levels, and so to continue one’s work, as a teacher, a researcher or an administrator, in an understanding of the economies of excess that properly characterize the quality of higher education.” I consider that the philosophy of education of Kimura and the Kyoto School enables us to think and live in the same way as Professor Standish talks.

NOTE

- * I am also conscious of another possible approach to the Kyoto School philosophy. Rather than naively seeking an alternative, we can find the influence in contemporary Japanese educational thoughts. As Professor Yano and Professor Tanaka argued in our Kyoto School book, we can find in the Kyoto School the roots of educational anthropology in Japan. Professor Tanaka also pointed out that the reflection of the Kyoto School, especially of Kiyoshi Miki, upon technology has exerted an influence on theories of educational practice, even after World War II when the School exited from center stage. But this direction of approaching the Kyoto School was not my task in the colloquium.
- ** The original version of this paper was presented at The 6th International Symposium between the Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University (Japan), and the Institute of Education, University of London (UK).

REFERENCE

- Nishimura, T. (2007) The Aesthetic and Education in the Kyoto School: Motomori Kimura's Theory of Expression, in: *Concepts of Aesthetic Education: Japanese and European Perspectives*, Y. Imai and Ch. Wulf (eds.) (Waxmann: Münster), pp. 64-76.