

Two Faces of Postmodernism: Postmodernist Critiques of Cultural Typologies and the Future of Comparative Studies of Culture

Kazuhisa YOSHIDA*

1. Introduction
2. First Critique of Post-colonialism and the Defense of Essentialism
3. Second Critique of Pragmatic Liberalism and the Defense of Universality
4. Concluding Remarks

1. Introduction

In the United States and elsewhere, postmodernism has had a pervasive influence on the humanities and social sciences, including Japanese studies in the US. During the latter half of the 1980s, for example, two American postmodernist scholars of Japanese intellectual history—Naoki Sakai and William Lafleur—shed new light on the cultural typology of Watsuji Tetsurō, modern Japan's foremost scholar of comparative cultural and religious history.¹ Although both Sakai and Lafleur are heavily indebted to postmodernism for their methodology, they construct their arguments from quite distinct premises. Sakai harshly criticizes Watsuji's anti-Westernism and cultural nationalism as reverse forms of Orientalism, whereas Lafleur carefully endeavors to redeem Watsuji's moderate liberalism by arguing that his vehement anti-Westernism is a deliberate disguise for his endorsement of the modern West's positive rationality. What explains this difference in approach? Addressing this issue will necessarily entail an examination of problems that range beyond those of modern Japanese intellectual history proper, including the Janus-faced nature of postmodernism and the US culture wars. My analysis of the correlation between postmodernism and the US culture wars has been provided elsewhere.² In this article I focus primarily on the twofold nature of postmodernism in particular.

Sakai's denunciation of Watsuji's cultural typology exemplifies the application of a particular inclination in postmodernism, reflecting trends in post-colonialism and cultural studies. Advocates of these trends, which are as it were the American variants of radical postmodernism originating in France, unsparingly criticize comparative and typological approaches to the study of culture that fall into the trap of 'cultural nationalism' or 'cultural essentialism.' To do so is to commit the fallacy of liming cultural differences according to fixed or essential entities that determine cultural

* よしだ・かずひさ

埼玉大学教養学部非常勤講師、比較文学 比較文化

identity.

Lafleur's defense of Watsuji is a good example of another inclination in postmodernism, liberal pragmatism. Such proponents of liberal pragmatism as Richard Rorty agree that assumptions about the 'philosophical universality' of the modern West, or about the 'universally applicable axioms of modern Western philosophy' such as 'truth,' 'reason,' and 'subjectivity' are unhelpful. Once these are discarded, however, Rorty and others believe that a wide range of people colored by cultural differences can participate in light-hearted, 'conversational' exchanges of cultural values and standards on equal terms. Such an approach can be clearly identified in Lafleur's interpretation of Watsuji's cultural typology. Lafleur argues that Watsuji endeavored to discover, and even honor, non-Western forms of rationality by addressing the diversity of cultural differences between East and West on level terms. Lafleur applies this somewhat audacious argument, aligned primarily with the second type of postmodernism, and more specifically with Rorty's liberal pragmatism, casting a heavy mantle of doubt on the authenticity of modern Western rationality.

We see therefore in Sakai and Lafleur two ways of applying the conceptual architecture of postmodernism to modern Japanese intellectual history. Their interpretation of Watsuji, and consequently their targets of criticism, differ fundamentally: *essentialism* and *universality*. Is it then possible to reconcile these apparently conflicting positions in postmodernism? In this article, I explore this question with the help of Terry Eagleton's meta-critique of postmodernism.³ First, Eagleton challenges the postmodernist critique of 'essentialism,' instead defending a seemingly conservative idea of 'cultural essentialism.' Interestingly, Eagleton's argument suggests that we should not simply dismiss the traditional methods of cultural typology as futile or erroneous; acknowledging cultural distinctions does not necessarily mean endorsing vicious racism or obstructing cross-cultural interactions. On the contrary, by accurately identifying the diversity of real cultural activities from comparative perspectives, cultural typology greatly contributes to a better understanding of common humanity. Second, Eagleton casts a skeptical eye on the postmodernist critique of 'universality.' He argues that the universality of human nature can by no means be separated from cultural differences as easily as postmodern liberal pragmatists believe it can. As a socialist, Eagleton further maintains that these flaws in postmodernism can eventually be overcome by embracing a form of dialectics, which may be somewhat wide of the mark. Yet Eagleton's claim for restoring a notion of 'universality' can lead us towards a productive reconsideration of the analytic methods of cultural typology, so maligned by postmodernists, and of the concept of cultural differences.

2. First Critique of Post-colonialism and the Defense of Essentialism

Eagleton's First Critique

Let us begin with Eagleton's first critique of postmodernism, which targets post-colonialism.

Post-colonialism, in short, has been among other things one instance of a rampant 'culturalism' which has recently swept across Western cultural theory, over-emphasizing the cultural dimension of human life in understandable overreaction to a previous biologism, humanism or economism. Such cultural relativism is for the most part simply imperial domination stood on its head.⁴

Here, Eagleton bluntly refers to post-colonialism as an inverted form of "imperial domination." At first glance, Eagleton appears only to be flirting with an inflammatory idea, but he is serious. Indeed, such a derogatory description might represent a serious blow to proponents of post-colonialism, who typically assume an idealistic posture of opposition to social injustices that are fundamentally incompatible with "imperial domination." To what extent is Eagleton's paradoxical indictment of post-colonialism relevant to the broader intellectual discussion of culture?

Eagleton also considers another problem with the post-colonialist critique of culture. Post-colonialists have been assiduously exposing a 'political ideologies' which, they argue, are embedded in everyday 'cultural' practices; they have consistently endeavored to examine cultural phenomena in terms of sociality. They are therefore bitterly antagonistic towards the older paradigm, delineated by Matthew Arnold and others, which regards culture as having its own autonomy and as demarcating a completely separate subject matter from that of other fields such as economics and politics.⁵ In opposition to this traditional paradigm of culture—what Eagleton disparages as "culturalism" here—, proponents of post-colonialism have emphasized a tacit complicity between society and culture. However, Eagleton argues that such a unilateral denunciation only serves to obscure more fundamental conditions of human culture: the need for sustenance, happiness and satisfaction, the pursuit of interests and ideals and so on, in accordance with which people have long fostered various forms of cultural praxes around the world. Eagleton persuasively shows that post-colonialists' willful neglect (or, at best, oversimplification) of culture is one of their fatal theoretical flaws.

Instead of emphasizing Eagleton's leftist parlance, evident in such phrases as "imperial domination stood on its head," I have analyzed post-colonialists' propensity for overlooking the value of culture in the use of my own phrases such as "abhorrence for culture" elsewhere.⁶ In confronting the complex subject of culture, proponents of post-colonialism have been imprudent and reckless enough as to be blind to the diversity of cultural phenomena, except in disparagement.

The same coterie of academic radicals who militantly advocate rescuing culture from the political and ideological battles of modern nation-states and redirecting it towards a broader sociality often lack the willingness to listen attentively to the voices of their opponents, adhering instead to a narrowly partisan position. This seems to represent a contradiction, which is the gist of my earlier critique. Now, let us return to the main subject. Eagleton's critique continues as follows:

For all its emphasis on difference, post-colonialism theory has sometimes too quickly conflated very different societies under the same 'Third World' category; and its language has too often betrayed a portentous obscurantism incongruously remote from the peoples it champions.⁷

In this particular passage, Eagleton points out that post-colonialist thought has already committed the fallacy of oversimplification and theoretical disintegration. In fact, the idea that countries as diverse as, for example, Japan, China, the Philippines, India, and the Middle East could all belong to a single category as the "Third World" is obviously absurd. Post-colonial theorists are often quick to frame complex interrelations of culture and politics in negative terms such as the ubiquitous "essentialism; however they are less adept at understanding how mutually enriching borrowings and collaborations among diverse cultures have shaped the histories of those cultures. In my view, their academic language has also fallen into a kind of esotericism, which is replete with the unfamiliar jargon and unwieldy conceptual apparatus; this is relatively well-known to those who have been exposed to even a sample of their writings. Despite, or precisely because of, their overly arcane language, however, their analyses and claims consist primarily of mere repetitions of surprisingly simplistic ideas. Is such a degree of theoretical complexity and embellishment in methodology truly necessary to merely reiterate such stereotypical notions?

Eagleton versus Sakai

Thus far, we have briefly traced the outlines of Eagleton's critique of post-colonialism. Given that nobody, at least in Japan, has ever attempted a frontal assault on post-colonialism in such a harsh voice, I think that Eagleton's courageous intervention deserves high praise. His mode of criticism is quite straightforward and audacious, and his tone sounds refreshing (there is a touch of sarcasm and assertiveness that is surely one of the distinctive features of Eagleton's writings). However, Eagleton neither delves deeply into the specific texts of his targets nor constructs his argument analytically. As a result, his criticism may strike some as nothing more than an irresponsible, false accusation made by a mere bystander. For better or worse, his critique remains within the boundary of so-called 'literary criticism.' To reinforce the persuasiveness of Eagleton's criticism, I will juxtapose his general remarks about post-colonialism with Sakai's specific interpretation of Watsuji's cultural typology and then examine the extent to which and the

ways in which the former maps onto the latter.

First, let us explore Sakai's observations on an alleged conspiracy between Watsuji's cultural typology and the construction of a Japanese national identity.

In *Climate and Culture*, Watsuji attempted to establish cultural typology by means of two basic categories: climate and the national character.... Yet at the same time, the reader can hardly ignore the fact the author also wished to construct a national narrative in which the identity of the Japanese nation could be constituted by means of the observation of cultural differences between Japan and other regions in the world. Consequently, one could conclude after reading the book that all other climates, cultures, and peoples are viewed as moments cumulatively synthesized toward a final objective: the cultural identity of the Japanese nation.⁸

It is now evident that what Watsuji's culturalism attempted to destroy was the political and social possibilities of what Jean-Luc Nancy calls "communication," the possibilities that, despite inscribed cultural, ethnic, and national differences, people as singular beings can articulate the modes of exposition in which to "communicate" with one another...⁹

This type of critique typically represents the strategy of post-colonialism: Cultural typology is always labeled as a political ideology, because it ultimately contributes to the establishment of the political 'identity' of a modern nation-state by confining diverse, even miscellaneous, aspects of cultural practices within the assumed uniformity of national character. Therefore, only the intervention of "people as singular beings," whatever this mean, can rescue culture from such enforced confinement. Against this claim, Eagleton writes as follows:

... [post-colonial discourse] has sometimes involved a romantic idealization of the 'other', along with simplistic politics which regards the reduction of the 'other' to the 'same' as the root of all political evil.¹⁰

In fact, according to postcolonial theory, 'the other' is always assigned the role of the 'good guy' and 'the same' is always assigned that of the 'bad guy.' In particular and in Sakai's case as well, Watsuji's analyses of national characteristics or cultural typologies are, without exception, designated as the villain's position because such taxonomies simply combine variegated cultures into a single category of 'the same' or of the national character. In contrast, some kind of anti-communal theory of culture, which would be based on a non-essentialist concept of humanity, is supposed to materialize in "people as singular beings." However, Sakai does not indicate precisely what this phrase means, either in the aforementioned passage or elsewhere. Judging

from other post-colonialist writings, his and others' ultimate goal might be some sort of hybrid cultural form such as that of 'exiles' or 'Creole languages.' Thus, in post-colonialist discourses, including Sakai's, the polar opposite of 'the same' always plays a heroic part because such an entity is presumed to represent 'the alterity' to communality or 'the other' that can never be absorbed into the homogenized realm of 'the same.' This is exactly what Eagleton refers to as the "romantic idealization of 'the other.'"

If we accept Eagleton's critique of post-colonialists' overemphasis, even fetishization, of 'the other,' then we must also commit ourselves to reevaluating, and eventually reinstating a revised notion of 'the same' in contemporary discourses on culture. It seems that no one, no matter who they are, can possibly deny a fundamental fact about everyday human affairs: that people who live in proximity by circumstance generally share common dispositions or features. If these common traits are tentatively termed 'culture,' it inevitably follows that culture has taken shape in human society not because, as Sakai claims, culture has been arbitrarily concocted by "people as singular beings," but because culture is a first-hand product of communality that has been molded over a long period of time out of an enormous quantity of popular experience. That such shared communality, which presumably constitutes one of the bases of human culture, is overly stigmatized as 'the same,' evidently indicates that the theory in question hardened into a kind of ideology.

Another oversimplified distinction between 'good' and 'evil' can be discovered in Sakai's critique of modern nation-states. In opposing 'culturalism' to 'singular beings' and 'communication,' Sakai clearly intends to criticize or 'deconstruct' the cultural ideologies of modern nation-states that have been cunningly disguised under the innocuous and euphonious label of 'culture.' Thus, as often occurs in post-colonial writings, the modern nation-states are implicitly understood to be the root of all modern socio-political woes. Against this claim, however, a series of fundamental, albeit apparently simple and naïve, doubts immediately arise: *Is a nation-state always an evil? Can the iron cage of a nation-state be discarded or, as they claim, deconstructed so easily? Can we dispense with the nation-state after all?* To these questions, post-colonialists stubbornly and uncompromisingly do nothing but reiterate their previous claims. Again, Post-colonialism, which seems to have forgotten its initial high regard for self-criticism, has, as I have just observed, already transformed itself into another cultural ideology. This is what Eagleton laments "simplistic politics."

Second, let us examine the other plank of Sakai's argument concerning the alleged conspiracy between culture and politics: the emergence of the East-West binary in conjunction with the construction of a national identity in the modern world. Sakai writes as follows:

Climate and Culture reproduces in its symmetrical reversal the structure of address known as "Orientalism." Just as Orientalism constitutes the subject called "the West," *Climate and Culture* projects the subjectivity of the Japanese nation.¹¹

...in order to construct their national communal identity, many people in Asian countries have had to exclude so-called Westerners and colonials by granting them outsider status, as well as by cynically accepting the exclusively Western identity of those Westerners and colonials. (Should we call this Occidentalism?) By inverting the Eurocentric taxonomy imposed on them, they could construct the mythic subject of their own nation.¹²

In this and other articles, Sakai tenaciously reiterates a claim similar to this one, which, in a sense, constitutes the recurring essence of his critique of Watsuji. The gist of this claim can be summarized under the following four headings of my own devising:

- A) The concept of the West does not exist independently of that of the East. These two seemingly unrelated notions in fact came into existence interdependently, and this interdependence replicates Hegelian dialectics in which the knowing subject and the known object determine one another. This is what Sakai refers to elsewhere as “complicity.”
- B) The East-West binary is politically constructed in the realm of ‘discourse.’ In other words, the boundary dividing the West from the East is, as Benedict Anderson points out, imaginary in essence.
- C) Complicity in forming the East-West binary is inseparable from the rise of modern racial prejudices as exemplified by Orientalism. The aforementioned analogy of the East-West binary to the dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity break down here because the knower-known relationship in the cultural cases necessarily creates an asymmetry between the West as the knower and the East as the known. Racism arises from this asymmetry.
- D) Therefore, post-colonialist scholars must critically intervene in, or deconstruct, the ideological East-West dichotomy typically observed in discourses on the typological study of national characters.

It is my observation that Sakai’s somewhat lengthy and esoteric analyses of modern political culture can be distilled into these several propositions, to which Eagleton, as mentioned earlier, refers to sarcastically as “simplistic politics.” Against this line of criticism, Eagleton responds as follows:

An alternative brand of post-colonial thought, in deconstructing any too rigid opposition between colonizing self and colonized other, ends up stressing their mutual implication and so risks blunting the political cutting-edge of an anti-colonialist critique.¹³

Here, Eagleton rephrases Sakai’s concept of complicity into his own articulation of such phenomena as “mutual implication,” giving his conditional approval to the idea of some sort of reciprocity between the colonizer and the colonized. Indeed, I also acknowledge that

post-colonialism has achieved great success in unearthing the “rigid opposition” of the East-West binary cunningly concealed in various domains of cultural discourse. At the same time, however, I have a growing concern that, if excessive emphasis is placed on the relationship Sakai views as complicity, considerable scope for the unrepentant self-justification on the part of the (usually Western) colonizers will arise. That is, now that the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized has proved to be reciprocal after all, it has become unreasonable and unfair to blame all the crimes of colonialism solely on the colonizers. In this way, Eagleton argues, post-colonialism runs the “risk” of “blunting the political cutting-edge of an anti-colonialist critique.” In fact, some conservative revisionists have speciously argued that some specific aspects of colonialism were not necessarily coerced by violence but were, indeed, voluntarily accepted, or even appreciated, by the colonized. In Japan, for example, a far-fetched claim of this kind recently emerged in the context of controversies over Japan’s war-guilt and the screening of history textbooks. I am also concerned that if students of culture observe cultural interactions between East and West in strictly negative terms, such as complicity, they will sooner or later reach an impasse that I earlier referred to as an “abhorrence for culture.”

Eagleton’s Defense of Essentialism

By juxtaposing Sakai’s critique of Watsuji’s cultural typology with Eagleton’s counter-critique of post-colonialism, I have thus far tried to make clear the political complexion peculiar to the criticism of post-colonialism, which has come down to two points: A) the critique of the solipsistic nature of ‘the same’ and B) the complicity between West and East in the discursive formation of the East-West binary. For the purpose of my subsequent argument, I will integrate these two topics under the super-ordinate concept of ‘essentialism.’ The relationship between the aforementioned two points and post-colonialist theory’s oft-invoked concept of essentialism can be proved without difficulty by simply reviewing the foregoing discussion between Sakai and Eagleton.

With regard to the first point, let us remember that Sakai’s critical targets, discourses on national character or more simply cultural typology, roughly corresponds to what Eagleton refers with his term, ‘the same.’ As Sakai critically argues with respect to *Watsuji’s Climate and Culture*, discourse on the typological characteristics of a nation’s people, ideologically, albeit naïvely, assumes that each culture is inherently endowed with its own uniqueness, in effect its cultural essence. To put this in Eagleton’s terms, the collection of diverse cultural practices under the label of ‘the same’ and the concomitant exclusion of ‘the other’ eventually comes to reify into a single essence of a given culture. This is one aspect of what I mean by the term ‘essentialism.’ Acknowledging this aspect naturally leads us to understand the connection between essentialism and the second point—the interdependency implied by the East-West binary. The confinement of culture to ‘the same’ and the exclusion of ‘the other’ provide a prerequisite to the imaginary and discursive construction of the East-West binary. In other words, the East-West binary is

synchronized with the emergence of myths about the cultural essence of each side. Thus, the East-West binary is involved in the domain of essentialism.

In summary, essentialism has in general received a bad reputation in the field of cultural criticism, especially in criticism offered from the perspective of post-colonialism. Yet it is important to note that Eagleton fundamentally disagrees with Sakai about the theoretical uses of essentialism. This 'disagreement' of Eagleton's matters significantly hereafter.

Swimming against the tidal currents of cultural criticism, Eagleton dares to defend essentialism. Eagleton first advanced this somewhat provocative argument in his book, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1988), in a not entirely persuasive attempt. The argument is, however, noteworthy because it explores new possibilities.

First, Eagleton, ideologically a leftist who accepts some elements of post-colonialism, never forgets to concede to postmodernist 'anti-essentialism' a measure of validity. For example, he notes the following:

For all that, of course, postmodern anti-essentialism has a point. There are indeed reductive, falsely eternalizing, brutally homogenizing uses of the concept of essence, and they have wreaked especial havoc in the fields of gender and ethnicity. Essentialism there means something like 'reifying to an immutable nature or type', and has been a potent weapon in the arsenal of the patriarchs, racists and imperialists, even if it has also been brandished by some feminists and ethnic activists themselves.¹⁴

Having made this scrupulous acknowledgement, Eagleton places greater emphasis on a defense of 'essentialism' in the following:

To believe in essentialism is not necessarily to entertain the implausible view that *all* of the properties of a thing are essential to it. Having a certain weight is essential to being human, as having bushy eyebrows is not. Nor is it to assume that there are always sharp breaks between one thing and another, that everything is locked off from everything else in its own watertight ontological space.¹⁵

Those cultures which have held that women have some qualities simply as women which make them eminently oppressible are wrong. Whether they are wrong because women have in fact no determinate nature at all, either oppressible or non-oppressible, or because women have a right not to be oppressed just as a consequence of being human, is a matter for debate between postmodernists and some of their critics. To say that women should never be oppressed anywhere just on account of their common humanity sounds like a more forceful criticism of patriarchy than to say that they have no common humanity to begin

with.¹⁶

In particular, the second citation seems to provide a new perspective. From among various forms of post-modernist thought, Eagleton selects feminism in particular for discussion here, shedding new light on the antagonism between feminism and its opponents. Interestingly, the same logic applies to the critique of culture; if one were to replace women with other cultures or cultural others, and men with one's own culture, Eagleton's argument would still make perfect sense. In the remainder of this chapter, I will apply Eagleton's defense of essentialism to the domain of cultural (intercultural) criticism, especially of comparative studies of culture, and examine how essentialism contributes to the future of the understanding of culture.

Eagleton's critique of sexism is easily transferable to cultural nationalism and racist Orientalism. Sexism assumes that the very essence of women lies in their subjugation to men, which, feminists complain, necessarily reinforces a fixed conventional role of women in society. Likewise, as indicated by Sakai and others, culturalism, or cultural nationalism, discovers the essence of a given culture in its national character, thereby imprisoning the actualities of people's diverse cultural practices within the political territories of a modern nation-state. Furthermore, the discursive construction of the national character easily leads to racist ideology or to Orientalism, rooted in the imagery of the East-West binary. In sum, as sexism subjugates women to men, both cultural nationalism and racist Orientalism force culture into politics.

Until recently, such critical arguments have pervaded Japanese cultural and intellectual history as well. In the case of Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), for example, her implied Orientalist assumptions are implicit in discussions of the purported characteristics of Japanese susceptibility to the notion of 'shame.' By distinguishing the 'shame culture' of Japan from the 'guilt culture' of the West, she dexterously, if unintentionally, established a kind of East-West binary that contributed to the formation of Orientalism in the field of Japanese studies in the US. Another proponent of culturalist ideology, as noted earlier, is Watsuji Tetsurō. Sakai argues that, in a series of worldwide comparisons of national characters, Watsuji committed the essentialist fallacy of sorting cultural differences into a typological taxonomy and at the same time fell into ethnocentrism by inverting occidental Orientalism and baring his own racial prejudice against Westerners. Thus, canonical works of modern Japanese cultural and intellectual history have been on the receiving end of harsh criticism from the perspective of post-colonialism.

In opposition to this trend in cultural criticism characterized by a consistently hostile attitude towards essentialism, which is manifested when it is contextualized solely in terms of sexism, Eagleton attaches greater importance to essentialism in general. To restore the proper status of essentialism without validating sexism, Eagleton adopts a strategy of assuming that all people, men and women alike, are equally and broadly united by their common humanity. That is, people are *essentially* human beings after all, and an *essential* trait of human beings is that they do not differ in

terms of humanity. Thus, a banner that proclaims the humanitarian principle—that no type of discrimination among those who are equitably associated by common humanity should exist—would be more effective as a strategy for realizing social equality between men and women.

If we follow this line of reasoning, we are naturally induced to cast doubt on the post-colonialists' critique of cultural essentialism; their denouncement of nationalism and Orientalism seems no longer very convincing. In our case, if we replace sexism with an ideological composite of nationalism and Orientalism, men with the colonizer (the West), and women with the colonized (the East), respectively, our entire argument seems to make perfect sense. The general contours of our counter-criticism will be based on the following two foundations. First, just as sexism is by no means permissible as an architectural principle of relations between men and women, so should any form of discrimination be prohibited in interactions between West and East. In this respect, we maintain consistency with post-colonialism. Second, however, we disagree with post-colonialism in the terms in which we oppose cultural discrimination. Cultural discrimination should not be permitted, not because, as the proponents of post-colonialism claim, it stems from an essentialist view of culture. Rather, we argue that it is impermissible precisely because it runs counter to the basic premise that all human beings are equally entitled to be esteemed in accordance with common fundamental virtues such as dignity, mutual respect, courtesy, mercy and so on.

Thus, by shifting the emphasis of the argument from a critique of essentialism to an advocacy for common humanity, comparative studies of culture, which many believe was given a virtual death sentence by post-colonialism, may be restored to a strong position.

To appropriately reinstate comparative studies of culture, we should no longer be wedded to a post-colonialist premise; the ultimate goal of comparative studies of culture, the promotion of mutual understanding and cultural exchanges among people of distinct cultures, is not necessarily obstructed solely by the negative legacy of essentialism. No matter how vehemently the proponents of post-colonialism criticize cultural essentialism, it is highly unlikely that the multifarious cultural differences on Earth will cease to exist. Likewise, no matter how ardently post-colonialists harbor a dream of establishing a utopian colony where new hybridized forms of heterogeneous cultures will flourish beyond the enclosures of modern nation-states, such reveries will eventually turn out to be futile except as fuel for the ideological fires of a handful of elite professors and critics, who somewhat arrogantly preach pompous sermons of post-colonialism from on high.

On the contrary, we had better start by acknowledging first-hand that, just as human nature is *essentially* ubiquitous, so is the diversity of cultural differences that exist in the world. It follows necessarily then that the typological analysis of cultural differences is responsible not so much for exacerbating the existing malaise of nationalism and racism, but, rather, for promoting a better understanding of our common humanity through the comparison of diverse aspects of people's real cultural praxes. Similarly, pursuing comparative studies of culture should be regarded not as

an implicit instigation of unequal hierarchies among diverse cultures around the world but, rather, as an endeavor which aids us all in deeply understanding the characteristics or specific natures of each individual culture, ultimately enriching our common humanity. Indeed, Eagleton's powerful and enlightening defense of essentialism suggests something very important with regard to the future of comparative studies of culture, which, admittedly, leaves much still to be desired.

3. Second Critique of Pragmatic Liberalism and the Defense of Universality

Eagleton's Second Critique

Now, let us shift the focus of discussion from Eagleton's critique of post-colonialism to his critique of American postmodernism, especially Richard Rorty's pragmatic liberalism. Eagleton's argument centers primarily on what he sees as a conspiracy between American postmodernists who deny universality and those who pursue culturalist enterprises. While mentioning Rorty by name, Eagleton writes as follows:

This universality must apply to ethics too. One kind of postmodern sceptic of universality believes in culturalist style that moral values are just embedded in contingent local traditions, and have no more force than that. An egregious example of this case is the American philosopher Richard Rorty...¹⁷

Postmodernism has demystified the most stubbornly naturalized of institutions by laying bare the conventions which govern them, and so has sometimes run headlong into a brand of neo-Sophism for which, since all conventions are arbitrary anyway, one might as well conform to those of the Free World. The work of Richard Rorty, who is refreshingly upfront about his political proclivities, is a case in point. In yanking out the metaphysical foundations from beneath the feet of its radical opponents, it has been able to avoid the embarrassment of engaging directly with their politics. Who needs to launch a detailed critique of left-wing thought when you can argue, much more grandiosely, that all social discourse is blinded and indeterminate, that the 'real' is undecidable, that all actions beyond a timorous reformism will proliferate periously beyond one's control, that there are no subjects sufficiently coherent to undertake such actions in the first place, that there is no total system to be changed in any case, that any apparently oppositional stance has already been pre-empted by the ruses of power, and that the world is no particular way at all, assuming we can know enough about it to assert even that?¹⁸

What Eagleton discerns here as the problematics of American postmodernism can be

summarized in the following two points: A) the claim of 'relativism,' in which the presence of universally applicable principles, such as reason and truth, is completely negated and all values are placed on a flat level of equality, and B) the claim of 'ethnocentrism,' in which the standards of value judgments are attributed wholly to the customs and manners inherent in each culture as marked by regional differences. Boldly enough, Eagleton dares to assert that these ideas are a deceptive "brand of neo-Sophism." Eagleton plays a variation on the same theme in the following passages, repeatedly targeting the version of American postmodernism represented primarily by the works of Rorty and Stanley Fish:

For American neo-pragmatists like Rorty and Fish, the collapse of transcendental viewpoints signals, in effect, the collapse of the possibility of full-blooded political critique.... We are always, in short, installed firmly on the inside of the culture we hope to criticize, so thoroughly constituted by its interests and beliefs that to put them into radical question would involve leaping out of our own skins.¹⁹

This doctrine, which depends on an eminently deconstructable distinction between 'inside' and 'outside', is currently being deployed by some to defend the American way of life, precisely because postmodernism is uneasily aware that no rational critique of that way of life, or indeed of any other, is any longer possible. To pull out the foundations from under your opponent is, unavoidably, to pull them out from under oneself. In order to avoid the unwelcome conclusion that there is no rational justification for one's form of life, one must seek to disable the very idea of critique as such, branding it as necessarily 'metaphysical', 'transcendent', 'absolute' or 'foundational'.²⁰

...all this can then be offered as a 'radical' defense of pluralism against the terrors of totalization. This is a dogma which is perhaps rather easier to sustain in Columbia University than in the Latin American nation of that name.²¹

In these passages, Eagleton points out that American postmodernism confuses its original claims of relativism and ethnocentrism with a self-complacent defense of the American way of life, and is consequently consumed by a conservative political ideology. A problematic combination of postmodernism and conservatism is seen, for example, in Rorty's provocative book, *Achieving Our Country* (1998). In this book, Rorty vigorously promotes intellectuals as the proper vanguard of social criticism. Rorty writes as follows:

All universities worthy of the name have always been centers of social protest. If American universities ever cease to be such centers, they will lose both their self-respect and the respect

of the learned world. It is doubtful whether the current critics of the universities who are called “conservative intellectuals” deserve this description. For intellectuals are supposed to be aware of, and speak to, issues of social justice.²²

In apparent contradiction to this spirited, apparently left-leaning manifesto, however, several explicit statements of patriotism pop up here and there throughout the same text. Rorty also writes the following:

...[W]e begin to realize that one of the essential transformations which the cultural Left will have to undergo is the shedding of its semi-conscious anti-Americanism, which is carried over from the rage of the late Sixties. This Left will have to stop thinking up ever more abstract and abusive names for the “system” and start trying to construct inspiring images of the country. ...Outside the academy, Americans still want to feel patriotic. They still want to feel part of a nation which can take control of its destiny and make itself a better place.²³

The difference between the two passages is hard to ignore. In them we see Rorty espousing a relativistic view of truth as a basis of his leftist strategy for securing social justice but then preaching the particular virtues of American civic patriotism or ethnocentrism. Yet this is only an apparent contradiction: Rorty’s rejection of universality is inseparably tied to his affirmation of cultural specificity. Moreover, Rorty’s ethnocentrism is, in a sense, a necessary corollary to his broader postmodern pragmatism. Nevertheless, a moment’s sober reflection would reveal something odd and uncanny about this combination; no contemporary intellectuals, whether radical or liberal, who possess even a spark of conscience and humanity, would object to the view that, while the moral ideal of cultural relativism is something to esteem, patriotism and ethnocentrism remain primarily troublesome concepts. We find these two seemingly conflicting claims co-existing unapologetically within a single text of Rorty’s. Eagleton rightly illuminates this inconsistency in Rorty’s postmodernism.

Regrettably, Eagleton does not give any further account of Rorty’s apparent self-contradiction; he should have dug deeper into this problem. I want to suggest here that, although Eagleton’s critique of Rorty is mostly to the point, a certain measure of validity must be granted to Rorty as well. Rorty’s claim of ethnocentrism sounds refreshing, especially to those, including me, who are satiated with leftist overindulgence in the ‘criticism-for-the-sake-of-criticism’ approach to culture. Rorty’s stimulating ideas and words seem capable of inspiring dramatic turnabout in our ingrained, habitual way of thinking. If Rorty were to use his ethnocentrism to promote cultural pluralism in the contemporary world, it would deserve more critical attention. Yet Rorty seems to have failed to provide a compelling account of how such a plan of ethnocentrism could be put into practice without falling into cultural solipsism. To put it more bluntly, Rorty’s ethnocentrism seems to

have something to do with a lack of sensibility to other cultures, an attitude that is all too often observed among Americans. Regrettably, again, there is no space here for a thorough discussion of this problem. Further elaboration must be bracketed here and relegated to another occasion. Nevertheless, the following argument concerns, albeit indirectly, the potentialities and limitations of Rorty's postmodernism insofar as it examines, not the works of Rorty himself, but the application of his philosophy to modern Japanese intellectual history.

The Influence of Rorty's Postmodernism on Lafleur's Interpretation of Watsuji

We now consider the strengths and weaknesses of Lafleur's reading of Watsuji in light of the problematic aspects of Rorty's postmodern pragmatism. First, let us confirm Rorty's strong influence over Lafleur in such passages as the following. Between the lines, one can clearly hear the reverberation of Rorty's postmodernism, which, as examined earlier, rests principally on two premises: skepticism about universality and praise of ethnocentrism.

What may be far more cogent and ultimately defensible in the stance assumed by Watsuji will be his angry contention that wars and historical tragedies such as the ones known to the Japanese in the twentieth century are *not* brought about by a constitutively flawed rationality or some kind of arrested development that prevents a given society from being as rational as its contemporaries.²⁴

Although Watsuji wanted a history of Japan seen in a "global" context, he rejected the supposition that there are global or universally valid stages of rationality through which whole peoples and their societies either must or ought to go. It is worth noting that he expressed skepticism about such grand theories at a time when the adoption and advocacy of such theories was *de rigueur* and more often than not taken to be the mark of a true intellectual.²⁵

My reason for discussing this here is certainly not to claim that, in the 1950s, Watsuji Tetsurō had been a precursor of all of this. I am not convinced that the notion of "precursor" fits here or, in fact, when no linkage of influence can be shown, to what extent it can ever be helpful in doing historical work. Nevertheless, Watsuji's move to appreciate Bacon at the same time that he felt compelled to distance himself from both Descartes and Kant is probably not a coincidence. Nor, I suggest, is this totally unconnected to his intellectual debate for the various theories of rational development that were so much a part of the intellectual climate of postwar Japan. Watsuji's sense of revulsion came first of all from his conviction that all such theories were inappropriate for application to the Japanese context; to that extent he continued to be deeply involved in his own specific intellectual milieu even when not

seeming to be so on the surface.²⁶

What uniquely characterizes Lafleur's reading of Watsuji is his conscious effort to extricate Watsuji's skepticism about modern Western rationality from the hitherto unfavorable criticism thereof. In his challenge to the orthodoxy prevailing in both Japan and the US, Lafleur first pays special attention to Watsuji's sustained remarks about Francis Bacon during the long period of turmoil that straddled Japan's defeat in the Pacific War. Lafleur then invokes the aid of a recent reappraisal of Bacon in the West: Throughout the twentieth century until around the eighties, a variety of scholars and critics of culture had denounced Bacon as an ideologue of modern industrial society; thereafter, however, some contemporary philosophers such as Rorty and Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996) shed new light on Bacon's utilitarianism, thereby rehabilitating his reputation. Rorty argues that Bacon's famous dictum, "knowledge is power," expressed a form of pragmatism: The use of knowledge should not be limited to the theoretical pursuit of purely epistemological rationality or universality but, rather, knowledge should be broadly taken advantage of for practical purposes that improve human life. In other words, Rorty sees a close affinity between Bacon's utilitarianism and his postmodern pragmatism: Both thinkers are highly skeptical of the kind of rationality stipulated primarily by Descartes and Kant, the two major figures of modern epistemology. In this particular phase of antagonism towards the rationality of the modern West, Rorty discovers Bacon as a precursor of his postmodern pragmatism.

Returning to the context of modern Japanese intellectual history, Lafleur goes on to claim that Watsuji's interest in Bacon provides a vital clue for a postmodernist interpretation of Watsuji's problematic texts, which have been long relegated to the status of flattery of the military regime or wartime propaganda. Lafleur starts from the fact that Watsuji maintained a continuing interest in Bacon both before and after the war. Watsuji's remarks about Bacon during the postwar years should be interpreted in terms of his intense rivalry with an ear-splitting chorus of '*Kindai-shugi*,' an increasingly observed trend of thought during this period that may be literally translated as 'modernism' as opposed to nativism or traditionalism. In the immediate aftermath of the war, modernist intellectuals of the younger generation, such as Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) and Ôtsuka Hisao (1907-1996), energetically launched their brand of social criticism with a cry of remorse for Japanese wartime follies. They demanded a complete overhaul of traditional ways of thinking and behaving among the Japanese by installing a modern rationality and subjectivity of European origin.²⁷ Watsuji, however, strongly objected. It is in this specific context of Watsuji's antagonism towards '*Kindai-shugi*' that his interest in Bacon begins to take on new significance. To excavate that significance, Lafleur traces the lineage of Watsuji's sustained, albeit intermittent, remarks on Bacon, from *National Seclusion* (1946)—its subtitle "Japan's Tragedy" clearly implies Watsuji's deep remorse—in the postwar period to a group of problematic or even infamous wartime writings such as "The National Character of the Americans (1944)." After his meticulous

examination of these texts, Lafleur concludes that, with his remarks on Bacon, Watsuji probably wanted to suggest his concealed trust in a form of omnipresent, transcultural rationality other than the one based on the modern epistemology of the West.

Although admittedly it assumes somewhat agonistic pose, Lafleur's defense of Watsuji's 'notorious' wartime texts seems to be a worthy enterprise. Compared with Sakai's hate campaign against Watsuji, which is full of negative, sterile remarks from start to finish, Lafleur's attempt deserves high praise and adumbrates the productive potential of comparative studies of culture. Notwithstanding such an idealistic premise, his argument still leaves some fundamental problems unsolved.

In my observation, the primary weakness in Lafleur's account is his neglect of pragmatist thread running through Rorty's postmodern philosophy. To put it differently, despite their apparent similarity, pragmatist philosophy is essentially incompatible with Watsuji's culturalist enterprise. The resemblance between contemporary postmodern culture and traditional Japanese culture has often been pointed out; a common feature of the two cultures can be observed in the voiding of 'subjectivity' as the term is understood in the modern epistemology of the West. Admittedly, we can discover an example of a conscious application of such a comparative view in Lafleur's interpretation of Watsuji. Nonetheless, a careful examination of Watsuji's entire body of scholarship would clearly suggest that his culturalism is rather different from Rorty's postmodern pragmatism in its content.²⁸ In addition, Rorty's pragmatic reading of Bacon itself needs to be examined further to assess its validity. All things considered, it would be safe to avoid taking advantage of such an insufficiently grounded resemblance too hastily. Regrettably, a more detailed examination of this problem must be reserved for another occasion.

Although Lafleur's reading of Watsuji is thus less than convincing, it suffices here to confirm that it depends heavily on Rortian postmodern pragmatism for its theoretical framework. In the late 1980s, when Lafleur proposed this new reading of Watsuji, postmodernism was at its zenith and having far-reaching effects on studies of culture. In America, postmodernism exerted enormous influence not only on the human and social sciences but also on more wide-ranging discussions about the multiplicity of cultural values. The discussions of postmodernism and multiculturalism heated up to such an extent that they were called 'culture wars,' a term that came eventually to characterize the broader political landscape in the US. That feverish atmosphere of the 1980s seems to me to reverberate, if somewhat faintly, in Lafleur's article. In other words, it is reasonable to assume that Lafleur's argument contributes less to Watsuji studies proper and more to extended discussions of multiculturalism in the US.

I do not condemn Lafleur for this aberration in his thinking. On the contrary, I was, and still am, deeply impressed by the sincerity of his intellectual challenge. Although Lafleur does not explicitly proclaim his political creed in the article, he seems to entertain the ambitious ideal of pursuing liberalism through his own study of modern Japanese intellectual history. For Japanese

scholars in this field, including myself, the sincere and enterprising attitudes of our American counterparts, including even radicals such as Sakai as well as moderates such as Lafleur, provide an excellent opportunity for broadly rethinking the very basis of their/our scholarship. That is why I have so far taken a seemingly tortuous detour to compare the conflicting readings of Watsuji's problematic texts offered by the two American scholars.

Eagleton's Defense of Universality

Let us now return to Eagleton. Just as Eagleton defends essentialism in opposition to post-colonialist criticism, so he also sheds new theoretical light on 'universality,' which has consistently been the target of criticism on the part of pragmatic postmodernists. As observed repeatedly, Rorty affirmatively and somewhat nonchalantly proposes that by liquefying the solid bases of philosophical universality, such as truth and subjectivity, people all over the world who have long been embedded in their own cultural differences will be able to start a free-style conversational exchange of opinions and values. Eagleton immediately dismisses such a proposition as opportunistic, claiming, instead, that one cannot separate universality from cultural difference(s) as easily Rorty rather facilely preaches. Surely, Eagleton's ambitious defense of universality might suggest something crucially important to my argument; at the same time, however, it sounds too crude and undeveloped to be fully persuasive. Be that as it may, let us examine his own words first:

But universality and difference are not necessarily at odds. Take, for example, the concept of human equality. You can understand this as meaning that all people are equal in their concrete attributes, which is clearly fatuous: Some people are a lot finer or shabbier than others, in particular respects.²⁹

It was for this reason that Marx, in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* and elsewhere, regarded the notion of equality as a typical bourgeois abstraction, one which was secretly modeled on the exchanges of the commodity form. Socialism is not in the end much interested in equality. To treat two people equally must surely mean not giving them exactly the same treatment but attending equally to their different needs. It is not that they are equal individuals, but that they are equally individuals. And to this extent a reasonable concept of equality already implicates the notion of difference.³⁰

This mutual implication is apparent in other ways too. Marx strongly believed in a common or universal human nature, but he considered individuation to be an integral part of it.³¹

These citations sharply underscore Eagleton's repeated references to Marx. This clearly

suggests that Eagleton attempts to break new ground by introducing a Marxist dialectical perspective into the simplistic dichotomy between universality and difference(s). As already seen, Eagleton diagnoses pragmatic postmodernism as having reached a philosophical impasse in negating universality for its own sake and, consequently, having fallen into the pitfalls of philosophical solipsism or political conservatism or cultural ethnocentrism. To avoid such tempting bait or to deconstruct such an intractably problematic dichotomy, Eagleton turns to Marxism. In the following passages, this 'Marxism' is rephrased as 'socialism.'

In this sense, socialism deconstructs the current oppositions between universal reason and culture-bound practices, abstract rights and concrete affiliations, liberalism and communitarianism, Enlightenment nature and postmodern culture.³²

...indeed quite a bit of postmodernism, with its zest for plurality, multiplicity, provisionality, anti-totality, open-endedness and the rest, has the look of a sheepish liberalism in wolf's clothing. The political goal of socialism is not a resting in difference, which is then just the flipside of a spurious universalism, but the emancipation of difference at the level of human mutuality or reciprocity.³³

Because such a complex series of ideas are drawn as it were in the single stroke of a pen, what Eagleton specifically implies by his strategic alternative of socialism, let alone whether the alternative has any prospect of successfully materializing in the near future, remains unclear. Conceivably, he might simply be telling the palpable truth that socialism is an idea esteeming the universal values and virtues shared by all men and women, such as respect for humanity, equality, diversity, and so on.

Regardless of Eagleton's real intention, at least one thing is certain for most of us: It is not a little embarrassing to hear the term 'socialism,' which sounds rather outdated and obsolete, coming from the mouth of Eagleton, one of the leading figures in contemporary literary and cultural criticism. Here, I must hurriedly add my reservation that I do not necessarily regard Eagleton's alternative plan of socialism as fallacious. It is hardly likely that in his oblique reference to socialism Eagleton really designates the socio-economic system that once existed primarily in the former Eastern European countries. Rather, Eagleton seems to want to reflect Marxist theories of culture that have gained considerable sophistication in the twentieth-century West; these include new philosophical ideas concerning the sublation of subjectivity and objectivity or universality and difference(s). Still, I must emphasize that Eagleton should have provided more specific, detailed explications of the mechanisms through which his proposed plan of socialism would actually lead to the realization of such a sublation. Likewise, I want Eagleton to show us how the entire enterprise will make its way without falling into nostalgia or playing a leftist bluff. In a series of

books—*The Illusions of Postmodernism*, *The Idea of Culture* (2000), *After Theory* (2000) and others—Eagleton seeks to piece together a solution from several sources, trying to systematize his miscellaneous thoughts and ideas concerning universality, essentialism, human nature, truth, and so on. Nonetheless, he seems not yet to have reached a definitive conclusion.

A Bridge between Universality and Difference(s).

Marxism enjoys no monopoly on attempting to bridge the chasm between universality and difference(s). We need not necessarily adhere to Eagleton's alternative proposal for socialism. Because a wide range of issues are involved in this problem, it becomes crucially important for us to go outside the closed circle of Marxism and listen to non-Marxist opinions. Let us take the example of multiculturalism in North America. In a series of discussions about how to overcome the defects of established methodologies that have failed to prevent serious antagonism from rearing up among distinct ethnic groups, some liberalist scholars and critics have proposed a new moderate approach to reconciliation. It is important here to acknowledge that this approach is philosophically oriented towards mediation between universality and difference(s). Elsewhere, I have examined the specifics of this philosophical position, the gist of which is roughly summarized in what follows.³⁴

The overheated debate about multiculturalism in North America, particularly during the 1980s, was often described in terms of 'culture wars.' At one extreme pole of antagonism, a group of people severely criticized the dominance of the white race over all other races, and demanded improvements in the status of ethnic minorities. Such harsh criticisms and uncompromising demands were expressed primarily by leftist radicals. At the opposite pole, another group of debaters persistently defended the universal principles of humanity and held up an ideal of equal respect and equal opportunity for all cultural and ethnic groups. Proponents of universalism of this kind insisted on dealing with the specific problems and conflicts that arise from diverse cultural differences according to a series of universal concepts, such as reason, subjectivity, human rights, democracy, and so on, the best legacy that humans have fostered since the Enlightenment. Charles Taylor, one of the representative theorists of multiculturalism in North America, describes the disagreement over the implementation of multiculturalism as an opposition between "the politics of difference" and "the politics of universal dignity."³⁵ These two factional parties thus stand in sharp contrast to one another.

As long as the politics of multiculturalism informs public and intellectual discourse, culture wars will become increasingly exacerbated. On the one hand, overemphasizing cultural differences may lead to the "Disuniting of America," as historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. seriously argues in his famed book of that title. On the other hand, focusing too much attention on human universalism will actually mean nothing other than coercing diverse ethnic minorities into yielding to the dominant white culture under the banner of "God Bless America." Unfortunately, neither

emphasis alone has ever succeeded in establishing critical or cultural peace, as eloquently demonstrated by numerous examples in contemporary North American society. In any case, this undesirable academic factionalism can only delay the day when the ideal of multiculturalism will be realized in North American society as well as elsewhere in the world.

To remedy this predicament, Taylor proposes a dialogue among members of different cultures, which he terms a “fusion of horizons.”³⁶ Multiculturalism as a dialogue can also translate into a practice of communitarianism, which is rooted in people’s daily customs and language use, an area in which Taylor is widely considered one of the leading theorists. Yet we cannot deny that such proposals of “dialogue” or a “fusion of horizons” have failed to break the deadlock that would substantially emasculate Rorty’s “cultural conversation.” Thus, the discussion of multiculturalism needs to be reshaped in terms of both theoretical investigations and social practices.

Intending to contribute to such an endeavor, I have attempted to resolve this philosophical imbroglio in my previous article. My tentative conclusion can be recapitulated as follows: In discussions of multiculturalism, Nietzsche and Kant best represent the philosophers to whom proponents of “the politics of difference” and “the politics of universal dignity,” respectively, are most heavily indebted for their theoretical foundation. Nietzsche and Kant are generally thought to have little in common with each other philosophically. Nonetheless, by carefully unearthing some common ground buried in their philosophies, we can narrow the distance between them. In short, a point of contact between Nietzsche and Kant can be discovered in such concepts as ‘inter-subjectivity’ and ‘common sense’; these ideas can serve as a basis for cross-cultural commensurability, a fruitful intercultural “conversation” in Rorty’s terms or a “fusion of horizons” in Taylor’s terms, among those who have differing views and opinions.

Taylor’s ‘fusion of horizons,’ Yoshida’s ‘inter-subjectivity’ and ‘common sense,’ and Eagleton’s ‘socialism’: Each has a unique philosophical, cultural, and political background. In my view, however, all these ideas have a shared orientation towards new relations between universality and difference(s). Those involved in contemporary discussions of multiculturalism are all equally required to extricate themselves from their own intellectual circles and participate in dialogues among cultures.

4. Concluding Remarks

Commentaries on Watsuji’s cultural typology have been filled with negativity both inside and outside Japan. The latest version of such negative remarks can be seen in Sakai’s harsh criticism, the methodology of which is based on the theories of post-colonialism and cultural studies. Despite a measure of cogency, Sakai’s harshness seems to have gone too far. I raise the question of how Watsuji’s works can be rescued from such scathing criticism. This problematization

necessarily leads to another question of how comparative studies of culture can be salvaged from a bleak future.

To answer these questions, I underscore Lafleur's audacious interpretation of Watsuji, which diverges sharply from Sakai's criticism. In an attempt to reconcile these two distinct readings of Watsuji's cultural typology, I propose examining the deadlock from the broader perspective of postmodernism. With the help of Eagleton's critique of postmodernism, I suggest that the disagreement between the two American scholars of modern Japanese intellectual history results from a more fundamental difference between two types of postmodernist premises, post-colonialism and liberal pragmatism. From this perspective, several problems, not only in Sakai's and Lafleur's readings of Watsuji but also more broadly in comparative studies of culture, emerge.

First, the gist of Sakai's criticism comes down to a proposition that the typological analyses of cultural differences, which presuppose the essential characteristics of each culture, are fallacious because they implicitly promote racism or a hierarchy of races, cultures, and civilizations. However, Eagleton's counter-critique powerfully exposes how such a post-colonialist critique of essentialism has become too one-sided. Second, Lafleur endeavors to redeem the cultural typologies, working in concert with Rorty who claims that eliminating the burden of the universality of the West would enable people all over the world to participate freely in cross-cultural conversations. This view seems intriguing at first, but ultimately is seen to be over-optimistic. Lafleur falls short primarily because of a problem peculiar to Rorty's pragmatic liberalism, the problem of the simplistic dualism between universality and difference(s). Here again Eagleton's counter-critique suggests something crucially important: Universality and difference(s) are inextricably intertwined.

How can the abyss between the two postmodernist approaches to studies of culture be bridged? In what direction should a moderate approach to culture be sought? I conclude my argument by tentatively suggesting that one possible starting point of a dialogue between cultures lies somewhere in the triangle bounded by essentialism, universality, and difference(s), and that observations of cultural differences ultimately leads to a better understanding of ubiquitous human nature.

Endnotes

- ¹ Naoki Sakai, "Subject and/or Shutai and the Inscription of Cultural Difference," in *Translation & Subjectivity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). William Lafleur, "Reasons for the Rubble: Watsuji Tetsuro's Position in Japan's Postwar Debate about Rationality," in *Philosophy East and West*. 51.0. (January 2001) (University of Hawaii Press).
- ² Kazuhisa Yoshida, "The Predicament of Speaking about Cultural Differences: Two Readings of Watsuji Tetsuro's Cultural Typology and the Context of American Multiculturalism," in *Hitotsubashi Review of Arts and Sciences*, Hitotsubashi University, no.3, 2009.

- ³ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), and *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
- ⁴ Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p.205.
- ⁵ Eagleton refers to the examples of biologism, humanism and economism.
- ⁶ Kazuhisa Yoshida, "Two Readings of *the Chrysanthemum and the Sword* in the Contemporary Perspective of the Comparative Studies of Culture," in *Studies in Humanities & Social Sciences*, Nihon University, no.72, 2007.
- ⁷ Eagleton, *ibid.*, p.206.
- ⁸ Sakai, *Translation & Subjectivity*, p.129.
- ⁹ Sakai, *ibid.*, p.148.
- ¹⁰ Eagleton, *ibid.*, p.205.
- ¹¹ Sakai, *ibid.*, p.145.
- ¹² Sakai, *ibid.*, p.126.
- ¹³ Eagleton, *ibid.*, pp.205-206.
- ¹⁴ Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p.103.
- ¹⁵ Eagleton, *ibid.*, p.98.
- ¹⁶ Eagleton, *ibid.*, p.100.
- ¹⁷ Eagleton, *ibid.*, p.114.
- ¹⁸ Eagleton, *ibid.*, pp.27-28.
- ¹⁹ Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p.203.
- ²⁰ Eagleton, *ibid.*, p.203.
- ²¹ Eagleton, *ibid.*, p.204.
- ²² Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p.82.
- ²³ Rorty, *ibid.*, p.99.
- ²⁴ Lafleur, "Reasons for the Rubble," p.17.
- ²⁵ Lafleur, *ibid.*, p.17.
- ²⁶ Lafleur, *ibid.*, pp.21-22.
- ²⁷ These standpoints are usually termed 'Kindai-shugi' in Japanese, as distinguished from 'modernism' in English that is usually explained as "the deliberate departure from tradition and the use of innovative forms of expression that distinguish many styles in the arts and literature of the 20th century." The quote is from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), p.1130.
- ²⁸ "Culturalism" is a term Sakai uses to denounce Watsuji's cultural typology.
- ²⁹ Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p.116.
- ³⁰ Eagleton, *ibid.*, pp.116-117.
- ³¹ Eagleton, *ibid.*, p.117.
- ³² Eagleton, *ibid.*, pp.118-119.
- ³³ Eagleton, *ibid.*, p.120.
- ³⁴ Yoshida, "The Predicament of Speaking about Cultural Differences," pp.343-350.
- ³⁵ Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- ³⁶ Taylor, *ibid.*, p.67.