

II. Reconsideration of the Concept of “Climate” (*Fūdo*) in Watsuji Tetsurō’s Cultural Theory

That the environment around us has a significant impact on the lives we are able to live ought to go without saying, but too often Western philosophers have neglected the importance of the environment to our self-comprehension within history.

Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960) incredibly emphasized his ethical conceptions on that need between human beings and their environments such as natural as well as social. Especially his concept of *fūdo* is most significant role in this topic. In Sino-Japanese tradition, it originally means ‘wind and earth’ that is ‘*fū*’ means ‘wind or airstream’ and ‘*do*’ means ‘earth or land’. From the combination of these two words, *fūdo* is defined as the ‘milieu’ or ‘climate’. However, for him, *fūdo* is seen not merely as a collection of natural features of a given land, but also as the metaphor of ‘subjectivity’, or ‘who I am’. In addition, this self-discovery or self-consciousness of one’s own existence through *fūdo* is never ‘private or individual’ but ‘collective or communal’.

However, Leopold’s “land ethic” is comparable one_a noteworthy exception in western tradition_to Watsuji’s ‘ethics of climate’. As one of the leading figures of the current wave of environmental ethicists and deep ecologists, Leopold brought attention to the core constitution of the human being in an especially

outstanding way of environmental ethics. In *Sand County Almanac*, he argues:

That man is, in fact, only a member of his biotic community is shown by an ecological interpretation of history. Many historical events, hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic interactions between people and land. The characteristics of the land determined the facts quite as potently as the characteristics of the men who lived on it⁹.

For him, the natural environment with which it has co-evolved. Leopold sees ethics as a matter of finding an accommodation between the group and individual that does justice to the authentic character of each. Leopold also takes the core insight and "simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land"¹⁰

In the ethical perspective of Watsuji Tetsurō, it might be said that because someone's existence as a human being requires the existence of other human beings, it is only right for someone to give deference to prerogatives of the community in certain situations and vice versa for the community to defer to the individual.

In his ethics of environment Watsuji does clearly assume that because everybody lacks substantial existence as human beings (that is, humans are not

⁹Aldo Leopold. (1964). *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*. 7th printing. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.205.

¹⁰Ibid., p.204.

independent beings but dependently co-arising), they are radically dependent on the environment around them for their construction as subjects. He attempts to explain this environmental construction of the spatiality of the subject in greater detail in his book *Fūdo*¹¹. In Japanese, the word *fūdo* can nearly to be translated as "milieu" or "climate" and is written with the characters 'wind or style' (風, meaning the human factors of a place) and 'soil or' (土, meaning the natural factors of a place). Hence, the meaning of it can generally be defined in two senses by means of its usage in Japanese culture as,

1. Regional forms of weather, soil, topography, and so on.
2. The spiritual environment as it affects the makeup of human cultures.

In view of that, Watsuji's conception of *fūdo* transcends in view of a natural environment as what surrounds us. Although biological, physical and geographical features exert forces on human living, but the human beings in turn transform the environment¹². For Watsuji, if human and nature are treated as two separate entities, it will be failed to see a more fundamental bond between man and climatic phenomena.

¹¹This book, *Fūdo*, was translated by Geoffrey Bownas as the title of *A Climate: A Philosophical Study*.

¹²Watsuji Tetsurō (trans. Geeoffrey Bownas. (1961). *A Climate: A Philosophical Study*. Tokyo: Ministry of Education Printing Bureau. pp. 4-8.

For Watsuji, *fūdo* seeks to overcome the boundary between human and nature, or this dichotomous framework with the *a priori* intertwined status between nature and human. One of the characteristics of *fūdo* as an interrelating conception is considered as that *fūdo* indicates concrete phenomena in daily life. For example, a physical movement of ‘air’ is never apprehended as a scientific fact in his philosophy. Rather, the movement appears as a ‘wind’ in spring that “scatters the cherry blossoms”¹³. What is more significant is the fact that this wind penetrates the human heart. Someone is found one’s feeling or emotion oneself “gladdened or pained in a wind that scatters the cherry blossoms”¹⁴. It is the evidence of what takes place at the outside world is intertwined with the status of the human heart.

On the topic of the wind in spring how to intertwine with the emotion of human beings, Jin Baek’s consideration is noteworthy for understanding Watsuji’s conception. According to Jin,

In apprehending at what level *fūdo* is operating, we can accordingly establish a tiered system from the concrete, where a climatic quality is intertwined with the human heart, to the abstract, where the climatic quality is treated as a physical quality indifferent to the human heart: from “a spring wind scattering the cherry blossoms to define the human heart gladdened or pained” to “a spring wind

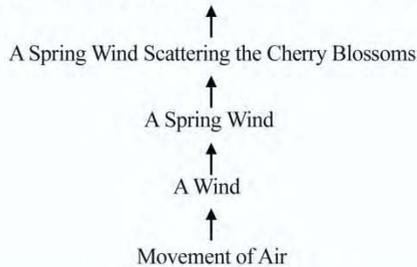
¹³Watsuji Tetsurō. (1961). *A Climate: A Philosophical Study*. pp. 4-8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*,

scattering the cherry blossoms”, then to “a spring wind”, then to “a wind”, and then finally to a “movement of air” (Chart 1).¹⁵

Chart 1. *Fudo* and levels of perception

A Spring Wind Scattering the Cherry Blossoms to define the human heart gladdened or pained



Jin Baek. (2013)¹⁶

From Watsuji’s notion of *fūdo*, climatic quality and human heart of emotion are closely interrelated with each other. In other words, natural environment including climate have great impact on human emotion. In this context, physical or sensational perceptions stimulated by climate or other natural phenomenon ordinarily interconnected with human emotion or conceptual understanding.

In this respect, Watsuji’s conception of *fūdo* is also remarkable contribution to the aesthetic standpoint of environmental conservation in current time even though he seemed to focus on that of ethical dimension at that

¹⁵Jin Baek. (2013). “*Fudo*: An East Asian Notion of Climate and Sustainability”. *Buildings*. 2013,3,588-597;doi:10.3390/buildings3030588. ISSN 2075-5309.www.mdpi.com/journal/buildings/

¹⁶ Ibid.,

time. Especially, it can be considered as one of the foremost philosophical concepts that claimed aesthetics as an intertwining things of everyday life, not only as works of art in museums, galleries, and theatres. In other words, in apprehending aesthetic engagement to environments more prefer than being 'subject' of nature or everyday things rather than being 'object' of mere art works in museums. To sum up, it can be said that Watsuji's concept of *fūdo* can support as a way of building bridges between the gap between mental faculty and physical faculty of human being by means of sensational awareness.