

Chapter 5

Primacy of Imagination and *Sensus Communis*: In Considering a Transcultural Subjectivity

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The question of how human beings create the environment in which they dwell is a common philosophical concern for many philosophers from the Kyoto school. For example, both Miki Kiyoshi and Nishida Kitarō have thought about how the embodied subjects or agents (*shutai* 主体) make history (Curley, 2020: 448). In Miki’s eyes, Marx offered a theory of history in which the development of history was identical to the development of the human being towards a total forcing of the human capacity for creation. Thus, for Miki, Marxism *was* humanism (Curley, 2020: 448). According to such views on human history and development, it is not hard to understand why Miki had shifted his concern to the logic of imagination (*kōsōryoku* 構想力) which is understood as the foundation of “the creation of the new culture” (Cf. Curley, 2020: 449). With these insights in mind, I want to renew the discussion about the significance of imagination and *sensus communis* in considering the constitution of a transcultural subjectivity concerning our digitalized global situation.

In this philosophical workshop, let’s consider *which cognitive power has the primacy in the construction of transcultural subjectivity*. In order to respond to this question and the title I made for this presentation, some concepts have to be clarified at the outset: What is meant by “transcultural subjectivity,” “[power of] imagination” and

“*sensus communis*”? What is the meaning of having primacy in the construction of a transcultural subjectivity?

1. What I Consider When I Talk about the Construction of a “Transcultural Subjectivity”?

When I talk about the construction of transcultural subjectivity, I do not mean the constructions of transcultural identity, which is somehow empirical, social, and historical. To define subject or subjectivity in the traditional way, thinkers tend to outline the differences among identities, the particular out of the universal, and the essential character of something is the result. The classical definition of human beings made by Aristotle, “*zoon logon echon* (Men are rational animals),” is the typical example of an essentialism. On the other hand, relationism focuses on the relationship among things in defining a particular. It’s emphasized that we can only know something among certain relations in a contextual whole. Things are neither self-standing nor infinitely differentiable entities. Both views are wrong, because they presuppose what they are looking for. In other words, to avoid infinite regress, they presuppose an absolute proposition as the goal of the thought for which they are searching. In combining the above ways of thinking, when I consider the constructions of transcultural subjectivity, I do not aim at an argument for an essential character or entity, but the faculty that enables us to construct the social-historical relations. Through these relations, the subject reveals what it needs in considering its *empirical* identity. However, what enables this possibility lies essentially in the *transcendental* condition, namely the transcultural subjectivity.

2. What Does It Mean When I Employ the Term “Transcultural Subjectivity”?

After the age of imperialism and colonialism, together with the unbound and cross-border experience in the digital age, a globalized world forces us to accept the fact that there is no pure and unbounded Western or Eastern culture in the strict sense. You may object to the invasion of global capital led by the so-called “multinational” enterprise and practice a kind of rebellion on a personal basis, but you cannot single-handedly change this reality. We are living in the age of hybrid identities. Cultural difference is only a matter of degrees rather than substance. In other words, we all possess a transcultural identity, no matter whether we are conscious or unconscious of this fact. I’m using the term “transcultural” subjectivity instead of, for example, “multicultural,” “intercultural,” or “cross-cultural,” because:

- 1.) “Multicultural” refers to a state that a subject contains multiple cultural or ethical origins. A multicultural person possesses different cultural resources. However, it does not mean that the different cultural characters necessarily have engaging interactions with each other.
- 2.) “Cross-cultural” emphasizes the action of comparison between two or more different cultures or cultural areas. The key point of such comparison lies simply in creating the action across different cultural entities. The starting point and subjective orientation of the comparison are not important as such.
- 3.) The word “intercultural” denotes a status of “in-betweenness.” An intercultural person could live in a so-called “international” environment very well, because such an environment must be a decentralized cultural environment, which can be copied and rebuilt everywhere on this planet. However, such

intercultural characteristics are in another perspective a kind of monopolization of the definitions of “international” and “intercultural.” Eventually, the “international” means, basically, for example, the employment of English, a capitalist lifestyle or the adoption of American standards, etc. So, to me, the concept “transcultural” presupposes a “rooted cosmopolitanism” representing a cultural tendency that appreciates cosmopolitan values without losing one’s cultural originality and gratitude.

Persons, who possess transcultural experience, construct their identities by cultural shock and consecutive comparisons with their cultural origins. It is a dynamic and hermeneutical process that presupposes the horizons of subjective time, which ontologically presuppose “the zero point of perspective (der Nullpunkt einer Perspektive)” as the starting point. Since we are in advance being thrown into a particular culture and historical background, it is inevitable that we must start to gain cross-cultural, intercultural and transcultural experience from a solid cultural origin, which is mainly and closely related to the native language. Thus except for those who grow up in a multilingual and multicultural environment, most of us construct our subjectivity in a transcultural way. First, we own first “our” culture, and then we start integrating other cultures into cultures with our cultural origins, dynamically, and hermeneutically.

3. Which Cognitive Faculties Have Primacy in the Construction of a Transcultural Subjectivity?

3.1. Imagined Communities and Imaginary Elements of Transcultural Subjectivity

I have mentioned that I am concerned mainly about the *transcendental*

conditions of the construction of a transcultural subjectivity. First, I am going to enquire about the essential conditions of having a transcultural subjectivity, then I will argue for the primacy of these conditions. The essential conditions of a transcultural subjectivity are our imagination and common sense (*sensus communis*). On the necessity of imagination, we may take Benedict Anderson's ideas as a reference. He says in *Imagined Communities* (1976/2006): "In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definitions of the nation; it is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 2006: 5–6).

Although Anderson's research lies mainly in the definition of the national identity and nationalism, instead of subjectivity, his consideration is still inspiring and suitable for our topic. He points out that understanding of one's political and national identity is by nature imagination, "because the members of even a small nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 2006: 6).

The sense of unity is basically built on an imagined unity that is invented and created within a community that shares similar concept constituting factors. Imagination is not a "fabrication," but a necessary cognitive process for the formation of any community. Thus, the term "imagined community" does not refer to false consciousness, but to a social psychological fact of society. In other words, imagination is the epistemological precondition of the constitution of identity and communal sense.

A transcultural subjectivity shares similar constituting factors, because the field and the boundary of a cultural entity are also imaginary. To me, the core of a cultural entity is built on some basic beliefs and normative concepts which are rooted in its language.

However, the boundary of a cultural entity is open, flexible, and extendable in the dimension of time. It is an organic whole that can adapt to the changes caused by the surroundings and transform itself by balancing the basic beliefs and the challenges.

Since we are living in the digital age, our subjectivity is inevitably a transcultural one and it must be developed through the collisions among different cultural entities. The difference between the so-called Eastern and Western cultures remains a reality, but the transcultural formation of one's identity and subjectivity becomes more and more common and essential.

We can expect that this formation relies a lot on the imaginary understanding of the cultural Self and cultural Others, through which we can engage in the dynamics of transcultural conditions of a developing Self. In other words, a transcultural subjectivity is unmistakably involves transcultural imaginary elements in its constructing process.

3.2. The Primacy of Imagination and *Sensus Communis* in Construction of a Transcultural Subjectivity

With the above ideas in mind, I propose that (the power of) imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) and *sensus communis* have the necessary cognitive precondition in the construction of a transcultural subjectivity.

In the *Lectures of Kant's Political Philosophy*, Hannah Arendt points out that *sensus communis* and (power of) imagination are two main mental operations in judgment. In my paper, I have reconstructed Arendt's arguments on Kant's political philosophy and shed light on the implication of the priority of imagination in respect of (power of) judgement in general (*Urteilkraft überhaupt*) (see Yeung 2017). I argue that imagination and *sensus communis* are the preconditions of judgment, because imagination can provide a representation of an object which is absent. According to Arendt's interpretation, imagination plays

an additional role in turning the objects from our outward sense into our inner sense, namely, the time (*die Zeit*).

On the one hand, the implication of this interpretation lies in the indoctrination of temporal character in the functions of imagination, by which the objects-to-be-judged in the present will be *transcendentally* connected with the objects recollected from the past or the projected in the future. On the other hand, *sensus communis* is responsible for providing the a priori standard for judgment, through which we are able to judge something *as if* we have the consensus from everyone in the community. Arendt traced the meanings of *sensus communis* from chapters 39–40 of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and determined two major topics: first, the criterion of the approbation or disapprobation is communicability. Second, *sensus communis* provides the standard of the judgment (Cf. Arendt 1992: 69–72, 131–132).

Another prominent interpretation by Hannah Arendt is the image-forming functions of imagination. The image-forming function is the key to understanding the significance of imagination in her theory of judgment. Without the image forming function, we cannot even present the object which is absent for the judging subject, and it entails the inability to judge no matter whether it is about the past, the present, or the future (Cf. Yeung 2017: 356). Moreover, the image-forming process is not a value-free process. It involves the pre-given taste and understanding of something which is encoded in the cultural historical backgrounds of the subject. Through the pre-selection by imagination, the judging subjects direct themselves to the thought-objects that are suitable for the activity of deliberation. Indeed, imagination is “discriminatory,” which pre-embeds the taste and choice in the “*re*-presentation.” Thus, imagination gains not only cognitive but also normative necessity and priority in the case of judgment (Cf. Yeung 2017: 354–355).

We may further ask: what and where is the source of the pre-given taste for imagination? The answer is *sensus communis*. As I mentioned, *sensus communis* is the standard for judgment. It is actually the ground for a hermeneutic process of understanding. Arendt translates the term as “community sense,” instead of adopting the generally accepted translation as “common sense,” because she wants to elaborate the preconditions of having a ground for a particular judgment. A community sense exists before an individual receives it as the foundation of his own judging. Thus, it is the transcendental condition of one’s own judgment.

The ancient wise man teaches us that “the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts¹.” Also, the community is not the sum of individuals. On the contrary, an individual becomes an individual due to the nurturing of the community. Hence, the community is *ontologically* preceding the individual. *Sensus communis*, both for Kant and Hannah Arendt is a transcendental ground for reflective judgment, and more importantly, it cooperates with imaginations as two main mental operations in supporting the power of judgment. Through judgment, a subject is able to express and understand reflectively their own identity. Therefore, judgment is the representation of one’s subjectivity. Thus, as the transcendental condition of judgment, imagination and *consensus communis* have their primacy when we consider the problems of the constitution of a transcultural subjectivity.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the construction of a transcultural identity relies on the reflective understanding of oneself. In other words, the reflective judgment about the relations of the self and a socio-historical surrounding world plays a crucial role in constructing a transcultural identity. Thus, if

1 This phrase often attributed to Aristotle, see *Metaphysics*, book VIII, 1045a.

Hannah Arendt's interpretation that imaginations and *sensus communis* really play a key role in considering the construction of transcultural subjectivity is right, we may further ask upon this basis: how important is it to cultivate people's imagination and *sensus communis*, given that we want to encourage the communities who possess and will further develop a transcultural identity and subjectivity?

The concern about the "dehumanization brought by digital globalized sensations" (see Chapter 3 in this booklet) directs us to the contemplation of the dark side of digital globalization. However, I am pretty optimistic about the phenomenon of digital globalization. As I have mentioned, we are already in the age of transcultural subjectivity due to the omnipresence of digital usage. We are already connected!

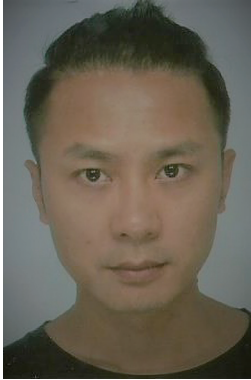
Furthermore, we keep defining ourselves for each given situation. In a word, we are continuously redefining our humanity under the digital globalized situation. The understanding and *shared imagination* between so-called Eastern and Western people will come closer and closer in the world of the digital nomad. This phenomenon is based on the plurality that arises from a kind of "rooted cosmopolitanism." Every digital nomad shares their understanding and shares their imagination, according to their cultural origin for different digital media. So long as the digital world is open (although we know that there are still a lot of places that do not share this premise), the construction of transcultural subjectivity will continue.

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