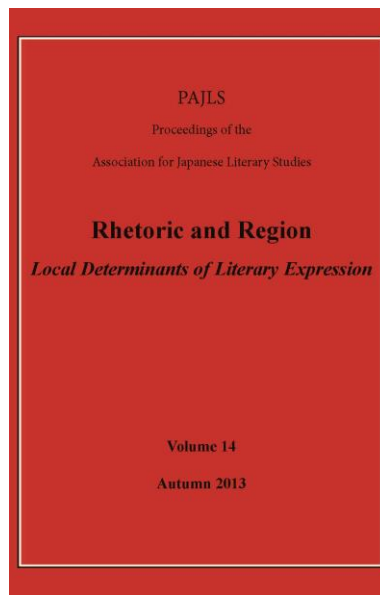"Two Views from Paris: Mori Arimasa and Katō Shūichi on Japanese Culture in 1955"

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Two Views from Paris: Mori Arimasa and Katō Shūichi on Japanese Culture in 1955

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Among the important world events of 1955—the Bandung conference in Indonesia, the tenth-year anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War, the second year of the Algerian War— were two events important in the postwar intellectual landscape of Japan: the return to Japan, from study in France, of Mori Arimasa and Katō Shūichi. My interest here is not just the return, but the important articles they published in that year articulating a vision of contemporary "culture" that drew from their time in France.

Mori, born in 1911, and Katō, born in 1919, were among the first Japanese students to study abroad after the war. Katō first went to Paris in 1951, on a half scholarship from the French government to study at the Pasteur institute. He returned to Japan in 1955, shortly after which he wrote the article that is my focus here "*Nihon bunka no zasshusei.* (Katō was always rather anxious about having missed the transition from Occupation to self-governance.) Mori had first travelled on a French government scholarship, and was in the first group of students—Endō Shūsaku was also in this group—to study abroad following the war. He intended to stay for one year, but returned after 5 years, for reasons that have much to do with his interaction with "culture"—and a focus of the essay I will discuss here, "*Bunka no ne to iu mono ni tsuite*"—and with "France." What we find is the degree to which each was profoundly and unexpectedly moved by "Japan" on their return. Each of them would go on to write at length about Japanese culture based on that experience.

They are linked by this return in the same year and by the fact that these two articles appeared in the same journal. Their articles appeared six months apart in *Shisō*; same topic for the same audience. Katō's in June and Mori's in December. They share a concern for "culture" and the anxieties of the moment. There share a desire to chart a future for Japan in the changed postwar cultural and critical landscape. But they plot trajectories in different directions. They also both avoid important issues, the world events that I noted at the outset, namely, the Bandung Conference, the tenth-year anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War, the second year of the Algerian War.

Katō begins his essay by recounting a near conversion experience: he writes how the sight of the Japanese coastline prompted him to change his thinking about culture, and the culture of nations. He was energized by a possibility of Japanese culture that can at least compete with the

"pure" cultures of Europe, and by a possibility of reevaluating Japanese culture in ways that can counter the malaise and sense of inferiority of the postwar years. He now finds that what sets Japan apart is not its "purity"—which England and France can claim, in his argument—but it's "*zasshu* (雑種)." And that *zasshusei* is precisely the defining characteristic of Japanese culture and, as such, will allow it to stand on equal footing with the cultures of Europe.

He now finds a Japan—and this is the point of his title—that is "*zasshu*": hybrid, composite, amalgam, mongrel. "In short," he asks, "if the cultures of England and France are taken as the exemplars of pure culture, then is not the culture of Japan the exemplar of a hybrid culture?"[1] The logic of which, he will go on to explain, means that while England and France can serve as a standard in their purity, Japan can stand as a standard in its hybridity and thereby they are on equal standing—Japan can thereby compete and hold its own against the cultures of Europe by virtue of this defining characteristic.

As Suzuki Sadami points out, Katō employs "*zasshu*" or hybrid in a metaphor that is also biological, as in a "cross" or a "grafted" plant. In this, he argues, where the roots might be traditional or "Japanese," the trunk, branches, or leaves might be Western. The point in the end is that one cannot disentangle one from the other. But the point is also, in the end, at least in the way that Katō develops the metaphor, that it remains clear which is root, and from what source, and which is trunk, from which source.[2] The cultures may be mixed, that is, inextricable one from the other, and hybrid, but with identifiable provenance for the pieces; it is clear which strand is "Japanese" and which is "Western" (to reproduce a lack of parallelism in Katō's writing). Not so much alloy as admixture.

Now, I first encountered this concept and this word *zasshu* with much excitement: here is a young French-educated intellectual, a translator of Sartre, returning to his island home from study in Paris, in the year of the Bandung conference, the second year of the Algerian War. I read expecting this to reflect the energy and revolutionary change-the-world excitement of a postcolonial era, of increased consciousness of the place of privilege in a racialized world.

Ebisaka Takeshi, who writes at length about these essays, develops this reading. In his long rumination on this essay he remarks that Katō's return from Europe stands as one of the notable events in postwar intellectual history and serves as a clarion call in the activity of the 1950s.[3] Further, when he first encountered the "proud strength" of thinkers such as Aime Césaire and Édouard Glissant talking about "Creolité," he was reminded of Katō and the mixture of confidence

[1] Katō Shūichi, *Zasshu Bunka: Nihon no chiisana kibō* (Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 1974), 31.
[2] Suzuki Sadami*, "Katō Shūichi, Sandai," *Gendai Shisō*, 37-9 (July 2009) 200.
[3] Ebisaka Takeshi, *Sengo shisō no mosaku: Mori Arimasa, Katō Shūichi o yomu* (Tōkyō: Misuzu Shobō, 1981) 84.

and courage that would have been required to raise one's voice and proclaim that Japan is "hybrid" in this way. Miura Nobutaka, the scholar of Francophone literature, writes that "Katō's intent, in this essay, was to explicate why Japan started the war, and point towards an answer of 'How should Japan live after the war?'"[4] The context is important, as this reading of Katō has him offering a means to battle the domestic essentializing discourses of the nationalists, and to address the question of how to live in the postwar. When Katō's essay appeared as a *bunkabon* bearing this title, it was subtitled "Japan's small hope;" this too was Katō's attempt to navigate between the ultra-nationalism that supported the emperor-centered imperial Japan on one side, and the blind religious faith in Westernism on the other. These are the binaries that frame this discussion, and many of the era.

All well and good, but Katō argues the opposite, with no reference, not even a nod, to the themes of hybridity and Creolité that *zasshu* would now associate with: rather, his argument is that hybridity gives Japan a unified and unique identity, one that can stand its own against the "pure" cultures of Europe, can compete, that is, on equal footing, with the major players—he constantly references French and British culture; Germany is conspicuously absent here—Japan can be, that is unified and pure.

Indeed, and I take a comment that Richard Calichman made on an earlier version of this paper, that there is real violence in a refusal to think about "hybridity" and what it would mean following the convoluted discourses about race and culture and admixture—all the various ways that one could be "Japanese"—following the war years. That is, how to account for the "imperial hybridity," in Calichman's wording, of the empire, when, ostensibly, all different groups could be "Japanese." Katō registers no thought about this in his discussion of "hybridity." I also have in the back of my mind the concepts that are invoked by "islands and archipelagos"—by which I think of the work of Francoise Lionnet and Shumei Shih, and of Imafuku Ryūta and Suga Keijirō—in a return to the islands, after a sojourn in France. Katō's conceptualization is quite clearly different; there is, that is, a strong tool hidden in this insistence on "hybridity" that could provide a powerful critique of the wartime state that is of such concern in Katō's long life of thought. Katō writes, in the afterward of the volume in which this essay is collected, that, "It was my goal after the war, like many historians, that by looking back over modern history, to come to know the origins and process of growth of Japanese fascism."[5] Katō was committed to criticizing authoritarian,

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[4] Miura Nobutaka, "Kureoru to zasshu bunka-ron: Katō Shūichi-Gurissan taidan in yosete [La Pensée Créole et le caractére hybride de la civilisation Japonaise: en marge de la recontre Shūichi Katō - Edouard Glissant],"*Nichifutsu bunka* 69, November (2003): 32-49, 42.

[5] "Atogaki," in *Katō Shūichi chosakushū* (Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 1978), 7:469.

conservative, fascist tendencies in Japanese society, all his life. The royalist politics, the conservative position here, then seems all the more surprising. In the afterword to his collected works, in 1979, he touched on the fact that his object of comparison was Europe, especially in the 1950s, and that in the 1960s and 1970s he wanted to be more "multilateral" (his word). But the binary of comparison never changes, especially on the point, the lacuna, of thinking about Japanese hybridity in its imperial project.

Thus, Katō takes us not to a place of mixing, but to another place of purity. He is not pointing to a messy, anarchic state of amalgamation, but a royalist state of purity and invented traditions. *Zasshu* does not here signal a porous breakdown, the fungible boundaries between cultures, as such vocabulary would now suggest. Rather, it is to offer a Japanese culture that is identifiably different from all the others, one that can stand its own alongside the "pure" cultures of Europe, one that can compete, that is, on equal footing with the "major" cultures.

Katō's argument and stance is, in important ways, a product of its time. Katō here stakes a belief in hope, offers optimism, when there was precious little. His excitement for Japanese culture came when many felt demoralized and inferior as Japanese. Japanese culture had become a discredited culture—a culture identified with the "feudal," "premodern," "non-rational," and fanatical," both domestically and in the world. It was a hard time to feel positive.

Mori Arimasa, however, makes no grand claims for culture. Indeed, he seems to not care all that much about "Japan." He considers the personal in "culture." This retreat into the personal may as well be an avoidance of a wider critique, but Mori wants to explore a *jibun* in reference to culture. Where Katō looks down from a ship deck to survey the ground and conjecture the way forward, Mori begins with himself, on the ground, as he thinks through issues of history and culture, looking up and out into French culture and tradition. It is a different sort of comparison, one where the goal is to become so fully immersed in the other that the comparison becomes a sort of "self-criticism." Or avoidance—Mori's erudite and compelling essays are all about the project of getting immersed. He died relatively young, but the preparation for the project became the project. Perhaps this is a result of becoming lost in the object of one's study.

Now, there is more to be said about these issues, but to keep the focus of the conference, I want to come back to thinking about the region: In this, I have been chewing on a phrase from Yano Masakuni in his book-length interaction with Katō's essay.[6] Yano writes, quite simply, that the experience of Europe was necessary for this perspective on culture to exist, to be possible. This

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[6] Yano Masakuni, *Katō Shūichi no shisō, josetsu: zasshu bunka-ron, kagaku to bungaku, seikinha ronsō* (Kyōto-shi: Kamogawa Shuppan, 2005).

vision of the West could not have existed without the travel there both in terms of what he saw and how he processed it, for home, for the demands of the home audience, expectations of what they were to get, the authority that the travel to Europe bestowed on him.

There is something obvious in this, which is why I keep chewing on it—the necessity of France for this transformation, but what is consistent is the totally unanticipated power that the experience of France had on them. Both men were deeply and profoundly changed by their time in France. This seems the more striking—certainly did to them—because they both went to France after considerable period of scholarship and study of France prior to departure. Mori was already professor of French and scholar of Pascal. Katō was widely read in European literatures and culture. They both were intimately familiar with the France to which they were headed; the shock was rendered the more traumatic by the profound sense in which they discovered that their book-learning was radically one-dimensional.

Mori describes an experience of real trauma: he is in dread as the ship gets closer to France; he can hardly get off the boat; when he does disembark he wants to stay in the South of France he says, in Marseilles, where the boat is docked. Which resonates with another important moment in the Japanese history of experiences in France—Yokomitsu Riichi's unfinished novel of Japanese travellers in France, also a novel of trauma and loss and sorrow, as one would guess from the title of *Ryōshū*—wherein the title character, who will go on to represent a commitment to a "pure" spiritual Japan, likewise is unable to get off the boat when it finally lands in Marseilles, seriously tempted to stay in his stuffy cabin.

Mori too writes, "When the ship first arrived in Marseilles I found I couldn't stand the idea of going to Paris and I ended up spending a few days in this southern French harbor. . . . There was something in Paris that frightened me."[7] He writes that he wished to return home. The essay is a desire to analyze, from the period of five years later, just what happened, and he admits it is difficult to get a hold of, but he is quite sure that it was not some neurosis, which, although it looks like what I would call a neurotic reaction, he seems to mean that this is actually based on something concrete. What frightened him about Paris was a concrete something that was in Paris, more than an abstract something that existed within him, in his imagination. To whit: "My fear, I know now, was that the depth and precision of the European scholarly tradition and philosophy which I knew only *imaginatively,* via books, *actually existed* there in Paris, which I could get on a train and arrive at in a single day."[8]

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[7] Mori Arimasa, "Bunka no ne to iu mono ni tsuite," *Mori Arimasa zenshū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1978), 4:146.
[8] Mori, 146.

Thought about another way, there is here the divide between self and Other. Mori keeps coming back to a desire that the split he now so keenly feels somehow be bridged. French culture as he grew up with it in Japan was something eternal and "out there" he writes; his project in France will be to discover how to make it internal, his own. This is ultimately his goal for Japanese society as well, that it will not look at other cultures as radically external or other, but as their own. Using the example of his own objects of study, he phrases it in ways that underscores how the trajectory parallels his own: how he anticipated going to France for a year and studying the thought of Pascal and Descartes, from a distance, as something external, to complete the academic research and return to his home and position. However, "I never thought that the philosophy/ideology of the stranger (他人の思想) could become my own ideology."[9] There is a collapse of distance, the sense that the outside traditions could be taken on as one's own, not simply as foreign. His response is to burrow even deeper into that culture.

Which is to say, the discourse on culture is profoundly altered by the experience of France. One of the ways that the France experience permeates this is a concrete realization that culture need not be a weapon. Katō is explicit on the ways that a fascist ideology of "culture," coded as pure and spiritual, as a legacy of the militarist war years, is energizing this essay. There is a subtext here in Mori's essay that culture need not be oppressive and suffocating, can be organic and natural even if the distinctions between "ours" and "theirs" remain.

In conclusion, we find that Katō draws from France and looks outward, setting on a path of culture and definitions, while Mori arrives in Paris and sinks inward, embarks on a very personal journey, an exploration of his self. The choices offered by these two, however different, remain committed to a binary from which, try as they might, they are not able to find a way out of.

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[9] Mori, 148.

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