

Essentialism and the Other: Two Vectors of Imagination

Shotaro IWAUCHI

Abstract

This study aims to reconsider the relationship between essentialism and the other by focusing on the role of imagination in essentialism. Traditionally, imagination has served the essentialist doctrine in that essentialism requires the unification of multiplicity into category and the imagination of other aspects not given to consciousness of the self. However, by encountering the other as transcendence or the subaltern, the imaginative faculty encounters setbacks. This occurs because this direction of imagination (from the self to the other) may be regarded as a form of dogmatism, Euro-centrism, and egocentrism as Emmanuel Levinas and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggest. In this regard, essentialism seems to be collapsed in parallel. Despite the existence of the subaltern, Spivak seeks the potentiality of essentialism and finds that only the “strategic” use of it by the weak in society can be justified to counteract the international division of labor. In this study, referring to the discussion of Spivak, I part ways with strategic essentialism in terms of the necessity of the universal justification of conceptions such as freedom, equality, human rights, and social justice. I claim that imagination directed towards the self, in other words, “Imagine thyself” provides the sense of risk, the function of self-critique into essentialism. In other words, essentialism must be modified so that it opens itself to continual reassessment by the other. The gameness of essentialism oriented to create the intersubjective confirmation should be defended to be responsible for the voiceless in society.

Key words: essentialism; the other; imagination; the subaltern.

1. Introduction

There are two kinds of essentialism. One is dogmatic essentialism, which regards essences as the substantial entities that exist objectively beyond this phenomenal world (such as the Platonic theory of forms). The other is intersubjective essentialism, which requires intersubjective reassessment and confirmation to validate the universality of essences (such as Husserlian phenomenological essentialism).¹ This study mainly deals with the latter kind.

In intersubjective essentialism, the question is whether what is identical to the object grasped by the self can also be validated by the other. If the other refuses the proposal, then the essence does not reach universality and merely stands on subjective or communal belief. Thus, the self needs to examine and refine the ways in which to express the essential structures and conditions in the process of insight. In other words, the self must critically imagine the different conditions and aspects in which the other exists as if “I” were there. In this regard, imagination is closely connected to the establishment of intersubjective essentialism.

However, with the emergence of the other as transcendence in Emmanuel Levinas’ sense, essentialism must be modified, somehow, because the imaginative faculty directed toward the other no longer works adequately. Merely imagining the conditions of the other from the first-person perspective becomes inadequate for obtaining intersubjectively validated essences. This is because imagination of the self cannot reach the lived experiences of the other. Rather, it may be regarded as a form of arrogance that intellectuals blindly hold on to because the self unilaterally internalizes alterity in this case.

Thus, it can be argued that the existence of the transcendent other creates a significant challenge for essentialism. It concerns whether the self can obtain the universal validity of the essence beyond socio-cultural differences and without the use of oppressive mechanisms. Is it possible for essentialism to accommodate plural opinions and conciliation of belief through conflict in itself? Or, is essentialism to be seen as already outdated as a part of the heritage of Western egocentrism?

In this study, I make an attempt to defend the potentiality of essentialism in terms of two vectors of imagination. Taking not only imagination directed toward the other but also imagination directed toward

the self into consideration, essentialism learns the sense of risk, i.e., the ability to self-critique, which provides tension to essentialism. However, this does not mean that essentialism should be applied to every field of study. It is important to determine the realm in which essentialist thought is required and the aim for which it is employed. In other words, essentialism is to be employed in correlation to a specific aim. I cannot discuss the comprehensive clarification of the aim of essentialism in this study; however, I do claim that the dimension of essences is still called for—at least in order to support the voiceless or the subaltern in society.

I first review the role of imagination in essentialism. Imagination can be defined as the ability to unify the multiple sensory data or individual ones into categories and examine the validity of the unified category obtained in the subjective consciousness. Second, the other as transcendence that appears in the dimension of infinity is described, with reference to Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*. For Levinas, the other cannot be internalized into the self, and consequently, the schema of the Western deserves criticism. Third, the relationship between the subaltern and the strategic essentialism of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is clarified. For Spivak, the use of “strategic” essentialism can still be justified to mobilize the subaltern even though “theoretical” essentialism, which may label the subaltern as fixedly being identified, should be abandoned. Finally, I attempt to lay out the potentiality of essentialism in a way that is different than Spivak's. Essentialism is equipped with the function of self-critique, which is to say that it bears the sense of risk, by means of bringing imagination toward the self into essentialism.

2. The Role of Imagination in Essentialism

In general, essentialism is defined as “a metaphysical theory that objects have essences and that there is a distinction between essential and non-essential or accidental predications.”² That is, essentialism claims that an essence must exist for determining the identity of something, which is characterized as a necessary and universal property that is common among individuals in comparison with accidental properties. As I mentioned, dogmatic essentialism and intersubjective essentialism are discriminate in that the former presupposes the essence as a substantial entity, while the

latter always requires assessment by the other to confirm the validity of the essence. Insofar as an essentialist theory attempts to avoid falling into a naïve and dogmatic way of thinking, essentialism always requires the intersubjective dimension in which the self assesses the validity of essences through imagining the situations, feelings, and thoughts of the other. Alternatively, in the field of modal logic, an investigator must expand the field of consideration to other possible worlds to which only imagination is able to reach. Thus, it can be argued that imagination and essentialism cannot be separated because essences in the sense of intersubjective confirmation always exist in combination with imagining different aspects lived by the other.

However, imagination has been subordinated to the power of intelligence in the history of modern philosophy. For instance, René Descartes maintained that “bodies themselves are not properly perceived by the senses nor by the faculty of imagination, but by the intellect alone.”³ For Descartes, neither sense nor imagination could serve in the role of mediation between cognition and the world, i.e., subject and object, while intellect alone had the quality of explicating the nature of the world. The trust placed in human reason underpins the confidence in disciplinary knowledge from the beginning of modernity, with sensation and imagination thought to be dependent on intelligence.

It was in the eighteenth century that two philosophers—Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant—presented the unique dimensions of imagination, which had been unnoticed by modern philosophers for a long time⁴ even though these two philosophers focused on different aspects of it. Whereas Smith thematized the specific role of imagination in terms of empathy for the other,⁵ Kant schematized a priori cognitive structures such as sensation, understanding, and reason, with imagination determined as mediation that synthesized sensory data (given through sensation) into the category of understanding.

To begin with, according to Smith, “as we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. [...]. By imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his

sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.”⁶ What is important here is the fact that imagination of the self is directed toward the other, and conceiving what we ourselves should feel in a similar situation is enabled by the symmetric stability of the relationship between the self and the other, such that the other is regarded as a variation of the self. Therefore, for Smith, “every faculty in one man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another. I judge of your sight by my sight, of your ear by my ear, of your reason by my reason, of your resentment by my resentment, of your love by my love. I neither have, nor can have, any other way of judging about them.”⁷

Kant stipulates the role of imagination on epistemological concern. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he claims that “yet the figurative synthesis, if it pertains merely to the original synthetic unity of apperception, i.e., this transcendental unity, which is thought in the categories, must be called, as distinct from the merely intellectual combination, the *transcendental synthesis of the imagination*. Imagination is the faculty for representing an object even *without its presence* in intuition. Now, since all of our intuition is sensible, the imagination, on account of the subjective condition under which alone it can give a corresponding intuition to the concepts of understanding, belongs to *sensibility*; but insofar as its synthesis is still an exercise of spontaneity, which is determining and not, like sense, merely determinable, [...] its synthesis of intuitions, *in accordance with the categories*, must be the transcendental synthesis of the *imagination*.”⁸ The transcendental synthesis of imagination must be an a priori structure embedded in human cognition as well as sensation, understanding, and reason so that it is called the “*productive* imagination” and distinguished from “the *reproductive* imagination, whose synthesis is subject solely to empirical laws, namely, those of association, and which, therefore, contributes nothing to the explanation of the possibility of cognition *a priori* and, on account of that, belongs not in transcendental philosophy but in psychology.”⁹ Through productive imagination, discrete sensory data is synthesized into a united meaning and classified on the basis of the categories of understanding that clarify what an entity is. It is Kant who attentively connects imagination to the category of understanding for the first time in the history of Western philosophy. After Smith and Kant, imagination has often played a functional role in the attainment of universal essences or the creation

of an imagined unity.

For instance, Edmund Husserl explicitly employs imaginative variation in the establishment of phenomenological essentialism. Compared with the scientific investigator, who seeks factual truths based on experience, for the investigator of the essence, only phantasy provides “the ability to run through freely and on all sides the endless manifolds of possibilities, here of possibilities of lived-process (to see universalities according to eidetic law, to attack problems like those of the constitution of real things in general).”¹⁰ The phenomenological method of grasping the essential structures and conditions of the object is called eidetic seeing, which is “based on the modification of an experienced or imagined objectivity, turning it into an arbitrary example, which, simultaneously, receives the character of a guiding ‘model,’ a point of departure for the production of an infinite multiplicity of variants. It is based, therefore, on a *variation*.”¹¹ Here, it is clear that Husserl attentively makes use of imagination (that is, imaginative variation) to clarify and attain what is identical to the object.

Furthermore, Saul Kripke employs the power of imagination in order to review possible worlds and determine a rigid designator. A rigid designator (e.g., names or statements representing scientific discoveries) designates the same object in every possible world regardless of whether the object exists in all possible worlds.¹² That is, “when we think of a property as essential to an object we usually mean that it is true of that object in any case where it would have existed.”¹³ For instance, in the case of gold, its atomic number (79) can be regarded as its rigid designator, and “any world in which we imagine a substance which does not have these properties is a world in which we imagine a substance which is not gold, provided these properties form the basis of what the substance is.”¹⁴ Indeed, the question has remained unanswered as to whether or not Kripke’s essentialism blindly reposes trust in the achievements of the natural sciences having been validated. However, we can at least figure out that imagination plays a significant role in inquiring into common properties in every possible world.

Moreover, as is well known, Benedict Anderson indicates that the nation is “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” because “the members of even the smallest 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.”¹⁵ Here, it can be argued that imagination contributes to the integration and union of unknown others. In other words, imagination brings forth a category in which the self and the other are yoked together, and the stability between them engages in the construction of a totality. After all, according to Anderson, imagined community without any specific ground has caused people to kill each other or to willingly die over the past two centuries.¹⁶

In short, the main function of imagination in terms of essentialism can be defined as unifying multiple sensory data or individuals into categories and assessing the validity of the subjective category by imagining the different conditions and aspects of the other. It should be noted that the potentiality of essentialism depends on its capability of imagining common structures and conditions inter-subjectively validated among others. Furthermore, the discourse of essentialism is underpinned by an assumption, namely, that the other is a variant of the self. This does not mean, however, that essentialism claims that there is no difference between the self and the other but rather that the self can know the difference (or commonality through actualizing differences) between them through firing up the imagination. Of course, an essentialist has the right to determine what something is without the dimension of imagining the other; however, in this case, obtained essences would fall into unverifiable dogmatism, leading to possible other world views trusted by the other being ignored. Therefore, I come to the tentative conclusion that imagination is an act of integration that provides for categories and the essence, allowing the self and the other to hold a stable symmetric relationship.

3. The Other as Transcendence

While the relationship between the self and the other holds symmetric stability, it is still possible for the self to know the situation of the other by imagining it “as if I were there.” However, this one-sidedly constituting procedure of thinking is stigmatized as cogito-centrism, and consequently, the basis of essentialism, the symmetric stability between the self and the other, collapses via the emergence of the other as transcendence. In this section, I briefly review how Levinas criticizes the entirety of Western philosophy,

which has always been a philosophy of the same.

According to Levinas, war as the ultimate form of violence encompasses all beings within a totality, and no one can create distance from the totalization of war; “the visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy.”¹⁷ While totality does not permit the existence of outside-ness so that there is no room for *echt* transcendence, infinity as non-encompassable within a totality expresses transcendence in the discourse of metaphysics, and “what remains ever exterior to thought is thought in the idea of infinity.”¹⁸ Simply stated, the tradition of Western philosophy has always remained the philosophy of the same and has contributed to the formation of a totality and, consequently, has no means to counteract the outrage of violence. The dominance of ontology over metaphysics betrays the inability of Western philosophy, for the egocentricity of ontology spoils the ethical relationship with the other.

For instance, Martin Heidegger claims that “all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task.”¹⁹ The question as to the meaning of being forms the central theme of *Being and Time*, preceding any tangible ontological question and explication as “in the question which we are to work out, what is asked about is Being—that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities are already understood, however we may discuss them in detail.”²⁰ In other words, being itself should be distinguished from any entities that “are” in the world. This is why Levinas maintains that Heideggerian ontology subordinates “the relationship with the Other to the relation with Being in general.”²¹ Apparently, it becomes absurd or even abusive for Levinas that “Dasein’s resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the Others who are with it ‘be’ in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being, and co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates.”²² In contrast to Heidegger, Levinas contends that a metaphysics in which “desire tends toward *something else entirely*, toward the *absolutely other*”²³ should precede ontology because “ontology, which reduces the other to the same, promotes freedom—the freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other.”²⁴ Ontology should be explicated

in terms of the metaphysical relationship with the other as a matter of priority; in other words, the meaning of being should be interpreted in terms of an ethical perspective, while the converse does not hold true. Therefore, Levinas concludes that ontology as the first philosophy may be defined as “a philosophy of power,” and “a philosophy of injustice,”²⁵ only to serve under the logic of totality.

Furthermore, the Husserlian transcendental enterprise remains a sort of philosophy of the same in terms of Levinas’ metaphysical perspective. Husserl employs the well-known method known as the “phenomenological reduction” in order to disclose the realm of transcendental subjectivity. In the phenomenological (transcendental) attitude, all positing of being should be entirely suspended or parenthesized with the operation of “epoché,” with transcendental subjectivity being regarded as the only place where every being in the world, including entity, conception, and idea, is constituted. According to Husserl, “the epoché can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely [...]. The world is for me absolutely nothing else but the world existing for and accepted by me in such a conscious *cogito*.”²⁶ Naturally, in Husserlian phenomenology, the other is thought to be constituted in transcendental subjectivity; the transcendental ego constitutes the other in the mode of alter ego.²⁷ In this way, the other “is therefore conceivable only as an analogue of something included in my peculiar ownness.”²⁸ Thus, it is not difficult to determine the symmetric relationship between the self and the other in Husserlian phenomenology; this is why Levinas says that “the metaphysical relation can not be properly speaking a representation, for the other would therein dissolve into the same: every representation is essentially interpretable as a transcendental constitution.”²⁹ Levinas is clearly opposed to the discourse of the symmetrized philosophy of the same in Husserl, for “the metaphysical other is other with an alterity that is not formal, is not the simple reverse of identity, and is not formed out of resistance to the same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same.”³⁰ For Levinas, the “Other” as the wholly other must be the “Stranger” over whom one has no power.³¹

In the dimension of infinity, the relationship between the self and the other apparently becomes asymmetric and disproportional, for the other as unambiguously undeterminable is always going forth from the understanding

of the self. Levinas claims that “the metaphysician and the other do not constitute a simple correlation, which would be reversible. The reversibility of a relation where the terms are indifferently read from left to right and from right to left would couple them the *one to the other*; they would complete one another in a system visible from the outside. [...]. the radical separation between the same and the other means precisely that it is impossible to place oneself outside of the correlation between the same and the other so as to record the correspondence or the non-correspondence of this going with this return.”³² The other as transcendence lays out the limitations of empathy and the understanding of the self towards alterity. Here, the self cannot objectively condescend to the situation of the other because the other is no longer a variant of the self; it is the endless movement always going beyond the intentional power of the self; the asymmetric relationship between them is “irreducible to the distance the synthetic activity of the understanding establishes between the diverse terms.”³³ Thus, it should be said that the emergence of the other as transcendence comes to disclose a clear limit of essentialism in that imagination becomes unable to reach out to the other and the other seems to exist beyond the imagination and understanding of the self. In this case, the self is not sure how the other thinks, feels, and experiences the world.

4. The Subaltern and Strategic Essentialism

There is no doubt that postmodern thought in Europe has presented the antithesis of the whole of modernity through reflection on the consequences of modernity, i.e., WWI and WWII and the outrage of Nazism and Stalinism. The fact that intellectuals in Europe could not find a way to countervail irrational violence presses for a fundamental paradigm change in the fields of philosophy and thought. For instance, Michel Foucault presents strong opposition to the epistemological model of modern philosophy shared from Descartes to Husserl, i.e., “the model of knowledge and the primacy of the subject.” This is because knowledge is always already mediated by a certain power network, and the forms and possible domains of knowledge have been determined by complicated and floating power relations.³⁴ Thus, for Foucault, there can be no isolated transcendental subject working as the evident starting

point in modern philosophy. In the context of the critique of power and, in particular, the critique of political power, it can be said that Foucault stands on the side of social minorities and protects them from invisible oppression. This is to say that he turns his regard to the other in society (i.e., prisoners and sexual minorities) who have been ignored and exist outside of the political language game.

In this regard, Spivak's critique of Foucault and Gilles Deleuze is surprising because the existence of the subaltern uncovered by Spivak seems to be analogous to socio-cultural minorities on the surface. However, Spivak sees a sort of arrogance and blindness of European intellectuals in the narrative of Foucault and Deleuze. According to Spivak, the conversation between Foucault and Deleuze entitled "Intellectuals and Power"³⁵ implies that "intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society's Other. Yet the two systematically ignore the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history."³⁶ That is to say they ignore the fact that they themselves are inevitably involved in ideological discourse and are indeed blind to the system of the international division of labor—standing on the side of exploiters and using the logic of Europeans. They believe that they can be a neutral medium for the Third World³⁷ by stating that "the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent"³⁸; however, this transparency itself indeed should be called into question.³⁹ The subaltern can neither be objectified nor subjectified by a one-sidedly determining gaze.

Apparently, the subaltern is thought to be the asymmetric other as transcendence so that "it is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other."⁴⁰ The conditions of the subaltern always overflow from the imagination and understanding of the self. An attempt to define unambiguously the heterogeneous other is inevitably thwarted as "outside (through not completely so) the circuit of the *international* division of labor, there are people whose consciousness we cannot grasp if we close off our benevolence by constructing a homogeneous Other referring only to our own place in the seat of the Same and the Self. Here are subsistence farmers, unorganized peasant labor, the tribals, and the communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside."⁴¹ In this sense, no one can be a representative or diaphanous mediate of the subaltern; rather the subaltern cannot speak at

all.⁴²

It is also worth noting that the heterogeneity of subalternity seems to be contradictory to the idea of essentialism, for essentialism determines what is identical among individuals. For instance, the statement “women should be like women” apparently presupposes a substantial essence shared by all women and, in terms of feminism, includes the very discriminative sense that ignores the plurality and multiplicity of personality. In this case, essentialism becomes a sort of dogmatism discriminating and oppressing the weaker “category” in society.

While Spivak is aware of the precariousness of essentialism, she attentively and strategically employs the idea of essentialism in order to counteract the fixed social system that is based on substantial conceptions such as gender, class, and race. This is called “strategic essentialism.” Indeed, I have a different vantage point on essentialism from Spivak; however, I agree with her that essentialism cannot be easily abandoned but simultaneously requires a sort of modification in order to not function as an oppressive mechanism. I expand on this point in detail later. Here, let me briefly review how and why Spivak employs the idea of essentialism.

To begin with, it is important that Spivak regards essentialism not as philosophical theory but as a strategic device to emancipate or mobilize socio-cultural minorities. Spivak writes: “If one is considering strategy, one has to look at where the group—the person, the persons, or the movement—is situated when one makes claims for or against essentialism. A strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory.”⁴³ As Stephen Morton points out, “Spivak’s account of strategic essentialism is precisely an attempt to develop a more situated account of the agency of relatively disempowered social groups such as women, the colonized or the proletariat.”⁴⁴ In other words, it can be argued that Spivak bestows essentialism in correlation to the specific aim, i.e., on a tentative basis, always preparing to discard it. While Spivak claims that “we have to choose again strategically, not universal discourse but essentialist discourse,”⁴⁵ she clearly stands opposed to traditional essentialism with the fixed distinction between the essential and the accidental. The question is under what conditions strategic essentialism is required. In other words, why do we need essentialism? Tetsuya Motohashi picks up on three situation types that are appropriate for strategic essentialism.⁴⁶

1. Strategic essentialism can be used when “women” talk about their gender or when people from India talk about India. The point here is the power relationship of discourse. That is, when men talk about “women” or when the stronger or dominant group talks about “India,” the discourse of essentialism is easily fixed and serves already existing power relationships. 2. The aim of strategic essentialism is to defend adverse claims by the weak against discrimination based on human categories (gender differences, ethnic groups, sexual orientation, culture, class, race, religion, age, and ability, among other things). Through recognizing the essence (conditions) of “the weak,” the oppressed in society can uncover a clue because the essence of the weak enables the unification of people who are suffering under the same circumstances. 3. The unification of subordinate groups provides the potentiality of solidarity open to the other. The self-essentialization of strategic essentialism enables the continual creation of the self through the sharing of the essence with the other.

As Motohashi observes, strategic essentialism plays a key role in preventing the isolation of the weak, for the essence necessarily reminds them of their connection with neighbors. Resisting the oppressive fixed social system, the new, modified essentialism is oriented to the establishment of a movement that is based on the unification of subordinate groups. Moreover, it is important to be aware that this is a temporal strategy. If essentialism begins to determine persons, groups, or communities in the irrational way, it should be deconstructed with thoroughness. Thus, the essentialism employed by Spivak provides a means for political movement of the social-cultural minorities to counteract traditional power mechanisms.

In sum, Spivak does not think that the existence of the subaltern is incompatible with essentialism as a whole. To the extent that the use of essentialism is limited to being a strategy for the weak, it can efficiently become functional for the sake of counteracting the dominant political power of the majority. Therefore, for Spivak, the potentiality for essentialism arises from considering the specific conditions under which essentialism does not oppress given social categories such as gender, class, and race, such that discussion on essentialism is not decimated.

5. Transformation of Imagination and Essentialism: Toward “Imagine Thyself”

Imagination directed toward the other that helps obtain intersubjectively validated essences meets with a setback by encountering the other as transcendence (i.e., the subalternity). The existence of the subaltern nullifies the self's attempt to imagine other conditions, such that the self cannot judge whether unified categories given to subjectivity can be confirmed by the other. The subaltern exists outside of the “horizon” of the life-world. When the self is faced with the clear limitation of the imaginative faculty, the self itself is called into doubt because the other is no longer a variant of the self; the evidence of the self is called into question. Here, we can find another form of imagination: imagination directed towards the self. Namely, imagination issues forth from the self toward the other but rebounds on the self from the other. How might this be conducive to essentialism? How might essentialism be modified by this?

Levinas maintains that “we think that existence *for itself* is not the ultimate meaning of knowing, but rather the putting back into question of the self, the turning back to what is prior to oneself, in the presence of the Other.”⁴⁷ Alternatively, Spivak claims that “to confront them (the subaltern) is not to represent (vertreten) them but to learn to represent (darstellen) ourselves.”⁴⁸ Both thinkers refer to the similar dimension that the logic of the self unavoidably encounters: “Imagine thyself.” To certify what the self is constitutes the basis of modern philosophy, which is to say that the evidence of the cogito has provided the unquestioned starting point for philosophy as rigorous science. However, the emergence of the transcendent other breaks with this foundation and creates another form of imagination, i.e., imagination towards the self, which provides the “sense of risk” to philosophy. That is, the self here can make a mistake or bruise the other's feelings; thus, the essence works here in a dogmatic way or allows labeling someone as being substantially identified. Consequently, a certain tension arises in essentialism. As far as it seeks essential and universal structures, essentialism clings to overcoming relativity among persons, cultures, religions, and communities. However, essentialism always exposes itself to falling into oppressive dogmatism as far as it has a clear limitation with respect to imaginative capability.

The thought based on the other as transcendence or the subaltern may involve refusing the idea of essentialism itself, which attempts to make a universal (intersubjective) basis for the establishment of society. Even though Spivak employs “strategic” essentialism to mobilize the subaltern, she apparently stands opposed to “theoretical” essentialism. I agree with Spivak in the sense that essentialism is employed in correlation to the specific aim. However, in contrast to Spivak, I think essentialism should be theoretically defended in pursuance of universal justification in some specific regions and explicated by anyone who would like to take part in the universal language game regardless of whether the person belongs to a high or low social class in the international division of labor.

It can be argued that assessing what realms require and deserve essential thinking itself constitutes a valuable challenge. For instance, the question of whether only the weakest in society should make use of essentialism must be reconsidered. More attention should be paid to the fact that only those who live in the First World can change the international labor system; more precisely, if “we” do not make any effort to understand and imagine the situation of the subaltern, there is no way to change the system except grin and bear the countercharge the weak for the emergence of outrage (such as terrorism and violent incidents). The subaltern indeed has no means to counteract the international political system of power. Moreover, it is not possible to provide universal reasons why the weak in society are to be rescued in the logic of Spivak. That is, no evidence has been provided as to the reasons why the self must be responsible for the oppressed other in society. Therefore, it is apparent that strategic essentialism hardly comes into effect before the universal justification of concepts such as freedom, equality, social justice, and human rights, which should be shared among all human beings, are obtained in advance. In the case of “women” or “India,” the essence generated within the discourse of the strong reproduces the fixed discriminatory mechanism, which always operates in favor of the powerful. However, this does not mean that essentialism must be abandoned.

As Edward W. Said notes, “universality means taking a risk in order to go beyond the easy certainties provided us by our background, language, nationality, which so often shield us from the reality of others. It also means looking for and trying to uphold a single standard for human behavior

when it comes to such matters as foreign and social policy.”⁴⁹ Not regarding universalism itself as the origin of evil, Said considers the potentiality of what sort of universalism would be justified. For Said, universality does not signify a straightforwardly naïve or dogmatic idea; rather, it is avoidable by taking a risk that goes beyond certainties. In tracking what Said states, we can also examine what sort of essentialism would be justified, and I think, the other as transcendence will provide a clue to aid the answering of this question. That is, it is in the possibility of the subaltern that essentialism becomes aware of the risk in itself. The omnipotence of thought of the self should be regarded as a treacherous presupposition. With regard to this, the possibility of the subaltern should be upheld as a possibility such that we can always be ready to explain, correct, and recant the affirmative claim that seemed to be unquestionable at first. In addition, we can apologize for insisting on inaccuracy; as Spivak suggests, “the possibility of subalternity for me acts as a reminder.”⁵⁰ In other words, the possibility of the subaltern assures the self of the awareness as regards misunderstandability, and as a consequence, the self recognizes the need for imagining itself, always shouldering the sense of risk. It is through a domineering egocentricity that the sense of risk is cauterized, resulting in essentialism falling into oppressive dogmatism based on the teeth of repression.

Importantly, on the one hand, the claim that “the other is a variant of the self” draws on dogmatism and egocentrism that irrationally discriminate and oppress the voiceless in society. However, on the other hand, this claim has supported the expansion of the sense of membership that assures the building of a society that is based on the respect of fundamental human rights. Quite simply, the awareness of the membership of humanity guarantees that anyone can possess human rights as far as they are human beings, and this awareness is cultivated by the proposition that “the other is also [a] human being as well as the self.” Modern society has actually set a project of the universal evolvment of freedom in motion on this presupposition. That is, instead of embracing the power of religion and the authority of the church, they decided to create rules and a foundation by “language” for building a new society in which anyone can be respected as a human being. With regard to this, the other should be regarded as a variant of the self, and the essence of freedom should be defended at least for the sake of basic civil liberties even

though we need to recognize the risk of the logic of modernity. Essentialism will contribute to defend the universal normative ethics in society. As Said claims, “all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously.”⁵¹ Therefore, essentialism cannot be easily superseded by the ethics that the dimension of infinity is conducive to.

By encountering the transcendent other, imagination has been faced with its own envelope at least once, and essentialism seems to have collapsed in parallel. However, we should resume the essentialist perspective in the light of the subaltern in order to strive against relativism, in which the basis for ethics is lost. Two vectors of imagination: imagination directed towards the other and to the self, generate the possibility of modifying the schema of essentialism. Examining the beliefs given to the self and becoming aware of the risk of essentialism, the self, notwithstanding, makes an attempt to imagine the situation of the other. In that case, “Imagine thyself” can be a guidepost for essentialism. “Imagine thyself” is different than the maxim “Know thyself” in that it requires us to question anew the idea of self-knowledge, of which Foucault and Deleuze are devoid. As Spivak points out, “when you seem to have solved a problem, that victory, that solution, is a warning,”⁵² Thus, we do not forget that the subaltern always exists outside the horizon of understanding. However, at the same time, we do not abandon the potentiality of essentialism that provides the basis for universal civil liberties.

6. Conclusion

Essentialism requires two vectors of imagination in order to avoid dogmatism. Indeed, the eidetic enterprise exists as the continual project *ad infinitum*, and we cannot fix what is identical to something in an absolute manner (insofar as all human beings are mortal). At every moment, future generations come into the world, and they create new possibilities. In this sense, the essence always entails the undeterminable horizon, which opens essentialism to continual intersubjective confirmation. What should be noted is that the undeterminability of the essence does not signify the impossibility of essentialism. Instead, we learn that essentialism can serve as the logic of

the strongest according to circumstances. I would also like to add that the aim of essentialism is not only to create a common understanding beyond socio-cultural differences but also to understand the differences among people, cultures, societies, religions, and communities. This is because what it is stands out in comparison with what it is not. The game-ness of essentialism (that is, universal and essential debate in order to create the meaning and value of society) ought to be preserved.

If human conditions such as mortality or the desire for freedom changes for any reason, essential structures and moments of the object will be inevitably transmuted. The important thing is not to certify that the essence factually exists in or beyond the world but to examine whether we really require a common understanding. If we do not need essences, we do not need essentialism either. In order to defend human rights as a universal condition for all human beings or to realize coexistence instead of zero-sum competition, we require essential thinking, which provides the intersubjective conditions for consensus and rules—the last bastion of the ethical.

The direction of imagination toward the self provides the sense of risk in essentialism and the possibility of avoiding dogmatic and oppressive mechanisms that have been problematized by Levinas and Spivak. Modified essentialism excludes “absolute” essences as substantial entities; however, I would like to stress that the conception of the essence is to be defended in correlation to its aims.

One of the limitations of this study is that only the potentiality of essentialism in terms of two vectors of imagination is presented, and the specific discussion of essentialism concerning freedom, equality, human rights, and social justice has not been reviewed. Indeed, a concrete regional ontology of such fields is required to prove the true significance of essentialism. Moreover, this study has not examined the method of essentialism in particular. On this point, I have already examined the procedure of the eidetic method in phenomenological essentialism in several papers even though there is still plenty of room for improvement. Despite these limitations, I am still sure that the outcome of the present study will be of some use to further research on essentialism and further studies on the relationship between the eidetic doctrine and the theory of value.

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¹ Regarding the intersubjective aspect of phenomenological essentialism, see Zaner (1973, p. 37). Further, see Sowa (2010, p. 551).

² Audi et al. (2015, p. 324).

³ Descartes (1989, p. 85).

⁴ However, it can be said that the philosophy of David Hume is an exceptional instance. According to Hume (2000, p. 16), "the idea of a substance as well as that of a mode, is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination," and "the particular qualities, which form a substance, are commonly refer'd to an unknown something, in which they are suppos'd to inhere." Because the aim of this section lies in the clarification of the role of imagination in essentialism, I do not discuss the conception of imagination of Hume in detail.

⁵ In this study, I review only empathetic imagination in Smith in order to clarify the direction of imagination from the self to the other. However, Smith indeed discusses two types of imagination: one of sympathy and the other of intellectual endeavor. I learned this distinction from the article, Griswold (2006).

⁶ Smith (2000, p. 3).

⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

⁸ Kant (1998, p. 256 f).

⁹ Ibid., p. 257.

¹⁰ Husserl (1980, p. 44).

¹¹ Husserl (1973, p. 340).

¹² Kripke (1972, p. 48).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁵ Anderson (1991, p. 5 f).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷ Levinas (1969, p. 21).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁹ Heidegger (1962, p. 31).

²⁰ Ibid., p. 25 f.

²¹ Levinas (1969, p. 46).

²² Heidegger (1962, p. 344).

²³ Levinas (1969, p. 33).

²⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

²⁶ Husserl (1960, p. 21).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 115.

²⁹ Levinas (1969, p. 38).

³⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

³¹ Ibid., p. 39.

³² Ibid., p. 35 f.

³³ Ibid., p. 39.

³⁴ Foucault (1976, p. 27 f).

³⁵ Foucault (1977).

³⁶ Spivak (2010, p. 238).

³⁷ In "Intellectuals and Power," Foucault (1977, p. 216) maintains that "if the fight is directed against power, then all those on whom power is exercised to their detriment, all who find it intolerable, can begin the struggle on their own terrain and on the basis of their proper activity (passivity)." However, this vision is so naïve and simple for Spivak, as the situation of the subaltern cannot be unambiguously determined, and the question of whether or not the subaltern can speak remains unanswered.

³⁸ Spivak (2010, p. 243).

³⁹ Spivak sends a skeptical look towards the First World feminism such as Julia Kristeva's *About Chinese Women* in an analogous way to the critique of Foucault and Deleuze. According to Spivak (1998, p. 187), "in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman."

⁴⁰ Spivak (2010, p. 248).

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 259.

⁴² However, this does not mean that the subaltern cannot speak in practice, but that "even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard."

Spivak (1996, p.292).

⁴³ Spivak (1993, p.4).

⁴⁴ Morton (2007, p.126).

⁴⁵ Spivak (1990, p.11).

⁴⁶ Motohashi (2005, p.149 f).

⁴⁷ Levinas (1969, p.88).

⁴⁸ Spivak (2010, p.259).

⁴⁹ Said (1994, p. xiv).

⁵⁰ Spivak (1996, p.293).

⁵¹ Said (1994, p. 11 f). However, it should be noted that Said stands opposed to the position of the dogmatic essentialism. According to Said, "the construction of fictions like 'East' and 'West,' to say nothing of racialist essences like subject races, Orientals, Aryans, Negroes and the like, were what my books attempted to combat." Ibid., p. xi f.

⁵² Spivak (1996, p.293).