

# The Phenomenon of *Iki* and Its Bodied Manifestation

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## 0. Introduction

Kuki Shūzō's famous work, *The Structure of 'Iki'* (『「いき」の構造』, 1931) is still attractive for us to read. It provides the reader with a vivid analysis of *iki*, not as a concept, but as a phenomenon. While there is some research on the background of this work from the aspect of the history of philosophy (e.g., Yamamoto2010/Mine 2002), it seems to me still unclear how his discussion is philosophically significant<sup>1</sup>. In particular, because of the theme in this work, his discussion tends to be treated as studies of Japanese culture (e.g., Okubo 2017). The problem is that it is not clear enough how his concrete analysis of *iki* relates to the structure of *iki* which Kuki proposes in his work, although he offers us many examples of *iki*. Frankly speaking, it is still difficult for us to understand what the phenomenon of *iki* in fact is, even if we learn examples of *iki*.

In this presentation, I will put his discussion of *iki* in the context of phenomenology. This attempt is of course not arbitrary because his discussion stands under influences from Husserl and Heidegger<sup>2</sup>. Considering that Kuki applies a phenomenological method to his analysis of *iki*, it should be clarified, how his discussion of *iki* is phenomenological, and what kind of phenomenon *iki* is. I would like to focus on his discussion of natural expressions of *iki*, bodied manifestations<sup>3</sup> (*shintaitekihappyō* 身体的発表). This concrete discussion in which Kuki analyses the phenomenon of *iki* with many examples, to my knowing, seems not to have been focused on from the phenomenological point of view among researchers. In order to show that Kuki's discussion of *iki* is phenomenology, I quote the theory of "the new phenomenology" derived from Hermann Schmitz. I will propose that *iki* is the phenomenon of *atmosphere* in this presentation.

## 1. The Tensive Characteristic of *Iki*

Kuki maintains that *iki* consists of the following three moments: "coquetry (媚態: *bitai*)," "pride (意気地: *ikuji*)," and "resignation (諦め: *akirame*)." He defines coquetry as "a dualistic attitude wherein the monistic self sets the opposite sex against the self and constructs a possible relationship between the self and the opposite sex (KSZ1, 17)." "Coquetry" is based on the tensive relationship

between two sexes. In one respect, “coquetry” is an approach to the opposite sex. In another, “coquetry” demands that the relationship remains dualistic. If the distance between two sexes disappears and the goal of “coquetry” is completely fulfilled, “coquetry” loses its tension and disappears. That is why “coquetry” must remain an absolute possibility.

The second moment, “pride” , which comes from the ideal of *bushido* (武士道), is a kind of resistance against the opposite sex (cf. KSZ1, 18). This moment plays a positive role in *iki*, keeping the relationship dualistic. The last characteristic of *iki*, “resignation” is an attitude of “disinterest based on a knowledge of fate released from attachment (KSZ1, 19).” This notion originated from Buddhist thought. This moment also plays an important role in maintaining the distance between the self and the other, but in a negative way. “Pride” as a moment of *iki* is a positive posture preventing the dualistic relationship from being unified, and “resignation” is a negative posture which accepts the situation that the goal of coquetry can never be achieved.

It is important for us to notice that these three moments are not independent parts of *iki*. We can analyze *iki* in terms of three moments, but it is not the synthesis of these three moments (cf. KSZ1, 73ff.). The basic characteristic of *iki* is the tensive duality, which forms the first moment “coquetry”. And in order to keep the goal of coquetry possible, “pride” and “resignation” are necessary. *Iki* is a kind of “coquetry”, but its goal is never to be realized. In short, *iki* is “coquetry for coquetry’s sake” (KSZ1, 22).

## **2. Bodied Manifestations of *Iki***

We understand that *iki* has the tensive characteristic. How does this characteristic relate to the concrete phenomenon of *iki*? In the discussion of bodied manifestations of *iki*, we can find the foundation of his discussion of *iki*.

Kuki says, ‘the clearest and greatest variety of natural forms of expressions of ‘*iki*’ as bodied manifestation appears in the area of sight’ (cf. KSZ1, 42). Expressions of *iki* as natural forms regarding sight means expressions in the broadest sense including postures and gestures. As an example, relaxing the body slightly is an expression of *iki* that relates to the entire body. We can see this expression in e. g. pictures by Torii Kiyonaga. Kuki connects his analysis of this expression with his analysis of *iki* as a phenomenon of consciousness. He says,

Coquetry as the duality, the material cause of *iki*, expresses the activity and passivity toward the opposite sex by disturbing the body's monistic equilibrium. But unrealistic ideality – the formal cause of *iki* – adds control and moderation to the breakdown of monistic equilibrium. [.....] *Iki* must be subtle, content with suggesting movement in the direction of the opposite sex. What is vital as an expression of *iki* is the awareness of the unrealistic idealism in the bending of the central perpendicular line when the posture's symmetry is broken. (KSZ1, 42-43)

Bodied manifestation is asymmetrical and unstable and is based on the tensional character of *iki* and expresses the dualistic relationship as the absolute possibility. Tada Michitaro, who discusses Japanese postures, also points out that a Japanese typical posture, the low profile (低姿勢), includes not only humility, but also the possibility of countering (Tada 2014, 53 f.). In this posture we can see a kind of strength and tension.

Kuki maintains that coquetry in Western culture is far from *iki*, because *iki* does not approach the opposite sex directly and explicitly, but subtly and implicitly. This contrast to Western culture appears also in art. Wearing thin fabric is for example regarded as an expression of *iki*. We can see this motif easily in *ukiyoe*. According to Kuki the relationship between material causes and formal causes (unrealistic ideality as the purpose of *iki*) is expressed in this motif as the openness of the path to the opposite sex by wearing very thin fabric and at the same time as the closedness of the path by covering the body with fabric. This characteristic in the motif of *ukiyoe* is quite different from the motif in Western pictures, in which coquetry is expressed by covering the naked body with hands.

We can find the similar contrast in the motif of bathing. Kuki maintains that a figure wearing *yukata* simply and casually right after bathing is a kind of figure of *iki*. For it describes coquetry and its formal causes as unrealistic ideality so that the figure wearing *yukata* reminds us of the naked body (cf. KSZ1. 43). In this case the tensive character appears in wearing *yukata* itself like thin fabric. Here we can see the tensive character of *iki* between the present (the figure wearing *yukata* right after bathing) and the past (the naked figure in bathing as the recollecting). The path to the opposite sex is opened so that the figure reminds us of the naked body. However, the path to the opposite sex is at the same time closed because it is the recollection, i.e., the past<sup>4</sup>. That is why this figure shows the tensive characteristic of *iki*. We can easily find this figure as motif in *ukiyoe*. Whereas the naked body or

bathing is one of popular motifs in western painting (e.g., The Turkish Bath by Angle), the figure right after bathing is a popular motif in *ukiyo-e* (cf. KSZ1, 44). We may summarize the characteristic of *iki* in terms of bodied manifestations generally as following: the tension between bareness or nakedness and covering, and the tension between relaxation and strength<sup>5</sup>. This characteristic, as we have already seen enough, appears in figures and gestures.

### 3. *Iki* and Atmosphere

Finally, I would like to put Kuki's discussion of *iki* in the context of phenomenology with the aid of the new phenomenology. Hermann Schmitz proposes the unique body theory. His main idea is *bodied self-finding*<sup>6</sup>(Leibliches Befinden). He distinguishes *body* (*Leib*) from *physical body* (*Körper*) from two points of view (cf. Schmitz1968, 37 ff./Schmitz1986, 77 f.). First the difference between them is their spatial place. Physical body has the *relative* space (der relative Ort), which is determined or identified by relationships with other spaces. We can indicate, for example, that my hand is *on the desk*, or I am standing *a few yards to the left of the station*. If you close your eyes, you cannot indicate the relative position of your hand (e.g., "My hand is about 5 meters far from a chair."). Body, on the other hand, has the *absolute* space (der absolute Ort), which is not determined by physical positions and determined independently of the spatial orientation. Even if you close your eyes, you can find or feel, where your hand is, which means that your hand is actually independent from relationship with other positions in this case.

This spatial difference between physical body and body appears also in the field of experiences. We can feel physical body *physically* by seeing or touching it, namely by perception, whereas we cannot perceive body objectively. Schmitz insists that being bodied is *self-finding* (Sichbefinden) of the absolute place (cf. Schmitz1968, 39). So according to him, body is bodied self-finding in the absolute place. This self-finding is classified in two levels: the integrated (ganzheitlich) level and divided (teilheitlich) level. When "I am *here*," I find myself bodied in the absolute place (*here*) in the integrated level. Bodied self-finding in the integrated level appears for example in surprise, weariness, or pleasure, because these feelings are surrounding our body. In fact, we cannot indicate what part of our body is surprised, pleased, and so on. On the other hand, when "I have a pain in *my stomach*," I find myself bodied in the absolute place (*my stomach*) in the divided level. Bodied self-finding in the divided level appears in pain, hunger, and so on. Of course, my stomach here is different from the

stomach in the relative place. One of the important differences between the relative place and the absolute place is whether we can set the boundary or not. As I mentioned, the relative place can be physically determined by the relationship with other places. We can say, “He is now 100 meters from Kyoto station.” However, it may be impossible that we indicate the boundary of our pain (cf. Schmitz 1986, 81). Although I can say that I have a pain in my stomach, I cannot (and a doctor also probably cannot) detect the range of my stomachache, because my stomachache is radiating in my body. The parts of body which appear in self-finding in the divided level (e.g., my stomach) are called *the islands of body* (Leibesinseln) by Schmitz (cf. Schmitz 1968, 39/ Schmitz 1986, 78).

According to Schmitz emotions are also bodied (cf. Schmitz 1973, 8). Emotions are not the states of mind or physical phenomenon of body, but the *atmosphere* that affects our minds as we can sense corporeally (cf. Schmitz 1972, 5). Atmospheres of emotions are surrounding us, and we can grasp them like climates (cf. Schmitz 1973, 8). In his theory, body and emotions are closely combined. These emotions are wide spreading sometimes only in our body which is defined from the surrounding world, sometimes as a whole. For example, my arms will get tired after carrying heavy things. In this situation, my tiredness spreads partly in my body (arms). On the other hand, the tiredness can spread over an entire room. We can imagine that tiredness can spread throughout an office and we can feel tiredness as an atmosphere as I feel comfortableness in spring through the climate. That is why our bodied emotions as atmospheres surrounding us can spread over the boundary of our body.

In this way, bodied self-finding can be combined with emotions which are understood as atmospheres surrounding us corporeally. This bodied self-finding of state, however, not only spreads wide as an atmosphere, but also gets narrow. This fundamental dualism defines bodied self-finding thoroughly (cf. Schmitz 1973, 11/Schmitz 1986, 82): *Narrowness (Enge)* and *Expanse (Weite)*. So bodied self-finding has counter tendencies of going to narrowness and expanse. Schmitz names these two counter tendencies: *tension (Spannung)* and *swelling (Schwellung)*. Our bodied self-finding is swinging between narrowness and expanse, as forms the rhythmical and tensional character. When I feel for example pain, anxiety, or am concentrating or hungry, narrowness becomes superior. When I feel, on the other hand, comfortableness, drowsiness, tiredness, or desire, expanse gets superior.

Now we can interpret *iki* as a kind of self-finding and atmosphere. As we have already seen, *iki* has the tensive character between the tendency toward the opposite sex and that toward self. These two tendencies as “coquetry” and “pride” appear through gesture and posture. Coquetry as the

tendency toward the opposite sex can be understood as expanse in bodied self-finding. Schmitz takes also desire as an example of expanse. On the other hand, *iki* has also narrowness as pride. This pride which resists against the opposite sex can be seen in the tension of body and wearing *kimono*. We can see the tensive character of atmosphere as bodied emotion in *iki*. As coquetry and pride demand each other to keep the relationship between two opposite sexes the dualistic absolute possibility, expanse and narrowness enhance each other by countering one another (cf. Schmitz 1973, 12).

That is why *iki* can be characterized as an atmosphere which is surrounding us corporeally. *Iki* is neither a property which belongs to a person and an object nor an individual state of mind. *Iki* spreads widely as an atmosphere surrounding us or place with its tensive characteristic. This suggests that *iki* is an intersubjective phenomenon.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Ebersolt discuss Kuki's theory of contingency from the phenomenological point of view (cf. Ebersolt 2017). Botz-Bornstein deals with the relationship between *iki* and Heidegger's hermeneutic, and argues that *iki* is a kind of style (cf. Botz-Bornstein 1997). Ohashi relates *iki* to *kire* which is a kind of aesthetic skill grounded on the Japanese traditional spirit and way of life (cf. Ohashi 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Today it is known that there are 3 version of *The Structure of "Iki."* The first one *The essence of "Iki"* was written in 1926 in Paris. The second one was published in the journal *Shisou* (『思想』) in 1930. And the last one, which is today known as *The Structure of "Iki,"* was published as a book in November. 1930. Among them there are some differences and many studies have been done. The important difference is the change of his method (cf. Takada 2002, 148ff./ Obama 2006, 68ff./ Sakabe 1990, 83). As we can see from the change of title, while Kuki used "the essence" in the first and second version, he uses "the structure" instead of "the essence." And remarkably, he uses "being (存在)," "beingness (存在性)," and "determination of being (存在規定)." This change means that he gave the method of Husserl up and came nearer to Heidegger's method. In the first manuscript he already distinguished his method from Husserl's "intuition of essence (本質直観: Wesensanschauung)" and characterized his position as concrete "understanding of being (存在会得: Seinsverständnis)," which comes clearly from Heidegger (cf. KSZ1, 92). This position is maintained in the final version (cf. KSZ1, 12ff.). It will be shown from this difference that Kuki became more critical of Husserl's method after the manuscript and second version.

<sup>3</sup> Ohashi regards Kuki's phenomenological analysis of objective expressions of *iki* as the most important accomplishment (cf. Ohashi 1992, 39 f.).

<sup>4</sup> Here we can find the tensive characteristic of *iki* from the aspect of time. Ohashi, who relates the phenomenon of *iki* to *kire*, analyses the temporality of *iki* and *kire* (cf. Ohashi 1992, 43 f.)

<sup>5</sup> At this point, we may find similarity between Kuki and Roland Barthes (1915-1980). "Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes?* In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure) there are no "erogenous zones" (a foolish expression, besides); it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance. (Barthes 1975, 9 f.)" Here we can see a kind of tension in coquetry ("erotic" in Barthes). However, in Barthes's case the way to opposite sex can be even opened because he refers only to the side of coquetry. In his discussion, we cannot find the moment of pride and resignation. The tension which Barthes refers to is only a means to show coquetry which can be achieved.

<sup>6</sup> He says, "the theory of bodied self-finding is the core of my phenomenology of bodiedness (Die

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Lehre vom leiblichen Befinden ist der Kern meiner Phänomenologie der Leiblichkeit)" (Schmitz 1986, 82). This idea comes from Heidegger's *affective self-finding* (*Befindlichkeit*). Affective self-finding is not just an emotion or a state of mind. Affective self-finding relates to *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*) of *there being* (*Dasein*). It means that we as there being find myself (*sich befinden*) in a definite situation which is determined by our thrownness (cf. Heidegger 2006, 134 ff.).