

RAS Institute of Philosophy
Tibetan Culture and Information Center in Moscow

First International Conference
“Buddhism and Phenomenology”

November 7–8, 2016
RAS Institute of Philosophy, Moscow

Supported by:

➤ Save Tibet Foundation



Joel Krueger

The University of Exeter, United Kingdom

Subjectivity, Intersubjectivity, and the Relational Self in Buddhism and Phenomenology

Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Exeter. He works on various issues in phenomenology, philosophy of mind, and cognitive science, with a particular focus on embodied cognition, emotions, and social cognition. He also works on topics in Asian and comparative philosophy, pragmatism, and philosophy of music.



**Subjectivity, Intersubjectivity, and
the Relational Self**
in Buddhism and Phenomenology

Joel Krueger

University of Exeter

Many comparative discussions of Buddhism and Phenomenology focus on the nature and character of **consciousness** and **self-consciousness**.

While important and interesting, this individualistic focus potentially overlooks resources both traditions offer for thinking about **embodiment** and **intersubjectivity**.

Today

Introduce Tetsurō Watsuji

– Phenomenology and Zen Buddhism

Introduce his approach to embodiment and the relational self

– *aidagara* (“betweenness”)

Apply his analysis to a case study in psychopathology



Who is Tetsuro Watsuji?

Aidagara embodied

Aidagara disrupted: a case study

Tetsurō Watsuji (1889-1960)

Kyoto School of Japanese Philosophy

– Kitarō Nishida, Hajime Tanabe, Keiji Nishitani

Cornerstone of his work is his focus on **culture** and **ethics**

– one of the earliest critics of Heidegger's *Being and Time*



Tetsurō Watsuji (1889-1960)

Fūdo (Climate and Culture; 1935) &
Rinrigaku (Ethics; 1937)

- exercises in phenomenologically-informed comparative philosophy

Husserl, Heidegger, Scheler

- also Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Bergson, James, Dōgen, Zen and Confucian ethics, “primitive Christianity” ...



Watsuji's phenomenology of *aidagara*—
“betweenness”—offers rich investigations of
embodiment, emotions, and intersubjectivity.

Also integrates **Zen Buddhist** notions such as
“emptiness”, “dependent co-origination”, “no-
self”, “logic of negation”, etc.

Given time constraints – and the practical (i.e.,
applied) emphasis of this talk – I'll only be able
to focus on a few of these notions.

Who is Tetsuro Watsuji?

Aidagara embodied

Aidagara disrupted: a case study

Aidagara

The common space of “**betweenness**”, or field of possibilities, in which individuals co-exist, communicate, and construct different ways of relating to and understanding one another.

“This betweenness consists of the various human relationships of our life-world. To put it simply, it is the network which provides humanity with a social meaning, for example, one's being an inhabitant of this or that town or a member of a certain business firm. **To live as a person means...to exist in such betweenness.**”

(Yuasa 1987, p.37).



For Watsuji, *aidagara* is realized at **multiple levels**

- e.g., from the way a mother cradles and sings to her newborn infant to the manner by which human beings co-exist as a global community



Aidagara isn't simply an abstract principle. It has a material reality—it is **embodied**.

For example, **culture** is a materialization of *aidagara*.

- collective effort to establish structures for managing the flow and form of information and communication.

The local practices that manage this flow—religious, educational, artistic, political, legal, family, medical, etc.—are, along with the artefacts that support them, **tools for fashioning aidagara**.

- material from which we fashion “betweenness”

Catholic confessional

- shields penitent from gaze of others, priest
- minimizes embarrassment, external distraction
- encourages feeling of openness, trust



Creates intimate form of
betweenness

- tool for managing *aidagara*



But *aidagara* isn't just realized *externally*, e.g., in material culture or more general structures of the lifeworld

- rooted in **embodied subjectivity**
- i.e., an *internal* feature of the self

ningen: person or self

- 人 (person)
- 間 (space, between)

Characters indicate that the self is simultaneously both subject *and* object, individual *and* social

- dual poles built into, **unified within**, the “dialectical” structure of *ningen*



“*Ningen* is the public and, at the same time, the individual human beings living within it. Therefore, it refers not merely to an individual “human being” nor merely to “society.” What is recognized here is a **dialectical unity** of those double characteristics that are inherent in human beings...*Ningen* denotes the unity of the contradictories. Unless we keep this dialectical structure in mind, we cannot understand the essence of *ningen*.”

(Watsuji 1996, p.15)



Aidagara also refers to the way one's own *body* appears in **two different modes** of betweenness

- as an objective thing, or intentional object (*Körper*)
- as a subjective, lived-through vehicle of intentionality (*Leib*)

These two different modes involve different forms of *aidagara*

- lived body is an experience of “here”, body as object appears “there”

“There is no distance between a subject and a human body. Hence, whether considered theoretically or practically, a human body is subjective through and through, so long as it is an element in the activity of the subject” (Watsuji 1996, p.65)



“I regard this **subjectivity spatiality** as the essential characteristic of human beings” (Watsuji 1996, p.157)

Who is Tetsuro Watsuji?

Aidagara embodied

Aidagara disrupted: a case study

Phenomenological approaches to *consciousness* and *self* have already made important contributions to understanding mental disorder and psychopathology.

- schizophrenia as *ipseity* disturbance (Sass and Parnas 2003)
- schizophrenia as disruption of *intentionality* (Fuchs 2007)
- depression as alteration of *being-in-the-world* (Ratcliffe 2008)

These approaches challenge a dominant biomedical tendency toward crude neuroreductionism

Remind us that the organ affected is the *whole person*—situated in, and interacting with, their environment.

Put pressure on idea that we can provide an exhaustive description and/or causal explanation of mental disorders purely by appealing to *internal biological variables*

Is the mental disorder in the individual or in the *space between* individuals?

(Broome and Bortolotti 2010)

In some cases, the latter—and Tetsurō Watsuji's phenomenology of *aidagara* can see how this is so.



Some of the characteristic features of **Moebius Syndrome** can be conceptualized as disruptions of *aidagara*

– both internal and external

This perspective can help clarify how some of the “mechanisms” of these disruptions exist **in the space between** individuals

Moebius Syndrome

Congenital and complete **bilateral facial paralysis**, impaired abduction of the eyes

- maldevelopment of sixth and seventh cranial nerve
- 0.0002-0.002% of births
- strabismus, hand and foot problems, clumsiness and poor coordination, language development delay, autism and learning disabilities



Loss of self-intimacy

Cluster of bodily-motor impairments in MS lead to *diminished sense of embodiment*

– disturbed sense of “internal” *aidagara*

Heightened sense of body as *object*, attenuated sense of body as *subject*

– diminished affectivity, emotions, self-regulative function

“I never thought I was a person; I used to think I was **a collection of bits**. I thought I had all these different doctors looking after all the different bits... ‘Celia’ was not there; that was a name people called the collection of bits.”

“All my gesture is voluntary, even now aged 46. **Everything I do, I think about**...with the lack of balance, mobility, and problems with coordination, you don’t get a sense of self...”

(Cole and Spalding 2009)

“I think there’s a lot dissociation...I sort of *think* happy or I *think* sad, not really saying or recognizing actually feeling happy or feeling sad...**I have to intellectualize mood.**”

“I think also that I have a fear of being out of control with emotions, feeling **something that I can’t manage.**” (Cole and Spaulding 2009)

Loss of *intersubjective* intimacy

People with Moebius also show heightened traits of inhibition, introversion, social inadequacy and inferiority (Briegel 2007)

Consistently report feeling **emotional distance**, lack of empathy from others

– inability to effortlessly inhabit “external” *aidagara*

“I did not express emotion. I am not sure that I felt emotion, as a defined concept. At my birthday parties I did not get excited. There were people around excited, **but I followed what they did**. I don't think I was happy, or even had the concept of happiness as a child” (Cole and Spalding 2009).

“But if I go back to my late teen years, I was not very embodied as a person and the physical nature of attraction was some way away. I remember a frightening, startling moment when, at a disco, I saw a girlfriend exploring her sexuality and flirting. That was so utterly alien to me...I could not find its meaning. I could not work out what it was about; it had no relevance to me” (Cole and Spalding 2009).

A crucial component of intersubjective connectedness consists of involuntarily mimicking one another's behavior

Motor mimicry

- behavioral matching of postures, mannerisms, and other bodily configurations
- “social glue” leading to emotional convergence, identification, pro-social behavior (Chartrand and Bargh 1999)

Face the primary site of motor mimicry

- complex neuromusculature
- we spontaneously imitate facial others' expressions
...and even *static pictures* (Dimberg and Thunberg 1998)

Individuals with MS lack the expressive resources to enter into, sustain the dynamics of this **face-to-face intimacy**

Suggestion

Motor mimicry—i.e., behavioral coupling—the **mechanism** that animates and sustains “betweenness” (*aidagara*)

These interpersonally-distributed processes quite literally unfold *in the space between us*.

Because they lack facial animation, people with MS are more likely to be judged

- unfriendly, depressed, disinterested, unintelligent, etc. (Lyons et al 2004)

Thus cannot access a central component of embodied emotion regulation

- unable to facially express and mimic emotions, mimic and entrain others
- leads to *dysregulation* (behavioral and emotional)

Evidence that people with MS exhibit profoundly impaired **emotion regulation**

(Kring and Moran 2008)

- 20-year follow-up of patient revealed severely impaired emotion regulation, exhibitionism/inappropriate sexual advances, and heightened aggression (Hedges et al 2003)
- woman with MS repeatedly hospitalized with episodic dyscontrol (Cole 2001)
- cataplexy (Parkes 1999; Tyagi & Harrington 2003)

Interpretation

People with MS lack access to **intersubjectively distributed** co-regulative processes

- e.g., facial mimicry of *calming expressions* that would help them modulate, regulate, and cope with intense feelings (Cole 2001)

In MS, disruptions of “internal” *aidagara* co-occur alongside disruptions of “external” *aidagara*

- two dimensions of a **unified** process
- dependently co-arise

Summary

Is the disorder in the individual or in the *space between* individuals?

At least in MS, it appears to be the latter—and Watsuji's Zen Buddhist-inspired phenomenology of *embodied intersubjectivity* and *aidagara* can help us better understand how this is so.

人

Thank you.

間