

The Formation of Miki Kiyoshi's Concept of  
"Fundamental Experience"

Uchida Hiroshi

Miki Kiyoshi (1897—1945) was one of the representative thinkers of the "Fifteen Years War" time (1931—45) of Japan. His concept of "fundamental experience" in an article, *Marxian Form of Anthropology* (1927) originated from a keyword, "darkness" of the mind of a true philosopher, in Miki's early essay, *An Untold Philosophy* (1919). "Darkness", according to him, related to eternity and held passionate aspiration for philosophical truth and illuminated its own way to the truth.

Miki inquired in his graduation essay, *Critical Philosophy and the Philosophy of History* (1920), how universal (eternal) freedom and individual were unified, and found ideas to solve the problem, in Kantian aesthetic concept of "teleological power of judgement", which Miki would expand, from 1937 until 1945, to a *social* concept of "the power of imagination (Einbildungskraft)", or human potential to create social elements of myth, system, technology, experience and language.

During his research stay in Marburg in 1923—24, Miki studied by M. Heidegger, who was then preparing *Being and Time* (1927), and encountered Heidegger's terminology "fundamental experience (Grunderfahrung)", which matched Miki's description in the graduation essay, "the unification of individual freedom and universal *grounds* theory and is *fundamental* to time, or category which composes *experiences*" (citer's italics).

Moving to Paris in 1924, Miki applied the concept to his epoch-making essays on Pascal, which were edited as a book, *A Study of Man in Pascal* (1926). He analysed *religious* fundamental experience in Pascal's "Pensées" into three orders, "body, spirit and belief". Miki saw in the religious belief the unification of universal freedom and individual, and limited Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics to a study of *natural* aspect of man's life; Miki judged that Heidegger did not cover religion.

Miki came back to Japan in 1925 and observed Japanese working people

trending toward Marxism, but he thought it lacked philosophical foundation. He grounded Marxism on philosophy, writing brilliant articles on Marx, initiating *Marxian Form of Anthropology*. Miki developed the concept of "fundamental experience" to social dimension; he argued that "fundamental experience" was expressed by word (Logos is God. — *John*) immediately in "anthropology", or "self-interpretation (Selbstausslegung) of man", and was then developed to "ideology", or "self-understanding (Selbstverstehung) of man", which opened "public sphere (locus communis)".

Miki did not take ideology simply as false consciousness, but as common expression of people's fundamental experience. He demonstrated that the unification of universal freedom and individual was estranged in modern society as capital. He now understood that religious fundamental experience and social shared human passion (Leidenschaft).

By that foundation, Miki appealed to Japanese people to form a united front to break through the difficult situation of the "Fifteen Years War" time.

Miki maintained the concept of "fundamental experience" until his arrest and death in jail (1945) and analysed just before the arrest in his posthumous manuscripts the religious fundamental experience of Shinran (1173—1262), the founder of the True Jodo sect of Buddhism in the Kamakura period. He had already planned to write on the religion of Shinran, when he had been tackling Pascal.