

February 21, 2007

Japan from the viewpoint of culture and civilization

-What is necessary for Japan in the 21st century?-

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Japan has been aiming to become a nation of creative science and technology since Professor Masatoshi Koshiha (Professor emeritus, Tokyo University) and Mr. Koichi Tanaka (Fellow, Shimazu Corp.) won the Nobel Prize in 2002. Although the direction of the policy is right, it is not always sufficient as a Japanese national design. Therefore, some doubt whether there remains an alternative centerpiece of Japanese national policy.

CIVILIZATION AND THE ORIGINS OF RESPECT IN INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

The Japanese people have few opportunities to come into contact with foreigners because Japan is an insular country located in the east of the Eurasian Continent, geographically isolated from other countries in the world. It was said that there was the symptom whereby Japanese people would forget valuable experiences in a foreign country soon after they arrived at the Haneda Airport. It is what was called "Haneda Amnesia." Now it is called "Narita Amnesia." This episode shows that Japan is part of an environment that is separated geographically from the world. There are approximately four million foreign tourists visiting Japan a year,¹ but the number of foreigners staying in Japan is only two million people,² which is less than 2 percent of the Japanese population. Added to this, it is said that about 190,000 foreigners stay illegally.³ Most of them are illegal employees. They spare no pains to work at hard, dirty, and dangerous job. Because they work even in a day off, they are spoken well of by managers of medium and small companies. On the other hand, the number of Japanese people visiting foreign countries surpasses 17 million people every year.⁴ Nevertheless, most Japanese people are ignorant about

¹ A total of 4,368,573 foreign tourists visited Japan in 2005, of a total of 6,727,926 if business trips and other reasons for coming are included. Source: The Japan Tourism Marketing Company.

http://www.tourism.jp/english/statistics/inbound/JTM_inbound/20061221.eng.xls

² There were 1,973,747 foreigners registered as living in Japan in 2004. Source: *The Japan Statistical Yearbook 2007*. Tokyo: Statistics Bureau and Statistical Research and Training Institute, 2007.

³ Japan Ministry of Justice. <http://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/issues/issues05.html>
Statistics on the number of illegal immigrants in Japan vary according to different sources. The MOJ figure of 190,000 is lower than most of those quoted in media sources.

⁴ The number of Japanese traveling overseas was 17,403,565 in 2005. Source: The Japan Tourism Marketing Company.

the international situation.

We Japanese people worry about how others think of us even amongst other Japanese. By the same token, the Japanese are anxious about how people in the world watch Japan. As the preamble of the Constitution of Japan shows, the Japanese people “desire to occupy an honored place in an international society.” Again, the point that Japanese people worries about is whether Japan is respected by international society. To be sure, in terms of foreign assistance, Japan is the first place or the second place in the world every year.⁵ The Japanese contribution in the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan (2002) was also highly evaluated from all over the world. However, it is quite natural that somebody thanks you when you give something to them, which does not mean that Japan is truly respected. Furthermore, Japan has many multinational corporations, such as Sony or Toyota, and most people in the world know their advertisements and products. Although Japanese skill at producing high-quality goods is appreciated throughout the world, it is not enough to attract genuine respect from the international society by such a skill alone. Consequently, Japan has to have something except money and technology to be respected in the world.

In my personal view, countries respected in Asia are China and India from the historical perspective.

China has four thousand years of history. In its long history, China has provided superior history books like *the Records of the Grand Historian*,⁶ and created famous thought such as Confucianism or Maoism. It is a fact that Mao Zedong often misgoverned as a politician, shown in examples like the Great Leap Forward (this policy sacrificed 30,000,000 Chinese people) and the Cultural Revolution. However, Mao overwhelmingly acquires respect in that he liberated the Chinese people from the *semi*-feudalism of the Qing Dynasty and its status as a *semi*-colony of the Western countries, and established the basis of modern Chinese. His great achievements, expelling the European Great Powers from China and building a new nation, gave hope to people of the developing countries who were fighting for liberation from colonization. By the way, according to Hotsumi Ozaki who is one of Japan’s most famous journalists on Chinese affairs before WWII, *semi*-colony and *semi*-feudalism means a situation that is even worse than ordinary colonialism and feudalism.

http://www.tourism.jp/english/statistics/outbound/JTM_outbound20061222eng.xls

⁵ Source: The United States displaced Japan as the world’s foremost donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2001. However, it should be noted that even since 2001, Japan’s ODA has always represented a larger percentage of GNP (0.28 percent in 2005) than that of the United States (0.22 percent in 2005). Source: The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD).

⁶ Sima Qian, *Records of the grand historian of China, translated from the Shih chi of Ssu-ma Ch’ien* by Burton Watson, Columbia University Press, New York: 1961.

India is the birthplace of the Four Great Ancient Civilizations in the same way as China. In addition, India has enriched the history of world thought by creating the Hindu philosophy. Furthermore, ascertaining the concept of “zero” is proof that Indians are good at an abstract thought, which may be one of reasons why the IT industry flourishes today in India.

Furthermore, India produced worldwide religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. Additionally, the principle of non-violent resistance by Mahatma Gandhi made created a new epoch of non-violent protests movements after WWII, and led to India independence. These religions and advances in thought are the heritage not only of Indians, but also of all human beings.

An interesting examination of the differences between Indian and Chinese civilization can be conducted. Firstly, Chinese people have shown historical eagerness in keeping records via documentation. In fact, the Chinese have recorded their own history since at least 3000BC. The first Chinese history book is *Records of the Grand Historian* that was edited by Sima Qian,⁷ which describes an overview of the history of China covering more than two thousand years from the Yellow Emperor to Emperor Han Wudi. Surprisingly, relics mentioned in *Records of the Grand Historian* can still be discovered today. This demonstrates the high analytical ability and breath of coverage of Sima Qian.

After his work, it became a custom that the next dynasty edits the history of former dynasty. This custom continued until the Qing Dynasty. In this way, since Chinese people emphasize the recording of history, heroes in Chinese history are said to have been concerned about how their names and achievements would be recorded. The basic policy when Sima Qian edited *the Records of the Grand Historian* was to limelight someone’s unknown talent, as Confucius praised in Yan Hui, his young disciple. Sima Qian treated this episode from his viewpoint, “is the Way of Heaven right or not?”

Meanwhile, this custom, whereby the next dynasty edits the history of former dynasty, provided an unfavorable by-product. That is, the next dynasty tends to emphasize the misgovernment of the former dynasty to glorify itself. This is the point that you should pay attention to when reading a Chinese history book. For example, while Emperor Yang of Sui China accelerated the collapse of his dynasty by wars and an extravagant lifestyle, he completed the Grand Canal, an equal to the Great Wall which was constructed by Qin Shi Huang. Although this canal obviously contributed towards promoting a political relationship and economic exchange between the north and south in China, Qin Shi Huang’s role in this canal hides behind his misgovernment in subsequent history books. Emperor Taizong of Tang China is described as an ideal monarch in *Zhenguan Zhengyao*, but he is also idealized to look better than he really

⁷ Ibid.

was.⁸

Unlike China, India has never recorded its history even though ancient India had its own letters. Indians seem to be better suited to philosophizing rather than recording something. Most of the Indian ancient history is a blank sheet, but as some researchers say, epic poetry, such as Ramayana and Mahabharata, fills it. Thus, the creation of philosophy proper was hard in China, which was busy pursuing facts through recording history. By contrast, it is the blank of the history provided an incubator for creating philosophy, abstraction, and thought in India. Namely profound Hindu philosophy is a product of such abstract thought. It is really interesting to note such a big difference between the two great civilizations in Asia.

In Europe, the Great Britain established parliamentary democracy. France created the idea of human rights. The United States is also an origin of human rights as the Declaration of Independence represents. High regard is given to the spread of human rights in Europe and the United States. In fact, Napoleon Bonaparte is regarded as a hero for his editing of the corpus of civil law even though there are advantages and disadvantages to his work. When someone compared Napoleon to Adolf Hitler during World War Two, Winston Churchill objected, “We should not identify Napoleon who was a historical hero with Hitler who was a slaughterer.”

Two more examples of remarkable European countries are Italy and Greece. In Italy, the Roman Empire maintained and developed Christian values, which was a progressive idea at that time. Furthermore, modern Italy enhanced European artistic value as a driver of the Renaissance. Greece also played an important part in producing European thought through philosophy, rhapsody, and sculpture. Lastly, Israel contributed to European development through Hebrew.

In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, which is the birthplace of Muhammad, is a sacred place and a spiritual center for the seven hundred million Muslims in the world. Considering that Islam succeeded to ancient Greek civilization when Europe was amid the “*Dark Ages*,” there is no doubt that Islam made a big contribution to human progress. Huijiao in Chinese is the name deriving from a story that Islam was introduced by Turkish Uighurs. Today, Hui Min Fan Dian means an Islamic restaurant in China. Islamic chapel (mosque) is popularly expressed as “qīngzhēnsi.” The number of Muslims who lives in the northwest and coastal region in China amounts to 20 million, and even autonomous districts exist in these regions. There are about 10,000 Muslims in Xi'an. It is said that “Ma,” a family name, came from Muhammad (if anything, it might come from “*Mahomet* (Muhammad in French)”). Also, “Mu,” a family name, seems to derive from Muhammad. Anyway, both may be of Muslim origin.

⁸ By the way, paper was not yet invented when Sima Qian wrote *the Grand Historian*. Therefore, Chinese characters came to be expressed as simply as possible for the sake of convenience because letters had to be written on a wood plate until paper was invented.

Additionally, in the Middle East, there are Israelis taking pride in having given the world the Old and New Testament. We've recently had a negative image of Israel due to incessant conflicts with Palestine. However, what we should not forget is that Israel was a stage for the creation of the historic valuable book, the Bible. Actually, the fact that the Bible is always a best seller in the world demonstrates that the Bible is read as the source of Western humanism by people.

There is a correlation between the content of the Bible and the Koran. It is said that the Koran took in a lot of elements of the Old Testament. Certainly, in the process of forming the Islam, it is an obvious fact that Judaism affected Muhammad. However, according to Muhammad's opinion, Allah gave human beings the Old Testament and the New Testament at first, but neither functioned well. Therefore, it is the Koran that Allah ultimately gave to human beings. In this context, Muhammad insisted that he was the last prophet of Allah. Furthermore, Muhammad said that Abraham (Ibrahim in the Koran), David (Daud), and Solomon (Sulayman) were not kings, but prophets. Islam regards Jesus Christ as a prophet, not God. This is the big difference between Islam and Christianity. Paul, who converted from Judaism, does not appear in the Koran (there is a theory that Jesus Christ propounded Christianity and Paul finished it.).

Judaism is not a worldwide religion, although it is based on the authority of the Old Testament in the same way as Christianity and Islam. Considering that Judaism is the primary religion in only one state, Israel, it lacks the universality of Christianity and Islam.

In the process of the human history, the above countries led us to developments in universal thought, religion, and philosophy. The present world consists of thought, religion, and philosophy that those countries produced, and those countries are respected by the international society due to their contribution to the development of civilization.