

Research Article

TRANSITION OF JAPANESE THOUGHT - A STUDY OF CHANGES IN BUSHIDO AND CULTURAL RELATIVISM DUE TO THE INFLUX OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Bushido is a very well-known way to introduce Japan, as the Japanese people are known for their "bushido." In recent years, however, the country has become increasingly Westernized, and its unique sense of ethics has faded, and it seems to be losing its identity. The reason for this is that after Japan's defeat in World War II, the U.S.-led Westernization of Japan proceeded apace, transforming the country into one that could be described as science-oriented. The benefits of this transformation made Japan economically rich, but at the same time, there was a strong tendency to exclude unscientific things and things without evidence. This study examines how people's thinking has changed since the influx of Western culture, science, and technology into Japan. It also examines cultural centrism and cultural relativism centered on Western culture and the ethics associated with them.

Keywords: Bushido, cultural centrism, cultural relativism, utilitarianism, social contract theory.

WHAT IS BUSHIDO?

Bushido is said to have been derived from three ancient philosophies. They are Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism. The first source is Buddhism, where the samurai attitude of "equanimity without fear of death" is based on Buddhist acceptance of destiny. The second source is Shinto, which refers to prehistoric prayers to nature and ancestors. From the worship of ancestors came reverence for the emperor, and from the worship of nature came patriotism, which became the prototype of Japanese thought. Confucianism, the third source, gave a name to these simple sentiments and theorized them. Confucianism emphasizes the eight virtues, including the five precepts of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith, and the three lights of loyalty, consideration, and respect.

However, Inazo Nitobe, author of *Bushido*, explains that the samurai did not adopt these eight virtues as they were, but replaced some of them with the seven central virtues of bushido: righteousness, courage, humanity, courtesy, sincerity, honor, and loyalty (Nitobe, 1938). The reason why they started with "righteousness," fighting fair and square, rather than "benevolence," which causes people grief, is that the true spirit of the samurai is to fight, and the same reason why they valued "courage," not fearing death, and "sincerity," keeping one's word. *Rei*, which demanded strict manners, was an expression of respect for others, and "chivalry" was to contribute to society as a whole without self-interest. For the sake of "honor," which he valued the most, he was willing to commit seppuku (ritual suicide). All of these virtues were practical and closely related to the daily lives of the samurai. Bushido, as we know it, is a philosophy of action based on a framework of seven practical virtues, with three ancient ideas as its source.

IDEOLOGICAL CHANGE THROUGH SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

However, when Western culture entered Japan with the Meiji Restoration, science and technology improved dramatically. And once

humanity, with its strong sense of self-interest and narcissism, discovered the cutting edge of science and technology, it became so caught up in it that it had no time to think about anything else, nor did it have time to think deeply about law and morality. Law, in particular, is necessary for the establishment of society and for people to come together and live, but it should not interfere with the concept of man's original ethics. Loyalty, courtesy, and affection toward parents, relatives, and many others are ideas emanating from the higher spirit of human beings, and these ethics cannot be regulated by artificial laws. In other words, "bushido," the ethics peculiar to the Japanese, must cover the areas beyond the reach of the law. However, this "bushido" peculiar to the Japanese people began to decline after they opened exchanges with foreign countries and began to adopt foreign cultures, science, and technology. The progress of science is due to the Western idea of freedom, and this freedom is developed without limit through the study of abstract science. As a result, everyone felt self-fulfilling benefits from the "right of freedom," which led to knowledge competition, scientific research, and material polarization. And materialism increasingly led to a disparity between rich and poor. World history and universal history written in the Western calendar do not include much discussion of the East, such as the birth of Buddha or the history of Buddhism, and those born in the East, including Japan, need to fully study the history of the East. The country of Japan, in particular, has had the moral spirit of Buddhism imprinted in its temperament since its founding, a perspective that is consistent with the history of its founding. As a result, Japan has viewed Buddhism as the correct teaching for the place of human life. It is also said that the nation of Japan was completed when Buddhism was combined with worship and loyalty to the gods and Buddha. Thus, the origins and development of the East and West are said to be different in flavor, suggesting, simply put, that Japan developed and built its civilization toward "ethical things," the depths of the human mind, while the West advanced toward "abstract and material science. Furthermore, it is said that the difference in the ideological backgrounds of the East and the West can be attributed to the establishment of urban culture through the invention of agriculture. However, the nature of that agricultural culture differs greatly between the East and West of Eurasia. Rice cultivation was practiced in the eastern monsoon regions, where summer rains are abundant, while

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wheat cultivation was practiced in the west, where rainfall is scarce. Wheat agriculture is a human-driven plant agriculture, and cattle raising is also human-driven. Rice farming, however, is supported by water and rain. It is in the forests that the rainwater is stored, and it is in the forests that a sense of reverence for nature and a sense of coexistence with nature are nurtured. In recent years, it has been pointed out that the development of science and technology by Western culture has brought about such adverse effects as environmental destruction, selfishness, emphasis on material and economic values, and destruction of moral values. This is an anthropocentric approach that takes the self or ego as its basic premise and recognizes objects that are in opposition to it. That object is discontinuous, fragmented, separate, isolated, independent, and unique, and the control, restraint, and limitation of human desire appear only as a coordinating principle of desire with other selves and others. The object that is separate and independent from the self is the object of human control, which is observed and analyzed objectively and rationally.

The results of this science are then used to the fullest extent for the benefit of human desires. Subjects, including nature, are efficiently used and improved only for themselves and for man. In addition, competition among humans is overemphasized against the backdrop of Darwin's theory of evolution, and the survival of the fittest (the inevitable disappearance of the losers and the weak) and the freedom of the strong are recognized to the fullest extent. The basic ideas of the West, which until recently led Western society and dominated the world, can be simplified into these concepts.

CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND ETHICS

However, the West has its Western way of thinking and the East has its Oriental way of thinking, and there is no superiority or inferiority between the two. These are values that the people of each region have developed over their long history to suit their own living environment. Today, there are many different ethnic groups in the world, each of which has its own unique culture and ideology that has been passed down from generation to generation from their ancestors. These unique cultures are the identities of the peoples. In modern cultural anthropology, "cultural relativism" asserts that there are only relative differences among cultures and that there is no superiority or inferiority between cultures. For example, people in uncivilized societies seem to live a primitive life from our point of view, so even their culture appears to be inferior. However, there is no superiority or inferiority of cultures, only relative differences, and those who think they are inferior are merely "cultural centrists" who apply the values within their own culture to other cultures. There is no objective standard to determine the superiority or inferiority of a culture or the degree of its progress. However, since the modern era, Western powers have colonized non-Western countries with massive military power. This is also due to the Western-centric belief that non-Western nations are inferior to the West and barbaric, a belief that has not changed in the East. The opposites of the West and the East are not equal, but are in a relationship of superiority and inferiority, with the West being superior to the East. However, excessive Westernization and modernization have caused various problems, especially environmental problems that are becoming more serious than ever before. It is only when we began to feel abnormal climate changes, such as global warming caused by the destruction of nature, that we became aware of the seriousness of environmental destruction and the need to change our overdeveloped, mass consumption society. The opinions on the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) and other such issues that have been discussed around the world in recent years naturally differ between developed countries, which have been promoting environmental destruction, and

developing countries, which are trying to continue their national development while destroying the environment. Simply put, relativism is the idea of respecting individual values and not imposing one's own view of life on others. However, there is no ethical code that says "this is right," and judgments of right and wrong are based solely on personal values. Certainly, the diversity of individual values and views on life should be respected, but that does not mean that anything is acceptable. Taking something that belongs to another person or harming another person is naturally reprehensible, and in society, such actions are treated as crimes and punished. Therefore, the idea that the ethical norms in our society are nothing more than laws that specify crimes that must not be committed is called "legal monism." However, since legal monism regards the law as absolute, it begs the question, "What can we do if we do not violate the law? If we follow the law, is everything just?" The question is always posed.

There is also the idea that one must ultimately follow one's own desires and should act in a way that maximizes one's own interests. This thinking is called "selfishness," which puts one's own interests first, but the idea that all that is good is good enough for oneself at the expense of others will lead to a bleak society lacking compassion and harmony due to the spread of selfishness, since people will not cooperate or help each other unless it is in their own interest. This would lead to a bleak society lacking in compassion and harmony due to the spread of selfishness. In contrast, there is the idea that people are concerned not only with themselves but also with their relationships. In contrast, the idea that the happiness of everyone involved, not just oneself, is considered equally, and that the best option is the one that maximizes the sum of everyone's happiness is called "utilitarianism." At first glance, utilitarianism seems to have the fairness of "properly considering everyone's happiness without being self-centered" and the objectivity and universality of "the best option is the same from everyone's perspective because it sums up everyone's happiness equally. However, although utilitarianism sums up everyone's happiness equally, it must really want to "give some weight to the happiness of one's own family and relatives." Also, because utilitarianism sums up everyone's happiness equally, it justifies the sacrifice of a few when the unhappiness of a few leads to the happiness of many. But can happiness obtained at the expense of a few others really be called equal happiness? In addition, because utilitarianism considers only what the balance between happiness and unhappiness will be a result of a choice, it does not take into account the circumstances leading to the choice and falls back on the idea that "anything is good as long as the outcome is good."

Therefore, a philosopher named Kant argued that "ethics should not be judged by results alone." Kant argued that the categorical imperative (a command determined without presuppositions or conditions), which unconditionally commands "do not break a promise" or "do not steal," even if the result is good, is the essence of ethics and morality. Kant said, "As long as it is a categorical imperative, a rule is a rule, no matter what the consequences, and it is strictly based on principle (Kurata 1995)." In addition to this categorical imperative, there is the idea of "rule utilitarianism," which has in common the idea of trying to follow a consistent rule of action, but unlike Kant, who believes that whether the outcome is happy or not is irrelevant in choosing that rule, and that the goodness or badness of a rule is only determined by whether the outcome is happy. This is the one that holds that the rule is not a good rule. Certainly, a rule that improves the sum of invariant happiness over a general rule seems necessary. However, as the saying goes, "even a lie is a good thing," in many cases we make choices that could be called "necessary evils" in order to protect ourselves or to facilitate social activities. This way of thinking is called "action utilitarianism," and R.M. Hare proposed a "two-tier utilitarianism" that incorporates

the ideas of both rule utilitarianism and action utilitarianism (Shibasaki 1995). For example, when considering whether to save a drowning child, one considers the child's happiness and the child's family's happiness if the child is saved, one's own happiness (e.g., unhappiness if the child fails and drowns, accomplishment and satisfaction if the child succeeds) and the family's happiness and unhappiness if the child does not save, and the happiness of all concerned if the child fails and drowns. Think about happiness and family happiness. By the time the child has to calculate and think about every single thing, such as his/her own happiness (unhappiness if he/she fails and drowns, a sense of achievement and reward if he/she succeeds), the happiness of his/her family (sadness if he/she fails and drowns), and the happiness and unhappiness of the people involved if he/she does not save him/her, it may be too late. In such cases, a spur-of-the-moment decision is necessary, and two-tier utilitarianism says that intuitive judgment should be followed when necessary. Furthermore, a philosopher named Hobbes believed that in a state of nature without rules, human beings would become a race of the weak and the strong, and it would be a miserable world where no one could live in peace. This gave rise to the idea of establishing minimum rules for each other, enforcing rule violations by the power of Society as a whole, and maintaining rules. This way of thinking is called the "social contract theory," but this alone, as with the theory of legal monism, does not come up with a standard for determining what is best within the scope of the rules. Furthermore, it could mean that anything else can be done as long as it is not in a state of weakness. Thus, Rawls refers to the doctrine of the social contract, which is at odds with the concept of utilitarianism. This is because utilitarianism is based on a position of majority rule that dismisses the minority because it emphasizes the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Rawls believed that it is important to distribute liberty equally among all the people who make up a society. Therefore, Rawls came up with the idea of the "veil of ignorance." The veil of ignorance is the state of not knowing any information about oneself (gender, health, assets, etc.) when determining social institutions and rules, this state being the "primordial state," the first principle, the principle of equal freedom, in which all people have equal freedom. The second principle, the principle of unequal freedom (inequality is allowed only in the following two cases.)

- 1, the principle of fairness and equal opportunity "where the same opportunities are afforded to all and arise through fair competition."
- 2, the disparity principle "when it leads to an improvement in the lives of the most disadvantaged" was in favor of the principle.

Rawls refers to the doctrine of the social contract, which is at odds with the concept of utilitarianism. This is because utilitarianism is based on the position of majority rule, which abandons the minority in order to emphasize the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Rawls believed that it is important to distribute liberty equally to all who make up society. And this argument of Rawls had a significant impact on the policy of positive discrimination. However, some criticized the veil of ignorance, saying that the primordial state is "abstract and unrealistic" and that man cannot be considered separate from society because he derives himself from the historical and cultural context of society. And while there have been various discussions about ethics, they all have their merits and demerits, and even now we have not reached a situation where everyone is convinced.

CONCLUSION

In the first place, ethics vary greatly depending on how a person perceives happiness and the culture of the country, and there may be no correct answer that works for everyone. It is natural that ethics and arguments differ depending on the history and culture of each country, as is the case with the current problems between Ukraine and Russia, and between Israel and Palestine. In Japan, dolphin fishing is a traditional practice, while in other countries it is condemned as barbaric and has even become an international issue. It can be said that ethics should be created with cultural relativity, respecting other cultures and ways of thinking while mutually considering "what is best."

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