

ASIAN VALUES AND EMOTIONS: TOWARD AN ASIAN COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I want to discuss three Asian values and emotions for establishing an Asian community, and how it can be applied in resolving problems that plague western society. The first is compassion for people, the type of love that bears no conditions. The love is not dependent on properties such as money, power, and beauty that are often associated with object of love. While it is very hard to find unconditional love in the modern western society, Asian culture exemplifies a brilliant tradition of love for others beyond egoistic interests. As such, while Asian culture is rooted in the compassion, the western society is experiencing degradation of its social fiber due to an exceeding focus towards self-interest. The second is happiness of self-certainty regardless of any external success. It is self-valuation of happiness irrespective of estimation by others. It is different in essence from the satisfaction of pleasure riding on visible achievements, which is the leading standard of happiness in the modern western society. The Asian concept of happiness can struggle against destruction of the environment due to mass consumption in pursuit of the greatest pleasure in the West. Finally the third is autonomy that stems from reaction against the dependence of most Asian nations on the western world in thoughts. Demand for the autonomy resists invasions of western civilizations upon Asia, and reinforces the validity of Asian values and emotions toward the community.

Keywords: Asian values, Asian community, Asian emotions, Asian concept of happiness, Asian reason

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Is there peculiarity of Asian sentiments compared to western ones? The sentiment peculiar to Asia that can be found only in Asia, and not in the West, could not exist any longer with the advent of the internet age. A way of life once unique to a region can be spread to another quickly through the Internet medium. But existence of the uniqueness is not my concern here. Dealing with particularities of Asian value and emotion here, I expect, can help establish an Asian community confronting the western world. Here, I will argue three ways of thinking, or feeling of Asia, which have their origins in major Asian traditions and Asian history. They are compassion for others, happiness of self-certainty, and autonomy. Besides the criteria of their origin, I have selected them under two additional considerations. One is that they should be alive today in the Asian world, and the other is that they should contribute to a new community facing western communities.

The issue of peculiarity seems trivial in the global age in which people and ideas cross over the whole world without lapse in time. In a pre-modern society, a culture or style peculiar to one region could be preserved and isolated from the rest of the world. Today, however, we live in the information-age where every manner of life is understood at an Internet speed. Every accidents and findings are announced in real time on CNN (Cable Network News). Thus when everything is shared by the world, the peculiarity, when significant, becomes impossible to find.

Here, however, I will not ask about the existence of the heterogeneity of Asian culture that is different from the western, rather the operation of some sentiments, or ways of feeling unique to Asia in the present world. The increasing relation between East and West makes the existence of peculiarity in culture impossible as seen above. There is nothing new in Asia. There is, however, something new in terms of real function in the present society. In the year 1377, Korea published the first document using metal printing. Despite the printing method predating Gutenberg nearly 100 years, the great discovery in Korea was not known to the rest of the world. It therefore did not become an effective element in the world history. This example shows that the existence is not the same as the influence. Some elements peculiar to the Asian world I will argue here are those having strong power in the present lives of Asian people, while they don't exist or are not important in the western world.

The reevaluation of Asian value was a popular trend in 1980s. It explained the rapid economic growth of East Asian nations. Over 1970s, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore achieved tremendous economic developments to join the ranks of the developed country. Before that, Asian traditional cultural heritages, especially the spiritual idealism of Confucianism,

were thought to have handicapped Asia's economic growth from fully realizing it's potential. Rather the economic success in the East Asian countries under the strong tradition of Confucianism urged people to look into their developments with a new vision.

The new consideration of Asian value was focused on totalitarianism in Confucianism. Confucianism has a holistic tendency to put higher value on family than on individual family members. In the same way, higher value was placed on the nation than on individual families. Facing the rapid economic growth of East Asian countries, many people in East and West began to find positive elements in the Confucian totalitarianism, and even concluded that it would be suitable in the corporate world. Many employees under the influence of Confucianism tend to think that the company they work for is a family, not just a place to earn money. In the 1980s, it was believed that one of the contributing factors in economic growth in East Asia was due to strong solidarity of employees and loyalty of Asian people to their company.

Compared to the past discussion about the economic developments in East Asia, my argument is for the establishment of an Asian community that is kind of a super nation between all Asian nations, like EU. The establishment of a community between various nations needs fundamentals, or principles for uniting all of them. The basic framework of the super state will consist of political, economic and social institutions. The formation of such super state should not be decided simply by a majority vote or utility, but by thorough reflection of the fundamentals. The three ways of feeling or thinking peculiar to Asia I suggested should be parts of the grounds of the fundamental principles, because they can offer the Asian community an identity in a natural way. They can be used as building block for constructing the framework of the community.

The Asian community, we hope, would be not a super nation simply combining Asian nations, but an alternative tiding over difficulties faced by the western communities. The suffering and the serious problems that the western worlds are subject to can be summarized as loss of humanistic solidarity in their communities due to obstinacy of individualism, and destruction of the environment originating from mass consumption. I believe that the three Asian sentiments proposed above overcome the western problems.

I.

I. ASIAN SENTIMENTS FOR ESTABLISHING AN ASIAN COMMUNITY

Here I am not going to search for some points of view or emotions that are simply unique to Asian people, but those that are used for the establishment of an Asian community with the hope of overcoming difficulties that western world's face. Such values and emotions should be alive in the Asian lives, and an effort must be made to overcome western problems through them. They are composed of three elements: compassion for people, happiness of self-certainty and autonomy.

1) Compassion for people

Compassion is a kind of love that is not dependent upon properties that are associated with objects of love. For example, many fall in love with someone who is externally beautiful, rich, good mannered, or wise, such traits can be called love-causing properties. Depending on some love-causing properties, most type of love is conditional. As such it is very hard to find unconditional love in the modern western world. However, in the Asian culture today, the brilliant tradition of compassion continues to be a substantial element of Asian sentiments.

For example, in the teachings of Confucius one crucial view of compassion is human-heartedness. To him human-heartedness was the first principle of morality and virtue of an individual. Everyone in society has some things that he should do, because they are the morally right things to do. *Yi* (righteousness) refers to such morally right things or moral duty. *Yi* is often contrasted with *li* (profit). The division of the two helps differentiate the morally superior man from the morally inferior man. The superior man does action for righteousness, but the inferior man acts for a profit. As such in Confucianism righteousness seems to be the first principle of morality. However, human-heartedness (*jen*) is the ground of righteousness. Everyone in society has intrinsic duties-what he ought to do. Oughtness of duties is grounded in *jen* or human-heartedness i.e., loving others. The father acts according to the way a father should act because he loves his son. In the same way, the son acts according to the way a son should act because he loves his father. Human-heartedness is the foundation of morality in that the man who really loves others performs his duties in society.

Human-heartedness in Confucius is the compassion for people. The father does not love his son because his son has some properties that he seeks. The son does not love his father because his father is wealthy or intelligent. Their love for one another is not dependent upon

some properties that the other person possesses. The love of Confucius is not property-based, rather it is unconditional. In the western tradition, such unconditional act is called agape love. So Human-heartedness is similar to agape love as it is grounded in compassion for people,

It is more certain that human-heartedness is unconditional love when Confucius explains how to practice *jen*. He suggested two ways of practicing *jen*. The one is not to do onto others what one does not wish for oneself. It is called *Chung*. *Chung* is the negative aspect of *jen* in that one does not do onto others what he does not want to do. The other is to sustain others, desiring to sustain oneself, and to develop others, desiring to develop oneself. It is called *Shu*. *Shu* is the positive aspect of *jen* in that one does to others what he wants to do. In both *Chung* and *Shu*, there is not any consideration of properties that loved people must have in order to be loved. Therefore *Jen* is the genuine humanistic love for others.

The tradition of Love of Confucius remains an influential element in the modern Asian societies. Today, in many Asian countries we can often find the emotion of egalitarianism that everyone should be treated equally irrespective of his merits or contributions. The demand that everyone should be treated equally regardless of any properties of him originates from Confucian *jen*. The focus on equality is not a phenomenon only in the socialist nations, but a universal wish of all Asian societies under the tradition of Confucian human-heartedness. The universal demand for the equal treatment could be hard to understand in eyes of the West in which the system of competition and reward prevail. However, the trend of egalitarianism based on the Confucian human-heartedness is permeated into many Asian societies.

The other view of compassion for others can be found at the spirit of charity, or *Zakat*, one of the fundamental doctrines of Islam. Originally, *Zakat* was a tax for helping others. In the spirit of charity, Muslims would recommend levy of additional *Zakat*. Muhammad once said a Muslim who sleeps alone comfortably while others starved was not a Muslim. Today the advent of modern technology in communication and transportation, allows the whole world to become neighbors. Thus Muslims can carry out his duty cited in the *Zakat* and help all humans around the world.

Someone would insist that the compassion for others is an important element of the western culture as well. It is certain that Christianity is a religion of love. But the spirit of love has been lost in the western society with the admiration of competition. A winner in the competition must have more reward than a loser. It is right, or just. The loser has to leave to the winner's arbitrary benevolence. In the modern market economy of the western society, the first principle of morality is not love, but righteousness or justice.

The system of competition and reward gives birth to serious problems in the western societies. They are experiencing serious illness which is likely to destroy their social unity. Competition makes few to winners and most losers. Winners take various kinds of booties, money, power and honor and give their possessions to their children by inheritance. The winners become wealthier, and the losers poorer. The widening gap between the rich and the poor is a threat and it decays the social integrity. It is one of the serious challenges facing the western societies.

The social unity can be recovered effectively with the idea of compassion for others. It is said that rift and conflict between classes in a society could be solved with benevolence and social welfare system. But they cannot work well without the compassion for others. If members of a society do not have the idea of compassion for others, why would they spend money for others and revise policies for helping other people? In this way, the compassion for others is both an element of Asian sentiment in Asian major traditions and an alternative to overcome the threat of social integrity facing western societies now.

2) Happiness of self-certainty

We can divide criteria of happiness as internal and external. The external mean that happiness is measured on the scale of outward or publicly visible achievements. On these criteria, one who succeeds in business, politics and promotion is happy. The internal mean that happiness is evaluated by individual's certainty of himself. Even though he fails in the eyes of ordinary, he remains happy because he puts high value on his life. The happiness of self-certainty here refers to the internal concept of happiness.

We can find the happiness of self-certainty from all of the important Asian traditions. I will discuss four views here. The first is from Confucianism, the second Taoism, the third Buddhism, and the last Islam.

First, Confucius suggests the happiness of self-certainty while introducing three pleasures of the morally superior man. According to Confucius, a man of complete virtue has three different kinds of pleasure. The first two stem from learning various subjects and communicating with friends. The last is the pleasure of self-certainty. Confucius says, "Is he not a man of complete virtue, who feels no discomposure though men may take no note of him?" We usually feel happy if we are recognized by others, but frustrated if not. The recognition by others seems vital to our happiness. But Confucius teaches us that publicly accepted reputation or success should not determine our happiness. The denial of the external

concept of happiness naturally leads to the internal concept of happiness. Even though others do not recognize him, someone is happy if he believes that he is right, or true. According to Confucius, The authentic happiness should stems from the self-certainty.

Second, Chang-tzu, a Taoist philosopher, advocates the internal concept of happiness while explaining about varying degrees in the achievement of happiness. According to him, the highest happiness is achieved through higher understanding of the nature of things. Things are different in their nature and their natural ability is also not the same. Chang-tzu tells us a story of a very large and a small bird. The one can fly thousands of miles, while the other cannot reach from one tree to the next. The abilities of the two are entirely different. However, they are equally happy when they have a full and free exercise of their natural ability. Here, Chuang-tzu points out that there is no uniformity in the nature of things and all of them are happy when they each do what they are able to do and like to do. It is easy to see that such a pluralistic concept of happiness is not different from the internal concept of happiness. Every person is different in his or her nature, natural ability and natural preference. As there is no absolute uniformity in the nature of each man and no need for such uniformity, everyone can be happy when he has a full and free exercise of his ability and wish. The thought of Chuang-tzu includes the happiness of self-certainty in that he denies the uniformity of the criteria measuring happiness.

Third, the happiness of self-certainty can be revealed in the theory of nothing and enlightenment of Buddhism. The concept of nothing means that everything is temporary. In fact, all things in the universe are manifestations of the human mind that moves only within the wheel of cause and effect. The present wish or cravings in someone's mind has determined by the past events. It means that the being of an individual is made up of a chain of causation. Given no absolute validity in the present tendency of our mind, everything that the mind intends has no absolute validity. Because everything is not necessarily as it is desired now, it cannot be fixed as what it is and called as something permanently. In these reasons, everything is nothing. The common people are ignorant of this truth and take all things as really *yu* (having being, existent). But the Buddhas have told them that actually all things are *wu* (empty, nothing). The fundamental Ignorance is called *Avidya*, which means no-enlightenment. From the Ignorance comes craving for and cleaving to particular things. Because all sufferings of an individual life arise from his fundamental Ignorance of the nature of things, the only way to happiness lies in replacing Ignorance with Enlightenment, which in Sanskrit is called *Bodhi*. All the teachings and practices of Buddhism are attempts to reach the *Bodhi*. From them the

individual avoids carving and cleaving and reaches to emancipation called *Nirvana*.

From the theory of nothing and enlightenment of Buddhism can be extracted the happiness of self-certainty. The theory denies the absolute value of things. If there is no absolute validity to desire in any things, there is no happiness with possessing any particular things. Power, money, or reputation has a limited value to an enlightened eye. So even though he does not possess anything that the common people want, an enlightened person is not unhappy. Everyone with the enlightenment is happy regardless of any external success if he is certain of his truth. It is a version of the happiness of self-certainty.

The forth, I can find the happiness of self-certainty from the spiritual awaking in the Islamic tradition. According Islam, human beings consist of spirit and self. The Spirit transcends time and space that mean our everyday world, while the self is to experience things in time and space. The distinction between spirit and self can be understood as the division of two aspects of one soul in terms of Kantian language: intelligible and empirical. The self or empirical soul is interested in things in the everyday life, while the spirit or intelligible soul is to search for the principles of creation of God. The spirit is not given us immediately, but can be acquired by meditation and practice to give up worldly things and transcend secular interests. According the Islamic teachings, this spiritual awakening is the highest goal of life. Muhammad said, "Die before dying." In other words, throw away the sensation of pleasure and the instrumental reason in order to get pleasure. If the spiritual awakening is a way of Islam, the happiness to Islam is not the pleasure accompanied by worldly achievements, but the knowledge of truth, which is interpreted as the internal concept of happiness. If he gets to the genuine happiness in the belief that he knows the truth, someone is happy in self-certainty.

As discussed above, the happiness of self-certainty consists of the four main traditions of Asia: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Islam. And the idea is prevailing in Asia in modern days. Good examples of that are the prevalence of meditation culture in Asian societies and the preservation of ethnic tradition by Asian people living in the United States and Europe. Various kinds of practices of meditation, a part of everyday life in Asia, are an attempt to overcome the temptation of external success and find happiness from self-certainty. And there are many Asian communities in large cities throughout both in Europe and in America. A good example of such community in the United States is, Chinatown in San Francisco, Koreatown in Los Angeles, and Little Saigon in Orange County. Such variety of ethnic communities of Asian people reflects partly strong certainty of their own culture with the aim not to fall in admiration of the developed western society, which is impossible without

the internal concept of happiness. If they did not keep their self-certainty, Asian people living in the developed western society would collapse in front of its external luxurious civilization.

The western worlds are experiencing a serious environmental problem. The external concept of happiness of western societies, the leading standard of happiness there, demands the satisfaction of pleasure at its maximum. The demand for the greatest happiness of the most people leads them to consume more and more amount of goods that come from nature. The western concept of happiness depends largely on the mass consumption. It causes abuse of nature, eventually destruction of the environment. The happiness of self-certainty does not demand that everyone seeks his satisfaction of his desire competitively. It does not make sense that every person wants the same kind and amount of pleasure as others. The happiness of self-certainty does not destroy the environment because the true happiness does not compete against others by consuming more goods. In this respect, the Asian concept of happiness can be a cure for the illness that plagues the west.

3) Autonomy

Autonomy is one of the most basic concepts of Kantian philosophy. The autonomy to him is an ability of freedom to set a rule upon oneself. If he follows an order of others, someone is not a man of autonomy. If he hears his own voice, someone is a man of autonomy. But the autonomy here will be used at the international level while the autonomy of Kant is a concept of moral philosophy. The autonomy with the respect of international relation means rule by one's own self with rejecting a foreign nation's domination.

While the first two sentiments have their origins from Asian philosophical traditions, the autonomy have been developed mainly from the dependence of Asia on the West in thoughts. Accurately speaking, the autonomy as an Asian sentiment has been formed with the Asia's reaction against the dependence. Historically, many Asian nations had been subject to the western imperialism in the modern age. But the dependence of Asia on the West here refers to the domination of the West over Asia in the aspect of thoughts regardless of the historical occurrence of the political colonization. At the end of the Second World War, most Asian countries restored their political autonomy. But the western sway over Asia in the aspects of thoughts becomes more powerful. Naturally the oppressed people in any respects have resistance and antipathy against the oppressors. The demand for the autonomy of Asia arises from Asia's movement of reaction against that.

The thought is a ground of a nation as the reason of its policy. For example, the idea

of freedom of speech makes some policies to protect the right to express various opinions between individuals, and the concept of private property produces some steps to encourage a free business of an individual. So thought is a source of power to lead a nation's directions.

The two western thoughts that hold sway over Asia are democracy and capitalism. The democracy here does not mean the general philosophy of democracy, but the representative system through the universal free election and the division of power. In the past, there were different political systems in place in Asia. Today, however, almost all traditional institutions of Asian nations have disappeared and in time have accepted the western democracy. Even a despotic state disguises itself as realizing the western democratic system with constructing a puppet parliament and a fake court.

The idea of capitalism of the western is dominating Asia's economic life today. The capitalism here means simply the free pursuit of economic profit, which is based on the external concept of happiness. The overbearing influence of the western civilization has collided with Asia's happiness of self-certainty. Eventually most of Asian countries implemented plans to follow the path of the western modernization in the form of capitalism. As a direct result, the western capitalistic institutions and the materialistic concept of life are not strange in the Asian present world.

The dependency in thoughts produces loss of self-identity, so raises up anger. That Asian people are dominated by the western thoughts means to discard their own ideas and to follow foreign principles. Such a loss of self-causes firstly the aggression against the self. If people who lost their identity become aware of the loss of self, they are guilty of the weakness or stupidity of themselves that would be considered as causes of the loss. After that, the loss of self can be developed into the aggression against others. If the remorse for the self is getting too bigger to control, the aggression against the self-changes the direction of aggression toward others. Now Asian people think that the dependence was not chosen by Asian people themselves, but forced by the West. It is called projection or displacement in the psychoanalysis. We often use the mechanism of projection to turn our own fault to others in order to protect our feelings. In this way, the regret at the loss of self in Asia has been being developed to antipathy against the West. The anti-western attitude heads forward the demand of autonomy. The repulsion of the western domination is directly related to the claim of Asia's self-rule out of the western grip.

The increasing demand for the autonomy in Asia has a positive aspect for establishing an Asian Community. It urges Asian people to restore their identity and reevaluate their tradition. Distancing from the West, Asia becomes to get a better view of it. A community

needs foundation to unite different members into one unity. The autonomy functions as the fence to keep off the flood of western civilization and at the same time causes advancement in searching Asia's own values.

II. CONCLUSION

As was discussed above, Asian value and emotion that could be used to support an Asian community are threefold. The first is compassion for people, the second, happiness of self-certainty, and last the autonomy. The compassion for people stems from Confucian human-heartedness, or *jen* and charity, or *Zakat* in Islam. The happiness of self-certainty comes from the view of three pleasures of the superior man in Confucianism, the pluralistic concept of happiness in Taoism, the theory of nothing and enlightenment in Buddhism, and the spiritual awakening in Islam. The autonomy has been being developed with the reaction against the western rule over Asia in thoughts.

Such Asian sentiments functions as a reliable cure for the western disease. The compassion for people can overcome dismantling of social unity prevalent in the modern western societies. The happiness of self-rule can conquer the environmental problems, the destruction of nature, which is also serious in the West. The autonomy reinforces the validity of Asian values and emotions. Pushing out the western thoughts allow Asian people to look into their traditions more positively. All of the three can be used for establishing an Asian community as an alternative to western ones.

There is not always full of optimism for the future of Asia. Respectively, Asian ways of feeling or ways of thinking discussed above have a dark side. The compassion for others could lead to a lazy society in which everyone claims only to be loved by others, not to love others. The happiness of self-certainty would be bound for a flimsy self-rationalization in order to deny poverty and underdevelopment. The autonomy might be a closed isolationism to become increasingly reclusive. As a rule, even the good is a two-edged sword. It is one of the most important Asia's missions toward a community to foster the positive aspects of them and check the negative.