

JAPANESE DEVELOPMENTAL SUCCESS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF JAPAN

A Comparative Area Study on Some Characters of Japanese Society

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I would like to draw relation of the aim of my presentation with theme of the conference. The theme of the conference is “Plurality and Self-Identity of the Asian Community in History”. The aim of this presentation is suggesting an idea about Japan’s development, so called “Japanese miracle”. So that, I will try to give an idea about Japan’s identity in the Asian community by having a look on some social features of Japan that might be thought as a shifting power of growth of the country.

In terms of development, Japan has been put in the same category along with other countries from the West like German and the USA. But, compared with other economic and politic countries of the west and the east, Japan does not have any natural resources and has not been a leading country diplomatically. So then, there must be some features that make Japan different from the western countries and enable Japan to progress as well. From this point, I can raise my question. Very simply, what are the key reasons of Japanese progress?

Initially, one might think that, it is because of organizational structures of Japanese administration systems only. But, for me who has been staying in Japan and observing the society for more than ten years, to answer the question above cannot be found out by doing an examination or observation only on Japan’s organizational structure of companies and public administration systems. Because, there is not such a big difference between Japan and other developed countries in terms of systems. What you will find out from Japan’s case, you could learn the same thing by examining case of any other developed countries from the West. Studying Japanese case might suggest more different things. Therefore, this presentation will try to find out reasons of Japan’s progress or developments in Japan’s cultural richness and ethical values such as hard work, patience, self-discipline, sensitivity, to serve others, being

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humble etc. which we are familiar with as we have same things generally in Asian cultures rather than having specific organizational structure, business model, policy programs, and so on.

The method which is implied in this study is “area studies” which can be defined as “practical and interdisciplinary approach to a specific cultural region”. As the method implies, without being limited within borders of an academic discipline, I will present selected aspects of the Japanese society which are being knowledge seekers, ability of improvement things, group mentality and team work, mutual trust, having “shy culture” based on my personal observation over ten years in addition on some quotations from previous studies and books given in the bibliography. There will be also some comparative approaches on cultures of Japan and Islamic culture and some academic subjects that researchers might be interested in.

I. JAPANESE PEOPLE AS KNOWLEDGE SEEKERS

Knowledge in general is one of the most important foundations of growth in countries as the well known description of “age of knowledge” for 21st century implies. Needless to say that in order to get knowledge there must be at least imparting side and a learning side. In this age, since having knowledge and using it makes a change in knowledge holders which don't easily give or share their knowledge. Therefore, learning activity has been more important.

In fact, Japanese people are very aware of importance of knowledge, and they recognize well the necessity of being open mentally and physiologically to learn things. Not only formal way, they do constant learning activity whether in education institutions or outside, individually or in-group, officially or privately, off-duty or on-duty, while travelling or staying, inside their country or abroad etc. They take every opportunity to learn things, to gather information wherever they be, whomever they meet with, and whatever they have. They gather information from streets, books; people directly, academic meetings, sport activities, and these days from internet.

They go travel to seek knowledge and invite people to get information. They go abroad to learn things. I just want to share my impression on Japanese tourists. They travel to seek knowledge and get information.

It is possible that anyone who has seen Japanese tourists somewhere might agree with the description above. For many people, identification of very typical Japanese tourist is this: They

are holding a camera in one hand and notebook in another hand, taking pictures, writing down whatever they see. Have you ever met with or saw any in your country or air plane flying back to Japan? I saw this scene several times especially when I return back to my country. I saw many of them writing down things, putting pictures they took on their notebooks with little notes written in different colors. Actually, every year 20 million Japanese go abroad to look for little hints of new ideas might be apply at home or work. Imagining that every year at least 20 million people go abroad to learn things, how amazing amount of information and knowledge they could collect from abroad. Not only individually but public institutions and the government also send experts and groups throughout the world to meet people who have information that Japanese people need or one day might be need. Seeking knowledge is not just one way. Along with going abroad Japanese institutions invite people to take their knowledge. When a foreign visitor comes to Japan, most of Japanese people think that “what can I learn from him?” and set up meetings, symposiums etc.

There should be some techniques to be able to collect knowledge. As far as I concern I can list up next points:

1) **Being humble:**

Most of Japanese people regard themselves as students. They don't hesitate to learn things even foreign students whom they accepted to teach. They do this because of profiting from others examples, knowledge and experience. I experienced this when I was student. People who have had more knowledge than me, even my supervisor, would ask me to learn things as if he doesn't know. I would speak and reply those questions with an air of importance.

2) **Life Long Learning:**

Study is a social activity continues everywhere; all ages. Therefore, everyone is expected to be student, and at any age you can be good student throughout the life. Learning activity continues even after graduation, taking certification of certain training, and attaining to a work.

3) **Group Study:**

Study is not only an individual habit, but it is also a kind of social ability. Anyone who graduated at least from a high school shares this ability and knows how to study within a group. When you attend in a conference or workshop in Japan held by Japanese people, you will recognizing that Japanese people are well trained and educated to study or work together. Rules are firm and well established roles of each person are well assigned and

distributed. Everyone, from chairperson to receptionist, from audience to person who holds microphone and waits if there is a person who wants to ask a question he will bring soon the microphone to that person knows in detail what they should do. Having knowledge only is not enough sometimes. It is also crucially important to select appropriate knowledge and how to use it.

II. ABILITY TO IMPROVE THINGS

Japanese people when they go abroad to collect knowledge they carefully examine all traditional instructions of target entity in specific region, and pick up the most appropriate on the basis of Japan's needs and social realities. For this purpose, Japanese people especially elites have been going to many countries since 19th century.¹ They even went to Ottomans to understand why they had been big power and find out hints for profiting with.

By the way, Ottoman Turkey also sent elite students to the West almost in the same period. But almost all of Ottoman elites concentrated on one side of the West. They mainly studied on humanities, social sciences, philosophies and arts instead of being interested in science at the same time. Moreover, they had felt a kind of complex about their own culture. They had tended to be fascinated by splendid and luxury costumes of the West than its technical improvement. They sent their most productive ages by enjoying leisure. When they came back to their country, they brought just some costumes, habits that did not help the empire at all. They also introduced some political and philosophical arguments that had been done continuously in the west such as conflicts between republicans and imperials, arguments of reform and renaissance between scientists and the church that had nothing to do with Muslim society and there was no point to paying effort on those issues. Especially, those elites began to impart their opinions open people after World War I. For those elites, the Ottoman became an “invader (occupier)” and an obstacle to progress. However, until that time, just 5 or 6 years before the war, Muslims under the rule of the Ottoman called themselves “the Ottoman” and the Ottoman was regarded as the leader of Muslim world. In each part of the Ottoman Territory of Postwar period, some people had appeared simultaneously in different

¹ Japan's study on abroad began in 1868 which is called “Meiji Restoration [Meiji Ishin]”. Meiji Ishin was a series of changes in Japan's government system to education systems which had been done by Japanese elites came back from their studies on the West at that time.

places who were claiming that each nation should have their own states; to be able to put this new idea on a firm foundation they would need an ideology which is nationalism. They tried to establish nationalism within a certain region such as Turkish nationalism in Little Asia, Arab nationalism in Middle East, Albanian Nationalism in Albania and so on.

Actually, in the West at that time, while people were doing these arguments between them, they knew that each part was important for them. So that, many western countries kept having religious and scientific institutions together; parliamentary system and imperial system alongside each other like England, Holland etc. while Muslims chose throwing their unity and being divided into small pieces so that bigger powers can easily swallow. Thus, what the people had was a collapsed empire and small societies. In coming years, people of Anatolia could establish The Republic of Turkey while many Muslim societies would wait to get their independence after experiencing the colonialism process.

Nowadays, things have been changing in Muslim countries. As we are just passing this process I may not be able to give a comprehensive explanation why people of Islamic world started recover its historical, geographical and diplomatic importance that used to have. Though, I may claim that, this is because of general consciousness that we should take only good things from the west that we lack now such as human rights, social equality, democratic rights, science, technique, social relief etc; and revival things that only we had before such as respect for religion and religious matters. This could be regarded as a better model for the Muslim society for now. But it needs modifying. So that, Japan's case is worthy studying to find out how to select best institution for each fields for a targeted country, and how to make some additional improvement on it, and adopt it as a new and different version.

III. GROUP MENTALITY AND TEAM WORK

Japanese people have a kind of “group mentality (group psychology)” and they tend to follow orders regardless of being right or wrong. They definitely obey to what the leaders say no matter whether an order or purpose is really acceptable or non-acceptable. I see this instinctive tendency in the streets sometimes. While people are standing at a red light and waiting for a green light, if someone crosses the street against the red light many people would be following this person.

One may think this behavior is not admirable. In fact, there are demerits of this character.

For instance, if bad people come into power, all people would follow them automatically. A typical example of this nature had been seen before the World War II. Japanese society as a whole, including good and bad people, religious and secular people, joined to invade countries around Japan.

This is true, not only for the Japanese society; but it is also true for other societies as well. I can say same thing about the Western societies too. Actually, there is no difference between the Japanese society and other societies in terms of obeying bad rulers. Taking the example of recent case, was there any protest from Native Americans against The USA when they attacked Afghanistan to take so called revenge of 9.11 and caused many lost lives of innocents? That is to say that, it is not only Japanese society's feature to follow bad leaders.

However, there are merits of being an obedient to the country though. The advantage is as people tend to obey orders easily it is very easy to introduce a system into society. This can help too much for leaders especially. Because the leaders do not have to do so much effort in order to enroot a new idea or system into the society as people easily accept ideas and orders as they are obedient. Having this social tendency or character is not harmful as long as the leaders are being good mannered people. Being an obedient within a society cannot be established easily. It needs mutual trust among the society.

IV. MUTUAL TRUST

In rural area of Japan, there is still a relationship between individuals relying on mutual trust. I would like to share two personal observations about this matter. Once I went to a small town called Kushimoto in Wakayama prefecture.² During my visit to there, I saw small packages of mandarin oranges were put on a table with price tags. There was also a small box seemed be a box to put money in. there might be some money in it. But there was not anybody around. It seemed owner of the stall (this small shop) had expected costumers to put money in the box if they had picked up a package, and had never thought that people would take mandarins, and go away without paying its price or money too. This is really amazing thing. Actually, as a manner, or theoretically, it is not a strange thing for Muslim society as we had

² As you might know, there is a memorial commemorating sinking of Ottoman Ship in 1899. In this happening around 500 people including captain died and were buried there. Actually, I visited this memorial hall and the victims.

this experience in the history, but now we cannot put anything out of our sight as we worry that someone would come and steal it.

Also, common information about Japanese people is what, if they find a wallet or money dropped on road would not pick it up or would take it to nearest police station without taking anything from inside. But, very rarely, in some cases, money might be taken, but this is not general. How they could establish such a mutual reliance that people don't steal things, or, don't pick up dropped or lost items of somebody else?

Mutual reliance is seen mainly in rural area. If you go urban area you would see very strong security on buildings. So then, why does this difference between rural and urban area come out. I think this occurs because of difference of types of social relations between rural and urban areas. Life in rural areas is based on individual relations and mutual aid between the individuals, as the nature surrounding you is strong, and to be able to prevent lives people have to help each other. As long as you think that if you are in a trouble your neighbor or relatives will come to help you, you might have a kind of trust to those people vise a versa. You also will rush to give your hand to people in trouble. So then you got that mutual reliance which is based on individual relations and mutual help.

However, in urban areas, daily life is based on systems and rules. People trust in systems, rules, and officials rather than individuals. Human actions are done through professional institutions. For instance, if you are sick or ill you might go to a nearest hospital without telling anything to your neighbor. People know that rules are very important and should be protected. Because that rule will help you some day if it still exists. Let me rethink the example of "returning lost money" to its owner from this perspective again. I think people do this because of two main reasons:

Firstly, if you return wallet to police station you will be given a certain percentage of found amounts. Secondly, people do a kind of empathy, by putting themselves to the position of the person who lost the money. Using the case of that person whose money was found, what would you think if you were that person's state? Of course, you would desire to be given back the money to you. So, you have to return back what you have found on the road, so that one day if you lost things you might be given your lost items as you were about to do now. In other words, if you obey the rule today and return back the money to the police station, your attitude likely will help you tomorrow when you dropped yourself a thing.

Let us compare this with the Islamic culture by raising the question of "does a person in Muslim countries if finds money on the road will return back it to its owner? For me, if that

person is pious or richer to the extent that he doesn't need that money, they probably will give it back or don't take it at all. Actually, the rule of lost-found items in Islam is clear and firmly established. If you find anything there are two options: Whether you take it as long as you think that you could find its owner and hand over it to him you can pick it up; or leave it as it is, so that owner might remember where he put or dropped and come to take it.

If the finder is pious he will do either of these two ways. If he is not pious, and doesn't care about the religious codes, he will may take and go away. Although non-Muslims whose religion doesn't mention about it why do Muslims take? I can offer an explanation like this: Intra-human affairs in Muslim Society are not based only horizontal relationship which means a relationship between equals, but people behave or adjust their behaviors based on vertical relationship which means a relationship between superiors who is Allah and lower level which is human's level. In other words, people of Muslim society interchange activities in accordance their relationship with each other and with Allah who is the all-knowing, hearing, and seeing.

If a person believes well that even anyone cannot see him when he takes dropped money which doesn't belong to him, Allah is always seeing him, and in hereafter he definitely will be questioned by Allah about this act and will meet the owner that money if the money would not give back. Besides this, Muslims don't care too much other people when they want to do things.

Why do have Muslims such confidence? Actually Muslims get this confidence from their faith (*iman*). Regardless of having strong faith or weak *iman* is only true and proved feeling that can be felt in one's heart. *Iman* is really very real and strong feeling only a believer can have it. As long as they hold *iman* in their hearts they would not feel any gratitude or indebtedness to anyone. He doesn't care too much about institutions or rules that established by humans like him. Because he believes that all given things are given by Allah and every lost thing is taken back by Allah. So, you will need anyone. This confidence may cause good results and bad results at the same time. Good result is, if this person has a strong *iman* and practice his *iman* in a good way,

Since he thinks that Allah always sees him he will fear Allah's anger and his punishment. And if he could stop desires of his *nafs* (carnal soul which invites person to do bad things) he will never cause any danger or damage to others. Moreover, to get Allah's satisfaction to him (*riza-i ilahi*) he might do good things to get other people benefited from. In Ottoman Istanbul, there was "*sadaka* stones" a kind of corner made from stones. Rich people would put money and go away. Poor people would come and take just the amount they needed.

But, if this person is not pious although has *iman* in his heart, will never care about other people and will capture everything that he wants to have. However, the case is different in non-Muslim societies. As they don't believe God mainly, they think that everything comes from inter-human activities. According to them, if you work you get money, if you don't you will have nothing. If you take other people's care they will do same thing to you. So, you have to be careful how to deal with other people whom you are expecting things. Individuals feel themselves weak as they don't have any true and real feeling in their hearts.

Therefore, they have to help each other. Then, they can easily establish common consensus and everyone will keep it. To use again the story of "finding money", to get the money back to yourself you need other people. In the case of non-Muslims is that they rely on human relations, and try to strengthen bonds among them and other by protecting social rules. So that, if they find money will give it back. Case of Muslims is that they rely on faith and human relations. If a person has strong faith he will give the money back. If a person has a kind of *iman* but doesn't care too much rules, he would take the money and go away. Whatever the reason of mutual trust in Japan is, there is still a common and universal moral codes within the Japanese society orienting people's behaviors. Along with mutual trust there is another aspect of this social ethic that is worth mentioning which is called "shy culture".

V. HAVING "SHY CULTURE"

I think most of Japanese people are shy. It is one of the cultural differences with other countries. "Shy" means here basically a collective action. This is different from what we say "shy". More comprehensive definition is this. Shy culture is a kind of a social pressure onto individuals to make them to behave in accordance to some social expectations. Shy culture is especially affective in the collective cultures in which every individual is expected to play a certain role through the society to maintain order of the society. Individuals have to prevent social codes and honor of the society. Individuals can protect their honors too as long as they conserve honor of the society. No matter of your personal values. You can keep having self-respect, respect of others to you by doing what the society wants to be done. "Good" and "bad" is been decided by the society. Your personal evaluation of things doesn't have any affect.

Sight of the society is everything. You might be lettered by this common sight as "a good person" or "a bad person". If you commit a behavior which is regarded as "sin" by the society

and the society will know that you did it, and then you are a bad man. Therefore, you should show your regret and sorry to the society, sometimes you should punish yourself by yourself. Otherwise, the society will isolate you and you couldn't find any place to live. Once the society excommunicates you, there is now way except two options: Whether you leave the society by going abroad or cutting every relation from the society like homelessness; or, kill yourself which is suicide. Within this kind of society, individual desires have been regarded "bad" like very famous Japanese saying "A nail that sticks out will be pounded down" which might mean as the society should be equal you cannot be selfish. As long as individuals are hard workers, and the conventional wisdom is to be equal the country will be developing as just Japan's case implies.

CONCLUSION

So far, we have tried to find out reasons of Japan's development by having a comparative look on Japan's social features based on my personal observation through the Japanese society over ten years. As the social features of the Japanese society I picked up five points which are: continuous knowledge seeking, ability of improvement things, group mentality and team work, mutual trust, having "shy culture". If a society has an endless and systematic desire to get knowledge; has an ability of using this knowledge based on that society's needs and adopt it, while putting their own model into practice if they work within a feeling of trust to each other, and conventional wisdom of that has been designed to get the society developed we can claim that this society has many conditions to be able to improve just like the Japanese society has been showing the proof.

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