

The History of Modernization in Japan and the “Foundation of Freedom”

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After the Second World War, most of the Japanese avoided the responsibility of the war, for they did not want to reflect on the meaning of the invasive war, but, instead, excuse themselves that they were only forced to commit the war. So Japan strived only for the economic success and became totally irresponsible for the war.

This structure made Japanese society very stressful, which finally caused the change of the government in 2009. Maybe this change can be the first step to the beginning of the “Foundation of Freedom”, for which Hannah Arendt admired the American Revolution.

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the miracle in Fushun

1 War experience and Japanese

I feel very pleased and greatly honored to speak here at such a radical turning point in history. I do not know if I can share my impression together with you. But, for me, the change happening now in Japan is the biggest ever since the Meiji Restoration or even the beginning of Edo era almost 400 years ago. I want to communicate with you who gathered here as frankly as possible about this changing world.

When I was born in 1948, my home country had made quite a new constitution, which clearly declared the renouncement of war and demilitarization. I wanted to know how Japan could become a country that never commits war crimes and acts of violence anymore. I was so curious how the people of my parents' generation spoke about their war experience. I read and heard a lot about the massacre and violence performed by Japanese soldiers. But every time I asked them how their life was during World War II and how they judged the days of that period, all the answers I could get from them were disappointing. “We are tired of war enough” or “the war with USA, such a super power country was too reckless”, these were all that I could hear from them and they never expressed any kind of remorse or reflection of their violence and war crimes. Why did they leave this world without telling the words of their own responsibility or reflection upon their actions?

The reason is fairly clear. For most of common people and soldiers, the war was never voluntary, but was irresistibly forced from the state under the name of Tenno (living God). They believe that they are not responsible for it. However, the situation is not so simple, for even the most responsible persons who had no

such excuse for the war were not as responsible as the common soldiers. Some of the Class-A war criminals during the International Tribunal for the Far East were willing to accept the responsibility of being the general of the defeated army, but no one (including the Emperor) ever expressed his own reflection on the war crimes and violence. There must be some deep abyss between the violent actions and the expression of the responsibility for them.

This situation can be found so similarly in terms of gender violence. Every time when I had a chance to hear both sides of victimizers and perpetrators in domestic violence, I was so often embarrassed by their totally opposite assertions. I was so perplexed that I was obliged to guess that either one part was lying. When they were asked to express their own opinion, both opinions do not look like intentional lies but based on some facts. For this reason, we cannot expect the sincere and deep reflection and confession of their perpetration.

Just because of this situation, I was so deeply moved and surprised to hear the history of the reaction of the Japanese soldiers to their own war crimes in Fushun war criminal control office (in Northern part of China). This historical experience is called “the miracle in Fushun”. The reason why it is called a miracle is because the attitude of the soldiers were completely different from that of other Japanese war criminals. In 1950, 5 years after the end of the Second World War, about 1000 soldiers and officers were sent to China, where they had committed war crimes. Quite unexpectedly, there were treated in a quite polite and humane way. They were not forced any laborious work nor offered poor meals. The soldiers, who were sent to Fushun from Siberia and who got the education for pleading guilty for some years, acknowledged their crime quite willingly. As the result, 97% of the prison-

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ers were liberated without even accusation and no one was sentenced to death. After their return to home country, they spent the rest of their lives as very sincere anti-war activists in spite of very hard prejudice and discrimination. What was the most striking was that these soldiers could talk and confess what they had done during the war quite calmly. What they spoke of was their own ferocious violent crimes which were hard to hear. Other soldiers could have never confessed such cruel deeds. Why could they do it?

2 the conditions for responsibility

Let's consider, first of all, why Japanese soldiers could behave in such a brutal and heartless way in China. First, since the beginning of the Meiji Period, the main ideology that mobilized Japanese men into the invasion into Asian countries is the result of a very systematic education to breed contempt towards Asian people (especially to Korean and Chinese people) and to organize Japanese soldiers under the very paternalistic social ideals that were symbolically expressed as Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (大東亜共栄圏) and Universal Brotherhood (八紘一宇) under the reign of Tenno. In order to change Japan from subsistent agricultural society into imperialistic "prosperous country with a strong army" (富国強兵), Japanese people were educated that the Asian countries remained poor and underdeveloped. So they allegedly needed to be occupied and liberated by Japanese. This kind of ideology made Japanese common people possible to go to Asian countries without having any doubt of invading these countries.

This insemination of the idea of discrimination into the enemy makes soldiers consider their enemy to be inferior and barbarous, which in turn makes them behave violently towards the enemy. This ideology can be found anytime and everywhere when people are organized to invade any country. You will find it very easily in Vietnam war or even in the present war. Therefore, once they know the fact that their enemy has the same family life and the same human feelings, they cannot kill their enemies without hesitation. This shows clearly that the first and fundamental condition to commit violence is that they consider their enemy as inferior to them and they can conquer and control them.

Secondly, we must pay attention to the education which made soldiers base their own moral conscience on the decision of their belonging upper group. This education made them consider all they had done as if they were not responsible for it. They do not distinguish their own decision or deeds from those of their group. If they identify themselves to their state, government or company and stop thinking and their own

judging, no moral problem can arise even if they commit serious crimes like rapes and massacres. The first repulsion that the Japanese soldiers felt when they were sent to the jail in Fushun was the treatment as war criminals. They thought of war criminals as those who committed some extraordinarily wrong crimes which others did not. As they were confident that they did only what was decided from above and together with others, they thought they could not be responsible for what they had done. Moreover, even if they did something wrong or cruel, they could justify themselves excusing that it happens so often during war. So they cannot be accused because of such crimes.

These reactions are so important when we consider about the ethics in nationalism and also in totalitarianism. In the modern society, the stronger the control of the state over each individual, the less responsible for what each commits. When power holders of states or religion appoint to its members some ideological choice as correct, the individuals who accepted this ideology as it is from above cannot have any kind of conscience or moral idea. So long as the ideology was given from above, they cannot feel guilty by themselves nor reflect on it.

The responsibility is often said to be the ability to respond to the partner. But it can appear only when one is able to respond as an individual. War in the modern period is considered to be the matter of state or its government. So long as a man considers that he works as a member of the army or plays a part as masculine, he cannot be responsible nor conscientious. Philosophically, the fact that consciousness and conscience has the same root in an etymological sense confronts us many interesting problems.

Violence is originally the rule over others through compulsion. And its strong combination with masculinity raises serious problems. Professor James Gilligan, who made important insights into violence, made it clear that virtue, courage, manliness and soldier are closely related etymologically¹. It is especially serious that the idea of "to be a man is to be a soldier" prevails so much among men that they cannot have moral judgment on what they do.

The soldiers in Fushun war criminal office who were forced to reflect on what they did during the war lived under quite different conditions from the leaders in the International Tribunal. All they were asked was solely to consider what they did as an individual but never about the deeds as Japanese soldiers. It made them impossible to evade and shift any responsibility to others or army. They were compelled to confront the crimes as individuals, i.e. they had to consider about conscience and morality.

Another important point in terms of violence by James Gilligan is that the actions of soldiers were ac-

knowledge as masculine. When they were ordered to stab a living captive to death, or when they raped non-resistant women or fired farmers' houses, what made hesitating soldiers rush into such deeds was the pride of masculinity. To hesitate to do it is to disgrace the pride as "man". As the essence of masculinity lies in the ability of enduring all kinds of difficulty and pains, to hesitate to commit cruelties is to dishonor the masculinity itself.

3 Japan after World War II and after the period of high economic growth

The defeat of Japan in the World War was so shocking for Japanese rulers, for they had believed that Japan would never lose. Anyway, the damage to Japanese society was very disastrous because of the very harsh bombings into the main city areas. Until the beginning of the high economic growth, Japanese people were mainly concerned about the overcoming of the poverty. People also hoped sincerely, partly due to the article 9 of our constitution, that Japan would never begin war again. The peace movement was very popular and strong. The main slogan of the teachers' union and women's movement was "never send our children into battlefield again".

However, these powerful movements put two important problems out of sight. The one point is that Japanese peace movement was mainly restricted within the standpoint of victims. As the sacrifice and damage by Atomic bombing and air attack was so disastrous that people mainly considered this kind of victimization and damage. The most typical attitude was shown to the soldiers from Fushun war crime office who came back to Japan around at the beginning of the period of high economic growth. These soldiers began the movement against invasive war vehemently, but the main reaction to them was to exclude them from Japanese society as they were considered to have been brainwashed by Chinese communists. This kind of repulsion to them was caused because they reflected on the invasion of the Japanese army and were active against invasive war. Most of Japanese never felt guilty for what they had done during the war.

The second point is that they did not consider about the overcoming of patriarchy or domestic violence so much. Until the beginning of the movement of women's liberation, Japanese women never tried to express their own violent problems inside family so openly. The problems of gaining workplaces for women and the peace movement for their children were their main concerns.

The high economic growth changed Japan very radically. After this period, building an affluent society became the main concern of Japanese people. And this

economic success changed Japan into consumptive society like USA. In spite of (Because of) the violence during the students movements and many political conflicts in the 60s and the first half of 70s, violence on the streets decreased year by year.

In 1980, Japan became the second most successful country in the field of economic growth. Generally speaking, the Japanese society was very peaceful and most of Japanese believed that they belonged to the middle class. This consciousness made Japan very safe and stable society. At the same time, however, such "problems without a name", as Betty Friedan called them, began to be seen in Japan. Family violence, domestic violence, wrist cutting, anorexia etc. have become quite common since then. Especially serious are the numbers of suicide and indiscriminate murders on the street. In the past 10 years, the number of suicides has always been higher than 30,000. In the first half of the last year, almost 1 incident each month was this kind of indiscriminate murder.

Also it is noteworthy to remember the fact that, in the first half of 2007, the number of assault by age 30s, was 2543, which was 5 times more than 10 years ago. The number of violent crimes without injury became 4 times (15291) more than 3650 in 1998. The most curious fact is the total number of crimes is decreasing year by year

In order to grasp this situation, it will be very important to understand the work condition of Japanese workers. Unbelievably long work time is quite common in Japan in the past 30 years. For example, one female student who graduated from my university came into my work room with full of anxiety. "I am not confident if I can keep working in the publishing company, for one staff told me as follows: "Now that you are the member of my company, you must be ready for working from 9 to 5." " This 9 to 5 was not from nine in the morning until 5 in the evening, but until 5 in the morning. Of course, not all the Japanese workers are like this. But I often hear of this kind. Some months ago, a female worker told me that she works 200 hours overtime every month. According to the statistics, around 25% of Japanese workers in age 30s work for more than 60 hours a week.

In this sense, the workers' stress has reached almost to their limit. Another fact shows this situation. The percent of the male workers who could take paternal leaves was only 0.7%, although more than 30% declare that they want to take it. All these situations show how severe the working condition in Japan is. Besides the life-time employment system was changed in 1995, which made the status of their economical stability very unstable.

The stress of young students is also enormous. Since the end of the 70s, the number of those middle class

students who were forced to study hard and subsequently killed their parents is marked. The point is that they are not from economical lower class, but from higher class.

4 The radical change in 2009

The Liberal Democratic Party kept their political power until this year for the past 55 years since this party was established. As a matter of fact, since the beginning of the parliamentary system in 1889, the same party group kept its power. Though there was a big change from the old constitution to the new one, the political leaders could maintain their position. The prime minister Nobusuke Kishi was a Class A war criminal responsible for the conclusion of the security treaty between the USA and Japan in 1960. In this sense, the authoritarian tendency in the field of political governance was very strong. People always believed the politics was decided from above. The main reason is because Japan succeeded in economic prosperity under the leadership of the LDP. But the rapid change of the social structure in the past 20 years based on Neo-liberalism was a kind of destruction of our society with no economic success. SONY, TOYOTA etc were so successful after the second World War, but the development of the BRICs can't allow any farther possibility of success. These developing countries can now establish their own economically successful conditions for themselves.

The result of the general election in 2009 was so overwhelming. But the most important characteristic of this result is that the new power holder party never got enough support from the people. The percentage supporting the Democratic Party is around 30%. They voted in the party just because they were tired of the past way of governance. This situation changed our political atmosphere. People are watching what the new cabinet will do carefully.

Until quite recently, we understood what democracy was, but never what sovereignty of the people was. Because we have never experienced the change of power by the people. For us Japanese, the constitution is given from above, so that a new constitution was given under the strong advice of the USA. We never understood that a constitution has something to do with the action of constituting.

First of all, we have never changed our constitution except through the defeat of Japan. For us Japanese, it is unbelievable that we can change it so often like in Germany or Costa Rica. Recently I knew a fact that, in Germany and in Costa Rica, their constitutions were changed for more than 50 times. We discussed it only in so far as we should change the article 9 or not, but we happily did not change it.

5 Foundation of freedom

Hannah Arendt wrote in her brilliant book "*On Revolution*" about the foundation of freedom. This book caused scandal, because it criticized the French Revolution. The French revolution was based on poverty and necessity, which changed the purpose of revolution. If "poverty can be a political force" (p. 62) of revolution, then the aim of revolution will not be freedom, but abundance. According to Arendt, Marx concluded from the French revolution that the role of revolution should be to liberate the life process of society from poverty into abundance. Only together with this process, the revolution can bring the liberation from oppression. It is historical fact that most of the social revolutions in the first half of 20th century were the liberating fight from poverty.

After the economic success through the age of high economic growth, almost 90% of Japanese believed that they belong to the middle class. Thanks to this abundance, it has become almost impossible to make any violent revolution in Japan. As the influence of Marxism was so strong in Japan, finding the alternatives was very difficult. Most of the so-called middle class did not know what to do to change this situation. In this sense, the description of the USA by Arendt at the time of American revolution is very interesting. American people "were not driven by want, and the revolution was not social, but political". "The predicament of the poor after their self-preservation has been assured is that their lives are without consequence, and that they remain excluded from the light of the public realm where excellence can shine; they stand in darkness wherever they go." (p. 59) The poor man was disregarded from others. "He feels himself out of the sight of others, groping in the dark." "He is only not seen. . . To be wholly overlooked, and to know it are intolerable." (p. 59)

This description is very symbolic to understand the present cultural situation in Japan. Although Japan has become very rich, the mental misery of the people in Japan is incredibly serious. The loss of self-confidence is beyond my understanding. A boy named Sakakibara who killed his school mates and girls and cut their head, stabbing their eyes by drills in 1997 was one typical example of mental loneliness and misery. He thought it was a mistake to be born into this world, so it was meaningless for him to keep living. The most striking fact was that so many of his generation showed their sympathy towards him. Every year when I ask my students about his deeds, more than 20% of the students showed their sympathy to him. The younger students born after 1980 do not know any serious poverty, but misery.

Professor James Gilligan pointed out the difference

between shame cultures and guilt cultures borrowing these ideas from Ruth Benedict. This contrast is very meaningful to understand Japanese. Under the culture of shame, people become sensitive and vulnerable to the feeling of shame and humiliation, which cause them to commit violence upon others. The feeling of shame occurs especially before the audience, an external judge. Conversely, people who live under the culture of guilt do the opposite (p. 50). They blame not others, but themselves.

Now so many Japanese feel so ashamed in fear of others' valuation. But this feeling has transformed a lot. Under the very harsh competitive system, by which, they believe, the economic success became possible, almost all Japanese feel a strong inferiority complex. Students feel ashamed by their result of examination. However, thanks to the affluent society, they don't feel ashamed of poverty. This change in Japan has put people more into the culture of guilt. The incredible increase of the number of suicide and wrist cutting shows it.

In short, most of the people are not poor any more, but they live under the dark time.

Arendt described the dark time as the time when "the public realm has been obscured. And the world become so dubious that people ceased to ask any more of politics than that it show due consideration for their vital interests and personal liberty"². In this sense, Japan was in the dark time at least for the past 50 years. Japanese could survive believing their economically successful life to be the happiest in spite of unbelievably long work time. By contrast, the new younger generation, who were born after the affluent era, are worn and tired of this structure. Besides, Through the SII (Structural Impediment Initiative) between USA and Japan since 1989, our social structure was changed so radically in the past 20 years. Japan was forced to destroy most of its traditional life style. So many people began to feel that the society is not safe and stable any more. Besides the immense increase of dispatched workers and part-time workers made Japanese people feel anxious that the new gap-widening society is coming.

The change has begun so suddenly. Since the first defeat of the LDP in the House of Councilors of 2 years ago, in spite of the great deal of efforts to keep the power by LDP, our society made a decisive step toward a radical change. The result of general election at the end of this August was meaningful enough. It was the first change of power through the election by the people. Since the victory of the DPJ, the change is marvelous; all kinds of what we believed peculiarly Japanese are now going to change. For example, one of the new prime minister's plans is to make the currency common among Japan, Korea and China. This is

really amazing !

What is really amazing is that we now begin to feel something new will come in the near future. Although we did not do any violent revolution, we began to have a presentiment that we need to judge our own direction into which we advance. Until this August, we believed that politics was the matter among the politicians, for they decided all in the parliament and the decision was from above.

For us Japanese, the idea of republicanism was the most difficult to understand. We never thought that "a constitution is not the act of a government, but of a people constituting a government"³. It is really unbelievable to us, for the old constitution of Japan was given to our people from the Emperor and the new one has never been changed except some attempts by the right-wings. The political attitude for most of the common people was not to think about the political issues, but only of economic matters. The political issues were either to follow the rulers or to forget about it. This lack of thinking was very characteristic in Japan.

But the new experience in the past one month compels us to choose to which direction we are going. Personally I do not support neither of the two major parties, LDP nor DPJ, but the changes the prime minister and his cabinet promise are surprising enough. Our past choice was to follow the decision of the above or to disregard it. So it was not choice, to say nothing of founding nor constituting.

In the following elections, we must begin to judge which policy we are going to take. This is true not only in the political realms, but also in private or gender issues. In Japan, for example, the percentage of illegitimate children was quite low (always less than 2%). It never became dominant to refuse the legal marriage so openly. But the number of the proportion remaining single has been increasing very quickly. This tendency is not the result of positive choice of women, either. The number of the victims of domestic violence is big enough in spite of the fact that Japanese men are not so macho. This comes from the strong control over women not to express their own opinions or feelings.

150 years ago, in the turning period toward the modernization, a very influential philosopher Yukichi Fukuzawa was perplexed so much, because he could not find any proper Japanese translation for the word "freedom". The present word Jiyuh (自由) means originally self-indulgence. The main concern of Japanese life was to escape from the control of law and government. The idea of freedom in Arendt's sense was beyond our understanding.

In this sense, we are starting for a new step. The time is approaching when we Japanese begin to constitute our own society, including gender relationship.

Maybe we can begin to discuss about the foundation of freedom without violence⁴.

References

- 1 James Gilligan: *Preventing Violence*, Thames & Hudson, 2001, p. 57
- 2 Hannah Arendt: *Men in Dark Times*, A Harvest Book, p. 11
- 3 Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, Penguin Classics, p. 137
- 4 本論文は、2009年11月5日ニューヨーク大学で行われた講演の原稿である。