TRADITIONAL CULTURES AND MODERNIZATION: Several Problems in the Case of Japan

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It is known that modernization, as far as technology and science are concerned, emerged after the Industrial Revolution, which was triggered by the invention of spinning machinery in England during the late eighteenth century. In Japan as well as in other Asian countries modernization has often been confused with Westernization. This is because modernization, when it occurred in these countries, quite often meant accepting Western culture and resulted in great changes of everyday life. However, Prof. Hideo Kishimoto once pointed out the difference between modernization and Westernization in the following way.

Westernization would mean that a certain indigenous cultural element of the traditional East is replaced by the penetrating Western element, and the functional role of the former is taken over by the latter.

Modernization, on the other hand, basically means to remold a cultural system into a new mode.

In the case of Japan, the adoption of Western clothes, food, hair styles and houses can be regarded as a part of Westernization. Although these things gave Japanese people some convenience and a smell of new culture, the functions they performed were almost the same as those which indigenous substitutes had fulfilled in earlier times. On the other hand, the introduction of telephones, TV, airplanes, mass communication, bureaucratic institutions, computer control systems and so forth can be considered to be a part of modernization because they contain the potential for enlarging the spheres of life and broadening one's outlook, and furthermore transform ways of thinking, patterns of behavior and world views. It definitely means remolding a cultural system into a new form.

This remolding will not always produce good effects such as a dignified style of life and social stability, although it is necessary and indispensable for improving the living standards of each citizen. This is because introducing western elements into non-Western countries may sometimes cause serious friction and tension with the traditional cultures.

In 1960, scholars from Japan, U.S.A. and other countries gathered at Hakone in Kanagawa Prefecture, and held a conference dealing with various aspects of modern Japan. At the conference one of the topics was how to define modernization as such. Prof. John W. Hall later pointed out seven characteristics as follows:

1. A comparatively high concentration of population in cities and the increasingly urban-centeredness of the total society.
2. A relatively high degree of use of inanimate energy, the widespread circulation of commodities, and the growth of service facilities.
3. Extensive spatial interaction of members of a society and the widespread participation of such members in economic and political affairs.
4. Widespread literacy accompanied by the spread of secular, and increasingly scientific, orientation of the individual to his environment.

5. An extensive and penetrative network of mass communication.

6. The existence of large-scale social institutions such as government, business, industry and the increasingly bureaucratic organization of such institutions.

7. Increased unification of large bodies of population under one control (nations) and the growing interaction of such units (international relations). *1

Although this list simply enumerates the characteristics, most of them can be applied to Japan's modernization. Following Kiyomi Morioka's views, *2 I myself would like to understand modernization on three dimensions which are related to each other: (1) technological and economic dimension, i.e., the development of scientific technology, and stable economic systems which structurally make the development possible; (2) social and political dimension, i.e., the gravitation of the population into large cities, the appearance of centralized government which facilitates modernization in a more effective way, the increase of governmental activities, such as public investments, and the permeation of bureaucratic systems as organization principles; (3) the dimension of value-system, i.e., the penetration of the idea of development among the people, rationalism, a strong consciousness of belonging to a unified nation, and the predominance of universalism emphasizing performance rather than ascription. This ideational dimension is deeply concerned with religious problems such as the meaning of life and the will to work as well as with secular values.

Traditional culture, if understood in a broad sense, indicates all human activities such as religion, philosophy, moral standards, laws, politics, economic, society, history, literature and art, such as have been preserved, learned and transmitted in a given community or group over a long period of time. In this paper I shall confine my attention mainly to the religious traditions of Japan. Focusing upon this point, I shall mention several factors which have supported modernization in Japan, and also try to point out some of the adverse effects brought about by that same modernization.

Peripherality is probably one of the traits which have contributed to Japan's modernization. Japan is geographically located on the periphery of culturally developed countries such as China, and has become accustomed to accepting foreign developed cultures. Japanese people have maintained a great interest and curiosity in imported things, including religion and science. This is why Japanese people never felt any strong resistance against the introduction of Western culture, both spiritual and material.

Emphasis on this-worldliness rather than other-worldliness also worked in favor of modernization in Japan. This emphasis actually means the value-worldly values rather than to other-worldly ones, and their ideals have to be realized in this world. It is obvious that this value-orientation is dominant in the Shinto tradition, but a more thorough examination is necessary to determine its origins. In Japanese mythology there is scarcely an account explaining the other world, although some people say that there is one exception. That is the tale of izanagi-no-mikoto's visit to Yomi (Hades). This tale, however, concludes with promises of development and prosperity in this world. Shinto does not have any eschatology as such. Shinto's view of history is a "cyclical type," if we may use Prof. Eliade's terminology. In the Shinto worldview, history
permanently repeats itself in a cyclical manner similar to the agricultural calendar. In Shinto mythology everything is thought to be immature and imperfect at the beginning, and then to become gradually better and better as long as men's endeavors and the protection of the gods continue. We may call it an optimistic worldview. This tendency did not change even in later periods of Japanese history. According to Mr. Kunio Yanagita, the hope of common people in Japan after they die is to stay on in this world, to keep spiritual contact with their offspring, and to give them blessings.

From the early modern period until the end of World War II, religion and national unity had been maintained quite successfully in Japan. This is represented by the fact that a tremendous number of Shinto rites and festivals based on the solidarity of natural groups were performed everywhere in Japan. This tradition still exists culturally in the present day, but it is different in one way or another from pre-war times. Such rites and festivals were performed publicly in pre-war times and in the Meiji period by regional public bodies, whereas this is not the case nowadays. Thus, the manner in which rites and festivals were performed in pre-war times was traditional in the sense that it had been handed down for many years. In ancient times there was the Jingi Seido (whereby the nation itself performs rites for gods who protect the people and the nation), and the bakufu and daimyo in the Edo period gave their support to Shinto festivals. The imperial system has held a central position in Japan since prehistoric times, and has been quite effective in integrating Japanese people in the process of modernization. Emperors have been not despots and exploiters but figures who mainly controlled the balance of power among competing leaders. Japanese people have not always maintained as emperor-centered orientation throughout their history. However, without the emperor system and the leadership of Emperor Meiji, Japan would not have been successful in becoming a modernized country in the Meiji era. Prof. Josefa M. Saniel is quite right in this point. According to Prof. Saniel, modernization in the Meiji period was so sweeping that large revolts would have occurred in the case of another country. Without the emphasis on chu (loyalty to lords) and ko (final piety) peculiar to the emperor system and family system, such acute changes in political, such acute changes in political, social and economic systems could not have occurred even in Japan.

The high level of education in pre-modern Japan also contributed to rapid modernization. Catholic fathers who came to Japan in the sixteenth century for missionary purposes held the intellectual ability of the Japanese in great esteem. The philological study of Confucianism was advanced by Sorai Ogyû (1666-1728) earlier than that of the Ch'ing Dynasty around that time in China. The study of Buddhism by Nakamoto Tominaga (1715-1746) and the study of the Manyô-shû by Keichu (1640-1701) also attained a high level of scholarship. Tadataka Inô (1745-1818) took measurements for the whole of Japan and made a map of it without using any advanced instruments. The accuracy of his map was confirmed by the Americans who came to Japan with M. C. Perry in 1853. They carried out their own measurements of the Tokyo Bay with more advanced instruments, the results of which showed little difference to Inô's map. Through Hirado and Nagasaki, Japan continues to receive various kinds of stimulation of from China and Western countries even during her policy of seclusion in the Edo period. These factors actually contributed to maintaining a high standard of scholarship in the Edo period, and thus made it possible to translate many Western technical terms into Japanese in the early Meiji period. The publication of school textbooks in Japanese and the quick growth in the rate of school attendance among the Japanese contributed immensely to spreading foreign culture and scientific knowledge in Japan. Elementary schools first started in 1872. The percentage of school attendance in 1873 was 28.1%, and then it rose very quickly to 81.5% in 1900 and 99.0% in 1920. Since
When discussing national identity in indigenous cultures, we must remember that Japanese people have always made a choice or selection among incoming things, and have maintained a strong stability against the excessive influx of foreign elements, although it is a historical fact that Japanese people have been positive toward accepting foreign cultures. Japanese classics such as the Kojiki and Nihonshoki probably started to be compiled in the reign of Emperor Tenmu (672-686). This coincides with the time when Japan was strongly reacting against the introduction of Chinese culture since the Taika Reformation (645). Even when the Japanese adopted the ancient Chinese law system (ritsuryo-sei), they neither took it as it was nor simply imitated it. In addition to the original system, they introduced elements such as the establishment of the Bureau of Shinto (Jingikan) and the prohibition of eating the flesh of animals in case of festivals.

According to Prof. Ichiro Ishida, the dividing line in the history of Japanese culture is seen in the middle ages. Prior to the middle ages, Japanese culture had been fostered and formed by stimulation from foreign cultures. However later probably after the Mongolian invasions (1274 and 1281), the autonomy of Japanese culture became stronger, although foreign cultural elements were used as a means of expression. It was in the middle ages that new stream of Buddhism such as Shin Buddhism and Nichiren Buddhism developed. Genuine Japanese arts such as noh, renga, tea ceremony and flower arrangement developed, too. In regard to the teachings of Shinto, it was in the middle ages that authentic teachings first appeared in the middle ages that authentic teachings first appeared in the Shinto tradition. Moreover, it was in the middle of the Edo period (1603-1867) that Kokugaku (National Learning) started. Kokugaku aimed at rejecting the Buddhist and Confucian bias in Shinto teachings and returning to the spirit of ancient Shinto. In the early Meiji period, there was excessive Westernization and modernization such as represented by the Rokumeikan. However, after the middle of the Meiji period, a sort of self-modification occurred as a result of a strong sense of balance in Japanese culture, even though it was accompanied by nationalistic movements. This kind of sense of balance still exists at the bottom of Japanese society even in the post-war period.

Japan rushed her modernization because she had to protect herself from possible colonization by Western countries, and to amend unequal treaties with foreign nations. After the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), namely after the above urgent problems were solved, Japan regretfully started to colonize other countries by limiting Western nations. Japan did it partly because she had to feed her overflow of population. Yet we must admit the fact that Japan's policy turned out to force neighboring countries to have a hard time. After Manchurian Incident (1931), national Shinto was quite often manipulated in order to unify the mind of the people. Soon after World War II, the Shinto Directive was issued by the Occupation Army. It required Japan to initiate a policy of church?state separation. The demand was so severe that there was no parallel even in Western countries. Along with other new policies such as the reformation of the family system and land system, the Shinto Directive had serious influence upon the promotion of moral education as well as upon Shinto itself. Confucianism probably suffered more damage than Shinto did. As time went on, however, something traditional gradually revived. This is not because conservative and reactionist groups have manipulated this change but probably because the people have tried to revise the lines along which modernization went too far.

Modernization as such is said to be an everlasting process without any terminal point. However we
should question what Japanese people have actually acquired from the modernization which started at the end of the Edo era. Certainly our lives have become much more affluent, convenient and comfortable than ever before. On the other hand, material fulfillment and the expediency of life have invited the alienation of man. Moreover, world-wide problems such as economic gaps among nations, overpopulation, starvation, draining of resources, nuclear armament, human rights, and environmental pollution have emerged. Many advanced counties including Japan must bear some responsibility for this in one way or another. A group of scholars consisting mainly of members of the Club of Rome, maintains that man must change the quality of his life style in order to survive; otherwise human beings will inevitably cease to exist. There are several requirements for surviving in the future. (1) Reducing the accelerating increase of production and consumption, (2) replacing the logic of growing and developing by a logic of stability and harmony, and (3) halting the search for material abundance and seeking a life style by which man can be satisfied with things mental and spiritual.

With the rapid development of scientific civilization we are faced with several problems common to all human races. How can all nations establish coexistence and coprosperity? How can man maintain harmony with nature and how can man protect his dignity? We should tackle these problems together by going beyond ethnic and national backgrounds, because the problems are related to the whole earth itself rather than to only individual nations. Man must try to solve them by uniting all nations into one spiritual community with a common destiny. Whereas development as such should be carried out only in developing countries, it is the responsibility of the developed nations to change the quality of life. This endeavor should be always accompanied by the quest of how human beings can be human. At the same time each country should review its own traditions and discover new meanings in the traditional ways of life. People formerly led simple and humble lives, following their faith and conscience. It is in this sphere that traditional culture will be able to contribute to the modernization process of each nation.

Like other cultural traditions in the East, Japanese traditional culture has placed great value upon the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. Looking at present Japan, however it is clear that all Japanese at present do not necessarily preserve the traditional worldview. Moreover, we have many instances of environmental pollution in Japan. We should seriously consider why this has happened. When we Japanese aim at forming a new spiritual and cultural world community, we need new ethnical standards appropriate for this. For example, we need to transform "ingroup-counselousness," which is said to be one of the characteristics of the Japanese people. That is to say, we need new social ethics by which we care not only for the people within a limited group but also for all others as well. Otherwise it will be impossible for the Japanese to be seriously engaged in solving global issues. In order to do this, the most expedient way will be to educate the people in that direction.

It is said that man is a child of history, society and culture. Even if modernization is necessary to improve human life, it will be indispensable for Eastern nations to maintain their traditional cultures too. Traditional cultures need neither to reject modernization nor to be absorbed in the streams of modernization. These two must harmonize and complement each other. Now is the time for each nation to seek its own individual and unique way of modernization.

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