



## JAPAN IS STILL A TRIBAL CLOSED SOCIETY AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO TRANSPLANT CRITICAL RATIONALISM IN IT

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### I. Japan as a marginal culture

Japanese culture has been influenced by various foreign cultures, from India, China, Korea, Western countries and so on. According to Sukehiro Hirakawa's terminology, Japan is, as a matter of fact, "a marginal culture" in contrast with a central culture such as China. Japanese aboriginal culture was almost nothing. For instance, Japan did not have any Japanese characters. Japan imported Chinese characters and modified them and made two kinds of Japanese characters, all of which we still use in writing Japanese sentences. By accepting foreign culture Japan has developed her own cultures. Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Scientific technology, Marxism, etc. are all from outside Japan. Confucianism was brought into Japan in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time Buddhism was also introduced in Japan. Buddhism from the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the 16<sup>th</sup> century had a strong influence upon the Japanese culture. On the other hand, Confucianism was strong from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and a decisive influence from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Christianity was so in the latter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and by the first of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Marxism was so between the two world wars and the postwar period. Therefore, it is very difficult to identify Japanese indigenous culture, if any.

In order to understand Japanese traditional ideas Shuich Kato's book, *A History of Japanese Literature*, which was translated into English in 1997, is very useful. In my opinion, his book is comprehensive and erudite, so in these points it is excellent and his point of view is clearly stated and his views are consistent from the beginning to the end, but he overlooks a decisive logical consequence from his analyses of the Japanese culture. I shall explain this now.

### II. The 'Japanized' world-view is born from tribalism

The aim of his book is to ascertain a Japanese indigenous world-view, that is, ideas, thought, traditions, and cul-

tures. He examines where and how Japanese people accepted/rejected foreign world-views, ideas, thought, and traditions in their history of Japanese literature throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He summarizes Japanese indigenous culture as follows:

- (1) The features of the Japanese world-view: Historical transformations in the Japanese world-view have been characterized not so much by the infiltration of various foreign thought systems as by an obstinate clinging to an indigenous attitude and, again and again, the imparting of a Japanese flavor to those systems. The world-view that was emerging in Japan about the fourth and fifth centuries was made up of a complex polytheistic system of belief containing elements of ancestor worship, shamanism and animism.
- (2) The Japanese world-view was neither an abstract nor theoretical view, but tended towards the material and the practical.
- (3) It did not involve a comprehensive philosophical system, but rather a system of customs, which involved special attention being paid to the intrinsic nature of individual phenomena.
- (4) There was no transcendent basic principle.
- (5) *Kami* ('gods') were entities of this world and there was a direct, historical relationship between the age of the gods and the age of humanity.
- (6) Since basic principles were concrete and did not transcend the special conditions for which they were devised, there was no question of any universal system of values that could be defined in terms of transcendental principles.
- (7) This does not mean that there were no individuals who did not possess an absolute sense of values. On the contrary, with heads of special groups frequently holding absolute authority over the groups' members, loyalty became an absolute value, as, for example, in the emperor system.
- (8) Such an authority is valid only within the group and it is evident that this authority does not hold good outside the group.

Then he asked the following question: What happened when this indigenous world-view encountered a highly organized, intellectually sophisticated, transcendental, but foreign, world-view? And he answered:

In some cases the foreign world-view was accepted for itself; in some cases, it was rejected for itself; but in the

majority of cases, the foreign thought system was adopted to Japanese needs. Then,

- (9) The standard form of adaptation can be seen when the foreign thought system was highly organized and sophisticated, as in the cases of Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity and Marxism. Abstract, theoretical aspects were weeded out, the transcendental basic principle was dismantled and only the parts that were valued in terms of practical application were retained. What remained was a 'Japanized' world-view. There was indigenous Japanese thought which remained unchanged through history.

And he points out two characteristics, which are related with each other: Firstly, generally speaking, the degree of integration of individuals into the society to which they belong is very high in Japan. Secondly, the feature of the Japanese indigenous thought is that the world-view does not admit the existence or value that transcends the ordinary reality. And he concludes:

Among the cultural elite, among the literary classes as a whole, and even in the case of some individual writers, foreign thought affected the shallower levels of consciousness and reason, while indigenous thought and feeling affected the deeper levels of emotional life. These shallower and deeper levels corresponded, as it were, to the public and private domains of the individual's life. Thorough integration into a group usually meant that the relationship between the group and its members crossed from the public into the private domain, and it was never easy for foreign thought to penetrate into the depths of emotional life. (p. 10)

These are the very features of tribalism, that is, he concludes that Japan is nothing but a tribal, closed society. But Kato did not explicitly say so. However, according to him, the Japanese have accepted any foreign thoughts which can be compatible with the sacred indigenous tribal ideas in the Japanese society, or have transformed foreign thoughts, which were not compatible with the sacred ideas, and made them compatible with the sacred tribal ideas. Japanese culture was changing drastically all the time but the core was unchanged. This is the core of the Japanese tribalism. In Japan as a marginal culture there remains nothing except racial tribal elements, if you try to find something aboriginal. The Japanese Tenno's system is the typical case. I remember that Levi Strauss came to Japan in 1970's and watched

Japanese traditions and cultures and eventually concluded that Japan is a super-sophisticated tribal society. Kato did not say this but the consequence derived from his remarks is the same as Levi Strauss's conclusion.

### III. The Meiji regime reinforced the Japanese closed society

Besides, there is decisive evidence that especially before World War II, Japan was a closed society. That is, it is no doubt that the enforcement of the old criminal law, which includes lese majesty in 1882, had a powerful role of choking any criticism against the Tenno's system. Since then it became a taboo to criticize the monarchy. Incidentally, according to Saburo Ienaga's paper, *The traditions of Republicanism in Japan*, in *Thought* in 1958, before the enforcement of the Meiji Constitution in 1889 almost for twenty years the idea of the Constitution as a republic was born and formed among the liberals, independently from communists or anarchists. At that time, there was another possibility toward an open society. However, because the political leaders who supported the Tenno's system propagated that even liberals, who asserted the democratic movement for the people's rights, were republicans and they were the same as communists or anarchists, in order to find the causes of their suppressions. Then many liberals could not but pretend not to be republicans in order to avoid the suppressions. Finally this democratic movement was oppressed and failed by 1889, as a matter of fact. As a result, under the absolute monarchy, though it was by name the constitutional monarchy, it became impossible for the Japanese to voice their republicanism until 1945. Or rather, by school-education based on the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890, the generations after that were decisively influenced and indoctrinated in their minds with the idea of absolute loyalty to the Tenno. As Russell properly points out:

In Japan, it is true, a theory closely similar to Filmer's is held, and must be taught by all professors and school-teachers....Plato is right in thinking that belief in this myth [that is, the dogma that God has created men of three kinds] could be generated in two generations. The Japanese have been taught since 1868 that the Mikado is descended from the sun-goddess, and that Japan was created earlier than the rest of the world. Any university professor, who, even in a learned work, throws doubt on these dogmas, is dismissed for un-Japanese activities.

Soon after this passage, Russell made a good point

against Plato in his saying that what Plato does not seem to realize is that the compulsory acceptance of such myths is incompatible with philosophy, and involves a kind of education which stunts intelligence. I hope philosophy will help in order to make the closed society more open. As a philosophy I have Popper's social philosophy in mind.

In short, Japanese thinkers could not critically examine the Japanese style of monarchy at that time. Again Ienaga clearly pointed out that before 1945 in Japan negative opinions on the monarchy were not allowed, and therefore, it was not allowed even to objectively point out the existence of such opinions to the Japanese.

Therefore, the Japanese society had been a closed society. And I think it still is. You may say Japan was open to other cultures and foreigners, excepting the Tokugawa regime, which definitely closed the door. You may say, Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Marxism, Constitutionalism and so on, are all from outside, so Japan was indeed an open society! My answer is "No". I am afraid that one who thinks Japanese society is not a closed society regards the image of the closed society and the members of the closed society as "A frog in the well knows nothing of the great ocean". In this sense Japan is not a closed society. According to Popper, one of the characteristics of the closed society is tribalism based on taboos. There have been indeed taboos on Monarchy.

### IV. The opening of the country and the open society

In his paper, *Thought as It Ought to Be*, the late Masao Maruyama, a leading political scientist in post war Japan, says on the present situation in Japan as follows:

Many scholars such as Bergson or Popper make distinction between the open society and the closed society. My word of the octopus trap form of organizations is exchangeable with the word of the closed society but what you have to be cautious in the case of Japan is that Japan as a whole at present is not necessarily the closed society, or rather, is open to the whole world in all directions. Then each group in Japan becomes an octopus trap and each group of an octopus trap is open to outside internationally...You see such a very strange situation in Japan.

I think in the first place he says that Japan is an open society in the sense that a Japanese person is not a frog in the well because he knows the great ocean, but in the latter place he says Japan is the closed society for the members of each group live in a octopus trap, which is a very closed

society. Therefore, Maruyama clearly says that though Japan appears to be an open society, she is really a closed society. In order to express this strange situation, he used the term "octopus trap". He deplores that there is no intercommunication among such groups in Japan. I think this is a problem in a closed society. However, I think the problem of Japanese racial tribalism, which I mentioned earlier, is a bigger problem.

In another paper, *The opening of the Country*, Maruyama claimed that the Japanese had *three* chances to make their country open, in the Muromachi period, and from the end of Tokugawa period to the Meiji period, and then after World War II. In his paper he analyzes the situation in Japan since Commodore Perry in 1853, and concludes that Japan could not but open her country but soon closed it, so Japan had still been a closed society until 1945. As Maruyama rightly understands, in the opening of the country there are two sides: to open the country is to open her toward the outside, that is, toward international societies. At the same time, it is to divide her as a nation state from the international societies, that is, the other countries.

Japan was compelled to open her country, so, as a reaction, Japan became nationalistic. As a result, it was regrettable but it was almost historically inevitable for Japan to return to the closed society. Therefore, Popper's idea of the open society and the idea of the opening of the country are related but have to be distinguished. For while the opening of the country can be an external help towards the open society, as a reaction it may make the society closed. Maruyama's insight is valuable and we should keep the distinction of the two concepts in mind. However, Maruyama feels comfortable in Japan as having a highly homogeneous nationality and he seems to me to support such a country. Maruyama says as follows:

The first thing which I feel when I come back to Japan from abroad is that when I get on the train, I observe that almost all the passengers are Japanese!

How did he judge that almost all of them are Japanese? Did he check their passports, which is one of the criteria of identity? Of course, not. For he has no right to check the other's passport. From their appearances? Then this is a terrible racism. From that they speak Japanese? Then how about Koreans, for example, who speak Japanese? Here he will have to choose one of two alternatives, whether he accepts the definition that a Japanese is a person who speaks Japanese or he admits that his judgement was

wrong. But I do not think Maruyama accepts the former definition. For this definition is too narrow in that it excludes children who do not speak Japanese! Then he cannot but to choose that his judgement was wrong. I am afraid Maruyama unconsciously cherishes the stereotyped homogenous image of Japan, which is regrettably the cause of a biased, wrong, monistic, exclusive tribal nationalism. Or though there is little possibility, does he think that a Korean, who lives in Japan and speaks Japanese, is already Japanese, even if his name is Kim. If so, I agree with him. But I am afraid that the concept of Korean Japanese is unthinkable to him.

Besides he states that the reason why he became a nationalist *soon after* World War II, when most people were against nationalism, is that he was a perverse person. This is a stupid reason and is a pity. Incidentally, Maruyama belongs to the generations after the Imperial Rescript on Education. On the basis of the Meiji Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education, Japanese homogeneity was artificially formed. For those who belonged to such generations it is very difficult to get rid of the various aspects of ideology from the Tenno's system before World War II. Even he, a liberal, might have been influenced by the ideas of the monistic, exclusive nationalism, derived from the ideology, though, of course, he was publicly opposed to this ideology. In fact, after World War II he became a leading figure for developing democracy and liberalism, and against militarism, ultra-nationalism, or super-nationalism, that is, militarist nationalism. He analyzed the logic and psychology of ultra-nationalism in his paper of the same title in 1946. He has rightly shown that Japanese militarism was not deviation but immanent in the structure of the Japanese state, national polity before World War II.

In prewar Japan people who were opposed to, or even doubted the Tenno system or wars were called un-Japanese, traitors, or betrayers of Japan and were excluded from Japanese society. At last after World War II as a legal institution the right of freedom was formally secured and then we could speak and criticize anything without exception, including the Tenno system. Maruyama did this action soon after World War II. At that time there was a liberal atmosphere. This paper of his has influenced a lot of people then.

Maruyama was a disciple of Shigeru Nanbara. Nanbara was once a liberal president of Tokyo University after World War II and contributed to the peace process after World War II. And Maruyama was one of Herbert Norman's best friends. Norman was a historian on Japan and a diplomat in Canada. There are two episodes on both, that is,



Nanbara and Norman. When Nanbara heard that Japan attacked the United States, he told Maruyama that if the Axis powers won the war, the world would be a disaster. This is a very important suggestion. Norman recommended Maruyama to read and review Popper's *The Open Society* in his letter to Maruyama in 1951. Maruyama accepted his advice and certainly read Popper's book and was influenced by the idea of the open society and wrote two papers, which I mentioned earlier. But he did not write a review of the book. This is regrettable. If he had written a review on Popper's *The Open Society*, Popper's important ideas would have influenced the Japanese people a lot already in the 1950's. This book might have been translated and published at that time. However, in fact, its translation was published in 1973, after the publication of M. Cornforth's *The Open Philosophy and the Open Society: a Reply to Dr. Karl Popper's Refutations of Marxism*, whose translation was published in 1972!

#### V. Prospect

I think it is our task for post war generations, who were educated based on democracy and liberalism, to develop the works of Maruyama, his friends, his followers, and his critics as well, so that Japan will substantially be an open society. Even now most Japanese do not behave democratically, though Japan is formally a democratic country, institutionally and constitutionally. Let me take one example. Maruyama was exalted and deified as a champion of democracy by his disciples, his surroundings and other enthusiastic people and it was difficult to us criticize his theory, even though criticism should be indispensable to democracy. It is ironical. Such deifications happen in many schools of thought. It is said that in each school of thought a leader is set up as a kind of Tenno. This behavior is the contrary to democracy and is a characteristic of the closed society. As it were, Maruyama and his followers live in an octopus trap! This is illustrated by the fact that a lot of critical books on Maruyama's political theory appeared *after* his death.

It is desirable for Japanese to be democrats not by name but in substance. However, it was a pity that our generation had asserted the post war democracy, or more pejoratively, the occupied democracy or a bourgeois democracy was a fallacy and had appealed to a kind of revolution from the end of the 1960's to the 1970's. Contrary to their intentions, their movement produced political reactions. This was an unintended consequence of it. But this is another story.

Maruyama intensively analyzed the situation of pre and post World War II, but did not explicitly analyze it from

the viewpoint of the closed society and the open society, as he did on the periods from the Edo to the Meiji in his paper, *The Opening of the Country*. Nor did he say that throughout history, Japan had been a militarist country and for the first time Japan could rid itself of militarism after World War II because of democracy in Popper's sense. In his stead in the near future I am going to analyze the situation of pre and post World War II from the viewpoint of the closed society and the open society and from Popper's democratic point of view. I hope the *third* attempt of reforming Japan for the more open society will be successful.

A word about reform. It is said that most reforms in Japan are from outside or from above. On the other hand, Popper's idea of the Open Society provides us with reforms from inside or from below. For in each country of the world people can try to reform their country from within. In this context, I think that the idea of political society is very important. For example, I do not belong to the United States nor to Austria. I belong to Japan as a member of the Japanese political society, for I have, for instance, the right to vote. With my friends, who also have such a right, and with people, living in Japan, who do not have such a right, to my regret, we have political power and voices, though we, critical rationalists, are the minorities, to change Japan for the better from within or from below, democratically and peacefully. In this sense of my belonging to the Japanese political society, Japan is a dearest and irreplaceable country to me.