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Civilization without Models

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Civilization without Models

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1. CHINESE CHARACTERS AS A VEHICLE FOR CIVILIZATION

A centralized judicial system known as Ritsuryō, modelled after the legal system of the Tang dynasty of China, was in effect in Japan from the seventh through the tenth centuries. After the collapse of this Ritsuryō system, the society of medieval and early modern Japan managed to develop an indigenous system in the course of its own history, rather than reorganize itself by adopting other civilizations as models.

This is evident when we compare the Tokugawa's *bakuhau* system known as *shōyajitate*, an organization which evolved naturally as an extension of village administration, with the society of the Li dynasty of Korea, which undertook reorganization of its institutions using as its model ancient Chinese society in which Confucianism was the state religion. The Confucianism revered by the Korean dynasty was a revivalism focused on the Chou Dynasty of China, the dynasty considered by Confucius to be ideal. The ideology which supports that model of society has influenced the conventions of people's daily life down to the most minute details.

For example, customs such as eating raw fish and meat, consuming dog meat and using a spoon not only to drink soup, but also to eat the main rice dish survive still on the Korean peninsula. The reason for the persistence of such ancient dietary customs in spite of their disappearance in the central region of Chinese civilization, is said to be that Li Dynasty Confucianists persisted in following the manners and customs of Confucian China [LEE, S. 1982: 8-235-238].

Apropos dietary customs, let me compare the way in which chopsticks have been used at the dinner table. The use of chopsticks for eating a meal originated in ancient China. Distribution of the area in which chopsticks have been traditionally used includes China, the Korean peninsula, Viet Nam, and Japan. This region coincides with the area throughout which Chinese characters are used for writing,

or what I will call "Chinese character civilization." I will have more to say concerning this below. According to ancient Chinese dietary custom, the spoon and the chopsticks were used together, and rice as the staple food was also eaten with the spoon. It was after the Ming Dynasty in China that the status of the spoon declined and the spoon became a specialized utensil for eating soup, and this led eventually to the present habit of eating rice with chopsticks. In Viet Nam, where repeated conflicts with China have been coupled with the deep and significant influence of Chinese civilization, what with the harboring within its own borders of a multitude of Chinese people, we can observe almost exactly the same usage of chopsticks and spoons as in contemporary China, whereas, as noted, ancient Chinese dietary customs remain on the Korean Peninsula. In contrast, in Japan, while the court culture of the Heian Period did use the spoon, it was dropped from the table with the downfall of the Ritsuryō system. Until recently, when ladels began to be served with *nabemono* (Japanese stew cooked in an earthen pot) and spoons with Western dishes, Japanese culinary custom made exclusive use of chopsticks. In short, only Japan evolved a style of eating unknown in China.

As seen in the Korean dynasties, China's satellite nations took a China-centered world view as their own model for civilization. At the core of this ideology was a strong tendency to seek an ideal model of civilization in the past and a Confucian worship of ancient orders. In Viet Nam, too, the intelligentsia felt strongly that "our country is part of the greater Chinese civilization, and Confucius and Mencius are our teachers" [KAWAMOTO 1977: 203]. Chinese characters have been the medium for this Chinese civilization, and civil officials who had mastered the ideology of Chinese civilization through Chinese characters ran the centralized bureaucracy, which took charge of the institutional side of the civilization.

On the Korean peninsula *hangul*, a Korean syllabary, was invented in 1443, but it was despised as *an-mun*, meaning a writing system for the masses ignorant of Chinese characters. Thus *hangul* did not come into active use until 1894, about the time when the old Chinese civil service examinations were abolished in Korea. *Chunom*, the alphabet for writing Vietnamese, was created in the early fourteenth century, but Chinese characters remained the official writing system, and Chinese composition style the official style of writing, until the abolition of the Chinese higher civil service examinations in 1915 (in 1918 in central regions). In contrast to *Chunom*, which means literally "the writing system of the spoken language," Chinese characters were called *Chunyo*, or "the writing system of Confucian scholars." As we can see, Chinese bore the burden of the ideology of Chinese civilization. *Chunom* never really developed into a system of writing for the Vietnamese people as a whole. They had to await the introduction of the Roman alphabet to commit their language to writing.¹⁾

1) Interpretations of Japanese civilization differ, of course. My interpretation, involving the comparison of Chinese characters, civil service examinations, the concept of filial devotion (piety) and the like within the sphere of Chinese civilization, was developed by incorporating ideas suggested in Lee Song-u [1982].

From ancient times Japan was, to Imperial China, a country comprised of clans, a country of barbarians, where Imperial influence had not yet made itself felt. Even though the Japanese might bring tribute, their country remained outside the reign of the Chinese Empire, and China never sent officials to reside in Japan, nor was there any real attempt to interfere with Japanese self-government. Japan does not, therefore, have a history of direct influence of Chinese civilization's system of governance. Thus compared to Korea and Viet Nam, Japan did not receive significant influence from the ideology of Chinese civilization: Japan maintained a high degree of freedom from the Chinese system.

Symbolic of this freedom, the Japanese early on invented the *kana* alphabets to be used in addition to Chinese characters, giving them the means to communicate Japanese concepts. The fact that the Japanese had a system of writing which enabled them to write in the style of their own national language not only enabled them to reduce the rate of illiteracy and disseminate knowledge widely, but also allowed them to separate themselves from Chinese ideology with greater ease. It is of great interest that when literature using the *kana* syllabary was gaining popularity, Sugawara no Michizane is supposed to have used the phrase "*wakon kansai* (Japanese spirit with Chinese learning)" in a proposal to cease sending envoys to Tang China.

2. FUNCTIONAL MILITARY LOGIC

The distinctive feature of the institutional side of Chinese civilization is the priority of civil officials over military officials. To begin with, the essence of civilization was said to be in civil, not military, rule. The core of the ideology of this civility was to be found in the philosophy of the ancient Chinese sages recorded in the classics. This ideology calls for adherence to an order inspired by high philosophical ideals and thus tolerates and even creates the potential for repeated departures from political reality.

In Japan, however, the *bakufu* system, begun in the Kamakura period (1185–1382), was inspired fundamentally by military logic rather than by civil logic, as a system for civilization. In the sphere of Chinese civilization, only Japan came to place greater value on the military than on the civil [UMESAO 1981]. Military logic will not sacrifice itself to ideology, but will always retain an orientation toward realistic action. Thus it will not necessarily adhere to a pro forma order (*tatemaie*) but will instead have functional (*honme*) emphasis.

Among those formerly within the sphere of Chinese civilization, Japan was the most eager to import foreign civilization, even during the period of its national isolation. The so-called "Dutch learning" is one example of this. Toward the end of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), both in the interest of economic revitalization of feudal clans and for expansion of military power, Western civilization was introduced consciously and without hesitation. In all probability, this was in part due to the fact that the Shogunate and the clans—the bodies politic maintaining social

order—subscribed to pragmatic military logic. This indicates that the political system of feudal Japan, by not separating civil and military officials, but instead employing the latter (*samurai*) as bureaucrats, could more easily adapt to reality.

From the time of “Japanese spirit with Chinese learning” to the Meiji Period’s (1868–1912) “Japanese spirit with Western learning (*wakon yōsai*),” Japanese society continued to be unenthusiastic about adopting the ideological basis of whatever civilization was being imported, and about any attempt to manage itself in accord with such foreign ideologies, the only exception being an attempt in ancient times to manage the state in accordance with Buddhist ideology. In the Edo period (1603–1868), for example, even though the doctrines of Zhu-zi were declared the official teachings of the Tokugawa, there was no thought given to reorganizing the social system along the lines of Zhu-zi’s ideology. Consequently the teachings of Zhu-zi never rose above philosophy.

Philosophies other than Zhu-zi’s continued to exist, and were allowed to exist as heterodoxy. This, however, never led to any sort of violent struggle of the orthodox against the heretical. Japan lacked anything like an absolute ideology, capable of encompassing religion and civilization. There was little interest in a comprehensive image of the system which formed civilization. Instead, Japanese showed a great eagerness to accept elements of systems individually and separately, and succeeded in integrating foreign elements within the context of Japanese culture.

Many of the nations outside the sphere of Western culture were colonized in the process of modernization, and were faced with the colonial power’s civilization in its entirety as their model. These countries possess a history characterized by forced acceptance of entire civilizations, including their religion and ideology.

In contrast, at the time of the Meiji period’s introduction of Western capabilities and talents, choices were made selectively in each distinct area about which civilization was to serve as an example. The military system of the army was modelled after that of France, and later after that of Germany. The navy was patterned after that of England, natural science after Germany, the economy after England and the United States and art after France. Japan never had the experience of confronting the whole of any one country’s civilization. For this reason, Japan managed to maintain a real continuity with the Tokugawa period, never really making sweeping and revolutionary change in the overall system even when taking in remarkable quantities of foreign elements.

In the realm of daily life as well, the same sort of trend is seen in the acceptance of Western civilization, the various elements having been reorganized within the Japanese context. There was no choice but to use terms which vaguely refer to their Western origin such as *yōfuku* (Western clothes), *yōkan* (Western style buildings), and *yōshoku* (Western food).

In this system, which places importance on function and gives emphasis to constituent elements, the overall ideology running throughout the system, if any, is obscure. In “*wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit with Western learning),” “Western learning” has concrete and explicit manifestations but “Japanese spirit,” which

should supply an ideology for Japanese society, is explained only by such vague and unclear terms as *Yamato gokoro* (Japanese heart) or *Yamato damashii* (Japanese spirit). On the other hand, the goals to be achieved through the system expressed by such slogans as *bunmei kaika* (civilization and enlightenment) and *fokoku kyōhei* (national wealth and military power) are clear and explicit. What is significant is that the system is working. The meaning of the system itself is not questioned. There is even a tendency to see a powerful and universal ideology as unnecessary.

An example of this can be seen in the first substantial study of civilization by the Japanese, namely, Fukuzawa Yukichi's *Bunmei no Gairyaku* (*A General Theory of Civilization*), published in 1876. In thinking of Japanese society's course of development in the early Meiji, he wrote:

Neither the study of Japanese polity, nor Christianity nor Confucianism has been able to hold the minds of Japanese people. Why is this so? The reason is that we only determine our goal and move towards civilization. What is this goal? It is to discriminate what is domestic from what is foreign and maintain the autonomy of our nation. There is no other way to maintain this independence except to seek it through civilization. The only reason for contemporary Japanese to seek civilization is to maintain independence. Thus our nation's independence is the goal. The civilization of the Japanese is merely a means for achieving this end [FUKUZAWA 1962: 258-259].

In other words, his argument is to reject ideology and accept civilization as a means of achieving one purpose, clear and simple, namely to protect national independence. Fukuzawa wrote that "Civilization should provide bodily comfort and spiritual enhancement for human beings" [FUKUZAWA 1962: 54]. As we can see from this definition of civilization, a certain philosophy of social evolution is revealed in his theory, but he was unconcerned about a philosophy which would be able to synthesize the various elements of civilization for social evolution.

3. THE INTEGRATION OF THE "PUBLIC" AND THE WESTERN

Within the sphere of Chinese civilization, the epitome of morality was to observe filial piety. In Japan, however, in the interest of maintaining the military logic of the *bakufu* feudal system, loyalty was placed above filial piety in the commonly accepted notion of society. Filial piety is a "private (*watakushi*)" concern, whereas loyalty is a "public (*ōyake*)" concern and in principle the "public" must always be placed above the "private" in Japanese culture. Thus the logic of the military and the concept of the "public" were integrated. It is for this reason that at the time of the introduction of various Western elements in Meiji Japan, the government, which had inherited the military logic of previous eras, took the initiative in affairs on the "public" side of daily life.

Thus, the introduction of Western dress began with the uniforms of military and government official, and in 1873, Western style dress was adopted for official cere-

monies. Public buildings such as military barracks and office buildings were Western in architectural style, and Western food was served at "public" dinners with foreigners and used for military provisions.

Even with the introduction of things Western in "public" spheres of daily life, the "private" realms of family life remained predominantly Japanese for a very long time. While "public" forms and styles were created and transmitted by *samurai*, the forms and styles of "private" life were shaped by and large around Edo period townspeople. Home culinary customs, residential architecture and patterns of living remained extensions of Edo period lifestyles and continued essentially unchanged through the 1940s. It was not, for example, until 1953 that the production of socks topped the production of *tabi* (Japanese style split-toe socks), indicating that until then, the use of traditional Japanese split-toe footwear, such as *geta* and *zōri*, adapted to *tabi*, was more common than the use of shoes.

Compared to food and shelter, men's clothing, often donned as it was in public places and on "public" occasions, changed relatively early to Western style, at least in clothing worn outside the home. On the other hand, women, primarily involved in the "private" spheres of daily life, saw the main trends in their clothing styles change to the Western only in the 1950s. In the controversy over the propriety of Western style clothing for women in the early Showa period (1925 to date), even the defenders of Japanese style dress admitted that "working women are exceptions," and allowed for the propriety of Western dress in the "public" sphere. Thus for women, too, the Western was introduced through the "public." Defenders of Japanese style dress in these controversies were afraid that by wearing Western style clothing, Japanese women would lose their "grace" and "femininity." It appears that while Japanese men had only a vague notion of the meaning of "Japanese spirit" they had a much more concrete image of women.

4. RECONSTRUCTION OF THE DIETARY SYSTEM

To all appearances the life of contemporary Japanese people is inundated with things Western. Does this mean that the Western, introduced as something appropriate in the "public" sphere, has crowded out the "Japanese"? I would like to explore this question by analyzing the results of a dietary survey I conducted [ISHIGE 1975].

In this survey, respondents were asked to categorize all the food which they eat at meal time into "Japanese style," "Western style," "Chinese style" or "other." A clear picture emerges from this survey of a strong oppositional relationship between bread and rice. First of all, bread and rice are never eaten at the same meal. Although bread comes from the West, where there is no concept of main dish (*shushoku*) as distinct from side dish (*fukushoku*), it has been granted the status of main dish on the Japanese table, following the traditional conception of meals as constituted by two categories of food, the main dish, which is always a staple food, and the side dish. It follows from this traditional categorization that bread and rice, both staple foods, thus both main dishes, cannot be served at the same meal.

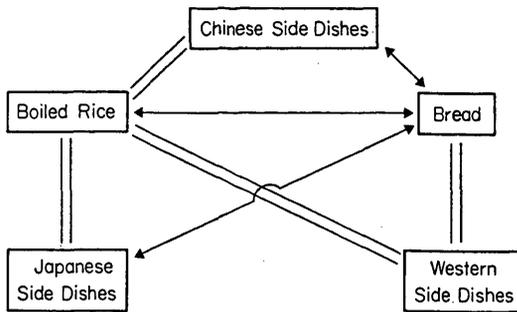


Diagram 1 The Correlation between Main and Side Dishes

When bread is served as the main dish, side dishes are limited to Western dishes, and bread is not served with Japanese or Chinese side dishes. That is to say, a complete system is in existence which equates the serving of bread with the serving of Western style side dishes. In contrast, when rice is served as the main dish, in addition to Japanese side dishes, Chinese and Western ones are also allowed. In fact, it is very common for side dishes of all these disparate historical origins to be served together at one meal. In short, compared to bread, rice as a main dish belongs to a more open system.

At home, even when side dishes of Western and Chinese styles are served with rice, meals are eaten with chopsticks, and are followed with Japanese green tea. It is evident that foreign side dishes have been incorporated into the Japanese meal, the core of which is rice. Instead of interpreting this as “Westernization” or “Sinification” of the Japanese diet, it would be closer to the mark to interpret it as “Japanization” of foreign elements, a process through which Western and Chinese cooking have been integrated into a reorganized Japanese dietary system. One may say that the “Western” has been assigned a place within the “Japanese” system. This relationship is demonstrated in Diagram 1.

This interpretation is also substantiated by data on food purchases. Tables 1 and 2 show correlation coefficients between purchases of bread and rice on the one hand and ingredients for side dishes on the other. These coefficients were computed

Table 1 Correlation Coefficients Between Main Dishes and Ingredients for “Japanese” side Dishes

	Correlation with Rice	Correlation with Bread
Fish	0.244	-0.057
Japanese Vegetables	0.260	0.008
Potatoes	0.219	0.111
Legumes (Beans)	0.136	0.008

Table 2 Correlation Coefficients Between Main Dishes and Ingredients for “Western” Side Dishes

	Correlation with Rice	Correlation with Bread
Meat	0.112	0.168
Milk	-0.083	0.223
Chicken eggs	0.168	0.170
Western Vegetables	0.155	0.174

from data in the "Household Budget Survey" drawn up by the Prime Minister's Office conducted during the investigation of the "Japanese Dietary Lifestyle" undertaken with the Ministry of Agriculture as the principal investigator. I have rearranged the data in order to verify the model suggested in the diagram. To be sure, these data differ in nature from the model, which was drawn up on the basis of the relationship between main dishes and side dishes as they are in fact served on the Japanese table. The survey data show a calculation of the relationship between household expenditure for two kinds of foodstuffs, the staple rice or bread, and the ingredients for other dishes. Few items show conspicuous numerical differences between the kinds of foods accompanying rice and those accompanying bread. Nevertheless the following trends may be observed.

First of all, rice is associated with such traditional Japanese side dishes as seafood, Japanese vegetables, potatoes and beans. Rice is also consumed with meat, eggs and such Western vegetables as cabbage and tomatoes, which became popular in conjunction with the consumption of Western dishes. In contrast, bread is consumed as a staple food only with meat, milk, eggs and western vegetables. With the exception of eggs, consumption of bread stands in a mutually exclusive relationship with traditional Japanese foodstuffs. Fish, which has traditionally been a food for special occasions, is associated with the consumption of rice, but is negatively correlated with the consumption of bread. This demonstrates the Japanese notion that Western food, represented by bread, does not include fish dishes, but is instead associated with meat dishes. Further, milk, which was not consumed traditionally in Japan, is appropriate with bread, and stands in an exclusive relationship with the consumption of rice [SHADAN HÖJIN SHOKUHIN JUKYŪ KENKYŪ SENTĀ (ed.) 1982: 52-57].

Western and Chinese cooking were adopted in Japan as a way to incorporate hitherto-lacking meat dishes into the traditional dietary system. At that time, Western foods, with their strong "public" aspect, preceded Chinese foods, which were much slower to gain wide acceptance. Moreover, the fact that Chinese cooking was adopted as food for the common people with no connection whatever with "public" occasions suggests the rather lower esteem in which Chinese civilization was held after the Meiji restoration of 1868.

Bread *cum* Western style side dishes, which constitutes a self-contained system, is seen—aside from home meals—on occasions in which "public" character is emphasized, such as dining at hotel restaurants or wedding receptions. At home, bread is served at breakfast, where it has been accepted as a convenient meal for the busy morning hours. It is a cuisine, shall we say, which emphasizes the characteristic military focus on function. In contrast to this, bread is seldom served at the evening meal, which although it is the most important meal of the day, is also the farthest removed from ascetic military logic for the contemporary Japanese, and occasions an opportunity for private relaxation.

The relationships displayed in Diagram 1 came into existence in the daily cuisine of the populace only in recent years. Until then, Western cuisine was totally removed

from the masses, and traditional Japanese cuisine almost entirely excluded Chinese and Western side dishes, which existed along with Japanese cuisine but had no relationship to it. Foreign elements continued to be imported into Japan from the time of the re-opening of the country in 1868, but it took a whole century for them to be digested and reorganized by Japanese culture so that they could be incorporated into the "Japanese" culinary system.

The contemporary "Japanese diet," thus established, is considered to be the most nutritionally balanced in the world. In the course of forming this culinary system, proposals have often been put forth from the "public" sphere in favor of taking Western cuisine as a model. The proposal was, however, to complement elements found lacking in the Japanese system with Western foods, rather than suggesting the exclusion of rice and *miso* soup and a complete shift to the Western system. Without an overall model after which to pattern their cuisine, the Japanese have developed a composite dietary system in which earthen pots for Japanese stew (*nabemono*) coexist in the kitchen along side frying pans and Chinese woks.

5. OPEN AND CLOSED SYSTEMS IN CIVILIZATION

With regard to diet, two types of system may be recognized. A closed system would not permit the intrusion of foreign foodstuffs and cooking. An open system would admit a variety of foreign elements, allow them to exist side by side, but at the same time incorporate them into its own civilization's dietary system. Examples of closed systems are China and France, whereas Japan and the United States are examples of open systems.

The arts of Chinese and French cooking and their styles of eating have achieved a high degree of perfection, the obverse of which is the development of an exclusive and ethnocentric tendency, also seen, for example, in the Sinocentric thinking of the Chinese.

In contrast, as discussed above, Japan has accepted, from the Meiji period on, foreign foods such as meat, dairy products and oils to complement what was lacking in its own traditional culinary system. Moreover, Japan has not limited itself to accepting foodstuffs per se, but has also incorporated as new sub-systems of its own dietary system everything from the production new foods and methods of cooking to ways of setting the table and table manners. In the United States, ethnic heterogeneity may be said to have lent support to a civilization with an open dietary system. There is not enough space remaining to elaborate here, but analogies of this "open system" and "closed system" dichotomy may be appropriate to the consideration of other matters relating to daily life in addition to diet.

Japanese foods and flavors which are winning worldwide acceptance are soy sauce, instant *ramen*, and monosodium glutamate. All of these have achieved worldwide acceptance as products of modern industry, much as products of the giant American food processing industry have gained world wide acceptance. Whereas French and Chinese foods have spread throughout the world more as highly refined

cuisines than as mere cooking, American and Japanese foods have spread as civilization's products of the food industry.

As the expression "economic war" suggests, strong military principles operate in the competition of the industrial world to capture world markets. American society began with the conquest of frontiers, and from an Eastern perspective, seems to be based on a very strong military principle. Here we find the basis for the similarity between Japan and the United States in their competitive relationship in the contemporary industrialized world.

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