

Concluding Remark

著者(英)	Harumi Befu
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Concluding Remark

HARUMI BEFU

Stanford University

1. INTRODUCTION

In summing up the accomplishments of the fourth symposium of comparative study of Japanese civilization, it is fitting to remind ourselves of Dr. Umesao's conceptual framework in the analysis of Japanese civilization which he unveiled in 1957. In this treatise Dr. Umesao proposed a bold hypothesis suggesting Western Europe and Japan to be grouped together into one civilizational category, grouping all other civilizations between the Eastern and Western extremes of the Eurasian continent into another. Dr. Umesao's hypothesis was to propose overall and overwhelming "civilizational" similarities between Japan and Western Europe.

This proposal was made in the wake of a total defeat of Japan in World War Second brought on by onslaught of military might of Western powers. It was a time when Japanese were still convinced that the reason for their defeat lay ultimately in the West rationality, democracy, and massive technological superiority and in Japan's lack of all these. Blames were squarely placed on Japan's total infusion of "premodern" (read "antiquated") and "feudalistic" value system and social structure, which countered, in the minds of Japanese, rationality and democracy. And it was with this irrationality, further, that war-time leaders tried to argue for the superiority of Japanese spiritualism over the military technology of the West. In short, Japan lost the war, according to the immediate postwar thinking, because Japan had what the West did not have and because Japan did not have what the West had.

Dr. Umesao's proposal flew squarely in the face of this almost universally received view of Japan by emphasizing similarities rather than differences between Japan and the West. It further implied Japan to be basically a different kind of civilization from China, contrary to the long and firmly believed view of Japan as existing under the Confucian umbrella covering the entire East Asia. To Dr. Umesao, Confucianism was a facade concealing fundamental differences between Japan and China in social arrangements such as kinship structure and other civilizational facets. Even Confucianism, when received in Japan, became something different from what it was originally designed to be in China.

Dr. Umesao's proposal to treat Japan to be more similar to Europe than different from it and more different from China than similar to it in its fundamental

character sent a shock wave through incredulous Japanese. Though increasingly being accepted, this view is by no means the most popular and the most widely received even now. *Nihonjinron*, in which Japan's uniqueness is sought primarily through its comparison with Europe, emphasizing differences rather than similarities, is by far the more popular view of Japan. But awareness and appreciation of Japan's similarity with the West has been on the increase of late as scholars begin to unravel the whys and wherefores of Japan's economic success. This is done by uncovering functional equivalents in Japan of Western civilization as causes of Japan's economic success. Thus Dr. Umeshio's early proposal was a premonitory harbinger of what is now beginning to be accepted, although admittedly the majority of Japanese even now take the view that the Japanese economic "miracle" needs to be explained by Japan's unique cultural paradigm.

2. CONFUCIAN UMBRELLA

In this symposium, the role of Confucianism in East Asia became an issue. Of late, economic development in the so-called "Confucian countries" in East Asia, namely Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, has led some to attribute the economic success of these countries to Confucian ethic.

The reason for the importance placed on Confucian ethic lies in its emphasis on values dealing with human relations, such as *chū-kō-jin-gi-shin*¹⁾, among them. Among these values, Oh emphasized loyalty and filial piety, particularly the latter, as being instrumental in the development of Korean *zaibatsu*. Parenthetically, many participants of this symposium agreed that among all the Confucian nations Korea, and not China is currently the most orthodox heir to the Confucian tradition. Sakudo, contrary to Oh, would pick "trust" (*shin*) as the prime mover of Japanese organization. However, many other participants put their bid on loyalty as the prime candidate for Japan's modernization. Filial piety is a kinship-bound concept and would not automatically allow an organization to transfer its members' commitment beyond the narrow confines of kinship organization. As an economic organization develops a need to transcend its kinship base in moving into the modern era of industrial capitalism, an organization bound by kinship-oriented values would face difficulty modernizing. This is not to say modernization is impossible if filial piety is the prime social value, since changes in the society as a whole could usher in new instrumental values which economic organizations can take advantage of, or kinship based values can symbolically transform themselves for extended application in non-kinship areas.

What Japan seems to have done is in part the latter. At least as *tatema*, the head of an economic organization, whether related by kinship ties or not to other members, has been regarded as the father figure of the organization in Japan, with all it implies in terms of authority and benevolence for the head of the organization

1) 忠孝仁義信

and obedience and nurturant dependence for subordinates. In political realm, the symbolic extension made the Emperor a benevolent, sacerdotal father figure, and helped create the loyalty of the subjects far beyond the limits of substantive kinship groups. At the same time, along with this symbolic extension of kinship values, Japan seems to have emphasized the value of loyalty over and beyond that of filial piety. Since loyalty is a concept unbound by kinship, its emphasis spelled enormous advantage for the development of Japan's economic organizations in moving beyond its kinship base.

3. JAPANESE HOUSEHOLD-AS-ECONOMIC-ORGANIZATION

But all this remark about the advantage of certain values would not have worked had it not been for the particular organization of Japanese household-as-economic-organization. Several principles of economic organization were discussed in the symposium, such as kinship, territory, religion, and caste, which have been the traditional bases of recruitment. More modern principles include ability and educational background. The Japanese household-as-economic-organization differs from any of these in that it allows both kin and non-kin to be members of the organization. The Japanese household, or *ie*, has always been an instrumental organization first and foremost and kinship was a means used to serve the purpose of the household because in most cases it served the purpose well. But the household as such did not exclude non-kin from being its members. It is true that non-kin members of the house generally held lower statuses than kin members and seldom took leadership, although there are notable cases where the household, especially a commercial household, had to rely on the competence and expertise of a non-kin lieutenant (*bantō*) of the household as the titular head of the household and the legitimate head by kinship tie had become incompetent, disabled, or just uninterested in the activities of the household. This flexibility allowed the household-as-economic-organization to maintain itself and prosper when, left to kinship members alone, the organization may well have collapsed. It also allowed the household-as-economic organization to expand beyond what is normally possible, given the demographic constraints of recruitment of members through reproduction. At the intermediate stage of commercial evolution in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods, many economic organizations were of this sort.

An important point to be noted is that the Japanese system of recruitment allowed at times competence, or ability to play a role, superseding kinship. At this intermediate stage, kinship definitely remained the basic principle of recruitment, but it not only provided room for competent non-kin to be members of the organization, but also opened avenues for their upward mobility in the organization. Most of large, successful commercial houses of the Tokugawa and the early Meiji periods profited from this arrangement.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES

Another important point made by several participants of the symposium has to do with the nature of human resources in Japanese economic organizations. The importance of human resources in contemporary business organization is a theme touted by a legion of Japanese managers and specialists analyzing Japanese business practices. Fodella mentions "disciplined labor force," as a key to Japan's economic success in modern times. Sakudo speaks of "industrious revolution", referring to the emergence of the merchant ethic of hard work during the Tokugawa period. Clark and Lifson emphasize the importance of information gathering through personal contact. Sakudo's focus on trust in business activity is also a manifestation of the same tendency to value human resources. Network of human relations is what moves an economic organization in the Japanese perspective. Social exchange framework discussed by Lifson is a specific way of understanding how this network works. In information gathering, the degree and kind of trust one has in the information-giver determines the quality of information. Without high quality information, business cannot be conducted. Much of such information is not available from impersonal sources, such as computers, mass media, company reports, and the like, but it is obtained in Japan only through personal contact by developing trusting relationship with key individuals in an organization.

5. CLASSIFICATION OF COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

A variety of types of commercial organization was introduced by participants. An attempt will be made here to classify them. This is only a trial formulation; it is not all-encompassing, not is it logically fool-proof. But it does, I hope, offer a beginning in ordering commercial organizations of Japan. The various types are presented below in an order which suggests historical development.

1. **HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY.** In this type, each household is an independent unit of production, whether it be in agriculture, manufacture (such as artisanal production), or retail (as in family grocer). In this type, recruitment of members on the basis of kinship predominates, although recruitment through adoption (*yōshi* or *muko yōshi*) is not precluded.

2. *Shōka dōzoku-dan.* Several households are organized as *dōzoku* in this type, where the main household serves as the headquarters of economic operations. Other households are its branches, or branches of a branch serving as the secondary main household, etc. Branches are established by sons, adopted sons, and trusted capable employees through the main household capitalization and are controlled by it. Branches are often established by non-kin employees of the firm after many years—or decades—of service, especially if their talent is recognized.

A classic case—in the sense of being meticulously researched—is the pharmaceutical group in Kyoto reported by Nakano Takashi (1964). It should be noted that this is almost an exact replica of what Aruga (1943) found in rural northern

Japan. Thus like the previous type, the same structural type can serve both agricultural activity and commercial activity.

3. *Dōzoku* COMPANY. This is the "classic" *zaibatsu*, where the firm takes on the statutory form of a company but shares with Type 2 much of its structural features. Characteristically in this type, the ownership and management are as yet not separated. In most other respects, too, the *dōzoku* company is like the previous, *shōka dōzoku-dan*.

4. MODERN *zaibatsu*. The classic *zaibatsu* evolved into the modern form as the ownership became separated from the management structure. The ownership is held in large part by the kinship group of the *dōzoku*, but the firm is run basically by trusted lieutenants (*bantō*), who are salaried employees. The modern *zaibatsu* tend to be much larger in scale than the previous types.

5. COMPANY. This is the most common type in Japan nowadays. In this type, kinship involvement either in ownership or in management is kept at minimum. But limited kinship involvement in company is common in Japan, where the sole or majority stockholder and his spouse—and also perhaps a son—hold offices in the company, or where a son is expected to take over the company as the father-president retires. Such patterns are common both in large and small companies in Japan.

6. COLONIAL COMPANY. A company which is established exclusively to operate in a colony falls under this category. The Hudsons Bay Company, the Dutch East India Company, The British East Indian Company are examples from European colonies. Japan followed suit in establishing the South Manchurian Railroad Company, which ran far more than railways and operated throughout Manchuria, north China and Korea. These companies have a strong exploitative element, although South Manchurian Railroad Company did engage in a vast amount of what can be construed only as "basic research" at least without immediate return.

7. MULTINATIONAL. This is a type which is quite familiar in the postwar scene, and needs no elaboration.

In working out these types, a number of variables may be identified. For example, recruitment of non-kin is what separates the *shōka dōzoku-dan* type from the household type. Another distinction between the first two against the rest lies in the fact that the first two can serve both agricultural and commercial goals, whereas the others are exclusively for commercial activities. Recruitment of non-kin on the basis of competence becomes especially important in both *zaibatsu* types, although kinship still may play a significant role at least in ownership. With respect to the distinction between the "classical" and "modern" *dōzoku*, the criterion of whether the ownership and management are fused or separated is criterial. For the colonial type, of course, presence or absence of a colony is the distinguishing criterion. Absence of a colony of course would mean absence of this type of company. But presence of a colony, of course, does not necessarily indicate the presence of a colonial company. Also, although not criterial, product diversification and

managerial diversification play an important role in the evolution of a firm.

In a very general sense, one may think of the evolution of commercial firms in Japan as having proceeded from the first type to the last, without implying that the appearance of a more evolved type necessitates disappearance of the previous types. Rather, a new type is added on while old types often still remain. The first, household type, for example, is definitely with us. The second and third types have disappeared. It seems the basic kinship principle of recruitment in these types prevented them from developing into a complex form required in modern business. The "modern" *zaibatsu*, of course, were dissolved by the postwar occupation. The fifth type is of course well and thriving. In fact many of the first type have converted into the company type if only for tax reasons. Numerically this is by far the most common type. The colonial type had a brief life, and did well while it lasted, but became extinct with the end of World War Second and returning of colonial territories to their original sovereigns. The multinational type, being a postwar phenomenon, is the newest, but it is also the most thriving and growing the fastest in terms of volume of business. Japan's economic growth is largely due to the growth of the multinationals. We will do well to focus our attention on these companies, since whether Japan's economic future will make or break will depend on how successful multinational will be.

6. RELATION OF COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATION TO GOVERNMENT

How commercial or economic organization relates to the existing political system is an issue which was raised from time to time in this symposium. Following are several types I have identified.

1. **DISINTERESTED.** In this type merchants take little or no interest in the politics of the country. *Kyōmin*, referring to overseas Chinese, Jews in most parts of the world—outside Israel, of course—East Indians (called "Asians") in East Africa, and Lebanese in West Africa are notable examples. The distinguishing feature in this category is the fact that *kyōmin* are immigrants to another sovereign country. They are not, for example, English merchants operating in colonial India or Dutch merchants operating in colonial Indonesia where the merchants have the protection of the colonial government. Another characteristic of this type is the orientation of the immigrants toward their own home country and disinterest in assimilating into the host country. Formation of enclaves in the host country and sending of remittances to the home country out of the proceeds of their economic activities in the host country are well known aspects of this disinterest. As a consequence they have been targets of discrimination and scapegoating, as have been seen among Chinese in the U.S., Indonesia and Malaysia, to mention a few noteworthy cases.

2. **CLOSE COOPERATION.** In Japan and in some of the developing countries of East Asia, the government has extended a helping hand in economic growth. To be sure, the image of "Japan, Inc.," where the government and the economic sector

work hand in glove is definitely false. The government picks and chooses certain target industries for maximum assistance and protection, paying less attention to others. Still in all, there is the attitude that the economic well-being of the nation is the government's business, and the government preempts prerogatives to plan, guide, manage, and interfere with commercial activities to the extent it feels economic growth can be aided by political intervention.

3. **DISTRUST.** In pre-revolutionary China, merchants not only maintained basic distrust of the government, but also took the attitude that government is to be taken advantage of. The government, in fact, did nothing actively to promote commercial activities. Thus their attitude was well founded.

4. **NECESSARY EVIL.** In the West, particularly in the United States, because of the strong emphasis in individualism and the right of the citizen, the idea that the best government is the one that governs the least is very strong. In the U.S., this attitude is noticeably stronger among Republicans, Democrats tending to favor a stronger government. But in comparative perspective, even Democrats would not favor a government of the type Japan has.

5. **SPLIT ORIENTATION.** Multinational corporations must contend with several governments at once and must develop strategies to cope with varying and often conflicting demands placed on the corporation by different governments. This is a situation which none of the previous types has to face. It, however, shares with the first, "disinterested" type in that the multinational's basic orientation is toward the home office in the home country, and not necessarily toward the country in which it has business operations. Profits are generally funnelled back to the bank in the home country, as *kyōmin* sends their remittances back home. In this sense, one might say multinationals are *kyōmin* with modern organization.

7. JAPAN NOT A "MIRACLE"

In this symposium we have examined economic activities and commercial organizations of the Japanese civilization in comparison with those of other civilizations. In doing so, we have tried to go beyond characterization of Japanese business and commerce as a special and unique case, as proponents of *Nihonjinron* are wont to do. Instead we have tried to uncover generalized concepts and processes by which to account for Japan's special case.

The Japanese case need not be, or should not be, characterized as a "miracle," as is often done. A miracle, as in immaculate conception, is a miracle because the phenomenon defies normal, rational, natural, or scientific comprehension. If Japanese economic success is a miracle, it need not be understood, and no effort need be expended to understand it because it is by definition unexplainable by ordinary rational means. But the Japanese case is not a miracle defying comprehension.

Why has it been, then, called a "miracle?" Clearly, it is a result of Western ethnocentrism. Westerners have regarded their own economic development as be-

ing normal, regular, and even normative. How it has proceeded is the only way they comprehend as normal. It even is assumed to be the model for economic development of other, non-Western nations. Deviations from the Western patterns are just that: deviations from the norm and from the normative. True to the nineteenth century unilinear evolutionism, the West still claims achievement of the pinnacle of economic success, which non-Western nationals are supposedly following and trying to achieve. "Underdeveloped," "developing," and "nearly (or newly) industrialized" are some of the common terms bandied around by Western development economists which only thinly disguise their value judgment. Enter Japan, which performs better than the teacher that the West is supposed to be. This outperforming of the West is a deviation from the supposedly normal and the normative pattern. The Westerner's reaction is that this cannot be, and therefore a miracle. Why should the course of economic development of any nation follow that of the West and why should it proceed at the same speed unless there is some God-ordained reason why the Western pattern is the only reasonable one, in short, unless it is based on ethnocentric judgment? Also, to call the Japanese case a "miracle," simply reinforces the notion of *Nihonjinron* protagonists that Japan is unique. It does not help us understand Japan as a normal, natural phenomenon that it is.

This symposium has hopefully contributed to negating the notion of Japanese economic success as a "miracle." It, of course, has its uniquenesses and peculiarities. But they are all quite understandable in normal, social science terms. Japan's rapid economic growth has to do with its ethics, its economic organization, its use of human resources, and its collaboration of the government with the business, to name but a few of the factors elaborated on in this symposium. We hope that this symposium will help put to rest any notion that Japan is a miracle, or that its uniqueness defies rational comprehension.