

History of Japanese culture interpreted in the light of culturalism

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Abstract

Cultures of cosmocentric paradigm demonstrate high interest in nature, high tolerance toward different manifestations of human body. Cultures of sociocentric paradigm demonstrate low interest in nature, low tolerance toward manifestations of human body, high interest in morality. Cultures of the same paradigm communicate rather easily; communication of cultures belonging to different paradigms usually leads to appearing of cargo cults. Communication of cultures belonging to the same paradigm also can lead to appearing of cargo cults: Confucianism in Japan was cargo cult since it didn't become social lift. Japanese culture is cosmocentric since its base (Jōmon) was cosmocentric. Spreading of rice culture inspired weakening of cosmocentric trend. *Kokugaku* movement and Meiji Restoration were first steps to the restoration of initial cosmocentric values; however they didn't deconstruct patterns of cargo Confucianism. True restoration of cosmocentric paradigm began after WWI since values of contemporary Western civilization are much alike those of Jōmon.

Key words: culturalism; cosmocentrism; sociocentrism; history of Japan

1. Milestones of culturalism

1.1. Cosmocentrism and sociocentrism

All cultures existing or ever existed upon this planet can be subdivided into two big paradigms: cosmocentrism and sociocentrism depending on what is central matter of discourse of certain culture.

Sociocentrism has the following characteristic features: central object of discourse is social relations, and their 'correct order'/morality; also sociocentrism likes artificial systems having no analogy in nature such as, for instance: jurisprudence, algebra, abstract art and so on, i.e.: sociocentrism like discourse with the use of some completely artificial abstract symbols which have no direct analogy in nature; also it usually escapes using of visual images which have direct analogies in nature; also sociocentric cultures usually don't like open manifestation of human body and sexuality, this aspect is especially well manifested in attitude toward LGBT as far as LGBT issues are probably the purest matter of sexuality without any other additional themes.

Cosmocentrism, on the contrary, has nature/cosmos as central matters of its discourse; also cosmocentrism likes to use visual images which always have some direct analogy in nature; moreover, cosmocentrism has positive attitude toward human body and sexuality.

Whether a culture is of cosmocentric or sociocentric paradigm can be seen if we take texts/narratives created by the culture for its own purposes and look at statistics of usage of concepts belonging to different semantic fields.

Pure sociocentrism and pure cosmocentrism are ideal types, and most of really existing cultures are placed somewhere between two extremes since any culture has elements of cosmocentrism and elements of sociocentrism as well. For instance, Socrates and Plato are sociocentrists of ancient Greece; Confucius is sociocentrist of ancient China; however, sociocentric trends appeared inside of cosmocentric cultures are much lighter than pure sociocentric culture trends: in Abrahamic texts can be seen strict prohibition of LGBT while in Confucian traditions can be seen just recommendations to separate different activities.

Nevertheless in any culture first or second paradigm dominates. Actually most of known cultures belong to cosmocentric paradigm.

People of the same paradigm can easier find common language with each other than people belonging to different paradigms.

1.2. Cargo cults and culture consistency

If we take a glance at different cultures we can see that the most successful and stable were and are those of them which base themselves on their own original ideas. In current context successful and stable means that culture can answer outer challenges and maintain itself.

Almost no culture can exist without borrowing of some technologies and ideas from certain other cultures.

Cargo cults are well described in anthropological literature as a practice of some 'wild aborigines' who wait for Western goods having made aircrafts and other related items of palm leaves and bamboo.

And usually they think that cargo cults don't exist in contemporary urbanized world. I can say that to think so is a great mistake. Cargo cults of contemporaneity are numerous.

When some issues are borrowed without due understanding of their inner logic then it leads to appearing of cargo cult. It is important to note that cargo cult isn't just incomplete or distorted borrowing, but also dogmatization of borrowed items.

The oddest cargo cults usually appear when something is borrowed from a culture belonging to one paradigm to a culture belonging to another paradigm. In such cases cargo cults are usually very abrasive and lead to very serious social disturbances. Probably one of the most notable example of such cargo cult is Christianity in Europe: when Christianity (initially a branch of Judaism, i.e.: a product of sociocentric culture; actually probably one of the most sociocentric culture ever existed) was imposed to pagan cosmocentric Europe it was a true catastrophe.

However, cargo cults also can appear even when borrowing takes place between cultures belonging to the same paradigm. For instance: European/Western culture and Japanese culture both belong to cosmocentric paradigm, but J-rock and J-pop are Japanese cargo cults after modern Western music.

Cargo cults are items of inconsistency. When there are many cargo cults in a culture then the culture is rather weak, i.e.: it can't develop itself freely and naturally and can't find appropriate answers to outer challenges.

Consistency is important not just by itself, it is important not just as consistency for consistency, but it is important because when base of a culture is consistent, when all concepts of culture are logically connected with each other then the culture is very stable i.e.: it can successfully answer any outer challenges and escape serious social disturbances.

In a more detailed way ideas of culturalism are expressed in a special paper (see Nonno 2015).

It is possible to say that culturalism is not just a particular theory, but applying semiotics that allows us to analyze cultural trends and allows us to see why certain cultures can coexist and certain not.

2. Applying of culturalism model to the history of Japanese culture

Having got above described semiotic model, now I am going to try to draw a sketch of conceptual history of Japanese culture from the very beginning of it (i.e.: Jōmon period) till nowadays.

Culture of Jōmon period (about 14,000 – 300 BC) evidently was cosmocentric. It is possible to make such conclusion due to the following fact: elaborated arty-crafty pottery means that people of Jōmon didn't spend much time to get food and had enough free time for development of their creativity. Moreover, absence of weaponry during the most time of Jōmon (Sahara 1990: 200 – 201) means absence of material differentiation and social cataclysms. Creativity usually flourishes in those societies which have rather liberal mores: so it's possible to suppose rather tolerant attitude toward different manifestations of sexuality and gender variations in Jōmon. It is supposed that during Jōmon period people of converted gender were respected as especially mighty shamans (Akulov, Nonno 2015: 61). In most of later periods people of converted gender have been allowed to exist if they placed themselves in rather marginal social niches (for instance *onnagata* actors¹ in kabuki), i.e.: they were allowed to exist, but weren't taken seriously.

In the end of Jōmon and in Yayoi period (300 BCE – 300 CE) cosmocentric trend step by step ebbed away while sociocentric trend based on rice culture strengthened. First of all it can be seen in extinction of Jōmon pottery tradition: from the end of Jōmon forms of pottery became less elaborated. Extinction of Jōmon pottery tradition correlates well with appearing of weaponry and fenced settlements (Sahara 1990) and with converting culture from more liberal to more stringent. Yayoi culture generally is considered as a completely new culture that replaced Jōmon.

Actually there is no strict border between Jōmon and Yayoi since, for instance, pottery of late Jōmon looks much alike that of early Yayoi and often even specialists can be tangled. Yayoi is actually continuation of late Jōmon. Strengthening of sociocentric trends began in the end of Jōmon yet, it could probably be somehow inspired by those migrants who spoke in Austronesian languages².

During Kofun period (3 – 4 centuries CE) appeared many migrants from Korea; these migrants from Korea spoke languages of Buyeo group³. From one hand these 'Korean' migrants brought new technologies, for instance: horses and metals; from other hand these migrants became the base of different cargo cults and eclectics.

One of the most notable cargo cults was Confucianism: in Japan it didn't become mean of social lift since practice of civil service examination system was not adopted by Japanese, and thus Confucianism in Japan became just an item that maintained oppression and hierarchy.

Despite initial cosmocentric culture was littered by different cargo cults it never met really serious obstacles and preserves and maintains itself in such issue as: Shintō, *waka*⁴ poetry and so on.

¹ *Onnagata* 女形 literally: “female form” / “female role” – male actors who performed female roles in kabuki theater; *onnagata* often lived as women in their everyday life.

² Presence of certain Austronesian component in Japanese ethnicity is still matter of discussion (mainly because of insufficient elaboration of verifiable methodology). Certain elements of Japanese language which are supposed to be of Austronesian origin are represented in Murayama 1976.

³ Main components of Buyeo group are Japanese and Korean languages; for more detailed information about proves of close relatedness of Japanese and Korean see Akulov 2016.

⁴ *Waka* 和歌 literally: “Japanese songs”: poetry written not in classical Chinese, but in Japanese and devoted mostly to contemplation of nature

First trumpet of restoration of initial cosmocentrism was *kokugaku*⁵ movement. It is possible to say that *kokugaku* was the movement that inspired Meiji Restoration in intellectual aspect.

Meiji restoration can be considered as first serious step to restoration of initial cosmocentrism. However, even after Meiji Restoration patterns of cargo Confucianism weren't undergone serious deconstruction.

Only after the end of WWII with forced democratization of Japan began serious and profound trend to the restoration of initial cosmocentrism.

Among scholars who study Japan can be often met opinion that cultural trend of contemporary Japan is deeply alien to 'traditional Japan' that is usually thought as Japan of samurais and geishas. Such point of view is rather naïve and perfunctory. Of course, contemporary trend is opposite to that of 'traditional rice Japan'. However, post-war Americanization could not harm Japanese culture since basic values of Japanese culture are values of Jōmon culture, and they are much alike those of contemporary Western civilization that also is cosmocentric. Thus, Americanization actually was not obtrusion of something new, but was just returning to cosmocentric Jōmon roots.

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⁵ *Kokugaku* 国学 literally: “national science” or “national studies”, *kokugaku* was intellectual movement appeared in 17th century, the movement paid main attention to studies of ancient Japanese chronicles, ancient Japanese poetry, to researches about Japanese identity and roots of Japanese ethnicity. Quite notable are the following facts: the movement was intellectual opposition of Neo-Confucianism and was closely connected with Shintō.