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978-1-107-62321-7 - Nippon Shindo Ron or the National Ideals of the Japanese People

Yutaka Hibino

Excerpt

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## INTRODUCTORY

WHAT is the present condition of society in this country? Is public morality widely practised or does evil flourish? I do not propose to concern myself chiefly with criticism or discussion of opinions of this nature, nevertheless, I cannot fail to note that many, observing the trend of modern society, heap abuse upon it and call it degenerate, while seeming to pride themselves upon their own purity. Is society advancing towards decay with the passage of time? Are there tendencies which hinder the development of those virtues upon which depend the health and well-being of the social organisation? The natural complexity of two thousand five hundred years of living history renders difficult the task of offering an immediate answer to these questions. There are, of course, many organisations like the Temperance Society or the Women's Friendly Societies which work continually and whole-heartedly to improve the condition of society, to develop character, and to encourage the practice of the beautiful customs of the past. The question whether these movements are simply ephemeral reactions or whether they are the true products and developments of the age is not an easy one to determine. In general there exist in society means of promoting moral ideals, enforcing right conduct, and cultivating noble qualities. Consideration of such facts should effectually silence these lamentations and complaints regarding degeneracy. So long as these means are effectively employed then no matter how great or how complex the problems there need be no fear that noble ideals will be neglected or the five virtues disregarded. Let us direct our attention, however, to the practices of those who teach ethics and morals to-day. I fear that there are few indeed who adopt the correct measures and the appropriate means of influencing society and educating men in the sphere of morals. This situation is a constant source of anxiety. Those who have a true interest in such problems can never suffer them to be neglected.

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Nevertheless, they are for the most part so difficult and complicated that solutions are hard to find.

Moral teachings are the pillars and foundations of society. They are the bed-rock of national virtue. Without them neither society nor state could exist for a single day. If there are defects in these teachings society is to that extent rendered susceptible to harm. It will be seen, therefore, that morality is truly a weighty matter. It is to be regretted that there are so few who comprehend the inner aspect of morality. How few there are who know how to navigate this boundless ocean! I cannot help but feel that if those who ignorantly and superficially bewail the decline of manners and the unpopularity of virtuous ideals would lay their scorn aside and bestir themselves “to plant the hemp in preparation for the braiding of the rope”, in other words if they would engage in a positive and constructive course of action, some good would be accomplished. Our Government, realising the importance of taking action, has already established the Society for the Discussion of Ethical Principles. This Society carries on an investigation of ethical principles and teachings which is of the utmost service in popularising this necessary discipline. Such valuable measures are especially opportune at this time. I sincerely hope that they will succeed.

Unfortunately, most of those who attempt to teach ethics cherish the vain hope that we Japanese can successfully undertake to live in accordance with some foreign system of ethics—what has been called “Asiatic” ethics for example, or even “universal” ethics. This arises from the idea of the solidarity of the race. We can, unhappily, see only too clearly on all sides the effect of these ill-considered and confused ideas. This situation should not be allowed to continue for a single day. With the Restoration<sup>1</sup> foreign civilisation flooded our country and the concrete elements of our own culture as well as the abstract underwent various changes. The people unwisely accepted the offerings of the four seas without sufficient

<sup>1</sup> The Restoration of Imperial rule and the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate, The date is that of the accession of the Emperor Meiji, 1868.

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discrimination. This is an evil which was perhaps inevitable under the circumstances and should not be too severely censured. Nevertheless, it was an unprofitable situation and one which far-seeing men regretted exceedingly. Shall our country, placed as it is among the nations like a piece on a chess board, direct the lives of its citizens by systems of ethics eastern or western or even that system which is called “universal”? It seems to me that there is no question as to whether the people of Japan should observe either a foreign, an eastern, or a universal system of ethics. We have our own peculiar system of ethics. We possess already a system which is adapted to the Japanese people. I cannot help feeling that Nippon Shindo, the Way of the Japanese Subject, is the most suitable system for this people. As the Way which Japanese people should naturally follow and the duties which they must observe are one and the same, let us set aside the words “Rinri” (ethical principles) and “Shushin” (moral culture) and recommend the term “Shindo” which coincides so much better with our national aspirations and characteristics. Shindo epitomises in one term all the loftiest aspirations of our compatriots.

What Way is this that every individual subject must aspire to observe? The Way, which from the dawn of our history has been the chief object of our aspirations, the object towards which all our tendencies and habits point, the Way which each subject must follow is nothing less than loyalty itself. Other than loyalty there is no way for the Japanese subject to follow. It is loyalty that guards and maintains the immutable permanence of the Imperial Dynasty. It is the source from which spring sentiments of true love for the Emperor and true patriotism for the country. Loyalty is the very life and spinal nerve of the Japanese subject. It is my firm conviction that the ethical principles of the Japanese people must be based upon the unique foundation of loyalty. The mutual obligations of children and parents, of relatives, of husband and wife, the duties of friendship and human brotherhood are all practical means for manifesting, accomplishing, and fulfilling the central obligation of loyalty.

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With loyalty as the stem the branches of filial piety, fraternal spirit, tranquillity in the home, trust in friends all take their natural order. It is in this sense that these virtues should be cultivated and encouraged. In this manner alone can the Japanese subject completely observe and fulfil the obligations of the Way. For the Japanese subject loyalty is indeed the unique and original source of all ethical culture as well as the impulse of all true deeds. Every ethical act is included and implied in that unique noun “Shindo”. All the inner meanings of the word loyalty are included in the wider sense in which this term is used.

I should like to consider at this juncture some of the traditional precepts of loyalty and filial piety which we hold in such reverence. I consider that the well-known saying, namely, “The loyal subject issues from the home where filial piety is revered” should be reversed. It should be, “The filial son is found in the home where loyalty is revered”. The teaching that “the higher duty casts parents aside” should rather be that when confronted by the higher duty of loyalty the lesser duty to parents ceases to exist. In other words, the teaching that filial piety is the source of all virtue must be altered by substituting loyalty for filial piety. When claiming that loyalty is the single Way we do not deny the obligations of filial piety. We simply regard filial piety as one of the manifestations of loyalty. Loyalty is indeed our highest good and all virtuous action originates therein. Let us hereafter abandon the contention that there is a universal set of ethical principles in the world. I believe that there are different sets of ethical principles peculiar to orient and occident. I believe further that there is a special set of ethical principles applicable only to Japan. There already exists in this country the teaching of Shindo which is naturally suited to the genius of the Japanese people.

To conclude my argument, I propose to call by the name of “Shindo” what has hitherto been known as “teachings regarding ethical principles”. I propose also to make many variations in the original teachings of ethical principles. I shall

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make loyalty the basic principle of Shindo in order that the title and the reality may accord well. By this means I hope to improve the culture of our country and permanently to elevate the character of our people. Such measures are of the utmost importance in the present chaotic state of civilisation. Therefore, I have considered this to be an opportune time for urging upon all the adoption of the teachings of Shindo. It is commonly held that the repudiation of fundamental obligations results in the decay of morality. Indeed, the cultivation of these virtues is as necessary to human life as the elements of fire and water. It is not for me to discuss, however, whether universal obligations or moral conduct suffer decline in the manner popularly held. I think it is of greater moment to proceed at once to the study of the fundamental conceptions of Shindo, to make plain the source of these doctrines, and to establish the authority of this conception in human affairs. I firmly believe that we must devote all our energy to seeking a permanent means of enforcing these teachings. I have already referred to the elements of Shindo, and the Japanese people are acquainted with the main outlines of the teachings included under this head. It may seem unnecessary, therefore, for me to express my humble opinions regarding Shindo. Nevertheless, I believe that it is worth while stating my point of view and making a practical appeal to the intelligence of the educated classes. By means of their helpful criticism I hope that the doctrine may be still further developed. My only desire is to do what little I can to enhance the prosperity and well-being of my country.

If it is asked what Shindo is a single word suffices for answer, namely, loyalty. If it is then asked what loyalty is and what it implies we reply briefly that it means the unchanging reverential service of the Imperial Line. Blossoming into expression it is the beauty and fragrance of a myriad cherry flowers, hoarded it is the beauty of a hundred tempered blades. Its beauty is manifest in the heroic death of Nankō and in the words of Shigemori's reproof. For all the glorious deeds of the past, unparalleled in the annals of the east or west, there is but one

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explanation, namely, loyalty. There can be no doubt whatever regarding the truth of this assertion. Though the world is wide and humanity past numbering these deeds of loyalty are the peculiar pride and possession of this nation. They constitute the special virtue and significance of our national flag. There can be no Shindo without loyalty. Loyalty is the central pillar of the state, and the very life of the Japanese subject. To this proposition I firmly believe there is not one dissenting voice among the myriad subjects of the Empire. When it comes to the question of cultivating, advancing, and practising this loyalty which is solely the possession of the Japanese nation and the essential element in Shindo I regret exceedingly that my own ideals and the present tendencies are radically opposed. I cannot remain silent in the face of this situation. My anxiety is increased because these tendencies reflect upon the doctrine of Shindo. I have already explained that Shindo is loyalty. Loyalty is that privilege accorded to the subject by means of which he may for ever manifest true service to the throne. From this explanation and this definition it will be clear wherein I differ in my opinions from the position popularly held at present. In taking this position I feel constrained to offer my apologies to my seniors and humbly anticipate their correction. If I were to express my opinions in order I should arrange them as follows:

- I. Regulations which govern the Imperial Household.
- II. The National Constitution.
- III. The Imperial Rescript.

Shindo, ethical principles, and moral culture all take their rise in these three sources. I must explain why I consider my opinions to be valid. My third reference is, of course, to the Rescript on Education,<sup>1</sup> which I shall hereafter simply call the Rescript.

<sup>1</sup> The Imperial Rescript on Education (Chokugo) was first promulgated on October 30th, 1890. It is always read in the schools at the beginning of the year, on the occasion of the Imperial birthday, and at other important anniversaries or ceremonies. It has undoubtedly had a profound effect in shaping the thought of modern Japan.

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To serve the Emperor with single-hearted loyalty and to sacrifice one's self courageously for the public good, are the natural duties of the Japanese subject. They remain unaltered by the passage of time. They are the superlative treasures of the Japanese subject by reason of which he rises superior to all foreign peoples. We should treasure these noble characteristics. They are not to be abandoned even should the waters of the Kamogawa flow backward in their bed. My only anxiety is lest those who endeavour to serve the Emperor with loyalty and the state with devotion, and who direct others in this service, should themselves be ignorant of the true source of all authority and of the Regulations which refer to the Imperial Succession. Should they remain in ignorance of these things then, in times of national disturbances which cover the sky like a cloud and the earth with blood, loyal subjects though desiring to serve out of pure and honest hearts may yet be unable to discover where their true duty lies. There is therefore a great danger that their services may be lost to the state, and that they may die in vain.

In order to allay these anxieties all subjects must be taught the objects towards which their loyalty should be directed, and the sphere in which they should display their virtuous conduct. They must also be taught that loyalty is the true expression of reverence to the Imperial House. And they must further be instructed with care in what manner the Regulations governing the Imperial Household are applied.

Merely to urge the observance of loyalty without a knowledge of the Regulations governing the Imperial Household is an extremely dangerous proceeding. There is a danger that such leading may result in useless and empty expressions of loyalty and courage. While teaching the reasons for observing the doctrine of loyalty it is the natural order to draw attention first to the true object of loyalty. In the second place the subject must be taught how this Imperial Household, which is the object of his loyalty, is itself governed. This, it seems to me, is the obvious order and the necessary division of the subject.



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Nevertheless, when we examine the teachings of those who discourse on ethical principles and lecture on morals we find that few indeed have anything to say about the Regulations which govern the Imperial Household. I cannot help regarding this as one of the faults of the times. It is manifested, too, most clearly in educational circles.

The Constitution embodies the great principles upon which the nation is established. It is the source of authority and power and it makes plain the Regulations which govern the lives of subjects. As Japanese subjects who desire to fulfil the demands of loyalty we must be acquainted with the articles of this Constitution. To endeavour to be loyal and virtuous without an acquaintance with this Constitution, which is the basic law of the land, is like looking for fish up a tree. Those who do not understand the Constitution may have hearts full of true patriotism and yet may find themselves unable to display this virtue to advantage. Such persons are liable to stumble into infractions of the Imperial commands out of ignorance. They may thus fail to reciprocate the august grace of our Ruler. Therefore, Japanese subjects who desire to fulfil their natural duties cannot afford to remain in ignorance of the Constitution of their own country. Nevertheless, when we examine the teachings of those who discourse on ethics and lecture on moral culture we find few indeed who have anything to say about the Constitution of this Empire. This, again, is a shortcoming particularly evident among the ranks of our educators.

The Imperial Rescript graciously vouchsafed to us on the thirtieth day of the tenth month of the twenty-third year of Meiji (1890), and known popularly as the Imperial Rescript on Education, teaches the subject how to live in accordance with ethical principles. Its importance lies in the fact that, in accordance with the Regulations which govern the Imperial Household, it inculcates reverence for the Imperial Family, and in accordance with the articles of the Constitution, it enforces the duty of obedience to the Emperor. I humbly venture to suggest that the august heart of our Emperor expects that there



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will be no misapprehensions in the fulfilment of their duties on the part of his subjects, the flower and pride of his Empire. Unless I am greatly mistaken, it teaches us clearly how to exalt the Imperial Line, how to obey the Imperial commands, and in fact, how we ought to live in this land of Japan. It is important for us to realise that the Regulations which govern the Imperial Household and the Constitution both stand behind the Imperial Rescript. Unfortunately, however, those who teach ethical principles and lecture on morals concentrate their attention upon the Rescript and overlook the vital importance of the Regulations governing the Imperial Household and the Constitution of the country. Is not this an example of foolish neglect? This is one of the faults of the times to which educators are peculiarly prone. This is a fault of our modern textbooks on ethics and morals which we cannot pass over in silence.

The Japanese people are placed in the midst of other nations and have constant intercourse with them. It is not our part to stand aloof. On the one hand, as Japanese subjects we observe the teachings of Shindo, on the other hand, as members of the family of nations we should be acquainted with the courtesies and amenities of intercourse with foreigners. I feel sure that all will agree with me here. It is hardly necessary to devote further space to this subject.

In concluding the above argument I should like to point out that the writings on Shindo (usually called writings on the principles of ethics and morals) are commonly divided into two parts, an internal or national section and an external or international section. In the first section the way each Japanese subject should follow is clearly explained. In the second section there should be a description of the way to be followed in intercourse with foreigners. Again, in the national section, the Laws of the Imperial Household and the Constitution of the state should be fully explained. The Rescript, which embodies the great principles of service to the Imperial Throne, in accordance with the Laws of the Imperial Household, and the Constitution of the state, must then be fully explained and

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understood. This arrangement of studies based upon the Rescript is the most suitable and convenient one. Most popular writings on morals and ethics have not, up to the present, contained any adequate discussion of these essential subjects. I greatly deplore this state of affairs and venture to publish my own insignificant opinions on these important subjects.

I humbly request the judgement of the intelligentsia on my attempt. I have made bold to publish this book regardless of my own unworthiness. I hope that my indulgent readers will vouchsafe their sympathy and make due allowances.