



**THE PROPOSAL OF WA-ISM AND A JAPANESE VIEW OF
THE FREE, PRIVATE MARKET ORDER**

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- ABSTRACT -

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Prior to opening her doors toward the world in the late 19th century, Japan had been formulating a certain philosophy, which led to the emergence of Japanese capitalism. This philosophy developed from a combination of ancient Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism, and the principle of Wa (harmony, concord) of the Japanese people. Wa-ism is meant to overcome traditional dualism through the non-duality principle.

Japan needs to develop her Wa-ism in order to develop a free and private economic society based on order in the market, while respecting international law, reciprocalism, and each other's cultures.

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Introduction

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Introduction

In *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber illustrated that capitalism emerged only once in history, in modern Europe, and its origin was to be found unexpectedly in the ascetic and nonsecular ethics of Protestantism, especially that of Calvinism.

Today, on the other hand, capitalism is showing rapid development in East Asia. We see these trends not only in Confucian-based countries such as Japan or "the four dragons" (Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore), but in Hinayana Buddhist countries such as Thai, Malaysia, the Islamic countries, and even in the southern part of Communist China.

I would like to set forth in this paper that, prior to opening her doors in the late 19th century, Japan had been formulating a certain philosophy, which led to the emergence of Japanese capitalism. This philosophy developed unexpectedly as well, from a combination of ancient Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism, and the principle of *Wa* (harmony, concord) of the Japanese people.

The dynamics of such a development is more a generalization of Weber's theory rather than a denial of it.

I. The Proposal of Wa-ism

That "Japan should harmonize Eastern and Western civilizations" had been the assertion of countless numbers of Japanese thinkers since the Meiji period (latter part of the 19th century). While perceiving the magnitude of Western civilization, this view implies the pride, obstinacy and hope of the Japanese who still wanted to avoid being completely absorbed by it. A small number of Westerners did show an inclination toward Zen Buddhism and other Oriental elements, thus affirming her pride. Nevertheless, how this integration would be made, at what point, and what would come about as its result had never been clarified.

Let us attempt a proposal for a system called *Wa-ism* and sketch an outline of it here. The scope of Wa-ism is described as being comparable to capitalism, socialism, ethnicism or totalitarianism; i.e., it will span centuries and continents. Its origin is Japan. In light of Japan's pace of development today, there is the potential that this will even be the prevalent philosophy of the first half of the Third Millennium, geographically covering a major area of the world centering on Asia.

Wa-ism, in terms of philosophy, is first of all able to surmount the question of dichotomy. For instance, from a dichotomic point of view, there can only be the following four positions with regard to the mind-matter relationship:

1. There is only matter, no mind. The mind is merely one form of matter--materialism.
2. There is only mind, no matter. Matter is merely a shadow, reflected on the mind--spiritualism.
3. There is both mind and matter. The two are distinct. For instance, even if the body dies, the soul continues to exist--physical/spiritual dualism.
4. There is neither mind nor matter--"All-things-are-nonsubstantial" philosophy.

These are the four positions that can be obtained by combining mind and matter, existence and nonexistence, and all of them are dichotomies.

The greater part of the natural sciences of modern Western civilization and Marxism are based on position 1. Physicist Ernst Mach emphasized position 2; however, Lenin criticized this in his *Materialism and the Theory of Empirical Criticism*, from the standpoint of 1. And yet, Einstein gives credit to Mach. Position 3 is the secular view of the spirit or soul, and Dogen (13th century Buddhist philosopher) criticizes this severely in his well-known *Shobo Genzo*, (95 volumes of Buddhist thought): "This is not Buddhism at all, but a view of the heretic Senni" (*Bendowa* volume). Position 4 can be called that of nihilism.

However, here the philosophy of non-duality comes into view. It is a teaching of Buddhism that the Oriental people have long been accustomed to. It offers that both mind and matter are actual existence, yet the two are not separate. Non-duality is the realization that confronting elements which were seen as separate until then, are not in reality, two distinct elements. The non-duality philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism was indeed the basis upon which the Golden Age of peace and prosperity, enlightenment and amity was built in the Orient. This view is something that may not be easily understood by Western people. Matter is not mind, they will say. Therefore, it would seem to openly violate the principle of contradiction which says that "non-matter is not matter."

As was mentioned earlier, the non-duality principle is powerful in that an object with a high degree of systematization helps bring about breakthroughs in learning, enriches the human spirit and brings peace to society. For instance, rather than a dualism in which the capitalist and the laborer are separate entities and are made to struggle with each other, no distinction is made between them in the non-dual view; thus, walls are broken down between "the self and others," "the observing subject and the observed object," "man and nature," "matter and idea," "life and death," "enemy and ally," "the ruler and the ruled," making it easier to see the true form of all reality, or the eternal, equal and absolute truth as

defined in Buddhism. Such a labor-management cooperative approach makes the distinction between the two fuzzy, but in turn helps the company prosper, and makes the worker more wealthy and happy. Wa-ism is meant to overcome traditional dualism through the non-duality principle.

The philosophy of Wa-ism is also based on Mahayana Buddhism and Shintoism. For instance, the main tenets of Hinayana Buddhism are three:

1. All things flow and nothing is permanent.
2. Self-renunciation.
3. Supreme enlightenment (Nirvana) and emancipation.

A modern translation of these meanings would be: 1. All things change. 2. All things are connected to all things; there is no independent absolute existence. 3. If we detach ourselves from doubt or adherence to a certain matter, we can attain peace.

These teachings are fine in themselves. However, they encourage the tendency to seclusion from the various productive activities of society in order to seek excessively for salvation.

On the other hand, the main teaching of Mahayana Buddhism may be expressed as, "All things are the truth unto themselves." It is not like Plato's *idea*, in which an ideal state is sought apart from reality, nor does it seek for seclusion in search of Nirvana as with Hinayana Buddhism. The kaleidoscopic changes of reality in themselves, just as they are, are the highest form of truth. Emphasizing this point, Dogen went so far as to declare that "The truth is equivalent to all things."

If all things were reality, there would be no need for man to spend time seeking for salvation in empty theories. One would only have to devote oneself to the work before him and to execute it. Some examples of other Japanese thinkers' views on what to do in life follow.

Bankei (1622-1693) states, "The holy discipline of the 'not born' philosophy, which I teach, is nothing but carrying out the farmer's duties diligently."¹ Suzuki Shosan (1579-

1655) said, "Invoke the power of prayer that your sins may be cleansed by farming, and spade the field one by one praying 'Namu-Amida-Butsu, Namu-Amida-Butsu (I surrender myself to the Buddha of Eternal Life);' then you will never fail to gain the reward of becoming a fellow of Buddhas."²

A disciple of Hakuin (1685-1768) states, "Teacher Hakuin taught us, 'try to hear the voice of one hand', but it is better to do business by making sounds with both your hands."³

Ishida Baigan (1685-1744) said that "A merchant maintains a living by creating proper profit, which is the merchant's honesty. It is not the way of the merchant that he brings no profit."⁴ Matsushita Konosuke (1894-1989, founder of Panasonic) was also of the same opinion. Ninomiya Sontoku (1787-1856, educator) stated, "If all those who run a business can become very concerned about communication within this world while seeking for profit; this will become a prayer for the power of the Goddess of Mercy."⁵

The fact that these various thoughts paved the way for the rise of Japanese capitalism is as described in the relationship between *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Christianity has also altered its form in the East and is in the process of giving birth to new teachings that has tenets in common with Mahayana Buddhism. *Seicho no Ie* (The Home of Growth) founded by Taniguchi Masaharu (1893-1985), The Unification Church of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon (1920-) are both worthy of respect in their adaptation to the mentality of the East. And although the denomination that I follow is so small that it does not compare with the above, the Keishin school of Christianity founded by Konishi Dogen (Yoshinosuke, 1898-1980), also has the workers' ethic. There is a song by Konishi Dogen that goes:

Calling the name of Jesus, I will work today, too.
I will do what business comes to my hand,
The goal being the Kingdom of God.

It encourages us to work diligently at the job granted to us without complaints, calling out the holy name, for the purpose of our lives lies in Heaven.

According to this way of thinking, as all things are reality, one never becomes attached to a single ideology (system of ideas). It is a 'becoming and developing', wherein lies the great potential of Wa-ism.

Shintoism also has the potential of becoming and developing which is the basis of Wa-ism. It has no strict doctrines and its enshrined object of worship is a mirror; in other words, the mirror reflects all of the images of those who come to visit. It makes things correct and bright, helping life to grow and develop unfettered. If doctrinal systems such as Christianity or Marxism with concrete, active contents are to be termed a "convex-type," the latter is a "concave-type" of system which possesses great adaptability.⁶

Japanese capitalism developed embodying a Wa-ism type of management in contrast to Western capitalism. Mr. Onizuka Kihachiro, president of Asics, wrote an article in the April 16, 1980 evening issue of *The Japan Economic Journal* from which the following is excerpted.

A large number of Western-type enterprises are profit-oriented groups (*gessellschaft*) formed by members who are linked together through interest relationships based on individualism. To make an extreme argument, labor is bought as a commodity, and the capitalist attempts to acquire as much profit as possible with the cheapest labor, while the workers form unions in order to sell labor at a high price. The capitalist owner easily resells a business and uses the funds to enjoy the remainder of his life. It is not too great a concern for him how the employees left behind are faring.

Then, what is the essence of a Japanese-type of management? About the time of the cherry blossoms, newly hired employees enter a company. Their employment is usually not based on a specific skill he/she may have as in the West, but is decided more by whether the individual's general knowledge, character, ideological background and health condition are suitable as a family member of the company. Once he joins, he begins by striving to understand the ways of the company to become a full-fledged member of the team. Through lifetime employment, security throughout his life is planned for, and a livelihood is assured by wages based on experience. In addition, the company attempts to provide complete social welfare through facilities such as a single members' dormitories,

company housing, recreational facilities, even courses in flower arrangement, tea ceremony, and so on, just as if treating a member of a true family.⁷

This passage may be said to express the basic tenet of Wa-ism. At its foundation is the philosophy which sees man and man as being inseparable. Through conceding and cooperating with each other, great prosperity is created in peace. The two resources Japan has created in this way, two kinds of stocks that cannot be depleted by use, are information (technology, know-how, etc.) and funds. The mission of Japan in the third millenium is to utilize these resources wisely for the world, by applying Wa-ism. I believe there will be many other countries who will foster this thought following the example of Japan.

In political terms, Wa-ism likewise emphasizes mutual concessions and cooperation. Decisions based on an approval rate of 70 to 80%, if not a general consensus will be preferred, reserving the majority rule as a final resort. Some may say there is no assurance that a decision will always be reached. However, it just may be that some situations are better left undecided.

Rather than an endless struggle of "rights" against "rights," mutual concession and cooperation following the non-dualistic philosophy between oneself and others is attempted. Rather than thinking that people can only be controlled through fear, an order based on mutual respect is the goal.

In the past 200 years, mankind has experimented with the following four combinations of ideologies:

1. Capitalism and liberal democracy--UK, US, etc.
2. Capitalism and totalitarianism--Nazi Germany and pre-war Japan
3. Socialism and liberal democracy--Western social democracies
4. Socialism and totalitarianism--Communist countries

Wa-ism lies between capitalism and socialism, between liberal democracy and totalitarianism, and is a new combination. Wa-ism seeks for international peace. Postwar Japan was an illustration that prosperity is possible without colonial rule or war.

II. Value Systems

A "value" that one has leads to the judgment that "something is good," while a standard that puts things in order of one's priority by comparison, "this is better than the other" is "a value system" or "a set of values." It is difficult to come up with a system consisting of a single clear line of organization. However, there are individuals who have set forth clear values, indicating what has greater value than the other, and have practiced their beliefs. These people had outstanding judgment and reason, and had received revelations as well.

On the grave of Uchimura Kanzo, a Japanese Christian leader, it is written: "I for Japan, Japan for the world, the world for Christ, and all for God." This clearly expresses his set of values. On the banner of Kusunoki Masashige, a classic example of a loyal subject in feudal Japan, were the words, "Injustice, Reason, Law, Power, Heaven:" Injustice cannot win over Reason, Reason cannot exceed Law, the Law cannot exceed Power, and Power cannot exceed Heaven. During this time, Ashikaga Takauji was the lord in power whom he was battling against, and Kusunoki believed that he was fighting for Heaven, which transcended the former.

When Jesus Christ was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he responded, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." He placed obedience toward God above the supernatural power of jumping off of a cliff, and the worship of God above the powers of the world. And yet, at times Jesus refrained from making value judgments. For instance, when asked if it is better to make a donation or to make tax payments, he replies, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's," thus avoiding a direct response.

It is also admirable that the Reverend Sun Myung Moon makes a positive statement as to the importance of money. The majority of religious leaders and scholars may speak as if money in itself were to be despised. However, Reverend Moon says clearly that

knowledge is above wealth, and love is further above knowledge. Then, he says, "Money is necessary to *share* love." This is a statement to be highly appreciated. I am also working daily as the head of a family, but if I could think of myself as working in order to share love, this brings me great comfort indeed.

Marx placed higher value on the proletariat rather than the bourgeoisie, and on material things rather than God or the mind. Rousseau valued the will of the people rather than the king, and natural states rather than institutions created by the government. Voltaire saw more value in reason rather than in priests or the church. Luther valued the Bible over the church. Hitler valued races other than the Jews, and the Arian race in particular. The Mito School in Japan viewed the Emperor as the most sovereign being. The founder of the Nichiren Buddhist sect valued his *Hokekyo* sutras the most, placing the Sun Goddess (*Amaterasu Omikami*) as only one of many gods who were to protect these sutras. Honen, founder of another major Buddhist sect set value on simply chanting the *nenbutsu* sutra rather than ascetic training. Rennyō, yet another Buddhist, believed that a painted image of Buddha had more value than a sculpture of Buddha, and that Buddha's written name had more value than a painted image. The reason why their respective followers believed in these value systems may have been that when they practiced the teachings, good results were obtained and because the teachings somehow matched their thinking as well.

Mr. Taniguchi Masakazu states, "the values of an age when everyone has become compelled to be aware of the earth, are the values of a global civilization" (*Japan Economic Journal*, April 9, 1990). Guidelines on what to do about the environment are being demanded of all businesses today. The single common value shared by all men today, seems to be the recognition of the earth as a living being. We claim that something must be done to care for this live earth. This is a new value which was not considered to be as universal in the past.

In contrast to this, Dr. Albert Einstein's values presented together with Mr. Bertrand Russell during the Cold War period, set prevention of the destruction of humanity as the

highest value. At a time when there was the possibility that all mankind would be annihilated by a nuclear war, this proposal had great appeal. However, its weakness was that if destruction were to be avoided by the world coming under Soviet totalitarianism, its consequences would be to discard human dignity and freedom.

Today, the confusion of values has given rise to various ills, even appearing as phenomena of the last stages of civilization. Po Le Tien, a man of letters of ancient China once sought wisdom from a great sage who lived in a tree. When he asked him "what man should do," the sage advised him of the words which were given by seven sages: "Do not do the various evil deeds, but do the good to the best of your ability." It was so simple that Po Le Tien became angry, "Even a child would know that!" The sage answered, "Indeed, even a child would know this but an aged man has difficulty practicing it." To this the writer had to agree.

Yet, the essential thing is to distinguish between the good and the bad, and if we cannot do this, we cannot practice it. It has become increasingly difficult to distinguish what is good or evil in the present-day world. At school, teachers do not have the authority to clearly define what is good or evil. Because they lack confidence, they merely try to befriend their students. This only confuses the child more. If one has acquired a firm set of values, one should be able to distinguish between good and evil.

There was an article in the April 1990 issue of *Time* magazine entitled "Browning America." As the number of immigrants, Asians, Hispanics, blacks increases, the skin color of the American majority is turning brown. A survey was made on how Americans saw this situation in which the white population would not be the majority in the near future. Most Americans seemed to be of the opinion that since the immigrants came to America, recognizing and seeking American values, things should work out. This brings out an important point, that whether it be a company, a small group, or those with differing abilities, it is easy to work with people who share the same values. On the other hand, it is

difficult to work with those who do not share one's values, even though they may be at similar levels of competence.

The Japanese desire very much that others, including foreigners will recognize the values of Japan. When they meet a foreigner, they ask questions such as whether they like sashimi (raw fish) or not, and if the foreigner replies that he does, there is a tendency for the Japanese to feel at ease, presuming that the foreigner appreciates other Japanese values as well. I believe that the value that Japan seeks for the most is *Wa*. Thus, if a foreigner comes also in search of the same, the Japanese can easily accept him.

When values are lost, this presents a grave problem. For instance, a certain tribe in Africa faced extreme poverty and starvation. This caused them to lose sight of their values as human beings. A son who had seen his ill mother for the first time in two years said, "Give me some food." The sick mother replied, "There is nothing to eat," which became the last of their conversations. Small children of the tribe were skins and bones because of malnutrition. Even their parents did not love them anymore. A parent grabbed food away from a little girl, and she finally died. The aged were scorned. People excreted waste in each other's doorways. They took away food from the mouths of the elderly. As a result of having lost their values from extreme poverty, the tribe was wiped out (from *The Mountain People* by Colin Turnbull).

In America as well, those in the position of instructing others seem to have lost sight of what is good or evil. Attitudes of respect for God or devoting oneself for the betterment of society have become rare. The world appears to be rampant with offensive music, sexual promiscuity, and wasteful extravagance.

The conclusion of cultural anthropologists is that there is a plurality of value systems, and there is no hierarchy in their relationships; all are equal and relative. Although there is an advantage in this way of thinking in that the positions of races which were traditionally thought to be inferior are equally respected, it has led to a diversification of values. In addition, the belief that "God is dead" leaves society in confusion, with no

