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Organizational Changes and Nationalism in the Meiji Era: Critical Evaluation of Eleanor Westney's *Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns to Meiji Japan*

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Abstract

In *Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns to Meiji Japan*, Eleanor Westney analyzes organizational changes in Meiji-era Japan, and concludes that organizational structure reshaped the Japanese tradition. This paper presents detailed criticism of her structural analysis. We argue that these changes were driven by nationalism and the imperial ideology of the Meiji government. Westney's argument is misleading for two reasons. First, she fails to take into account ideological elements which are critical for analyzing organizations in the Meiji period. Second, she does not distinguish central values from peripheral ones. What she calls "changes to traditions" reflect changes only to peripheral values. We further argue that the uniqueness of Meiji-era Japan is the coexistence of two distinct elements: westernization of the social system, and deification of the emperor. These two ingredients correspond to the pragmatic and moral bases of Meiji nationalism.

Key words: nationalism, imperial ideology, Meiji

1. Introduction

The major theme of this paper is organizational changes in Meiji-era Japan. Our conclusion is that these changes were driven by nationalism and the imperial ideology of the Meiji government. Here we define "imperial ideology" as a political and religious ideology based on the emperor system of Japan. Thus, on a purely theoretical basis, imperial ideology is not synonymous with imperialism. In practice, however, these two concepts were interrelated in pre-WWII Japan. Clearly our position is in sharp contrast with the argument put forward by Westney (1987) in *Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns to Meiji Japan*. In a discussion based

strictly on a study of structural changes, Westney concludes that organizational structure reshaped the Japanese tradition, and not, as we contend, the other way around. She considers the police, the postal, and the newspaper systems in Meiji Japan. Because of its close link with the Meiji ideology, we will focus here on the police system.

Our criticism of Westney's argument is twofold. First, she excludes the critical element in the Meiji period, namely nationalism and imperial ideology. Meiji was a period when the entire nation was being united under the slogan of "Rich Nation, Strong Military." The emperor was deified, and was used as a symbolic figure for the purpose of achieving such unification. Every significant social phenomenon in the Meiji period was essentially a reflection of this movement. Westney never acknowledges this ideological element in her analytical scheme. Second, she confuses central and peripheral values in Meiji Japan. She analyzes only the peripheral values and non-essential behavioral changes, referring to them as "changes to traditions," and ignores central values. She then claims that organizational structure determined the resultant traditions. Her argument is misleading because what she terms "traditions" do not really reflect the essential value system in Meiji Japan.

We need, however, to make clear that the accuracy of her data is not an issue. Indeed, the data per se are quite detailed and interesting. The following two problems lie in her methodology and interpretation: 1. she excludes the critical ideological element from her argument; and 2. she mixes up central and peripheral values of the Meiji period. Consequently she reaches the following incorrect conclusions: 1. the culture and tradition do not explain the organizational changes; and 2. the organizational structure reshaped the traditions.

It is well known that nationalism and the emperor system were at the core of any social phenomena in the Meiji period (Tanaka 1977). The nationalism of the Meiji period was embodied in the slogan of "Rich Nation, Strong Military," and was composed of two elements. The first element was "Civilization and Enlightenment." It aimed at the westernization of social systems in order to catch up with the Western Powers in practical, i.e. political and economic, terms. The second element was imperial ideology. It aimed at the deification of the emperor for the purpose of unifying the nation around a shared ideology. The essential characteristic of Meiji nationalism is the coexistence of these practical and ideological elements, the latter of which identified the emperor as the moral foundation of the Japanese nation.

In the remainder of the paper, we will elaborate on the points indicated above. In the next section, we will discuss the significance of nationalism and the ideology of Meiji in more detail. The third section will focus on detailed criticism of Westney's argument. With the data from her own work, we will propose a different analysis which takes into account the role of ideology.

2. Nationalism and Ideology of Meiji

Neither nationalism nor ideology of the Meiji period played a major role in Westney's analysis of organizational changes. Indeed, she does not discuss the significance of the emperor or of National Shintoism in depth. On the one subject in which she comes closest to recognizing the importance of these issues—that of the unequal treaties between Japan and the Western Powers. Westney fails to mention the underlying nationalistic and ideological aspect, and considers these treaties only as a practical political concern.

The nationalistic movement of Meiji was rooted in a sense of crisis. Japan had been exposed to the constant menace of the Western Powers, a situation which had become apparent in the final years of the Tokugawa period. Some Asian nations had already fallen under domination by the Western Powers. For instance, China was defeated by England after the Opium War in 1842. Although Tokugawa Japan had formally closed the door to foreigners, it did maintain minimum contacts with foreign governments. In 1844, the Netherlands officially informed Japan of the result of the Opium War, and warned that the Western Powers would reach Japan sooner or later. Thus, even 24 years before the Meiji Restoration, the threat posed by the Western Powers was common knowledge and of considerable concern among government officials of Tokugawa (Tanaka 1977, 48). In addition to China, England took possession of India in 1858. France conquered Vietnam in 1862, and Cambodia in 1863. Russia established Vladivostok, a seaport facing the Sea of Japan, in 1861. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Eastern Asian region was coming under control from the Western imperial powers, and Japan and Korea were the only countries that maintained a closed door policy.

The sense of crisis was further aggravated by the forced opening of Japan in 1854, and by the subsequent trade treaty with the United States in 1858. This was the first treaty which established extraterritoriality, and was later reaffirmed by the Meiji government. This sense of crisis was combined with a strong sense of resentment, and developed into the movement of nationalism. Its purpose was to unite the entire nation in efforts to achieve parity with the Western Powers. This was the origin of Meiji nationalism, as it came to be expressed in such slogans as “Rich Nation, Strong Military” and “Civilization and Enlightenment.” From a historical perspective, it is evident that no social movement in the Meiji period can be discussed without taking nationalism into account, and organizational changes are no exception.

As we mentioned in the first section, the uniqueness of Meiji is the coexistence of two distinct elements: westernization of the social system, and deification of the emperor. These two elements might seem contradictory at a first glance. The former sounds liberal and progressive

while the latter sounds conservative and regressive. In reality, however, these two ingredients corresponded to the pragmatic and moral bases of Meiji nationalism, respectively. The first element was represented by "Civilization and Enlightenment." In a word, this was the manifestation of an inferiority complex towards Western countries. The goal here was to match the Western Powers in terms of the practical efficacy of the military, police, and legal systems. Organizational changes based on Western models were a means to achieve this goal. These social changes were, however, the outcome of nationalist feelings and therefore subjected to ideological constraints.

The second element represented the ideological aspect, i.e. the deification of the emperor. This imperial ideology achieved its culmination in the form of National Shintoism. The emperor was a symbolic figuring of the moral values around which the nation was to be rallied. We should note that the westernization processes were always subordinate to this ideological constraint. For instance, no matter how westernized the police system, its basic mission remained unchanged, i.e. to serve the emperor as upholders of domestic security (Westney 1987, 89). Organizational changes based on the Western models were introduced only in so far as they did not interfere with the imperial ideology. The central values of the Meiji period were embodied in this ideology, and remained unaffected despite the organizational and structural changes.

We can see how these two ingredients were interrelated in the government's policy to integrate religion and politics. Religion, in this case, means Shintoism. Based on the integration policy, the new Ministry called Kyobu-sho was established in 1872. Its basic objective was to spread the worship of the emperor according to Shintoist principles. However, the mission statements also included such slogans as "Rich Nation, Strong Military," and "Civilization and Enlightenment." These imply that the ideological drives and the westernization processes were intertwined in reality. Equalling the Western Powers was mandatory for ideological reasons as well as for practical ones. It became the moral duty of the Japanese to unite under the symbol of the emperor and to equal the Western countries.

This close relationship between the westernization processes and the imperial ideology was not something that suddenly emerged in Meiji. In fact, we can observe a similar relationship at the last stage of the Tokugawa period. As we described, the inferiority complex and the sense of resentment were expressed in the expulsion of foreign nationals. Such a movement was immediately combined with loyalty to the emperor, and was developed into the major political ideology opposing the Tokugawa government. On a purely logical basis, those advocating the expulsion of foreigners did not have to resort to the emperor. In reality, however, these advocates needed ideological and moral justification for expelling foreigners, and the only moral justification they could invoke was that of the emperor. In other words, they needed to act against the foreign powers in the name of the emperor to save the nation. The situation was basically the same

in the Meiji period except that the resentment was sublimated into the ideal of "Civilization and Enlightenment."

For the aforementioned reasons, it was not a mere coincidence that the deification of the emperor started from the very beginning of Meiji. It was rather a natural outcome of the nationalistic movement. The Meiji government issued a proclamation declaring the sacredness of the emperor as early as in 1869, i.e. the second year of Meiji. Ancient ceremonies were revived to reinforce the sacred image, and new holidays were established based on ancient mythology. In addition, the new shrine system came into effect in 1871. All shrines in Japan, no matter how small, were ranked in relation to the emperor. All other religious sects, Buddhism, Christianity, and various sects of neo-Shintoism, were placed in subordination to National Shintoism. The emperor visited all major regions in 1872, 1876, 1878, 1880, 1881, and 1885. Imperial ideology and National Shintoism were subsequently made the basis of the state with the issuances of the Meiji Constitution in 1890 and the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1891. They both served the goal of establishing the absolute power of the emperor. The Meiji Constitution is remote from our image of a modern constitution. For instance, freedom of religion was acknowledged only in so far as it did not violate the worship of the emperor. The Imperial Rescript was distributed to all schools, and was read at every school ceremony. The sacred image of the emperor was thus forced on the children in the name of education.

When we place the police system in this historical context, its mission was clearly the protection of the nation and its people in order that they might better serve the emperor, and also guidance of the Japanese people in the government's efforts to instill "civilization and enlightenment." The Meiji organization of the police was not a simple Samurai legacy as Westney (1987, 53) claims. It was rather the manifestation of Meiji nationalism, which consisted of a sublimated form of resentment against foreign countries and of moral and religious loyalty to the emperor.

Another important consequence of Meiji nationalism was the invasion of Korea. Resentment against the Western Powers gave rise to feelings of aggression, which was then discharged by being directed against Korea. In psychological terms, we observe a mechanism of displacement at work. That is, Korea was invaded simply because Japan could not find any other scapegoat for the threat it experienced from the Western Powers. As we suggest below, close consideration of this case reveals Japan's emotional frustration at the unequal treaties forced upon it by the Western countries. Korea was the only other Asian country which adopted a closed door policy in the middle of the nineteenth century. The invasion of Korea was launched as late as 1875. The idea of invasion itself, however, was present even at the end of the Tokugawa period. Interestingly, the advocates for the expulsion of foreigners were those who also proposed the strategy of invading Korea.

In the Meiji period, until 1875, political leaders had been constantly debating this issue. Although leaders often disagreed about the details, the invasion itself was not an issue. The question was simply the timing of the attack. The invasion of Korea might have brought political and economic benefit. However, the influence of Meiji nationalism and of the resentment against the Western Powers cannot be ignored. As one historian has asserted, it was the manifestation of Japanese nationalism and the sense of superiority over Korea in combination with the need of national unity in the face of the Western threat (Tanaka 1977, 111-112).

In 1875, Japan attacked Korea to force the opening of the country. In this incident, Japan behaved just as the United States did in the 1850s. The Meiji government sent a fleet of six battleships. In 1876, the Commerce Treaty was promulgated, and Korea was forced to open the country. This treaty was “unequal” in the same sense as were those between Japan and the Western countries. It included extraterritoriality, and excluded tax clauses, which consequently guaranteed no tariff for Japan. In fact, the Japanese government official explicitly acknowledged that Japan was following the American precedent when he stated, “In the negotiations with Korea, Japan will follow Perry’s way of peaceful opening.” In psychological terms, Japan was identifying itself with the aggressor, i.e. the United States, and was doing Korea the same injustice as the United States had done to Japan. Beyond practical and political spheres, the unequal treaties carried profoundly emotional and ideological connotations for Japan.

In short, the macro-social movement in the Meiji period was driven by a nationalistic ideology. The police system was simply one representation of such movement. In its neglect of the ideological aspect, Westney’s analysis of the organizational changes is, to say the least, inappropriate and misleading. Our criticism corresponds to what Donaldson (1985, 9-11) has called the second type of criticism of structural organization theory. Westney’s analysis suffers from “a failure to locate the organization within the social structure of society.” In the next section, we will criticize Westney’s argument in more detail.

3. Criticism of Westney’s Argument

In the previous section, we focused on the significance of nationalism and imperial ideology in the period of Meiji. In this section, we criticize Westney’s argument from the ideological perspective. Westney (1987, 18-19) listed the three goals Japan sought to achieve in emulating Western organizations: military capability, revision of unequal treaties, and transformation of Japan into a more civilized country. While these three were important objectives in the Meiji period, all of them were practical outcomes of the nationalistic ideology. Westney treats these elements only as practical concerns. Consequently her analysis remains in the pragmatic domain, and she

fails to provide insight into the underlying ideology which actually drove these movements.

In addition to the lack of a critical ideological element in her analysis, Westney confused the central and peripheral values of Meiji Japan, and consequently reached the wrong conclusion. In the final chapter of her book, Westney (1987, 219) concludes as follows: "What we see in these three organizations is a reshaping of the Japanese traditions to fit the needs of the organizations rather than a reshaping of the Western models to fit the traditions of Japan." Thus she argues that organizational structure determined Japanese traditions. What Westney calls "traditions" here, however, were only superficial behavior of the Japanese which in turn reflected only peripheral values. Summarized below are some of the changes Westney refers to in her discussion of the police system.

In the case of the *rasotsu*, Tokyo's first Western-style police force, the sword of the samurai was replaced by a wooden baton, drinking sake became prohibited, and wearing uniforms was required. The regulations of the *rasotsu* were later taken over by the *Keishi-cho*. The *Keishi-cho* emulated the broad range of functions performed by the Paris police, including the enforcement of public health regulations, licensing and regulation of prostitutes, supervision of a wide range of commercial activities, and so on. Negative sanctions such as dismissal, demotion, and fines were also modeled on the Paris patterns.

The above behavioral changes in the police system were certainly a consequence of introducing the French model. However, to conclude from these data that organizational structure determined traditions is simply incorrect. These changes were only of superficial nature, and were not related to the central value system of Meiji. As discussed in the previous section, the central values in the period consisted in the imperial ideology which the westernization processes never interfered with. We can explain the consequences in two steps. First, imperial ideology and nationalism drove the westernization processes. Second, westernization brought about changes in the peripheral values. Therefore, changes in the peripheral values were necessary to maintain the central values. Westney did not consider the ideological aspect, and thus missed the first step. She consequently focused only on the second step, and reached the wrong conclusion.

We can see her confusion regarding different levels of values in the following passage: "The role of the Meiji police was varied and complex. They were at one and the same time agents of change and guardians of tradition. . . . The ultimate evaluation of their impact on the society depends very much on the weight and value assigned to these apparently contradictory roles" (Westney 1987, 94). The roles of the police in the Meiji period appeared contradictory precisely because she excluded the ideological aspect and resorted to a structural analysis. These two roles were different aspects of the Meiji ideology. The police were the guardians of the central values, and were also agents of changes influencing peripheral values, which is no contradiction at

all. Westney perceived these two roles as distinct, but such an approach is inappropriate because they both originated in the same ideology.

Westney refers to the fact that the administrative function of the police was moved from the Justice Ministry to the Home Ministry in 1874. She discusses this change mainly from the structural perspective. From her viewpoint, the crucial fact is the formal separation of the judicial and the administrative functions of the police as in France. However, she never discusses why the Home Ministry was created by the Meiji government in 1873 in the first place. The new Ministry involved the consolidation of two critical administrative functions, the police and industrial promotion, and it was another manifestation of Meiji nationalism. The Home Ministry was led by Toshimichi Ohkubo, a political leader of the period whose name Westney never mentions. Ohkubo actually had formulated a plan for establishing the Home Ministry as early as 1868, i.e. the first year of Meiji. After 1875, the budget of the Home Ministry became the largest of all government agencies, exceeding that of the Ministry of Finance. In this sense, the role of the expanded police system was inherently linked with the nationalistic movement.

Westney (1987, 49) also writes as follows: "Kawaji was proposing to move the Police Bureau from the Justice Ministry . . . to a new Home Ministry in which the police would be a more predominant concern and which would broaden the scope of the police well beyond the role designed for them by the justice officials." We need two comments on this passage. First, she does not elaborate on what precisely is meant by "broaden the scope of the police." The scope of the police was broadened in the Home Ministry precisely because the police was one of the two critical administrative functions within the Home Ministry. But why this happened cannot be understood without taking into account the ideological perspective. Second, the transfer of the administrative function of the police to the Home Ministry was not a mere personal preference of Kawaji. The consolidation of the two functions was a part of the overall scheme of the Meiji government to achieve its ideological goals.

As for the issue of professionalization, Westney considers this a matter of organizational strategy. In her view, training intended to achieve professionalization brought in certain features of "Japanese-style management" such as loyalty toward the organization and a personal sense of duty (Westney 1987, 90-91). Thus she argues that the organizational strategy produced these characteristics. However, these elements were inherent in the imperial ideology in the first place. Loyalty toward the organization was ultimately loyalty to the emperor because the purpose of all social organizations was to serve the emperor. Similarly, a personal sense of duty was based on the duty to the emperor because he constituted the moral foundation of the Japanese nation and its people. As we have already suggested, the imperial ideology was present from the very beginning of the Meiji period, i.e. before such organizational strategy was implemented. Consequently the

organizational strategy did not produce the imperial ideology; it was rather, as we are suggesting, the other way around. The imperial ideology impelled such organizational strategy, which in turn resulted in the intended characteristics.

Finally, Westney's illustration of Meiji Constitution is misleading. She asserts that ". . . the government announced its commitment to adopt a constitution and hold elections for a national parliament by the end of the decade. . . . It was a spur to the consolidation of the structures of administration and control, before a popularly elected assembly emerged to claim a role in shaping them" (Westney 1987, 71). In her account, it sounds as if the Meiji Constitution were a step toward modern democracy. This was simply not the case. It remained far from our image of a modern constitution. The Meiji Constitution as promulgated in 1890 was virtually the legalization of the imperial ideology. It established the absolute and sacred position of the emperor in the name of a constitution. Under the Constitution, National Shintoism was instated as the ultimate moral foundation of the Japanese people and nation, and this religious ideology acquired the highest legal justification. From these analyses, it should be now clear that Westney's data are better interpreted when we take the ideological aspect into consideration.

4. Summary

We have shown that organizational changes in the Meiji period were driven by nationalism and imperial ideology. In particular, the police was a tool by which the Meiji government sought to achieve their ideological goals. Thus, Westney's conclusion that organizational structure reshaped Japanese traditions is incorrect. Her analysis is mistaken in two respects. First, she did not take the ideological aspect into consideration. Second, she confused the central and peripheral values of the Meiji government. In this regard, there is some irony to her view that "Specific traditional organizational patterns . . . quickly disappeared wherever they were in conflict with the modern patterns. Traditional values, on the other hand, had much greater generality and flexibility than the specific patterns they had legitimated; they could be framed so as to justify a wide range of structures and behaviors" (Westney 1987, 221). Unfortunately, she failed to recognize the connection among "traditional values," Meiji nationalism, and the imperial ideology.

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