

# Japan's Grand Strategy and Universal Values

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## 1. Defining the National Interest

In a democratic state like Japan, open discussions among free people determine the state's national interest. In defining national interest, two points should be kept in mind.

The first is that a national interest construed too narrowly will not help in pursuing the nation's genuine interest. The dominance by those who forget the public interest and pursue only their own narrow interests is always short-lived. We who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must always keep in mind the common interests of humankind as a whole in defining national interests.

Second, we must not confuse the end with the means. The supreme objective of the state is always the survival and happiness of its people, not the reverse. As Mencius in China once said 2,300 years ago: *"The people are the most important; the statehood comes next; the sovereign is the lightest."*

The national interest is the supreme interest of the state and there are three elements in it. In *The Analects of Confucius*, "adequate armaments," "adequate food" and "trust in Heaven's law" are cited as key to governance. These can be translated into modern terms as security, prosperity and a value system. The essence of the national interest is constant, transcending time and space.

The number one interest of the state is security. Security means physically protecting the nation from external threats. Mencius stated that for a state, life springs forth from difficulties and calamities, and death from ease and pleasure.

A nation that is indifferent to the dangers around it will inevitably perish.

To ensure national security, a strong industrial economy is necessary.

But because of today's time constraint, I will talk about the third element of national interest: values.

So let me move onto the value system, the third element of the national interest.

## 2. Value System

"Value system" is a term indicating a set of beliefs. Beliefs arise from a solidification of individual ethical judgments about good and evil. These judgments spring from one's

conscience. The conscience activates the moral sentiments of deep inner happiness and bitter remorse, innately teaching individuals to distinguish good and evil.

A value system is a set of ideas formulated and polished by moral feelings that well up from the conscience. The value system is a product of the human conscience.

Value systems have been revised and refined over the span of history of individuals, nations and even humanity itself.

Although individual value systems are distinctive and reflect the history of an individual human being, an ethnic group or a nation, the conscience which gives rise to value systems is a universal function of every human being.

Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that there is a basic or core universal value system common to all humankind.

In *The Analects*, Confucius in ancient China cited adequate armaments, adequate food, and trust in good governance as being keys to governance, and when asked which of them could be dispensed with, he said, first, “get rid of armaments,” then, sternly stated since human beings die anyway, “even if I starve to death, trust alone I do not give up.”

For Confucius, trust is the faith that people have in the responsible rule of its ruler, commissioned by Heaven. What is this Heaven’s rule entrusted to the ruler by the people, which the ruler cannot betray? In today’s terms, this is nothing but the value system.

Universal values like human rights and democracy came to Japan from the West and shook the souls of the young Japanese 150 years ago. The famous Japanese Foreign Minister, Munemitsu Mutsu, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century wrote a poem while he was a young revolutionary in jail.

The poem was entitled, “Reading World History.” He wrote: “Peace and wars on the six continents, the rise and fall of nations over three thousand years, there was no just war under Heaven, the strong always ate up the weak, no different from the butchers’ place, but when I came to the chapter about the American revolutionary war, my eyes were opened with joy.”

Unfortunately, after 300 years of peaceful self-isolation, Japan’s early experiences during the heyday of imperialism were bitter. The Japanese at that time immediately lost their trust in the fairness of international society.

In 1873, only 5 years after Meiji Restoration, in Berlin, the Iwakura Mission to Europe was instructed by Bismarck, the “Iron Chancellor,” that the key to international politics was might not law. And, indeed, the young Meiji government was plagued by the unequal treaties imposed by the Western imperial powers, and racial discrimination.

Moreover, what shocked Japan was that many Asian empires and kingdoms with long-sustaining civilisations were conquered, colonised or half-colonised by European imperial powers.

Even China and India were no exceptions. The injustice of the Opium War, in which China was humiliated by the British, sent huge shock waves to pre-modern Japan.

Japan made its debut on the international stage at a time when law and ethics had most regressed, at least from the Asian perspective.

For the leaders of the Meiji government, Westphalian-style European power politics — the ruthless competition of absolute sovereign states must have reminded them of the brutal Muromachi civil war period of the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the rule of the jungle prevailed in a cruel power struggle.

But European countries, meanwhile, were quickly reaching “ethical maturity” in international relations.

In comparison with old Asian civilisations, the Germanic European powers like Great Britain (Anglo-Saxon), France (Franks), and Germany (Franks), which sought global hegemony in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were, in fact, late to bloom as civilisations.

For a thousand years after the fall of the Roman Empire, they had been shut off within a bleak, religious society. Needless to say, compared to the civilisations of India and China which for thousands of years had consistently been held in high esteem in human history, or the dazzling Islamic civilisation that had begun in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, or the civilisations of Japan and the Korean peninsula that had started to flower all at once in the 6<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of the Sui, Tang and Song dynasties of China, or even the Ottoman Turks, who continued to put pressure on Europe for 600 years, the spiritual history of the Germanic Europeans was late to bloom.

Their spiritual leap arose out of the religious Reformation and the Renaissance. The term “Enlightenment” that Europeans often use means rolling back of darkness and opening up to the light. At that time, the Europeans did indeed roll back the darkness.

From this period until Europe achieved worldwide hegemony, it took only 400 years. Europe’s greatest contributions to humankind were (a) developing science and technology on the basis of the natural science that Newton and others nurtured, as well as preparing and achieving the Industrial Revolution; (b) devising democratic political institutions based on Enlightenment thought as represented by John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau; (c) establishing the idea of international law that traces back to Hugo Grotius; and it would probably be fair to add (d) the worldwide free trade system that the United States fully endorsed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Conversely, they also made mistakes. The destruction of the civilisations of Central and South America and the slave-like labour imposed on the indigenous people in silver mines that took place at the beginning of the Age of Exploration; the African slave trade and mono-cultured plantations using slave labour; the colonial rule of countries in Asia and Africa during the period of imperialism; racial prejudice; the two world wars that were fought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century at the cost of tens of millions of lives—these are blots on human history.

The centuries in which Germanic Europe made great leaps in world history were also a period in which they committed great mistakes in their relations with the other civilisations.

Human beings, however, continue to seek ethical perfection based on their conscience. They are endowed with feelings of remorse flowing out of their conscience. Mistakes are always corrected in the long run. Human beings always continue to mature ethically as a whole, as a species.

Slavery was largely abolished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, war was renounced, racial discrimination eliminated and Asian and African colonies all became independent. Political ideas like basic human rights, democracy, peace and peoples' self-determination became part of the international political mainstream in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

At the root of these ideas is the unshakeable belief in human dignity on a global scale that transcends race, ethnicity, nationality and religion.

The values called universal values today had limits when they were limited to, and in fact not adequately applied outside Western nations.

In fact, many Western democracies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the former half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were also great colonial empires. Racism disguised as pseudo-science of social Darwinism was rampant there. In the latter half of the last century, colonialism and racism were put to an end.

After decolonisation, however, many Asian and African nations did not turn to democracy immediately. The path to democracy was not a smooth transition. Some chose communism and some were put under the rule of military juntas. But towards the end of the last century and after the Cold War was ended, they turned to democracy one by one. New democracies are very proud of themselves.

The Twentieth Century was the century of awakening for all Asians and Africans. Western values have become truly universal only since they eventually transcended race, ethnicity, nationality and religion in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this respect, humans will forever remember and honour names like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela and others who fought tirelessly for Western universal values to become truly universal. They were the true heroes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The reason why Japan took the wrong path in the former half of the last century was that it could not wait or indeed precede the ethical maturity of the Eurocentric international society.

Japan did not grasp the newly emerging mainstream paradigm of global liberalism led by the United States that replaced the European imperialism.

Like Germany, Italy, Russia and other late-developing modern states, Japan believed simply that the age of ruthless power struggle and rule of the jungle in which only might counted would continue deeply into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is easy for a bullied child to become a bully because his faith in social justice has been injured. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Japan is a country that believes in universal values and makes the case not for power alone but for justice in international society.

And Japan must become a rule maker that promotes the values it cherishes. Japan today has the resolve to assume leadership and the weighty responsibility in the international community of defining and achieving justice on a global scale based on human conscience.

As I said, a value system reflects the history of a nation and its people, and in that sense has some degree of uniqueness. Yet what gives rise to it is conscience, which is universal. Humanity must therefore share certain core values that are universal.

The Japanese value system, too, undoubtedly contains values that are shared by humanity as a whole. Searching for the universal elements in the Japanese value system is important.

It is important in the sense that the Japanese experience could show many Asian and African countries something important. Many of them still fear that their traditional value systems might conflict with a Western-centred value system. Japanese experience shows that they do share with Westerners some core elements of human values and that there can be a universal value system common to the human race.

This is also the mission of Japan, which suffered the pains of modernisation and westernisation, 150 years earlier than many other Asian and African countries which gained independence after the Second World War.

The success and distress that Japan experienced in the process of modernisation and westernisation can be both a guide and an aspiration for countries like many of those in Asia and Africa who are still going through the modernisation process or democratization process on their own.

### **3. Japan's Value System**

What, then, will the Japanese value system be?

The first of these universal elements of values in Japanese thought is love of humanity; this could just as well be called respect for human dignity. In plain words, this refers to the basic human feeling of loving and caring for others.

This is needed to live together with others and is a moral sentiment that Japanese people have valued. Buddhism teaches love and compassion. Buddha teaches mercy or compassion and prayed for the happiness of all living things. People in Japan learned through the teachings of Buddha to save all without exception. This love of humanity stems from the wisdom of Buddha.

Confucianism, too, teaches a love of humanity. He said that love should be extended from an individual to the family, from the family to one's fellow countrymen, and from one's country to the whole of humanity.

This boundless love for humanity is called "*jin*" in Japanese or "*ren*" in Chinese. Confucius himself said that "*jin*" is love. Confucians value sincerity and compassion. The basis of the teachings of both Buddhism and Confucianism is the awakening of conscience. From there flows out love. And love can be exalted to meaning love of humanity.

In the West, Tolstoy in Russia said that God is love.

Naturally, from the perspective of love for humanity, every individual life is equal. When a human is not treated as a human, the feelings that erupt from conscience change into anger. Righteous indignation is accompanied by action. Actions stemming from righteous anger against abuse of power are called, in the West, "protecting human dignity."

In this regard, Mencius is particularly important. Mencius said that a tyrannical ruler loses the mandate of Heaven and returns to being a lowly man, and for that reason he could be destroyed.

This way of thinking closely resembles the political thought of the European Enlightenment. The essence of politics is no different between East and West.

The second element of universal values in Japanese thought is the rule of law. Power is not absolute. It is not an end; it is a means to ensure survival, a means to make the people happy.

There is a supreme objective beyond power that power serves. That objective is a moral existence, what is called the general will of the people (Rousseau) or the will of Heaven that manifests itself through the will of the people (Mencius).

In Japan, the *Golden Light Sutra*, which was spread all over Japan during the reign of the Emperor Shōmu in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, preaches that disaster will befall an unjust king as Buddha's punishment.

The idea of founding a nation based upon the law of Buddha, and thus protecting the nation in peace, spread along with Buddhist teachings.

This marks the beginning of the rule of law in Japan and is a key event in the history of Japanese political thought. In his late work, *The Precious Key to the Secret Treasury*, high priest Kūkai of the 9<sup>th</sup> century taught that the objective of establishing a state is by no means for the sake of the monarch or his ministers, but to save all the people.

In addition to the above, there is another universal political value that Japan introduced in the Meiji period (1868-1912): democracy. What is important about democracy is not just the concept.

Rather, it is the specific procedures and systems that are important. As Mencius would say, if the voice of the people is the voice of heaven, then how do we systematically and procedurally hear the voice of heaven?

This is only possible through a democratic system. A democratic system is a series of institutions: (a) in the first place there must be a human rights charter which guarantees freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly; (b) then there must be systems such as a legislative assembly, a political multi-party system, free elections and universal suffrage to ensure the people's control of the government and their participation in its policymaking; and finally (c) there must be an independent judiciary that can protect people's rights independently from the arbitrariness of the executive or legislative branch.

If only one of these is missing, democracy will not function. Europeans regarded political power as essentially malign or even evil and they came up with a system for controlling it, based on the lessons of the classics of Greece and Rome.

This was Europe's great contribution to the human history of political thought.

Japan opened its national parliament in 1890, the first one among sovereign states in Asia. And more than 100 years have passed since then.

Since the establishment of the Imperial Diet in 1890, Japan has had the longest history of democracy in Asia. Now parliamentary democracy is spreading all over Asia.

In some countries which newly emerged from developmental dictatorships or former communist states, implementing democracy has been an ongoing process of trial and error. Democracy does not thrive when it is imposed from the outside.

In particular, the countries that had once been subject to European colonial rule have strong feelings of repulsion when advanced industrialised countries overstep the limits of sovereignty and meddle in their domestic affairs, even in the name of protecting human rights.

But when political actors genuinely aspire to realise the dignity of human beings and the rule of law, they will inevitably and eventually seek to introduce a democratic system.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Let me conclude here. History shows its mainstream. It is like a river. It zigzags, but the water flows down in accordance with Earth's gravity. Small rivers gather to make a big river and merge into the sea. National history becomes regional history, and it becomes human history.

We know or must know where we are headed. After the great confusion of thinking and ideology as well as unprecedented bloodshed in the last century, we now know that the international community of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the one in which all mankind should join to shape, regardless of skin colour, religion, civilisation or political beliefs.

Internet technology has connected many people who understand beyond boundaries that without exception, humans value love and care for others, and that nobody is living alone and people can be united against common difficulties, thanks to a universal function shared by all, namely human conscience.

Interests differ from state to state. But the international community is based upon shared universal principles.

All humans are equal. Everybody has the same dignity. Everybody has the right to pursue happiness. Nobody should be compelled to obey. Consent is the basis of changing existing rules. From there, the principles of the United Nations Charter flow out. Free trade is valued. Enhancement of human rights and democracy is right.

Shared values evolve and expand as time goes. Prohibition of wars, settlement of disputes by peaceful means, human rights, self-determination, independence and decolonisation soon became universal values after the Second World War.

Development and protection of the global environment followed as new values.

Now, global health, gender and absolute poverty have become new big agenda. All these challenges can only be tackled with the concertation of nations and peoples on a global scale.

There are retreats and setbacks. The annexation of Crimea, fighting in Ukraine, devastation of Syria, confusion of Libya, massive flows of migrants to Europe from North Africa and Middle East, Brexit, the spread of anti-migration sentiments in Europe, the fatigue of Europeans and

their rejection of further integration, widely spread Muslim youths' despair in North Africa and the Middle East as well as extremism attempting to reset the global systems set by the West.

But they must be seen as tactical retreats. Mankind will never go back to the 19th century when abuse of human rights, slavery, racial discrimination, wars and killings were common practices. History surely makes progress but only in a zigzag way.

Asia is now climbing the ladder of development. In the beginning of the latter half of the last century, Asia suffered from the devastation of the Korean War and the Vietnam War as well as genocide in Cambodia. It is as late as the 1980s that Asia's "four tigers" appeared, namely Singapore, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. ASEAN nations followed. Many of them are now proud democracies. And China took off. Towards the end of the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, West Asia will emerge as a new centre of economic dynamics. India should be the last superpower to rise. Then Africa should follow the path.

In these newly industrialised nations, new middle classes are appearing. Many of these nations are now joining the mainstream club of industrial democracies. Asians believe in the future and they do have hope in it. The gravity of History is moving back to Asia again.

People in these young and dynamic nations are awakening. They are awakening to their pride and to their power. Their aspirations for democracy and to improved living-standards are genuine. Social rights of labourers are claimed. And they will awaken to their responsibility to sustain the actual liberal international order together with the old industrial powers.

The new industrial powers will not replace the old ones to become the new mainstream of History. Rather they will join the old club-members in making the mainstream. Japan has stood up with these new leaders in Asia as well as old friends in Europe and the United States to bear leadership in the region and globally.

Bitter experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century taught it many lessons. Japan has been upholding and will continue to uphold universal values and principles to lead.

Japan will fulfil its regional and global responsibilities in three ways. First, Japan will maintain the region's stability by the alliance with the United States. Cooperation with India, Australia, ASEAN nations and Korea is essential. Europe is an indispensable partner.

Second, Japan will pursue its economic prosperity by further enhancing economic integration in the region and globally. Fair trade rule and practices are the key to achieve it.

Finally, Japan will continue to push the mainstream of History; rule of law, human rights, democracy, free market, free trade and a rule-based international community.

Japan has the will to lead. In this context of international cooperation, and in this context alone, Japan will shine in this century.