
David Richardson

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr

**Recommended Citation**


This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
regards China in comparison with what he observed as fairly normal for the United States and Western Europe, actually applies to much of the rest of the world’s historical experience. Chinese rural social conditions may actually prove to be far more normal for the vast majority of human experience than what evolved in the West! Perhaps Fei’s *Xiangtu Zhongguo* realistically mirrors rural conditions in most other non-Western societies. At least we can thank Professor Fei for his provocative and pioneering work in this area.

Ronald R. Robel


The author acknowledges two great aids to her book, among others. The first is her association with the School of Social Science at Princeton. The second is in her association with fellow professors at Yale University. Her avowed approach is by way of sociology and anthropology. Her book is an history, as well as a sociological study. She writes with great care; for she combines exact statement and excellent rhetoric. Here is an example:

> The fact that the samurai’s honor culture cannot be reduced to a neatly codified formula does not mean that no social code existed. The *living* form of any honor culture always remains in an indeterminate intermediate position between formula and formlessness.(8)

We Westerners may wonder, how can a nation be so successful in industry and business management? For the Japanese encourage collectivist thinking. Doesn’t this mean that Japan devalues individualism and depreciates bold initiative?

Eiko Ikegami approaches this question from a new angle: the cultural development of the Japanese samurai. She writes a history of the samurai’s cultural transformations since the 12th century. This gives her a clear understanding and appreciation of the tensions between individualism and collectivism, from the Heian era to modern Japan. Japanese citizens now look to the Western model of individualism. And we Westerners are extreme individualists. But the samurai’s life, since the 12th century beginning, has been individualistic. The samurai experienced his personal honor in the context of his own integrity. The honorific individualism of the samurai culture was an outstanding Japanese trait. It is,
The Confucian influence in Japan, therefore, is much weaker than in China. Japan is a culture based on ideas of honor and shame, and so, too, is China. But the culture of honor in Japan did not spring from keeping the societal order, as in China. Samurai originally sought their honor in open displays of violence. They experienced shame in this context. There is na (name), haji (shame), menboku (face), chijoku (dishonor), iiji (pride), and sekentei (one's appearance in the world). In sum, China's influence has been pervasive, and the Japanese citizen has, therefore, felt two different desires. The sentiment that seeks honor is aggressive and competitive, and the desire to avoid shame is conformist. (17)

Medieval samurai communities placed a high value on the social autonomy of landed elites. This and other circumstances decentralized the Japanese state. Organized commercial power, moreover, was relatively weak. But the military consolidation of power was vertical. It involved a reconstituted vassal system of the samurai class. Early on, the samurai class had clashed with horizontal political alliances. Traditionally, the emperor and the aristocrats whom he bound to his court were at the top of the power structure. But they did not have nearly the coercive influence of the samurai culture. As for the merchant class, it was politically unorganized. There were no great urban powers; for cities were relatively undeveloped. For these reasons, it was perhaps impossible to suppress the samurai culture with its honorific individualism. The samurai class comprised the samurai (knights), the daimyos (leading samurai: the war lords) and the shoguns (the Japanese rulers). (37)

Such were the conditions around 1600, when the Tokugawa Shogunate assumed rule over Japan. Ikegami's theme is the relation of single samurai to the symbolic community of honor. The author sees this as intimately related to the samurai's intense sense of individuality. Samurai honor "fires the imagination of the modern Japanese." (42) The samurai's passion for independence and individuality still exists symbolically today. Japan still experiences the old samurai's painful efforts to reconcile their individual honor culture with their collective identity.

The samurai were, at first, violent military specialists serving the ruling class. One special mark was a sense of identity as professional warriors. Another was their competitiveness with other social groups to have dominion over agricultural lands.

The samurai entered history in the ninth or tenth century, and thus Japan's dual power structure came into being. The two forces were the new samurai power and the older emperor's court. The duality increased in the time of the Kamakura shogunate in the late twelfth century. The shogunate was a semi-central type of regime, and it gradually strengthened. As for the imperial court, the couriers did not become a class of warriors. Samurai, for their part, did not turn into a court aristocracy. Thus the samurai's power expanded, and the aristocra-
cy's power declined. The shogun was the de facto military leader of the country, and the imperial court could confer legitimacy on the strongest military leader (daimyo) as the recognized ruler.(10)

Beginning with the Kamakura shogunate, the Japanese culture of honor developed into a richly symbolic and normative style. Now, a fully successful samurai was no mere professional soldier, but a landed military lord. And the poorest samurai at the service of a lord participated in the culture of honor. Previously the Japanese court had withdrawn from international competition. For the aggressiveness of the Chinese Sui dynasty (587-617) and the Tang (618-907) drove the emperor to concentrate on the control of local clans.(54) There was a clan honor prior to the rise of the samurai. But the samurai's honor became central to cultural values.

There was another difference. The mid-Heian court culture, between 810 and 1156, resulted from an agrarian lifestyle. Heian aristocrats opposed violence or shedding blood. Nevertheless, "the professional use of violence was endemic to the samurai world-view."(57) And the earliest samurai were violent outsiders to the agricultural world. Later, the samurai became landowners. The Kamakura shogunate, ca 1232, and the successor Muromachi (1378-1573), made codes to moderate the accidental quarrels among the vassals. For the shoguns took care to keep their central authority and power intact.

As samurai landownership expanded, great houses (ie) incorporated bands of samurai under the samurai lord. And the ie were the cradle of the culture of honor. Beginning around 1150, it became customary for samurai who had failed in battle or in comportment to commit seppuku (suicide by disembowelment) in the presence of their lord.(103) Self-willed death was at first the personal decision of individuals. The violence of the seppuku expressed an individualist honor. But in the Tokugawa era, this honorable death became the form of punishment for samurai. The suicidal sword was replaced with a wooden one, or with a fan, and the miscreant was decapitated. The special punishment was appropriate to samurai honor. But, since the execution served the Tokugawa state, rather than the condemned, the latter had to observe decorum. He must not kill himself too violently or too heroically, lest his daimyo punish members of his family, too.(253)

The predominant religion, Buddhism, with its nonviolence, did not confront the violent samurai practices. Instead, the Buddhist funeral rituals and prayers for the dead were attractive to all Japanese. But Japanese feudalism never had the supportive religious power of England, France, and the other European societies. The Buddhist sects never developed a central institution like that of the Catholic Church. Military communities of Buddhist monks existed that could even conduct wars. But the secular community subordinated the sacred in Tokugawa times. Every Buddhist and Shinto sect retained its semiautonomy, but a magistrate of temples and shrines strictly supervised them.(189)
Much earlier, in the late 7th and early 8th centuries, Confucian China enormously influenced Japan. The rulers closely modeled the central bureaucracy and the court aristocracy on the laws and bureaucracy of T'ang China. By using the Chinese model of government, the emperor's government could throttle the power of local wealthy clans. All land officially belonged to the emperor.

The Japanese state sought tax revenues by allowing individuals to hold new land as their personal property. Local wealthy clans and farmers sought to privatize land by reclamation. It is from the reclamation lords, who lived in villages, that the samurai evolved. As for the populace, around 1600, the non-samurai population was demilitarized. In the year 1582, authorities executed 83 farmers, who had fought over irrigation waters. They had disobeyed the edict prohibiting all quarrels and fights. As part of the Tokugawa pacification, the regime saw to village disarmament and the confiscation of weapons. Only samurai could bear arms and be protectors of the non-samurai classes.

The Tokugawa shogunate with its overwhelming military power, nevertheless did not disband the daimyo armies or assimilate them into a central army. The daimyos were required to retain their vassals and to keep their armies. But they could not make war on their own account. And the daimyos owed the shogun a prescribed amount of military duty. Thus the shogun could field an army of 400,000 men.(158) Meanwhile, Japan maintained its isolationist policy.

The daimyos became courtier-vassals. But, at the same time, they could keep a strong control over their own peasantry and land. They suppressed the restive villages and collected taxes. But they did not pay taxes, for the shogun had vast territories whose revenue financed him. The samurai chiefs, the daimyos, could and did strictly control the vassals under them. They “forced vassal samurai to live in their castle towns, and they cut them off from direct control over their land.”(160) Under these conditions, the Tokugawa regime consolidated the country by a vertical reconstruction of the vassalage system on a national scale.(163) It was an integrated and yet decentralized state structure. One might think, incorrectly, that Japan was a loose collection of social groups, in comparison with the modern nation-state. But there was unity. The samurai bureaucracy combined the roles of the aristocracy, the military, and the bureaucracy. Yet, Tokugawa Japan never developed the absolutist state that is familiar in European history. The society preserved the semiautonomous nature of various societies.(184)

Ikegami has a chapter on the Confucian and post-Confucian Samurai. From the beginning of the Tokugawa era, there was no deliberate choice of Neoconfucianism as an official ideology. It was not until the late 17th century that Confucianism replaced Buddhism as the primary force in the Tokugawa intellectual culture. In China, Confucianism went hand in glove with the centralized bureaucracy and with popular morals. But the Japanese did not develop civil service exams based on Confucian doctrine. And Confucianism never dom-
inated the populace and its customs. (300)

In Japan, the Confucian scholars had to deal with an elite leadership, "defined by their collective identity as fighters, rather than as a group of scholars comparable to the Chinese Mandarins." (304) In China, the mandarin elite had to ascend by way of examinations based on Confucian doctrine. But the elite of Tokugawa Japan based their collective identity on military values rather than on scholarship. As a result, Japanese scholars partially transformed Confucian ideals to fit the warrior class. Despite the low status of Japanese Confucian scholars, their learning had advantages. The ambitious scholar had a springboard to obtain employment in a *daimyo* house. The limits of Japanese Confucianism and the low status of the samurai who became scholars allowed for flexibility in intellectual activities, far beyond that of the Chinese mandarins. The shogunate gave support to several Confucian schools and to the various Buddhist sects. There were, moreover, other intellectual movements.

This decentralized pattern of religious and intellectual development may have been instrumental to Japan's quick and flexible response to Western science and civilization in the 19th century. (308)

The Tokugawa samurai's personal attachment involved blind loyalty between vassals and their masters, and this became ingrained in the Japanese culture. The Confucian scholars, however, interpreted loyalty more rationally and even viewed it cosmically. The bureaucrats required loyal obedience to the Tokugawa state, but there was a crucial difference between the Japanese and the Chinese forms of loyalty. The Chinese gave the highest priority to kinship and house loyalty, rather than loyalty to masters or sovereigns. For their part, the Japanese had a system of hierarchical vassalage outside the ties of kinship. And Japan's meritocracy was oriented to the day-to-day ambitions of the Tokugawa samurai hierarchy. (314) It was not until late in the 18th century that the samurai education in classical Chinese texts came. These are the powerful limits on the impact of Confucianism on Japan.

In fact, the Tokugawa Confucian writings "incorporate a stimulus to passionate action and a fervent sense of individuality under a veil of philosophical moralism ... we often discover in the works of these samurai intellectuals a fusion of the warrior spirit and the trained rational capacities of the Confucian scholar." (316)

And, unlike the Chinese, for whom shame is typically a public humiliation, Japanese shame can be profoundly internal. (323)

The Tokugawa Japanese did not have the individualism of Western capitalist societies. They had, instead, an "honorable individualism." This reflects the tension between Japanese conformist ideologies and the counter-cultural element of individualist expressions and actions. The self-possession and the possessive
individualism of the landed elites paralleled their pride in the ownership of land.(352)

The Meiji government abolished the samurai status after the restoration of 1868. Nevertheless, a relatively small group of ex-samurai continued to occupy an overwhelming percentage of official offices and ruling posts. But lower level citizens knew that the door to success was open. Even a peasant’s son could get a name in the world, and this created a surge of effort to advance. The modern Japanese work-ethic probably comes from the ambition of commoners for upward mobility. Japan continued to be an honor-ridden society, and there could be success and honor in the entrepreneur’s marketplace.

I observe that Ikegami, with a few exceptions, confines herself to her sociological and historical analysis of the samurai. She knows that Japan had a very different environment from that of the Chinese people and their emperor with his court and his mandarins. But the author does not discuss the sources of the two worldviews, China’s and Japan’s. Thus her book is a “comparative civilizationist” study only in a limited degree. What she unveils about the governing classes of Japan, their customs, society, politics, and history is most interesting.

David Richardson


Nine authors under the editorship of Professors Tilly and Blockmans consider cities and city systems in nine late medieval societies, and their possible relation to state formation and transformation. Included are North Central Italy; the region including the juncture of the Alps, the Adriatic, and Pannonia; the Ottoman Balkans (but without explicit reference to the peculiarities of Muslim cities); the Roman-German Empire of the late Middle Ages; Scandinavia; Poland; Spain, Portugal; and the Dutch state. France, Russia, England have been intentionally omitted "to avoid the charge of using set examples".

The general goals of the collaboration are set forth in an introductory chapter by Tilly and a summary chapter by Blockmans. Tilly stresses the importance of warfare and its needs as a determinant of the relations between princes and the cities included in their domain, and argues further that in regions of dense urbanization there is a likelihood that merchants will have a major voice in determining the extent and character of warfare, while in regions of thin urbanization this role tends to fall to feudal warlords and landlords. He recog-