



Internationalization in Japanese Bioethics

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2010-08-10 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Morioka, Masahiro メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.24729/00010152

Internationalization in Japanese Bioethics

Masahiro Morioka

* This paper was presented at the UNESCO conference, *Bioethics in Asia*, 3-8, Nov. 1997, Kobe, Japan. Before the presentation I made some important revisions on the paper that had been printed in the official proceedings. The following is what I really talked at that conference.

Since the early 1980s the Japanese have talked a lot about the internationalization of their society. Through the word "internationalization" they have discussed the importance of bilateral communications between Japan and foreign countries, for example, saying that the Japanese should pay great attention to the global situation, and try to make themselves better understood by people overseas. Some went on to say that the Japanese had to learn the "international" ways of thinking and behaving, and Japan become a real member of the global community.

But, here, a difficult problem appeared. Just what are these "international" ways of thinking and behaving. They argued over what the criteria that distinguish the "international" way from the "not-international" way might be, but they did not reach a consensus. Some said that what European and American people were doing was the "international" way, but many doubted it. Some of them said that Japan should be more western, but others emphasized that Japan had to go its own way following its traditional ways of thinking and behaving. This debate still continues even now.

Bioethics was no exception. Modern Japanese bioethics began in the early 1970s¹. The Japanese women's liberation movement started in 1970, and they fought against an anti-abortion movement that was led by the government. In Japan, abortion has been legal since 1948. This feminist movement was the beginning of Japanese bioethics. Japanese bioethics started as feminist bioethics. This is a very important these, but we do not have enough time to discuss it today.

Women's fight against the government has continued from the 1970s into the 1990s. In the 70s, they argued three points, namely, (a) the state should not interfere individual women's sex and reproduction, (b) abortion was a freedom and right of women, (c) we will have to create a new society where women want to give birth of their own will. Their fight was mainly against the Japanese government. They did not necessarily know much about world wide women's liberation movements. (And, of course, western feminism knew nothing about Japanese feminism in the 70s.) Their main attention was focused on raising consciousness

among Japanese women and strengthening solidarity. Japanese feminism itself began in the early 20th century. They have continued a long fight for women's rights throughout this century. The 70s women's lib movement was a contemporary version of this historical Japanese feminism.

Discourse among the pro-choice movement of Japanese feminism underwent a slight but profound change in the early 80s. They started to speak of freedom of abortion under the name of "fundamental human rights" of a woman. In this they were influenced by the world wide feminism movements of the time. In 1975, the first International Women's Conference was held in Mexico; leaders of Japanese feminism took part and brought back information from around the world. They were brought face-to-face with the condition of women in the third world. Some of them were shocked by the fierce debate between women from advanced industrial countries and women of the third world. In 1980 the Treaty for the abolishment of discrimination against women was adopted in Copenhagen. In that treaty women's rights in sexuality and reproduction were confirmed.

Japanese feminism, influenced by these world wide movements, started to assert that a woman's reproduction should be based on the "fundamental human rights" of a woman. For example, a women's lib group, SOSHIREN, said in 1982 that freedom of choice whether to give birth or not should be a "fundamental human right" of a woman. And they emphasized that their movement was linked with contemporary world wide feminism². The Japan Association for family planning asserted the same thing in 1983 and stated that this issue must be discussed and reconsidered based on the contemporary world wide consensus³.

They looked overseas and found in the international standard "fundamental human rights" a strong tool for the development of their movement. This occurred in Japanese feminist bioethics in the early 1980s.

During the same period, Japanese male scholars began to know of the word "bioethics" as medical ethics through American bioethicists. They invited bioethicists from the United States and began exchanges with them. From the mid-80s a fierce debate on brain death and organ transplants boiled up. The Japanese people showed a strong concern about this controversy. Some people said that we had to learn western bioethics and introduce it into Japan. Others said that Japan had a long history of traditional ethics, and hence we had to create a "Japanese" bioethics different from the western one. For example, many people said that the Japanese put great importance on human relationships, rather than human rights, and hence they needed a relationship-based bioethics different from the rights-based one. I have discussed this controversy elsewhere⁴; and will not repeat myself here.

One of the interesting points was the completely different interpretation of the concept "internationalization" held by these two parties. The former, who think the Japanese have to learn western bioethics consider "internationalization" as following the international basic

standard, such as "fundamental human rights," and contributing to world-wide ethical rule-making. On the other hand, the latter, who think the Japanese should go their own way, consider "internationalization" as advocating a local ethical tradition, and by so doing, contributing to global harmony among cultures and religions etc..

Interestingly, those who like to speak of "East Asian bioethics" seem to look at the issue through an "East-West" paradigm, and say that eastern or Asian countries need a new type of bioethics different from the western one. However, looking at western countries closely, one can see there has been a strong reaction against "rights-based bioethics," for example, the pro-life movements in the United States. Ethics of caring may be an example of this. Hence, we should note that "westernization" is not the same as "modernization." Even in western countries there are a many of people who have strong antipathy toward modernization. Similarly, in Japan, there are number of people who have sympathy toward modernization.

Let us define briefly these three concepts, internationalization, modernization, and westernization along with Japanese context. "Internationalization" means that the Japanese become a member of global community and make themselves understood by foreign people. "Modernization" is to escape from a feudalistic society and become "modern." (Of course, the meaning of the word "modern" is ambiguous here.) "Westernization" means that society of a certain country changes into society similar to the western one. These concepts are really complicated, for instance, I wonder if there are any western countries that have been completely modernized.

Let us go back to "internationalization." Japanese bioethics, since 1980s, has tried to internationalize itself, but has continuously been faced with a difficult problem: "at heart what is internationalization." It is not following the United States' standard. For instance, with regard to global environmental problems such as regulation of CO₂ emission, the United States still refuses to accept an proposed "international" standard. In the bioethics field, ethical standards concerning reproductive technologies vary even among European countries.

If we pursue rigorously international standards, the concepts remaining in our hands would be a very few, such as "human dignity," "love," "compassion," and so on. Even "fundamental human rights" can be rejected by certain religious groups in some contexts. Of course the concept of "fundamental human rights" is not almighty, but I believe it must be the basis of bioethics of our age.

Professor Hyakudai Sakamoto, the president of East Asian Association of Bioethics and the president of Japan Association of Bioethics, emphasized that the concept of "fundamental human rights" was born in the West, hence Asian or Japanese bioethics should "deny" this⁵. I do not think so. In another session of this conference a question concerning "Asian values" was raised. If there are Asian values, "fundamental human rights" should be one of them. Japan has a long history, more than hundred years, of struggling for "human rights and

freedom.” We should not forget this.

Everywhere in the world, people who have political power and status sometimes forget the importance of “human rights.” But there are a number of people who are suppressed politically and economically, and the concept of “fundamental human rights” is an important tool for empowering their life. And also should we note that there is profound diversity inside a culture, society, or community. There can be and must be diversity among bioethical ideas in Asia.

Notes:

- 1 Morioka, Masahiro “Nihon ni Okeru Feminizumu Seimeirinri no Keisei Katei (in Japanese)”. *Seimei Rinri*, Vol.5-1, 1995:60-64.
- 2 SOSHIREN *Yusei Hogo Ho Kaiaku to Tatakau tame ni* (In Japanese). 1982:57.
- 3 Nihon Kazoku Keikaku Renmei *Kanashimi o Sabakemasu ka* (In Japanese). 1983:282-287.
- 4 Morioka, Masahiro “Bioethics and Japanese Culture” . *EJAIB* Vol.5, 1995:87-91.
- 5 Hyakudai Sakamoto “Presentation at the annual conference of the Japan Association of Bioethics” Nov.1, 1997 at Tsukuba.