

"The Chrysanthemum and the Knife" - A Book Report

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Abstract

The Chrysanthemum and the Knife is Benedict's successful work in interpreting Japanese cultural forms using the theory of "cultural patterns", and it is also one of the classic works of anthropology. The main contents include the anti-materialistic tendencies of the Japanese people, the hierarchy system, the humane society, the culture of shame and the parenting model of children, which are interrelated and mutually influential, and finally form the contradictory national character of the Japanese. Although there are some shortcomings in this book, it still has high academic value.

Keywords

Anti-materialism; Hierarchy; Friendship; Educational model.

1. The Author's Research Methods and Ideas

"The Chrysanthemum and the Knife" is a classic anthropological work written by the famous American anthropologist Benedict through her high academic accomplishment, coupled with her in-depth analysis of a large number of relevant Japanese materials. The author believes that in order to understand the Japanese people, it is necessary to understand the coercive forces behind the behavior and way of looking at things in the Japanese people, so she proposed the research perspective of "what the Japanese will do, not what we will do when we are in the same situation as them", and then conducted the relevant research from the following methods: 1) face-to-face communication with some Japanese who grew up in Japan and stayed in the United States; 2. Read a large number of existing Western scholarly achievements in Japanese studies and self-revealing written texts written by Japanese; 3. Watch a lot of films created in Japan; 4. Conduct comparative research, on the one hand, to make cultural analogies between Japan and similar cultures, such as some primitive tribes in the Pacific islands, Thailand, China, etc., and on the other hand, to compare cultural differences, such as the cultural differences between the United States and Japan. It was through these methods that the author was able to collect a large amount of information about Japan, even though he had never been to Japan, and from these sources, he was able to conduct a detailed study of Japan. Each time the author makes a point, he will give two or three examples from Japan and other cultures to illustrate it. In the process of analysis, it not only reflects the author's keen insight and profound insight, but also shows that the author draws on some theories of structuralism and psychology, and combines history with reality. This shows that if you want to write good works, you must not only have a certain ability, but also be good at using other theories and disciplines to assist your research.

2. The Main Content of This Book

Many scholars who have studied Japan have found that the Japanese nation is very "contradictory", which the author summarizes as "Japanese people are aggressive and peaceful and courteous; Reluctant and advocating harmony; unruly and polite; stubborn and rigid and judging the situation; obedient and hateful to be at the mercy of others; loyal and treacherous; fearless and timid; Conservative and passionate about new things. In response to these contradictions, the author proposed the title of the book, "Chrysanthemum and Knife", in

which the chrysanthemum is carefully trimmed and maintained with a wire on the one hand, and the sharp knife on the samurai on the other, two conflicting and contradictory things together constitute the dual character of the Japanese people. The author wonders why Japanese people have developed such a character. And why do the Japanese tend to value the spiritual over the material, as mentioned later? Answers to a series of questions, such as why the "emperor" is unshakable in the hearts of the Japanese, constitute the main content of this book. As the author delves deeper step by step, the answers to these questions emerge in front of us little by little.

2.1. "Anti-materialistic" tendencies

The book mentions that the Japanese behaved in the war with an "anti-materialistic" tendency, such as "the slogan in the Japanese army's tactical manual: 'Use our training to counter the enemy's numerical superiority, and our flesh and blood against the enemy's steel.'" 'Ordinary people are very cold in bomb shelters in winter, and the radio will ask everyone to do warm-up exercises, claiming that the gymnastics can not only replace heating equipment, but also replace the lack of food. Even more extreme is the Japanese broadcast's claim that in battle, the spirit can triumph over physical death. These behaviors all exhibit varying degrees of "anti-materialism" tendencies. After research, the author found that this tendency arose because the Japanese believed that through special training, a person's spirit could reach the highest level. The author divides these special cultivation into two categories, one is the cultivation of ability; The other category is more demanding, which the author calls "consummation." For the first type of self-cultivation of personal ability, the book mentions that a Japanese officer trained soldiers, and each Xi exercise would last for 60 hours, with only 10 minutes of rest in between, with the purpose of training soldiers not to sleep. The Japanese believe that this is a kind of spiritual mastery, and that the spiritual will should control the physical body, and the physical body has unlimited potential and can receive any form of training, and they do not care whether the health of the physical body will be compromised. The Japanese theory of "human affection" is also based on the idea that the body must be subordinated to the major events of life, whether the body can withstand it or not, and that a person should sacrifice everything and cultivate himself in order to promote the Japanese spirit. They believe that cultivation is to grind off the "rust on the body" and turn a person into a sharp knife. This kind of cultivation is equivalent to physical cultivation, and it is an extreme cultivation that exercises one's physical endurance. Through this kind of cultivation, one can live a little longer in some difficult environments.

"Perfection" is a higher level of cultivation ability, and there are a series of words in Japanese that describe the spiritual state of "perfection" in self-cultivation, and the author uses the word "selfless" as an example to explain "perfection". The state of "perfection" expressed by "selflessness" refers to "no flaws and no natural perfection" between will and action. Those who have not attained the state of "perfection" will have an insulating barrier between their will and their actions, i.e., "contemplating me" and "disturbing me", and after special training to remove this barrier, the "perfect" person will be completely unaware of what he is doing. This type of training includes meditation, pole-standing (diving into ice water, standing under a waterfall, etc.), and koto (questions, i.e., one question and one answer). It is also possible for an untrained person to have the experience of "selflessness", such as when listening to music and singing and dancing, and a person is intoxicated with it. To put it simply, the state of "selflessness" is a state of forgetting oneself and not feeling oneself. The most extreme way for the Japanese to express this creed is that they highly appreciate people who "live like dead" and believe that those who "live as if they were dead" will attain "fulfillment". A person who becomes completely devoid of his own thoughts and consciousness and lives like a "walking dead" is the highest spiritual state that the Japanese pursue. Through this series of self-cultivation, I finally became a "me without me".

In the author's opinion, it is these self-cultivation that lead to the "anti-materialistic" tendencies of the Japanese. But why do Japanese people cultivate themselves? The author believes that this has something to do with Japan's hierarchical system and humane society. The Japanese hierarchy is deeply ingrained in the hearts of the people, and the people of each class strive to do what they have to do, and their human society forces them to follow the rules, which makes the Japanese people practice a certain degree of self-cultivation. The author believes that Japan, as an island nation, lacks various material resources may also be one of the reasons why they attach importance to spirituality and despise materialism.

2.2. Japan under the hierarchical system

The emperor has an unshakable position in the hearts of the Japanese, and when Japan is defeated and surrendered, they will not see it as the emperor's defeat, but as the wrong command of militarism. No matter what happens, it won't be the emperor's problem. Nothing stings the Japanese more than verbally belittling the emperor or attacking him, and stirs up their fighting spirit. "The emperor is the symbol of the Japanese people, the core of religious life, and the object of supra-religious faith." If the sanctity of the emperor were to be challenged and destroyed, the entire social fabric of Japan would collapse. The exalted status of the emperor was not established until modern times, so why was it so madly worshipped? According to the author, the biggest reason is the Japanese hierarchy.

"The Japanese believe that hierarchy is the basis for building relationships between people, between countries, and between peoples." "To each according to his place, to each his own" is an expression of the hierarchy in which they trust. They believe that as long as they do what they should do and fulfill their duties and obligations, then life will be safe and sound, and even those who are higher than themselves cannot destroy their rights at will, which is a system of "mutual responsibility". They "give legitimacy to hierarchy as a viable social structure" and give it political legitimacy, and "trust in hierarchy is based on the whole idea of the relationship between man and his associates and between the individual and the state", and build the political system on this basis.

In everyday life, Japanese people use etiquette to confirm the difference in rank between each other. This is mainly reflected in the generation, age and gender. First of all, "filial piety" is a direct manifestation of the hierarchical system. Second, primogeniture is inherited and has privileges that are not much different from paternal authority. Finally, girls do not have the same care and education opportunities as their brothers. The hierarchy of the Tokugawa period was further consolidated. The Tokugawa clan had detailed rules on the day-to-day behavior of members of each hereditary estate, and the head of each household was required to post a sign of the status and status of the class at the door. As a class second only to royalty and court nobility, only samurai could have surnames and intermarry with each other. The Japanese sense of hierarchy is also reflected in their views on politics and international relations. Hierarchy is one of the first things the Japanese consider when constructing the world order. They believed that the world was unstable because of the lack of hierarchy, so the Japanese made the establishment of a new world hierarchy their own justification for war. But it is clear that the hierarchy is not popular with other countries, and it is shameful to start a war of aggression against other countries for any reason.

2.3. Grace and affection

"Grace" and "affection" are important reasons for the integration of Japanese society, and most of Japan's social relations are personal or domination and obedience structures, and there is basically no free association between individuals, and the maintenance of this structure mainly comes from the principle of "grace" and "affection". The author argues that the relationship between Japanese rule and obedience, that is, the hierarchical relationship, is constituted by "repaying gratitude." "En" runs through the life of a Japanese person and permeates every

aspect of their life. From the moment they were born, they were already on the road to "repay the favor".

2.3.1. Kindness and reciprocation

When the Japanese say, "I have received someone's favor," they actually mean "I have a lot of obligations to someone," and they call the creditor or the benefactor "benefactor." The highest and greatest of all the "graces" is the "Imperial Grace", and the emperor's kindness is something that everyone must feel and respectfully accept. In addition to the "imperial grace", it also includes the kindness of parents based on the culture of filial piety, as well as special kindness to teachers, superiors, etc. Due to the Xi of following the hierarchy, they have a very high moral awareness of repaying kindness, but they do not like to be casually favored and thus bear the debt of human affection. For Japanese people, it is annoying to accept the kindness of strangers casually. Many expressions of gratitude in Japanese actually express a person's inner anxiety when receiving a favor from someone else, such as, "It's so rare," or "How can this be?" "I'm very sorry" and "I'm honestly afraid" show that their feelings when receiving favors are often full of contradictions. As a result, the debt of grace makes people feel depressed and uncomfortable, and thus resents the favor.

"Repaying kindness" and "gratitude" are completely different categories, "gratitude" is regarded as a kind of debt, but "repaying gratitude" is a kind of proactive behavior, owing favors does not belong to virtue, only repaying kindness belongs to the category of virtue. When a Japanese person does not hesitate to sacrifice his life in return for his kindness, that is when virtue begins. According to the different categories of "kindness", the form of repaying gratitude is also different. There are two categories of "grace", one is continuous and unlimited in terms of repayment and quantity, that is, "obligation" (a person's obligations are divided into two categories: "filial piety" for the kindness of parents and "loyalty" for the emperor's kindness); One is the same amount as the grace received, and there is a specific repayment period, that is, "affection". Sentiment constitutes Japan's humane society and is an important aspect of the study of Japan.

2.3.2. Affection

Affection belongs to one of the ways to repay kindness, and there are two kinds of affection for society and affection for personal reputation. Social sentiments include obligations to the monarch (daimyo, feudal lord, etc.), close relatives, those who bestow favors on them, and non-close relatives (e.g., uncles, aunts, cousins, etc.). When a person is insulted or defeated, he has an obligation to clear his name, such as revenge or revenge, which is a matter of affection for his own reputation.

The author believes that if you don't understand the meaning of affection, you can't understand the way the Japanese behave, and that any action that comes from the heart cannot be called affection, and "reluctance" points out the difference between affection and obligation, which is voluntary and heartfelt, while affection is forced and unwilling. Therefore, the Japanese always say that "affection is the hardest thing to bear." One must repay the favor as if it were a duty. In explaining the rules in the Japanese "realm of affection," the author borrowed the American rules for debt repayment. She argues that there are three similarities between the two rules: (1) the Japanese regard those who disregard their feelings as bankrupt personality, while the Americans regard those who are unable to repay their debts as bankrupt personality; (2) "Reciprocation" should also be treated in the same amount ideologically, that is, the value of the return gift cannot exceed the value of the gift received; (3) When the repayment is postponed, the interest will increase naturally, and the same is true for "repaying the favor".

The preservation of one's reputation is the affection for "reputation", and the author devotes a chapter to describing it. This type of "affection" consists of specific virtues, i.e., "observance of the red tape of the rule of 'to each his own place, to each his own business,' and to endure

suffering, in order to maintain one's reputation in one's profession and skill." When a person's reputation is damaged, he can take revenge, as long as the act is a compliance with "affection" and the preservation of reputation, it cannot be regarded as a violation. If a person sacrifices his family, property, or even his or her life to protect his reputation, he or she is considered to be a person of high moral character, which means that the preservation of reputation becomes part of morality. This kind of virtue also includes calmness, restraint, etc., a mature and steady Japanese must know how to be tenacious and self-restraint, such as being a samurai, you must be able to endure hardships and stand hard work, even if you are dying of hunger, you must pretend that you have just finished eating. All professional responsibilities and the "affection" of the professional reputation of the worker are also very strict, such as the reputation of the teacher does not allow them to say that they do not know the student. Because of this emphasis on personal honor, Japanese people feel deeply humiliated when they hear criticism and ridicule from others, which is the "shame culture" contained in the Japanese personality.

2.3.3. Culture of shame

The "culture of shame" is an aspect of the Japanese national character. The so-called "shame" refers to whether an individual's position and behavior in society, and the consequences of his actions are ridiculed and insulted in the eyes of others. If society and others reject and ridicule him, then he will feel shamed, and he will be cast a shadow psychologically, and everything he will do will be sentenced to "death". The "shame culture" of the Japanese is very different from the "guilt culture" of the Westerners. "A society that advocates the establishment of an absolute standard of morality and the development of human conscience on its basis can be defined as a 'culture of guilt'". People can be freed from the shackles of their hearts by prayer, confession, and repentance through atonement. The "culture of shame" is "a true culture of shame that relies on external coercive force to do good deeds", and Japanese people do not have the Xi of confessing and admitting that they are wrong. If his actions are contrary to moral standards but are not known to the rest of society, then he does not have a sense of "shame" and therefore does not think that he is at fault, which is one of the main reasons for the contradictions in the Japanese national character. Another important reason for the formation of their contradictory personality is their children's education model.

2.4. Children's education

There is a discontinuity in the Japanese model of child-rearing, and this discontinuity creates a duality in the Japanese personality. The author likens the life curve of the Japanese to a shallow U-shaped curve, in which the Japanese are extraordinarily tolerant and have greater freedom in their infancy and old age, but their prime of life is full of these restrictions. That is, as they get older, various restrictions come with it. This growing trend has created discontinuities in the upbringing of children in Japan. Childhood and old age are a "relatively free territory" for the life of a Japanese person. But when a boy is 10 years old, he or she must begin to learn Xi "faith in the name" Xi and some corresponding rules, that is, "under what circumstances you can attack the other person directly, and under what circumstances you can use indirect means to wash away the stigma." "In the case of girls, girls must comply with a variety of constraints and conditions, and this obligation requires them to take it upon themselves to do so, and it should not be compelled by their parents to do so. What the girls suffer is a kind of hidden constraint that is not very harsh, through a calm and firm expectation, that is, a kind of non-authoritative pressure. But in general, when Japanese children are able to understand people's language, they are taught to respect others and to bow when they meet and bow, especially to their fathers.

The Japanese have admonishment, mockery, diversion and Xi methods for children's education, among which the mocking method is more interesting, such as the mother will say to the child: "You are not as good as your father, I don't love you, I only love your father." This is just a joke,

but it will be taken seriously in the child's heart, even if the mother will say that it is just a joke later, it will not erase the impact of these words on the child. This experience played a great role in cultivating the fear of ridicule and contempt among Japanese people, and also had a certain influence on the formation of their "shame culture". The author believes that the contradictions described by Westerners about the Japanese can be found in their children's education.

3. Conclusion

Benedict's keen and profound analysis of the collected materials and the use of easy-to-understand words portrayed the spiritual and cultural outlook of the Japanese people as a whole, reflecting her high academic accomplishment, and also providing us with a very good book for understanding the Japanese. However, due to some subjective and objective reasons, this book still has shortcomings. Overall, this book is a must-read and should be read for Xi of anthropology, and it is also a good read for those who are interested in Japanese culture in other majors.

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