

Individual Corruption under the Bushido of Modern Japanese Militarism

-- Taking The Diary of Azuma Shiro as an Example

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Abstract. In The Diary of Azuma Shiro, we can clearly see the process of a modern Japanese's individual consciousness being squeezed under the Bushido of fierce nationalism and militarism, and the individual finally fall into corruption. Militarism Bushido provided a cultural and moral basis for the corruption of modern Japanese. In addition, Japanese national character, cultural pattern, and nationalism also provide a basis for the process of individual corruption.

Keywords: Militarism; Bushido; The Diary of Azuma Shiro; Japanese national character.

1. Introduction

Corruption is Heidegger's existentialism meaning, which suggests a way of existence of being thrown into ordinary people. Heidegger believes that every human being is in daily co-existence, and daily co-existence is controlled by ordinary people, who do not have a subjective nature and are relieved of their responsibilities. For example, "when a Japanese apologized for the aggression of China, the Chinese often said that It was the Japanese government's fault, not the Japanese people's. This is also a typical phenomenon of replacing the human being him/herself and removing individual responsibility". "Bushido is some customs, conventions, and routines formed by feudal warriors in their war life and daily life, and developed from the practical needs of warriors". After the Meiji Restoration, part of Bushido was artificially extracted to rebuild militaristic services. Under this behavior, a Bushido with new connotations and modern significance can be called militaristic Bushido, which has caused a great squeeze on Japanese nationals. However, the Japanese people gave up their individual consciousness under the militaristic Bushido and devoted themselves to militarism fanaticism, that is, the alienation of the individual to sink.

This situation is closely related to Bushido, a Japanese tradition. In the article Bushido and Japanese Militarism written by Yang Shaoxian in the 1990s, Bushido was regarded as the ideological origin, spiritual pillar, and the evil root of denying the crime of militarism. In recent years, the research on Bushido tends to be diversified and rational. The author has noticed that most of the academic discussions on the process of Bushido's influence on militarism are carried out from a macro perspective. The deconstruction and analysis of individual psychology in The Diary of Azuma Shiro can lead the analysis to a more microscopic level. The Diary of Azuma Shiro records what Azuma Shiro, one of the Japanese invaders, saw and heard when he joined the army from August 16th, 1937 to September and October 1938. This text has authenticity, integrity, and unique advantages as a personal diary to reveal individual thoughts. Based on The Diary of Azuma Shiro, this paper will analyze the process of individual corruption under the Bushido of modern Japanese militarism, and try to explore how the national individuals under the Bushido of modern Japanese militarism accepted this kind of values and the participation of nationalism in it.

2. Individual Corruption under the Bushido of Militarism in The Diary of Azuma Shiro

The Diary of Azuma Shiro provides an effective way to peek into the experiences of individual subjects and history from the perspective of individual choice and trend. Azuma Shiro was an ordinary

Japanese soldier during the war of aggression against China. His 13-year military career from soldier to sergeant can be considered as an experience of the whole process of total war. In *The Diary of Azuma Shiro*, we can find that individual corruption under the Bushido of militarism can be roughly divided into three stages:

First of all, nationalism has largely overwhelmed individual consciousness. “Nationalism is usually used to express a kind of consciousness among members of ethnic groups or a state that enhances the strength, freedom and wealth of a nation”. However, in Japan, this state is not normal, especially in Japan during the Showa period. The ideological power of nationalism is enough to overwhelm any individual except the emperor. In *The Diary of Azuma Shiro*, “the living people want to survive. Isn’t it human nature for the living to survive? But being a Japanese cannot take timid actions for this reason”. This sentence reflected a general sense of belonging and consciousness among Japanese people at that time, which was even considered as the supreme position in their lives. For the sake of the nation or motherland, they had to do everything and be fearless in everything they encountered. “As long as he defies Japan, we must let him bleed and fight him!” Under this kind of consciousness, all aspects of life are inseparable from the motherland, and the consciousness of being an individual is completely overwhelmed by extreme nationalism. As a traditional morality and a national morality recognized by the emperor, the militaristic Bushido has become a force of collective unconsciousness or social unconsciousness and has entered the individual spiritual world without any hindrance.

However, how did this militaristic Bushido squeeze the individual internal consciousness? First, the external public opinion squeezes the individual, especially the militaristic Bushido consciousness squeezes the individual in the family. In the beginning of his diary, Azuma Shiro mentioned a person who had a great impact on him—his mother. On the occasion of parting from her family, what his mother said was not “come back alive” but “if you are unfortunately caught by Chinese soldiers, you just break your belly and commit suicide!” And his mother’s words have caused a great touch on Azuma Shiro’s soul. So, “I swear firmly in my heart-- I will gladly die!” The biggest feature of the Japanese “the Yuan-jen” society lies in its emphasis on relationships. As the most basic unit of social relations, the family is of great significance in Japanese society. The squeezing of individuals by wider public opinion also exists. For example, when Azuma Shiro was unable to go to the frontline because of illness, he felt that “there is nothing more painful for a soldier who can feel shameful than being seen as a coward on the battlefield.” Another example is the report titled “Nan Gong is still alive today” depicted in *The Diary of Azuma Shiro*, which publicizes the fact that Azuma Shiro’s mother gave him a dagger to persuade him to commit suicide when he was defeated.

It is clear that the public opinion at that time conveyed to the people the idea that defeat was shameful and glory was greater than life. Second, the content of Bushido in military countries squeezes individuals. Specifically, it includes “death madness”, “loyalty to the emperor and the motherland” and “national superiority theory”. In Azuma Shiro’s thought, he mentioned that the two elements of Bushido were sacrificing spirit and despising life. These two points are essentially the spirit of “death madness” emphasized by Yamamoto in *Hagakure*. Yamamoto emphasized that people should practice making “death always lives in this body” In fact, we can also see Azuma Shiro’s training of his self-thinking many times. “Japan, the motherland, has the right to live and the obligation to survive. It is her sacrifice and a valuable sacrifice”. This kind of thinking is enough to see that social unconsciousness as a loyalty concept, has a conflict with individual consciousness. And national superiority has become a necessary condition for the sergeant to kill the Chinese without mercy. *The Diary of Azuma Shiro* also called the Chinese dirty Chinese and a group of dogs many times. This idea of national hierarchy and national superiority also became an important reason for Japan’s wanton killing during its invasion of China in World War II. The third aspect is the catalysis of militarism Bushido in the situation of life and death and great pain. “There is persistence in life at the root of resistance and struggle, and when this persistence is most strongly manifested in objective reality, the most prominent attitude in this persistence is the total negation of life”. When Azuma Shiro was first shocked by the cruelty of the battlefield and the lying bodies everywhere, he cried in

his heart, “I don’t want to die! I do not want to die!” But this kind of sorrow did not last long. “First, I convinced myself that soldiers should return to wildness”. When I saw the bodies of our troops being buried and accepted the turn-over of the army monks, I even said that “it’s not worth dying for”. It is precise because I am too afraid of death, that is, the loss of life, but I have no choice but to go in the ideological direction of denying life. In essence, this is the ideological path of inheriting the Buddhist elements in Bushido to eliminate pain, that is, thinking that all pain comes from being and constantly training oneself to the situation of not being.

In the end, individual citizens like Azuma Shiro fall into corruption under the choice of resistance to militaristic Bushido, noble outlook, and mediocrity. “The evil of mediocrity” is a philosophical concept used by American Hannah Arendt when discussing Adolf Eichmann, a war criminal who killed countless Jews. “The evil of mediocrity” emphasizes “eliminating one’s own thoughts”, and the thoughts of modern Japanese people emphasize “forcing the internal and external consciousness to be consistent”. Although there are differences between the two, they are all reflected in the submission of individual consciousness and internal consciousness to the external. The high expansion of nationalism and the oppression of internal consciousness by militarism Bushido were infinitely magnified in Showa, a unique historical period. When this kind of oppression is excessive, or the resistance of inner consciousness is greatly shaken in some way, it will still cause a strong struggle in the hearts of Japanese people. This resistance will be extremely strong due to long-term oppression. However, after the end of the resistance, it was incredibly quick to be “mindful and relieved”. As if with inertia, Japanese people generally chose to give up the struggle and slide into mediocrity. When the leader was about to execute sixteen obedient Chinese workers for fear that there was an enemy among them, especially when the leader was going to kill an old man who reminded Azuma Shiro of his father, “Azuma Shiro shouted: Don’t kill this old man”. However, no matter how strong these revolts were in the heart, and what kind of storms were caused, they would soon be relieved and observed later. Instead of realizing the impulse to save lives, he reflected on his own “benevolence of Song Xianggong”. As a result, he slipped into mediocrity, merged into the fanatical collective, and became a machine for executing orders. Later in the war, Azuma Shiro had clearly told himself that “killing people is not a crime, but loyalty to the motherland”.

As an individual representative of an ordinary Japanese soldier, Azuma Shiro’s corruption process reflects the influence of militarism Bushido on the people at that time, especially the sergeant.

3. The Reconstruction Movement of Bushido and the Emergence of Militaristic Bushido

When we ask how individual corruption actually happened, we need to understand how the militaristic Bushido came into being and why it can have such a huge impact on the national individual.

Since the Meiji Restoration, Bushido has experienced an unprecedented and grand reconstruction movement, the essence of which is the production distortion movement of cultural nationalism. In modern Japan, it was greatly impacted by the western countries’ detaining customs, the black ship incident, and the signing of the Kanagawa Treaty, etc., and it was also in the process of the Meiji Restoration’s certain achievements and the further development of the Japanese superiority. Bushido tradition is reconstructed in the fields of politics, military affairs, academic research, education, and individuals.

First of all, the application subject of Bushido has been expanded. In this respect, the application subject of Bushido has gone through a process from samurai class to soldiers and then to all citizens. Before the Meiji Restoration, the application of Bushido was confined to the Bushido class. Since the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government has completely abolished the feudal samurai system by such measures as returning the books and scrapping the knives. Subsequently, the Military Commandments published in the name of the Emperor fixed this modern Japanese military spirit with the traditional Bushido as its basic ideological resource.

By 1890, when the Emperor published Imperial Rescript on Education, the popularization of modern Bushido was completed. Imperial Rescript on Education's aim is to instill militaristic thoughts into young people to serve the country's militaristic national policy. Bushido, published by Nitobe Inazo in 1899, pushed the worship of Bushido of all the people to a new peak. In Azuma Shiro's time, Bushido had completely got rid of the restriction of class and group and became a worthy morality of the whole nation. So much so that Azuma Shiro clearly told himself that "Bushido is the Japanese spirit. However, Bushido is dead, that is, the Japanese spirit is dead". Even women have the morality of "the mother of militarism" centered on the requirement of maintaining militaristic Bushido. In addition to the fact that the mother sent her son a knife to commit suicide, The Diary of Azuma Shiro also depicts the popularity of the Rizhiwan March with the theme of the mother sending her son to war at that time.

Secondly, the loyalty concept in Bushido has been recreated. From its birth until the end of the shogunate period, it has always been a multi-agent loyalty view. During the shogunate period, long peaceful years, and intergenerational evolution, this kind of sincerity has completed its loyalty to a single monarch, namely the shogunate, and even to principle (Maruyama). Up to modern times, under the crisis of several times of closing customs by the western powers and the extreme disappointment of the shogunate, the Mizuno thinkers, represented by Yoshida Shoin, discovered traditional myths such as the Records of Japan and the elements of "respecting the emperor" and "Japan's superiority" in the thinkers' thoughts such as Yamaga Sokou, which formed the "respecting the emperor Bushido". After the Meiji Restoration, the idea of "respecting the emperor" gradually developed and became "the tradition of Bushido", just as Tetsujiro Inoue, as an imperial thinker, repeatedly emphasized that "the moral purpose of Bushido is to be sincerely loyal to the emperor". In Azuma Shiro's time, this thought has been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people and regarded as truth. For example, Azuma Shiro often sang the lyrics "Sleeping warrior of the sunrise country! Life and death must be a shield to protect our emperor". Not only that, the emperor, as a national system, this consciousness is more directly reflected in his loyalty to the country. "We should throw caution to the wind and dedicate everything and even our lives to our dear motherland".

More importantly, the specific content and structure of Bushido have also been recreated. It mainly shows the characteristics of loyalty and death from complexity to simplicity. At first, Bushido was just a "bow-and-horse way" produced in the middle of the war in response to the war and the relationship with the monarch. By the Tokugawa period, the morality of Bushido was abstracted, interpreted, and transformed by combining with Confucianism and other cultures, and became a complicated theoretical system. For example, the thinker Yamaga Sokou's "Male Way" is explained in his Sokou's Discourse, which includes four major items and many specific moral items: "establishing the foundation, knowing the mind, being careful about dignity and daily use". However, the more complicated the system is, the more difficult it is to generalize and have full effect. In the Military Order of 1882, the military spirit was explained as "loyalty, proper etiquette, military courage and essential essence", while loyalty was emphasized, and the more complicated moral principles other than the five articles were diluted to enhance its effect. When Imperial Rescript on Education was promulgated in 1890, although it also mentioned the moral goals of "filial piety to parents and harmony with friends and brothers", it paid special attention to "restraining loyalty and filial piety" and "bravery". In addition, as the tradition of Bushido, "death madness" has always been emphasized, but in fact, the book Hagakure has been listed as a forbidden book and a fantastic book in a long historical period, which shows the unconventional and unusual nature of its thought that is difficult to be accepted by ordinary warriors. However, this book was praised as a tradition during the total war period, which can be said to be a vivid testimony of Bushido's "reconstruction movement". Azuma Shiro's view of Bushido on the battlefield represents the general understanding of Bushido by soldiers at that time: "The two elements of Bushido are: sacrificing spirit and the contempt for life". It is this simplistic and over-emphasized understanding that makes militaristic Bushido an important basis with strong vitality and effectiveness and makes Japanese soldiers deeply remember

and even die for it. Azuma Shiro always reflected on the day's battle before going to bed. "I rushed to the front. When I think of this, I feel a sense of superiority".

In a word, Bushido completed the reconstruction movement in modern times. Although this reconstruction movement was led by the emperor, the military department, and some imperial thinkers, it was widely participated by academia and the public. As a modern product, it has entered the hearts of the people with a traditional status and style, which has reduced the rejection as a foreign object. In The Dairy of Azuma Shiro, we can clearly see that a new modern militarism Bushido has penetrated into the hearts of Japanese people in a traditional way, which has exerted an important influence on Japanese people and finally became the cultural and moral basis for corruption.

4. The Cultural Pattern of Multi-layer Separation and the National Characteristics of Relief and Truth

How did the individual citizens under the militaristic Bushido accept it so quickly and go straight to corruption? Apart from the militaristic Bushido, there are other factors that cannot be ignored, that is, the basis provided by Japanese national character, cultural pattern, and nationalism.

During the period of Total War recorded in The Diary of Azuma Shiro, due to the interference of extreme nationalism, Japanese society actually showed a state where the distance between the individual and the state became extremely narrow, and the oppression of the individual by the will of the state was infinitely magnified. We need to understand this by comparing the social state of Japan in peacetime with that of the Total War period. Japan's society in peacetime has the characteristics of multi-layer separation just like its cultural pattern. In terms of cultural patterns, Japanese culture rarely conflicts with other cultures and accepts other cultures quickly, which is due to its unique cultural patterns. There have always been many cultural explanations in Japanese academic circles at home and abroad to explain its national character and cultural pattern, such as Maruyama's prototype theory, which holds that Japanese culture originally has a prototype.

In this prototype and the process of accepting new ideas, old ideas and new ideas can coexist peacefully in a space at intervals. For example, Benedict found that during the overthrow of Tokugawa era and the Meiji Restoration by the lower samurai and merchants, they absorbed western theories and advanced production methods, but "never regarded their task as an ideological revolution, but as a career". From the perspective of social relations, the difference between "tatemae" and "honnen" in Japanese deeply reflects this point. Japanese society emphasizes "carefully weighing up a person's words and closely watching his expression", and skillfully switches "tatemae" and "honnen" on appropriate occasions, but it does not require "tatemae" to force the "honnen" to be oppressed, and the "honnen" can be kept at the conscious level. This method can not only make the Japanese make correct actions to adapt to the occasion, but also effectively alleviate their inner anxiety in the face of changing external environment.

It can be said that it is common sense and a basic ability in Japanese society. However, this social relationship has been greatly changed in Azuma Shiro Diary. "The alive people want to survive. Isn't it human nature for the alive to survive? But being a Japanese cannot take timid actions for this reason". Azuma Shiro's thinking in this paragraph overwhelmed his consciousness as a Japanese and forced him to change his consciousness as a human. It is not that the difference between "honnen" and "tatemae" skillfully used by the Japanese is enough to reflect the ambiguity of nationalism on the gap between the individual and the state in this period, which makes the militaristic Bushido smoothly enter the individual heart and form strong oppression.

On the other hand, although the social environment has changed, the characteristics of Japanese national character, which tend to be "relieved and conscientious", have always played a role, and even produced a strong phenomenon in this special social situation. "Decisiveness, thinness, and forgetfulness are Japanese virtues". Watsuji Tetsuro noticed this kind of advocating struggle of the Japanese and praised the characteristics of "relief and insight" quickly after the struggle. Although it is hard to convince people to explain this characteristic of Japanese people from the perspective of

terroir, it can be well explained from the perspective of multi-layer separation in terms of cultural acceptance and social relations. This multi-layer structure is essentially an activity of squeezing the inner, although it is not direct. When internal resistance or external oppression exceeds a certain limit, the conflict will break out. This tendency of being relieved and observing truth is well reflected in *The Diary of Azuma Shiro*. Azuma Shiro often thought about life and death, fate, war, and evil in the early stage of the war. I felt sad and frightened when I saw corpses everywhere on the battlefield, and I also saw the old people being mutilated and shouting “No”.

When such resistance is strong in his heart, it is like a storm. However, these emotions, no matter how strongly they come, soon become the evil of mediocrity that forces them to integrate into this kind of war values after resistance and defeat. This makes Azuma Shiro himself sigh, “This is who we are today. We became murderers and arsonists”. “But gradually, I cannot say what’s wrong. When I saw another soldier, Nishimoto, killing a Chinese with sacks and gasoline”, Azuma Shiro wrote, “such a thing is no sin on the battlefield”. “Faith is actually like monosodium glutamate”, the meaning behind the metaphor of Azuma Shiro is thought-provoking. In fact, he did not unconsciously accept this militaristic Bushido, but took the initiative to use it as a tool for inner balance. We cannot ignore the initiative participation in the process of reaching this balance. At that time, Japanese nationals, especially non-commissioned officers, did not sink under the influence of social unconsciousness without any awareness, but actively chose to sink under relief and observation.

The multi-layered separation of cultural acceptance and social relations reflected in this Japanese cultural pattern, and the participation of nationalism and the national characteristics of relief and truth in the process of Japanese people’s rapid and overall fanaticism under the influence of militarism Bushido in the Showa period are hard to ignore.

5. Conclusion

The *Diary of Azuma Shiro* profoundly reflects the process of an ordinary Japanese’s corruption under the Bushido of militarism. A person who is kind at home and even full of reflective spirit may be overwhelmed by militarism and become a devil. Besides the evil of human nature, we should also see the historical reasons for the excessive expansion of nationalism during the period of the Bushido Reconstruction Movement and Total War, as well as the basis provided by unique cultural patterns and national character. Militarism is more likely to resurface anywhere. The *Diary of Azuma Shiro* reveals the process of ordinary citizens’ corruption under the militaristic Bushido, telling us the relativity of morality and the complexity of human nature all the time. Personally, it is particularly important to always embrace the spirit of reflection and unwillingness to sink. As far as the country and society are concerned, “taking the helm” and maintaining a good social and moral atmosphere are the key points. These warnings are the most precious wealth left by history for mankind.

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