Individual and Society in Japan and Western Europe

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More than one hundred years has passed since the Meiji Revolution, and the person-to-person relationship in Japan appear to have been modernized. At the level of daily life, however, the Japanese still have traditional, sometimes incantational relationships with others. Examples of these are seen in senior-and-junior relationships, group consciousness, and parent-child relationships. Such a strong tie between an individual and society often cannot be understood by Western people.

This paper aims to clarify the deep ties between an individual and society that the modern-day Japanese unconsciously possess, from the viewpoint of history. First of all, it deals with the problem of what responsibility an individual should bear for what he or she does in the relationship between the individual and society in the modern Japan. Then, it aims to survey the historical background of the relationship in the processes of the formation and dissolution of divine judgement.

Divine judgement, which can be observed as early as in the Nihon-Shoki (the old chronicles of Japan 8th century), was used until the 17th century as a means of clearing suspicion. Bidding dates back to as early as trial by ordeal and trial by hot water. While trial by ordeal and trial by hot water had disappeared in the 17th century, bidding remained until the 19th century. It also remains today in the form of lot drawing, though the level is somewhat different. The great significance of society (Seiken) in relationships between modern Japanese people can be seen in the fact that the article on the loss of pledge (13th century) still partly remains today. In Japan, the concept behind divine judgement continues down to today without a definitive rupture.

In Europe, on the other hand, divine judgements such as trial by ordeal and trial by hot water also existed in the past, but they began to disappear completely after the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Opinion is divided between P. Brown, and R. Bartlett and others on the extinction of divine judgement, but they all agree on the separation of the sacred and the secular, and they suppose a close relationship between the obligation of confession and the extinction of divine judgement. The process of establishment of the individual (the personal character) together with the obligation of
confession in the 13th century is described elsewhere. This paper aims to clarify the establishment of a distinction between a sin and a crime, and the penetration of rational elements into human relationships.