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Ichiro Horide

The Mercantile Ethical Tradition in Edo Period Japan

A Comparative Analysis with Bushido

 Springer

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*For my late, beloved wife, Atsuko, in
gratitude for her constant, loving assistance
and support for this project*

Preface

This book is the result of an encounter with the name “Suzuki Shosan” in Ronnie Lessem’s 1991 work, *Developmental Management: Principles of Holistic Business*. I am ashamed to say that I had neither heard nor read about Shosan Suzuki at that time. Checking the references, I found that Lessem quoted from Shichihei Yamamoto’s 1979 work: *Nihon Shihonshugi no Seishin (The Spirit of Japanese Capitalism)*. Reading intensively through the *Suzuki Shosan Zenshu (Complete Works of Shosan Suzuki)*, I recognized that Shosan Suzuki was a pioneer who advocated Japanese occupational ethics, saying that working hard to benefit those living in the world is precisely a Buddhist practice itself. Hajime Nakamura, a noted Japanese scholar of Indian philosophy, writes: “Thus, in the history of Japanese Buddhism, the development of occupational ethics on a large scale, and the emphasis that one’s secular occupational life is itself Buddhist practice, likely originates with Shosan Suzuki” (Nakamura 1949, *Kinsei Nihon ni okeru hihanteki seishin no ichi kosatsu (A discussion on the critical spirit in early modern Japan)*, in “Gendai Bukkyo Meicho Zenshu (Complete Works of Great Books of Buddhism)” Ryubunkan, p. 309). Shosan Suzuki’s professional ethics inspired my research interest. Eventually, I was motivated to make further, deep investigations into historical documents published throughout the Edo period. These led to an in-depth study of the mercantile ethical tradition of Edo Japan. Happily, Japanese publishing businesses were at the zenith of prosperity at that time: Edo people enjoyed a variety of publications, from which I picked up documents related to commercial ethics written by merchants themselves, rather than professional writers, to gain practical knowledge about the daily business behavior of merchants. The more I read, the more my research motivation increased, which finally resulted in this publication of my research of business ethics of Edo merchants.

When discussing any research of merchant ethics throughout the Edo period, it is not easy to find comprehensive, empirical inquiries as compared with descriptive studies. Thus, I preferred an intensive, empirical study focusing on daily matters such as “proprietor’s behavior”; “apprenticeship”; “family and employee management”; “marketing, financing, buying and selling, and inventory control”; “the worship of ancestors, Gods, Buddhas, and Sages”; and “charity and donation.”

Bushido is famous, and, even in the modern business world, Bushido is often used as a word expressing the ethical spirit of Japanese businesspeople. However, as this work proves, merchants in the Edo period had their own merchant paths, “The Way of the Merchant,” or “Shonindo” in Japanese. My ultimate purpose in this work is to clarify a relationship between the way of the merchant, “Shonindo,” and the way of the warrior, “Bushido.” After intensive, comparative research of Shonindo with Bushido, I found evidence that Shonindo essentially corresponds to Bushido, with the sole exception of matters of life and death.

This work consists of six chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss Shonindo and Bushido as the groundwork for a case analysis in Chap. 4. Chapter 4 is a case analysis of Shonindo based on passages selected from documents sorted by religious doctrine, which reveals evidence for Shonindo, “The Way of the Merchant.” Chapter 5 describes characteristics of Shonindo based on comparative and behavioral analyses of merchant ethics, including Western merchant morality.

This book is addressed not only to researchers but also to everyday readers. Thanks to a man named Inazo Nitobe, nearly everyone has heard of Bushido, while very few have ever heard of anything like Shonindo. It is thus no wonder that modern businesspeople refer to Bushido when they discuss the Japanese “business spirit.” Therefore, this work intends to provide knowledge of Shonindo to the world and to introduce readers to Japanese mercantile ethical tradition discovered through historical, empirical analysis.

Chiba, Japan
November 2018

Ichiro Horide

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This work would not have been possible without the help of three people: Dr. Ryuzo Sato, C.V. Starr Professor Emeritus of Economics at New York University's Stern School of Business; Professor Edward Yagi, at present with Reitaku University in Japan; and Professor Stanley J. Ziobro II with Trident Technical College in Charleston, South Carolina, USA.

I am especially indebted to Dr. Sato, who initially encouraged me to write this book and consistently pushed me to proceed with my research and writing until the project was complete. Without his strong, steadfast, and warm advice, this project would never have seen the light of day.

Professor Yagi supervised the overall translation despite a heavy, full-time workload of research and classes. He majored in Japanese Language and Literature at UC Berkeley, was the first Westerner to ever graduate from a Japanese-language MBA program at Keio Business School, teaches classes in Japanese, and often writes articles and academic papers in that language. Without his heartfelt, considerate support driven by the Western chivalrous spirit, this project would never have been completed. I deeply appreciate his thoughtfulness and good will.

Professor Ziobro was responsible for converting most of the original Japanese manuscript into English. His translation skills, which allowed him to put into English even the most technical terms of religious philosophy, are truly extraordinary. I am deeply grateful to him.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Research Subject	1
1.2	Previous Research	2
1.3	Research Method and Criteria	22
1.4	Review of Historical Records	24
	References.	25
2	Why Study the Ethical Thought of Merchants in the Edo Period Japan?	29
2.1	Japanese Merchants Had a “Path” Comparable to Bushido	29
2.2	Why and How “The Way of the Merchant” Arose.	30
	References.	34
3	From “Bushido” to “Shonindo”	35
3.1	The Significance of Bushido	35
3.2	Inazo Nitobe and <i>Bushido</i>	37
3.3	The Theory of <i>Bushido</i> During the Edo Period	43
3.4	The Ethical Code of the Mikawa Samurai, Suzuki Shosan	53
	References.	58
4	Case Analysis of the Shonindo	61
4.1	What Is Shonindo?	62
4.2	The Early Edo Period: Shonindo in the Seventeenth Century	63
4.3	The Middle Edo Period: Shonindo in the Eighteenth Century	76
4.4	The Late Edo Period: Shonindo in the Nineteenth Century	141
4.5	The Shonindo Movement Viewed Throughout the Edo Period	176
	References.	178
5	Shonindo: Characteristics and Criticisms	181
5.1	Comparative Analysis of Shonindo with Bushido	181
5.2	Behavioral Analysis of Shonindo.	189

- 5.3 Shonindo and the Terakoya (Private Elementary Schools
in the Edo Period) 205
- 5.4 Comparison with Western Shonindo 208
- References..... 215

- 6 Conclusion** 217
- 6.1 Consequences of Hypothesis Verification 217
- 6.2 Summary of Findings on How Merchants in the Edo Period
Japan Put Morality into Practice 218
- 6.3 Future Research 224
- References..... 225

- Index**..... 227