

"Is 'Human Dignity Doctrine' Sustainable in Future Global Bioethics ?"

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Preface

In the early stage of introducing Bioethics, we have largely accepted the notion of 'Human Dignity' as a key concept for the fundamental doctrine of Bioethics. Since then, this doctrine has really worked effectively to help and relieve the weak and unfortunate people in the world society.

However, now, in the beginning of the 21 Century, we come to notice the danger and harm of careless abuse of the concept of 'Human Dignity', especially when it rejects to introduce some new innovations and prevents us to apply them to our society even to promote the total welfare of our global community. New devices of genetics, for typical example, the stem-cell researches, are often banned by the name of 'Human Dignity'.

Here, we have to re-examine the essential meaning of the concept of 'Human Dignity' regressing to its origin, and also its historical importance, its benefits and harms.

[1] Origin and it's primary positive effects of the concept of 'Human Dignity'

Historically speaking, the idea of 'Human Dignity' first arose through the movement of humanism in the 'Renaissance' period, when the people living and working in the "cities" as citizens (bourgeois) required the same authority as kings and noble people held. Through this social movement 'citizens' succeeded in obtaining various new rights (human rights), thus humanism was established and spread all over the European world, and eventually the idea of 'Human Dignity' as an attribute of human reason (Vernunft) was gradually taking root among citizens. Thus the European modern age started as the age of humanism. And this glorious movement culminated at the success of the French Revolution, where the concept of the "the fundamental human rights (droits fondamentaux de l'homme)" was established.

As the result, European citizens were liberated, and modern civilization was achieved

with great success in various fields of human activities.

[2] Dark side of 'Human Dignity' - Beginning of modern discriminations

However, this notion of the 'Human Dignity' and therefore 'Human Rights' embraced a very dangerous connotation from the beginning, for these virtues were endowed only to the citizens but not to the non-citizens, and therefore they created the new types of modern discrimination. They first discriminated farmers and females because they were not citizens and therefore not endowed the human rights and human dignity, and later, European citizens discriminated Asians and Africans because those

'non-enlightened' people were not 'citizens' without having 'human dignity' and even 'human rights', and therefore, European citizens could easily and rightly colonize Asian and African territories in the beautiful name of humanistic enlightenment and development of savage territories. Let us recall the terrible American slavery system of Africans with horrible discriminatory prejudice. We have never experienced such sort of racial discriminatory slavery system before in our long history.

This is the very dark side of the notion of the 'Human dignity' and 'modern humanism' which restricted these beautiful virtues, at least implicitly, to only European citizens at that time. The concept of 'Citizen' and 'Dignity' held a dangerous discriminatory connotation from the beginning.

The idea of the 'human dignity' and 'humanism' brought another kind of fatal discrimination, i.e. that of human being from nature and natural things. Through the modern age of humanism, 'conquering nature' was deemed to be a heroic conduct of dignified human being. Thus human beings have willingly destroyed nature in the large scale in the name of civilization and development, exterminating many species of living things, animals and plants and also losing productive scenery landscapes.

The doctrine of the 'human dignity' connote the hidden claim of the arrogant 'citizen egoism' or 'European egoism' or simply, 'human egoism'.

[3] Adjustment and equalization of Human Dignity (Age of Social Liberation)

Luckily enough, we have noticed these unhappy, discrimination and global unfairness through the ending process of the Euro-American imperialistic world strategy . At the middle of 20th Century, we internationally started to avoid these social and sometimes racial discriminations, and until now, the world wide apparent colonization has almost ended.

Still, however, some socially deep rooted discriminations remain even in the most developed countries, i.e. the unfair distribution of 'human dignity'. Thus, finally in the USA, in 1970th era, they originated feminism to liberate females and successively a big enterprise to liberate Afro-Americans. This movement, as a side effect, motivated to open the study of Bioethics in the USA.

Through these movements the idea of the human rights, and human dignity were gradually equalize to all human beings and therefore, many of unfortunate and minority societies were saved and protected. Also the activities of UN and especially UNESCO must be highly estimated in this regard.

In this era, the notion of the 'human dignity' together with the notion of the 'human rights' were pervasively the key concepts to give fundamental grounds for arguments for all kinds of social decisions. New queer word such as 'Death with dignity', 'War for Dignity' were often popularly used, and UNESCO publicized various versions of declaration on Human Rights and Human Dignity.

[4] 21Century Technological Innovations and Pollution of Human Dignity

The decisive doubt, however, against this superfluous belief on the 'human dignity' and 'human rights' arouse in the latter quarter of 20 Century, facing various kind of scientific, technological, and social innovations, setting aside various political crises.

First, recent rapid development of genetic sciences and technologies gave a big doubt to the biological grounds of the idea of the 'human dignity'. All living things are equal to have same type of genetic pattern of DNA sequences. There is no reason to dignify only human beings exclusively in this sense. Formerly it was maintained that "to inherit the genetic pattern not artificially changed is a human right" (*European Yearbook Vol.30*). However, now it is clear that we may have to inherit artificially changed genetic pattern to avoid some fatal genetic diseases, and to enhance our living value toward the future. Nevertheless, the human cloning was rejected by almost all governments and professional organizations in the vain name of 'human' dignity at its first stage. But now we started the 'stem-cell research', which necessitates some cloning of human parts. And also some experimental and practical use of human parts or organs is necessary for this research and its medical application is urgently expected. Of course, we have to be deliberate and precautious to any new technology, but there is no ground to reject it by the name of 'human dignity' any longer. We call these abuses of the term 'human dignity' (following Prof. Tristram Engelhardt's joke) as the 'pollution of Human Dignity' ironically.

Secondly, we are now noticing that the destruction and pollution of environment was

persecuted mostly by human selfish activities in the name of 'development' and 'freedom', which are tacitly supported by the belief in the human dignity. Now it is urgent for us to recover and protect nature of our Globe regardless 'human dignity'

[5] Asian Ethos – Annihilation of ego

Now at this rare historical moment of the beginning of the 21st century, it is very meaningful to re-examine the non-European ethos, especially, the 'Asian ethos' traditionally deep rooted in the Asian minds. Generally speaking, Asian traditional ethos is fundamentally 'naturalistic', and there has never existed the idea of 'human dignity'. Take the cases of Confucianism, Taoism, and Ethical thought of Mencius and the Neo Confucianism. Nowhere can we find the idea of human dignity. Also in the Buddhist tradition, we can hardly find the thought of human dignity. Rather we find the thought of the value equity of all lives on the earth, even the thought of 'human annihilation' and 'human self-sacrifice into Nature'. There the idea of equality of life and awe and affinity to nature are always pervasive and common.

When we throw away the idea of the 'human dignity', what can support our ethical feeling and can justify our human ethical responsibility? To this very crucial and grave question, I would propose to refer to the Mencius's well known maxim "Every person equally and universally holds the Feeling of Pain and Ache" 「惻隱の心人皆これあり」. In fact, this sort of feeling is universally built in every human minds, and this feeling seems to work in every ethical judgment, even implicitly, in the depth of every human minds. Similar words exist in every European language, also. For example, 'sympathy', 'compassion', 'pity', etc. But there are subtle but grave differences in their meanings and nuances from 「惻隱の心」.

Surprisingly enough, Arthur Schopenhauer, a German philosopher, in his ethical essay used the German word 'Mitleid' for [惻隱の心]. (He is said to have studied seriously Mencius's writings). I believe this is one of the best translations of the Asian mind to European words.

At any rate, at the beginning of 21 Century of the history of ethical thinking, we have to stop, or abandon the old fashioned humanistic idea of Kantian 'practical reason' or the 'categorical imperatives' or the like. We do not have any reason to believe that only we, human beings, exclusively hold the beautiful, tender and noble ethical mind, as Immanuel Kant has once dreamt in his book "Kritik der praktischen Vernunft"

Now, conclusively speaking, we should not resist against scientific and social

innovations in the fictitious and vain name of the 'Human Dignity' any longer. We have come to the historically epoch-making age to stop and end the movement of humanism over to the post-humanism where the equality of the value of every life on the Earth will be fundamentally maintained, and therefore, we have to sweep away the grounds for believing in the 'human dignity', to equalize us to every other natural being keeping the Asian traditional way of thinking about Nature deep in mind, and try to sustain human life and human value in harmony with other environmental beings and finally to enhance human welfare whatsoever it might be.

'Equity' and 'Sustainability' should be the two fundamental principles of the 'Global Bioethics' in the 21st Century.

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