

Distance research method in *The chrysanthemum and the sword*

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Abstract: *The chrysanthemum and the sword* is a classic written by Ruth Benedict, a renowned anthropologist. This article analyzes why the book is regarded as a classic, how Benedict expands field investigation from mainland to foreign countries by "distance research method", and how she successfully interprets the national character of Japanese people with her meticulous insight. Her research findings have played an important role in the decision of keeping Mikado after World War II by American government, and in the successful governance of Japan later, which is thought of as a paradigm of applying academic research into government decision-making.

When holding the Chinese version of *The chrysanthemum and the sword*, we were attracted by a green chrysanthemum on the white cover, whose petals are outlined by crimson. Red, yellow, purple and other colors of chrysanthemum may be common, but never are green ones. There is a Chinese saying "red and green are not compatible". The green chrysanthemum symbolizes peace. So, what does red mean? Are they the inevitable "red" under the "sword"? The symmetrical pattern falls the vigorous green into dead stillness, which best interprets the book title-*The chrysanthemum and the sword*.

1. Factors make this book a classic

One of the *Japanese Series*, the book is published by a top press-the Commercial Press. Known for its high quality in China, its publication is really worth reading. Receiving her Ph.D. from the famous Columbia University of USA, Benedict is a dignified and elegant anthropologist. Just before the end of World War II, she was appointed by Central Intelligence Agency to study on Japanese characteristics in the way of anthropology so as to analyze their psychology, and provide governance strategies for the United States.

With her unique exquisite heart and her anthropologist's insight, Benedict has portrayed completely the contradictory psychology of the Japanese: loving beauty and militaristic, courtesy and pugnacious, pioneering and conservative, compliant and intractable. Her proposal to govern Japan by preserving its original administrative machinery was proved successful by White House.

As a classic of studying modern Japanese problems, *The chrysanthemum and the sword* is a must-read book for both foreigners who hope to understand the Japanese and for Japanese who care about themselves. All above contribute to make this book a classic.

2. Classic distance research method

"Seeing-is-believing" has been a golden rule in that people try to find answers by seeing and listening. However distance research applied in *The chrysanthemum and the sword* overturns this believing. Japan and the United States are faced to each other across the Pacific Ocean. Being far away in America and bearing the responsibility of doing research on Japanese nation, Benedict had to adopt the most characteristic research method in anthropology-field investigation. However,

instead of Japan, the field where she studies can only be in the United States. The only interviewees are those local Japanese detained in America during the war. As what she writes in her book: "The fact that our two nations were at war inevitably meant, however, a serious disadvantage. It meant that I had to forego the most important technique of the cultural anthropologist: a field trip. I could not go to Japan and live in their homes and watch the strains and stresses of daily life, see with my own eyes which were crucial and which were not. "She felt helplessly confined with geography. "As a cultural anthropologist, in spite of these major difficulties, I had confidence in certain techniques and postulates which could be used. At least I did not have to forego the anthropologist's great reliance upon face-to-face contact with the people he is studying. There were plenty of Japanese in this country who had been reared in Japan and I could ask them about the concrete facts of their own experiences, find out how they judged them, and fill in from their descriptions many gaps in our knowledge which as an anthropologist I believed were essential in understanding any culture."To obtain true and effective information for further research, Benedict adopted a compromise but approximate method: to conduct the research off site. She took the local Japanese who have been deeply influenced by Japanese culture as her studying objects, which ensures the objectivity of her distance research.

Besides the concrete implementation investigation in distance, Benedict did literature research too. She studied "Suye Mura", the only anthropological work on Japanese at that time, written by John Fee, an anthropologist, made full use of the research results of some social scientists, explored the symptoms and implications from written or spoken propagandas, read travel notes written by Americans who have ever lived in Japan and self-records by Japanese "willing to express", watched propaganda, historical films made in Japan and films about modern life in Tokyo and some rural areas, and discussed them in details with the Japanese. It is through multiple ways of study, analysis and verification on literatures that Benedict ensured the correct judgment and interpretation.

3. Insight in this classic

The "distance research" brought Benedict on a road closer to her goal. Along this way she worked steadily with her meticulously logical analysis and keen insight, making remarkable achievements. This not only brought her the success of decision-making report, but also made *The chrysanthemum and the sword* a classic!

Benedict focuses on the Japanese lifestyle in the book. She regards lifestyle as the most direct expression of their spiritual beliefs, because she firmly believes the correctness of this presupposition that "in any primitive tribe or any of the most advanced civilized nations, human behavior is learned from daily life". As a result, she attaches great importance to their national character revealed by the daily trifles. As the Chinese saying goes: True feelings can be seen from tiny things", which gave her a unique perspective on the Japanese: to string up the essences by sort out the clues contained in the following facts: 1) Japanese believes in a creed: "fight for the establishment of hierarchical order". From "the Japanese in the War", Benedict found out the reason for this creed. They also believe that it is a necessity for all countries to keep "each proper place" in this hierarchy system. 2) "Japanese depict themselves the top of the international hierarchy."However, this ideal conflict with the reality. From this, Benedict found their cogent reason to fight for "keeping each proper place" in the war between Japan and America, as well as the key point to understand their behavior. 3) Deeply in their mind, Japanese people are rooted with "righteousness", a thought of their position in the huge network of personal favour to each other. It is this "righteousness" that contributes their extreme bushido, "hara-kiri", to show their loyalty to the emperor and absolute submission to their superiors. And "their daily will and behavior come from this sense of gratitude."4) From the elaboration of "pay a debt of gratitude by any chance", Benedict found their ethical basis for the daily behavior: "To them the primary and ever-present indebtedness called on is worlds apart from the active, bowstring-taut repayment which is named in a whole series of other concepts." As a result, the Japanese regard their active dedication for

gratitude as the beginning of morality. 5) Japanese believe that everyone has both "giri to the world" and "giri to one's name". "Affection is hardest to bear", and people are deeply involved in it and leap at it. When it is distained, the Japanese will try their best to "clear their names" because "a person in the main beach has the same strong feelings for kindness and insults, and they have to be seriously rewarded." To pay back, Japanese choose to abide all kinds of etiquette and even bear the pain to defend their professional reputation, and to fulfill righteousness they would rather commit suicide in the war. 6) The extreme ethics of repayment and self-restraint do not stop the Japanese to enter "the circle of human feelings". They pursue and respect pleasure, so they can appreciate and enjoy everything as much as they can. But at the same time, they are influenced by the humiliating culture and fall into a "ethical dilemma". "chu,ko,giri,jin, human feelings and other moral norms" represents the Japanese outlook on life. "Evil world" doesn't exist in their life. Although there are many contradictions in life, the Japanese "do not see human life as a stage on which forces of good contend with forces of evil. They see existence as a drama which calls for careful balancing of the claims of one circle' against another and of one course of procedure against another, each circle and each course of procedure being in itself good. " Therefore," Occidentals cannot easily credit the ability of the Japanese to swing from one behavior to another without psychic cost." At this point, we can understand why Japanese were not indulged in pain and did not retaliate against the American after learning the defeat, but disarm to live in peace with the American. And we can understand Benedict's suggestion to persuade the US government adopting autonomous management after the victory over Japan.

4. Conclusion

Benedict's analysis is logical and meticulous. When analyzing the foundation of the Japanese national character, she not only analyzed thoughts and behaviors from the Japanese emperor to the common people, but also clarify the Japanese outlook of life and values on how to treat people and handle affairs. All of these originate from "children's learning" in Japan. The entrenched senses of hierarchy, righteousness and gratitude runs throughout their life while "Japanese motivation is depended on conditions". If circumstances permit, Japan will try to maximize its survival benefits at any time, not only to seek a position in a peaceful world, but also to become a member of the armed faction in this troublous world. This is the Japanese, the authentic Japanese and the Japanese who show their national characters.

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