



The Influence of National Culture on Whistle-Blowing: A Cross-Cultural Investigation

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Abstract

With the change of history, national culture gradually becomes the moral common theme for the group, which is subtly stored in the national ethical system. Although it is not a major virtue in contemporary society to judge right and wrong, but national cultural trace will be found in every thought occurred. Collectivism and individualism respected national culture is not simply ideological distinction, and its complex perceptual system sufficient to cover the whole report making process of potential whistleblowers. This paper makes Korea, Japan, as a respected national culture of collectivism representative, and the United States, the United Kingdom as a respected representative of the national culture of individualism, and then focuses on analyzing different types of national culture, which brought ethical conflicts to potential whistleblowers.

Key words: National culture; Cross-cultural investigation; Potential whistleblower; Collectivism; Individualism

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INTRODUCTION

Whistle-blowing is “the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action” (Near & Miceli, 1985) The influence of national culture on potential whistleblowers’ ideology is not sudden, even let you cannot feel its existence. This kind of influence began to invade from the early family education. It is strengthened through learning from school, from organizational work and from contacting with society. These changes in energetic domain influence their personality, beliefs and ethical judgment. Sparks & Pan (2010) confirmed the existence, and claimed that the “Ethical judgment process is a rational Assessment process, but it includes some unconscious instincts, and it also subject to the inherent beliefs and prejudices.” (Sparks & Pan, 2010) Rest (1986) emphasized the auxiliary role of instinct ethical judgment in the process of ethical judgment. Messick (2009) even believed that “Ethical judgment is an instinct process, but not as usually think that there is a kind of ethical decision making model.” (Messick, 2009) Of course, not all national culture will point to the justice of whistle-blowing, and some negative effects also inhibit the report will. These bring the disturbance to the potential whistleblowers.

1. THE INFLUENCE OF COLLECTIVIST NATIONAL CULTURE ON WHISTLE-BLOWING

Each country has its own culture and recognized ethical cognition, South Korean Confucian culture and the Japanese lifetime employment system is only representative of Asian culture. The potential report

will be inhibited to some extent under these two special national cultures influencing. Especially when the strong ethnic cognition of whistle-blower is inhibited by the national culture, then the ethical conflict will appear. Of course, with the continuously strengthening of national cooperation, the Western management style and cultural thought have impact on the original Asian cultural atmosphere. With this impact, the lifetime employment system of Japan and the Confucian culture of South Korea have appeared some new changes in content and form, but the fundament of society culture cannot be changed easily. Especially the deep-rooted ethics cognition which exists in the heart still influences people's daily behavior patterns. Thus, the resistance of whistle-blowing from the lifetime employment system and the Confucian culture is also retained in the subconscious of potential whistleblower. This is a microcosm of whistleblowers' ethical conflicts which is brought by the intrinsic society culture of the country.

1.1 The Japanese Lifetime Employment System Inhibits the Emergence of Report Will

Japanese life-time employment system has always been the focus of academic discussion, and it is once thought to be the key reasons of Japanese rapid development.

The organizations which use the lifetime employment system have some extent advantages in management. Firstly, under the influence of the lifetime employment system, most of these organizations are cohesive, and the annual work series institution adopted by these organizations makes an interdependent relationship appear between employee and organization. At the same time, organization could invest a lot of money in the employee training and never mind the loss of human capital. Secondly, under the lifetime employment system, the employees don't have to worry about the risk of unemployment, and could shape themselves completely according with the career planning of organization. The existence of lifetime employment system objectively reduces the ratio of unemployment, job-hopping, poaching and trade secrets leaked. To some extent, it also promotes the establishment of social stability and harmonious order. But this interdependence relationship and the system designed for a stable social structure also produced a closed organization culture. The strong dependency further inhibits the formation of reporting will, and it also limits the behavior consciousness of potential whistleblower. The lifetime employment system restricts the layoffs of organizational behavior, and the organizations are also willing to build a family organizational culture which is available to make employees closely link their own interest with the organization, and further produce a psychological loyalty. But this loyalty which is respected and recognized by society objectively limits the report behavior. Because of keeping away from the other organizational cultures, employees are strictly limited in moral cognition of blind

loyalty. The report behavior which will damage the image and the interest of organization is regarded as a betrayal. Closed organizational culture has set a negative image for whistleblower in advance. At the first day of joining, the introduction training let everyone carry a heavy psychological burden. The thought how to balance the pay of organization is in each person's consciousness. The free training, all sorts of welfare and the promise of no layoffs have made new members produce an owing consciousness. Especially when all these unwritten promises above become a reality, the owing psychology gradually evolves into a blind loyalty to the organization. At the same time, vision planning of organization also makes the employees be full of confidence for their career development. The bloated confidence makes the employees believe that the wrongdoing is the necessary part of achieving organizational justice vision. The wrong thought of "Focus on the big picture, doesn't be distracted by trifles" drives them to believe that report behavior is an appearance which cannot understand what is final justice. The whistleblowers are not worth to be trusted, and they are disloyal.

Under this system, all of the social relations are derived from the organization, and it is similar to the "unit" system of our country in founding days. Every normal employee has his own organization, and no group membership or abandoned by the organization is considered as bad person. The employee who loses the protection of organization will become lonely and helpless. What's worse, there is no organization willing to hire these employees, because only those who are considered seriously harm the organization will get fired. Meanwhile, the lifetime employment system praise seniority system which chooses the entry year and qualifications main compensation evaluation indicators. The qualification of each Job-hopping and dismissal employee will recount at beginning. It also makes many people cannot afford the cost of moving. The above rules form an interdependent relation between organization and employee. The disadvantage is to limit the free flow of the labor force, and this also makes whistleblowers lose their due protection. Therefore, this absolutely dependent relationship strictly limits the production of report will.

1.2 The South Korean Confucian Culture Discourages the Whistle-Blowing

Confucian culture has been in South Korea for nearly 2000 years. In the 1st century, there were three kingdoms in Korean Peninsula. They were Koguryo, Baekje, and Xinluo. The Confucian culture was introduced into Koguryo at first, then into Baekje and Xinluo. In Korea dynasty, Confucianism has reached the peak, and as a social thought survived in a stable form. Although South Korea is not the original country, it has not been destroyed like the original country, China. This is the reason when facing the infection of western

culture, South Korea not only introducing the advanced technology and management method to speed up the economic development, but also resisting the infection of individualism. The persistence of the Confucian culture has created a distinctive society culture in South Korea. It also makes the South Korea maintain stability when facing the cultural impact from other countries. But the inherent disadvantages of Confucian culture have been survived at the same time. It has deeply rooted in the society culture of South Korea, influenced many aspects of economic and social development. Whistle-blowing is a representative one of them. The Confucian culture builds a society ethic atmosphere which greatly limits the report will of potential whistleblowers.

The core frame of Confucian culture is “Three cardinal guides and five constant virtues”. It means “ruler guides, parent to child, husband and wife”. This is the important management method of feudal society. The purpose is to restrict the public thought, and further to consolidate its empery rule. “Three cardinal guides and five constant virtues” requires the officials, the son and the wife to be unconditional obedience to the monarch, his father, and her husband, so as to strengthen the central power, because there is no social role can avoid this basic relationship. This thought makes an unusually and far-reaching influence in South Korea. The establishment of country supreme power directly affects the public organizations at all levels, and indirectly influences all types of domestic organization. Such obey is particular the organizations which have a clear hierarchy system. In these organizations, all members are strictly required to enforce the order, and any question is seemed to be stupid, which is also a mistrust of management power. With the intervention of western culture and national education development, this absolute power is gradually fade out new, but the “Hierarchical” thought which mixes into the enlightenment education is still a disturbance to potential whistleblowers.

Confucian culture emphasizes family values, and the highly praise concept “officials and monarch, father and son, husband and wife” is produced under the concept of “Family”. In this idea, “Nation” is Family. Therefore, in the daily governance, “Monarch” is “Father”, that means the public will obedience their monarch just like the son respected his father and follow his orders at home. In the world, South Korea is probably the most emphasized filial piety one. Not only at home and school, but also in society, these two words are widely used. In the concept of Confucian culture, Nation and Family is the same meaning. This relationship fast transits to a “Family Consciousness” which is produced by blood relationship, geopolitical relationship and study relationship in daily life. Under the influence of family consciousness, there is not alone. Everyone automatically establish various groups in consciousness, and members of the group have a strong

sense to protect the group interests, but also have a strong xenophobia. The individual value only exists in group and only servicing for group targets should be seemed value. Therefore, the negative impact of the family consciousness is to only pay attention to person’s social attributes, but ignores the personal attributes. Individual becomes an accessory of country, organization and group, and then lose its own independent ethic independent ethics identification. So the stress of blood relationship, geopolitical relationship etc. is pervaded in every field of South Korea. This group consciousness caused many interest groups appearance, which is the root of serious corruption and the increased gap between rich and poor. The family concept is not only to make potential whistleblowers lose the primary independent ethics judgment power, but also be driven by the interests of the family values. Few people will show the family mistake to the outside, if did it, this will not only make their own expelled from family, and other family also won’t accept a turncoat.

“The five constant virtues” with in “Three cardinal guides and five constant virtues” means “Benevolence, Righteousness, Courtesy, Wisdom and Trust”. Confucius claims that “Benevolence” means to be humble and patience when getting along with the others; “Righteousness” means to take the initiative to lend a hand when the others fall in the trouble; “Courtesy” means to be polite and respectful to the others. The fundamental core is to emphasis to create a social relationship with love, modest, polite and harmonious atmosphere. “Benevolence, Righteousness, Courtesy” is emphasized in South Korea ethic system, and it is important to maintain a harmony society and an orderly organization. This modest and polite style is advantageous to form group cohesion, but bad for whistle-blowing will transform from production to implement. When potential whistleblowers found wrong doing, the first thought is not how to stop it or how to report it, but try hard to look for a defense for the wrong behavior, even put the understanding the existence of the error behavior as a starting point. Take the “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” as a principle of giving up reporting behavior, and propose his own ideas to the offenders with a humble attitude. All of above behaviors is led by Confucianism, and it is hard to imagine that the persons who are influenced by Confucianism could stop the wrongdoing in time. On the contrary, the report will be gradually weakened when the wrongdoing is discovered. At last, even if not reach indulgence, it will evolve to keep silence.

2. THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUALISTIC NATIONAL CULTURE ON WHISTLE-BLOWING

As opposed to collectivism, the countries which respect individualistic culture generally accept and understand

the whistle-blowing on popular recognition, but in fact to America and Britain as the representative of the individualistic national culture, still deeply rooted the resistance to whistle-blowing behavior which comes from their national culture. Although the resistance is not obvious and never reaches the degree to change the report will, but it plays a subtle function which could affect the ethical judgment of whistle-blowers' subconscious mind.

2.1 The Avoiding Thought in American Culture Holds the Whistle-Blowing

Individualism occupies an absolutely vital situation in western culture, and it is also the foundation of the development of capitalist social pattern and the democratic political system. The individualism emphasizes the individual rights, self control and the primacy of personal value. These views are particularly important in American culture system. From the beginning of the declaration of independence in 1776, independence and freedom of the individual value idea became the founding of the United States. As to whistle-blowing, the individualistic countries should be far more positive than the collectivism advocated, but through the study we found that the traditional individualistic culture of the United States quite emphasis on the respect and the protection of individual interests. It makes individual behavior produce a strong consciousness of protection, and indirectly led to a behavior – “avoid”.

In the inheritance and development of traditional culture, Hartz (1955) found this avoid which hides in the individualism culture. The men in 17th century who fled to America from Europe were keenly aware of the oppressions of European life. But they were revolutionaries with a difference, and the fact of their fleeing is nominal fact: For it is one thing to stay at home and fight the “canon and feudal law” and it is another to leave it far behind. It is one part thing to try to establish liberalism in the old world, and it is another to establish it in the New. Revolution. The difference is that the “avoid” only needs a new establishment, but no fight. So when dissatisfying with the surrounding environment or the social order, the first thought of the American individualist is not fighting, but avoids. Avoid far away from the dislike group and social environment, then to establish a new order. This concept of culture also affected the report will of potential informer, and the ethical issues in front of them is “why raise your voice in contradiction and get yourself into trouble as long as you can always remove yourself entirely from any given environment should it become too unpleasant?” (Hirschman, 1970, p.108) Hirschman claimed that “this preference for the neatness of exit over the messiness and heartbreak of voice has then “persisted throughout our national history” (Hirschman, 1970, p.107)

However, this avoidance is not completely free, and sometimes, the cost also brings some troubles to potential

whistleblowers. One of the problems, avoid cannot completely erase the past. Most of the individual will choose to be silently in order to avoid the potential trouble from whistle-blowing, but it cannot change the facts of knowing the occurrence of wrongdoing. Therefore, in the incident investigation process, the avoid will still be implicated. Second, avoid will be questioned by loyalty. To a certain extent, avoid is a kind of silent confrontation. Although the form of avoid is contrary to whistle-blowing, it is also abhorred by managers. Reports should be directly classified as betrayal but the whistleblowers still believe the existence of tissues and justice in the organization, but the one who chose to leave do thorough lose hope and completely give up. Thus, leaving is the most disloyalty. Meanwhile, the avoid isn't bound to leave away from a country or one field. When his disloyalty was found by the second employer, some hate emotion still appeared. Because nobody can guarantee there is no second disloyalty or avoid. Once the organization falls in trouble, they do not mind about the second to avoid. Third, avoid means to try hard for a new life. The avoid will try to cut off all contact with the past. Surely it includes all social relationship, life order and personal achievement. Start all over is a great trouble to the person which cannot cut and create the brilliant achievements as past.

2.2 The Compromising Thought in Britain Culture Impacts the Law to Protect the Whistleblowers

Britain also generally advocates individualism, and respects for individual rights and personal freedom, especially for personal political rights. But the British individualism is gradually growing up in the bondage of the traditional conservative national culture. This also caused the British individualism in a deep-seated conservatism. British conservative thought has a long history, and some scholars presumed the conservative culture are the result of the special geographical condition and natural conditions. The poor living condition leads the British to form an anxious thought and a desire for stable life. But when this group thought achieves perfection, the deformity of political compromise and tolerance is produced, which is used to cope with the upcoming threats. This is also the core idea of the British conservatism.

“Public Interest Disclosure Act” was published in 1998. “Protected Disclosures” is the first time to be written in the British Act, but the bill has a strict limit for obtaining the protection. In this bill, the disclosure must be one which the whistleblower reasonably believes shows a criminal offence, a failure to comply with legal obligations, a miscarriage of justice, danger to the health and safety of employees, damage to the environment, or the hiding of information which would show any of the above actions. From this bill, it is not hard to find that the British government still hopes to eliminate violations by

whistle-blowing as well as to protect the citizens' personal safety and health. But the conservative ideas in the law put forward a lot of restrictions on whistle-blowing which is bound to bring some troubles to whistleblowers. The first is the request of the position of wrongdoing. The bill requires the damage degree and the scope of the error to achieve reasonably, and the nature of wrongdoing belongs to pose a threat to public health or safety. Such requirement not only to prompt the whistleblowers to carefully consider the harm of wrongdoing, but also reduces the kinds of wrongdoing. That means that the error which does not achieve the report degree should not be reported, though it obviously violates the law. Second, the bill also requests the rationality of whistle-blowing. The report information cannot involve the business secrets, and also cannot break the contracts with organization. But in fact, the most effective evidences of wrongdoing belongs to the business secrets, and the most employment contracts also limit the responsibility and obligation for employees, just like do not betray the organization. Finally, the bill limits the protection for whistleblowers. In the bill, the precondition of getting protection is to report internally first. Only is there clear evidence to prove that the internal report will impact the result, the whistleblower could choose the external whistle-blowing directly. But the fact is that the internal report without reasonable program and support is more dangerous than the external report. Especially, when the whistleblower cannot to judge the results of the report, the report will should be restrained. So under the influence of conservatism, the only way of the British individualism is to compromise with the power. The persistence of

personal right and personal freedom can only stay with a strictly limited scope.

CONCLUSION

Each country has its own cultural concept and recognized ethics awareness. The inherent culture of each country also happened in the evolution of osmosis with the world cultural fusion. In this process, some kind of ideology is strengthening and some are weakened, but they all cannot get rid of the influence of national culture. Neither in the Eastern culture which respects the collectivism nor the Western culture which advocate individualism, it is able to find out the factors that make the potential whistleblowers fall into trouble in the ethical judgment process. These factors gradually precipitated in the subconscious of potential whistleblowers with the development of culture, and become a root of the ethic dilemma.

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