



ETHICAL LIFESTYLE MOVEMENT

ROOTED IN TRADITIONAL JAPANESE VALUES



The term "ethical" comprises the concept of contributing to the world by being aware of our impacts on society and the environment, and is therefore inextricably linked with the SDGs. SHUTTERSTOCK

Gathering attention in Japan as a new concept encouraging actions that consider people and the environment, "ethical" initiatives are now developing in unique ways across different fields. At the basis of this movement is the distinctive culture of Japan.

New words that are well-attuned to the needs of the times strike a chord with people and rapidly penetrate society. One such word in Japan now is "ethical," a loan word from English. The term has recently entered the limelight as a new concept asserting that awareness by both individuals and companies of the consequences of their actions and decisions will lead to solutions to major issues facing society and the environment. It is used in combination with other words to create such terms as "ethical consumption" and "ethical living." It is the simplest and most approachable form of international contribution, through which anyone can engender change in regards to global issues by just slightly altering their perspective.

Driven by the growing interest in the SDGs and the movement to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050,

"ethical" has now become a key term appearing in a wide range of fields, from government and business to daily life. "It has spread very rapidly especially over the past year," says SUEYOSHI Rika, founder and director general of the Ethical Association, which is spurring on the ethical movement in Japan. "One main reason is that many people have seriously rethought their lives during this pandemic."

At the same time, the concept is not entirely new to the Japanese people. Many aspects of the Japanese way of thinking share something in common with ethical action, such as *mottainai*, the concept of using what is available so that it is not wasted, and *otagaisama*, the concept of helping each other in times of need. According to Sueyoshi, "The basis of ethical action is to give sufficient thought to how

our daily lives or the production of goods impact society and the environment. Many individuals and companies are putting this concept into practice by channeling the spirit that is deeply rooted in Japan." She goes on to say, "Japan is leading the world in the transformation to sustainability through various technological innovations such as the development of new eco-friendly materials, but our country is also good at making the most of what we already have. This is prompting the birth of many ethical initiatives that are distinctive to Japan."

Unique even among such initiatives is a non-profit organization, Otera Oyatsu Club (Temple Snack Club). Buddhist temples in Japan have a long-established practice of not letting the offerings of food made to Buddha go to waste. They are eaten with gratitude by the monks and their families, and shared with neighbors and visitors. Building upon that concept, the initiative aims to make good use of the collected offerings by sending them to single-parent households suffering for various reasons. Endorsing this idea of connecting the "haves" of



SUEYOSHI Rika, founder and director general of the Ethical Association, holding a special class at a junior high school. Ethical consumption is becoming a widely covered subject within educational establishments in Japan, from elementary schools to universities. ETHICAL ASSOCIATION

temples to the "have nots" of society in order to solve the issues they each face, more than 1,770 temples and some 580 civic organizations are now supporting a total of 22,000 children monthly. Individuals and companies have also joined in to provide support in the form of donations and gifts.

Because of the pandemic, the number of households seeking support has increased fivefold over the past year. "The number of offers to provide assistance has also grown, especially because such a harsh situation exists," says NODA Yoshiki, a Buddhist monk and one of the directors of this organization. In fiscal 2020, donations increased 2.3 times compared with the previous year. The various supporters come from a broad range of society. They include an elementary school girl who donated rice purchased with her own allowance, as well as those who, having rebuilt their lives through the support they received, have now become support providers themselves.

Through this activity, Noda says that he was again made aware of the deeply rooted Japanese spirit of helping each other. "Somewhere, in the back of my mind, I had a sense of superiority about helping others. But I was able to renew my understanding that we're all equals, and of the importance of being there for each other in times of need." One of the most troubling aspects of poverty is the isolation of people in need. Otera Oyatsu Club thus works actively as a platform to connect people asking for "help" with those saying "I want to help" by awakening the spirit of mutual support.

Anyone can start their own ethical initiatives from something easily accessible, based on their traditional values and culture. If these actions continue to stimulate empathy and new ideas, we might see the birth of new forms of international contribution, not only in Japan but around the world as well.



Top: NODA Yoshiki, one of the directors of Otera Oyatsu Club, says, "We send not only snacks, but also rice and daily essentials such as masks, along with carefully crafted messages addressed to each recipient." Bottom: Traditionally the offerings made at the temple are first presented to Buddha and then later shared among monks and local residents. OTERA OYATSU CLUB