

THE CHINA AFFAIR AND JAPANESE THOUGHT

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The significant change in the current of Japanese thought, so noticeable if we consider the popular ideology of the early Showa era (1926-), began not with the present affair in China but with the affair of 1931 in Manchuria. The present affair has had no other bearing upon Japanese thinking than that of developing the movement which arose after 1931. But this development has been extremely rapid and consequently the problems inherent in the new thought have become increasingly manifest.

For more than ten years prior to the upheaval in Manchuria, Marxism had completely captured the minds of Japanese intellectuals in the prevailing atmosphere of liberalism, and constituted a sort of “fad” among them. Although Marxism failed to develop into an important political force, it influenced to a definite extent labour and agrarian movements. Since the outbreak of the Manchurian affair, however, governmental control over communism and its movements has been enforced with growing strictness and thoroughness, and, at the same time, movements for promoting “the spirit of Japan” or “Japanism” have been developed in a most energetic way. These movements, although primarily directed against communism, have not been at all tolerant towards liberalism and have worked earnestly for the awakening of the nation to

the excellence and unique quality of the national polity and culture of Japan. Thus, nationalism, in the face of all manner of criticisms against it, has steadily gained in power and influence.

As a result of this change in the current of Japanese thought, there have been many “converts” from radicalism to nationalism or Japanism. Such ideological conversion is perhaps a phenomenon peculiar to Japan and something that cannot be comprehended by the individualist and rationalist occident. “Conversion,” connotes not a gradual, logical process of development but an act of suddenly turning away. It is a moral rather than a theoretical change. As such it can take place naturally, and not extraordinarily, to Japanese minds which are dialectical in their thinking and in which two things mutually contradictory can be synthesized into one. In Japan, therefore, when Communists are arrested, the authorities, instead of administering punishment to them as hopeless cases, try by all means to “convert” them.

These cases of conversion, which have increased, since 1931, have become extremely marked through the exaltation of the nationalistic sentiment in connection with the present affair. One of the most significant instances of this trend is the right turn of the Social Mass Party, greatest of the proletarian parties in Japan. With the outbreak of the affair, the party gave up its programme based on the class theory and has now been completely converted to nationalism. The movement for national spiritual mobilization advocated by the Government has also much to do with the same trend. The purpose of the

movement is to consolidate the national unity required by the present emergency through the promotion of the spirit of Japan. The Japanese people all subject themselves voluntarily to strict self-discipline and self-restraint in order to overcome every kind of domestic conflicts, trying thereby to realize a state of undisturbed national unity. Such a unity, born of the traditions of Japan, can be accounted for by the fact that the entire nation, since the dawn of its history, has united itself internally as a coherent whole allowing no room for the existence of any opposing national groups and kept itself as an entity comparatively independent of any external forces, favoured by geographical conditions.

These movements conducted in the name of Japanism are not altogether free from elements which can be considered as reactionary. It cannot, however, be denied that, when viewed in the light of the prevailing state of affairs with reference to Japanese culture, they cannot but acquire a positive significance for the destiny of the nation. Since the Meiji era, Japan has devoted herself to the task of transplanting and imitating Western culture, which has had an essential and rightful place in her development as a modern nation. On the other hand, however, modern Japanese culture has developed in a way in which connections with the past traditions are little maintained. In fact, there can be no intellectuals in the world today more international in culture than those of Japan. They are really absorbed in the study of philosophy, literature, arts and other branches of knowledge of the West. This attitude of the Japanese intelligentsia constitutes, it is true, a virtue which

is sufficient for demonstrating the progressive spirit of the Japanese people; but it contains in it a danger of destroying the faith in the uniqueness of the culture and traditions of the country. There are not a few among that class of Japanese who are conversant with recent movements of thought in the West but lacking in the knowledge of the traditional ideas of their own people, and who are well versed in the histories of other lands but not informed of the history of their own country.

Such a situation can not be considered as sound and wholesome for the society or the culture of a nation, and such a slogan as “back to Japan” can rightly claim a positive significance beyond its mere reactionary import. For no genuine creative work can be achieved without its being combined with tradition. It is essential, therefore, for Japanese culture, especially for ensuring its real creativeness, that it remain in the right relationship with its past. Thus the movement for promotion of the spirit of Japan must be appreciated as an indispensable step towards bringing about the creative development of Japanese culture which has attained its present state solely through transplanting of Western culture. These movements admittedly are liable to fall, under various circumstances, into errors of reactionary conservatism. Accordingly, thinking people in Japan today are exercising the greatest care to ensure that such movements serve as an impetus for the production of something genuinely creative.

Another conceivable danger in connection with these Japanism movements is that they might be degraded into chauvinism by emphasizing the uniqueness of Japan and

involving the exclusion of anything foreign. This danger certainly exists, but it is not so serious as it appears to superficial observers. Exclusion of things foreign is contrary to the characteristics of the Japanese people and the traditions of their culture. Thus, such an exclusionist attitude, if it arises, will only be a passing phase in the development of the nation's cultural life. The history of the Japanese people shows how their ancestors accepted the cultures of China and India with open-heartedness and fairness. When Japan and China are compared in their cultural relations with other lands in modern times, the former has clearly outstripped the latter in progressively transplanting Western culture. The people of Japan have never abandoned, we have every reason to believe, the same fair and progressive attitude toward foreign cultures. To keep itself in touch with other cultures is an indispensable condition for the development of a national culture, but it has to guard against the danger of forgetting or losing self.

These Japanism movements necessarily involve various problems. In the first place, it is not a simple matter to define the "things peculiar to Japan," which they are anxious to revive and promote. That is a question which has of late been seriously discussed in Japan by many scholars, critics and men of letters. If national culture is understood as something which has been formed with diverse foreign influences, the question of peculiarity with reference to national culture can never be defined with mathematical clarity. The discussion and study of the problem, however, has in itself an important significance in that it awakens the nation to self-consciousness and, by so

doing, influences the present task of cultural creation. Secondly, even if something is established as constituting "a thing peculiar to Japan," it might be simply something which is feudalistic and of no special significance to present-day Japan, and, thus, to persist in upholding it might be mere anachronism.

Such doubts may be intensified in view of the fact that the modernization of Japan has been largely a process of Westernization. As a matter of fact, the things appearing as peculiar to Japan, especially those understood as such by foreigners, are mostly things feudal and not things modern. Since, however, the Japanese people have had centuries of existence and activities as an independent nation, there must be something which has continued as peculiarly Japanese and constituted the individuality of Japan. Such an entity, needless to say, should not be considered as something fixed in the past but as something constantly developing. Individuality is something which develops, while the people and the State are both individuals. Accordingly, men of intelligence in Japan are not satisfied with the method of seeking things Japanese merely in the past and of regarding them as altogether unchangeable, but are trying to develop their intrinsic value in the present process of cultural creation. Lastly, if that which is said to be intrinsically Japanese is found to be something peculiar and having no general character, in other words, lacking in universality, can it be recognized as something truly valuable?

Individuality cannot simply be a peculiarity; it is a synthesis of peculiarity and generality. That which is said to be Japa-

nese, therefore, should be examined in respect to its general significance and universal value. With regard to this question also discussions are still going on among those concerned to study and promote the nature and significance of the spirit of Japan.

This last question as to whether a system of ideas which is called by the comprehensive name of "Japanism" possesses a general applicability besides being peculiarly Japanese, presents itself to present-day Japan, not only as a theoretical and cultural problem, but also as a momentous practical and political problem. The Japanese nation as a whole has shown a great concern in the cultural work in North China now that this area has been completely occupied by the Japanese Army. Never before in the history of Sino-Japanese relations has the nation shown such an interest in such cultural work. This interest is natural since the objective of the military actions of Japan in China is to establish peace in the Orient and friendly relations between the two countries. Prince Fumimaro Konoe, Japanese Prime Minister, stated at the outset of the present affair:

The Chinese People themselves by no means form the objective of our actions, which are directed solely against the Chinese Government and its army that are following such erroneous, anti-foreign policies.

That statement truly and rightly represents the will of the entire nation. We are at present fighting against China; our compatriots are shedding their precious blood. None of us, however, entertains enmity toward the Chinese people. Many

Chinese citizens residing in Japan today are actually enjoying a normal, peaceful life. That a nation remains free from any hostile feelings toward the people of an enemy nation in time of war, whether declared or not, is certainly a remarkable fact, as compared with the circumstances of such former wars as the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese. It might be a rare example in the history of the world. The Japanese people, without a single exception, heartily desire to shake hands with the people of China and to cooperate with them in promoting the peaceful development of the Orient. That is why the Japanese are paying serious attention to cultural work in China.

Various types of cultural activities, such as popularization of medical services and promotion of educational work, can be thought of as immediate measures to be carried out in North China, but the spread of right ideas is of paramount importance. All the problems of today, whether political or cultural, are inseparable from those of ideas. One of the objectives of the present Japanese actions in China is that of defending that country from the communist menace. Since, however, military activities cannot be carried on permanently, Japan has to resort to the measure of influencing China by means of ideas. The question then arises as to whether what is called "the spirit of Japan" can serve as the ideological basis for such a relationship between the two countries.

It can certainly serve as the principle for unifying Japan itself, as it is deep-rooted in the national sentiment of the Japanese people. If, however, it remains as merely something peculiarly Japanese, it can neither be comprehended by the Chinese nor

mean anything to them. Thus, with regard to the system of ideas called “the spirit of Japan” its generality or universality constitutes a problem. That system of ideas, over and above being Japanese, should at least be oriental. And since it should be oriental, the spirit of the Orient should be universal for the same reason. It is true that there can be no universal culture in abstract terms, that even the brilliant culture created by the ancient Greeks was distinctly Hellenistic and national. It has to be noted in this connection, however, that, because the Greek culture, while being peculiarly Hellenistic and national, had in it certain universal elements, it has profoundly influenced the cultures of the world. What we intend to create as Japanese culture should at least be something possessing an equivalent generality in the oriental world.

This is the challenge Japanese culture is confronted with, now that it has started to extend its sphere of influence over the Asiatic continent. This challenge is sufficient to stimulate the Japanese intelligentsia to rise to the occasion. Never before in the history of Japan have they met a challenge of such significance and magnitude. Japan has in the past learned from India and from China, but these cultural relations have always been unilateral. There have hardly been instances of Japanese culture influencing either of the two Asiatic countries. Consequently, the peculiar culture created in Japan under the influences of Chinese and Indian cultures has scarcely been subjected to a test in respect of its generality or internationality. The geographical and historical circumstances of Japan in the past have not, in general, given rise to a will, a fully conscious

will, to create within its culture a culture which possesses general value applicable to the life in other lands.

If books on literature, science and philosophy written by Japanese came to be directly and widely read by Chinese, both their contents and character would go beyond the bounds of things Japanese and become greatly changed. Culture cannot of course be imposed on people by force of arms. On the contrary, there have been instances in the history of the world in which the conquerors were conquered by the cultures of the conquered. Japan must therefore become the creator of a culture which can really be comprehended, loved and admired by the Chinese.

The fact that Japan is not necessarily intending to force Japanese ideas upon China can be seen from the view prevailing among Japanese leaders that the principles underlying the cultural work in North China should be Confucianism. Confucianism is a system of ideas which originated in China and culturally ruled that country for centuries. And it was transplanted to Japan early in its history, profoundly influencing her politics and culture, and it forms even today an essential element in the general culture of the Japanese people. Thus, Confucianism can be considered as the common ideological bond between the two countries. It is true that this system of ideas has the limitations of a system originally evolved in feudal ages. It is reactionary and anachronistic to try to apply it to the present-day society without reflecting on those limitations. To take up the question of Confucianism, however, in connection with the cultural work in North China, can at least have

the effect of awakening the Chinese to the consciousness of their own and consequently of oriental culture and traditions at large.

The culture of the East, with its history of several thousand years, is indeed a vast, well-nigh unexplored treasurehouse of world culture; and the peoples of the Orient are called upon to perform the task of exploring it and making known to the world the significance of the treasures it contains. For this task the peoples of Japan and China must collaborate. In so doing, however, we Japanese do not intend merely to adhere to traditions. Nor do we intend to exclude Western culture. In order to explore the grand culture of the East and clarify its significance, it should be noted, we must depend upon the methods of science developed in the West. The first essential step is to be trained in those methods. Our ultimate purpose, therefore, should not be simply to appreciate the peculiarity of oriental culture but to clarify its general and humanistic significance, thereby making contributions to world culture. We are aware of the impossibility of developing our culture by dissociating it from Western culture. We also know, in the light of our history, that China is in need no less than Japan of cultural influences from the West for ensuring a fresh development. Accordingly, we are strongly inclined to remind her of the wisdom of striving for the development of oriental culture, in collaboration with her good neighbour and learning from her experience.

Mr. Bruno Taut, a celebrated German architect, who is a friend, student and critic of Japan, writes on "The Third Ja-

pan” in his book entitled *Houses and People of Japan*, which was published here in 1936. According to him, the First Japan represents that Yamato period which absorbed and assimilated in a unique way the prehistoric culture recognizable even to-day in the Grand Shrine of Ise. The Second Japan belongs to the time when she was absorbing the cultures of Korea and China, while the Third Japan is a synthesized and coherent entity which emerges after her complete absorption and assimilation of the culture of the Western world. But has such a cultural, synthetical entity as this, “The Third Japan,” begun to emerge? To this question, the German architect answers in the negative. The Third Japan, it is true, has not as yet appeared in a distinct and definite form. But it can nevertheless not be denied that such a Japan is destined to be born. In fact, we are now in the midst of the travail for its birth. We are certainly experiencing the period of “*Strum und Drang*.” There might be certain oversteppings and shortcomings, but the Third Japan is sure to be born.

For the appreciation of the nature of the “*Strum und Drang*” Japan is now undergoing, it is a matter of prime importance, we are convinced, that the prejudiced view of world history characterized by so-called Europeanism should be corrected. This Europe-centred view of the world and its cultural history has long ruled the thinking of Westerners as a presupposition, self-evident and established. In post-War years there have appeared not a few who admit that such is a distorted view. The reflection on this way of thinking, however, seems not to be prevalent today. The world, in its ideal state, should not be

unicentral but multicentral. If Europe is one centre, the Orient is another, and these centres, with their respective uniqueness, should be closely interrelated.

The idea that a single area constitutes the centre of the civilized world should be discarded. If, therefore, Europeanism is a prejudicial view, “Orientalism” which stands in contrast to it is similarly a wrong view. It is a mistake to try to view world history in accordance with a narrow Orientalism. The formation and development, however, of its unique culture on the part of the Orient is a thing essential and desirable for the wealth and development of world culture as a whole. Thus, Japan is seeking the collaboration of China for the establishment and development of oriental culture on a totally new basis.

※最後のパラグラフにある “prejudicial” は珍しい言葉のようですが底本のまま。

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——原稿が残っていないという事と、これが参考篇とされている事から推測すると、三木清は日本語で書き、誰かが英訳したと言う事だろう。

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