

THE JAPANESE AS PEERS OF WESTERN PEOPLES

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The finest—that is, the most rapid and complete—adjustment to political environment ever made by a people was that achieved by the Japanese in their revolution, which was at the same time a restoration, culminating in 1868. Although further acquaintance with Japanese history reveals the fact that for over a century scholars and princes alike, though from different motives, had been working up that restoration of the imperial family to power, the same further acquaintance also reveals the astonishing depth and breadth of that revolution, so that wonder at the total achievement need not diminish. This marvel of statesmanship was generally perceived and generously acknowledged by the civilized powers that had proved useful as its exciting cause; but no proper inference was ever drawn as to what might be expected in other spheres of culture. Indeed, the favorite position for wiseacres, resident in Japan or elsewhere, was to query whether the Japanese had done more than don the garb of civilization, while its body and soul remained foreign to them. Probably no one would put this query now; certainly no Russian would put it in respect to the science and art of warfare; and continuous and brilliant success in this terrific branch of modern culture has so called universal attention to its authors that the query will probably never be put again in reference to any sphere whatsoever of human achievement. The Japanese learned from the fame they gained in the recent Chinese war that only by this sternest test of human endeavor could the full respect of western nations be won, and they are now taking a second object-lesson to the same effect.

But the Japanese are as great in the arts of peace as in that of war; and well will it be for western nations if, now that their attention is forcibly directed to this wonderful yellow race, they

take the trouble to examine its entire culture. Let the reader test the following survey of Japanese traits for this astonishing thesis: while the Japanese stand on the same general plane of culture as the peoples of Europe and North America, they are distinct rivals with them for pre-eminence on that plane, by reason of the number of points wherein they are demonstrably supreme. Should this thesis prove true, it follows, of course, that no "yellow peril" can come from the Japanese; nor, since they now enjoy leadership of the Far Orient, is it likely that any can come from Korea or China. To be sure, should the entire Mongolian race rise to the plane already reached by the Japanese, the Indo-Keltic race would then have rivals for both material and mental supremacy such as it had never met before; but that would be no peril, except to our follies and foibles, and these we really ought to be willing to part with. Rivalry in culture can only increase our own culture, provided always that we are willing to learn in turn from rivals, although these be of the yellow race. But it is time for our survey, which need not here touch more than what Hokusai, the great Japanese artist, called "the vital points."

As physical basis for his culture, the Japanese owns a body which makes up in agility what it lacks in size. Japanese closely resemble the famous Ghorkas of India. They have the same admirable balance of bone and muscle, and the same lightness of movement and power of endurance.¹ This vigor, with a related healthiness, the Japanese owe to various causes. When only a month old, the baby is taken to some Shinto shrine, where it receives a name, is devoted to the *uji-gami*, or family deity, and, the next day, is strapped upon the back of mother, elder brother, or sister, whom it automatically clasps with arms and legs, so as frequently to acquire bowlegs, but always muscles of a fiber resembling that of wild animals, because both have exercise from early life onward. This outdoor life, with its fresh air and sunshine, reduces infant mortality below that of other peoples, so

¹ Here plainly is the physical basis for those recent military achievements that elicited from Colonel Gädke, a German military expert, the astonishing verdict that the Japanese infantry is now the best in the world.

that the death-rate of children under five years of age runs no higher than that among older people. The simple food and drink of the masses, with their moderation in smoking and liquor-drinking, further promote health; while the daily use of a very hot bath protects them from rheumatism, and this in turn from organic heart disease, of which it is the chief cause. Japanese men are as entirely free from the opium-smoking of their Chinese neighbors as Japanese women are from their foot-binding; nor do the women lace their waists as westerners persist in doing, in spite of all warning to the contrary. What little waist there is to the Japanese figure is filled by the *obi*, or broad sash, and freedom from restrictive coverings results in a faultless shape and marvelous flexibility of both hands and feet. The daily bath makes the Japanese crowd the sweetest-smelling one in the world, and the Japanese skin elastic and velvety. Athletics had fallen into disuse since the revolution in 1868; but a unique national sport called *jujutsu*, or the "soft art," in which a wrestler throws his assailant by skilfully diverting the onset, has of late been enthusiastically revived, along with other sports, throughout Japan, so that the Japanese Athletic Association now numbers nearly a million active members.

The skill and industry of the Japanese in agriculture may readily be judged from the fact that nearly fifty million people subsist mostly on foods raised upon the rim and crevices of a long but narrow chain of volcanic islands, over most of which will grow only a bambu scrub that not even goats will eat. As grass is scanty, cattle are few; and meat, milk, and butter practically unknown until recently. Fish of fine quality in great abundance has supplied the place of meat, though fowls and eggs are eaten, as indeed they are eaten the world around, being the only generally diffused food of man. Under these conditions, agriculture must be intensive, and it is. Rice, now the staple grain, is sown thickly, and subsequently transplanted by hand and a blade at a time; but the crop never fails, and its quality is the best in the world. In face of the impossibility of raising more food in Japan, and an annual net increase of 600,000 in the population, emigration to Hawaii, the Philippines, Formosa, and Korea has

become a plain necessity, except where population is absorbed by the recent extraordinary growth in manufactures and commerce. Japanese show equal skill with French and Italians in the culture, reeling, and spinning of silk; and this article forms the chief item of export. They grow tea, mine coal and copper, and are every year making an increased number of articles in demand by the home and foreign markets, as well as these are made anywhere. Their skill and industry quail at nothing that other peoples can do; and when the raw material fails at home—as with cotton, iron, sugar, and kerosene—it is imported from abroad. Under such conditions, Japanese commerce grew from 13 million dollars in 1869 to 303 millions in 1903, of which exports furnished 145 millions and imports 158—an unprecedented increase in the world's history, of course! Growth in the merchant marine has reached from a mere coasting trade with junks to a place fifth in the list of nations! As an example of organization, Japanese may offer their postal system, now the cheapest and perhaps the best in the world, besides an excellent system of postal savings-banks. Letters are carried for one cent, and postal cards for half a cent each.

If the Baconian maxim, that the start is all, be correct, then Europe is debtor for its mathematics and science to the marvelous Greeks, whom Francis Galton credits with the highest genius of any people that have yet lived. This science other Indo-Keltic peoples in Europe and America have hitherto enjoyed the sole credit of deepening and extending; but within a few decades the Mongolian Japanese have shown such brilliant results in the same direction that here, too, they must now be included in “the foremost files of time.” The Murata rifle, with which the Japanese army is so well equipped, is the invention of a Japanese, and was further improved by Colonel Arisaka; while the smokeless powder used was invented by Mr. Shimose. The German bacteriologist, Dr. Behring, must freely share his laurels with his collaborator, the Japanese Dr. Kitasato, for the discovery of diphtheritic antitoxin; while the distinction of isolating the active principle of the suprarenal glands called adrenalin, now the most powerful astringent and hemostatic known, fell to Dr. Takamine,

after European and American chemists had sought it for decades in vain. Messrs. Hirose and Ikeno are equally distinguished in botany.

For the foundations of logic and philosophy the civilized world is indebted to the Greeks, precisely as it is for mathematics and science. It now seems that—to use Goethe's phrasing—pretty nearly all that is reasonable in these disciplines has already been thought; and certainly Japanese have no more need to show originality in these subjects than Americans have. As to general philosophic ability and interest, Japanese students have betrayed no deficiency to their instructors whether at home or abroad. Those who suppose they have gained benefit from the peculiar metaphysics of Christian Science will be interested to learn that it was closely matched in the early nineteenth century by Kurozumi Sakyo, who at thirty-five years of age, while rapt in his devotions to the rising sun, was so penetrated by the *yoki*, or positive and cheerful spirit, that "his heart suddenly became pure, and he laid hold upon that life which vivifies the universe." The *yoki* had previously saved him from mortal sickness, and now it enabled him to cure others of various diseases—a practice which has been continued to this present by his followers, who constitute a considerable sect in Japan.

Though the Japanese have proved, not simply position, but pre-eminence on the modern plane of culture in the spheres of politics and warfare, they had learned the principle of these activities from the West. But in the case of art no such discount can be made; for the Japanese art, both fine and decorative, that has won recognition the wide world around, is an exclusively Mongolian product. This recognition has been tendered, not only by confessed admiration, but by that imitation which makes the sincerest praise. We have the authority of Richard Muther for the fact that French impressionism was inaugurated by enthusiasm for the artistic marvels that Japan exported soon after its opening to foreign intercourse. Enthusiasm for the Japanese swept over the studios of Paris like a storm; and in a short time great collections were made by such masters as Manet, Tissot, Whistler, Degas, and Monet. Finally, the Paris Inter-

national Exposition of 1867 brought Japan entirely into vogue.

Where there had been rhythm, tension, clarity, largeness, and quietude in the old European painting, there was in them [the Japanese] a nervous freedom, an artificial carelessness, and life and charm. . . . Artists learned from them another manner of drawing and modeling, a manner of giving the impression of the object, without the need for the whole of it being executed, so that one knows that it is there only through one's knowledge.

As Paris was art center for the western world, these Japanese traits, once adopted there, spread everywhere, and have now become so familiar to our eyes as to lose some of their erstwhile novelty. By reason of this currency, much Japanese art now seems as familiar to us as Shakespeare's plays seem full of quotations. The puerilities of Dresden china and the improprieties of Sèvres have been revealed by the advent of the famous Royal Copenhagen, which closely follows a Japanese model; while the American Rockwood has won its deserved fame by adopting a Japanese type to American clays and American tastes, and a Japanese is regularly found on the staff of art-craftsmen at the Rockwood studio in Cincinnati. William Anderson sums up the survey in his superb *Pictorial Arts of Japan* with the words:

In its motives it claims a share of originality at least equal to that of any art extant; in the range and excellence of its decorative application it takes perhaps the first place in the world; though in the qualities of scientific completeness (perspective, chiaroscuro, and anatomy) it falls much below the standard of modern Europe.

But while these faults are the pardonable and remediable effects of a mistaken reverence for traditional conventions, and indeed are already being remedied, the remarkable beauties reveal qualities that no academic teaching could supply.

But most people have heard some echo of Mr. Alfred East's dictum that "Japanese art is great in small things, but small in great things." This error arose in part from the seclusion of "great things" in private collections and temple treasures, whereas "small things" of fine artistry are abundant in Japan as they are nowhere else on earth. But also the fact is that, in point of both subject and form, Japanese fine art compares fairly with European, as Mr. E. F. Fenollosa demonstrates in his lec-

tures; while Mr. K. Okakura has shown, in his *Ideals of the East*, that Japanese art has been informed with patriotic, religious, and philosophic sentiments as pronounced as those of any other people. Nor has this ample content failed to run through a development correspondent to that in Europe. Thus, a religious period of sculpture, Chinese-derived, in the seventh and eighth centuries was succeeded by one of painting in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. The statues—really idols, as with the Greeks—show a more abstract modeling, as becomes the Buddhist subject, and have a more decorative setting on lotus and glory than was practiced in the West. The painting reached its consummation in Yeishin, who was the Fra Angelico of Japan in tenderness of line and glory of color. Then followed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries a national school—the Yamato-Tosa—mostly with military subjects descriptive of the current civil strife. Then renewed Chinese influence gave rise to a grand idealistic landscape in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which yielded in turn to realism in the sixteenth and subsequent centuries, though all pre-existent schools have representatives to this day.

A unique phase of this realism was the colored block printing, extra-academic and democratic alike in artists, subjects, and patrons, but attaining a refinement of line and color appreciable by no other pavement populace in the world. The originals were painted by such masters as Kiyonaga, Utamaro, Hiroshige, and Hokusai; and the process work done by unnamed engravers and pressmen, whose perfection of craftsmanship is almost incomprehensible to the westerner. E. F. Strange declares this “the highest form of a purely democratic art the world ever saw.” The people’s sense for nature also is so keen that Wordsworth could have no message for them; and their sense for decoration so sound and simple that neither could Morris do them service. Also Morris’ maxim, that art should be made by the people and for the people as a joy to the maker and user, is an everyday fact in Japan. In fine, the Japanese are the greatest draftsmen and colorists living, and in decorative composition have given the world that asymmetric style which forms the only alternative

from the symmetry which was bequeathed us by the great Greeks. If, therefore, there is any peril to art involved in current international relations, it must be *to* the yellow race quite as much as *from* it. It is worth while to notice here, as a precondition of all art, that the Japanese are beyond compare the neatest and cleanest people upon earth. Neither street, yard, nor house is ever seen in the least littered or disordered; while, as already noticed, a daily hot bath keeps the whole people as fresh and fragrant as new hay.

Even a slight acquaintance with the history and present practices of the Japanese can leave no doubt that they possess a keen moral faculty, however it may have been diverted from our standards by varying conditions. There is added comfort in this fact for those who believe in the "yellow peril;" for, even should the Mongolian develop his vast material resources in his own behalf, he could still be depended upon to respect our rights at least as much as we have his, for that could strain no moral faculty at all worth the name. The "varying conditions" just cited were communalism as contrasted with our individualism, and feudalism in contrast with our industrialism. Such broad political and social facts as these determine special virtues by the score. Thus, the chief duty in Japanese eyes was loyalty to the feudal lord, which, since the restoration in 1868, was transformed into loyalty to the national lord or Mikado, now emerged from his sacred seclusion in the Kyoto palace. This loyalty was binding, whatever might be the character of the liege lord; indeed, retainers have sometimes committed suicide to place emphasis upon disregarded admonitions to a dissolute or headstrong master; and the duty of vendetta—avenging the murder of a lord or kinsman—was carried out with a self-sacrificing zeal that reached its climax in the "Forty-seven Ronins" glorified by all Japanese to this day. And this Japanese loyalty still possesses the sovereign seal of *kesshi*, "ready even to death," as is everywhere evident in the war just closed. In a call for a forlorn hope, practically everyone responds, some observing an old custom of writing the petition in their own blood. Japanese can count the cost and then be perfectly determined. In feudal times children

of *samurai* were made familiar with death from a tender age by their parents, who taught the little boy how the sword should be directed against his bosom, and the little girl how the dagger must be held to pierce her throat. The *bushido*, or knightly code, of these choice souls rested on a tripod of *chi*, *jin*, *yu* — respectively wisdom, benevolence, and courage. “*Samurai* must have a care of their words, and are not to speak of avarice, cowardice, or lust.” And though the *samurai* as a caste have been abolished, the *samurai* spirit still pervades the Japanese army and navy, producing officers whose plain living and high thinking render them doubtless the most efficient in the world.

In contrast with this noble *samurai*, the farmer, the artisan, and especially the trader were contemned. Said Aochi to his son: “There is such a thing as trade. See that you know nothing of it. . . . To be proud of buying high-priced articles cheap is the good fortune of merchants, but should be unknown to *samurai*.” In addressing the *samurai* the trader was required to touch the ground with his forehead, and while talking with a *samurai* to remain with his hands upon the ground. Is it any wonder that under such conditions the trader fell into lying and dishonesty; and that, during his transition from a feudal to an industrial system, he retains some of his vicious habits?

The communalism of old Japan took the family as its social unit, and valued each member thereof for work done and not for intrinsic worth. Judged thus, woman had value only as a mother and a domestic, while man was left free to resort to concubinage or harlotry, as soon after marriage as the fading charms of his wife ceased to please him. The resultant licentiousness, together with the lying mentioned above, form the evil pair that some critics claim especially disgrace Japan; but, in any case, both are doomed under the new conditions. Professor Gubbins, translator of the new Japanese legal codes, is authority for the view that “in no respect has modern progress in Japan made greater strides than in the improvement in the position of woman.” And in certain respects practice is even preceding theory, as in honor accorded the empress, and in the public wedding of the prince imperial with mutual pledges for bride-

groom and bride. In contrast with such looseness of the marital bond, the relation between father and son was and is exceedingly strong. Filial piety ranked next to loyalty in the scale of duties, and was carried even to excess; whereas, according to competent observers of both Orient and Occident, we allow our children to fall short of duty in this particular.

In the realm of religion, the Japanese, like ourselves, adopted the faith of an alien race: we a reformed Judaism of the Semites, they a reformed Brahmanism of the Indo-Kelts. Position on the plane of human culture in this matter must be estimated by what Japanese did for this imported Buddhism; and that, at least, equals all that any European people ever did for Christianity, exceeding much though it might be. There was the ardor of early faith, a development extending over a millennium of years, dogmatic interest resulting in the extant eight great sects with thirty-six subsects, provision of stately temples with their gorgeous cult, and the wide extension of monasticism. Nowhere in Japan can one travel ten miles without coming upon some *tera* or temple, devoted to this noble faith; but, still more, nowhere can one travel a single mile without coming upon some *miya*, or shrine, devoted to a primitive, native faith, that of Shintoism, faithful devotion to which, even in presence of the more imposing Buddhism, must be counted a service to religion over and above anything achieved in Europe, where only mere fragments — what Professor E. B. Tylor calls “survivals” — survived the incursion of the superior faith. This faithful preservation of their early religion has rendered Shintoism the most picturesque, complete, and ancient religion of the natural or tribal type now extant. This statement may seem open to challenge, but the writer is on familiar ground here, and is ready to defend his thesis against all comers.

It follows from this survey that the thesis stated at the outset is established: the Japanese do hold position upon the same plane of culture as western peoples, and are even rivals for pre-eminence in many respects. There can be no “yellow peril,” therefore, in the Japanese leadership of a progressive Far Orient, but only an honorable rivalry, profitable alike to yellow and white.