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Holland 4

The Meaning of Japan

38-12-20 I have thought that it might be instructive to turn from our own race problem to one of the great problems of the world and to consider the meaning of Japan in modern civilization. I do this the more gladly because Japan is a colored nation and thus exemplifies one of the color problems of the world.

The physical aspect of Japan as one sails across the China Sea from Shanghai is that of slim brown mountains rising suddenly from the water. The vegetation is sparse, only 15% of the whole area of Japan being cultivable. And yet the green of trees, the struggle of the crop, and the blooming of flowers gives a singular aspect of beauty and charm to the busy industry on the three islands that stretch northeast from Korea to Sakhalin.

Japan is a small country, smaller than Texas and but twice the size of Great Britain; but it is thickly settled with 70 millions of people. They came east ward to these is-

lands from China and Korea, and northwest from the darker Malay lands and from India, and form a mixed people, short of stature, yellow and brown in color with coarse straight hair.

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Here on these little islands the drama of their life has been played for $2\frac{1}{2}$ thousand years. The beginnings are swathed in myth with the first clear openings centering in strife with Korea which was the geographic center of the extension of Japan from the mainland to the sea, and which the inland Japanese conquered in the second century. From Korea and China came books and scholars, and upon this foundation Japanese civilization began to expand in the 5th and 6th centuries. Buddhism came from India at the same time that Christianity came to France and Great Britain. And in 710 the first permanent Japanese capital was erected at Nara. I was in Nara last fall and later in Kioto which became the second capital in 794. Here one can still see the subtler expressions of Japanese life; the beauty of architecture; the spread of poetry and painting; the growth of Shinto,

Japan was a culture of little things; of dwarfed trees and tiny gardens; of minute and untiring cultivation of the soil; and wide worship of sea and air and mountain. There were silk and pearls and gold and gorgeous ceremony and solid building. Yet life in Japan did not have the gorgeous iridescence of the Chinese tile and towers. It was more sombre and solid and built upon the hard and continuous work of masses of men. Under the music, dancing, and painting was the hard work and striving for power which characterizes a growing state until we had that curious division of power by which phantom emperors were ruled by the great families of the Shoguns who became the real rulers of Japan, who beat back the hords of Kublai Khan, the Mongul, who had conquered China and who eventually unified Japan into a country that knew how to guard itself from enemies without and within.

Perhaps it will be well to pause a moment here and review somewhat more in detail the history of Japan. The books of Confucius, one of the world's greatest philosophers,

were brought to Japan from Korea in 286 A. D. and Korean and Chinese scholars became instructors to the young princes and nobles. In 552 A. D. came Buddhism and for two generations a fierce religious feud arose between the old religion and the new. The old religion was an accumulation of myths and ceremonies somewhat analogous to the ancient African religions as they re-established themselves in the West Indies and to a lesser extent in the United States. The new Buddhism came from India. It was one of the greatest attempts of all time to lead men into the paths of righteousness but belief and example, by dogma and ceremony. The spread of Buddhism over the East was analogous to the spread of Christianity over the West. But the results were different for Buddhism became a religion of art and humanity; it suppressed war, it built beautiful temples, it promulgated a religion of personal sacrifice. Gradually it gained the ascendancy in Japan and for 200

years the state was gradually changed, the ownership of the land distributed more widely, the government centralized, the beautiful city of Nara built, "bright and gay like the cherry in full bloom." Then beginning with 784 came the period of great families and the rise of feudalism along with a development in literary and esthetic tradition, and the establishment of a new capital at Kyoto. Poets wrote, tournaments were held amid cherry blossoms, flower viewing became an art, games and amusements were elaborated, and music, and dancing, and painting cultivated. In the 12th century arose the powers behind the throne, the Shoguns, which made the hereditary emperor a shadow in some such way as the King of England today is but the official reminder of a power which is lodged in the hands of the Cabinet and Prime Minister. But the Japanese Shogunate from the 12th to the 19th century was upheld by the military power, ability, and wealth of a few great families without democratic control. It led in the middle of the 14th century to civil

strife which lasted throughout the 16th century, but gradually in the 17th century Japan achieved a unity in contra-distinction to the division under the feudal lords. From 1603 to the middle of the 19th century the Tokugawa Shoguns ruled Japan. A long continued peace was established and the country was carefully secluded from its neighbors for fear of foreign religion and foreign aggression. A revival of learning took place. The Japanese language and literature as contrasted with the Chinese was encouraged, and nationalism and imperialism were preached. Then came the visit of Commodore Perry and the nation was rudely shaken from its slumber of seclusion. Treaties with foreign nations had to be made and suddenly the whole form of government was changed. The ruling Shoguns were deposed; the imperial power under the Emperor Meiji came to the front and the first deliberative assembly met in 1869. This did not mean that Japan was a democracy, but it meant that

the basis of power was more widely distributed among noble families and the rising merchant class so that the democratization of the nation began in 1868.

Rather suddenly then in the middle of the 19th century, and through the impulse of a swash-buckling American ship captain, the doors of Japan were forced open and she came through commerce to be a part of the modern world. The great families of the Shoguns who were compelled to make treaty with the West and open the kingdom to power, incurred therefor such enmity that they fell from control and the empire was restored, under the visible power of the emperor, but still backed and advised by other great families and great nobles. This restoration of 1868 marked modern Japan.

That modern world had started with the African slave trade when labor became a commodity and when the growing disposition of Christianity to regard the souls of workers was transmuted into the new theory of capitalism which made human labor a thing to be bought and sold. The crops raised by Negro slaves in Louisiana, in the United States,

the West Indies, and South America began to circle the world and built that primary accumulation of Capital which soon dominated the new machine industry; new cities arose; a new commerce; a new demand for the exchange of goods; and Japan had in its silk, its pottery, its handicrafts, material which the world wanted. Europe and America forced her to trade with them as they were forcing China. But Japan was different from China; not so different in the manner of its men for they had much of the same blood, but whereas the imperial power of China had driven resistance down into the family, clan and village and thus distintegrated the land, in Japan, on the other hand, you had a singularly unified country which enabled it to present a united front to the world from 1853 to this day. Social classes were straitly drawn and yet solidly and subtly knit together by the strongest bonds of religion, Emperor-worship, a common heritage of culture and a new enthusiastic nationalism. Only for a moment did foreign courts hold jurisdiction over foreigners living there. Foreign merchants found no such foothold as they found in China and India and

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pretty soon the European world was satisfied to trade with Japan as an equal, albeit a shrewd one to be watched.

Then came one of those sudden forward movements that has characterized Japanese history: a war with China over Korea broke out in 1894. It was in the view of the world an absurd illogical struggle. China was a giant even though sleeping with hands and feet tied by England, America, and France. But a giant, nevertheless, with 400 millions of people, with a history which made Europe an infant, and with possibilities that were colossal. Yet because China was encroaching upon Korea, that Korea which was almost a motherland to Japan and yet geographically a threat to her independence, Japan attacked China and in a short swift war of a year, showed the weakness of the greater country and convinced Europe that the time for dismembering China and making her a colonial appendage to European commerce had come.

The Japanese were practically compelled by the concert of European powers to take nothing from China but Korea and Formosa which meant that China, now revealed as weak and

tottering was to be divided by Europeans with Japan left out. Hereupon immediately Russia, Germany, and England stepped forward to make good their claims upon various sections of China. But this led in 1904, to another and more astonishing war when Japan actually challenged Russia, in many respects then the greatest of European powers, and made her sue for peace in 1905. Thus in two bounds Japan from being in 1868 a country about to be dominated by European merchants, became in 1905 one of the great powers of the world, breaking the myth of white world domination. From this time until today Japan has presented a problem for those who think of the future of modern civilization as a problem of white folk.

From being first a cunning curiosity and then a presumptuous imitator she is envisaged today as a great danger and rival to Europe and America. This change of attitude has come about because of the military and naval power of Japan; because of her attitude toward China; and especially because of the fact that she has put the East into manufacture as a rival

of the West. Japan's attitude toward China developed after the World War. The World War meant that the power of the white race to rule the world was definitely gone. Japan knew, however, that as soon as Europe recovered from this catastrophe and as a method of recovery she would pursue her plans toward China, and that China would practically be divided between France and England with Germany and the new communistic Russia demanding eventually their share. The result was that Japan, having suffered least in the War, seized Germany's share during the War and demanded practically a Monroe Doctrine for China; that is, the right of Japan to lead in the future economic development of the East to the exclusion of white Europe. It was a tremendous demand naturally preposterous in the eyes of Europe despite the well-known fact that she had been making demands for white domination of all Asia and Africa during the whole of the 19th century. Not only did Europe resist this demand but China, itself revolutionized before and during the World War, and seeking to re-establish its integrity, complained bitterly that her cousins of the yellow race were trying to play the same role which her enemies of the white race had so successfully played

in the 19th century. It was in vain that Japan declared that her role was different; that she was protecting China and Asia against Europe; and that unless she warded off the communism of Russia to the north and the imperialism of England at the South, China would never survive and Asia would never become independent.

Pursuing this idea, Japan in 1931 seized Manchuria and made it into a puppet state and later dominated two districts of North China. The reaction toward Japan was bitter and the feeling throughout the European and American world would, under other circumstances and in other ages, have led immediately to war. But Europe as Japan well knew could not fight and for the first time since the Turks threatened Vienna, a colored people successfully defied Europe.

Nor did Japan rest here. Hitherto the whole European argument had arraigned Asia for backwardness in modern industrialization. Japan therefore deftly changed her object

and attack. Gradually pushing back her purely military program of aggression, seemingly on China but really against the West, she began to industrialize the Japanese state. She integrated her handicrafts, she built factories, she imported raw material, she lowered her money wages. The state helped to furnish capital. While the export trade of Europe and America dwindled during the depression Japan's went up by leaps and bounds.

("Made in Japan", Guenther Stein, pp.167, 169, 170, 171)

"To-day Japan exports five or six times as many finished products as she did in 1914. If the exports of 1914 are used as a basic index of 100, the quantitative development of her exports is as follows:

1914, 100; 1920, 210; 1928, 254; 1932, 325; 1934, 555.

Japan's quantitative share in the world's trade of manufactures is now almost 10 per cent.

In some products her share is much larger; in cotton tissues, for instance, it is 40 per cent. Even the average figure is lower only than the shares of the four industrial Great Powers: Great Britain, the United States, Germany and France, which together monopolize two-thirds of this world trade. . . .

Today Japan is the largest exporter of cotton tissues in the world; her share of 40 per cent is larger than that of Great Britain. The British record, established shortly before the war, was 7 billion square yards of cotton tissues. At that time Japan was not a serious competitor. A few figures will illustrate the later development of British and Japanese exports of cotton tissues (in million yards):

	Great Britain	Japan
1923	3,866	1,419
1932	2,198	2,032
1934	1,995	2,568

Great Britain's exports of cotton tissues have gone back to the figures of the 'sixties, the time when feudal Japan was opened to international trade by force. At that time Japan had hardly any industry worth the name, and Japanese pioneers were coming to England to study Western spinning methods. And to-day Japan is ahead of Great Britain by 500 million square yards! . . .

Japan began her career on world markets as a simple exporter of raw silk. During the second phase of her development as an exporter, cotton tissues seemed the only item which could be added. Soon, however, in the third phase, she became a leading exporter of artificial silk and of other textiles. And already the fourth phase has begun, for of late the exports of all textile products have been exceeded by the exports of non-textile 'general industrial merchandise'. . . .

The 'non-textiles' which Japan to-day exports up to a value of at least 1 million pounds each include the following: tinned foodstuffs; wheat flour; refined sugar; drugs and chemicals; dyes, paints, &c.; boots and shoes; buttons and jewellery; paper; potteries; glass and glassware; iron rails; enamelled ware, cutlery and nails; clocks and scientific instruments; lamps; toys."

She reached all parts of the world, she under-sold England in England and the United States in America. She became a great rival of Western industry. Europe sought to retaliate by tariffs to restrict her exports but Japan so organized her buying power that she forced trade agreements even from such enemies as Australia and America. When Australia refused to buy Japanese goods, Japan refused to buy Australian wool; when the United States threatened to exclude Japanese goods, Japan threatened to stop buying 200 million dollars worth of American cotton annually. It did not take Australia and the United States long to come an understanding with Japan, for Japanese buyers did not compete with each other. They stood as a unit.

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But this meant strain and told upon Japan's internal organization. It depressed the status of all Japanese workers, and particularly of Japanese peasants. It threatened inner but turmoil, despite this Japan had strong arguments to support her at home: what would happen if labor over-threw capital in Japan? Colored labor was not recognized in the West as human labor; the people of the United States had excluded the Japanese by law, not because

they were vagabonds and burdens but because they were too thrifty and too efficient; a political deal between the West and the South brought the Japanese exclusion law in return for the defeat of the anti-lynching bill in 1924. Thus America showed her clear attitude toward colored labor whether it was her own black citizens or yellow foreigners. Moreover, while the money wage of Japanese was low, the return in satisfactions, in beauty and completeness of life, was larger than in the West; so that her workers were not as discontented as they ought to have been when one takes into account their need of better nourishment, clothing and shelter.

One cannot leave Japan without a further word as to its religion, literature, and art today. The most influential religion in Japan is Shinto. It is a combination of prehistoric myth, ancestor worship and Chinese ethics. One can understand it best by imagining that the African rites imported to Haiti by the early slaves had been rationalized

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and directed into a code of ethics by educated and thoughtful leadership, that their primitive beauty had been retained, and that on the family worship had been ingrafted the worship of government and nation as typified in the emperor. There emerged a religion of honor and ethic with little dogma, with simply ceremony which binds children and youth in a singularly charming way to the Japanese state. Shinto and Buddhism have had many points of contact and influence. To the 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ million followers of Shinto must be added the 42 million followers of Buddha cooperating in many respects; and yet Buddhism divided, like Christianity into 11 sects, is still a powerful philosophy of life more Chinese than Japanese in its general outline. To these may be added 250 thousand Christians.

Japanese literature has had a long and honorable tradition. It has been influenced since 1868 by modern European literature which has been largely translated into Japanese. Newspapers and magazines have given rise to a wide body of readers among a people largely literate. There are several daily papers with a circulation of a million and more.

There is a native novel and a new native poetry and recently an increasing literature of the proletariat. In the fine arts Japan has been original and singularly beautiful. Their painting has been in water colors rather than oil and with India ink. Instead of centralizing their attention on the human figure they have portrayed more in the abstract, depicted beautiful landscapes and flowers and mountains, and in human beings action rather than form. I saw the last National Exhibition in Kiota and the marvelous work in screens and figures. There is, of course, nothing so beautiful as the Japanese color prints. In sculpture and applied art, in lacquer ware and ceramics Japanese art has set world wide standards. Architecture in Japan has been celebrated for its simplicity and simple beauty rather than the overwhelming grandeur of the Chinese. While in the drama there is a national tradition to which the West is more and more giving careful attention.

Here, therefore, stands Japan today. Slowly she is turning toward understanding with China although that involves the danger of European interference since China still has naive confidence in the philanthropy of the West. Japan has declared her enmity toward Russian communism although that forces her to give too much power to her military party and to turn her back upon perhaps the greatest effort to raise the economic level of the common people which the world has ever seen. Then too, because of the race prejudice of England and America which refuses Japan fellowship as an equal, she has been forced almost into the lap of Fascist Germany and Italy who represent today war, tyranny, reaction and race hate on the most dangerous scale. Yet all is not dark. Japan has a magnificent heritage of courtesy, pride, hard work, and efficiency. She has a beautiful national art and a religion of honor and sacrifice. She works as a group more completely than perhaps any other single nation. She has won the respect of the world even though that respect is expressed in fear and armament. She has but one thing to remember and

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larger and larger numbers of Japanese realize this: first, that the union of Japan and China and eventually India can easily dominate the world with a leadership of mankind such as Western Europe never could accomplish; but that secondly, this may be a danger to culture unless the welfare of the worker as contrasted with the profits of the rich are made the leading ideal of Japanese civilization. We who watch the development of Japan from afar, with sympathetic eyes, and the curious tie of color with all its memory of insult, slavery and exploitation can but hope that her possible leadership of the world will make for industrial democracy and human understanding across the color line on a far larger scale than the world has yet seen accomplished.

It perhaps is not necessary to draw a moral from the history of Japan which may be applicable to us now and here, but I cannot refrain from pointing out one lesson: and that is that the fundamental problem which Japan is today attacking is not her problem of

militarism or even of politics. Like a large part of the world today she recognizes that the economic foundation of her people, the regulation of industry no so much for profit as for the uplift of mankind must be the center of her future striving. And so with us, all we like sheep have gone astray in trying to imitate the profit making of America and the seeking to use our vote and power to that end. When in truth beneath the power of the ballot, beneath the order of the state and the social welfare of mankind is that organization of economic power by which poverty can be banished; crime cured; and health maintained. This is not industrial education coming back in new guise. It is industrial organization lead by higher training for the uplift of the masses.

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