CHINESE ELEMENTS IN JAPANESE CULTURE

By
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The Sixteenth
George Ernest Morrison
Lecture in Ethnology

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THERE are many ways of studying the well-known phenomenon of Chinese elements in Japanese culture. However, to an anthropologist who is interested in cultural processes, the most important approach must concern the manner in which particular ways of life, conveniently termed patterns of culture, come into being and subsequently tend to undergo change. Such processes, so anthropologists believe, may be observed at work within every society, whether it be a primitive tribe or a sophisticated nation. In every case they appear to develop from the interplay of two sets of forces. One of these brings into existence customs or objects that are thought to have been locally originated, so that this force is called independent invention. The other, termed diffusion, brings on the scene cultural items that are known to have originated elsewhere, but which have been diffused to, or borrowed by, any society whose way of life is under study.

Contrary to beliefs that are popularly held in some quarters no society of world-wide importance has ever built its culture entirely or even primarily on objects and ideas of its own devising. Analysis reveals that in each instance a national way of life consists of only a few local items at best, and a large number of traits that were taken over by diffusion from some outside place of origin. Professor Alfred L. Kroeber, dean of American anthropologists, neatly summed up the situation a year ago when he said: "Most anthropologists and culture historians would agree that as regards probably every human society the major part of the content of its culture or civilization has been derived from outside".[1]

By way of illustration it cannot be denied that three of the most essential ingredients of our culture are: use of the Latin alphabet; belief in the teachings of Judeo-Christian religions; and that regard for individual privacy and independence which is basic to all democracies. Yet, no one of these all-important traits was independently evolved within the territorial limits of

[1] A. L. Kroeber, "The Delimitation of Civilizations", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, April 1953, p. 268.

the Western world. Every schoolchild knows that the Latin alphabet grew out of a form of Phoenician writing that was first used along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea; that Judeo-Christian beliefs originated in the Asiastic Near East; and that Western ideals of democracy are grounded on certain principles that had originally been formulated in Europe. In regard to each of these items whatever was borrowed has been so thoroughly made over and so completely absorbed that, in the absence of historical information, it would be hard to distinguish the traits that had been diffused from those that were of local origin. As a broad rule, it may be said that in every society's cultural evolution there arrives a time when its diffused items become practically indistinguishable from its independent inventions.

If we look at our subject from this point of view we must from the outset recognize that the basic ingredients of the Chinese and Japanese ways of life are compounded of local and borrowed traits. The proportions of the two sets of factors vary considerably in each of the societies under consideration, but once they had become amalgamated no distinction was drawn between them.

There is no one living today who knows precisely when or how Chinese culture came to be started, but it is pretty well agreed that the way of life which has come to be regarded as typically Chinese began somewhere about 2000 B.C. in the general vicinity of the modern province of Shensi, perhaps between the great bend of the Yellow River and the river Wei. At this remote date the ancestors of the present day Chinese people were distinguished from their neighbours primarily by their use of the Chinese language and by their devotion to agricultural pursuits. On all sides they were surrounded by numerous tribes who neither spoke the Chinese language nor paid much attention to farming.

The stage of culture that the settled Chinese agriculturists had achieved around 2000 B.C. is known to anthropologists as the Neolithic or New Stone Age, which means that the people understood and practised farming and animal husbandry, and that they carried on many of the arts and crafts still current in our own day, such as pottery making, basketry, and cloth weaving; but that they either knew not, or failed to make extensive use of any metals; and that they had no system of writing.

For approximately four centuries the early Chinese apparently remained at Neolithic levels, after which they progressed into the Bronze Age. Use of bronze calls for a combination of copper and tin, two metals which are so rarely found side by side that their acquisition leads to trading which, in turn, means contact with ever-widening groups of people, thus increasing opportunities for cultural enrichment through the process of diffusion. For one reason or another, possibly in order to keep track of trading expeditions in search of metals, a system of writing goes hand in hand with a society's entrance into the Bronze Age.

In China the Bronze Age corresponds more or less exactly to the dynastic period known as the Shang, which dates around 1500-1100 B.C. The term Shang dynasty suggests that by 1500 B.C. the Chinese-speaking farmers had been organized into a political structure, somewhat resembling a kingdom, over which for the next four hundred years or so a succession of kings ruled, all of whom belonged to the family or house of Shang. The introduction of bronze-working techniques did not mean the abandonment of the older practices of Chinese life, including a fundamental reliance on farming and animal raising. Instead, the Chinese people of Shang times retained their old customs but added to them new traits, among the most important of which was a system of writing. As far as can be told, Chinese writing was an independent invention and not a borrowed or diffused trait.[2] It did not bear any resemblance to the written systems that had long been in use in the Near East, and out of which our own phonetic alphabet ultimately developed. Nor was the most ancient Chinese writing, in contrast to that of Western Asia, devoted largely to matters of trade and business in general.

Chinese writing, in its earliest form, consisted not of marks which represent sounds—the basis of any phonetic alphabet—but rather of figures which are not letters but are known as characters. Some of these have a pictorial quality, and probably evolved from true pictures. An English equivalent, roughly speaking, is our letter "a" which is derived from the Semitic "aleph" which was originally, so it can be demonstrated, the picture of an oxhead. Other Chinese characters stood for ideas, much as we might use the word "lion" to represent not the animal itself but rather the idea of courage, as in our phrase "lion-hearted". Still other Chinese characters were made to

[2] A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology*, rev. ed. N.Y. 1948, p. 737.

stand for various sounds of the spoken language just as our "ly" as in love-ly, has meaning neither as a picture nor an idea but only as a sound. Chinese characters, then, may be said to have been either pictorial, ideographic, or phonetic.

The earliest known written system of Shang China differed from that of Western Asia not only in the use of characters rather than letters, but also in its intent or purpose; for instead of being geared to business it was associated with religion. The Bronze Age Chinese believed that their destinies were controlled by various spirits whose advice and encouragement they sought at critical times. Communication between living men and spirits in those days took the form of oracle bones. These consisted of questions written on thin animal bones, frequently shoulder blades of tortoises, which were then subjected to heat. Answers to the questions raised were interpreted by the way in which the heat cracked the thin bone; and occasionally the answers received, as well as the questions asked, were inscribed on the same bone. Rulers, for example, might ask if a given time were propitious for attacking an enemy, and farmers might ask if they would get good crops. In each case the reply might be a simple yes or no. This method of getting advice from the spirit world is called technically scapulimancy, and is known to have been used—not always with true writing—in many parts of the world.

It was once thought that ancient Chinese writings on oracle bones were crudely inscribed with sharp-pointed instruments, but some modern scholars believe that writing brushes dipped in ink were in use as early as in Shang times. Since some of the characters drawn were pictorial it is easy to see why Chinese writing, or calligraphy, is really a fine art. Professor FitzGerald, an earlier lecturer in this series, aptly described this situation when he wrote: "In China . . . the use of an identical instrument for writing and painting, the brush, linked the two arts with an indissoluble bond . . .

"Graceful curves, thick and thin lines, a flowing continuity transformed the written character into a work of art, and gave calligraphy a place in the Chinese culture which has no parallel elsewhere, even in the illuminated manuscripts of Mediaeval Europe."[3]

For over three thousand years the people of China have re-

[3] C. P. FitzGerald, *China: A Short Cultural History*, rev. ed., London, 1950, p. 440.

garded artistic writing as a close affiliate of high scholarship. To them any important bit of writing should appeal to the eye as well as to the mind. That is one of the points on which they differ so widely from us, among whom it is often the case that the more profound a scholar is the more illegible is his handwriting.

Somewhere about 1100 B.C. the Shang dynasty was overthrown by the powerful house of Chou, which persisted with greatly varying degrees of control until 221 B.C. If we overlook the fact that there were long centuries when the Chou Emperors scarcely ruled all of China even in name, and if we measure only the time span from the assumption of Chou leadership until another dynastic house came officially into power, then it may be said that Chou was by far the longest lasting dynasty in Chinese history. If we are to be realistic, however, a distinction must be made between the earlier phases of Chou rule from 1100-771 B.C. and the later period which ran from 771-221 B.C. In the earlier phase China was controlled by a succession of tough-minded, military men who gave the country a strong and powerful central government, and under whose administration China made a great deal of cultural progress in many directions. Then, in 771 B.C. catastrophe struck the house of Chou. It was defeated by a coalition of rivals and forced to abandon its old capital at Sian, in Shensi province, and to establish a new one at Loyang in Honan. There followed a troubled era, the worst part of which historians of China know as the "The Period of the Warring States." As its name implies, the period was one of constant strife and confusion; no central authority was strong enough to control all the contending powers; and China suffered from partition into a number of mutually jealous and rival divisions. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that 771 B.C., when the house of Chou was driven from its capital city, marks the turning point between a period of strong, centrally controlled government, and an era of perpetual strife and chaos.

It was in the second part of the Chou dynasty, while China was in a state of constant confusion and political turmoil and when Chinese culture seemed on the brink of disintegration and dissolution that China's greatest pair of philosophers, Lao Tzu and Confucius, sought to bring order out of chaos. These two stressed diametrically opposed ways for China to escape from

its troubles. Lao Tzu argued that the world was run by a mystic power named Tao, which regulated all matters perfectly, but which man could neither understand nor control. Therefore, Lao Tzu taught that the more human beings extended themselves the more they interfered with the benign operation of Tao. Hence he believed that inaction was the best policy for man to follow, a "Let Nature (read Tao) take its course", sort of doctrine. In direct opposition to Lao Tzu's viewpoint were the ideas of Confucius, who is supposed to have lived from 551-480 B.C. He felt that man's difficulties arose because in his day the Chinese were no longer scrupulously obeying the many rules of conduct that had been in force in times past. The essence of his teachings consisted first, of trying to discover all the regulations that had guided human behaviour in earlier days of peace and harmony and second, of trying to persuade his contemporaries to live by the elaborate codes of conduct that he was compiling. In later years the cardinal principles of Confucius came to be universally accepted throughout China and to provide the key for an understanding of Chinese society until the twentieth century; but the teachings of Lao Tzu, while altered in a great many respects, also continued to play an important part in the later development of Chinese culture.

Confucianism has been so thoroughly and competently treated by many writers that there is little need to deal with it fully here. Suffice it to say that Confucius believed and taught that all would be well again with China if only every person were content to accept the position in society into which he happened to be born, and if proper reciprocal relations were punctilliously observed between ruler and subject; husband and wife; father and eldest son; older brother and younger brother; and friend and friend. That is to say, in each of the first four pairs there is clearly a superordinate and a subordinate member, and if rulers, husbands, fathers, and elder brothers carried out their obligations scrupulously they were fully entitled to the respect, obedience, loyalty, and services of subjects, wives, sons, and younger brothers, respectively. Furthermore, those in the dominant positions, particularly rulers, had been selected by Heaven, so Confucius believed, which had given them a mandate to rule because of their great virtue. Filial piety was the key to the whole system, because subjects owed their rulers the same loving respect and care that children owed to their parents and

especially, that eldest sons owed to their fathers. One extremely important modification of Confucian dogma was made by a later philosopher, Mencius, who argued that if a ruler failed to carry out his proper obligations his subjects had the right to rebel and depose him.

Although the teachings of Confucius were destined to form the basis of the Chinese socio-political system for over two thousand years, they were not widely accepted in his own lifetime. Indeed, he had only a scant following while he lived, and in the succeeding Ch'in dynasty his works were altogether repudiated and subjected to public burning. Not until well into the following Han dynasty, which came into power in 206 B.C. and lasted to 220 A.D., were the works of Confucius given high regard. In other words, he did not become an important figure in Chinese affairs for about 300 years after his death. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of 100 B.C. Han officials began "to adopt the rules of good behaviour and the rites inculcated in the Confucianist books . . . From this point the Confucianist ideals first began to penetrate the official class recruited from the gentry, and then the State organization itself. It was expected that an official should be versed in Confucianism and schools were set up for Confucianist education."[4]

From the time when this system was inaugurated fairly early in the Han dynasty, until 1904-5, Chinese governmental officials, exclusive of Emperors and a few hereditary noblemen, were supposed to be chosen from the winners of competitive examinations centred on a knowledge of Confucian doctrines. Only in China, of all the countries in the world, has it been so universally believed that great scholars are automatically good administrators; and only in China has respect for traditional learning been so deeply imbedded in the heart of a nation's culture. On the face of it this system was completely democratic as any bright young man, regardless of how lowly his birth may have been, had a chance to become a scholar, pass the competitive examinations, and gain a high post in the government. In practice, though, it soon became so expensive and time-consuming to acquire the necessary scholarship that few except sons of wealthy families could aspire to become skilled Confucianists. There thus arose in China a custom of political administration by gentlemanly scholars which endured into the present century.

[4] Wolfram Eberhard, *History of China*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1950, p. 78.

This is another aspect of Chinese culture that differed vastly from the West.

By Han times at the latest two of the most basic elements of the Chinese pattern of culture, writing and Confucianism, had become firmly established; and each of these was a native, indigenous development. It was during the Han dynasty, too, that a third major ingredient of Chinese culture was introduced. This was Buddhism which was, in contrast to the other two traits, unquestionably diffused from an outside source. Nevertheless, Buddhism, although it had originated in India some five centuries before it reached China, was changed in so many respects that in its Chinese form it bore only a slight resemblance to its original shape. In the beginning the Indian founder of the faith had taught that man's fierce desire for life and the acquisition of what may be called worldly goods led to an everlasting cycle of re-births on earth, during which man was again and again likely to be subjected to such miseries as poverty, sickness, old age, and death. To escape the endless chain of re-births, one had to live in such a way as to extinguish every spark of desire. When this was accomplished one's soul entered the haven of Nirvana and was no longer subject to re-birth. No intervention by a deity was necessary to achieve this kind of salvation. All that was needed was strict self-discipline and a personal willingness to abide scrupulously by the Buddhist rules of proper conduct.

When Buddhism first reached China it was by no means readily accepted. Supporters of Confucianism and Taoism, which had by this time shifted from philosophies to religions, saw a dangerous rival in the foreign faith from India, and Buddhism initially found favour only in a very limited circle centred around the Han Emperors and their courts. Gradually, within the first few centuries of the Christian era, Buddhism began to appeal to the masses, and by 500 A.D. it was thoroughly entrenched as one of China's major religions. During the process of popularization Chinese Buddhism remained neither unified nor close to the original Indian model. A variety of rival sects developed, of which two require special mention.

Perhaps the most distinctive branch of Chinese Buddhism came to be known as the Ch'ang School, whose foundation legend ascribes to the seventh century A.D. It put its entire emphasis on meditation or contemplation as the sole road to

enlightenment and salvation. Disciples were supposed to meditate on the problems and meanings of life until, in a flash of insight, the truth was revealed to them. Such a faith requires no saving deity, no creed or dogma, no lengthy study of sacred texts, and no exercise of reason and logic. Those who are favoured with the proper flash of insight and enlightenment immediately attain the status of a Buddha; all others are doomed to failure. No amount of Heavenly mercy, prayer, ritual, self-discipline, or study is of any avail. All scholars agree that this rather mystical sect of Buddhism was strongly influenced by the doctrines of Taoism, which serves to illustrate how a diffused trait of culture can be re-shaped by local practices until it is indistinguishable from independently developed customs.

Another cult of Chinese Buddhism that varied widely from the basic Indian teachings of Buddha, is known as Amidism. It centred around devout belief in a merciful saviour called Amida, who was entirely unknown to followers of original Buddhism. Amida is supposed to be a deity, miraculously born of a lotus plant, whose mercy is unquestioning and universal. To his followers the goal and practice of religion is no longer to achieve Nirvana by personally extinguishing all desires, but rather to gain admission to the Western Heaven, a very plush sort of Paradise, simply by calling on the ever-compassionate Amida. Since one could never be sure that his cry for help had been uttered with the proper sense of devotion to guarantee a favourable response it meant that worshippers had to lead devout lives, spending much of their time in the exercise of their faith. This relatively easy cult was, at first, despised in scholarly circles, but it appealed so vividly to the general populace that by 900 A.D. Amidism was far and away the most popular form of Buddhism in all China.

On the score of religion we again find a marked contrast with the West. The Chinese hold that there is nothing strange about being a Confucianist, Taoist, and Buddhist at one and the same time. To them the three faiths are no more than three paths leading to the same goal. Ordinarily they see no reason to explain or to justify their simultaneous membership in a variety of faiths, but if pressed for an explanation they are likely to draw an analogy from Western concepts of medicine. Just as Occidentals take it for granted that a patient will go to different practitioners if he needs dental care, internal medicine, or surgery, so, the

Chinese are apt to say, do they practise Confucianism when family problems are involved; Taoism for gaining long life or increasing one's wealth; and Buddhism when it comes to matters of death and the afterlife. The Chinese see nothing incongruous in resorting to different faiths for different purposes, so that their religious tolerance has none of the patronizing or condescending overtones that it has in our culture.

Before the end of the first millenium of the Christian era, China had passed through all the phases of its basic development. While each of the earlier dynasties contributed much to the patterns of Chinese life, and while each of the later ones added greatly to the enrichment of Chinese culture, the people themselves give special emphasis to two dynasties of their formative period. First and foremost is the Han dynasty, 206 B.C. to 220 A.D., during which many aspects of Chinese life were crystallized to such an extent that the modern Chinese may still describe themselves as "children of Han". The second is the T'ang dynasty which lasted from 618 to 907 A.D. Before the T'ang dynasty came to an end the most characteristic elements of traditional China had become thoroughly engrained into the Chinese pattern of culture. The written system had evolved along the lines of the characters first used in Shang times, and had now gained greater permanence from the invention of printing. The socio-political teachings of Confucius, which had been somewhat haltingly applied to administration by some of the Han emperors, were in the days of T'ang made the firm basis of a complicated governmental bureauracy. The religious concepts of Buddhism, first accepted by a limited number of Han rulers and courtiers had, by T'ang times, evolved into a variety of Chinese sects such as Ch'ang and Amidism, and had come to be widely accepted throughout the land.

Not only were the Han and T'ang dynasties brilliant and of crucial importance to the Chinese themselves, but they also had an explosive quality that carried some of their attributes far beyond the existing borders of China to other parts of Asia, particularly to Korea and Japan. By coincidence, Japan was just beginning to formulate something approaching a national way of life during the very centuries when Han China was at the height of its glory. Under the circumstances it was inevitable that China should be sending forth a variety of important cultural influences and that Japan should be on the receiving

end, with Korea frequently serving as a sort of middleman, taking items from China with one hand and passing them over to Japan with the other. In the period between the start of Han and the close of T'ang, Japan received a host of traits by diffusion from China. At first the process was a simple consequence of expulsive forces in China and receptive tendencies in Japan. At this stage, so to speak, the process worked by itself and required no special effort on the part of either country. Later, the Japanese, still aware of China's cultural leadership in East Asia, made conscious endeavours to fashion their ways of life on the basis of Chinese models. For this purpose they sent a number of official missions to study in China, and to introduce what they had learned abroad to Japan. One of the earliest, largest, and most important of these official embassies went to China in the year 607 A.D. and the last to have official sanction left Japan in 838. These dates, it should be noted, fall largely within the span of the T'ang dynasty.

Government sponsored missions accounted for only a part of the influences that Japan received from China in its formative years. Several other kinds of contacts contributed to the same process until, taken in full, the list of Chinese elements in Japanese culture included customs of dress, architecture, etiquette, literature, politics, philosophy, religion, crafts, and fine arts. Yet, for all its borrowings Japan never became a duplicate of China, nor were its imitations entirely slavish. This point can be illustrated with reference to the written system, Confucianism, and Buddhism, the first two of which, it will be recalled, were independently developed in China, but all of which Japan received by diffusion.

Before 403 A.D. there is no sure indication that the Japanese knew how to write their own spoken language and even that date is regarded as dubious by some modern authorities. Practically speaking, there is little reason to date the origins of writing in Japan, in any important sense, until two or three centuries after 403. When writing did become established in Japan it was, at the outset, frankly Chinese. Materials used, methods of writing, characters employed, and attitudes to calligraphy, all were Chinese. During the eighth century in particular it became the fashion for the educated and the elegant to read and write Chinese, much as European aristocrats used to handle French. Unfortunately, the Chinese script was not well suited for

writing Japanese. Without going into technical details, it is enough to point out that the Chinese language is largely (though not entirely) monosyllabic, whereas Japanese is essentially polysyllabic; Chinese has very few inflections, while Japanese is highly inflected; Chinese places great emphasis on the use of tones, but Japanese is spoken comparatively almost in monotone; and word order is entirely different in the two languages. Clearly, then, the Chinese script was ill-suited for the writing of Japanese, and in the course of time the Japanese devised various methods of adding elements to the basic Chinese characters so that their own spoken language could be more faithfully rendered in writing. Even so, a great deal of overlap has remained between the written systems of China and Japan. In the inaugural address that opened the Morrison Lectures, Dr W. P. Chen said in part: "It is not generally known that China and Japan originally had one [written] language. When in Japan, I could have asked a Japanese policeman at a street corner for directions by writing. So also in Korea".

Anthropologists who study the early stages of human cultures are impressed by the importance of writing. Things that are written rather than spoken can be duplicated over and over again with little danger of omission or error; they can all the more readily be transmitted throughout the entire world, far beyond the reach of any human voice; they can long outlast the life-span of their original author; and they can carry much more conviction and authority than any verbal message. We all know that if a postman told any one of us orally that we had to report for compulsory military training, we would pay little attention to his words. But if the same postman delivered the same message in writing, properly signed and attested, few of us would dare to disobey.

All this should serve to give some indication of the great importance to Japan of the introduction of a written system. Moreover, the fact that it was Chinese writing that took root in Japan, meant that those exceptional Japanese who became literate could automatically read and write Chinese and study Chinese texts. Turning first to the matter of writing, one cannot help but agree with Professor Reischauer when he says: "Because of . . . the tremendous prestige of all things Chinese, the ancient Japanese made little effort to write their own language. Proper names and brief poems in Japanese were spelled out laboriously

with one Chinese character used phonetically for each syllable, but little else was attempted. Instead the Japanese wrote in pure and often reasonably good classical Chinese . . . They even attempted to imitate Chinese literary forms, and men of education prided themselves on their ability to compose poems in Chinese."[5]

As to written documents that became available to those Japanese who could read Chinese, the most important by far were the works of Confucius. These exerted their greatest initial influence on Japan's socio-political system during the reign of Shotoku Taishi, who ruled from 593 to 621. His deep admiration for and interest in things Chinese was continued by later rulers and culminated in the years between 645 and 650 in the great Taikwa Reform edict whose principal intent was to provide Japan, which had previously consisted of a shifting confederacy of great local powers, with the framework of a strong centralized state along the lines of the bureaucracy that governed T'ang China. This attempt was hardly successful partly because the Japanese continued to rate soldiers above scholars, and partly because they continued to cling to traditional customs of assigning many high posts on the basis of heredity. For such reasons it was impossible to develop in Japan the kind of scholarly bureaucracy grounded on competitive examinations that was so characteristic of China in the T'ang period. Just the same, once it was introduced, Confucianism continued to exert a deep impression on the structure of Japanese society.

A second great effort to make Confucianism an official doctrine in Japan occurred during the Tokugawa Shogunate which controlled Japan from about 1603 to 1868. The chief hallmark of any shogunal government was a clear distinction between the Imperial line, which held the throne and controlled matters of ceremony and etiquette; and the shoguns, who were military dictators and the real powers behind the throne. The Tokugawa shoguns were bent on retaining this system for ever, and accordingly they favoured only those aspects of Confucianism that taught inferiors to obey and revere those above them. Needless to say the Tokugawa shoguns opposed the grant of true leadership to the Emperors; they minimized the Confucian doctrine of reciprocity that emphasized a ruler's obligations to his subjects; and they rejected the Mencian corollary which introduced the right of

[5] E. O. Reischauer, *Japan Past and Present*, London, 1947, p. 29.

rebellion to people whose rulers were judged to be lacking in virtue. Thus while some features of Confucianism, notably filial piety, were accepted in Japan, other aspects were played down or dismissed.

Third of the outstanding elements that Japan received from the Asiatic mainland was Buddhism. As far as Japan was concerned this religion came not from India but from China by way of Korea. It was in 552 that a Korean monarch, anxious for an alliance with Japan, sent that country an image of Buddha and some volumes of Buddhist texts, with the comment that Buddhism was highly regarded in the great and powerful Chinese nation and that it might, therefore, prove valuable to Japan. As this was at a time when Chinese prestige was exceedingly high in Japan, the Emperor of that day decided to give Buddhism a try. It did not make immediate progress and was strongly resisted by many factions, particularly by those who had vested interests in Japan's native faith, which came later to be known as Shinto.

Shinto consists of a number of ancient religious beliefs, centering about the worship of a Sun goddess, and those of her direct descendants who are the Emperors of Japan. Another aspect of Shinto doctrine is the concept that Japan is the land of the gods, and that the Japanese people are somehow more spiritual or holy than all others. The Emperor who allowed Buddhism to enter Japan was less interested in counteracting Shinto beliefs than he was in using the new faith as a political implement for dividing two alarmingly strong factions. In its earliest phase Japanese Buddhism was entirely different from Shinto, and there was marked rivalry between the followers of the two religions. After a time the differences faded into insignificance as a result of the efforts of certain religious leaders who began to identify Shinto deities with Buddhist figures and to argue that they were one and the same. One Japanese extremist, Nichiren, even went so far as to preach violently that Buddhism was essentially a Japanese religion, and that its purest version was to be found in Japan rather than in India. Since then many modern Japanese, particularly residents of rural areas, have been indifferent to the doctrinal distinctions between Buddhism and Shinto.

As a matter of fact, the principal forms that Buddhism took after it had become almost universally accepted in Japan were

derived from Chinese rather than Indian sects. The two schools which gained the largest number of adherents, although each school became greatly sub-divided in Japan, were based on the cults of Amidism and Ch'ang, both of which were already prevalent in China. Amidism came to be preached in Japan by a number of sects, all of which had reference to a Pure Land, which was a direct allusion to Paradise. Despite the many differences of dogma and interpretation that divided them, all of the Pure Land sects had in common a belief that Amida was a deity of salvation who would forgive any worshipper that called on him with proper faith. From about 1000 A.D. to the present, "the cry of *Namu Amida Butsu* ["Homage to Amida Buddha"] was increasingly on the lips of the faithful, bringing comfort to many troubled souls . . ."[6]

While the simple faith of Amidism had an understandably wide appeal to the downtrodden masses, another sect was in greater favour with the aristocratic swordsmen or *samurai,* who belonged to the upper classes. Their principal doctrine was Zen, which can be traced back to the Ch'ang sect of Chinese Buddhism. Zen Buddhism is extremely hard to discuss. Its followers love to repeat a statement, applied originally to the difficulty of understanding Tao in China, to the effect that "Those who know do not tell, whereas those who tell do not know".

Nevertheless, despite the difficulty of the task, something must be said of Zen Buddhism, for it has been an important force in Japanese life for well nigh a thousand years. Its only goal is to achieve instantaneous enlightenment, and its only technique is meditation. Anything that interferes with complete meditation is regarded as a distraction which should be thoroughly eliminated. Therefore, Zen Buddhists consider all forms of ritual to be worse than useless. They believe that those who meditate long enough and consistently enough will be rewarded with a flash of insight that brings enlightenment. That is why they have no regard for detailed study of texts, closely reasoned arguments, devout faith in the existence of divine saviours, or long hours of prayer. Indeed, Zen Buddhism is a hard creed, and any disciple who tries to reason or to use the devices of other religions is sure to get a thoroughly materialistic beating at the hands of an experienced practitioner.

[6] Sir George B. Sansom, *Japan, a short cultural history,* rev. ed., London, 1946, p. 247.

Zen's attraction for Japan's military classes is not altogether impossible to understand or explain. There is something in its unwavering approach to a single goal, its tough-minded rejection of all props that might help to support the weak and unsteady, and its dogged insistence on the elimination of all things not essential to its main purpose, that has a strong appeal to fighting men who believe in rigorous training and unquestioning discipline. Besides its adoption by numerous religious mystics and by most members of the armed forces, Zen also exerted a profound influence on Japanese forms of art, by its insistence on getting at the very heart of a subject, without being distracted by side issues. As Dr Anesaki, one of Japan's greatest students of Zen has put it: "The fundamental principle of all the military arts is simply that of the Zen training; the life rhythm that pervades nature is the basis of all military drill as well as of aesthetic refinement."[7]

So we see that unlike China, which locally originated two of the three most basic elements of its culture, Japan imported all three. Yet, in no case did the Japanese fail to make a borrowed item so different from its original form, and so much a part of their own way of life, that in the long run there came to be no practical difference between what was locally invented and what was borrowed from abroad. In this respect Japan conforms to universal principles of cultural formation and growth for, with the passage of time, all nations or large societies tend to make over into their own likeness whatever they have accepted from other areas.

One logical outgrowth of our topic remains to be considered briefly. "Why", it may be asked, "did Japan originally look with so much admiration on China, only to grow indifferent at a later stage, and finally bitterly antagonistic and hostile?" This question can best be answered in terms of historic perspective. In the first few centuries of our era, especially in Han and T'ang times, China completely dominated the Far Eastern scene. In those years Japan was an immature young nation, so that if there were to be any cultural intercourse between the two regions it would have had to be on a master-pupil level, with China giving and Japan receiving instruction. Later, during the Tokugawa era, Japan chose for a number of political reasons to seclude itself from the rest of the world. Consequently for a long stretch of

[7] M. Anesaki, *Art, Life and Nature in Japan*, Boston, 1932, p. 122.

over two centuries Japan had almost no direct contacts with China. When at last, exactly a century ago, in 1854, Japan was forcibly opened as a result of Commodore Perry's expedition, the Japanese leaders had a choice, as it were, of once again borrowing from China or of modelling themselves on the West. But in 1854 China's fortunes were at a low ebb. For over a decade it had been living under humiliating conditions imposed on it by Western conquerors. Had Japan tried to walk in China's footsteps in 1854 the trail could have led only to defeat and degradation. There was nothing practical to be done, therefore, but to follow the leadership of those who had laid great China low. From the time of its opening, then, Japan set itself unreservedly on the path of Westernization. This meant, among other things, the development of heavy industries and large-scale armaments. Realistically enough, Japan was quick to recognize that the West acknowledged as first-class powers not nations that had great artists or philosophers, but only those that maintained enormous armies and navies. Once she had grasped this salient fact, Japan took the road of Westernization and followed it without deviation, even though it meant attacking China from whom she had once drawn so much of her basic culture.

It is a popular pastime, among some writers, to speak of the unchanging Orient. But, to anyone who has studied the fluctuating relations of China and Japan it is perfectly evident that in the Far East, as well as elsewhere, there are times when "the old order changeth, yielding place to [the] new".

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