The Ethical Life of the Japanese.

L. W. Bursel.
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The ancient history of Japan, as recorded in native annals is very inextricably because of the mythology, with which it is interwoven. In these mythical legends, numerous deities play a conspicuous part, the country itself being styled the Land of the Gods. It is asserted by them that there first existed eleven generations of heavenly deities, followed by five generations of earthly deities, who were in turn succeeded by the Mortal Monarchs.

It is difficult to ascertain the precise origin of the present race, but it is supposed that they are of Chinese origin and in early times invaded the islands driving farther north the aborigines, of whom the Ainu or today are supposed to be the descendants. The idea that the Japanese are of Chinese origin probably comes from an old legend, that a daughter of a prince in central Asia, curbed by her father fled from home, and finding a deserted canoe on the seashore she crossed the waves, till she chanced to find an island for her in the ocean. Here she landed and her descendants peopled the island.
tracing back the stories as they multiplied.

As regards their early beliefs, Shintoism was probably the first approach to any religion. For about twelve centuries this was the sole religion of the land by the Japanese it is called the way of the gods. It consisted essentially in implicit obedience to the Mikado who as his name, Son of Heaven, would indicate, is supposed to have descended from the gods.

In Shintoism there was no creed, nor any elaborate system of doctrines. The good gods were worshiped that there might be an increase of good gifts and the evil ones that they might be appeased. The people prayed for an abundance of food, shelter, and clothing and twice a year held a grand festival of general purification when the whole nation was cleared of its sins and pollutions. The Emperor was the god dwelling in the flesh and of course his ancestors were to be worshiped. Besides the deified Emperors
and heroes, there were hosts of gods who were the divined powers of nature.

However gradually grew away from religion into a cold, empty system of statecraft, used as support to the government so that, in five hundred and thirty two, Buddhism was introduced, the way was already paved for rapid progress.

Buddhism originated with a lofty philosophy, and a code of morals higher perhaps than any other; that religion has ever reached before or after. Its three distinguishing features are metempsychosis, atheism, and absence of caste. It is preached in a land cursed by secular and spiritual oppression it declared all men equally sinful and miserable, and all equally capable of being freed from sin and misery through knowledge. It taught that the souls of men had lived in a previous state of existence, and that all the pains and sorrows of this life were but...
her punishment for sins committed in a previous state. Each human soul has whirled through countless eddies of existences, and has still to pass through a long succession of birth, pain, and death. All is fleeting; nothing real. This life all a delusion. After death the soul must migrate through many stages superior or inferior, till perchance it arrives at last in Nirvana, or absorption in Buddha.

But the morals of Buddhists were superior. They were the consequences of a refined morality. Besides the cardinal prohibitions against stealing, lying, drunkenness, and so forth, every shade of vice, hypocrisy, anger, pride, suspicion, greediness, gossiping, and cruelty to animals, were guarded against by special precepts.

Such was Buddhism in its early purity. Besides its moral code and philosophy, it had almost nothing. Driven from India, it swept through various countries and after twelve centuries
of which they had not been informed. By this time the original simple doctrine had been transformed and made glorious in the approved, with which mixture of renunciation had clothed them. It had a vast and complicated machinery, a geographical and sensuous foundation, definitely located hells and purgatories populated with a hierarchy of titled demons and furnished after the most approved theological fashion. Of these the priests kept the keys, regulating and grading the tortures or bliss. Buddhism thus had a perfectly mechanical with which to work on an ignorant and superstitious people. In this way it conveyed and brought with them the Christianity of Rome. In whose doctrine and religion, commerce and piety were so closely connected, so that the Christianity
The beg guns, and the powder, which the traders brought to the island, were regarded by the natives as equal members of a trinity of terrors, and synonymous with each other.

At this time nearly the whole land was engaged in the petty wars of the different feudal lords. The mass of the people on whom the burden of the war fell, were in the lowest depths of poverty and misery. The native religions offered little comfort. Shinto was already almost forgotten except as a matter of history by a few scholars, while Buddhism was gradually sinking into a system of masses and prayers.

Then came the priests of Rome, with the crucifix in their hands, and eloquence on their lips, with gorgeous robes and inspiring ceremonies, processions and mysteries. They brought pictures, get crosses and images, and erected splendid altars. They preached that all believers should enter Heaven immediately after death, as against the cycles of Buddhism, and in this way stirred up
the utmost of enthusiasm. They even made use of the old religion to further their own. The very idols of Buddha, after slightly slightly altered with the chisel served as images of Christ. The Buddhist saints were transformed into the twelve apostles. Even the monosions seem to battle with the cross on their helmets, and embroidered on their breasts, like the Crusaders of old who went to Jerusalem.

The native rulers noticed the profession of foreign precious metals, and wishing to shorten professed Christianity, and such was their zeal that they compelled all their subjects to either embrace the faith or immediately leave the land. Gradually as the different orders, the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Augustinians increased, they began to encroach on each others parishes. This gave rise to innumerable feuds. The factions rigorously excommunicated each other, while the pogroms ensued, and the native priests resisted. The ears of Europe were torn by the roiders and missionaries to destroy the wars. The Portuguese Dutch and...
English stirred up hatred in the Japanese for the Dutch, and the Spanish and Portuguese strengthened the character of the heintie, and vigorously abused each other whenever it served their interest.

Firstly as the gold of the Christians grew less abundant, and a new ruler took charge of affairs in Japan, Christianity took a different place. The more frightful of force, Cutsie, took place, so that at the end of the seventeenth century the existence of Christianity in Japan was a mere historical fact. It left no mark on the Japanese mind, and on its departure Japan took up again the old religion of Buddhism.

In the mental activities of the Japanese people, ambition, statement, good sense and antique taste play an important part. His ambition seeks nobility and greatness for his own sake. It would be ashamed to turn back on account of risks. To this end Buddhism has contributed an element of pessimism by never ceasing to remind
The people that all in this life is vanity. The sounds of the evening bells coming from some distant hill top, slow, measured and melancholy, reverberating through the whole town, the great halls and temples, clean swept, the clean shaven monks, deeply engrossed in their daily devotions, the innumerable names and stories of men and women who have foreseen the need and found rest for their tired spirit, all remind the people of life and peace not to be found in this world.

The happy fusion of activity and ambition and resignation is well typified in their national flower, the cherry blossom. Among men the Buddhist among flowers the cherry. In its season all Japan is covered with the white blossoms. But in a few days they begin to fall and swept by the breeze they go, leaving behind no trace of a greedy hold on life. Thus it is the flower is loved not only for its beauty but for its significance. Confucianism had had a great deal to do with forming their ideal in ethics. The sacred books of Confucianism are largely ethical, social and political, but above all practical. The maxims of Confucianism were in its highest teaching, against the pantheon of vague speculations of Buddhism, it taught
the importance of the daily of life, and refused positively to speculate on the mystical and uncertain future. The Confucian idea was to create a class of cultured men—men of sweetness and light, as Matthew Arnold would say, to take the affairs of government, and guide the people. In the ante Hoei of Confucius it is said, 'a true man lays the foundation; when the foundation is laid, then is the way of truth secure. Filial piety and brotherly goodness are near these the foundations for the establishment of righteousness.' The reason that Confucian so strongly upheld filial piety, was probably because he lived in a time of almost total anarchy. He traveled from prince to prince, but was with little success. He did not feel that he was called upon to serve a king, but looked to Providence to send him to some prince who should help him. He professed to be a transmiller and not a prophet. He once playfully composed himself to a jeweler with a rose and precious stone and said, 'I would sell it, I am only waiting for a proper price.' The Japanese held that filial piety was the foundation of all virtue, yet profoundly
their first impulse was loyalty. The claims of the Mikado and the state, were with religious devotion, held above all others. Think of one family ruling over a nation for some twenty centuries. In many cases the attachment between master and servant was the heritage of many generations. When the restoration from feudalism took place the Mikado was not only absolute in power, but was almost worshiped by the people as a divine personage. The mass of the people were still ignorant and superstitious, but they possessed the good sense to know whom to follow. The place of woman may best be illustrated in this connection. The Hindu theory of threefold obedience was taught: when young obey your parents; when married obey your husband; and when widowed obey your son. Also, the Chinese reasons for divorce, disobedience to the husband on the part of the husband, childlessness, over-generosity, desertion and other kinds of disease, over-stableness, and committing of theft. The inferiority of woman however, was not
at the bottom of all this, but the superiour
rights of the family over individual rights. So
it was, that if the wife was in any way hostile
to the general welfare of the household, she was in
duty bound to leave it.

The wife obeyed her husband, or, if a son happened
to be the head of the house she and her sons obeyed
the elder son, as did also the father if he lived in
retirement. From a modern standpoint this
sounds very harsh, but it makes a difference as
to whether a son succeeds to his father's estate as a
right or a duty.

Another phase of duty is shown in what they
call "reasonably duty." In their novels and dramas
this is carried to singular extremes. We read of
people compelled through "reasonably duty" to perform
acts quite opposed to their most natural inclinations.
A wife having two children, one her son, the other
a child of her husband's former wife is turned as good
to the latter a child. Princes must realize the
harm in which he is placed by designing enemies,
sacrificing her own child to save the prince.

The devotional loyalty to the Mikado still exists,
but many of the old theories and conceptions were
brought down with the collapse of the feudal system.
And the old religions. The introduction of the new
ideas of political rights and civil liberty, and the introduction of Christianity, learning, and literature from the West. As your lately said, Japan has accomplished as much in the last quarter of a century as Europe did in several centuries.

Laying aside all religion, Christianity interested more than any thing else in Japan, as it does in the principle of monogamy and personal property.

Considered from a western stand point, the old system of ethics is too one sided. Theoretically considered it may be well balanced, but practically it is not. The duties of father, husband or elder brother were certainly light when compared with those of child, wife or younger brother. And though the feudal times may have demanded a system like this, the people realize that the times are now changed and that a new system of ethics is needed.

Japan has been acting under the higher principle in freeing them still from innumerable feudal exactions and giving social and political privileges to all classes.

The new ideas in Japan are much like those of the West. The people are working for the glory and upbuilding of their country, for the good that they and their ancestors had derived from the king and the state. They begin to now
see and regard such matters as the Christian nations of the West, that is, "The history of the past human race is one vast ethical process; that is an evolutionary process toward an ethical end. So that all times all men all peoples are to contribute toward the realization of those states and conditions of things, which are the ultimate good of all history. And is the fulfillment of the visions and prophecies of the best men of all ages.

It took red Japan one thousand years to develop her own distinct ideas from China and India, and it is but reason able to suppose that it will take an lesser a century for them to thoroughly assimilate the ideas of Europe and America, and when they have succeeded in that, they will have attained what the best men of the present generation are correctly hoping and praying for.
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