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INTELLECTUALITY

SOME writers hold that the Japanese are inherently deficient in the higher mental faculties. They consider mediocre mentality to be an inborn characteristic of Japan and assert that it lies at the root of the civilizational differences distinguishing the East from the West. The puerility of Oriental science in all its departments, the prevalence of superstition even among the cultivated, the lack of historical insight and interpretation of history are adduced as conclusive evidences of this view.

Foreign teachers in Japanese employ have told me that Japanese students, as compared with those of the West, manifest deficient powers of analysis and of generalization. Some even assert that the Japanese have no generalizing ability whatever, their progress in civilization being entirely due to their remarkable power of clever imitation. Mr. W. G. Aston, in ascribing the characteristic features of Japanese literature to the fundamental nature of the race, says they are "hardly capable of high intellectual achievement."*

While we may admit that the Japanese do not seem to have at present the same power of scientific generalization as Occidentals, we naturally ask ourselves whether the difference is due to natal deficiency, or whether it may not be due to difference in early training. We must not forget that the youth who come under the observation of foreign teachers in Japanese schools are already products of the Japanese system of education, home and school, and necessarily are as defective as it is.

In a previous chapter a few instances of recent invention and important scientific discovery were given.

* "Japanese Literature," p. 4.

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These could not have been made without genuine powers of analysis and generalization. We need not linger to elaborate this point.

Another set of facts throwing light on our problem is the success of so many Japanese students, at home and in foreign lands, in mastering modern thought. Great numbers have come back from Europe and America with diplomas and titles; not a few have taken high rank in their classes. The Japanese student abroad is usually a hard worker, like his brother at home. I doubt if any students in the new or the old world study more hours in a year than do these of Japan. It has often amazed me to learn how much they are required to do. This is one fair sign of intellectuality. The ease too with which young Japan, educated in Occidental schools and introduced to Occidental systems of thought, acquires abstruse speculations, searching analyses, and generalized abstractions proves conclusively Japanese possession of the higher mental faculties, in spite of the long survival in their civilization of primitive puerility and superstitions and the lack of science, properly so called.

Japanese youths, furthermore, have a fluency in public speech decidedly above anything I have met with in the United States. Young men of eighteen or twenty years of age deliver long discourses on religion or history or politics, with an apparent ease that their uncouth appearance would not lead one to expect. In the little school of less than 150 boys in Kumamoto there were more individuals who could talk intelligibly and forcefully on important themes of national policy, the relation of religion and politics, the relation of Japan to the Occident and the Orient, than could be found in either of the two colleges in the United States with which I was connected. I do not say that they could bring forth original ideas on these topics. But they could at least remember what they had heard and read and could reproduce the ideas with amazing fluency.

A recent public meeting in Tokyo in which Christian students of the University spoke to fellow-students on the great problems of religion, revealed a power of no mean order in handling the peculiar difficulties encoun-

tered by educated young men. A competent listener, recently graduated from an American university and widely acquainted with American students, declared that those Japanese speakers revealed greater powers of mind and speech than would be found under similar circumstances in the United States.

The fluency with which timid girls pray in public has often surprised me. Once started, they never seem to hesitate for ideas or words. The same girls would hardly be able to utter an intelligible sentence in reply to questions put to them by the pastor or the missionary, so faint would be their voices and so hesitating their manner.

The question as to whether the Japanese have powers of generalization receives some light from a study of the language of the people. An examination of primitive Japanese proves that the race, prior to receiving even the slightest influence from China, had developed highly generalized terms. It is worth while to call attention here to a simple fact which most writers seem to ignore, namely, that all language denotes and indeed rests on generalization. Consider the word "uma," "horse"; this is a name for a whole class of objects, and is therefore the product of a mind that can generalize and express its generalization in a concept which no act of the imagination can picture; the imagination can represent only individuals; the mind that has concepts of classes of things, as, for instance, of horses, houses, men, women, trees, has already a genuine power of generalization. Let me also call attention to such words as "wake," "reason"; "mono," "thing"; "koto," "fact"; "aru," "is"; "oro," "lives"; "aru koto," "is fact," or "existence"; "ugoku koto," "movement"; "omoi," "thought"; this list might be indefinitely extended. Let the reader consider whether these words are not highly generalized; yet these are all pure Japanese words, and reveal the development of the Japanese mind before it was in the least influenced by Chinese thought. Evidently it will not do to assert the entire lack of the power of generalization to the Japanese mind.

Still further evidence proving Japanese possession of

the higher mental faculties may be found in the wide prevalence and use of the most highly generalized philosophical terms. Consider for instance, "Ri" and "Ki," "In" and "Yo." No complete translation can be found for them in English; "Ri" and "Ki" may be best translated as the rational and the formative principles in the universe, while "In" and "Yo" signify the active and the passive, the male and the female, the light and the darkness; in a word, the poles of a positive and negative. It is true that these terms are of Chinese origin as well as the thoughts themselves, but they are to-day in universal use in Japan. Similar abstract terms of Buddhist origin are the possession of the common people.

Of course the possession of these Chinese terms is not offered as evidence of independent generalizing ability. But wide use proves conclusively the possession of the higher mental faculties, for, without such faculties, the above terms would be incomprehensible to the people and would find no place in common speech. We must be careful not to give too much weight to the foreign origin of these terms. Chinese is to Japanese what Latin and Greek are to modern European languages. The fact that a term is of Chinese origin proves nothing as to the nature of the modern Japanese mind. The developing Japanese civilization demanded new terms for her new instruments and increasing concepts. These for over fifteen centuries have been borrowed from, or constructed out of, Chinese in the same way that all our modern scientific terms are constructed out of Latin and Greek. It is doubtful if any of the Chinese terms, even those borrowed bodily, have in Japan the same significance as in China. If this is true, then the originating feature of Japanese power of generalization becomes manifest.

Indeed from this standpoint, the fact that the Japanese have made such extensive use of the Chinese language shows the degree to which the Japanese mind has outgrown its primitive development, demanding new terms for the expression of its expanding life. But mental growth implies energy of acquisition. The adoption of Chinese terms is not a passive but an active process.

Acquisition of generalized terms can only take place with the development of a generalizing mind. Foreign terms may help, but they do not cause that development.

In a study of the question whether or not the Japanese possess independent powers of analysis and generalization, we must ever remember the unique character of the social environment to which they have been subjected. Always more or less of an isolated nation, they have been twice or thrice suddenly confronted with a civilization much superior to that which they in their isolation had developed. Under such circumstances, adoption and modification of ideas and language as well as of methods and machinery were the most rational and natural courses.

The explanation usually given for the puerilities of Oriental science, history, and religion has been short and simple, namely, the inherent nature of the Oriental races, as if this were the final fact, needing and admitting no further explanation. That the Orient has not developed history or science is doubtless true, but the correct explanation of this fact is, in my opinion, that the educational method of the entire Orient has rested on mechanical memorization; during the formative period of the mind the exclusive effort of education has been to develop a memory which acts by arbitrary or fanciful connections and relations. A Japanese boy of Old Japan, for instance, began his education at from seven to eight years of age and spent three or four years in memorizing the thousands of Chinese hieroglyphic characters contained in the *Shisho* and *Gokyo*, nine of the Chinese classics. This completed, his teacher would begin to explain to him the meaning of the characters and sentences. The entire educational effort was to develop the powers of observing and memorizing accidental, superficial, or even purely artificial relations. This double faculty of observing trifling and irrelevant details, and of remembering them, became phenomenally and abnormally developed.

Recent works on the psychology of education, however, have made plain how an excessive development of a child's lower mental faculties may arrest its later

growth in all the higher departments of its intellectual nature; the development of a mechanical memory is well known as a serious obstacle to the higher activities of reason. Now Japanese education for centuries, like Chinese, has developed such memory. It trained the lower and ignored the higher. Much of the Japanese education of to-day, although it includes mathematics, science, and history, is based on the mechanical memory method. The Orient is thus a mammoth illustration of the effects of over-development of the mechanical memory, and the consequent arrest of the development of the remaining powers of the mind.

Encumbered by this educational ideal and system, how could the ancient Chinese and Japanese men of education make a critical study of history, or develop any science worthy of the name? The childish physics and astronomy, the brutal therapeutics and the magical and superstitious religions of the Orient, are a necessary consequence of its educational system, not of its inherent lack of the higher mental powers.

If Japanese children brought up from infancy in American homes, and sent to American schools from kindergarten days onward, should still manifest marked deficiencies in powers of analysis and generalization, as compared with American children, we should then be compelled to conclude that this difference is due to diverse natal psychic endowment. Generalizations as to the inherent intellectual deficiencies of the Oriental are based on observations of individuals already developed in the Oriental civilization, whose psychic defects they accordingly necessarily inherit through the laws of social heredity. Such observations have no relevancy to our main problem. We freely admit that Oriental civilization manifests striking deficiencies of development of the higher mental faculties, although it is not nearly so great as many assert; but we contend that these deficiencies are due to something else than the inherent psychic nature of the Oriental individual. Innumerable causes have combined to produce the Oriental social order and to determine its slow development. These cannot be stated in a sentence, nor in a paragraph.

In the final analysis, however, the causes which produce the characteristic features of Japanese social order are the real sources of the differentiating intellectual traits now characterizing the Japanese. Introduce a new social heredity,—a new system of education,—one which relegates a mechanical memory to the background,—one which exalts powers of rational observation of the profound causal relations of the phenomena of nature, and which sets a premium on such observation, analysis, and generalization, and the results will show the inherent psychic nature of the Oriental to be not different from that of the Occidental.

XX

PHILOSOPHICAL ABILITY

WE are now prepared to consider whether or not the Japanese have philosophical ability. The average educated Japanese believe such to be the case. The rapidity and ease with which the upper classes have abandoned their superstitious faiths is commonly attributed by themselves to the philosophical nature of their minds. Similarly the rapid spread of so-called rationalism and Unitarian thought and Higher Criticism among once earnest Christians, during the past decade, they themselves ascribe to their interest in philosophical questions, and to their ability in handling philosophical problems.

Foreigners, on the other hand, usually deny them the possession of philosophical ability.

Dr. Peery, in his volume entitled "The Gist of Japan," says: "By nature, I think, they are more inclined to be practical than speculative. Abstract theological ideas have little charm for them. There is a large element in Japan that simulates a taste for philosophical study. Philosophy and metaphysics are regarded by them as the profoundest of all branches of learning, and in order to be thought learned they profess great interest in these studies. Not only are the highly metaphysical philosophies of the East studied, but the various systems of the West are looked into likewise. Many of the people are capable of appreciating these philosophies, too; but they do it for a purpose." Other writers make the same general charge of philosophical incompetence. One or two quotations from Dr. Knox's writings were given on this subject, under the head of Imitation.*

What, then, are the facts? Do the Japanese excel in

* Cf. chapter xvi. p. 199.

philosophy, or are they conspicuously deficient? In either case, is the characteristic due to essential race nature or to some other cause?

We must first distinguish between interest in philosophical problems and ability in constructing original philosophical systems. In this distinction is to be found the reconciliation of many conflicting views. Many who argue for Japanese philosophical ability are impressed with the interest they show in metaphysical problems, while those who deny them this ability are impressed with the dependence of Japanese on Chinese philosophy.

The discussions of the previous chapter as to the nature of Japanese education and its tendency to develop the lower at the expense of the higher mental faculties, have prepared us not to expect any particularly brilliant history of Japanese philosophy. Such is indeed the case. Primitive Japanese cosmology does not differ in any important respect from the primitive cosmology of other races. The number of those in Old Japan who took a living interest in distinctly metaphysical problems is indisputably small. While we admit them to have manifested some independence and even originality, as Professor Inouye urges,* yet it can hardly be maintained that they struck out any conspicuously original philosophical systems. There is no distinctively Japanese philosophy.

These facts, however, should not blind us to the distinction between latent ability in philosophical thought and the manifestation of that ability. The old social order, with its defective education, its habit of servile intellectual dependence on ancestors, and its social and legal condemnation of independent originality, particularly in the realm of thought, was a mighty incubus on speculative philosophy. Furthermore, crude science and distorted history could not provide the requisite material from which to construct a philosophical interpretation of the universe that would appeal to the modern Occidental.

In spite, however, of social and educational hin-

* Cf. chapter xvii.

drances, the Japanese have given ample evidence of interest in metaphysical problems and of more or less ability in their solution. Religious constructions of the future life, conceptions as to the relations of gods and men and the universe, are in fact results of the metaphysical operations of the mind. Primitive Japan was not without these. As she developed in civilization and came in contact with Chinese and Hindu metaphysical thought, she acquired their characteristic systems. Buddhist first, and later Confucian, metaphysics dominated the thought of her educated men. In view of the highly metaphysical character of Buddhist doctrines and the interest they have produced at least among the better trained priests, the assertion that the Japanese have no ability in metaphysics cannot be maintained.

At one period in the history of Buddhism in Japan, prolonged public discussions were all the fashion. Priests traveled from temple to temple to engage in public debate. The ablest debater was the abbot, and he had to be ready to face any opponent who might appear. If a stranger won, the abbot yielded his place and his living to the victor. Many an interesting story is told of those times, and of the crowds that would gather to hear the debates. But our point is that this incident in the national life shows the appreciation of the people for philosophical questions. And although that particular fashion has long since passed away, the national interest in discussions and arguments still exists. No monks of the West ever enjoyed hair-splitting arguments more than do many of the Japanese. They are as adept at mental refinements and logical juggling as any people of the West, though possibly the Hindus excel them.

If it be said that Confucianism was not only non-metaphysical, but uniquely practical, and for this reason found wide acceptance in Japan, the reply must be first that, professing to be non-metaphysical, it nevertheless had a real metaphysical system of thought in the background to which it ever appealed for authority, a system, be it noted, more in accord with modern science and philosophy than Buddhist metaphysics; and secondly, although Confucianism became the bulwark of the state

and the accepted faith of the samurai, it was limited to them. The vast majority of the nation clung to their primitive Buddhistic cosmology. That Confucianism rested on a clearly implied and more or less clearly expressed metaphysical foundation may be seen in the quotations from the writings of Muro Kyuso which are given in chapter xxiv. We should note that the revolt of the educated classes of Japan from Buddhism three hundred years ago, and their general adoption of Confucian doctrine, was partly in the interests of religion and partly in the interests of metaphysics. In both respects the progressive part of the nation had become dissatisfied with Buddhism. The revolt proves not lack of religious or metaphysical interest and insight, but rather the reverse.

Not a little of the teaching of Shushi (1130-1200 A. D.) and of Oyomei (1472-1528 A. D.), Chinese philosophical expounders of Confucianism, is metaphysical. The doctrine of the former was widely studied and was the orthodox doctrine in Japan for more than two centuries, all other doctrine and philosophy being forbidden by the state. It is true that the central interest in this philosophical instruction was the ethical. It was felt that the entire ethical system rested on the acceptance of a particular metaphysical system. But so far from detracting from our argument this statement rather adds. For in what land has not the prime interest in metaphysics been ethical? A study of the history of philosophy shows clearly that philosophy and metaphysics arose out of religious and ethical problems, and have ever maintained their hold on thinking men, because of their mutually vital relations. In Japan it has not been otherwise. If anyone doubts this he should read the Japanese philosophers—in the original, if possible; if not, then in such translations and extracts as Dr. Knox has given us in his "A Japanese Philosopher," and Mr. Aston in his "Japanese Literature." The ethical interest is primary, and the metaphysical interest is secondary,* to be sure, but not to be denied.

* Quotations from "A Japanese Philosopher" will be found in chapters xxiv. and xxvi.

Occidental philosophy has found many earnest and capable Japanese students. The Imperial University has a strong corps of philosophical instructors. Occidental metaphysical thought, both materialistic and idealistic, has found many congenial minds. Indeed, it is not rash to say that in the thought of New Japan the distinguishing Oriental metaphysical conceptions of the universe have been entirely displaced by those of the West. Christians, in particular, have entirely abandoned the old polytheistic, pantheistic, and fatalistic metaphysics and have adopted thoroughgoing monotheism.

Ability to understand and sufficient interest to study through philosophical and metaphysical systems of foreign lands indicate a mental development of no slight order, whatever may be the ability, or lack of it, in making original contributions to the subject. That educated Japanese have shown real ability in the former sense can hardly be doubted by those who have read the writings of such men as Goro Takahashi, ex-president Hiroyuki Kato, Prof. Yujiro Motora, Prof. Rikizo Nakashima, or Dr. Tetsujiro Inouye. The philosophical brightness of many of Japan's foreign as well as home-trained scholars argues well for the philosophical ability of the nation.

A recent conversation with a young Japanese gives point to what has just been said. The young man suddenly appeared at my study door, and, with unusually brief salutations, said that he wished me to talk to him about religion. In answer to questions he explained that he had been one of my pupils ten years ago in the Kumamoto Boys' School; that he had been baptized as a Christian at that time, but had become cold and filled with doubts; that he had been studying ever since, having at one time given considerable attention to the Zen sect of Buddhism; but that he had found no satisfaction there. He accordingly wished to study Christianity more carefully. For three hours we talked, he asking questions about the Christian conception of God, of the universe, of man, of sin, of evolution, of Christ, of salvation, of the object of life, of God's purpose in

creation, of the origin and nature of the Bible. Toward the latter part of our conversation, referring to one idea expressed, he said, "That is about what Hegel held, is it not?" As he spoke he opened his knapsack, which I then saw to be full of books, and drew out an English translation of Hegel's "Philosophy of History"; he had evidently read it carefully, making his notes in Japanese on the margin. I asked him if he had read it through. "Yes," he replied, "three times." He also incidentally informed me that he had thought of entering our mission theological training class during the previous winter, but that he was then in the midst of the study of the philosophy of Kant, and had accordingly decided to defer entering until the autumn. How thoroughly he had mastered these, the most profound and abstruse metaphysicians that the West can boast, I cannot state. But this at least is clear; his interest in them was real and lasting. And in his conversation he showed keen appreciation of philosophical problems. It is to be noted also that he was a self-taught philosopher—for he had attended no school since he studied elementary English, ten years before, while a lad of less than twenty.

As a sample of the kind of men I not infrequently meet, let me cite the case of a young business man who once called on me in the hotel at Imabari, popularly called "the little philosopher." He wished to talk about the problem of the future life and to ask my personal belief in the matter. He said that he believed in God and in Jesus as His unique son and revealer, but that he found great difficulty in believing in the continued life of the soul after death. His difficulty arose from the problems of the nature of future thinking; shall we continue to think in terms of sense perception, such as time, space, form, color, pleasure, and pain? If not, how can we think at all? And can we then remember our present life? If we do, then the future life will not be essentially different from this, *i. e.*, we must still have physical senses, and continue to live in an essentially physical world. Here was a set of objections to the

doctrine of the future life that I have never heard as much as mentioned by any Occidental youth. Though without doubt not original with him, yet he must have had in some degree both philosophical ability and interest in order to appreciate their force and to seek their solution.

In conversation not long since with a Buddhist priest of the Tendai sect, after responding to his request for a criticism of Buddhism, I asked him for a similarly frank criticism of Christianity. To my surprise, he said that while Christianity was far ahead of Buddhism in its practical parts and in its power to mold character, it was deficient in philosophical insight and interest. This led to a prolonged conversation on Buddhist philosophy, in which he explained the doctrines of the "Ku-ge-chu," and the "Usa and Musa." Without attempting to explain them here, I may say that the first is amazingly like Hegel's "absolute nothing," with its thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and the second a psychological distinction between volitional and spontaneous emotions.

In discussing Japanese philosophical ability, a point often forgotten is the rarity of philosophical ability or even interest in the West. But a small proportion of college students have the slightest interest in philosophical or metaphysical problems. The majority do not understand what the distinctive metaphysical problems are. In my experience it is easier to enter into a conversation with an educated man in Japan on a philosophical question than with an American. If interest in philosophical and metaphysical questions in the West is rare, original ability in their investigation is still rarer.

We conclude, then, that in regard to philosophical ability the Japanese have no marked racial characteristic differentiating them from other races. Although they have not developed a distinctive national philosophy, this is not due to inherent philosophical incompetence. Nor, on the other hand, is the relatively wide interest now manifest in philosophical problems

attributable to the inherent philosophical ability of the race. So far as Japan is either behind or in advance of other races, in this respect, it is due to her social order and social inheritance, and particularly to the nature, methods, and aims of the educational system, but not to her intrinsic psychic inheritance.

XXI

IMAGINATION

IN no respect, perhaps, have the Japanese been more sweepingly criticised by foreigners than in regard to their powers of imagination and idealism. Unqualified generalizations not only assert the entire lack of these powers, but they consider this lack to be the distinguishing inherent mental characteristic of the race. The Japanese are called "prosaic," "matter-of-fact," "practical," "unimaginative."

Mr. Walter Dening, describing Japanese mental characteristics, says:

"Neither their past history nor their prevailing tastes show any tendency to idealism. They are lovers of the practical and the real; neither the fancies of Goethe nor the reveries of Hegel are to their liking. Our poetry and our philosophy and the mind that appreciates them are alike the results of a network of subtle influences to which the Japanese are comparative strangers. It is maintained by some, and we think justly, that the lack of idealism in the Japanese mind renders the life of even the most cultivated a mechanical, humdrum affair when compared with that of Westerners. The Japanese cannot understand why our controversialists should wax so fervent over psychological, ethical, religious, and philosophical questions, failing to perceive that this fervency is the result of the intense interest taken in such subjects. The charms that the cultured Western mind finds in the world of fancy and romance, in questions themselves, irrespective of their practical bearings, is for the most part unintelligible to the Japanese."*

* "Things Japanese," p. 233.