

XXIII  
MORAL IDEALS

(Continued)

AN Occidental is invariably filled with astonishment on learning that a human being, as such, had no value in Old Japan. The explanation lies chiefly in the fact that the social order did not rest on the inherent worth of the individual. As in all primitive lands and times, the individual was as nothing compared to the family and the tribe. As time went on, this principle took the form of the supreme worth of the higher classes in society. Hence arose the liberty allowed the samurai of cutting down, in cold blood, a beggar, a merchant, or a farmer on the slightest provocation, or simply for the purpose of testing his sword.

Japanese social and religious philosophy had not yet discovered that the individual is of infinite worth in himself, apart from all considerations of his rank in society. As we have seen, the absence of this idea from Japanese civilization resulted in various momentous consequences, of which the frequency of murder and suicide is but one.

Another, and this constitutes one of the most striking differences between the moral ideals of the East and the West, is the low estimate put upon the inherent nature and value of woman, by which was determined her social position and the moral relations of the sexes. Japan seems to have suffered somewhat in this respect from her acceptance of Hindu philosophy. For there seems to be considerable unanimity among historians that in primitive times in Japan there prevailed a much larger liberty, and consequently a much higher regard, for

woman than in later ages after Buddhism became powerful. With regard, however, to that earlier period of over a thousand years ago, it is of little use to speculate. I cannot escape the feeling, however, that the condition of woman then has been unconsciously idealized, in order to make a better showing in comparison with the customs of Western lands. Be that as it may, the notions and ideals presented by Buddhism in regard to woman are clear, and clearly degrading. She is the source of temptation and sin; she is essentially inferior to man in every respect. Before she may hope to enter Nirvana she must be born again as man. How widely these extreme views of woman have found acceptance in Japan, I am not in a position to state. It is my impression, however, that they never received as full acceptance here as in India. Nevertheless, as has already been shown,\* the ideals of what a woman should do and be make it clear that her social position for centuries has been relatively low; as wife she is a domestic rather than a helpmeet. The "three obediences," to parents, to husband, to son, set forth the ideal, although, without doubt, the strict application of the third, obedience to one's son after he becomes the head of the household, is relatively rare.

What especially strikes the notice of the Occidental is the slight amount of social intercourse that prevails today between men and women. Whenever women enter into the social pleasures of men, they do so as professional singers and dancers, they being mere girls and unmarried young women; this social intercourse is all but invariably accompanied with wine-drinking, even if it does not proceed to further licentiousness. The statement that woman is man's plaything has been often heard in Japan. Confucian no less than Buddhist ethics must bear the responsibility for putting and keeping woman on so low a level. Concubinage, possibly introduced from China, was certainly sanctioned by the Chinese classics.

The Lei-ki allows an Emperor to have in addition to the Empress three consorts, nine maids of high rank,

\* Cf. chapter ix. p. 103.



and twenty-seven maids of lower rank, all of whom rank as wives, and, beside these, eighty-one other females called concubines. Concubinage and polygamy, being thus sanctioned by the classics, became an established custom in Japan.

The explanation for this ideal and practice is not far to seek. It rests in the communal character of the social order. The family was the social unit of Japan. No individual member was of worth except the legal head and representative, the father. A striking proof of the correctness of this explanation is the fact that even the son is obeyed by the father in case he has become "in kio,"\* that is, has abdicated; the son then becomes the authoritative head. The ideals regarding woman then were not unique; they were part of the social order, and were determined by the principle of "communalism" unregulated by the principle of "individualism." Ideals respecting man and woman were equally affected. So long as man is not valued as a human being, but solely according to his accidental position in society, woman must be regarded in the same way. She is valued first as a begetter of offspring, second as a domestic. And when such conceptions prevail as to her nature and function in society, defective ideals as to morality in the narrower sense of this term, leading to and justifying concubinage, easy divorce, and general loose morality are necessary consequences.

But this moral or immoral ideal is by no means peculiar to Japan. The peculiarity of Japan and the entire Orient is that the social order that fostered it lasted so long, before forces arose to modify it. But, as will be shown later,† the great problem of human evolution, after securing the advantages of "communalism," and the solidification of the nation, is that of introducing the principle of individualism into the social order. In the Orient the principle of communalism gained such headway as effectually to prevent the introduction of this new principle. There is, in my opinion, no probability that Japan, while maintaining her isolation, would ever have succeeded in making any radical change in her

\* Chapter vi.

† Chapter xxix. p. 339.

social order; her communalism was too absolute. She needed the introduction of a new stimulus from without. It was providential that this stimulus came from the Anglo-Saxon race, with its pronounced principle of "individualism" wrought out so completely in social order, in literature, and in government. Had Russia or Turkey been the leading influences in starting Japan on her new career, it is more than doubtful whether she would have secured the principles needful for her healthful moral development.

Justice to the actual ideals and life of Old Japan forbids me to leave, without further remark, what was said above regarding the ideals of morality in the narrower significance of this word. Injunctions that women should be absolutely chaste were frequent and stringent. Nothing more could be asked in the line of explicit teaching on this theme. And, furthermore, I am persuaded, after considerable inquiry, that in Old Japan in the interior towns and villages, away from the center of luxury and out of the beaten courses of travel, there was purity of moral life that has hardly been excelled anywhere. I have repeatedly been assured that if a youth of either sex were known to have transgressed the law of chastity, he or she would at once be ostracised; and that such transgressions were, consequently, exceedingly rare. It is certainly a fact that in the vast majority of the interior towns there have never, until recent times, been licensed houses of prostitution. Of late there has been a marked increase of dancing and singing girls, of whom it is commonly said that they are but "secret prostitutes." These may to-day be found in almost every town and village, wherever indeed there is a hotel. Public as well as secret prostitution has enormously increased during the last thirty or forty years.\*

\* An anonymous writer, in a pamphlet entitled "How the Social Evil is Regulated in Japan," gives some valuable facts on this subject. He describes the early history of the "Social Evil," and the various classes of prostitutes. He distinguishes between the "jigoku" (unlicensed prostitutes), the "shogi" (licensed prostitutes), and the "geisha" (singing and dancing girls). He gives translations of the various documents in actual use at present, and finally attempts to estimate the number of



Thanks to Mr. Murphy's consecrated energy, the appalling legalized and hopeless slavery under which these two classes of girls exist is at last coming to light. He has shown, by several test cases, that although the national laws are good to look at they are powerless because set aside by local police regulations over which the courts are powerless! In September, 1900, however, in large part due no doubt to the facts made public by him, and backed up by the public press, and such leaders of Japan's progressive elements as Shimada Sabur, the police regulations were modified, and with amazing results. Whereas, previous to that date, the average monthly suicides throughout the land among the public prostitutes were between forty and fifty, during the two months of September and October there were none! In that same period, out of about five thousand prostitutes in the city of Tokyo, 492 had fled from their brothels and declared their intentions of abandoning the "shameful business," as the Japanese laws call it, and in consequence a prominent brothel had been compelled to stop the business! We are only in the first flush of this new reform as these lines are written, so cannot tell what end the whole movement will reach. But the conscience of the nation is beginning to waken on this matter and we are confident it will never tolerate the old slavery of the past, enforced as it was by local laws, local courts, so that girls were always kept in debt, and when

women engaged in the business. The method of reaching his conclusions does not commend itself to the present writer and his results seem absurdly wide of the mark, when compared with more carefully gathered figures. They are hardly worth quoting, yet they serve to show what exaggerated views are held by some in regard to the numbers of prostitutes in Japan. He tells us that a moderate estimate for licensed prostitutes and for geisha is 500,000 each, while the unlicensed number at least a million, making a total of 2,000,000 or 10 per cent. of the total female population of Japan! A careful statistical inquiry on this subject has been recently made by Rev. U. G. Murphy. His figures were chiefly secured from provincial officers. According to these returns the number of licensed prostitutes is 50,553 and of dancing girls is 30,386. Mr. Murphy's figures cannot be far astray, and furnish us something of a basis for comparison with European countries. Statistics regarding unlicensed prostitutes are naturally not to be had.

they fled were seized and forced back to the brothels in order to pay their debts!

But in contrast to the undoubted ideal of Old Japan in regard to the chastity of women, must be set the equally undoubted fact that the sages have very little to say on the subject of chastity for men. Indeed there is no word in the Japanese language corresponding to our term "chastity" which may be applied equally to men and women. In his volume entitled "Kokoro," Mr. Hearn charges the missionaries with the assertion that there is no word for chastity in Japanese. "This," he says, "is true in the same sense only that we might say that there is no word for chastity in the English language, because such words as honor, virtue, purity, chastity have been adopted into English from other languages."\* I doubt if any missionary has made such a statement. His further assertion, that "the word most commonly used applies to both sexes," would have more force, if Mr. Hearn had stated what the word is. His English definition of the term has not enabled me to find the Japanese equivalent, although I have discussed this question with several Japanese. It is their uniform confession that the Japanese language is defective in its terminology on this topic, the word with which one might exhort a woman to be chaste being inapplicable to a man. The assertion of the missionaries has nothing whatever to do with the question as to whether the terms used are pure Japanese or imported Chino-Japanese; nor has it any reference to the fact that the actual language is deficient in abstract terms. It is simply that the term applicable to a woman is not applicable to a man. And this in turn proves sharp contrasts between the ideals regarding the moral duties of men and of women.

An interesting point in the Japanese moral ideal is the fact that the principle of filial obedience was carried to such extremes that even prostitution of virtue at the command of the parents, or for the support of the parents, was not only permitted but, under special conditions, was highly praised. Modern prostitution is rendered possible chiefly through the action of this per-

\* P. 148.



verted principle. Although the sale of daughters for immoral purposes is theoretically illegal, yet, in fact, it is of frequent occurrence.

Although concubinage was not directly taught by Confucius, yet it was never forbidden by him, and the leaders and rulers of the land have lent the custom the authority and justification of their example. As we have already seen, the now ruling Emperor has several concubines, and all of his children are the offspring of these concubines. In Old Japan, therefore, there were two separate ideals of morality for the two sexes.

The question may be raised how a social order which required such fidelity on the part of the woman could permit such looseness on the part of the man, whether married or not. How could the same social order produce two moral ideals? The answer is to be found in several facts. First, there is the inherent desire of each husband to be the sole possessor of his wife's affections. As the stronger of the two, he would bring destruction on an unfaithful wife and also on any who dared invade his home. Although the woman doubtless has the same desire to be the sole possessor of her husband's affection, she has not the same power, either to injure a rival or to punish her faithless husband. Furthermore, licentiousness in women has a much more visibly disastrous effect on her procreative functions than equal licentiousness in man. This, too, would serve to beget and maintain different ethical standards for the two sexes. Finally, and perhaps no less effective than the two preceding, is the fact that the general social consciousness held different conceptions in regard to the social positions of man and woman. The one was the owner of the family, the lord and master; to him belonged the freedom to do as he chose. The other was a variety of property, not free in any sense to please herself, but to do only as her lord and master required.

An illustration of the first reason given above came to my knowledge not long since. Rev. John T. Gulick saw in Kanagawa, in 1862, a man going through the streets carrying the bloody heads of a man and a woman which he declared to be those of his wife and her seducer,

whom he had caught and killed in the act of adultery. This act of the husband's was in perfect accord with the practices and ideals of the time, and not seldom figures in the romances of Old Japan.

The new Civil Code adopted in 1898 furnishes an authoritative statement of many of the moral ideals of New Japan. For the following summary I am indebted to the *Japan Mail*.\* In regard to marriage it is noteworthy that the "prohibited degrees of relationship are the same as those in England"—including the deceased wife's sister. "The minimum age for legal marriage is seventeen in the case of a man and fifteen in the case of a woman, and marriage takes effect on notification to the registrar, being thus a purely civil contract. As to divorce, it is provided that the husband and wife may effect it by mutual consent, and its legal recognition takes the form of an entry by the registrar, no reference being necessary to the judicial authorities. Where mutual consent is not obtained, however, an action for divorce must be brought, and here it appears that the rights of the woman do not receive the same recognition as those of the man. Thus, although adultery committed by the wife constitutes a valid ground of divorce, we do not find that adultery on the husband's part furnishes a plea to the wife. Ill-treatment or gross insult, such as renders living together impracticable, or desertion, constitutes a reason for divorce from the wife's point of view." The English reviewer here adds that "since no treatment can be worse nor any insult grosser than open inconstancy on the part of a husband, it is conceivable that a judge might consider that such conduct renders living together impracticable. But in the presence of an explicit provision with regard to the wife's adultery and in the absence of any such provision with regard to the husband's, we doubt whether any court of law would exercise discretion in favor of the woman." The gross "insult of inconstancy" on the part of the husband is a plea that has never yet been recognized by Japanese society. The reviewer goes on to say: "One cannot

\* June 25, 1898.



help wishing that the peculiar code of morality observed by husbands in this country had received some condemnation at the hands of the framers of the new Code. It is further laid down that a 'person who is judicially divorced or punished because of adultery cannot contract a marriage with the other party to the adultery.' If that extended to the husband it would be an excellent provision, well calculated to correct one of the worst social abuses of this country. Unfortunately, as we have seen, it applies apparently to the case of the wife only." The provision for divorce by "mutual consent" is striking and ominous. It makes divorce a matter of entirely private arrangement, unless one of the parties objects. In a land where women are so docile, is it likely that the wife would refuse to consent to divorce when her lord and master requests or commands her to leave his home? "There are not many women in Japan who could refuse to become a party to the 'mutual consent' arrangement if they were convinced that they had lost their husband's affection and that he could not live comfortably with them." It would appear that nothing whatever is said by the Code with reference to concubinage, either allowing or forbidding it. Presumably a man may have but one legitimate wife, and children by concubines must be registered as illegitimate. Nothing, however, on this point seems to be stated, although provision is made for the public acknowledgment of illegitimate children. "Thus, a father can acknowledge a natural child, making what is called a 'shoshi,' and if, subsequent to acknowledgment, the father and mother marry, the 'shoshi,' acquires the status of a legitimate child, such status reckoning back, apparently to the time of birth." Evidently, this provision rests on the implication that the mother is an unmarried woman—presumably a concubine.

Recent statistics throw a rather lurid light on these provisions of the Code. The Imperial Cabinet for some years past has published in French and Japanese a résumé of national statistics. Those bearing on marriage and divorce, in the volume published in 1897, may well be given at this point.

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	MARRIAGES	DIVORCES	LEGITIMATE BIRTHS	ILLEGITIMATE
1890	325,141	109,088	1,079,121	66,253
1891	325,651	112,411	1,033,653	64,122
1892	349,486	133,498	1,134,665	72,369
1893	358,398	116,775	1,105,119	73,677
1894	361,319	114,436	1,132,897	76,407
1895	365,633	110,838	1,166,254	80,168
1897	395,207	124,075	1,335,125	89,996*

These authoritative statistics show how divorce is a regular part of the Japanese family system, one out of three marriages proving abortive.

Morally Japan's weak spot is the relation of the sexes, both before and after marriage. Strict monogamy, with the equality of duties of husband and wife, is the remedy for the disease.

This slight sketch of the provision of the new Code as it bears on the purity of the home, and on the development of noble manhood and womanhood, shows that the Code is very defective. It practically recognizes and legalizes the present corrupt practices of society, and makes no effort to establish higher ideals. Whether anything more should be expected of a Code drawn up under the present circumstances is, of course, an open question. But the Code reveals the astonishingly low condition of the moral standards for the home, one of the vital weaknesses of New Japan. The defectiveness of the new Code in regard to the matters just considered must be argued, however, not from the failure to embody Occidental moral standards, but rather from the failure to recognize the actual nature of the social order of New Japan. While the Code recognizes the principle of individualism and individual rights and worth in all other matters, in regard to the home, the most important social unit in the body politic, the Code legalizes and perpetuates the old pre-Meiji standards. Individualism in the general social order demands its consistent recognition in every part.

We cannot conclude our discussion of Japanese ideas as to woman, and the consequent results to morality,

\* The last line of figures, those for 1897, is taken from Rev. U. G. Murphy's statistical pamphlet on "The Social Evil in Japan."



without referring to the great changes which are to-day taking place. Although the new Civil Code has not done all that we could ask, we would not ignore what it has secured. Says Prof. Gubbins in the excellent introduction to his translation of the Codes:

"In no respect has modern progress in Japan made greater strides than in the improvement of the position of woman. Though she still labors under certain disabilities, a woman can now become a head of a family, and exercise authority as such; she can inherit and own property and manage it herself; she can exercise parental authority; if single, or a widow, she can adopt; she is one of the parties to adoption effected by her husband, and her consent, in addition to that of her husband, is necessary to the adoption of her child by another person; she can act as guardian, or curator, and she has a voice in family councils." In all these points the Code marks a great advance, and reveals by contrast the legally helpless condition of woman prior to 1898. But in certain respects practice is preceding theory. We would call special attention to the exalted position and honor publicly accorded to the Empress. On more than one historic occasion she has appeared at the Emperor's side, a thing unknown in Old Japan. The Imperial Silver Wedding (1892) was a great event, unprecedented in the annals of the Orient. Commemorative postage stamps were struck off which were first used on the auspicious day.

The wedding of the Prince Imperial (in May, 1900) was also an event of unique importance in Japanese social and moral history. Never before, in the 2600 years claimed by her historians, has an heir to the throne been honored by a public wedding. The ceremony was prepared *de novo* for the occasion and the pledges were mutual. In the reception that followed, the Imperial bride stood beside her Imperial husband. On this occasion, too, commemorative postage stamps were issued and first used on the auspicious day; the entire land was brilliantly decorated with flags and lanterns. Countless congratulatory meetings were held throughout the country and thousands of gifts, letters, and telegraphic

messages expressed the joy and good will of the people.

But the chief significance of these events is the new and exalted position accorded to woman and to marriage by the highest personages of the land. It is said by some that the ruling Emperor will be the last to have concubines. However that may be, woman has already attained a rank and marriage an honor unknown in any former age in Japan, and still quite unknown in any Oriental land save Japan.

A serious study of Japanese morality should not fail to notice the respective parts taken by Buddhism and Confucianism. The contrast is so marked. While Confucianism devoted its energies to the inculcation of proper conduct, to morality as contrasted to religion, Buddhism devoted its energies to the development of a cultus, paying little attention to morality. A recent Japanese critic of Buddhism remarks that "though Buddhism has a name in the world for the excellence of its ethical system, yet there exists no treatise in Japanese which sets forth the distinctive features of Buddhist ethics." Buddhist literature is chiefly occupied with mythology, metaphysics, and eschatology, ethical precepts being interwoven incidentally. The critic just quoted states that the pressing need of the times is that Buddhist ethics should be disentangled from Buddhist mythology. The great moralists of Japan have been Confucianists. Distinctively Japanese morality has derived its impulse from Confucian classics. A new spirit, however, is abroad among the Buddhist priesthood. Their preaching is increasingly ethical. The common people are saying that the sermons heard in certain temples are identical with those of Christians. How widely this imitation of Christian preaching has spread I cannot say; but that Christianity has in any degree been imitated is significant, both ethically and sociologically.

Buddhism is not alone, however, in imitating Christianity. A few years ago Dr. D. C. Greene attended the preaching services of a modern Shinto sect, the "Ten-Ri-Kyo," the Heaven-Reason-Teaching, and was sur-



prised to hear almost literal quotations from the "Sermon on the Mount"; the source of the sentiment and doctrine was not stated and very likely was not known to the speaker. Dr. Greene, who has given this sect considerable study, is satisfied that the insistence of its teachers on moral conduct is general and genuine. When I visited their headquarters, not far from Nara, in 1895, and inquired of one of the priests as to the chief points of importance in their teaching, I was told that the necessity of leading an honorable and correct life was most emphasized. There are reasons for thinking that the Kurozumi sect of Shintoism, with its emphasis on morality, is considerably indebted to Christianity both for its origin and its doctrine.

It is evident that Christianity is having an influence in Japan, far beyond the ranks of its professed believers. It is proving a stimulus to the older faiths, stirring them up to an earnestness in moral teaching that they never knew in the olden times. It is interesting to note that this widespread emphasis on ethical truth comes at a time when morality is suffering a wide collapse.

An important point for the sociological student of Japanese moral ideals is the fact that her moralists have directed their attention chiefly to the conduct of the rulers. The ideal of conduct as stated by them is for a samurai. If any action is praised, it is said that it becomes a samurai; if condemned, it is on the ground that it is not becoming to a samurai. Anything wrong or vulgar is said to be what you might expect of the common man. All the terms of the higher morality, such as righteousness, duty, benevolence, are expounded from the standpoint of a samurai, that is, from the standpoint of loyalty. The forty-seven ronin were pronounced "righteous samurai" because they avenged the death of their lord, even though in doing so they committed deeds that, by themselves, would have been condemned. Japanese history and literature proclaim the same ideal. They are exclusively concerned with the deeds of the higher class, the court and the samurai. The actual condition of the common people in ancient times is a matter not easily determined. The morality of the com-

mon people was more a matter of unreasoning custom than of theory and instruction. But these facts are susceptible of interpretation if we remember that the interest of the historian and the moralist was not in humanity, as such, but in the external features of the social order. Their gaze was on the favored few, on the nobility, the court, and the samurai.

In closing our discussion of Japanese moral ideals it may not be amiss to append the Imperial Edict concerning the moral education of the youth of Japan, issued by the Emperor November 31, 1890. This is supposed to be the distilled essence of Shinto and Confucian teaching. It is to-day the only authoritative teaching on morality given in the public schools. It is read with more reverence than is accorded to the Bible in England or America. It is considered both holy and inspired.

#### IMPERIAL EDICT ON MORAL EDUCATION

"We consider that the Founder of Our Empire and the ancestors of Our Imperial House placed the foundation of the country on a grand and permanent basis, and established their authority on the principles of profound humanity and benevolence.

"That Our subjects have throughout ages deserved well of the state by their loyalty and piety, and by their harmonious co-operation, is in accordance with the essential character of Our nation; and on these very same principles Our education has been founded.

"You, Our subjects, be therefore filial to your parents; be affectionate to your brothers; be harmonious as husbands and wives; and be faithful to your friends; conduct yourselves with propriety and carefulness; extend generosity and benevolence toward your neighbors; attend to your studies and follow your pursuits; cultivate your intellects and elevate your morals; advance public benefits and promote social interests; be always found in the good observance of the laws and constitution of the land; display your personal courage and public spirit for the sake of the country whenever required; and thus support the Imperial prerog-



ative, which is coexistent with the Heavens and the Earth.

"Such conduct on your part will not only strengthen the character of Our good and loyal subjects, but conduce also to the maintenance of the fame of your worthy forefathers.

"This is the instruction bequeathed by Our ancestors and to be followed by Our subjects; for it is the truth which has guided and guides them in their own affairs and their dealings toward aliens.

"We hope, therefore, that We and Our subjects will regard these sacred precepts with one and the same heart in order to attain the same ends."

## XXIV

## MORAL PRACTICE

ONE noticeable characteristic of the Japanese is the publicity of the life of the individual. He seems to feel no need for privacy. Houses are so constructed that privacy is practically impossible. The slight paper shoji and fusuma between the small rooms serve only partially to shut out peering eyes; they afford no protection from listening ears. Moreover, these homes of the middle and lower classes open upon public streets, and a passer-by may see much of what is done within. Even the desire for privacy seems lacking. The publicity of the private (?) baths and sanitary conveniences which the Occidental puts entirely out of sight has already been noted.

I once passed through a village and was not a little amazed to see two or three bath tubs on the public road, each occupied by one or more persons; nor were the occupants children alone, but men and women also. Calling at the home of a gentleman in Kyushu with whom I had some business, and gaining no notice at the front entrance, I went around to the side of the house only to discover the lady of the place taking her bath with her children, in a tub quite out of doors, while a manservant chopped wood but a few paces distant.

The natural indifference of the Japanese to the exposure of the unclothed body is an interesting fact. In the West such indifference is rightly considered immodest. In Japan, however, immodesty consists entirely in the intention of the heart and does not arise from the accident of the moment or the need of the occasion. With a fellow missionary, I went some years since to some famous hot springs at the foot of Mount