Struggle in Japan

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IN Asia, where half of the world's people live, one of the greatest struggles for the allegiance of mind and heart in the history of mankind is being waged. Nationalism, insecurities, and fears are being exploited with consummate cunning to further the expansion of communist rule and to increase distrust of democracy and the West. Already many peoples have been lost. Others are wavering under the combination of assiduous wooing and naked threats. It is frighteningly clear that the struggle has entered a new phase of critical intensity. There are facts whose importance to us in Canada compels urgent and careful consideration. Every month of indifference and hesitation on our part makes less certain our chance of success in this struggle for the souls of men.

Though the details, as observed in India, Ceylon, and more recently in Japan, and from contacts with Asians of other lands, vary from country to country, there is an underlying similarity in the patterns. Japan, a modern nation, has moved farthest along the path which other Asian lands now so eagerly tread. In her history and present story we can see mirrored many of the hopes, the fears, and the struggles of these other lands.

Japan has been a separate entity for hundreds of years. Geography and a further self-imposed isolation of more than two centuries have combined to create a profound sense of continuity with the past. The imperial family, with its quasi-divine history and its alleged unbroken descent of three thousand years, symbolizes to the Japanese the heritage and destiny of their nation, the "Children of the Sun." But the roots of this consciousness are firmly embedded in their own hearts. Thus, a farmer tells with pride that he occupies land which has been in his family for over three hundred years. So also, the most enthusiastic young radical seeks examples of his own idealism among the heroes of his nation's past.

In the colourful history of Japan the remarkable ability of her people to adapt foreign ideas and customs to their own use stands out. Fourteen hundred years ago a new religion and culture, a new system of writing, and a new legal and political organization were adopted from China within a century or so. Again, in the decades following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan changed from a feudal type of society to a modern, industrial nation able to stand on equal ground with the great and powerful nations of the world. These are chapters in human history unique in design and sweep. They tell of the reasoned selection of only those ideas desired and of how, in turn, they were fitted into the existing pattern of Japanese life to form a new one, but one inseparably bound to an uninterrupted past.

This ability to change without severing her roots is traced by scholars to

the "web society," the unusually intricate Japanese social pattern, with its myriad of obligations and intertwining relationships. Shinto, Buddhist, and Confucian beliefs have intermingled to produce a culture stressing the group, be it family, community, or nation, rather than the individual. Other peoples have had powerful family systems but the "web society" is more than a form of social organization. It is a way of life which governs every Japanese in all his thoughts and actions from birth to death. Superficially, it is seen in what the foreigner is apt to regard as devious thought patterns and excessive politeness. Without these intricate rules of thought and behaviour human relationships would be difficult, if not intolerable, in so crowded and so all-embracing a society.

Such a pattern leads to a marked degree of family affection and co-operative responsibility but it leaves little place for the desires and talents of the individual. The incessant demands of complex obligations and the continuous suppression of personality to the group gradually build up frustrations, no less powerful because the process is so subtle that it is rarely noticed by the individual himself. Normally, deeper feelings are masked by the pattern of behaviour or find temporary release in socially accepted ways. In a situation for which no rules exist, as in wartime, the pent-up emotions can burst out with a terrifying violence which shocks even those in whom they existed when once more they find themselves in familiar surroundings. In addition, one element from the turbulent feudal period, the warrior code of "Bushido," has been used in the recent past by militarist rulers to instill a spirit of ruthless fanaticism.

As a people living on an archipelago relatively poor in natural resources, the Japanese have long been aware that life is a struggle, whether it is wrested from land or sea. The forces of nature are quite impersonal, sometimes helping and sometimes destroying men. There are moments of serenity and peace but there is also the violence of storm and earthquake. For the Japanese the basis of life is too clear and immutable to encourage metaphysical speculation. In such a world the only assurance of permanence is to come as close as possible into harmony with nature. There are, of course, gay and even boisterous elements in Japanese life but throughout is an underlying strain of melancholy.

Art, music, and literature all reflect the search for glimpses of enlightenment in a world of harsh realities. Truths are to be found in the momentary experience of a cherry blossom falling into a pool, the croaking of a frog on a summer night, or the reflection of a moonbeam. The skill of an artist depends on his ability to evoke a complementary response in the mind of the observer rather than in sketching out in detail his own emotion and thought. It is, perhaps, because of this complementary role which the observer must play that there is enthusiastic participation by so many in all walks of life in the writing of poetry, flower arranging, the perfection of the tea ceremony, and in other forms of artistic expression.

For the foreigner, the search for harmony with nature may be easily

observed in the gardens of unsurpassed beauty with their careful blending of form and composition of water, shrubs, trees, and distant mountains to create a sense of peace and oneness with nature which enables men to regain composure and a sense of their place in existence. The initial impression of a plainness in a moss or stone garden may seem almost the antithesis of beauty but further contemplation leads to an understanding that beauty and truth may be found in other than the elaborate or dramatic.

Japanese homes reflect the same virtues in their frugality of design and furnishings. Quality is determined by the choice of materials and the skill of the workmanship. A flawless piece of wood as a pillar, a lovely wall hanging, an exquisite art object are the marks of a home's beauty.

All Japanese are acutely aware of their vulnerable economic position. Over eighty percent of all raw materials used in industry and twenty percent of food must be imported. The partnership of government and business is making every effort to expand trade without resorting to the discreditable pre-war practices. Serious obstacles confront such efforts. China, formerly a major customer, is partly closed to Japanese trade. Many Asian nations remain antagonistic because of wartime experiences or are trying to encourage embryo home industries. Western nations from whom Japan buys most of her imports are beginning to show signs of raising barriers to the entry of Japanese products. Despite great trade increases, Japan's dollar deficit is only met through purchases by the American treaty forces, a diminishing source of such funds.

It is to our long-term advantage to help Japan improve her present unfavourable trade balance with us. If we want Japan as our friendly customer, we must be willing to be her friendly customer. Short-sighted and selfish trade policies could force Japan, so vitally dependent upon trade, into the communist orbit.

Always complicating the economic picture is the large and growing population. Its effect is felt in every aspect of life, whether it be farming, education, industry, politics or health. The influence is especially marked in a land intensively cultivated, low even in basic natural resources, and possessing one of the highest densities of population in the world.

Economic and population pressures helped the expansionist policy of the militarists, a policy which finally led to war. Around them in South-East Asia the Japanese saw rich, underpopulated territories under the control of European nations. It was no problem to raise the cry of "Asia for the Asians" and to carry it further to a feeling that Japan had as much or more right to these lands. The situation is even more critical today because of the repatriation of overseas Japanese from former colonies to the homeland, an annual population increase of approximately 900,000 people, despite a relatively low birth rate, and the restrictive immigration policies of less populated countries like Canada.

It is useless to talk of friendly equality to Asian nations when exclusive immigration laws belie our words. No one suggests altering the basic com-

position of our population. All that is asked is a selective immigration policy based on criteria other than race and colour. We are concerned over the serious shortage of trained people in Canada. In the young, educated Japanese we have a reserve who could make an invaluable contribution as citizens to the development of Canada. At present, these same educated young people are turning to communism because they cannot in many cases find jobs commensurate with their skills and training. If we need proof of their ability to fit into our way of life, we need only look at the valuable and loyal contribution being made by Canadians of Japanese descent. Humanitarianism and self-interest alike demand our urgent attention to the problem.

During the post-war occupation almost every phase of Japanese life felt the hand of reform—the role of the Emperor, government, the armed forces, the police, the judiciary, education, economic patterns, industrial relations, and the role of women. Though circumstances have altered the nature and extent of many of the proposed changes, the process has continued, with readjustments, since the restoration of sovereignty in 1951. Whatever the end result, it will be distinctly Japanese but very different from the pre-war pattern. In this the reforms have been successful.

In the last year there has been a realignment of political forces. The conservative government of Mr. Kishi is a union of the former Democratic and Liberal Parties. Some of its members were associated with the pre-war era, a source of concern to those who fear a return of old ways. In general, the government's foreign policy is pro-western, while at the same time reasserting national sovereignty. Trade with mainland China is also likely to increase. Japan will assume a more active role in world affairs now that she has become a member of the United Nations.

A number of political difficulties face the government. The problems of the northern islands occupied by Russia, and the prisoners-of-war still held in Russia remain unsettled. The permanent occupation of Okinawa as a United States military base provides a ready "grievance" for those who would stir political unrest. The new constitution contains a section forbidding resort to armed force and war. World events have changed and there is need for Japan to have armed forces of sufficient size and strength to defend herself. The government seeks to alter the constitution to permit larger defence forces, but lacks sufficient popular and Diet support to do so. Many Japanese and outsiders fear a resurgence of militarist power, with a return to internal oppression as well as external aggression. Above all, the Japanese want no part of war, especially a nuclear war, for they know its meaning. The desire on all levels of society for the control of nuclear testing and for a peaceful world is a genuine one, almost fanatic in its intensity. It is, perhaps, best symbolized by the simple but sincere inscription on the memorial in the heart of Hiroshima.

"Rest in peace. We will never repeat this error."

By "we" they mean themselves as well as others.

The Socialist Party is a recent union of left and right wing groups. Generally speaking, it opposes proposals to alter the constitution and favours a foreign policy not unlike that of India, including diplomatic and trade relations with communist countries, and the withdrawal of the American forces. Among labour, intellectuals, and students, the socialists have a considerable following.

The Communist Party has had a checkered career since the war. At one time it fomented serious riots, though most of those rioting were not communists. This policy was not too successful and present policy seems to be to embarrass, wherever possible, without engaging directly in violence as a party. Careful advantage is taken of local grievances, such as proposed airfield extensions. At one time communists dominated the leadership of many of the labour unions, teachers' groups, and student organizations. Today this control is less apparent; many believe this to be simply an alteration in strategy and not a real loss of power. Communist propaganda is widespread in both subtle and direct forms. It is aimed at the young, teachers, and industrial workers, in particular. The communists are appealing with the utmost skill to the fears, idealism, national pride, and insecurity of the people. All too often they are successful in gaining sympathy for communism and in promoting false beliefs and distrust of the democratic world. Thus, many are unable to believe the evils perpetrated in communist lands and to believe the truth about the western world even when it is demonstrated to them. Though relatively few in actual numbers, the communists are well-organized and potentially have a large following among left socialists and other sympathizers.

Democratic ideas have made headway in Japan but all too often this has been less because of our efforts to demonstrate their truth than because the Japanese are sensitive to their inherent worth. Canada holds a unique position of respect and trust in Asia. It is our opportunity, indeed our urgent duty, to assume a more active role in interpreting western aims to Asia and, in turn, to interpret Asian aims to our western partners. In particular, we must strive to find an answer for nuclear weapon control commensurate with defensive security.

There is need for a growing number of people who understand and appreciate the culture of other lands. An interchange of teachers, students, and others is one way to gain such informed people. Success requires careful planning. Participants should be adaptable and observant as well as intellectually qualified. There must be opportunities to learn the history and culture, to see a cross-section of life, to live in homes, and to work beside their hosts. Haphazard arrangements result only in misunderstanding and often in bitterness.

How have all the factors in the past and present combined to affect the world of the young Japanese?

Economic and population pressures have resulted in a degree of competition in all phases of life totally unknown in this country. Hence, there is a drive for higher education with the resultant better opportunities. This, in

a country with compulsory primary and secondary education, has produced large numbers of high school graduates desiring further education or training. Only about one-third of those who seek such opportunities gain entry and in professional and technical courses the ratio may be 1:40. Even so, universities and technical institutions are crowded to capacity with more than 600,000 students. Young people from rural or labouring homes stand little chance of higher education unless they win scholarship assistance or can obtain part-time employment. Inadequate diet, tuberculosis, and mental breakdown are not uncommon.

On graduation the competition for jobs is acute. To-day only about half have employment on graduation.[1] The picture would be serious indeed except that many take jobs below their degree of training and others are absorbed for a time by the family farm or business. Women graduates return to the home. It is little wonder that extreme political philosophies have great appeal when insecurity is so great. A minor economic or social fluctuation could readily change a moderate youth into a militant Marxist.

The views of young Japanese on most questions largely reflect, though more vocally, those of the people in general. Everywhere one senses a striving to build a peaceful, respected, and more secure Japan. But agreement on the means to this end is far from unanimous. The young are jealous of their new-found freedom to think and to act, a reaction whose extreme forms are a source of concern to their parents. Only the future will tell how wisely this freedom is to be used.

But there is a deeper and more crucial problem in the lives of the youth of Japan. Defeat is never easy for a people. It is especially devastating in effect for a people with a sense of mission. For the Japanese surrender meant not only national defeat but religious defeat as well, so closely had religion and national policy been intertwined. Even the most hallowed principles and concepts have been subjected to scrutiny. Whereas their parents can retain faith in the tenets of Buddhism and Shintoism, for many of the younger generation faith has become purely the observance of custom. As a standard for judgment and action it has been lost. The creed, "I believe in myself," is typical of many. At best it is a tenuous belief. In time of crisis it brings disaster upon its believer, faced with his own inadequacy.

Into the vacuum in belief has poured a welter of ideas to compete for the allegiance of mind and heart. Materialism, communism, new syncretic religions, esoteric beliefs, existentialism, and Christianity are competing with vigorous counter-reformations within Shintoism and Buddhism.

Christianity as a faith is a minority religion but its ethical influence is wide. Many are ready to incorporate the Christian ethic into their general scheme of belief. Fewer are prepared to take the further step of accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Master of their lives. Acceptance of any religion which is a dynamic for all of life is not easy for the Japanese after the recent wartime disillusionment with a religion which dictated every thought and action.

As in the West, materialism in different guises is a serious obstacle to more than intellectual acceptance. We owe an incalculable debt of gratitude for the dedicated witness of Christian missionaries but we seriously need to examine the other and often more glittering pictures of life which our society presents. It is difficult to expect the Japanese to accept the totality of Christianity while much of the professed Christian world pays only lip service.

There is, however, a more basic obstacle facing the prospective Christian. Christianity challenges traditional beliefs, modes of thought, and social concepts to an extent not found where society is based on the Greco-Christian tradition. The personal core of Christianity, the concept of the unique relationship of God to man as revealed in Jesus Christ, is not easy to understand or accept for one with a different philosophic heritage.

Despite these formidable difficulties, the Church in Japan is moving forward. One is struck by the high proportion within its ranks of the young and the educated for whom the influences of the past are less binding. Even more revealing is their reason for acceptance of Christianity. It is the realization that only the redeeming love of God in Jesus Christ provides an answer to their inner doubts and fears. Only when life has been transformed can the Christian ethic and social gospel attain their full meaning. This is the message of faith which must be made a living reality for others, especially those in rural and industrial areas.

Thus, the world of the youth of Japan is a composite of past influences, present experience, and the hopes that may be. It is an exciting and bewildering world but one that desperately seeks answers. Sooner or later it will find them. What they will be is our challenge as well as that of Japan.

There is real hope, a hope seen in the words of a student whose parents died in the atomic holocaust that sounded the knell of the old Japan.

"At first I felt only hate, hate against all mankind that it could have brought itself to this. I lost faith that there was anything good or decent in life. A technical field requiring minimal contact with my fellows offered the only means of hiding my despair. In the distress and intellectual ferment of the years of rebuilding I came to realize that such action on my part and that of my fellows would only perpetuate the conditions in men's hearts and actions which lead to war. It was my duty and that of young people in every land to do what we could to make peace and brotherhood a reality. I'm seeking a way with love, not hate, in my heart."

1. From a report by Mr. K. Nishida, Ministry of Education, to the World University Service International Seminar in Japan, August, 1955.