

The Religions of The Japanese

Their Character and Future By Yashichiro Yamashita

In general the religious conditions of Japan are very similar to the civil—a mixture of occidental and oriental characteristics. The form of government derived from, or modelled upon, American and European systems, is representative in character. The constitution is well balanced, neither wholly oriental nor wholly occidental, but having about an equal proportion of the characteristics of each. This harmony is the only system fitted to Japan's needs and aims. It would not do to take the entire English or American, or any other system of government, without examining to see whether it fitted the life and qualities of the Japanese or not. To have adopted any one of these systems entirely would have brought danger, and the people of Japan knew it, so they avoided it successfully.

Now the religious conditions follow the above outline exactly. At present a great many of her people are looking toward the Christian faith. However, Buddhism still holds the greater number. Shintoism covers the entire nation, in respect to the national duty. Confucianism rules the whole people insofar as pure ethical principles are concerned, Shintoism means literally "The Way of God." It contains no moral code. An eminent writer of the eighteenth century in Japan, Mr. Motoori, even asserting that in Japan there was no necessity for any system of morals, as every Japanese acted aright if he only consulted his own heart. He also declared that the whole duty of a good Japanese consisted in obeying implicitly and without question the commands of the emperor. In Shintoism Japan is held to be the country of the gods and the emperor to be direct descendant and actual representative of the sun goddess. It developed only the national spirit, indeed, which is so-called Bushido, or warrior spirit, and Yamato Damashi, or Japanese spirit. This national spirit guarded the integrity of Japan through her whole history of 2,557 years.

Shintoism forms, therefore, the national character and ties together the entire nation. As a whole the nation upholds Shintoism as one's higher duty. This has more of a political than of religious significance. In the year 552 A. D. the first Buddhist image was brought in from Korea. But a better means of protection had been taken by many Shintoists. About the beginning of the ninth century, the priest Kukai compounded out of Buddhism, Confucianism and Shintoism a system of doctrine called Ryobu-Shinto, the chief characteristic of which was the theory that Shinto deities were nothing more than transmigration of Buddhist divinities. The doctrine of Ryobu-Shinto, was a compound of the best in Shinto-Confucianism and Buddhism, transformed by Japanese character into a more perfect form. This form of religion is still strong and it is called the Japanese Buddhism, being thus distinguished from other Buddhism. This doctrine spread over the land and became almost a state religion through several centuries, from about the seventeenth up to the nineteenth centuries. In the Shogun Tokugawa's era there were several grants by which many temples were to be built and repaired from the public finance and ministers or priests to be treated as public officers. At the beginning of the present era of the Emperor Mutsuhito, 1867, those grants disappeared and it had begun to lose its influential ground. The members are decreasing from day to day. At present it is said to number about 1,115,000 out of the entire population of 43,000,000.

Buddha recognized the idea of transmigration of human souls and assumed that human existence is on the whole miserable and a curse rather than a blessing. His morality and religious observances constitute the theoretical way of enjoying the various duties of common life and of religion. His theory was derived from life and his religious appeals were largely made to man's duties. A little later than the date of the introduction of image of

Buddha, the Confucian philosophy of morals based on ethics rather than revelation was developed.

Confucius presented an ethical system and taught the practical in philosophy. Morals, rhetoric and politics were the main subjects he worked on. His "Good" has no connection whatever with any God, but recognized Him in the realities of life as the great law of nature. He said at the beginning of his greatest writing, "The Great Learning," "The nature of man is perfect and uniform. Learning alone makes him different, imperfect and unlike his fellows." His theory had been accepted by the whole nation without regard whatever to their difference on religion and all sought to learn it. The Confucian schools were established through the country. Schoolmasters started to teach it in little villages and parents began to guide their home rule with this system of ethics as a basis. The method is still used and is the most influential one in both public and private life of the Japanese, being more important even than their religion. They obtain their knowledge and the best means of life through this Confucian philosophy. There was another fact which is also a notable one. That was the establishment of anti-Confucian schools. It was pretty strong among the well educated people. The principle doctrines of the school were these: (1) The nature of man is evil. (2) The force of evil is much stronger and more powerful than any other. (3) But man can gain control over its power for evil, and destroy it whenever his mental development is fully perfected.

About 1867 Christian missionary work actually began. At the beginning it met with severe difficulties, but has since met with more tolerance. The members are increasing from day to day. It is said that its followers now number about 15,000. The majority of educated people, with the exception of a few noted men, cannot be classified as Christians. Buddhism controls largely the lower classes, and undoubtedly Shintoism and Confucianism have power over the entire nation. As a fact this very interesting thing ought to be noted. The Japanese have always sought to learn by themselves. They never adopt whole ideas from others, but transform the best from others into their own. A good example has already been shown in the case of Japanese conversion of Buddhism into the so-called Ryobu-Shintoism. Their ethical ideal is formed in Confucianism and their national spirit in Shintoism. This ideal and the spirit guard the integrity of the nation.

Ryobu-Shintoism would be the natural religion for Japan. We all know that the religious belief is not formed by scientific method, or by any logical process, but by our ancestors' home training and their faith. There is no reason, then, why we should not reform, or change it, if the change is evidently for the better. The conditions of today are better than those of yesterday, and tomorrow's should be better than today's. Such betterment depends on man alone. The power of man only pushes the conditions forward or backward. The individuality of man is the power of man, and man's ideas makes the individuality. If a man has a weak idea he develops a weak individuality. Ideal religion is acquired only by ideal man. Such religion ought to follow scientific method and logical processes, not habit, custom and home training.

At present each religion claims its superiority without learning of other religions. This is not the result of a better idea, or of strong individuality, but of superstition. From my point of view Christianity is superior to any other, but I doubt very much whether my idea is better than that of those who claim superiority of their own. I do not attempt, however, to force my own belief of religion on others, because it is not good law or morals. The moral law is to force our own belief only on ourselves. When our be-

lief and its actions prove better than others, many will desire to learn them. A person is free any time to change his view according to his own idea of what is better. The most powerful influences in Japan upon the future of Japanese religion are these:

- (1) To investigate any new idea of religion offered.
- (2) To repair the old religion.

The first view was taken by Dr. Inouye Tetsuziro, who is the head professor of comparative religion in the Imperial university of Japan. He says: "My new religion is not a white-washing of ancient doctrine. I should like to find a new substance for our life, but not a new form. The form has constantly changed throughout the ages and all the forms are alike in value, but substance has never varied." The second view was taken by Dr. Inouye Euryo who is the most prominent philosopher and Buddhist in Japan. He rejects the idea of Dr. Inouye Tetsuziro. He says: "Is it necessary? The number of people who understand science is exceedingly limited, while religious principles interest everybody. Admitting the possibility of creating a religious doctrine that should be in complete accord with science, what a sorry religion it would give us. It would above all be robbed of its primordial charm, its perfume of the past. . . . What would you think if anyone were to offer you an ideal soup made of beans, meat, juice, milk and fish sauce? What a strange mixture that would be, and yet each article taken separately is good and highly esteemed. . . . Humanity already has a religion of this character, that of Auguste Comte. And when, after incredible efforts, I succeeded in finding his church in London, I was told that the number of these adepts has never exceeded forty or fifty persons. It is easier to repair an old building than to build a new one." (Literary Digest, April 12, 1902.)

Many leading men in Japan follow the above views and Japan will never be Christianized or Buddhaized, but is very likely to have some mixed form derived from a purely ethical source. The religious conditions in Japan, therefore, would follow the model of those civil conditions which she has already attained. It is not the least important or necessary to Christianize or Buddhaize her entirely, and is impossible. But if anyone tries to do so he must learn thoroughly of Confucius at least, and show them a false principle in it.

Minnesota Daily: Following the very excellent example of Professor Trueblood of Ann Arbor, it is rumored that the powers at this institution are seriously contemplating the establishment of a new department at Minnesota. Owing to the universal interest in the subject under discussion at this college, both among the professors and the student body and even among certain of Captain Guad's contingency, it is felt to be a much-needed departure. The object of this new branch of education is the instruction of youths and maidens in the artful intricacies of love-making. It is believed that the natural aptitude of Minnesota students and the peculiar advantages afforded by the situation of the campus, will make the department flourish here.

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