

Eastern Art Sought in Battle Against Conformity

The influence of one art or culture on another is a confirmation rather than an affirmation, according to Dr. Prudence R. Myer of Tulane University.

Dr. Myer is a guest on the University of Nebraska campus through the summer program of the Far Eastern Institute.

Seek First

Speaking Monday evening on the "Western Image of Eastern Art," Dr. Myer explained that to be influenced by the art of another culture, one must first be searching for something.

The seeking may or may not be conscious, she explained. It may be conscious, but not explainable until the sought becomes the found. But it must be sought, Dr. Myer emphasized.

What makes people seek other cultures?

One reason for the quest, according to Dr. Myer, is the "cult of conformity."

When everything begins to be too much alike, she explained, people seek valid parts of other cultures.

Search for Validity

Thus, she said, we learn about other ways of life, other forms of art, other religions than those to which we are accustomed and try to bring what seems valid from them into our own lives and cultures.

There are other reasons as well for an awakening interest in the Orient and especially in Japan, she said.

Mysterious Land

One reason is the aura of mystery which surrounded Japan until it was "opened" for trade in the last century. Before and immediately after trade commenced, she explained, the "naivete" of the Western world about Japan was amazing.

"The awareness of the East has expanded just incredibly in the last century," she said. "It is a cliché to say so, it is so obvious," Dr. Myer added.

Common knowledge about Japan today, information known even to small children in modern America, was mysterious and unknown a century ago.

A book on Japanese art written in 1897, for example, had to devote considerable space to describing the sliding paper walls of Japanese homes and to explaining the now-familiar ricksha, she explained.

Knowledge Abounds

Today, she said, "Just keeping one's eyes open one can acquire a considerable amount of knowledge" about Japan and the other Oriental nations.

Popular magazines carry frequent articles on Oriental art and culture, Dr. Myer noted. Valuable information can be gleaned from articles on major acquisitions of museums, from descriptions of

special art exhibits of Japanese work, from news, feature and depth articles written in and about Japan.

Books that would have cost her \$15 to \$25 when she was in college, containing prints of Japanese art, are sold today in paperback from for \$1.25, Dr. Myer said.

"There is no excuse," with the possible exception of time, for any interested person being unable to become informed about Oriental art and culture today, she said.

Varied Influenced

Beyond art, examples of Japanese and Oriental culture are all around us, she said, especially in home decorations.

"Every furniture manufacturer in Grand Rapids makes a line of Japanese or Chinese furniture," she commented.

Willoware is an example of the Chinese influence in china, she said. Made in England, Willoware shows a strong Eastern influence in its design. Today, she laughed, we can buy inexpensive imitations of Willoware made in Shoji screens, familiar to most readers of home and women's magazines, are another example of Japanese culture used widely in modern America.

And what of the Japanese people? Is the influence twofold?

In modern Japan "bright young things" work as secretaries and in stores, wearing the trimmest of Western sheaths, elegant in Western chemises, she said.

The Old: Elegant

"The most sophisticated, and introversiveness, she said. To her it is a great discipline. "You can't say that either view is wrong or that either is right," she said with a smile. "But they are different."

It would be as hard for her to understand Beatnik Zen as for Beatniks to understand her idea of Zen, she said, although both views derive from the same subject.

Time Variations

And what the 19th century impressionist painters, among the first to bring Japanese art to the West, sought and found there is different from what most modern artists find in the Japanese culture, she said.

Going to the same segment of another culture at different times, people discover different facets of the same thing, she said. And at different times, people go to different segments of the same culture, depending upon what they are seeking.

Art as a Confirmation

Someone who experiments with an art form from another culture, be it painting, sculpture, music or literature, is confirming his own ideas, not drawing upon something totally new to him, she said.

Totally disparate ideas cannot be combined, she explained. First some idea, conscious or not, must be held in common to be developed by mingling.

Ideas Develop

And knowledge, of course, develops ideas. Familiarity helps make ideas recognizable and enables the mingling which brings varieties of culture together.

Zen—and Zen

The Western concept of Zen Buddhism was one example Dr. Myer used to show how the influence depends on the seeker and what is being sought.

Much touted by modern Beatniks, Zen is, to them, admirable for its spontaneity

movement today, moved from India to China to Japan, she explained, and brought Chinese influence to Japan's culture as a whole and to Japanese art.

Twin Streams

Since that time, she said, Japanese and Chinese art forms have progressed like "two separate streams," moving together, than apart, always similar, always distinct.

And always, when two cultures influence each other, Dr. Myer added, the influence depends on what is being sought.

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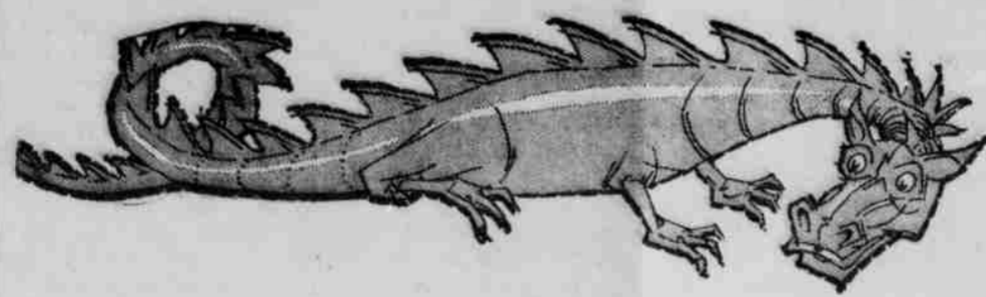
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"Almost every time I lecture on Japanese art," Dr. Myer said, "someone says to me later, 'My father or my brother or my fiance brought this back from Japan or from Korea.'"

Thus increasing knowledge of Japan creates interest in Japanese culture. And interest brings out new facets of Japanese culture.

It is extremely interesting to follow the changes in the Eastern influence on Western art in the last century, Dr. Myer said, as the culture of the East moved from the mysterious unknown to the familiar.

Servicemen Help

A large part of the average American's knowledge of the East, she said, probably comes from returning servicemen.

How are Americans, who defeated, then occupied Japan received?

Dr. Myer admitted she had "heard" of Japanese resentment toward Americans, of rejection of the American way of life because of America's own unsolved problems.

But "I have never talked with anyone who felt it in Japan," she added quickly.

Dr. Myer explained that the word most frequently used to describe the Japanese by those who have visited Japan is "charming."

Great Courtesy

The Japanese people are "extremely courteous," she said. "If it is only superficial courtesy, it is well concealed," she added.

Dr. Myer should know. Her doctoral thesis, "Pre-Islamic Religious Architecture in Bihar and Bengal," is only a sampling of her study of the East.

She has received awards from the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Association of University Women, the American Philosophical Society and the Tulane University Council on Research.

Studied in Japan

In 1957-58 she was granted a Senior Research Fellowship under the Fulbright program.

Dr. Myer is a graduate of Oberlin College and has done graduate work at the New York University Institute of Fine Arts and Radcliffe College.

She has held staff and faculty positions at the Cleveland Museum of Art, Mills College, Wellesley College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and Newcomb College of Tulane University, where she is assistant professor of Art.

Dr. Myer is the author of articles in "Artibus Asiae" and "The Art Bulletin." She has reviewed books for the "Journal of Aesthetics, Artibus Asiae, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians" and "Journal of Asian Studies."

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Indifference to the East No Longer Feasible: Houn

"An indifference to the developments in the Far East is no longer possible in the interest of peace for the world today," said Franklin W. Houn.

Houn is a guest lecturer in the Far Eastern Institute at the University this summer and will stay on next fall, he said. This summer he is teaching Far Eastern Politics and a seminar in international relations.

Raised in China

Born and educated in China, he worked in the presidential office in China until 1948, when he came to the United States, he said.

"It is important for Americans as well as the people of other countries to have an understanding of the Far East today," Houn said.

"The world is becoming smaller," Houn said, "and these countries are no longer so far off." "The rise of these countries in the Far East has made an understanding of Far Eastern politics more important to us," he added.

"Communist China especially is becoming a world power and its activities vitally affect us," Houn said.

Communist China and Russia are attempting to separate the communist countries from the non-communist countries of the world, and their menace has become greater, Houn said.

It is important that the non-communist countries understand the communist movement, he said. Without this understanding it will not be possible to solve our problems in this area, he added.

"In the past there has been indifference," Houn said. Indifference or ignorance of the developments in the Far East is no longer possible if problems are to be solved and peace maintained, Houn explained.

"We must be informed on Communist affairs in the world today," Houn said.

Studied Red China

After receiving his doctorate, Houn did research work at the Library of Congress in Washington, he said. At Stanford University Houn continued his research on Communist China, he added. He taught at Michigan State University, before going to Dubuque University in Iowa, he said.

During the last ten years Houn has continued his study of Communist China, he said. He has had numerous books and articles published on this subject, he said. His forthcoming book is entitled Propaganda and Indoctrination in Communist China.

One of his earlier books, published in 1957 and entitled Central Government of China 1912-1928, dealt with the Chinese people's unsuccessful attempt to develop a democracy patterned after those of the West in the third decade of this century.

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