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Britain and Japan:

Twins of Time and Tradition

Among the more remarkable social phenomena of the present day are two islands on either side of the world, Japan in the Pacific and Britain in the Atlantic. What is remarkable about these two islands is the way in which they resemble each other in their development, in their situation, in their historical and social movements. Each island lies adjacent to a large land mass, Japan next to Asia, and Britain off the coast of Europe. Japan's 143,000 square miles as against Britain's 96,000 square miles may appear to be unequal, but when one considers the habitable portions of these two lands this inequality disappears. Again, Japan's approximately 100,000,000 people are almost twice those in Britain, but the population density of the two islands is of the order of 630 for Japan as against 550 for Britain, two figures which underline the proximity of their population problems. Apart from the coal in Britain, each of these islands is devoid of any other large body of natural resources and is dependent not only upon the import of raw materials with which to undertake manufacture of any kind but upon the cultivation of its human resources to an almost unprecedented degree.. Although each island devotes a large portion of its land to agriculture, nevertheless they are both dependent upon other lands for food. Again, around Osaka, Japan has the Black Country counterpart of England, and has outlying islands which are not unlike those off the coast of Britain.

Historically the two lands have much in common. Whereas Britain drew the backbone of her culture from Europe beginning with Roman times, Japan drew hers from China. In each instance the peoples of the adjacent land mass exerted an influence upon the island cultures with the result that today there are identifiable strains reaching back into the past, and present in the habits and patterns of thought in the current populations. Each country has moved through periods of feudalism to industrialism, and each reveals today the results of similar forms and forces which time has imposed upon their respective societies. Thus one finds in Britain the landed classes with their hierarchy of status, and in Japan a comparable group with similar attitudes and interests. It is not without reason that Japan, when looking for a form of government, should draw upon the British constitution for the pattern to be followed

in its Diet. Although Britain was the home of the Industrial Revolution in the 17th and 18th centuries, Japan was not far behind in assuming Western technology following Perry's visit in 1853. Following this awakening, Japan moved rapidly enough to be able to reach the status of a world power in 1914 and again reveal her strength in 1939. Both World Wars found Japan and Britain in strong positions in their respective oceans. Today, though the United States has assumed the position of spokesman for the democracies, taking this position over from Britain, the United States nevertheless must look to Britain in her negotiations with Europe, and to Japan—if only indirectly—for her negotiations with Asia. Thus the two islands by virtue of their historic and geographic positions provide the necessary east-west balance for world diplomacy.

It is not without reason, too, that both Britain and Japan have in their days been imperialistic powers. Since each was forced to move out from confined shores to other lands for the resources they needed and the markets they required, they were perforce engaged in economic aggression to provide for their needs. With the passing of time, and the assumption of economic over military measures of acquisition, the two lands have developed along similar lines. The industrial character of the two peoples is similar in that both have engaged in ship-building, and in the production of cars, machinery, textiles. In each there is attention given to precision in work. "Made in Britain" has generally been associated with goods of the highest quality and workmanship. "Made in Japan" has only recently begun to take on this association, although today there is no question that Japanese standards of excellence are as good as any and better than most. The character of business within each country runs a similar pattern so far as general organization is concerned, for in both one finds on the one hand many small entrepreneurs and on the other large industrial combines.

Where two such societies are characterized by so many similarities in history, in geography, in development, in situation, and in population, it is interesting to perceive similarities in their educational systems. Perhaps the most outstanding similarity is to be found in the emphasis on selection. In Japan the examination plays a most important role in the selection of students from the kindergarten through the university. Although in Britain the examination does not play the same role until "eleven plus"—a measure which is being dropped in many parts of England—there is nonetheless the additional role played by the public school in selecting students for further education. This is not without its parallel in Japan in the practice of the private schools leading on to the private universities. More important than the examination itself, however, is the fact that this instrument is used to select the best students on an academic basis, and to move them through to the best positions of leadership in society. The public schools of Britain often selected and still do select students on the basis of the "old school tie." This process has, under modern pressures, been modified, although it will be some time before it entirely

disappears. Despite such differences as obtain in the two societies,, it is obvious that pressure of population, and the desire to provide a competent leadership are two factors operating to give each society a driving wedge into the future of the modern world. This has been obvious for some two centuries: both societies appear to have maintained their industrial position, if not entirely, at least partly because of this selectivity.

On the other hand, in both countries there is the desire to modify what may be called the traditional selective process by extending educational facilities to a larger section of the population. Britain's exploration of the usefulness of the Comprehensive School and Japan's consideration of a more broadly based school system attest this observation. Furthermore, popular pressure in both countries is aiming to remove at least some of the more restrictive aspects of the examination so long accepted as part of the selective process.

In still another respect one finds similarity. Whereas in Britain the prestige universities are Oxford and Cambridge, in Japan the same prestige attaches to the old Imperial Universities of the order of Tokyo and Kyoto. Too, the Red Brick Universities of England are matched in Japan by the private universities which serve somewhat similar roles in their respective societies, taking those students who in the normal course of application and of examination do not make it to the prestige institutions. By the same token, business and industry seek their candidates from the old line institutions first, and only go to the second when they can not fill out their employee lists with first line people. There is a tradition, too, in both countries, that positions in Government and in the military should so far as possible be recruited from the traditional strongholds of education—the old-line universities.

As is to be expected in these two highly industrialized societies the problem of general and technical education is important. In both, general education is considered to be important enough to provide for a rounding out of the vocational and technical education which plays so important a part in serving the needs of business and of industry. Britain, of course, has been able to benefit from the experience in technical education which she found in practices on the continent, whereas Japan, though needing this kind of education somewhat later in her history, has nevertheless had to depend a good deal more upon her own resources than what she could find on the outside. Since that early period, Japan has embarked upon a program of development of her facilities for technical education: to this end she has appointed missions for overseas study, and convened conferences to which the knowledge and skills of the world could be brought for her examination. It is not by chance alone that Japan's technical and industrial capacity has mounted rapidly in the period since 1945; for instance, the phenomenal growth of the electrical and optical industries and of the growth of ship building, motor cars, and heavy machinery generally.

Interestingly enough, both Japan and Britain have been concerned with the behaviour patterns of people, as witness in Britain the emphasis upon character education, and in Japan a similar emphasis upon moral education. Although in Britain formal religion has contributed to the definition of moral education, in Japan Buddhism and Shintoism have not done so to the same extent—with the result that the educational process has had to give attention to this respect of the education of individuals. In part this concern may be attributed to the presence in both societies of an awareness of the stabilizing force of a universal ethic made all the more evident by the cross-current of world opinion to which seafaring nations are prone.

Britain and Japan posses two institutions which are fascinating counterparts of each other. The Japanese teahouse provides an atmosphere conducive to conversation amid surroundings which give each person present a feeling of being a member of the human family of minds interested in ideas. The British pub, though dispensing beer instead of tea, nevertheless serves a similar purpose in providing occasion for the exchange of ideas as well as darts. Along somewhat similar lines, though in another situation, the Japanese tea ceremony is not without its British counterpart in the tea hour, institutions which in both societies have become somewhat sancrosanct. These two institutions suggest a similarity of disposition to the consideration of ideas, and a somewhat more interesting suggestion as to the similarity obtaining in the area of formality. What may be considered to be "reserve" on the one hand, is seen to be "inscrutable" on the other.

It is usual to draw attention to the sharp contrasts found in Japan as between Eastern and Western modes of thought: to wit, eastern contemplation versus western consideration, eastern work versus western leisure, eastern art versus western action, and eastern global thinking versus western linear thought. It is not, however, without significance that one finds in Britain a difference between European and British modes of thought: witness what is found in the cast of thought as between Wales and England, or between Ireland and England. On the other hand, in both Japan and in Britain, there is a set of contrasts between the old and the new. In several respects these are similar. In both countries ancient pomp and ceremony play their distinctive roles, even to providing sharp contrasts with modern requirements. Though Kabuki Theatre may not belong to the same class as Shakespeare Theatre, the role each plays in its society is similar. In both, precedent governs tradition, and in both, too, performance is the measure of the man in the same context. These contrasts may be found in any society, but in Japan and in Britain they take on the significance of being sharpened by virtue of the 'insular' character of both nations. This insularity is not to be understood as implying 'provincialism' but is used rather in its more limited geographical sense. The fact that in these societies so many outside influences are constantly being brought to bear suggests that each

society sets up a countervailing force which tends to insure the continuity of its own special ethos. This appears to be the shape of the traditional movement in Japan today, and is reflected, too, in a similar movement in Britain. This holding to tradition represents in both societies a laudable desire to ensure the preservation of the individual against the onslaught of the weight of the masses, and more important, to ensure the proper balance of the individual's development as between the 'dehumanizing' force of science and the 'enhumanizing' influence of his past.

A curious similarity exists between Japanese and British pragmatism. Both peoples are given to working things out in practice, and to arriving at a theory only after a good body of evidence is in. This in part explains why the Japanese have been said to imitate so widely, when in actual fact what they have been doing is trying things out to see how they work—the creative Japanese idea follows. Thus, the introduction of the Junior High School to the Japanese school system waits upon its satisfactory working before assembling evidence pointing to formal adoption. In Britain, experimentation with various kinds of school organization continues. This disposition to try things out, then bring in legislation to cover practice, is to all intents and purposes, similar in both countries.

In so far as languages are concerned, it is a rather interesting phenomenon to find Kanji, Kana, and Katakana in Japan, whereas in Britain, English, Scotch, Irish, and Welsh play their part in communication. That both countries should possess several distinct tongues is not without significance if only to point to the character of the people and the history which lies back of this character. Without doubt the insistence on recognition of the individual and of his group and his culture plays a most important part in the life of each nation. There appears to be something in the character of both peoples which eschews the singular mode of communication and reflects the multiple streams to be found in the rivers of their emerging philosophies.

That two such island empires as Britain and Japan should be possessed of so much similarity in respect of their histories—quite apart from their geographies—their institutions, and social characteristics, raises some very interesting questions as regards the apparent differences between East and West. For one thing, it seems a reasonable inference, that given equivalent geographical positions and equivalent natural resources, peoples of both eastern and western hemispheres will tend to develop along somewhat similar lines. There may be some differences in particulars but the general lines of development will be similar. Furthermore, given two societies with somewhat comparable historical development, the institutions which emerge will reflect one another in one or more respects. Despite the fact that Britain's overseas trade and cultural activities undoubtedly influenced Japanese development, there are nevertheless too many indigenous institutions resembling one another too closely to explain away easily in this manner. Perhaps the most significant inference is that the shib-

boleth of 'never the twain shall meet' can find no ready acceptance in the light of these British and Japanese similarities. For education the import is great. Human beings, wherever they live, are the creators of both heredity and environment, and the institutions they devise to foster their continuance are affected by the same factors. It would appear in the context of British and Japanese experience that tradition is to society what heredity is to the individual, and that environment affects societies as it does individuals.

Canada has a very special interest in Britain and Japan, a special interest which derives from the social, economic and political influences which both countries have exerted upon Canada and which they continue to exercise in one form or another. And while it is true that Britain's social, economic and political influences have been by far the greater over a longer period of time, Japan's emergence as an industrial nation in the Pacific—in contrast with Britain's considerably earlier emergence in the Atlantic—in need of vast amounts of natural resources for her industrial machine is bringing about a change in the relative position of Britain and Japan vis-a-vis Canada.

This change is indicated by the very significant increase in trade between Canada and Japan, and by the equally significant phenomenon of Canadian import of Japanese skills and technical knowledge in manufacturing, mining and finance. Canada's traditional reliance upon Britain and Europe for people with training and skills has now been extended in a measure to Japan, and recent changes in Canadian immigration laws will facilitate such immigration. All this is, of course, to the benefit of Canada.

Though many reasons may be educed for Canada's lesser educational productivity relevant to Britain and Japan—even taking into account population differences—two reasons appear to be particularly tenable. First, both the public and private educational systems of Britain and Japan have a national focus which, though balanced by provisions for local controls, excludes the development of a too limiting provincialism, and provides for dynamic directives to students and studies alike. Second, in both Britain and Japan the commercial and industrial communities cooperate with schools, colleges and universities to an extent unknown in Canada. A third reason applies to Japan in particular, and that is the early recognition that educational planning and research were absolutely essential to a proper educational development. If Canada is to be educationally productive, then certainly there must be a better provision for a national focus, such as the provinces giving up some of their precious educational sovereignities, and there must be much better cooperation between the educational and industrial communities, not only in the matter of programs and products, but also in the realms of research.

From the educational point of view, Canada's motto "From Sea to Sea" means not only from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but from Britain

to Japan as well. In the first instance, the distance is measured in miles; in the second in centuries. So far as these twins of time are concerned, Canada may continue to depend upon others for assistance with its professional and technical skills, and swing like a pendulum between East and West. On the other hand, Canada can attempt to achieve educational maturity by devoting as much attention to its human resources as it has in the past to its natural resources. Britain and Japan on either side of Canada have provided Canadians with challenging examples.