

Japanese Philosophy And Politics

By Joshua W. K. Liao

THE Japanese philosophy of power politics and territorial expansion by virtue of military aggression has its roots in the early history of the country and the national legend of the people. In origin, it took shape through the practice of certain creeds in divine wills and ways and was called Shintoism in the literate age as found in the "Records of Ancient Events" (古事記) and the "History of Japan" (日本書紀). In reality, the national religion of Japan grew out of the ceremonial usages followed by her early tribal chieftains and ancient priest-kings. In the main it offered little or no teaching for the conduct of private individuals until it later took on certain Confucian and Buddhist influences.

Worshipping the spirits of the sun and the moon, mountains and rivers, Shintoism is fetishistic and also polytheistic in nature: but, as it asserts its major belief in the Sun Goddess, it is henotheistic. It claims no founder but gives a mythical account of the divine origin of the Mikado (御門), or Emperor which has been traced to Izanagi (伊弉諾) and Izanami (伊弉冉)—the Japanese Adam and Eve. The daughter of this divine couple, by the name of Amaterasu (天照), conferred upon her grandson Ninigi (瓊瓊杵) the divine right to rule over All-under-Heaven he could survey. The great grandson of Ninigi—the sixth descendant of Amaterasu—at the head of the invading Children of Heaven (天孫) appeared in Hihuga (日向 present Miyazaki Prefecture 宮崎) and at once set out on his eastward campaign for territorial expansion. Navigating through the Seto Inland Sea (瀬戸内海), he overcame all obstacles on the way and, after effecting a landing on the Main Island (本州), he subdued all wild tribes encountered and finally ascended the Imperial Throne in Yamato (大和 present Nara Prefecture 奈良縣) on February 11, 660 B.C. Thereupon the victorious chieftain became the founder and first ruler of the only ruling dynasty and was posthumously called Emperor Jimmu (神武), or Divine Militarist, as he has been revered.

Korean Influence

The historic authenticity of the events as such, however incredible to average readers, has been challenged by few or none of the present-day Japanese scholars. None the less tremendous has been the subsequent influence exercised by such a belief. In all probability, the invading tribes entered the archipelago from the Korean Peninsula for, as far back as it can be traced, the standard Japanese language was Ural-Altaic in origin, very similar to Korean, and the dominant classes of people in Japan have borne numerous other resemblances to their continental cousins.

THIS article is the first third of a digest of a volume written by the author before Pearl Harbor, the manuscript of which was lost in Hongkong during the war. The second and third parts will appear in future issues. Dr. Liao, a native of Taiwan (Formosa), received his primary and secondary education in Japanese schools from 1913 to 1923. Following this, he attended a Chinese university and subsequently took post-graduate work in America and Europe. He has written several articles for the *Review* in the past, his most recent being a series devoted to the history of Chinese philosophy.—Editor.

Assured of victory by their possession of metallic (probably bronze) weapons, they kept waging battles against the aborigines. Thus, because the demand for *Lebensraum* in the new country necessitated the expansion of territory at the expense of the Ainu (倭奴) in the east and the north and the Kumaso (熊襲) tribes in the south, Emperor Jimmu's successors similarly made their influence felt through military conquest, on the one hand, and the popular practice of the worship of the Sun Goddess, on the other.

The first historic contact between China and Japan was recorded in the "History of the Later Han" (後漢書), which tells us that in A.D. 57 the Ainu (倭奴) Kingdom from the East Sea sent an envoy with tribute to the Chinese Court to whom the Han Emperor Kuang-wu (漢光武帝) granted a seal. According to Japanese sources, that was about the time new campaigns for territorial expansion were under way. For in the year 97, Yamatotakeru (日本武), the able son of the 12th Japanese Emperor Keiko (景行), led a southward expedition to Satsuma (薩摩 western half of the present Kagoshima Prefecture 鹿児島縣) to subdue the Kumaso tribesmen and in 110 he moved eastward to conquer the Ezo (蝦夷) natives and succeeded in expanding the imperial territory as far as Shinano (信濃 present Nagano Prefecture 長野縣). It is believed that he was in possession of a famous sword made of the best steel of the age, whose origin, whether imported or home made, remains untraceable. He passed away during his triumphant return and has been worshipped as the first and one of the greatest Japanese war heroes.

Similarly, in 199, the year following the demise of the 14th Emperor Chyuai (仲哀), the Empress Dowager Jingu (神功), or Divine Merits, led a westward expedition against Korea

and exacted tribute from the Peninsula. She is supposed to have ruled up to 269. According to the Chinese "Records of Wei" (魏志), an envoy from the Ainu queen visited the Wei court in 238, the year which occurred during her reign.

Thus, not only was the right and origin of the Mikado traced to divine origins, but also every military or diplomatic success was called a divine accomplishment ordained by Providence. The people, therefore, worshipped both the Sun Goddess and her lineal descendants, who governed them and expanded their living space. So thoroughly did the sentiment of reverence for the Mikado permeate the soul of the Japanese nation that even in the subsequent days of the military dictatorship of the Shoguns (將軍 1192-1868) the Emperors could still win loyal homage from the masses of the people and claim nominal supremacy over the feudal lords and the actual rulers of the Empire. For the Imperial Household remained the concrete object of worship, functioning as the centripetal force of religious and social order.

Confucianism and Buddhism

Meanwhile, alien ideas, as expounded through Confucianism and Buddhism, began to mould Shintoism into an elaborate code of rites and rules, as well as a system of ideological foundations for the political and social institutions of the country. Although the Japanese must have acquired some knowledge of Chinese culture when they first came into direct contact with the Chinese, their history tells us that in the year 285 the Korean scholar Wa Ni (王仁) presented to the 15th Emperor Ojin (應神) copies of the "Confucian Analects" (論語) and the "Thousand Character Scripture" (千字文). Thenceforth the Chinese script and philosophy spread rather slowly. In 403, the Imperial Court appointed Sinologists—mostly descendants of Korean immigrants—historiographers of the feudal states, and in 513, Kudara (百濟), one of the then three Korean Kingdoms, presented the erudite scholar Tuan Yang-erh (段楊爾) to lecture on the Five Classics (五經). However, when the 30th Emperor Mintatsu (敏達) ordered the historiographers of the feudal states to read the official letter written in Chinese from Korea upon his accession in 572, only one of them could read it.

It was not until the beginning of 603 that the Empress Suiko (推古) adopted the Chinese calendar for the first time. In the fourth month of the same year Prince Shotoku (德聖) promulgated the Constitution of 17 Articles, specifying the distinction between ruler and subject and stressing the latter's loyalty to the former

and the former's consideration of the latter's welfare all after Confucian teachings. In the ninth month, court ceremonies were codified after the Chinese system.

About this time, Monk Nan-yuan (南淵) was sent to China to study. After his return he was more interested and successful in spreading Confucian than Buddhist ideas. From then until the 16th century practically all prominent Sinologists in Japan were Buddhist monks, for under the pressure of the Court nobles and the *Samurais* there had not yet appeared professional teachers and scholars on a par with the Chinese Literati of classic antiquity. Nonetheless, by imperial decrees the "Records of Ancient Events" were completed in 712 and the "History of Japan" in 720, both after the model of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's (司馬遷) "Historical Records" (史記), and the "Collection of Ten Thousand Odes" (萬葉集) was issued in 759, modeled after the "Book of Poetry" (書經).

While Confucianism, dwelling upon life in this world, added to the body of Japan, Buddhism, interested in life hereafter, furnished the country and the people with their soul. The Indian doctrine of Brahma and Atman—the world-being and its manifestation in an individual being—took the form of the doctrine of individual self-mergence into the supreme interest of the nation, and its spirit came to be called the "Yamato Tamashii (大和魂)." With the traditional cult of emperor-worship and the Confucian teaching of loyalty and subordination to superiors, this new idea fitted in like hand and glove. Thus, while stressing filial piety in China, Confucianism in Japan concentrated on loyalty; while talking about the world-being in India, Buddhism in Japan came to enhance the sense of the national soul.

Initial Opposition

Queerly enough, at a time when Buddhism had long before declined in India and had just passed its zenith and was on the decline in China, it started flourishing in Japan. The first Buddha brought to the Japanese Imperial Court from Korea in 552 aroused bitter opposition. Its adherents, however, kept contact with Korean Buddhists first and later sent monks to China to import the new religion. During the T'ang Dynasty two Chinese-educated monks, Saicho (最澄) and Kukai (空海), were able practically to transform the cultural, political, and religious life of the Japanese. In 788, the former, for the purpose of preaching Buddhism of the T'ien-t'ai School (天台宗), built the famous Enryaku Temple (延暦寺) on Mt. Hiei (比叡山), overlooking the then capital city of Kyoto. On account of its proximity to the political and cultural center of the Empire, discontented politicians, warriors, and unemployed vagabonds very often either sought aid from the temple or found shelter there by joining its monastery. When well supported, they resumed their

political activities and revived their hereditary pugnacity to the extent that in the course of time there appeared a new fighting class of "monk-soldiers" (僧兵) to meddle in State affairs. Thus, while preaching pacifism elsewhere, Buddhism in Japan came not only to tolerate but even to equate militarism.

Hitherto most of the Japanese writers had adopted Chinese characters entirely—some for ideographical designations and some for phonographic purposes—which often caused confusion and complications. It took five centuries of incubation before an indigenous system of writing made its appearance. In 806, Monk Kukai, by selecting and modifying certain Chinese characters, invented the Japanese alphabet of 47 phonographic letters, which brought the literary life of the country to a new level. He founded and preached the True Word School (真言宗) in Japan.

Shinran's School

During the Sung Dynasty a Buddhist Protestant Revolution was launched and led by another Chinese-returned monk, Shinran (親鸞), who had imbibed Buddhism of the Pure Land School (淨土宗). To popularize the religion throughout his native land after his return, he attempted to accommodate it with the mundane needs of life by allowing monks meat and matrimony. The consequent reformed sect, called the "Pure Land True School" (淨土真宗), was small in the beginning but became well-liked at once, so that nowadays the great majority of the Japanese Buddhists are followers of Shinran and almost every non-Christian Japanese is a Shintoist in public but a Buddhist in private life.

In 1253, there appeared the Japanese Buddhist Wesley in the person of Monk Nichiren (日蓮). He began as an expert in the "Lotus Scripture" (法華經) and regarded it as the principal gospel of Buddhism. With his base established at Kamakura (鎌倉), seat of the then *Shogunate*, he decided to preach what he considered to be the sublime phase of the religion and therefore spent most of his time journeying all over the countryside and undertaking a series of revival meetings. So magnetic was his personality that every congregation was nearly hypnotized by his sermons and almost every patient was healed by his contact. He founded the Sun Lotus School (日蓮宗).

Showing his interest in political affairs, Nichiren in 1260 submitted to the Lord Protector Hojo Tokiyori (北條時頼), his doctrine of installing the right man and thereby stabilizing the country, and in 1266 he presented to the Lord Protector Tokimune (時宗) his warning against an imminent Mongol invasion, which actually took place 15 years later in 1281. As the intimacy between politics and Buddhism grew, not only members of the Imperial Household would leave home and become monks and nuns, but even emperors would abdicate and retire to enjoy the monastic life. However, like early Christianity in Rome,

Buddhism in Japan gave politics its best elements—the ethics of social service and self-sacrifice and the metaphysics of idealism and spiritualism, but derived from politics the worst factors, such as intrigue and hypocrisy, pugnacity and dissension.

Bushido and Militarism

In a country like Japan, where constant warfare was waged to expand its territory at the expense of neighbors, the emergence of professional warriors with growing prestige had been a social necessity. The fighting group, who had been taught to worship the Sun Goddess and the *Mikado* and to obey their feudal lords, welcomed the Confucian ethics of loyalty and filial piety, fidelity and justice, but did not develop into a special social class before the rise of the *Shogunate* in 1192. It was the first *Shogun*, or Military Dictator, Minamoto Yoritomo (源頼朝), who, in order to regulate his subordinate warriors, laid down certain precepts which became the germ of *Bushido*, or Way of the Warriors. Whereas Shintoism had hitherto neglected the regulation of the conduct of private individuals, professional warriors were now instructed to be industrious and frugal, orderly and clean, loyal and brave, righteous and chivalrous, thus setting a good example to the commoners. Always and everywhere the ruling authorities inculcated such principles and habits into the minds of the future warriors. Of Buddhism, the Dhyana School (禪宗) in particular advised them to practise Dhyana so as to subdue corporeal desires and devote their individual selves to supreme causes; Confucianism promised to uphold the social status and code of honor to those of the *chun tzu* (君子), or gentry in China.

Thenceforth, *Bushido*, as observed by professional warriors called "Samurai," developed through the blend of Japanese militarism, Chinese moralism, and Indian mysticism, and the *Samurai* emerged gradually to occupy the central position in the social hierarchy of Japan. Just as the cherry blossom among flowers, the *Samurai* among men was regarded as the most brilliant element. Proud of himself, he respected himself, expecting, as well as expected, to live up to every bit of the knightly code of honor. He would prefer death to disgrace. And to die an honorable death he would commit *harakiri* or disembowelment, to reveal his courage and justice. When his superior was wronged, he should, for the cause of loyalty, avenge him even at the risk of his own life. Unlike European Cavaliers, he showed no mercy on weaker elements—even women and children—a trait which has characterized Japanese life.

With the *Samurai* developed into the social elite, the commoners, like flocks of sheep, looked up to them for guidance and example. Every boy admired the warrior, wanted to become a warrior, and felt proud of acting like a warrior. If he later was actually taken into the fighting class, he would thereby bring glory

to his family. Small wonder that, by such a system of military and social education which functioned for six straight centuries, the semi-barbarous islanders were actually transformed into an efficient people of industry and frugality, courage and obedience.

For centuries every feudal lord, to safeguard his position and expand his domains, would keep a number of warriors and henchmen, and every warrior would, in turn, strive to keep his own protégés. In time of peace, the subordinate would gather information for his superior through investigation and espionage and create rupture and dissension among neighbors and rivals by means of tricks and intrigues; in cases of emergency, he would rally round his master and fight so as to get his title promoted and his bounty increased. If his master were lost, unless he could avenge him at once and find a new one, he would become a *ronin* (浪人) roaming from state to state.

National Traits

Therefore, by *Bushido*, too, were formed other national traits of the Japanese—pugnacity and intrigue, cruelty and blind submission or docility which were vividly reflected in the 6-century history of the *Shogunate*.

Fully blood-stained, the whole history in the main narrates the family feud between the Tairas (平氏) and

the Minamotos (源氏) that created all episodes of homicide and suicide, patricide and fratricide, regicide and genocide. Originally descended from the Imperial Family, though at different periods, the two clans early distinguished themselves with military prowess for the *Mikado*; the Tairas in suppressing local rebellions and the Minamotos in subduing the Ainu tribesmen. Meanwhile, they became the worst rivals for power and prestige. In the beginning, the Tairas gained the upper hand, but in 1185 the Minamotos under Yoritomo's leadership, after a successful comeback campaign, exterminated them.

First Shogun

In 1192, Yoritomo became the first *Shogun*; but in 1203 the reins of government fell into the hands of the Hojos (北條氏), a branch of the Tairas, who dared not arrogate the title of *Shogun* but remained contented with being known as Lord Protector (執權). They were overthrown in 1333 and replaced by the Ashikagas (足利氏), olive branches of the Minamotos. Anxious to hold the title of *Shogun* but unable to keep the feudal lords in order, the Ashikagas lingered on to see civil war spreading far and wide. For instance, Yoshimitsu (義満), in order to enhance his dignity, had to acknowledge Chinese suzerainty openly from 1401 onward. In 1573, the line was ended by Oda Nobunaga (織田信長), a descendant of the Tairas.

When Nobunaga was emerging victorious over his rivals, he came to know Portuguese activities in Japan in introducing western firearms, medicine, and Catholic Christianity. He liked things western and so patronized Christians. But his subordinate and successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豊臣秀吉), who had hailed from the social substrata and had driven Nobunaga's son to suicide, was so anti-foreign as to persecute Christians and dispatch expeditions against Korea and China in 1591 and 1597. After his death in 1598, a similar fate befell his own son, who was exiled in 1603 by Tokugawa Ieyasu (徳川家康), a descendant of the Minamotos and the founder of the last *Shogunate* in Japan.

Closed-door Policy

For fear that western ideas and munitions might seduce feudal lords of remote states, the Tokugawas were equally anti-foreign and anti-Christian and drove Christian converts into a rebellion at Shimabara (原島) from 1637 to 1638. In 1639, they even promulgated a closed-door policy, forbidding all foreign trade and intercourse except with Chinese and Dutch merchants. This isolationism lasted for two full centuries. Thus, just as the cosmopolitanism of Confucianism and Buddhism became insular after entering the island Empire, so did *Bushido* remain provincial until fused with alien ideas in the 19th century.

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