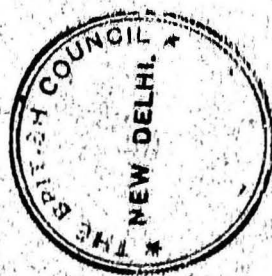


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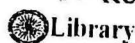


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JAPAN IN 1960



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By DR. IVAN MORRIS, B.A., Ph.D.

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Report of a lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Soc
May 25, 1960, Sir Esler Denning, G.C.M.G., O.B.E., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Sir Philip Southwell, our Chairman, is unfortunately not able to be present today, and he has therefore asked me to take the chair and to introduce Dr. Ivan Morris, who is to talk to us on "Japan in 1960."

Dr. Morris worked for some years in the Research Department of the Foreign Office. He went out to Japan not long ago, and came back only last November, on a grant from the Royal Institute of International Relations, and has recently published a book, under the auspices of Chatham House, entitled *Nationalism and the Right Wing of Japan*. I am sure you would rather listen to Dr. Morris than to me, so I will confine my introduction to that. At the end of his talk there will be a film and, if time, there will be questions following the film.

YOU can reach Japan from London by regular commercial air service in about thirty hours; before long the time will no doubt be reduced to twenty hours or even less. Before the war the same journey required about two months. With the increasing speed and decreasing cost of air travel, Japan may soon become more accessible to the English visitor than Italy was in the last century.

Yet for the average educated Westerner the country remains exceedingly remote—more remote, perhaps, than any other major civilization in the world today. This is partly because the Japanese language constitutes one of the most effective barriers to mutual understanding that the mind of man has devised. The remoteness is also due to the total difference in cultural traditions and to the fact that for some two hundred years of her relatively recent history, Japan deliberately cut herself off from the outside world.

Since her opening to the West about one hundred years ago, Japan has become the most industrialized and westernized nation in the Orient. It is this very westernization, however, that makes the discerning visitor realize how extremely alien Japan remains in many ways, particularly in patterns of thought and culture.

It would be foolhardy to attempt in the space of some thirty minutes to paint a systematic picture of Japan in 1960. Instead I shall try to suggest a few points that are essential for an understanding of the country.

My first point, and my main one, concerns the westernization, or more specifically the Americanization, of Japan. Most people when they take their first trip to Japan are struck first of all by the westernization of the country. Despite all that has been written on the subject, they often expect to find a country of rickshaws, cherry-blossoms and quaint Oriental charm. Instead, of course, they arrive in Tokyo or Yokohama and are confronted by the largest, and probably the ugliest, urban conglomeration in the world, full of rattling trams and overhead wires, in which the occasional kimono-

clad geisha and the even more occasional rickshaw appear as out-of-place anachronisms, and in which garish Western-style bars with names like Lucky Joe's or Harry's Hideout are far more conspicuous than traditional Japanese tea-houses. For people who have arrived to sample the mysteries of the "inscrutable Orient" the drive from Haneda airport to the centre of Tokyo with its mile upon mile of smoky factories and sooty warehouses can be a disappointing experience indeed. Often they come to the conclusion that Japan has lost such charm or originality as it possessed and is becoming a thoroughly westernized nation.

Fortunately for the visitor who cares to explore a little further, this is far from being true. In the first place there is the rich traditional culture that has been carefully fostered through all the vicissitudes of Japan's recent history—traditional theatre, dancing, music, painting, as well as the lesser arts such as flower-arrangement, garden design and tea ceremony. These have not, as one might expect, become fossilized arts preserved through the centuries like museum pieces for the enjoyment of a select coterie of aesthetes or for the satisfaction of culture-hungry tourists. Japanese Nō plays (dating from the fourteenth century) and traditional folk dancing, to take two examples, are not like our own Miracle Plays and Morris Dances but belong to a living culture. For this we can partly thank the much-maligned geisha; for the geisha have done as much as anyone to keep alive old cultural traditions. The cultural past is in many ways still vigorous in Japan and provides a valuable counterweight to the steady Americanization of the country.

Most visitors to Japan, of course, see only the big westernized cities and occasional snatches of countryside shooting past at sixty miles an hour outside a train window. The cities are important, tremendously so, but they are by no means the whole picture. Almost half the population still lives in the country and is engaged in agricultural pursuits. Here we find relatively little westernization. Despite the great changes in peasant conditions brought about by the post-war land reform, social patterns and cultural pursuits have been little influenced by the West. Although material conditions have improved, people in the villages still think and behave in many ways just as they did before the West came to Japan.

It is not only in the villages that Japan remains very Japanese. In the cities, too, social relations have to a remarkable extent withstood the impact of the Occupation and of Americanization. The family system, though it is being questioned in many quarters, is still strong; and marriages, even among urban university graduates, still tend to be arranged by the family rather than decided independently by the partners.

Japanese industry also is by no means as westernized as one might imagine. The country still suffers from what has been described as an "elephants and fleas" economy. On the one hand are large-scale, well-capitalized modern enterprises; these are the ones most visitors from the West are likely to be shown. Cheek by jowl, however, are hundreds of small, often precarious, household concerns with vastly inferior conditions of employment, in which relations between employers and employees reflect the traditional Japanese family system. These small concerns account for fifty per cent. of the country's non-agricultural employees; cheap

labour and unfair trade practices, such as copying, which have been the bane of British industry for such a long time, are nowadays mainly associated with such concerns. Just as in Japanese culture ancient traditional forms like Nō theatre and Sumō wrestling (which dates from the first century B.C.) flourish side by side with strip-tease and baseball, so in industry we find a situation in which the productive forces of different historical ages exist side by side. The present does not displace the past but coexists with it.

It is often suggested—in fact it has become something of a cliché—that Japan has been peculiarly successful in absorbing foreign influences, first from China, then from Europe and America, and in making them an integral part of her own culture. I very much doubt whether this is true. It would seem to me, on the contrary, that Japan has so far failed to integrate Western imports into the traditional pattern. Mr. Arthur Koestler describes the import of western culture into Japan as a “skin graft that never took.” In general I am inclined to agree with him that the Japanese have failed to assimilate or to discard western cultural imports. Juxtaposition has almost invariably taken the place of integration. What must be pointed out, however, is that Japan is not alone in this failure: no other country with a culture as alien from Europe as that of Japan has so far achieved a successful integration of its own cultural pattern with that of the West. (What is now happening in China appears to be a case of replacement rather than of integration.) Given a long period of stability it is possible that Japan may eventually succeed in reconciling the two planes of her existence; but for the moment they tend to remain apart. For those who value the persistence of cultural diversity and contrast in the modern world this, of course, is a cause for satisfaction.

While I am still on the subject of the westernization of Japan I should like to make one more rather important point. A trend that impressed me greatly during my recent years in the country was the gradual swing of the pendulum back towards more characteristically Japanese ways of thinking and of doing things. This does not mean that Japanese men are about to abandon their western clothes for the kimono and the topknot, or that modern motor-cars will soon give way to rickshaws and palanquins. It does mean that the wholesale adoption of western methods and approaches which went on during the seven years of foreign occupation is being replaced by a more critical attitude towards the West and by a tendency to return in many spheres to the Japanese way of doing things.

In politics this takes the form of a trend that has become known as the Reverse Course. This trend has been continuing now for some years. It has involved, among other things, the return to power of people—or of the type of people—who were influential before Japan's defeat. These people were thoroughly discredited during the occupation period and in a general sort of way were considered responsible for Japan's disaster. In addition, the occupation “purge” debarred them from public office. Now a great many of them are back on the scene.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that many of the government's policies during the past ten years should have represented a return to the past. In one field after another the bold reforms of the occupation period are

being undone or emasculated. This is part of a nationalist reaction to excessive foreign influence—a type of reaction that has occurred before in Japanese history, sometimes with disastrous results. There is, of course, nothing sinister about a country's reassertion of its national values; far from it. The danger is that it might go too far in the wrong direction. Much will undoubtedly remain from the noble efforts of the occupation, notably the land reform; but any hopes that seven years of foreign rule might in themselves transform Japan into a modern democratic state have already been belied.

I turn now to my second point: over-population. There are few countries where an abstract economic term like "population problem" has so concrete a significance as in Japan. You are aware of it the minute you step off the boat or aeroplane. In the cities the crowds pack the streets day and night, so that it is often quite impossible to find a place to walk on the pavement. The trains, trams, buses, theatres and department stores are packed to bursting point. Even in remote rural districts you can never get away from people: the fields and villages and country roads are full of them. And almost every time you visit a shrine or temple you have to compete with huge school excursions—hundreds of little pink-faced children in black uniforms who, when they grow up, are somehow going to have to make a living in their four small islands.

Let us look briefly at the statistics. In terms of population per arable acre, Japan has the densest population in the world, and probably the greatest of any important country in history. The birth rate is now surprisingly low, but given the age structure of the population Japan will increase by a million a year for a considerable time to come. Tokyo alone, already the largest city in the world with nine million people, will soon exceed twelve million. Before long the Japanese population will be twice that of Great Britain, and unless there is a war it is bound to reach at least 120 million—all these packed into a country only two-thirds the size of France—a country of which only about sixteen per cent. is arable, of which some two-thirds is mountain and forest, and which is hopelessly deficient in raw materials. Having lost all her overseas investments and territory, Japan has to import twenty per cent. of her food requirements and eighty per cent. of the raw materials she most needs for her industry.

Though he may not know these statistics, almost every Japanese person is keenly aware that he lives in a poor country. But poverty is relative, and it is only in comparison with the West that Japan is poor. The average annual income per person in Japan has been calculated as being £80—not a princely sum on which to live, especially when we consider that an evening at a good Japanese restaurant costs one about £10 a head. Compared to the average Indian, however, the Japanese is doing very well indeed—four times as well, in fact. The average in India is £20 a year, and in the rest of Asia and Africa between £25 and £30. Japan becomes poor only when we look at the average for the world (£135) and particularly for the NATO countries (£500). The reasons for Japan's relative prosperity are not far to seek. The smoky factories, the high-tension wires, the grimy warehouses that we passed on our drive from Haneda Airport to Tokyo are the marks of a hundred years of intensive industrialization

which, despite the disastrous war, has made Japan a very rich country by Asian or by Latin American standards. The standard of living in Japan is steadily improving (there has been a twenty-five per cent. increase in real purchasing power since before the war), but it is still lamentably low for a large part of the population, and besides it is constantly threatened by the growing number of people.

Over-population in Japan has numerous effects. In fact, it could be argued that almost every problem in Japan can be related to this phenomenon. Over-population helps to preserve the backward *status quo* in labour relations, farming methods, women's position and other spheres of life. It is one of the major obstacles of the development of individualism. It produces an enormous reserve of unemployed and semi-employed workers. It reduces the average size of farms to a pocket handkerchief of two and a half acres and causes a steady flow of people from the overcrowded country districts into the already swollen cities. It makes the entire economic structure of the country precarious and completely dependent on world trading conditions.

For world trade is, of course, the only possible solution to the population problem. Emigration is no answer at all, overseas expansion is out of the question, and birth control can alleviate, but certainly not solve, the problem. Japan's dependence on the conditions of world trade is absolute; any serious and prolonged decline in exports is bound to result in unemployment, falling living standards, social unrest, political turmoil and some sort of explosion. This is something that we cannot afford to forget.

I come now to a third point, namely, the continued isolation of Japan. I referred briefly to this in my opening remarks, but I should like to say a little more about it now. Although Japan is so dependent on the rest of the world, she is, paradoxically, a very isolated country. In the first place she is geographically isolated. Of course, it is not very far in miles from the west of Japan to southern Korea, and by jet airliner it takes only a matter of hours to reach the most distant parts of the world. Yet the number of Japanese people who can remotely envisage ever seeing a foreign country, or even meeting someone who has been abroad, is very small indeed. For all intents and purposes it is just as hard for the average Japanese to go abroad now as it was eighty years ago, when the country had emerged from 250 years of deliberate seclusion. And then, even if they should meet foreigners, the peculiar language difficulty usually makes it hard for them to communicate on any but the most banal level. All this results in a form of insularity which is all the more remarkable because of the superficial westernization. With insularity comes national sensitivity, a keen awareness of being Japanese, of being very different; and as a corollary, a suspicion of foreigners, which in time of crisis can easily be whipped up into xenophobia.

Japan's position is frequently compared to that of this country. Both are islands with energetic, sea-faring people; both have huge oceans on one side and on the other large land masses, whose inhabitants they have often fought and defeated; both are largely dependent on trade; both have ancient monarchies and a great respect for tradition. Yet to note the

similarities is to be aware of the enormous differences in the situations (to say nothing of the characters) of the two peoples. Largely as a result of over-population, inadequate resources and the total loss of her overseas investments, Japan has most of Britain's difficulties magnified a hundred-fold. Apart from this, Japan emerged from the war into a world that had little friendship or respect for her and many bitter feelings.

The Japanese are very aware of being isolated in Asia and, especially in left-wing circles, one often hears the phrase, "the orphan of Asia." At the moment Japan is confronted with the open antagonism of Communist China (which severed all relations two years ago) and with the hostility of her nearest neighbours, North and South Korea, and to a lesser extent the Philippines. Relations with Russia are very poor and a peace treaty has still not been signed. In other words, the countries that should be closest to Japan for reasons of cultural tradition or geographical propinquity are in fact her greatest antagonists.

In the remaining Eastern countries, attitudes towards Japan vary between suspicion and indifference. It is true that painful war-time memories are fading faster than I, for one, would have expected. The fact remains that Japan can look in vain throughout the Far East, South-east Asia and Australasia for a country that regards her with anything approaching friendship or sympathy. One consequence of this is that the so called Kishi Plan to set up an Asian Development Fund, whereby Japan would use her technical expertise to help modernize the economies of various South-east Asian countries has met with a very cool response. Not surprisingly, many Asians were uncomfortably reminded of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere which Mr. Kishi and his fellow ministers tried to ram down their throats during the war. The trouble is that Japan, denuded now of all her former possessions and spheres of influence, lacks any fund of good will on which she can draw—a good will of the type that Great Britain enjoys in so many countries of the world, including parts of the former Empire.

Ironically enough, the country with which Japan has succeeded in building up the closest ties is the former enemy that not long ago brought her to utter ruin. The American decision to build up Japan as a friend and ally was, of course, a direct result of the Cold War and particularly of the war in Korea. Since about 1950 western policy has aimed at making Japan a strong and reliable ally in the anti-communist camp. Our objectives in this are quite clear and require no elaboration. Japan is the most advanced industrialized country in Asia. Her adherence to the western cause is an immense asset; if she should become neutral or turn to the other side, the West would suffer an incalculable setback. So far as Japan herself is concerned, the alliance with the West remains the cornerstone of official conservative policy.

This brings me to my final point. Not so many years ago, when we were fighting the Japanese on the Asian continent and in the Pacific, we should have found it rather hard to imagine that this ruthless totalitarian state, with its brutal militarist tradition and its hysterical opposition to the democratic West, was soon to become—as it is now—the only large country in the Far East with a really democratic form of government and

that she should also become by far the most important ally of the western democracies in that part of the world. Our war-time ally (China) has become a fierce, aggressive, self-righteous dictatorship and our greatest potential enemy in the Far East—and vice versa. These dramatic reversals should teach us at least one thing—not to take anything for granted, at least where the Far East is concerned.

At present Japan enjoys a democratic, parliamentary system of government in which the main political power belongs to the leader of the party that obtains a majority in free general elections; the Emperor remains as a symbol of national unity, but has no powers that can be abused by people claiming to act in his name; the fundamental democratic freedoms are guaranteed by law and are, on the whole, respected. This vigorous, highly industrialized country, though situated close to the huge Communist land mass, is on the side of the West, and a great majority of its voters continues to oppose any trend towards neutralism.

This is a satisfying position, but we should not become complacent about it. In the first place, the democratic structure in Japan is far from stable. Democracy never took strong root in Japan before the war, although western political institutions were carefully copied. In the crises of the 1930's, democracy collapsed entirely, and was succeeded by a form of nationalist totalitarianism that led Japan into a disastrous war. After the defeat of 1945, democracy was reintroduced into Japan as the basis of the occupation reforms. It is, therefore, not an indigenous system that has developed over the centuries through the struggles and aspirations of the people, but an exotic product that was imposed from above and from outside. In Japan, as in Germany, the democratic system in many ways runs counter to national traditions of authoritarianism and obedience. If all goes well it is possible that in both countries democracy may in time become a firmly rooted force regulating the daily life of the people. In a time of crisis, however, it is quite possible that the still frail democratic structure may be swept away in a new wave of anti-western nationalism. It is worth while to recall that during the past year or so no less than five Asian countries have abandoned democratic processes in favour of a strong central government. The failure of democracy in so many Asian countries should remind us that we must not overestimate its power of survival.

Nor should we take for granted Japan's adherence to the western cause. For the moment a continuation of the alliance clearly serves Japan's best interests. The time may come, however, for instance in the case of an economic crisis which we in the West seemed unable or unwilling to alleviate, when these interests will change or appear to change. The advantages of preserving close ties with the West may then seem less valuable than the benefits to be derived from friendly relations with the Communist powers or from some type of neutralist policy. We must remember that Japan is paying a fairly heavy price for pursuing her close ties with the West. It is largely as a result of these ties that China has cut off all relations with Japan.

On balance the great majority of Japanese consider that the benefit of their close western connections outweigh the disadvantages of being psy-

chologically isolated in neutralist-Communist Asia. We in the West should do what we can to make it advantageous for the Japanese to maintain and even strengthen these ties. This is surely not a matter of sentiment but of sheer self interest.

In the last analysis everything seems to depend on a continuation of the present favourable economic conditions. If Japan enjoys good trading conditions during the coming years and can absorb her growing population into an expanding industrial system, I think that we may look forward to a steady strengthening of her democratic structure and to her continued adherence to the democratic nations of the West. If, on the contrary, there should be a severe and prolonged economic setback, Japan is quite likely to swing to one extreme or the other and to abandon her present close connection with the West. In view of the immense potential strength of Communist China, this would be a loss that we could ill afford.

The lecture was followed by a film describing a railway journey through Japan, kindly lent by the Japanese Embassy.

The CHAIRMAN: The film has left us virtually no time for questions; we have finished punctually at half-past two. It only remains for me to express the thanks of the Society to Dr. Morris for the very interesting lecture he has given, which, from my own experience, one can say is the correct representation of present-day Japan. We have also had a tour of Japan shown by the film, which at least shows what Japan is like if you travel in its best and fastest train.

I would ask you all to express your thanks to Dr. Morris in the usual way.

The vote of thanks was accorded by acclamation, and the meeting then ended.

