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If Japan Awakens China

When one man does not understand another man's mental processes, how can one forecast the other's future action? This is precisely the situation today between the white race and the Japanese. In spite of all our glib talk to the contrary, we know nothing (and less than nothing in so far as we think we know something) of the Japanese. It is a weakness of man to believe that all the rest of mankind is moulded in his own image, and it is a weakness of the white race to believe that the Japanese think as we think, are moved to action as we are moved and have points of view similar to our own.

Perhaps the one white man in the world best fitted by nature and opportunity to know the Japanese was Lafcadio Hearn. To begin with, he was an artist, and he possessed to an extreme degree the artist's sympathy. By this I mean that his sympathy was of that order that permits a man to get out of himself and into the soul of another man, thus enabling him to look at life out of that man's eyes and from that man's point of view—to be that man, in short.

Lafcadio Hearn went to Japan. He identified himself with the Japanese. To all intents and purposes he became a Japanese. A professor in a Japanese university, he took to himself a Japanese wife, lived in a Japanese household, and even renounced his own country and became a Japanese citizen. Being an artist, enthusiastically in touch with his subject, he proceeded to interpret the Japanese mind to the English-speaking world, turning out the most wonderful series of books on Japan ever written by an Occidental. The years passed, and ever he turned out more of his wonderful books, interpreting, explaining, elaborating, formulating every big aspect and minute detail of the Japanese mind.

Just at the beginning of the Russo-Japanese war, full of years and wise with much experience, Lafcadio Hearn died. His last book was in the press, and it appeared shortly afterward. It was entitled "Japan: An Interpretation." In the foreword Lafcadio Hearn made a confession. He said that after all his years of intimate living with the Japanese, he was at last just on the verge of beginning to understand the Japanese. And he felt justified in this belief, by virtue of the fact that he had taken all those years to find out that he knew nothing of the Japanese. This was a hopeful sign. He had come farther than other white men, who still believed that they did know something, in greater or less degree, of the Japanese.

As for himself, after the many years of thinking, he knew, he frankly confessed, that the Japanese mind baffled him. He told of the Japanese schoolboys with whom he had been in daily contact—of how he had watched their minds unfold and expand as they grew into manhood. And then he sadly explained that now that they were men, Japanese men, out in the world of Japanese men, they were strangers to him. Oh, they greeted him, and shook hands with him and talked with him as of yore; but they were soul-strangers to him. He looked into their faces, but not into their souls. He saw their eyes, but no glimmering could he catch of what went on behind those eyes. Their mental processes were veiled to him. Why they did this or that or some other action

was a puzzle to him. He found them actuated by motives he could not guess—motives generated in the labyrinths of their minds where he could not follow the process. Life appeared to them in perspective differently from the way it appeared to him. And he could get no inkling of that perspective. To him it was an inconceivable fourth dimension. And so he wrote that last sad foreword to the last sad book of his, gazing mournfully the while into the mysterious eyes of Asia, which had baffled him as they have baffled the men of the West from the days of Marco Polo to this our day.

The point that I have striven to make is that much of the reasoning of the white race about the Japanese is erroneous, because is it based on fancied knowledge of the stuff and fiber of the Japanese mind. An American lady of my acquaintance, after residing for months in Japan, in response to a query as to how she liked the Japanese, said: “They have no souls.”

In this she was wrong. The Japanese are just as much possessed of a soul as she and the rest of her race. And far be it from me to infer that the Japanese soul is in the smallest way inferior to the Western soul. It may even be superior. You see, we do not know the Japanese soul, and what its value may be in the scheme of things. And yet that American lady’s remark but emphasizes the point. So different was the Japanese soul from hers, so unutterably alien, so absolutely without any kinship or means of communication, that to her there was no slightest sign of its existence.

Japan, in her remarkable evolution, has repeatedly surprised the world. Now the element of surprise can be present only when one is unfamiliar with the data that go to constitute the surprise. Had we really known the Japanese, we should not have been surprised. And as she has surprised us in the past, and only the other day, may she not surprise us in the days that are yet to be? And since she may surprise us in the future, and since ignorance is the meat and wine of surprise, who are we, and with what second sight are we invested, that we may calmly say:

“Surprise is all very well, but there is not going to be any Yellow peril or Japanese peril?”

There are forty-five million Japanese in the world. There are over four hundred million Chinese. That is to say, that if we add together the various branches of the white race, the English, the French, and the German, the Austrian, the Scandinavian, and the white Russian, the Latins as well, the Americans, the Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders, the South Africans, the Anglo Indians, and all the scattered remnants of us, we shall find that we are still outnumbered by the combined Japanese and Chinese.

We understand the Chinese mind no more than we do the Japanese. What if these two races, as homogenous as we, should embark on some vast race-adventure? There have been no race adventures in the past. We English-speaking peoples are just now in the midst of our own great adventure. We are dreaming as all race-adventurers have dreamed. And who will dare to say that in the Japanese mind is not burning some colossal Napoleonic dream? And what if the dreams clash?

Japan is the one unique Asiatic race, in that alone among the races of Asia, she has been able to borrow from us and equip herself with all our material achievement. Our machinery of warfare, of commerce, and of industry she has made hers. And so well has she done it that we have been surprised. We did not think she had it in her. Next consider China. We of the West have tried, and tried vainly, to awaken her. We have failed to express our material achievements in terms comprehensible to the Chinese mind. We do not know the Chinese mind. But Japan does. She and China spring from the same primitive stock—their languages are rooted in the same primitive tongue; and their mental processes are the same. The Chinese mind may baffle us, but it cannot baffle the Japanese. And what if Japan wakens China—not to our dream, if you

please, but to her dream, to Japan's dream? Japan, having taken from us all our material achievement, is alone able to transmute that material achievement in terms intelligible to the Chinese mind.

The Chinese and Japanese are thrifty and industrious. China possesses great natural resources of coal and iron—and coal and iron constitute the backbone of machine civilization. When four hundred and fifty million of the best workers in the world go into manufacturing, a new competitor, and a most ominous and formidable one, will enter the arena where the races struggle for the world-market. Here is the race-adventure—the first clashing of the Asiatic dream with ours. It is true, it is only an economic clash, but economic clashes always precede clashes at arms. And what then? Oh, only that will-o'-wisp, the Yellow peril. But to the Russian, Japan was only a will-o'-wisp until one day, with fire and steel, she smashed the great adventure of the Russian and punctured the bubble-dream he was dreaming. Of this be sure: if ever the day comes that our dreams clash with that of the Yellow and the Brown, and our particular bubble-dream is punctured, there will be one country at least unsurprised, and that country will be Russia. She was awakened from her dream. We are still dreaming.

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