

FOURTH ANNUAL ESSAY CONTEST TOPIC
OF ASIAN STUDENT:

CHANGE versus TRADITION in ASIA : Is Compromise Possible ?

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During the XXth century, a current of ideas from the West began to pass over the cold Orient frozen in its millenary civilisation and is bringing with it new changes which affect Asia down to its tradition, within the frame of which it used to grow. The change is affecting every area : political, economic, social and moral.

In politics, the notion of the infallibility of the people substitutes for the notion of the sacredness of dynastic successions; and following the ideal preached by the French Revolution of 1784, and the Declaration of the Human Rights, every government has a feeling of being behind the times, or unfashionable when it does not have an elected assembly.

In economy, feudal economic systems have given way to capitalist economic systems, and the evolution is tending to replace capitalist systems by a larger socialism which could easily shift on way of the classes' struggle into Communism.

In the social and moral spheres, the change has affected many aspects of tradition. The modern life propelled by technical and scientific progress concentrates men's attention on the race-for-wealth and serves to bring greater equality among social classes. The idea of liberty and equality which demanded equality of political rights between the sexes, abolished social barriers which had kept them apart. On the other hand, with the progress of science in explaining the mysteries of Universe, rationalism tends to undermine the respect for

religious beliefs, considered now as old superstitions.

But despite the strong current of ideas which came and imposed itself thanks to scientific achievements, Tradition firmly opposes to them the weight of many thousand centuries of experience; and our age witnesses the contest between these two forces : Change versus Tradition.

The experience of China and Japan shows Asia that she could not close her door to the change from the West; and of course, in this contest between change and tradition, the problem does not lie in the choice of an alternative, but in in the fields in which Change will operate and in the degrees of change. In the inevitable struggle to decide on the fields and degree of change we may well ask : Is compromise possible?

Of course, the civilisation of the East will never be transformed into that of the West; it is neither possible nor desirable. Civilisation is function of geographic, economic, and ethnologic conditions. The conditions of the East differ from those of the West, and the basic difference is that Asia is infinitely older than the West.

We are living the age of first contact and of transition between the West and the East, in which the East attracted by the charms of the new, seems to yield to the temptation of taking everything from the West. But this period may continue only another five or ten years; with time, the wisdom of Asia will reassert itself and people will be able to discern what they should keep from Tradition and what they should change. However, we can contribute to the achievement of this period by deciding as wisely as we can what we should adopt from the West, and what we should not.

-4-

speculation, every doctrine and theory relating to human nature and its problems, that human mind can conceive has been tested, meditated upon, experienced and lived, in the course of many thousand centuries of the history of the Orient. In this, Asia does not have anything to learn from the West. This domain is hers. Asia possesses a huge treasury of philosophies and theories which have the consecration of many thousand generations of sages; and one such philosophy, that of the philosophy of the "middle-just" (the Trung-dung of our ancient Viet-Nam) will serve as a light to guide us through the evolutions of our political, social and moral conditions begotten by the modern economic life.

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In politics, a sensible evolution which/enable the masses to participate in government by the elite-group, and which will educate them in their electoral responsibilities is far more desirable than the blind adoption of any regime which could tend to demagogic excesses.

In social affairs, which are closely connected with politics, more prudence is required to keep us from being tempted by the apparent logic of Western extremist-doctrines. Any form of hyper-capitalism or of utopian communism which is in contradiction with its political history, is doomed to have a very short life in Asia, for neither can be adapted to the moderate temperament of Asiatic peoples. In this respect, the expensive experience of some Asiatic nations, forced by their geographical positions to evolve too fast, and still feeling their way, illustrates this point. To such huge agglomerations as China and India, both still looking for some solution to their social problems, the formula of the ancient COMMUNALISM

western civilisation, which has the merit of having developed old discoveries of the Orient, has grown too fast by means of technology and science; and this rapid growth causes its frequent political-military crises, its economic depressions, its social and moral perturbations.

On our generation devolves the responsibility of avoiding for Asia such kinds of crises which would compromise the equilibrium of the world. In order to obtain the maximum profit from our contact with the West, it seems necessary to distinguish between what we should take from the West in the domain of material life, and what we should take in the domain of intellectual life.

In the domain of material life, we should assimilate everything from the West, without reservation. We should learn all the technical progress they have achieved, to realize a higher standard of living in Asia, a full employment of her immense potentialities in human labor and natural resources. We should use science to protect us against natural evils such as diseases and cataclysms, and man-made evils such as war and aggression. We can make ours all the scientific achievements of the West, but only in this domain the assimilation be total. In the domain of ideologies and doctrines, we must be extremely circumspect.

In fact, old Asia, which was the cradle of Mankind, was also the author of all the discoveries that modern western technology has developed, from the numeral zero to nuclear and atomic theories, not to mention football-game, gunpowder and the compass. Asia however, did not develop these discoveries, because it was too much absorbed in the contemplation of Nature. In the domain of philosophic and ideologic

is still adaptable, and seems preferable to the Red Communism which looks too much as though it is made of blood. And who knows that China, still in evolution, inspite of every appearance, will not become a Republic of Many Chinas, or a United States of China, and with some modifications, will not return to her ancient Communism ?

The present world led by Western civilisation with its tremendous technical achievements and very poor philosophies as guides, is not stable, and runs the risk of seeing the total destruction of Mankind.

In this exchange, the ideal is to keep the spiritual values of the East and adapt technology and science from the West. Thus conceived, the evolution of the Orient in its meeting with the West, not only will make possible the compromise between Change and Tradition , but it will realize also a wise synthesis of what is the quintessence of the West and the East; and when every nation in the world is persuaded that the wisest way to progress in agei is to use Western technology as means, and Eastern philosophies as guides, then, a great Serenity will reign on the Earth, and a brighter day will shine for Mankind...../.

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