

WHY AND HOW JAPANESE HISTORY MAY BE STUDIED WITH PROFIT IN AMERICA.

History of Japan is so little known abroad that one is obliged to argue for its more extensive study. It has been said that, had the Russians possessed an insight into the national life of Japan, the recent war would probably have never taken place. However that may be, that here in America the general understanding of the history and the character of the Japanese people is too inadequate for the increasing importance of the relations of the two nations, has been growing painfully evident in recent years. A better knowledge is imperative, for the welfare of the nations.

Aside from this practical need, however, the student of historical science will find in Japan's history many points of general and abiding interest. Institutionally, for example, Japan began her national career as a patriarchal state, with the emperor at the apex of the organization. Internal and external circumstances conspired to make this system untenable in the seventh century, when the State was reorganized after the model of the centralized bureaucracy of the T'ang Empire of China. This artificial reform was followed by five centuries of a gradual unforeseen transformation of society, in which a process similar to the feudalization of Western Europe in the early middle ages took place under similar circumstances and upon similar principles. Finally, in 1185, feudal institutions were recognized by the emperor as the ruling machinery of the State. For the next four hundred years the system continued to develop, and in 1600 culminated in the elaborate feudal polity of the Tokugawa shogun. After seven centuries of well-nigh unbroken rule, feudalism, too, proved untenable, in the nineteenth century, under foreign pressure and internal unrest. It was overthrown, in 1868, by the united force of the imperial force from above and of discontented feudal elements from within, and was succeeded by a period of an active adaptation of European institutions. It is unnecessary to say that the transition from the patriarchal to the bureaucratic, from the latter to the feudal, and thence again to the constitutional form of government, has been attended by corresponding social and economic changes. At every step the student meets lessons of universal import, some of which may even serve to elucidate, either by similarity or by contrast, certain great features of occidental history.

To some persons, the moral and spiritual growth of Japan may seem even more interesting than the institutional. Here again are seen alternate periods of eager receptivity, assimilation and original expression. Japan's national cult, later called shinto, took its form before the coming of the continental civilization of Asia, and, together with the emperorship, with which the cult was closely bound, became a permanent heritage of the nation. Indian thought and Chinese culture, which began to pour in from the sixth century, elevated the tone of the ruling classes, and inspired the vigorous artistic activity of the eighth and ninth centuries. This was followed by several hundred years of practical isolation from the continent, in which the refinement introduced in the previous age was gradually assimilated to the life of the higher society. By the eleventh century, even Buddhism had become largely Japanese in its doctrine and ritual, and the Buddhist church had grown to be a commanding economic and political force of the Empire. Then came a tremendous reaction from the feudal classes, which had been forming themselves in the country at large and became the controlling power of the nation at the end of the twelfth century. The rise of these classes coincided with the coming from China of a new form of Buddhism and Buddhist art, the simplicity and vigor of which responded to the robust spirit of the warriors. These men of arms, with their rough but keen sense of honor, fashioned the moral tone of the new age. From 1600, the feudal rulers for the first time found in Confucianism, which had come to Japan more than ten centuries before, the best exponent of the actual ethical relations of the feudal society, and utilized its precepts for the purpose of formulating the warrior's code of morals. From this time, also, during a new period of foreign exclusion, the general culture and arts of life were greatly diversified and were widely diffused among all classes of people. Unity of culture was again broken when, in the middle of the last century, Japan was forcibly brought under the influence of European science and Christianity. These new elements she has as yet hardly had time to digest. One who follows these successive periods of Japanese culture will find forms of art and modes of life that typify each epoch and are never successfully reproduced in another age. Every period also presents innumerable problems for fruitful study.

If one tried to study these or any other aspects of Japanese history from literature written in European languages, he would be disappointed to find, among the great mass of works that

have been produced, that only half a dozen important sources have been translated. It is not impracticable for him, however, to acquire some degree of knowledge by selected readings from the vast literature. For general history, for example, he may read Brinkley¹ or Mazeliere,² with the aid of the indispensable Dictionnaire by Papinot.³ After this preliminary work, he may limit his attention to some special topic, and acquaint himself with works in that field which are mentioned in Wenckstern's Bibliography.⁴ Whatever his subject may be, however, he may do well to consult publications of the Asiatic Society of Japan,⁵ of the Japan Society at London,⁶ and of the Deutsche Gessellschaft fur die Natur und Volkerkunde Ostasiens.⁷ As to the monographs on special topics, there are few that are not mentioned in Wenckstern, while their relative value will readily be judged by any trained student. It would be impossible here to enumerate even the best works on all the larger phases of history.

The historical sources in the original language are at present the only reliable material for a satisfactory investigation in any important field. To those who can use them I am happy to say that they will find in the Library of Congress and Yale University Library larger and better selected collections of Japanese historical material than at any other place out of Japan. The nature of the more than nine thousand works kept at the Library of Congress has been briefly described by me in the Librarian's annual report for 1907, and it is only necessary here to point out that they are particularly strong in the historical geography, and in the history of the religions and of the general culture of Japan. The Yale collection, which consists of about an equal number of works, is specially rich in original sources, and also

¹Captain F. Brinkley, *Oriental Series: Japan, Its History, Art and Literature*. In 12 vols. See vols. 1-4. Boston, 1901-2.

²Marquis de la Mazeliere: *Le Japon; Histoire et Civilisation*. In 5 vols. Vols. 1-3 already published. Paris, 1907.

³E. Papinot: *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Geographie du Japon*. 2d Edition. Tokyo, etc., 1907. The author writes me that an English edition of this work is forthcoming.

⁴Fr. von Wenckstern: *A Bibliography of the Japanese Empire*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Leiden, etc., 1895, and vol. 2, Tokyo, etc., 1907.

⁵Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan; published irregularly since 1872. Tokyo.

⁶Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society; published irregularly since 1893. London.

⁷Mittheilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft fur Natur—und Volkerkunde Ostasiens, since 1873. Tokyo.

Also see the *Revue Francaise du Japon*, monthly, since 1892, Tokyo; and articles on Japan in the *Comptes-rendus of the Congres International des Etudes d'Extreme Orient*, since 1873; the *T'oung Pao*, since 1890, Leiden; and the *Ostasien*, monthly, since 1898, Berlin.

in material on two branches of history, namely, institutions and art. The sources may be divided into four classes. Under the first may be mentioned inscriptions of monuments in stone and metal, including a few rubbings from the original.¹ The second class comprises original documents. They cover all the period since the early eighth century, including, besides a large number of transcriptions² and fac similes, not a few actual documents.³ Under the third class comes an unusually large number of annals, memoirs and diaries, of all historic ages,⁴ all of which are among the fundamental sources of history. While these are mainly of political nature, a few relate to religious institutions⁵ and to foreign relations.⁶ The last class is quite a com-

¹These inscriptions, together with seals and signatures, fac-similes of many of which are among the collection at the Library of Congress, form an important class of sources. While the contents of the inscriptions are in many cases too favorable to their subjects to be trustworthy, they often throw important sidelight upon history, and otherwise are valuable sources for social, literary and artistic history.

²Among these is the most valuable selection, entitled *Ko-bun rei-shu*, made from a vast number of documents (mostly relating to land property) kept at the Buddhist temple *To-zhi*, by (and probably in the autograph of) the historian *Ban Nobutomo*. The *Dai Nihon ko-mon-zho*, edited by the Historiographic Institute, Imperial University of Tokyo, which is expected to be completed in two hundred volumes, is regularly coming to Yale.

³Among these may be mentioned a Buddhist scroll, copied in the eighth century [the Library of Congress owning four scrolls of this period]; an almanac, with diary, of 1423-24: twenty documents of the latter part of the fifteenth century; many documents relating to the municipal government of Kyoto from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, etc.

⁴The records of this class may be divided as follows: (1) Diaries of civil nobles of Kyoto. Owing to the important fact that the central institution of the Japanese State, namely, the Emperorship, has been constant and immovable throughout the ages, there has clustered around that institution a permanent class of civil nobility. The nobles possessed a degree of culture and refinement, and many of them methodically kept diaries. As may be expected, some of these diaries, depicting, as they do, men and things at the center of culture and power, are among the best-prized sources of political and social history. During the feudal ages, when political powers descended to feudal classes, the nobles' records sometimes reveal the relation between the Emperor and the feudal suzerain. (2) Records of the feudal classes before 1600 are fewer in number, but are not less important, than the diaries of Kyoto nobles. Feudal records multiply rapidly after 1600. (3) Diaries of some great Buddhist priests during the feudal ages, who were on intimate terms with feudal authorities, are highly valuable. (4) Japan is exceptionally rich in that class of literature which is known in that country under the name "*zui-hitsu*." It consists of notes on all sorts of miscellaneous subjects, very often written down with little apparent order in arrangement. There are an endless number of these scrappy works, sometimes extended over hundreds of chapters, and often containing exceedingly valuable first-hand information.

⁵Such as the *Soku-kyo hen*, relating to the suppression of Catholicism, in 22 vols., and the *Otani Hon-gwan-zhi tsu-ki*, a history of the Buddhist temple West Hongwan-zhi, 7 vols. The latter has been copied from the original at the temple, and at the time of copying there was no other copy extant. [The Library of Congress has the *Ko-ya-san fu-do-ki*, a history of the Buddhist monastery on Mt. Koya, in about one hundred volumes, specially copied from the original at the monastery.] These Buddhist institutions were great historical factors.

⁶E. g., the *Cho-sen tsu-ko tai-ki*, Korean Relations, 10 vols. Specially copied.

prehensive set of illustrated books⁶ and scrolls,⁷ from which such aspects of social life as can hardly be studied from verbal descriptions may be gathered. Although works of historical geography are not so numerous as at the Library of Congress, the more than a thousand topographical maps which were presented to Yale by the Japanese Army and Navy Departments and Geological Bureau will be found to be highly valuable in the study of old history. Works on law and institutions are specially numerous, the collector having made a particular effort in this field, as in the field of art. Another department, history of commerce, though incompletely, is better represented than in any Japanese library that I have seen. It is needless to say that such helpmates of history as archeology, numismatics, religion, literature, customs and manners, etiquettes and rites, weapons and arts of war, heraldry, genealogy, etc., as well as works of reference, are also represented. It should be understood that many of the works already described are not on the market, and the majority are in manuscript, not a few, perhaps not less than sixty works in 1000 fascicules, including the best works, having been specially copied in different parts of the country from the original and otherwise good copies. Special effort was made to secure a fair collection of photographs and other forms of reproduction of art, for the reason that these objects seem in many cases to represent, not only in their subject-matters, but also in the detail of their execution, the spirit of the periods in which they were produced. The earlier specimens have the additional interest that they prove the existence of an indirect Greek and Western Asiatic influence upon Japanese culture. The present collection has been made with these ideas in view. It consists of hundreds of photographs, rubbings, fac simile reproductions and technical studies of details, many of these being specially made by experts.

After this brief description of the Yale and still briefer reference to the Library of Congress collection, it is fair to say that each of the collections is far from being complete. Yet the student might spend some of his time to great advantage and, as regards certain subjects, to much satisfaction, with the Japanese material at Washington and New Haven.

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⁶E. g., the *Zhin-rin kin-mo dzu-i*, 6 vols., showing different occupations of the people during the flourishing period of the Tokugawa rule. [The Library of Congress has a large number of works of this kind.]

⁷These scrolls are hand written, and some of them are among the most highly valued sources of history. [The Library of Congress possesses many scrolls not duplicated at Yale.]