

## Japanese philosophy

There are many books and documentary films about Japan but they do not describe the true Japan. Foreigners do not have a deep understanding of Japan and the Japanese do not have the correct idea about the rest of the world. We can have two different attitudes: one is that we are better than them and the other is that they are better than us. Christians (Europeans and European immigrants in America, Africa and Australia) have this basic attitude of superiority. This is why cinema and television in Europe and America show mostly rich, beautiful and good people. Actors and actresses are mostly beautiful. On the other hand, Japanese films often show the poorest, ugliest and worst people. You can see it in the famous Japanese director, Akira Kurosawa's films. Japanese think that the truth can be discovered in the worst part of human beings or society. This is because the Japanese have the basic attitude that others are better than them. When I visit Japanese web sites, I am always impressed that the Japanese are always talking about the points on which foreigners are better than them. The Japanese are always trying to learn good things from foreigners. Europeans and Americans have the basic idea that they are better and most advanced, and believe that the rest of the world should follow them.

What is the historical reason for this Japanese attitude? If you look at the Eurasian continent, the British Isles are in the west and the Japanese islands are to the east. This created some similarities between the British and the Japanese. They both have a strong identity and a well developed cohesive society. The difference is that the sea between France and Britain is very easy to cross but the sea between Korea or China and Japan is very difficult to navigate. A navy can easily cross the Channel but it was impossible to cross the Japanese sea. That is why there were individual contacts between Japan and the continent but no military relations until the use of the steam engine. About 1500 years ago, civilization came from Korea and Japan learned the great Chinese culture for the next 500 years. At that time, China was the most developed country in the world. Then the Mongols conquered China and they even sent a navy to conquer Japan but it was wrecked in the Japanese sea. This created the idea in Japan that the sea was protecting Japan from foreign invasion and Japan had to develop by itself. Naturally there were always individual contacts and some Japanese even emigrated to the Philippines and Indo-China but there were no military operations.

Europe developed navigation and started its imperialism 500 years ago and they came as far as Japan. But their transport capacity was limited so their military conquest stopped at China. It is true that Japan was not much of interest for Europe except for its culture. So the basic relationship between Japan and the rest of the world remained cultural and this created the attitude in Japan of learning from foreign culture.

Since 1800, the steam engine allowed the imperialistic expansion of the United States from the states of New England in the US to the West and South. The Pacific Ocean is rather easy to navigate and the steam engine permitted their navy to reach Japan in the 1860s. They could not transport enough soldiers and weapons to conquer Japan but succeeded to occupy two ports in order to reach China. This provoked England, France and Germany to occupy ports in Japan in competition with the US. However Japan did not have much interest for Europe which preferred to use Japan to stop the US from

going to China. As a result, Japan learned from Europe how to develop an army based on the steel industry. Industrial development in the 19th century was based on the presence of coal near the cities which could provide many workers. This was the situation in Europe, in countries such as Sweden, England, Belgium, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. Holland, France, Spain, Italy, Russia and others could not develop as much since they lacked these resources. The states of New England in the US and Japan also had this condition and they made great industrial progress. Again Japan learned from foreign countries and developed industrially.

Since 1900 Britain and the US tried to use Japan to stop Russia invading China. They helped Japan to attack Russia in 1904 and permitted Japanese imperialist expansion in Korea and China. This created 40 years of imperialism in Japan and fortunately it was not long enough to become the tradition. It will disappear with the death of the generation educated in that period.