

Japanese Propaganda in the Mirror of Events

In attempting to justify their invasion of China the Japanese have used a variety of explanations most of which can be roughly grouped under the following three headings. There has now been ample opportunity to test their sincerity or reality by the record of actual happenings.

1. Their Divine Mission to the Other Peoples of Asia. This form of propaganda is intended chiefly for home consumption. According to it, not only the Emperor is descended from the Sun Goddess but the whole nation, and especially the army, share somewhat in this semi-divine origin. This gives them a racial superiority and a sacred mission to spread their culture. They must liberate oppressed peoples like the Chinese from their corrupt and incompetent officials or from western exploitation and bring to them the beneficent effects of Japanese Rule. Only thus can peace be brought to Eastern Asia. The army is not at war with the people of China for whom it has only the most altruistic intentions, but with their wicked government which must be duly punished and overthrown in order that the people may have the blessings that will follow. Seven months have now elapsed since the Japanese began their unprovoked invasion. Wherever their armies have gone they have left a trail of utter devastation and disorder. Civilians have been slaughtered or bombed from the air with callous indifference or deliberate frightfulness to an extent that remains worse than will perhaps ever be known because of the relentless censorship of news. The best authenticated facts are in the Shanghai-Nanking area where at least 300,000 civilians are estimated to have been killed during the advance of the Japanese forces. In Nanking the orgy of the slaughtering of soldiers who had voluntarily disarmed after having been promised protection and of civilians, of raping of women from little girls to those over fifty years of age, of looting, burning and other vandalism, has no parallel within modern times in its bestial savagery. Owing to the presence in that city of press correspondents and other foreigners there has been a measure of publicity given to the uncontrolled brutality of the Japanese troops through several weeks following their entry, yet essentially the same disorders have occurred wherever else they have gone with the single exception of the Peking-Tientsin area and of Tsingtao. Even in the two northern cities there is a constant non-violent rackets-teering under the menace of the ruthless force which is brought to bear upon the slightest provocation. Elsewhere throughout that province, in Shansi, Inner Mongolia, and in the Yantse Valley, eyewitnesses report similar killing of civilians, raping, looting, burning, but because of fear of reprisals they dare not let their names be used. Many of the officers are meanwhile grafting as rapaciously as any of the Chinese mandarins from whom they claim to be saving the people. The regions around the foreign settlements at Shanghai are divided into sectors, and foreign merchants have already discovered that in order to secure the movement of goods or other privileges essential to the restoration of trade, all that is necessary is to find the right Japanese entrepreneur who will then negotiate with the General concerned and divide with him the "squeeze" agreed upon. Similar practices seem to be rife among all ranks of the army. As always under Japanese military occupation the sale of opium derivatives is pushed, with the active protection of officers who unquestionably share in the profits. The Holy War for which the Japanese are being asked to sacrifice so much turns out to be a tawdrily tarnished spectacle revealing the basest of human passions and of sordidly selfish motives.

11. The Preservation of Eastern Asiatic Culture. This is also partially to impress the home constituency but chiefly perhaps for the elderly Chinese who feel disgruntled over the handicaps they suffer from their own lack of modern or western knowledge. It holds out to them the agreeable prospect of coming into their own again. But its bold inconsistencies are amusing. The claim is only listened to because of the armed force which accompanies it, and this from battleship to bombing plane and bayonet is copied down to the last detail from the West. So of the uniforms and tactics employed. So of the merchants and manufacturers who hope thus to extend their trade, dressed from top to toe in western attire and using toilet and all other accessories from the same source making or selling cheap imitations of western goods. The officers stay in the most expensive British or French hotels in the port cities. Even their latest vices are learned from the West, notable their increasing tendency to drunkenness. What really lies behind this specious contention is their desire to prevent the modernization of China so that their military domination and economic exploitation of the country will not be hindered.

111. The Suppression of Communism. This line of sales-talk is almost entirely intended to play upon the prejudices of western countries where the bogie of Bolshevism can still be effectively conjured up. It is the most disingenuous of all their arguments as tested by historical evidence. The present Chiang Kai-shek Government, which they so rabidly denounce, began its program by the most vigorous efforts to eliminate organized and militant Communism from China. This was unswervingly maintained through the first eight critically formative years of the new Government and resulted finally in the complete ascendancy of the national forces. During that entire period the Japanese never assisted to the slightest degree in this exhausting struggle. On the contrary they did everything possible to embarrass the anti-communist Government, fomenting disaffection north and south, seizing territory or revenues, consistently striving to keep China politically disunited and weak. They did attempt to coerce China into signing an "anti-communist pact" but on terms which no self-respecting nation could accept. It was really nothing other than the notorious Twenty-one Demands revamped under this thinly disguised euphemism. General Chiang has been often criticized for wasting time and the nation's resources over a futile and relatively unimportant issue when there were other more menacing dangers. Western nations occasionally gave some help. But Japan watched quietly until when in September, 1931, the Government was desperately engaged with the troublesome red armies and China was afflicted by the most disastrous flood in human history, and western countries were otherwise preoccupied, she had her coveted opportunity to seize Manchuria. In the years that followed Japan wrested away the Province of Jehol; constantly harassed North China, setting up the notorious East Hopei regime as the nearest she could then come to her attempt to compel a secessionist move of the five northern provinces; instigated and protected huge smuggling operations on the North China coast; tried to prevent western nations from extending credits or supplying munitions; continued her intrigue and intimidation in the South as well as North; in short, did all possible to weaken the Chiang Government, despite its persistent struggle against Communism in the face of enormous internal problems inherent in the situation even if there had been neither Communism nor Japanese aggression. But resentment against Japanese imperialism and a growing realization of its dreaded consequences have had the strange effects of awakening Chinese Communists to the consciousness that they were first of all Chinese and of bringing about a rapprochement between them and their former enemies, - a "united front" against a common danger far more important to them all than differences in political ideologies.

Communism left to itself would have been absorbed into the national life of China, either becoming a minor political party or exerting some influence toward various socialized reforms. As it is, it will increasingly furnish an emotional stimulus and an effective technique in resistance to Japan. According to official

Japanese declarations there was "no communist peril in Manchuria" at the time of their occupation. Quotations from similar sources reveal the growth of this peril and of the necessity for strenuous efforts to suppress its influence. The Japanese military now look forward rather optimistically to "the pacifications of Manchukuo" in another ten years. The same is essentially true of Korea where as in Manchuria the virus spreads chiefly from Japan itself. In the past few months of Japanese occupation of North China it is becoming rapidly true. Away from the big cities and the narrow corridor following the railway lines there is everywhere chaotic anarchy being slowly reorganized for guerilla warfare under communist leadership. The same will doubtless follow in the occupied regions further south. There is therefore a close connection between Japanese rule and communism. Nor is the reason difficult to trace. Communism is a form of social rebellion resulting from intolerable oppression by those more privileged. It has a peculiar appeal for the common people, especially in those countries where democratic ideals or practises have not spread. It has a simple creed, a very concrete program, and a technique perfected by constant use. It contains the promise of relief for all those regions of continental Asia which have been brought under the cruel tyranny of Japanese military domination. The only real protection against Bolshevism is the creation of those social and economic improvements which it aims to bring about, the application of democratic principles so that the masses feel themselves to be in possession of real political equality, the abandonment of arbitrary military force, the abolition of poverty by reforms in taxation, high rates of interest, land tenure etc., and the development of civic liberty and of individual human rights. There is no hope for any such progress in any region under alien Japanese military rule. This form of political absolutism will only breed more grinding poverty and embittered discontent with consequent revolutionary activities drawing most naturally upon communist terminology and technique. Western readers unfamiliar with actual conditions should be on guard against Japanese assertions about Communism in China. There is none of it in those areas under the authority of the National Government, nor the adoption of any of the characteristic policies of the Soviet State. Japan is the real source of the spread of communistic influence in Eastern Asia, both within Japan and wherever her military autocracy gains control. As the physical body forms a process for ridding itself of some harmful element which is poisoning its life, so communism may be likened to nature's remedy for ridding the body politic of a malignant infection.

Only once has Japan really undertaken to prove her claim to be a "bulwark against Communism in the Far East", and that was not in China at all but in Eastern Siberia. This was in the turmoil following the Great War, and the real aim was of course to get control of the vast territory between Vladivostok and Lake Baikal. She had the sympathy and assistance of several other Powers, and spent a vast sum of money, but withdrew after four years of wasted effort. The significance of the inglorious episode for the purpose of this article is that the chief cause of failure was because the people of that region - by no means of predominantly communistic leanings - suffered so intensely under the rule of the Japanese military and the Russian adventurers they set up as puppets that they were prepared to welcome a Communist or any other regime that would rid their country of them.

The best method of treating Japanese propadanda is not to argue for or against it but to test it by the record of easily ascertainable facts. The real motives for their persistent aggression in China are glory and gain, chiefly gain, - imperialistic conquest and commercial exploitation. In order to realize these objectives, as they themselves put it when they speak frankly, they must destroy the growing military strength of China, prevent her industrial development and eliminate foreign, especially British, influence. These three aims can also be tested by the record of events as planned and executed by the Japanese High Command. Prince Konoye summed it up when he boasted that the purpose of all this frightfulness and destructive violence was to "beat the Chinese people to their knees and break their will to resist".