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KOREAN ASSIMILATION**

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BY C. MIURA, LITT.D.

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BY C. MIURA, LITT.D.

MORE than ten years have passed since the annexation of Korea, but during the greater part of this decade there were few noteworthy happenings. After Governor-General Terauchi was succeeded by General Hasegawa, however, the "Mansei " rebellion broke out. This was caused by dissatisfaction with the government and by the Korean independence movement. Naturally the attention of the Japanese people became concentrated on Korea, and serious questioning arose as to the advisability of continuing the policy heretofore pursued.

In particular, it was seen that the word "assimilation " was not agreeable to the Korean people, as it savored of ultimate Japanese dominance. Hence this word should be changed to " harmonization " or "amalgamation," or some word embodying a more conciliatory idea. The idea of cultural development succeeded the attempt at assimilation. Not only were the feelings and sentiments of the Korean people considered more carefully than before, but a definite move was made to abolish discrimination in taking the census and in the treatment of officials and people, and efforts were thus made toward a real amalgamation of the two peoples.

Yet this point must be emphasized: Many of these policies are merely projected and not yet genuinely enforced. In addition there are no doubt many fields in which discrimination has not been abolished even in intention, as for example, in certain political, military, legal, commercial and social realms. In my own opinion it is really wiser not to talk much about these reforms until they are actually carried out. Then they will come as a joyful surprise and will be more likely to receive due appreciation. Of course it takes time to prepare for radical changes, but we must remember that it is natural for us all to be less grateful for benefits when these are too long delayed. Hence as speedy enforcement of the reforms, one after another, as possible would appear highly desirable.

But not to interfere in the realm of politics too much, let us proceed to consider the practicability of ceasing to approve the Koreans forming a "separate community." If all discrimination were in fact abolished, would assimilation then become easily accomplished ?

Let us consider the case from the historical viewpoint first. The earliest mythology contains tales of Susa-no-o-no-Mikoto and how he and many other ancient gods went and came between Japan and Korea. Then we are told that Korea became a vassal state in the time of the Empress Jingo, and it is even said that the two nations were originally from one racial stock. For example, the *kabane* (primeval bones) discovered in Japan are said to resemble bones found in Korea, though formerly it was held that such *kabane* were distinctively Japanese. Again the names " Shiragi " " Koma " and " Kudara " are found designating counties (*gun*) in Japan, and this would seem to indicate the immigration of Koreans to Japan in long-past times. These after some generations must have become so completely assimilated that not even the slightest trace of them remains, in the characteristics of the people of their localities. From these immigrants loyal subjects of Japan and even famous generals

have resulted. If we study deeply into the reasons therefore we shall find the following:

1. Our nation was very haughty and independent in its spirit.
2. In those early days Koreans and Japanese must have lived together in some localities.
3. Doubtless a long time, probably even a thousand years, has elapsed since this mixed residence began.

Now while the Koreans themselves assert that they are fond of what is new as a people and have a saying like this, "We, though orientals, have no great liking for old customs," yet in reality they are decidedly conservative. As a proof of this we may adduce the fact that the national costume has not been changed for over a thousand years. Indeed the immigrants to Japan in the old days were so nationalistic that they plotted an insurrection against the Japanese Government, and our authorities were so disturbed over this Korean invasion that they had the newcomers removed from Kyushu to the eastward. When the Korean ambassador appeared upon the scene, all were surprised to see him dressed in Chinese costume and so adversely was he criticized for this departure from established custom that he was obliged to return home straightway.

Our government was so haughty that the officials burned all documents relating to this Korean invasion in the early part of the Nara period. For the same reason equality was not conceded so far as envoys were concerned, although the people were allowed to become naturalized like other foreigners and in various ways encouraged to emigrate from Korea. They seem to have lived in special communities in various localities, but afterwards intermingled and intermarried, and became completely one people ; but in order to attain this perfect amalgamation it was necessary for many centuries to pass. This we must not forget: In the end the result was perfect assimilation or amalgamation, but we must realize that at first the principles of equality and non-discriminating treatment would be only slowly put into practice.

Now, in considering these " special communities " of which we have been talking we must realize that one reason why the members were isolated was because of their inferior social position. For this there were various reasons. Some became captives of war, some were sold as slaves through poverty, while some were given as hostages. Again, some were divested of official rank on account of faults committed, and so lost prestige. Others were born in a low class, so-called proletarians. Political as well as social factors determined their social standing. In Korean society there are three grades: royalty, nobility and commoners. Below these are the proletarians, still contemptuously treated as inferiors.

But the Koreans as a people are not to be treated by Japan as an inferior nation, since they were politically amalgamated with the consent of their Emperor. They should be treated as exactly equal to our own nationals. This is the technical view, but practically, of course, we cannot deny that there is a difference between the aggressor and the passive recipient, and hence that the Koreans look upon themselves as a doomed nation is quite natural and reasonable in the circumstances.

In regard to the "separate communities," there are fragmentary records, but no complete history. The Koreans, on the contrary, have records extending through many ages but the modern chronicles are more full than the ancient. But as this history shows Korea a tributary nation and one suffering

humiliation through almost its whole national existence the people in general are not proud of these records. Furthermore, the majority are incredibly ignorant of their own history as a people. Thirdly, the so-called "separate communities," was as a rule of inferior culture and hence came to be known as "younger" or of "second" rank. Class distinctions were carried to an extreme point in Korea, only a few belonging to the nobility and the rank and file being rude and uncultivated. Even at the present day, education is not by any means general or advanced, as the policy of the government has been defective. But from of old the Koreans had their own distinctive culture and they cannot be called a people of mean ability. If advantages can be secured for them they are likely to make excellent progress and contribute much to the world's good. It is not unlikely that men of genius may emerge in the course of time from the so-called "hermit nation."

Fourthly, these "separate communities" speak a separate language and follow different customs from the rest of the country. How much have they changed since the annexation, in dress, food, customs and language? Though born linguists, very few learn Japanese unless obliged to do so.

The isolation in which the "separate communities" live may, of course, be due in some cases to differences in manners and customs and language, but there are places where Koreans and Japanese lived together for some time; even in these cases, however, the Japanese gradually ousted their Korean neighbors and possessed themselves of their holdings. The Japanese thus themselves built up an exclusive community. Going back to the early immigration of Koreans to Japan in large numbers we find they lived together and retained their own dress, customs, etc. There is one example of a community which retained its native dress and customs for 300 years, after migrating to Satsuma province, Japan; while the people in these separate communities were envious, suspicious and obstinately antagonistic to outsiders, their solidarity within the group was strong, and in rising against those outside, they all clung together most tenaciously.

Now, as the Koreans have lived thus in the past --- a life of constant political strife --- they have become infected with this disease until it has penetrated to the marrow of their bones, so to speak. Even now both young and old insist upon a division between North and South in Korea, they slander each other, make false charges, forbid intermarriage, and are exclusive to an extreme degree. Having this tendency, after the annexation it was naturally increased.

Much of the foregoing refers to conditions before the annexation took place, so it is impossible to make sweeping conclusions as to the future. We see the Koreans inclined to seclude themselves in separate communities, and we see also that this separation must not continue. This is true in regard to the Japanese also who when they migrate to foreign countries tend to form separate communities. If the Korean Independence movement should gain strength and the sentiment against amalgamation should increase, the separate communities are likely to multiply, and those who have intermarried with Japanese in Korea and also in Japan will probably suffer criticism and be ostracized by their anti-Japanese brethren.

Let us consider, then, whether independence is possible for Korea. We must realize that it is outside the realm of possibility for Japan to give up Korea, whatever the difficulties may be, as she has sacrificed much for the defence of the nation, carrying out this policy through many years. Korea means more to Japan than India does to England or Annam to France. Should England and France lose

these possessions, their national existence would not be jeopardized, but with Japan, just the opposite would be true. The difference is fundamental. From this consideration, it is clear that Korea's desire for independence can never be granted much as we may sympathize with their national pride. It is but an air castle. In all her history we have no record of the Koreans having attained independence nor do they seem fitted for it. Industrially they are weak, with the exception of the farming class. Now for Koreans to plot the destruction of Japan while living within her bounds, is plainly treason. If they wander in other lands, they must live as exiles. Are they to be a second Ireland or will they become like the Jews? If so, they must remain isolated forever. Moreover they are sacrificing their lives for nothing and prodigally spending their wealth for no good end.

There is one way left for them to succeed. If they will try their utmost to attain complete assimilation, then they may hope to see all discrimination abolished, and may secure complete political and social equality.

A certain Chinese official is said to have given the following reason for not being willing to accept the decision of the treaty which conferred certain rights upon Japan. To me, who knew the history and national characteristics of China it seemed not unreasonable. He said history could not be obliterated of course and it was true that China's political history had been full of dark blots. But from the viewpoint of the history of civilization, China had reason to be proud of her past, as she has an honorable record of inventions in the realms of astronomy, printing, fine arts and antiquities, engraving, etc.

Now a last word to the Korean people. Why not bow to the inevitable, and hasten their pace in regard to amalgamation? In face and features, Koreans are but slightly different from Japanese --- not like Indians under the English or Algerians under French rule. As natural linguists, the mastery of the language will not be very difficult, and no doubt they would soon be treated all over the world as Japanese. In the past, perfect amalgamation has been attained, and in the present a beginning has been made, by marriage and adoption. Surely it would not be difficult for Koreans to secure all the rights and advantages of Japanese. Of course many a year is needed for complete amalgamation, but first goodwill and a good understanding between the two peoples must be secured before antagonism has completely hardened into hate. Until all obstacles have been removed to this complete harmonization of Koreans and Japanese no happy future seems possible.