

"EAST IS EAST"

By Ambassador Carlos P. Romulo

The Oriental mind has ever been an insoluble mystery to the white man. And in turn, the white man's ways are equally as perplexing to the Oriental. This mutual mystery must be solved if understanding is to be brought about between East and West.

I know that many a white man is prone to blanket the Oriental under the damning conclusion: "He is a liar. You can't trust him. He is slippery."

That white man might be astonished to learn that the Oriental condemns him in almost the same words. The white man should modify his criticism. Instead of saying the Oriental does not tell the truth, he should say, "If he does not tell the truth to me, it is because he suspects me." For nearly all Orientals are suspicious, with good reason, of all white men. A dog, a child, a man cringes when afraid. The dog shows his teeth if he dares. The child and the man will lie in self-defense.

The Oriental regards the white man as a slippery character who will get the better of him in the end, because this has always been

the rule in the Orient. The white man, according to the Oriental, comes to him in the guise of being a civilizing influence, and proceeds to grab everything in sight.

The Oriental is not evasive and given to subterfuge with his fellow Orientals. He has no reason to mistrust his own people; and Oriental is never untruthful, unless he is driven to direct refuge from fear.

The Oriental is not mysterious. He operates on age-old simple patterns and believes in simple precepts of behavior centuries old. Chinese, Hindoo, Indonesian, and Japanese hold to the basic Oriental thought pattern with minor differences. In the Japanese these differences have become intensified with tragic results.

Even the westernized Filipino has retained certain characteristics that are basically Oriental. In the Philippines we cherish a Tagalog saying handed down from our Malayan ancestors: "Life is short, and well I know it is only a minute long. Therefore, I want this minute to stay

with me as long as it can, for who knows what may happen to me tomorrow?" This sums up the universal Oriental objection to any haste. Haste is an indignity. The Oriental is not racing against time, for why should he? Time, he knows will beat him in the end.

The white man wonders at the serene and unlined faces of elderly Orientals. Their look is serene because, no matter how hard their outward life has been, inwardly they are at peace. The white man's incessant "chop-chop!" or demand for hurry, is a constant affront to the dignity of the Oriental soul.

Happiness, if you examine the fundamentals of his belief, is a reflection of the soul. No matter what bodily discomforts are his, if the soul is at peace, the Oriental is content. No wonder the Occidental finds this difficult to understand! He must have conveniences and even luxuries to be content. The average white man plans his life around a car, a home, a radio, an electric refrigerator, two movies a week, and "a chicken in every pot."

John Chang, his Oriental prototype, does not know about these things. He is happy without material comforts, money, or progress in the Occidental sense, because to him happiness is not measured in terms of comfort

but in the inward satisfaction which is his aim in existence. He can be happy if he has a bamboo bed to sleep upon, a dish of rice and vegetables to share with his family. His family is his universe, and his happiness depends upon its unity. He reaches the apex of his day seated with his household around the common bowl of rice. In this patriarchal state he is the supreme ruler, the sire, the head of his wretched but beloved dynasty. This is carried to an unpleasant extreme by the Japanese in the Shinto, where the entire nation is one family and the emperor is supreme father of all.

The Oriental is hypersensitive and thin-skinned, courteous to the point of appearing to fawn. His very courtesy makes him out a liar to the white man. And his reluctance to rush against eternity is a trait the Occidental mistakes for laziness.

The Occidental bids you "Good-by," and the Oriental, "God be with you." The Occidental says, "thank you," and the Oriental, "God repay you." These are minor differences. In the Oriental they hark back to his inner trust, his placing of even small matters in the hands of God.

Bahala na! Bahala na—leave it to God! It is an expression that covers many needs. The pest of

grasshoppers arrives, but the Filipino does not throw up his hands in despair. He collects the pests in baskets and roasts them; they are as delectable as shrimps. *Bahala na!*

The river rises and the flood washes away the houses of the village. The people do not wail. Houses can be rebuilt. The people take to their bancas, the river is bobbing with river boats, the swains row their girls, as they all sing. It is like a festival, but an unexpected one. *Bahala na!*

Bahala na, the Filipino's *mana*, his *selah*, and so what! This is not indolence, but faith and a placing of ill luck in the lap of providence. But the white man frowns upon such Oriental resignation to fate. He thinks it a symptom of laziness and a lack of respect for material values.

The Oriental always prefers avoiding of the moment. So, instead of telling you he cannot meet you on the morrow, he says, "I may see you tomorrow." For the moment he has spared your feelings. He has protected your soul. If he is in your employ and for some reason desires to leave you, he will not come out with a reason that might embarrass you both. Therefore, his mother is sick, or he is going to visit his cousin, or he needs a vacation.

You part with kind words and plans for a speedy reunion. But you both know, if you, too, are versed in Oriental ways, that he will not return. Something has gone wrong between you. But since it would hurt your feelings to explain, why should he explain?

The Filipino could not bring himself to condemn the opinions of a guest. He had placed consideration for his guest's feelings above his own. This the white man can never understand. There are many things he fails to comprehend about the Orient. One of his blindest spots is the white man himself.

The Occidental is very sure his is the superior type of civilization. To prove his contention, he conquers entire nations and introduces into them governments, business methods, automobiles, airplanes, electric refrigerators, and radios.

The Oriental has nothing to show but his soul. But the Oriental, rightly or not, believes that his civilization is based upon the eternal spirit and the Occidental's upon a transient materialism. He holds the physical to be incidental and the spiritual supreme. Behind him innumerable ages of Oriental logic uphold his faith in the supremacy of the

soul. Therefore, the Oriental concludes, his is the superior civilization.

The white man, not knowing this, and positive in his belief in his own civilized superiority, is willing, if need be, to enforce his claim with violence. This has been done many times in the Orient, and has given rise to many misunderstandings and suspicion, and even hatred.

The white man has done much to make himself hated by the touchy Oriental, who is touchy because he has been under white domination for centuries and has never failed to resent that domination. The well-fed white man looks from automobile or rickshaw upon the wretched native, in scenes of unbelievable humiliation.

The Oriental, watching from the dust, sees the unmoved interest of this sightseer. He thinks, "He has no soul." He sees the white man's trained police beating up helpless natives with clubs, and concludes that the white masters who order such brutalities are without souls. Imagine the feelings of the Chinese, that proud and sensitive race whose civilization is the oldest in the world, who read, posted in Chinese characters before parks in their own native

land, the order: "Dogs and Chinese Not Allowed!" Let John Doe picture to himself such signs posted to keep him out of his own Central Park!

In the Philippines, during the early days of the American occupation, it was punishable by imprisonment for the Filipinos to play their national anthem or display the Filipino flag. This insult to us as a nation was deeply resented and loudly protested. But this was not a personal indignity. And we were not only permitted to protest, we were not thrown in to jail for protesting; and we were eventually permitted to display our own red, golden rayed sun and three stars beside the American Stars and Stripes.

We have, in Tagalog, another saying: "His face is money!" This is the way the average Oriental looks upon the white man. To him the white face expresses greed, cunning—a soulless desire to bleed him, the helpless native, of his last drop of blood.

As a Filipino I was proud of my nationality. As a nationalist I had faith in the genius of my people. I set out to visit the other countries of the Far East; to gather the opinions of fellow Orientals whose languages I could not speak and whose ways

I did not share. But I expected them to show pride in their nationality. I waited their saying with Oriental dignity and pride: I am Burmese, or Indonesian, or Malay!

Instead, I found them ashamed to speak. The very mention of nationalism was taboo. It was disgraceful to be a native in Asiatic countries controlled by Holland, France, or England. These people were living in such misery as I had never known existed.

The Occidental is well aware that 17 million Filipinos did not stand by the American flag in the Philippines only through a sense of personal devotion to America. But Americans and Filipinos alike were willing to die together for a principle. That principle, democracy, was never presented more magnificently as an ideal for men to live by than within this century in the Philippines.

It is because of a promised independence, because the need for it was implanted in Filipino hearts by America, that we

fought on Bataan. Why, in the Philippines, did we fight against America? Why, 42 years later, did we fight beside America? For the same purpose: freedom.

The essence of our world struggle is that all men shall be free. The Atlantic Charter laid down the premise of that world freedom, binding its signatories "to respect the rights of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live." The merits of this principle were proven by America in the Philippines. Through that example we know that educational advantages, fair dealing, good will, and the infiltration of the principles of democracy will end the war.

We have learned that there are no economic or spiritual wastes so great as those caused by war. We know, or should know by now, that to create peace we must devote to it the same enthusiasm and industry we have shown in our preparations for war.

Condensed from
"Mother America"

THOUGHT FOR THE WEAK

Face powder can attract a man, but it takes baking powder to keep him a happy hubby.

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