

Instead of the refinements, socially we are inclined to favor the vulgar that is in western culture. This essay attempts to explain our cultural attitudes toward the west.

OUR CULTURAL AMBIVALENCE

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Our cultural relationship with the west has been cultivated and encouraged for centuries that nobody among us can legitimately claim exemption from its impulses and influences. While there are so many things desirable in western culture embodied in its demands for excellence and perfection, the unrelenting search for knowledge, the adventurous spirit of speculation and the utilisation of scientific formulations and others that strongly recommended to us their cogent necessity for our time, nevertheless there are certain attitudes with which we regard culture that have driven us to confront dilemmas we usually resolve against our favour. These attitudes have widely contributed to the imbalance of our intellectual tradition and ultimately to the confu-

sion and alienation that are characteristics patent to our culture.

A case in point is the attitude wherein we take Spain and America as whole symbols of western culture when in reality they are not. But of course, this has been possible because for a long time our contact has been restricted to these countries. This mistaken regard has contributed to our ignorance of the fact that culturally and intellectually they are only parts of the vigorous continent of Europe where until recently the great issues and events of the world are decided first in the mind. It is in countries like Germany, England and France where an older and a stronger cultural tradition can be found which, taking its substance from the native soil imbibed the elements of

the classical age and became concretised for us in terms of their arts, philosophy, and science whose richness is forever a challenge to human inquiry and experience.

Cultural Ambivalence

Hence, while there is generally a constriction of our cultural relationship mainly with the two countries mentioned above and therefore a misunderstanding of our partial cultural parenthood there is also a miscalculation of its ultimate meaning. In spite of our proud declarations of popularising education, the finest and deepest thoughts of the west have not been a generative and constructive force in our social thinking precisely because education has lacked the quality to enrich and stimulate the appreciative and critical intelligence, nor has it fully approximated the challenge and the standards which the highest achievements of the west has to offer to us. The publicised avowal we pay as our allegiance to western culture is therefore contradicted by the inept demonstration of our appreciation.

Thus, the recent reaction to ban a novel of great literary and cultural merit like D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, for example, while at the same time our choice not to show any outward protest against the flood of imported comics and cheap detective novels, can be an indication of this ambivalence. Our acclaims are dictated by the taste of the controlled multitude while our counsels are based on the easy reaches of intelligence that to continue the analogy, while socially we may yield to cultural outrages like the soap operas, the twist, and crude popular music we will reveal at once our implied if not downright disgust when the question turns on serious drama, ballet, or classical music which are integral components of western culture. In short, instead of the refinements, socially we are inclined to favour the vulgar that is in western culture to the extent that we desist or default from thinking that this is not all of the west, and also to obscure the fact that the proper homage we can pay to its artists, thinkers and scientists is one of gentle and sceptical intellectual con-

ironation rather than by bias or ignorance which we use to justify our chosen intention.

Western Heritage

Attempts therefore to protect the public must always favour excellence for these can never corrupt us except as we regard them from a puerile point of view. Serious and sincere actions must be directed against the crude and the vulgar even how much they are found to be socially acceptable precisely because social corruption arises from these sources. We must also accept the fact that cultural excursions involve a risk in intelligence and orientation for the very notion of individually in culture demands a particular approach that is unique to any of its particular aspect to be explored. Hence, in one way culture demands nuances of human adaptations especially in intelligence to which its finest and highest refinements seek communion. The perennial challenge poised by intelligence engaged in advancing and understanding culture would somewhat be a confirmation and at once a rejection too of the banality and stupidity of their age, and

which is perhaps made nearer and more relevant to us by the cogency which the remembrance of Socrates, Einstein, Rizal, Darwin, Tagore, Shakespeare, and others will always arouse in us.

While we may therefore declare our western heritage, we must at the same moment affirm our rights to be mentally challenged which is a precondition concomitant to our acceptance of such a heritage. For in as much as we propose excellence for our consideration, such a demand posits also the affirmation of freedom to pursue these excellences to wherever they will lead us as long as such an action is first confined to and confirmed by discussion and whose solutions are solved after the clash of reason and logic.

Cultural Fringes

But our reaction to such a proposal has not only been marked by indifference and abstention but also by outright denunciation because we have feared for so long the serious actions of intelligence. This ingenuity to resist, together with time and the social process conspires

therefore in working against our enlightenment that a condition is still being produced where a time-lag in our cultural reception hinders our minds in making a correct appraisal of the perspective of things.

For one, our being at the receiving-end of the intellectual movements in the west opens up to us only the cultural fringes when the west is already at the cultural centre. This makes us fight now also for principles western peoples have already won a hundred years earlier that we miss in the process a sense of contemporaneity precisely because our intellectual complexes are still checked by the impositions and demands of the undesirable survivals of the past. This makes also for our misplaced seriousness to consider according to a critic as epigrams what are already clichés abroad and novelties that which are already antiquated and outgrown by the west. Hence, we can take our being a semi-feudal society with indifference still in spite of the great progress in science and economy in the west; we can regard and respond to the evils of medieval-

ism with a kind of tolerance born not out of our liberalism but by an over-optimistic and over-masochistic turn of mind that legalises for us the hopes that they can be workable still in our times; and ultimately to take secularism and science as suspicious encroachment on the body politic; and the free and intelligent spirit of man that represents to us its expression in scholarly anguish as inspired by the devil and therefore fit for a ritual of exorcism and slaughter.

Cultural Values

This mental condition and inclination have so far produced among our intellectually sensitive sector a sense of contradiction and escape because the west has been romanticised in our imagination. So that when we seek an affirmation of our desires we will at once propose an immediate exodus to the west which we consider as our cultural home. The opposition of our cultural values is such that we have taken what belongs to us either with selective condescension or disgust as to make us compare hastily, to our conscious disadvantage,

say, the slums of Manila with the affluent quarters of London, our sari-sari stores, with the intellectual's cafes and art galleries of Paris, and our nipa huts with the skyscrapers of New York, completely forgetful of whatever our own could offer and emphatic in our assertions of contempt for our worst aspects so that we can justify our resignation, and our neglect or our suppression of whatever are the worst qualities of these foreign cities mentioned. Hence, we tend also to forget that what we seek in these lands and what they stand for us in our imagination as a concatenation of positive achievements and progress have been made possible not because of escape and endless rantings but by hard unremitting work through long years of struggle, which when allowed to operate in our country may eventuate ultimately to the realisation here of what we desire in those cities.

On the other hand, the reaches of our self-alienation can only be matched by the degree to which we have estranged ourselves from the quest of eastern culture. For

our colonial submission has resulted into a situation where we have not only been suddenly cut-off from our past and everything that it signifies but also has isolated us from our immediate neighbours. We have been "tribalised" and "insularised" so thoroughly that even now a declaration of nationalism is regarded with suspicion and the effort to emerge from our isolation in order to widen our cultural relationship with our neighbours is stifled by insidious interests that on the one hand, our estrangement may indicate itself in the ability of some of our intellectuals to discuss intelligently all the phases of the European Common Market but showing ignorance and embarrassment when the question of the Asian Common Market (where we rightfully belong) becomes the subject of inquiry; or on the other, this may show up in a mentality addicted to favouring the Monroe Doctrine while at the same time suspicious of those among us who advocate the Asia-for-the Asians policy.

Eastern Culture

This western constriction of our minds and grasps may

also reach the particular absurdity to assess eastern culture as something quaint and inferior not only out of ignorance but also because of the extent to which we try ourselves to believe that, since the particular Chinese we meet in the street used to be a poorly dressed peddler with slit eyes and used a chopstick when he eats, and the Hindu as a lean businessman with a long beard and deep set eyes wearing a strange garment, and since both are coloured peoples, we conclude at once that their culture is necessarily inferior to that of western man whom we socially deify.

In other words, there is a tendency in us to reduce these things to personalities and prejudices as cultural indices and as long as we regard eastern man as a stranger to us, to hide the fact (as in truth our education hides it from us) that old China and old India as particular manifestations of eastern culture possess a cultural tradition as ancient as any that can be found in the world and offering as varied excellences in arts and philosophy as any country in the west can offer;

or to make secret the thing that, until the tenth century, eastern culture and political sway as shown by these two countries are superior to any which the west can offer. In point of fact, as a historian reveals, not in one instance alone did the east civilise the west.

But through the contingencies of history, whatever the east inculcated in terms of its refinements to the west had been underestimated because of the latter's subjugation of the former that was made possible by the birth of the imperatives of a new and a then vigorous economic order that sought its nourishment in the material wealth of the east so that it can survive and remain strong.

Hence, the tales of the uncouth and treacherous oriental and the myth of the white man's burden later on plaguing the accounts of western writers. It is therefore paradoxical that while the west proposes to us the experience of its whole cultural universe from the vulgar to the refined, it has portrayed to us in turn the worst qualities not only of ourselves but of other orientals as well, and our ha-

bitat as a random country of base, helpless, and uncultured persons who must be "civilised" with each need for loot and the expansion of commerce up to a point where they are insisted upon to forget their ancient culture that they can be remolded into a colonial appendage wherein captivity is the rule.

Intellectual Confusion

Ultimately, these kinds of thinking that direct our minds to appreciate the unwanted elements of both eastern and western culture confuse our intellectual and cultural tradition for so long. However, it is being corrected now by the new driving force of nationalism whose creative spirit is sweeping the renascent areas of the world. Our ability to examine our relationship with both cul-

tures can be illuminated if we at once take ourselves, our needs, and our desires and whatever is worth preserving and developing in our culture as a starting point from where the other qualities special to east and west must be related and referred. Any widespread and intensive cultural movement that will draw us nearer to the realities and to ourselves must take these considerations seriously.

For only then we can maintain for our examination an independent and balanced perspective that will insure a conscious act of will to affirm our bold allegiance to cultural refinements and an equal rejection of those aspects that are anti-human and debasing. It is only this choice that will find for our cultural ambivalence its harmonious resolution.

A pleasure-loving character will have pleasure of some sort; but, if you give him the choice, he may prefer pleasures which do not degrade him to those which do. And this choice is offered to every man, who possesses in literary or artistic culture a never-failing source of pleasure, which are neither withered by age, nor staled by custom, nor embittered in the recollection by the pangs of self-reproach. — Thomas Henry Huxley