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**Committee II:            Synthesis and Relationships in Culture**

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**Of the paper by:       Se Won Yoon**

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**on**

**The Reception of Western Culture in**

**China, Japan and Korea**

It is the mission of this committee to study cultural phenomena and to assess the functions and potentials for cultural synthesis. In sending the members of this committee on their way to explore cultural synthesis -- as contrasted with cultural specialization and analysis -- chairman Vincenzo Cappelletti presented them with two distinct perspectives. One of these is derived from sociologist Max Weber, who alleged that "only through rigorous specialization can the learned man go far". The Weber perspective can have implications for both the individual learned man and learned society generally. Its implications might also be relevant to a total nation or continent, and its mission might be summarized as "specialize in order to go far".

The second perspective supplied to this committee by its chairman is derived from philosopher Henri Bergson. In Bergson's reported view, synthesis seems to be, historically, as necessary

as specialization and analysis. Indeed, one might conclude that in Bergson's perspective synthesis is a "higher power of analysis". From this perspective, one might also conclude that it is not specialization but cultural synthesis that is necessary for an individual, a society, a nation or even a continent "in order to go far".

In response to these general instructions, Professor Se Won Yoon of the Kyung Hee University in Seoul set out to study and assess the differing ways in which "Western culture" was received by the countries of China, Japan and Korea during the modern era. Initially, his time span was to be the last century only, but in his final version he found it necessary to go back in time to the initial contacts between "western culture" and the orient three and four centuries ago. Moreover, in his review process he opted to give up his initial and more sensitive title of "cultural assimilation in Korea, Japan and China" in favor of a more neutral title "the reception of western culture. . . in China, Japan and Korea."

What observations does Professor Se Won Yoon make and what conclusions does he draw? Before summarizing these or commenting upon them, I must hasten to state to my readers and listeners that I have practically no claim to being a Far Eastern scholar or even observer. I confess to being an addict to inter-cultural relations and reactions. I have long been intrigued by the problems as well as the wealth of pluralistic societies. I have learned in my youth about the process whereby the countries of

the eastern Mediterranean were "Hellenized" after the conquest of Alexander the Great, and even greater landscapes were "Romanized" by the Pax Romana. I have also been intrigued by the process through which an obscure and relatively poor province of Rome, after its military defeat, managed to pass on its Judeo-Christian culture to all of Europe and eventually to gain a foothold throughout the globe. I have studied also the spread of Islam, through most of Africa, some sections of Europe and much of the Far East. In more modern times, I have been aware of the spread of Napoleonic governmental structures and legal systems through Europe, Latin America and the Far East. Even more recently, I have observed the spread of Marxist dogma and Communist regimes in countries where, contrary to Marx's initial timetable, industrialization, Adam Smith's economic Darwinism and capitalism's other evil manifestations hardly had the time to germinate.

But about major cultural movements in the Far East, be they the spread of Buddhism or Western culture, there is a great lacuna in my intellectual repertoire. Accordingly, you must listen to me as an amateur commentator at best. An amateur, nevertheless, I am -- one who is willing to venture forth out of love of knowledge and with enthusiasm, to seek understanding of the nature of contemporary culture in the three countries selected by Professor Se Won Yoon: China, Japan and Korea.

Professor Se Won Yoon documents his conclusions regarding the distinct ways western culture was received in three countries under study. In China, the idea persisted that China continued

as the center of the world and western culture was only to supply new skills and technology. In Japan, likewise, Western technology was merely to be grafted on top of the Japanese spirit. In Korea, on the other hand, a more synthetic interaction was sought between oriental morality, ethics and norms, on one hand, and Western technology, on the other. In Korea, though western technology was not viewed as a culture, it was, nevertheless, recognized as a tool or vessel for the redevelopment of native culture.

There is a wealth of information and insight in Professor Se Won Yoon's paper on the opening of the Far Eastern countries to Western culture and technology. He views China as the initial window for the perception of Western culture in the region. He talks about the early efforts of Jesuit missionaries (beginning in 1601), who spread not only religion but also astronomy, geometry and geography. But he considers the effort to propagate Christianity and to spread Western civilization as having failed. In great part he attributes the failure to the inability of monotheistic and monochromatic Christianity to coexist with ancestry worship in a society which adhered to a polychromatic value system -- where Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism easily mixed. Thus even though the Chinese were willing to make use of Western technology and science, the desire to preserve their own value system predominated. Moreover, even the influence of science was felt mostly in urban and intellectual circles, and its impact on the country at large was limited.

Only the defeats of China by England in the Opium Wars in the middle of the 19th century spurred the country to improve its military forces and systems and to introduce western-style industrialization. Regional differences and the absence of a unified language and customs made the task particularly difficult. Loyalty to family and province, over country and nation, greatly contributed to the maintenance of the status quo. The 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the 1937 invasion of the Chinese mainland gave rise to the more recent struggle between Chiang Kai Shik, who advocated democratic capitalism, and the Communist party led by Mao Tse Tung. It might be too soon to determine what cultural face China will assume in years to come, but some straws of the evidence are already in the wind.

Japan's exposure to the West began in 1542 with the arrival of Francis Xavier, a Spanish Jesuit priest. Portuguese and Dutch visitors introduced Japan not only to Western medicine and trade, but also the the flintlock, which soon became a Japanese export commodity and a basic tool in its conquest strategy.

Since these early beginnings, the Japanese went on with great energy to build steamships, to reform its educational system on the German model, to update its military structure after the French style, and to transform its political system in the pattern of the British constitutional monarch. the United States occupation of Japan at the end of World War II added a final impetus to the country's energetic move towards Western technology and even many sprinklings of Western culture.

Korea's encounter with Western culture came through its contacts with China. But late in the 18th century, Korea felt so threatened by the potential impact of the West, that missionaries were barred and Western science was proscribed as evil.

Despite the ban on Catholicism and the imposition of an isolationist policy, western religious influence grew among the Korean intelligensia. But not until the last quarter of the 19th century did Korea commence regular relations and trade with the European nations. Soon, thereafter, the Japanese conquest of 1905 turned Korea into a virtual Japanese colony, a situation continuing until 1945. After the liberation from Japan, the Korean war of 1950-53 brought a new foreign military force to the country, American troops -- American technology and American capital. In a short time, Korea was able to utilize western science and skills in the protection of its own ethics and values.

What is to be learned from the historical lessons offered by Professor Se Won Yoon? What does he tell us about cultural specialization versus synthesis? What does he tell us about the impact of Western culture upon the Far Eastern countries of China, Japan and Korea? All cultures develop traditions, and it is in the nature of tradition to resist change, to oppose the impact of new cultures. Yet to a greater or lesser degree each of the three countries studied are now set on the road towards the acquisition and utilization of Western technology. That trend appears irreversible. All three countries are imbued, in

their own tradition, with strong work ethics and strong commitments to discipline and responsibility. The new availability of Western technology and capital supplies make for easy utilization of these human resources. The economic successes of Japan and Korea have been unprecedented. The judgment on China is not yet in, but many are betting on China's future.

Can these countries borrow and utilize Western technology without being affected, or corrupted, by its culture and its ills? The answer is: probably not. Western technology has usually required mobile capital and mobile labor. It gave rise to working mothers, to under-supervised children, to marital breakdowns, to delinquency and alienation. It is these cultural side-effects that the three countries of the Far East would like to avoid. Are these side-effects inherent in Western technology, or can they be overcome by the Far East's countervailing cultural forces of family love, pride, and communal responsibility?

A few final words should be said about specialization versus synthesis. No man is an island, and no nation is an island. Personal or national isolation are no longer possible at an age where distance can be measured by light years. For the individual as well as the nation some healthy instances of specialization in economics as well as the arts, will continue -- bringing forth rich fruits. There is little reason to seek the development of the Kabuki theatre in Yemen or expect the planting of coffee in Iceland. But beyond the historical ethnic, regional, or psychological differences all too evident to all of us

-- the trends seem to be towards a greater synthesis of world culture. I hope this trend helps the survival of these cultural strands most productive of human as well as environmental well being. I hope, also, that it does not proceed at undue speed -- because I, for one, much too much appreciate cultural diversity to be praying for the utopia of a universal cultural synthesis.