



1919

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(3)

MAKING A JAPANESE QUESTION AT PARIS

by

Huntington Wilson

So far as there is a Japanese question, it is an artificial rather than a natural ^{one} ~~growth~~; and it is a question that should be grasped frankly and firmly, like a nettle, and not given by mystery a fictitious power for harm. The Japanese race question is the result of rough tactlessness on the part of some of the politicians of America, Australia, and Canada, and of a parvenu bumptiousness cultivated by some of those of Japan, aggravated on both sides by that ^{failure} ~~fear~~ to tell the people the truth which is the worst characteristic of democratic governments, and which has been foolishly shown by the government at Tokio with the result of inflaming the popular mind,--that same inflammation being now invoked by Japanese officials as forcing them to make demands.

The demand in this case is for "equality". Of the celebrated trio "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", only fraternity is permitted by ~~Mother~~ Nature, and it is to be hoped that more of it will be sought in the coming era. Everyone knows, of course, that literal equality (except before the law) and complete liberty are unknown to nature and to man, whether between individuals or between nations, in any civilized society. As between any two great nations, each one surpasses the other and is surpassed by the other in some respects, and each differs more or less from the other, due to race, environment, language, institu-

tions and laws; and there exists no universal^{ly} recognized standard of comparison upon the basis of which there can be established any absolute superiority, inferiority, equality or inequality between nations.

In view of these platitudes, the Japanese can hardly be suspected of asking a certificate of scientific equality, for no nation could claim that. Therefore their demand can only mean a mutual recognition of international equality, of dignity, of honor, of right, and of obligation under international law. Inasmuch as this has never been denied them since the abolition of extraterritorial jurisdiction in Japan, it is a little hard to see why the Japanese should wish themselves to raise the question of their equality by demanding stipulation of what the world has grown accustomed to accord as a matter of course. This, however, is their affair, and there seems to be no reason why Japan should not be given the desired declaration, with a proviso, however, that naturally no national policies that may be necessitated by the racial, social, economic or political welfare, solidarity or homogeneity of any of the great powers shall ever be construed or invoked as in any way derogatory of the principles of equality in question.

It would be a very good thing to make the desired declaration of equality if there could be at the same time spiked once for all the guns of those who would pretend that the national policies which some countries are obliged to adopt, for perfectly sound and reasonable economic ^{or other} causes, partake at all of the nature of an affront to the dignity and international equality of other nations. Japanese politicians, if they would but admit it, know well that neither they nor we could afford to permit immigration which would demoralize the wage scale or standard of living in either country. They know well that neither country could afford to permit an immigration of peoples hard to assimilate and likely to form

separate communities in the nature of an imperium in imperio. They know well that neither country would be wise to favor an immigration which, if in large numbers, would result in the intermingling of two good races to produce a hybrid one. By not telling these truths to their people, they encourage a mistaken and dangerous idea--the idea of an affront to the honor and dignity of a proud people. By their tactless and demagogic methods and their unskillfully drawn laws many of our politicians do the same. If there is anything the United States need do to ameliorate this situation, it is by way of national, not international, action. As to foreigners generally, and as to immigration, land-owning, and naturalization particularly, it would be better, and quite as effective, to have federal and state laws that were general in terms and that set up criteria of principle, any necessary discriminations to be made administratively and in pursuance of such criteria of principle,--which would be almost entirely economic. Then the principle of equality would be clear to all and the specific discriminations would stand upon their true and entirely inoffensive basis. I elaborated such a policy in the North American Review of March, I think, 1913. Extra-governmentally, too, we could do something for better feeling. Proud and sensitive people are not over fond of diminutives and trivial nick-names, like "Jap", nor of fatuous patronizing. Worst of all are those deep-dyed yellow newspapers that, in search of sensationalism, are not restrained by patriotism from systematically insulting and baiting one or another friendly foreign nation.

The other aspect of the Japanese "question" one must guess to be an effort by Japan to use the Peace Conference, and particularly American reservations about the Monroe Doctrine, as the occasion for gaining categorical recognition of some sort of Japanese Monroe Doctrine in Asia. The merits of this question depend upon how much authority in the Far East Japan seeks. Certainly there is no reason why we should fail to respect in fact Japan's natural and actual position in the

Far East, nor should we be given to pin-pricking instead of co-operating with Japan in her legitimate enterprise in that quarter. Any too sweeping recognition of a too complete free hand on the part of Japan would seem unnecessary and unwise; but Japan's position in the Far East is a real thing although a comparatively new thing; and it is based on actualities, and is to be treated as such. Our position in the Western Hemisphere under the Monroe Doctrine is an ancient position strengthened by years of tacit acquiescence, clustered with valid tradition and interpretation and become real, like a title through prescription. There is slight analogy between the two.

One hopes that the Monroe Doctrine will not be weakened by the proposal and denial of a specific recognition, which it hardly requires and which should never have been broached unless first privately assured. One may hope that, with a liberal policy toward Japan, we shall nevertheless not sign away for all time and for all circumstances, a legitimate participation of the West in the affairs of the Far East. One may hope that we shall not sign away the right to regulate our immigration and other such affairs; and that we shall not allow Japan to go home nursing a grievance, accentuated, perhaps, by the exclusion of ^{her} representative from the intimate council of great powers, where it would seem that he could have done no harm, while he might have added,--as America should have done,--some words of detached and practical common sense.
