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Japan through the Looking Glass

By Alice-Leone Moats

ILLUSTRATED BY MICHAEL BERRY

Travel—anywhere—is all that the Japanese have left by way of amusement

THE first word any foreigner learns in Japan is *arimasen.* It means there isn't any. Next, he learns *nai desu.* That means there isn't any. Usually, the waiter or room boy or shopkeeper just lets it go at that but sometimes, in an expansive mood, he will amplify it by adding, "New Structure." That's supposed to make everything clear in spite of the fact that no one knows what the New Structure is. It forms an integral part of the much discussed "New Order in East Asia," and that makes it even more confusing.

According to Premier Konoye, the New Structure is neither Nazi nor Communist. In his own words: "The goal of the movement in its ideological aspects is to give a clear-cut idea of the Japanese national character to official, financial and all other circles and strata in this country. It is designed to embody all the finest points of Communism and Naziism, but the fundamental objective is a strictly Japanese ideology according to the principle of fulfilling the duties of subjects of the emperor."

This definition may be clear to Japanese used to struggling with imperial rescripts, which sound like so much double talk. To Occidentals it's a bit vague but after a short time it becomes obvious that the "proposed" New Structure, as the papers cautiously qualify the term, is responsible for the lack of everything—food, luxuries, most necessities, comfort, transportation and pleasure.

through the Looking Glass

Always great admirers of the Germans, the Japanese have not only imitated the Nazi spirit but have gone it one better by adopting a program of strength *without* joy.

Under the rules of the New Structure no dish in a restaurant may cost more than one yen (about 24 cents): the price of breakfast is limited to one yen, luncheon to two and a half and dinner to five yen. At those prices, the food can't possibly be of first or even second quality, and it isn't. Butter is a commodity never encountered in a public eating place and seldom in even the house of a foreigner, olive oil is never seen, and coffee is made of soybeans or barley. The bread is soggy and gray; when ordering *à la carte*, the customer pays fifteen sen for each slice, which must come out of

"Well, in our country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else—if you ran very fast for a long time as we've been doing."

"A slow sort of country!" said The Queen. "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

LEWIS CARROLL

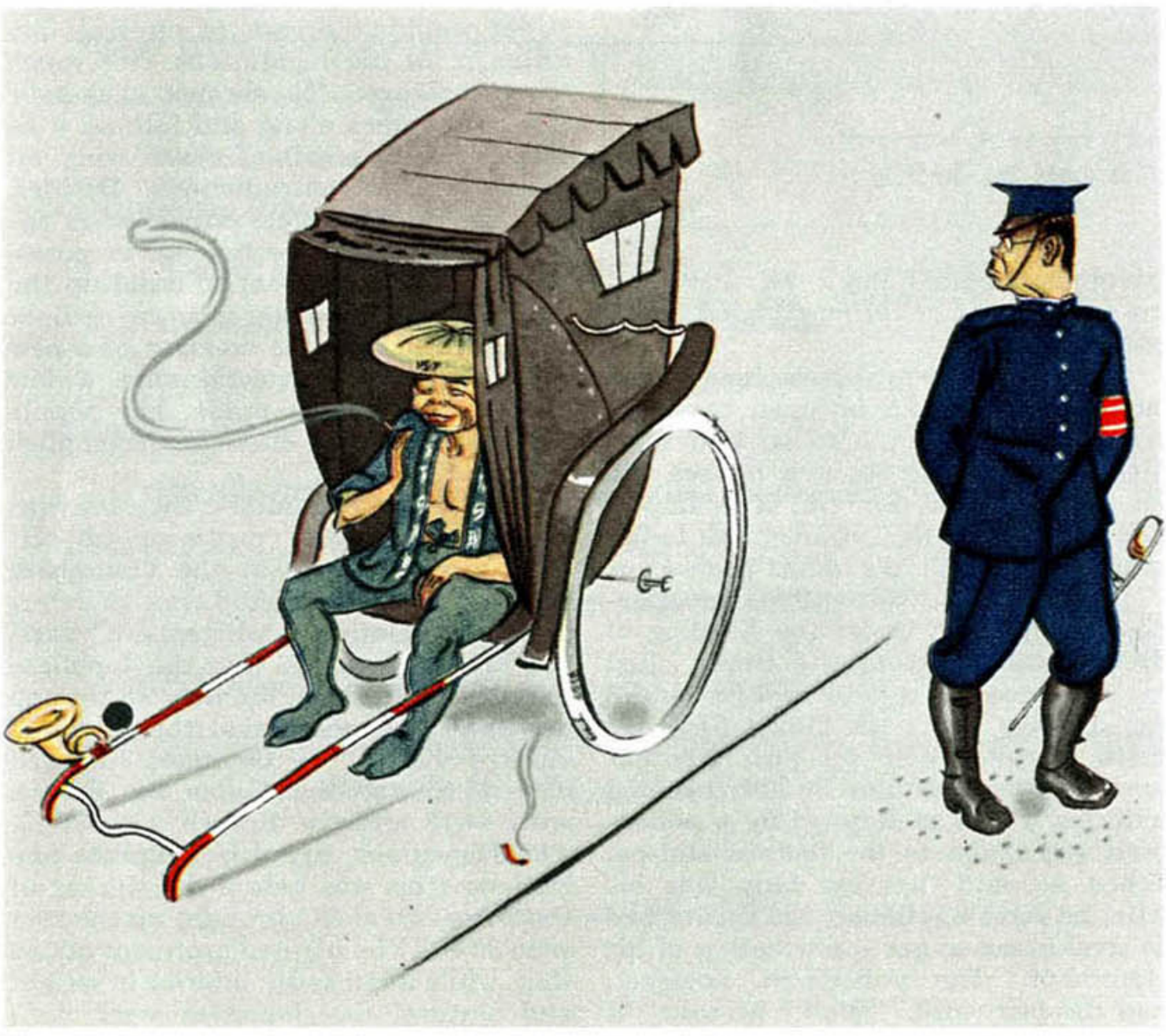
the two and a half or five yen he may spend on lunch or dinner. The egg shortage in Tokyo is admittedly the worst ever, matches and sugar are rationed under a ticket system, whale meat is sold instead of pork. Every now and then a few stale, dusty, not too sweet squares parading under the name of candy will appear on counters but the chocolate shop has no chocolates to sell.

Fresh milk is a rare luxury. Condensed and powdered milk may be sold only under a system of cards issued by the mayors of municipalities exclusively for the use of infants under one year of age. That is, if the request is accompanied by a doctor's certificate stating that the child can't get sufficient milk from its mother. On the other hand, mothers are urged to feed their babies as long as possible and it isn't at all unusual to see women in trains and other public conveyances giving the breast to children two or three years old.

Cases of food and drink poisoning have doubled in the last year, which caused the police to issue a warning against eating stale or bad fish, tainted raw vegetables, meat and cakes. They pointed out that, while many people might think they were economizing by eating stale food, the resulting waste of money through illness was more expensive in the long run. No one can say that the Japanese are not a logical people.

The lack of commodities such as milk, butter and eggs is a hardship to foreigners; the Japanese wouldn't mind if they could get enough of their staple food—rice. But they can't. Due to the poor crops in recent years, the great amount of rice that must be exported to feed the troops fighting in China, and the farm-labor shortage resulting from the "Incident," there isn't enough native rice to go around. It has to be mixed with grain imported from Indo-China and Thailand, which doesn't suit Japanese palates, or with barley and wheat, which suit their palates even less. Anyone sufficiently foolhardy to complain over the poor quality of the rice finds himself locked up in jail for three days without food. At the end of that time, he is let out with the question, "Don't you find that the quality of the rice has improved?"

Practically every day there is an article in one of the newspapers discussing the rice question. "Rice to the



Smoking during working hours is frowned upon and those who indulge are likely to be ticked off

Japanese," says one, "seems to be more a religion than a necessity. That men must eat rice and rice alone is not written in any book. A New Structure must be based on a new national method of living. This is more important than political or other reforms."

The more expensive brands of cigars and cigarettes have been done away with to "relieve the shortage of cheaper brands." A week or two often goes by when it is impossible to buy either "Hikaris" or "Cherries," the two most popular cigarettes. The tobacco monopoly's bland answer to that is a claim that there has been no reduction in output, the shortage is due merely to an increased demand.

The government authorities have taken smoking in hand also by enlisting the support of the National Spiritual Mobilization Headquarters in a campaign to induce moderation in the consumption of tobacco by inveterate smokers and abstention on the part of minors and women. Smoking during working hours or on the street is frowned upon and those who smoke are ticked off for flouting the spirit of the New Structure.

But Try to Buy It

October 7, 1940, was the date originally set for the ban on the sale of all luxury goods. In the end, at the pleas of the merchants, an extra year's grace was allowed. But the prices are now fixed by the government, and luxuries may be sold only under special license, which means to foreigners. An obi, (sash) for instance, cannot be sold for more than one hundred yen. Those of best quality have therefore been put away to be sold if and when the laws are changed. The same has happened with other expensive goods. In some cases, they are still left on display but when it actually comes to purchasing them it turns out to be impossible for obscure reasons. A young diplomat

looking at a cabinet for phonograph records was told by the shop clerk that he had better make a decision immediately because, next month, it would be half price. To an Occidental mind that didn't make good sense, but he eventually caught the point—next month the cabinet wouldn't be for sale.

Several large department stores have closed and the buildings have been taken over by the government for offices. In keeping with the spirit of the times, the display windows show only the cheapest, least gaudy wares. Nothing must be done to tempt the purchaser. (Women's hats, for instance, must be either black, brown or navy blue and of only one model: a round, schoolgirl type with rolled brim, not exactly becoming to Japanese faces.) According to the newspapers, a salubrious effect is evident as a result of the luxury ban—people are now proud to wear old clothes and happy to flaunt patches instead of expensive finery.

The people who aren't either proud or happy to disport themselves in worn or mended garments are usually cautious enough to do so. Women who appear in the streets too expensively dressed run the risk of being slapped by some ardent patriot or being handed a ticket by a member of one of the feminine organizations. Usually, a girl who is handed such a ticket takes it meekly and walks on, but sometimes spirit is shown, as when one girl thus approached handed the card back, saying, "I am a weaver and happen to know that there is a difference of about one hundred thirty yen between the price of your clothes and mine." Many girls have adopted the practice of saving their tickets. The one who has the most is acknowledged by her friends to be the best-dressed woman in her circle!

The Ladies Rebel

It is impossible to buy a yard of pure silk in Tokyo. The foreigners who need to replenish their wardrobes or who are furnishing houses must send to Shanghai for dresses, upholstery or curtain materials. The same is true when it comes to purchasing sheets or towels. The natives make out with a staple fiber material known as *sufu*, which has only one quality — unexpectedness. Sometimes it shrinks to half size, sometimes it stretches and sometimes it just disappears.

The Japan Women's Federation actually dared to stage a revolt against sufu and called a meeting inviting many government officials and representatives of textile manufacturers to be present. There was an exhibit of 86 sufu garments sent in from all over the country, 82 of which had been rendered completely useless by one washing. Sufu, the woman said, was not any good for baby clothes, not only because of

its poor durability but also because it wasn't absorbent. Therefore, they added, the government's campaign to popularize the material was inconsistent with its earnest drive to increase the birth rate.

Faced with such arguments, the authorities gave in to the determined ladies by giving assurance that more liberal amounts of cotton would be allowed for particularly vulnerable articles such as socks, shirts, students' uniforms and baby clothes. The newspapers termed this surrender "A disorderly retreat from the sufu battle line."

Sufu, however, found one champion. He was a villager called Mr. Taguchi, who, after spending a convivial evening in an inn, took a short cut home with two friends by way of a railroad line. Due to poor timing, they were just halfway across the bridge when an express thundered down on them. Mr. Taguchi took a dive just outside the tracks as near the brink as possible while his chums sagged onto the rails. They were picked up later in baskets, but as the train whistled by our hero a protruding rod swooped him up by the knapsack on his back, depositing him at the other end of the span when the sufu strap gave way. "I picked myself up," related Mr. Taguchi when he'd caught his breath, "and made a deep bow to that knapsack strap which saved my life. I wasn't hurt and I had never before realized that sufu was such fine stuff in times of emergency."

September 16th has been set aside as a date for honoring the rabbits who have given up their skins to keep the army warm. Prayers are to be sent up yearly for the eternal repose of the souls of these heroes who are doing their bit for the Fatherland. "Dog Day" will no doubt come next, for, by order of the Ministry of Forestry and Agriculture, the canine population is to be cut down with the triple objective of using the hides for soldiers' shoes and gloves, and thus relieving the leather shortage, of saving rice and of protecting the public from mad dogs.

Only diplomatic, government, army and navy cars are allowed an unlimited supply of gasoline. No private cars are permitted on the streets unless they have been converted for charcoal consumption or other gasoline substitute. Seventy per cent of the busses now run on charcoal—that is, they do when they can get charcoal. When the authorities passed this law it seemed a brilliant idea; they didn't figure on the charcoal shortage that occurred last winter.

Sightseeing busses are prohibited, no matter what they burn, and taxis are rationed to seven gallons of gasoline a month. As a result, taxi drivers refuse to carry a fare farther than a few blocks, a run which takes much longer than it would to cover it on foot because the

driver turns off the motor every few yards with the naïve idea of saving fuel. With truly touching faith, he will usually even try to coast uphill. Pressure has been brought to bear on all hacks not to convey their fares to theaters, race tracks or other places of amusement and none may go within a block of a licensed quarter.

For over two years now the general adoption of a national uniform has been urged. It is khaki and looks very much like a soldier's uniform except that it bears no insignia. Somehow, the idea hasn't taken on as well as the authorities had hoped. The Hochi newspaper came forth with the theory that if neckties were prohibited, the strange reluctance of the public to clothe itself in khaki would be overcome. This brilliant inspiration came to the writer of the article like a bolt from the blue while on a train eavesdropping on a conversation between university students. "Appalling as it may seem," he cried, "during this period of a great national emergency, the youths were chattering about nothing more significant than the color and design of neckties." In a flash he knew why the national uniform was spurned. The Japanese treasure sack coats and don't want to abandon foreign-style clothes, and they regard neckties as cultural symbols indispensable with sack coats. Abolish neckties and the problem is solved!

However, the government is convinced that all subjects of the emperor will be in uniform within a year or two, and to encourage them it has been ruled that national uniforms will be regarded as correct attire on all formal occasions such as shrine and temple festivals, weddings, funerals and other functions both public and private. Protocol has been readjusted by the imperial household to permit the wearing of uniforms on all informal occasions within the palace grounds, including garden parties and informal receptions. Morning coats, however, will still have to be worn by those granted a formal audience with the emperor and on occasions when tribute is paid to the sanctuaries. Special badges are to be provided, which can be pinned on to the tunic of the uniform to proclaim what type of dress the wearer would ordinarily wear. A black badge, for example, will indicate that he is dressed for a funeral. A red one, that he is all togged out for a wedding and so on straight through to sports clothes.

Women also are to be put into uniform. The Welfare Ministry called a series of meetings with representatives of the War, Navy, Commerce and Industry, Agricultural and Forestry ministries, the Imperial Household Department, the Cabinet Information Bureau, the National Spiritual Mobilization Headquarters, the Clothing Association and the Japan National Uniform As-

sociation (no halfway measures for the Japanese) for the purpose of designing a simple uniform for women. The idea was to save material and promote increased interest in national-defense projects among women. The details of style and design were to be left to committees of more or less qualified experts who were expected to put their heads together and work out a little model combining the best features of European and Chinese styles. The kimono, it was decided, would not do as a basic model, the long sleeves requiring too much material and the skirts having a tendency to come open in front. It had already been necessary to set a movement on foot to force women to wear baggy pants when bicycling because, it was said, the sight of their kimonos flying open too often led young men into delinquency.

To date, the combined efforts of ten ministries, bureaus and departments, plus the various committees, have not been sufficient to decide on the perfect uniform. The machinery was set in motion last July; by November the Welfare Ministry had threatened to put an end to the bickering among the females by running up a little number itself, but it also has failed to find a solution to this serious problem concerning national welfare.

The New Structure allows no place for amusement or relaxation. Restaurants, bars and ice-cream parlors must be closed by ten at night. Japanese restaurants have a rule that rice and geishas can't be provided at the same meal: a patron pays his money and takes his choice. No liquor may be served before five in the afternoon. The New Grand Hotel in Yokohama has a sign reading, "We regret that owing to the new regulations the bar will be open at five." The patrons also have cause for regret as the only liquor served is native. This is due to the fact that the law forbids charging more than fifty sen a glass for any drink. It's a simple manner of doing away with imported liquor.

There are only three restaurants serving foreign food in the capital and not one place with music for dancing. Bridge and other games of chance may not be played in public places and, although there are three theaters and a few movie houses still operating in Tokyo, the public is offered every discouragement against attending them. It is one of the best examples of the government's policy of discouragement rather than prohibition. Some foreigners going to a movie one afternoon found an S.R.O. sign at the box office. They decided to go in anyway and take a chance of getting a seat when someone left. When they got into the theater, they found it three-quarters empty.

through the Looking Glass

Strictly No Necking

Most of the pictures shown are five or six years old and, aside from the dimness and flickering due to their age, it is difficult to see what is happening on the screen because the lights must be left on in the auditorium. This is to prevent any surreptitious love-making which would run counter to the spirit of the times. Lights must also be kept on in cars and taxis, partly for reasons of morality and partly to allow the police to see at a glance who is riding in the car.

The ancient and traditional Kabuki Theater has struck all frivolous plays from its programs and sticks to those depicting heroism in battle, love of country or parents. About twenty famous Japanese dances have been relegated to oblivion because they had to do with sordid romance and improper love —emotions that don't conform with the New Structure. Song-story tellers have amalgamated into a patriotic association to place their calling on a higher moralistic plane. They did this after the police had complained that their recitals had fallen into a sorry state, being much too entertaining.

The police also clamped down on "insincere" mind readers, astrologists and fortunetellers who bilked the public. Those who were sincere and not considered harmful to public order were allowed to continue their trades under a license system which also forced them to charge uniform fees. Soon after, the Tokyo Association of Fortunetellers decided to see only happy omens in cards, stars and tea leaves so that patrons might not be unduly discouraged in these times of great emergency and stress.

Skiing simply for fun was frowned upon last winter. The sport is all right if undertaken only with the idea of hardening the body. Those who went to mountain resorts and appeared to be skiing only for pleasure were ticked off by members of the Young Men's Association. If their attitude remained unchanged after such official reproach, they were dealt with in the "proper" manner by the authorities. That, in Japan, has an ominous sound and one may be sure that the snowy slopes were covered only with solemn little figures sliding down, grimly determined to harden their bodies with the least possible enjoyment.

The Municipal Education Bureau came to the conclusion that primary-school children participating in the annual field day had had too much fun in the past years. Now, not only has the custom of serving tea and cakes to visiting parents and friends been abolished but the children are not permitted to enjoy themselves at such wasteful and frivolous pastimes as eating an apple suspended by a string, without the use of hands. The bureau faced the

fact that, of course, it might be difficult to banish joy entirely from field events because some youngsters revel in athletic contests and announced magnanimously that any fun of this sort which filtered in would be accepted tolerantly as not essentially frivolous.

The Spiritual Mobilization authorities in Tokyo have found that elaborate weddings run counter to the new spirit and have recommended that they cost no more than twenty yen. This does away with any entertainment or exchange of gifts. *Sake* and food for attendants at funerals must be done away with as well as the custom of exchanging condolence presents.

There are 1,500,000 girls working in factories in Japan today with pay ranging from sixty-five sen a day for twelve-year-olds to eighty-five sen for those over eighteen. In another year this number will probably have doubled, for, in its moral drive, the government is making an effort to cut down the number of bar girls, geishas and prostitutes, who will now have to seek new lines of endeavor. The choice is limited to finding a husband or a job in a factory.

By law, bar girls are spaced farther apart than they used to be. Instead of each one being allotted about forty-three feet of floor space, she must now range over sixty-four feet. A newspaper pointed out that a few enterprising bar proprietors might get the bright idea of removing furniture to reclaim sufficient nooks and crannies to provide what with great and, perhaps, unconscious aptness it termed "*lebensraum*" for the present staffs.

The police have taken vigorous measures to do away with or, at any rate, cut down prostitution, which they refer to as "this shameful relic of feudalism." In Tokyo alone, the official figures number the geishas at 12,000, licensed prostitutes at 7,000, with about the same number of unlicensed. Just to prove that this time they mean business, the police from now on will refuse to recognize any contract for the sale of a girl into prostitution by anyone except her real father, and that for proper reasons. "Improper" reasons are such things as the settlement of gambling or other paign to do away with pleasure is that travel remains all that the Japanese have left in the way of amusement. Trains going anywhere are always packed and reservations for sleeping-car accommodations must be made at least three days in advance. Anyone wanting to buy a ticket for a journey of more than a few hours must be at the station at least an hour beforehand or risk missing the train because of the line-up in front of the ticket windows.

Trains are Not for Pleasure

It is the custom in Japan for every member of the family to see a traveler

off, and when a soldier leaves for war not only his family turns out but several hundred pinafored members of one of the two patriotic women's associations (together their membership totals about eleven million) whose main duty seems to be cluttering up railroad stations and shouting "Banzai, Banzai" to the brave laddies as they depart. That makes getting anywhere near a train practically impossible.

Last summer when a great complaint went up that there weren't enough trains, the railways put on a few extra ones. About a month later, they were taken off. The complaints again arose and were answered with the statement that there wasn't any point in putting extra trains into service since they still remained crowded. The Railway Ministry now distributes propaganda to prevent people from taking pleasure trips, and another step in the discouragement program has been the closing of the information bureau in the Tokyo station on Saturdays.

There have been a few voices lifted in criticism, not of the New Structure, but at the way in which it was being organized. According to the newspaper Kokumin, the upper house is made up of a bunch of sissies who lack enthusiasm for the New Order. The peers, simply because they haven't a clear idea of what the New Structure will be like, are coy and "effeminate" about supporting it. Another newspaper brought a complaint against the premier because of the age of the officials in the projected Imperial Rule Assistance Association. There was only one under fifty, which was scarcely compatible with the theory of a "new structure."

However, the ordinary man in the street wouldn't dream of offering any criticism of the regulations. It's much too dangerous. He accepts each new law as it comes along and follows it as closely as is possible, considering all of the various contradictions. Besides, for one carping article published in the newspapers there are ten full of praise and all efforts are bent to build up the Japanese ego. Nippon is to bring light to the world with the creation of a new order in East Asia, and once a few changes have been made, her people will be the right ones to accomplish this feat.

Just how well qualified they are was pointed out by a professor of science and literature at the University of Tokyo, who conducted tests to determine the relative intelligence of various races. He found that the Japanese led all the rest. Taking fifty as the top mark, he announced that the Japanese clocked 49.76. The Germans followed with 44.65 and then came the British with 44.18 and the French with 40.13. The Hawaiians, Spanish, Filipinos and Italians (this was before the signing of the Tripartite pact) brought up the rear with 30.00. The learned professor added

that, while admittedly inferior in weight and stature, the Japanese were definitely superior in lung capacity, running speed, accuracy of motion and, above all, grasping power. No country in Asia would venture to deny that last claim.