

## Censorship In Japan

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QUIETLY, unobtrusively, the Censor is at work in Japan. The quality of this censorship may be gauged by the following *haiku*, a Japanese poem of 17 syllables, which was submitted to the American authorities for pre-publication censorship and suppressed as containing material against American interests:

"Small green vegetables  
Are growing in the rain  
Along the burned street."

The reference is to a scene so familiar in present-day Japan, that of vegetable gardens planted by the Japanese wherever there is an available piece of ground whether it be along a busy thoroughfare or among the ruins.

And should you presume the above is simply an isolated case, consider the following:

"It seems to be a dream far, far away  
That we wielded bamboo spears  
Priced at only one yen and twenty sen  
Against the big guns and giant ships."

The reference here is to the fact that during the last days of the war the Japanese government had instituted a kind of Home Guard equipped only with bamboo poles as weapons.

It is rather difficult to determine why these poems were deemed dangerous. The *haiku*, as prescribed by long tradition, strives merely to evoke a mood by means of a paradox. The second poem probably is best interpreted as a wry comment by a Japanese on the astonishing lengths to which his war leaders could go in publicizing their asininity. Other interpretations of this second poem are possible but they would not represent so well the current preference of the Japanese for sardonic comments on their political and military immaturity—an attitude that is commendable both for its common sense and its humility.

But the American authorities in Japan are very touchy about criticism. Indeed, when one Japanese writes a personal letter to another he has to be very careful not to express a derogatory opinion about censorship because censorship stations located in Tokyo, Osaka, Fukuoka, and Nagoya are very busy looking for just such things. The italicized portion of the following personal letter, sent by one Japanese civilian to another, was deleted by the censor:

" . . . As I have not received your answer to my letter which was probably mailed on the 10th and in which I enclosed my photograph taken in January, I am anxious to know what has become of it. *Because the Occupation Forces now censoring in Hakata are ill-reputed, I had some misgivings in sending a letter to you, and I was awaiting your answer still more eagerly.* I suppose it must have been lost on its way. . . ."

Not all letters receive this kind of treatment. More frequently the offensive item is transcribed to what is known as a "comment sheet" which is forwarded to the main office in Tokyo. The original letter then is directed to the proper person without deletion. The following excerpt from another letter was not deleted although the sentiments expressed probably are more bitter than those found in the first example:

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"... Most of the letters are examined these days, you know. This is quite provoking. Although freedom of speech and freedom of thought are loudly proclaimed, at present they are more limited than during the war. . . ."

On the basis of thousands of comment sheets pouring into Tokyo every week the Civil Censorship Detachment of GHQ has been able to state in its official publication:

"Broadly, the attitude toward SCAP and its policies is still favorable. However, strong exception is taken to certain directives and to the controls maintained on the press and, above all, to postal censorship, which Japanese in increasing numbers are criticizing."

From this and other statements issued by the Civil Censorship Detachment it is safe to say, first, that the American authorities are aware that our censorship policy is creating considerable bad feeling, and secondly, that they feel, despite the antagonism created, that the policy should be continued.\* But inasmuch as the reasons have been enshrouded in a mysterious secrecy the American observer cannot be blamed for viewing the whole situation with some suspicion, especially when he learns that deliberate efforts have been made to keep such information away from people in the United States.

Unfortunately I am not able to quote verbatim a memorandum sent by a high-ranking policy-making officer to the several District Censorship Stations throughout Japan and Korea but the substance of it was this: *that extreme secrecy must be maintained concerning all censorship operations inasmuch as there are groups in Congress and among the American people who would be adverse to the censorship policy. Those people must not be given access to the facts.*

While one naturally will make allowances for the fact that our military caste frequently prefers to impose a veil of secrecy over operations which, when disclosed, sometimes prove to have been quite inoffensive, one cannot avoid feeling uneasiness when a function so dangerous as censorship is wrapped in obscurity. Moreover, this uneasiness certainly is not allayed when the military authorities attempt to curtail the activities of American correspondents in Japan. One can find some justification in the exercise of censorship powers over a defeated nation which, at least theoretically, is still capable of disturbing the peace, but one finds it very hard to see how Americans, too, have deserved to be denied the opportunity to hear the truth.

Too much news is cut at the source so that the American public gets a bare trickle of information. There is hardly a day goes by in Japan when some important story does not come over the teletype machines with instructions from higher headquarters that it be canceled. Such was the story about the American general who stated that war with Russia could be expected not in a matter of years, months, or even weeks, but in a matter of days, and that the United States was making strong preparations in Japan for the event. Our militarists speak a strange language overseas which would quickly arouse the ire of the American people were it not for the activities of the Army's Public Relations Office which tactfully prevents disturbing stories from reaching the public.

\*It is an indication of the Army's awareness of the problem that Mr. Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union has been invited to survey the situation in Japan and Korea, acting as a private citizen.—THE EDITORS.