

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RR-12
Change

30 August 1968
14603 Longacre
Detroit, Michigan

Mr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Dick:

Though the spring and early summer followed what has become for us the expected Tokyo life-pattern - an almost preposterous level of "business" - it was less real than usual. Spare moments were filled with speculation about our impending return to the States. Events there culminating with the assassinations had stirred a great deal of talk among the members of the foreign community in Tokyo as well as with our Japanese friends. The Japanese, though shocked particularly by the death of Robert Kennedy to whom they felt close (He visited Japan and spoke to students of several universities.), were not deeply concerned on a personal level. They were able to make, half facetiously, references to the brutality and viciousness of American ways, and to realize vaguely that the problems with which America now struggles grew out of the very social and economic conditions towards which they are striving. Still, the widespread ownership and tragic use of guns in America is quite incomprehensible to the Japanese (who have, it might be added, more direct methods).

The uniformity and somberness with which visiting Americans intoned the facts of American change did not fail to unsettle us. We were told that if we had been away for more than a year we would literally not recognize things. By way of confirmation, an airforce sergeant stationed at Tachikawa Airbase just west of Tokyo related to us one night how drastically the nature of the new recruit had changed during the past five years. While obviously in no position to be openly aggressive, they are hardly docile, he said. A direct order is liable to bring a response like, "if I get around to it," or, if the order is particularly disagreeable, "you've got to be kidding."

We have seen, in addition, a few CBS documentaries on the Japanese commercial TV networks. These become perhaps more ominous in rebroadcast since the original soundtrack suppressed and an agitated sumo wrestling- or baseball-style Japanese reportage superimposed. Japan is no stranger to riots nor for that matter to hippies, mod styles, nor to psychedelic rock;

but riots are, to my knowledge, never spontaneous, and novel behaviour is confined to small segments in the large cities. These phenomena and words like "psychedelic" are quickly picked up by the mass media, particularly by the astounding array of thick, glossy weeklies and monthlies, but the actual nature of the phenomena remains obscure. Because of incomplete understanding and lack of the specialized equipment available in the United States, Japanese efforts tend to be gestures, evocations, rather than vital extensions of their Western models. With this and more in mind we approached US soil in a considerably more expectant humor than on other returns. Japan is psychologically as well as physically very much further away than Europe, cultural and personal isolation far more real there.

Hawaii was our first stop. We had come to attend the University's Festival of the Arts in this Century, though need of relief and the satisfaction of curiosity were also motivating. Several Japanese composers whom we know well, Yashiro Irino and Joji Yuasa, were guests at the festival, along with Bulent Arel, a professor at Yale. Four concerts were presented including one of works by young composers, and another of orchestral compositions. In my next newsletter, I will have more to say about this festival and an earlier one, "ORCHESTRAL SPACE '68" in Tokyo.

In fact, things had changed in Hawaii, but the newer aspects of life there were not exactly the sort of thing we had been prepared to encounter. The same process has continued as we begin to move about the mainland, and it is clear that the abrupt shocks we had been warned to expect are not going to materialize. The changes are more subtle and, of course, appropriate to the various conditions of different locales. Possibly the lack of shock is due to the fact that Americans living in Japan are, on the surface, not so poorly informed as one might think. The Far East Network (FEN) sustained by the US Armed Forces carries a complete twenty-four hour schedule free of advertisements, though not of regular announcements in the nature of "public service" spots as we have in this country. Some of these, aimed at youth in and out of the service, are beautifully done and thoroughly "with it." Others are embarrassingly chauvinistic, almost grotesque. A good example of the latter category is the singing commercial for God that is sponsored by the chaplain's service. A mixed, close-harmony group backed by Les Brownian sound (a more than slightly dated idiom considering the audience segment toward which it is presumably aimed) belts out the following message:

"Where'd you get the idea you could make it all by yourself?
Doesn't it get a little lonely sometimes -
Out on that limb - ~~hmmmm~~ -
Without Him?

On the other hand, three hours of visceral rock per day, news on every hour, the rebroadcast of baseball and football games, special current events programs, and the weeknightly program, "What's Happening?" project a continuous and reasonably accurate picture - so far as it goes - of the country and its current concerns. News broadcasts faithfully mention even draft card burnings and protests without editorialization. There are also four English language newspapers in Tokyo. Three, The Yomiuri, Mainichi, and Asahi, are translations of the largest Japanese newspapers (which are, incidentally, national publications, appearing all over Japan on the same day), and one, The Japan Times, is exclusively English language. These, along with Asian editions of the major newsweeklies, make a good deal of information available to foreign residents in Japan. Information through print and film, however, is not comparable to experience, and we were primed for the feel of a new reality beginning with Hawaii.

One has come to expect a constant of physical eruption in America through urban building and road development. It is evident in Hawaii as elsewhere. The most striking changes seem to us to be in the nature and quality of services, however. These, in turn, reflect the social impact of the youth market, and changes in the work force stemming from automation, integration, and increased social mobility. Qualifications not permitting, I am unable to go into the sociological aspects of change more than to list a few of its obvious products and to register our subjective reactions.

Young people swarm over the streets and beaches of Waikiki, which is south of the older city of Honolulu. The majority of them are not obviously affluent, though they are remarkably, pervasively blond (a new "Clairol" formula has apparently overcome the peroxide perils). One bearded fellow we met on the beach was a highschool teacher in Southern California, and was visiting his family. Since his wife is an airline hostess and constantly on the move, "family" life has assumed a curiously elastic guise for them. Another young man replied, "I'm not sure," when I asked if he were a university student. He had not done well in school during the spring and was waiting - in Hawaii - for word from his department. Both were dressed cleanly and modestly, but the clothing was worn and contradicted both the origins which would have been necessary to support a summer in Hawaii ten years ago, and the buttoned-up, tweeded, corded regulation apparel of the last generation. It was fairly clear that these young people were not uncomfortable about being there. They slept on beaches, with friends, around hotel pools, complained about accomodations, loved the water and each other, dressed as scantily as their tans and shapes merited, and in the process altered the idle-rich atmosphere that once cloaked the names of Hawaii and Waikiki.

With them, and for them, came the most obvious changes in Hawaii: a profusion of inexpensive eating places, the standard steak-salad-baked potato fixed-price dinner, snack bars, "mini-meal" stands; three or four reasonably well stocked bookstores; souvenir shops which had moved eastward to Indian incense, meditation jackets, necklaces for men, and psychedelic posters; two or three new movie houses showing current fare; and live attractions geared for youthful audiences: The Doors, The Rascals, and Simon and Garfunkel.

Now, on the mainland, our impressions are rather different. Tourism is no longer supreme as it is in Hawaii, but youth, certainly is. The effects of social restructuring, mass education and mass media, progress in civil rights, and so on, are everywhere, just as we anticipated they would be, but those apocalyptic changes are not immediately evident. For the first few weeks, our suspicion was that things are proceeding socially and culturally just about as we would have expected (hoped) they might, and that the shock resides in the just now dawning awareness on the part of older persons and the fundamentally conservative press.

This intuition seemed confirmed during several visits to the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor. Most succinctly put, it appears that the "beat" values (to use the historically accurate term) of ten to fifteen years ago have become the mass values of today. Where legions of cord suited rep tied young men used to stride, there now shuffle hords of irregulars clad in whatever they happen to feel fits their persons. Pendelton plaids, shirtwaist dresses and heels have been replaced by bell bottom trousers, minis, and sandals. It all suggests that students are far less concerned about building themselves and their appearances to accepted images of young businessmen or suburbanites. Having been fully in sympathy with many of the beat values when we were in school, the present collegiate tendencies seem perfectly reasonable if not gratifying.

Japanese school children are placed in identical navy blue uniforms until college where they adopt scarcely less severe and regimented clothing. As noted above, there are pockets of dissent, some of which are quite extreme, but the overall picture is subdued, restricted by narrow selections of rather drab colors, and by regimentation of styling. The very wide range of stature between the pre-war generations, many of whom are just over five feet tall, and the present day urban teenager, who may well top six feet, makes style directly responsive to size. In Japan, as well as here, the youth market is becoming dominant, and there are indications that competition in the clothing industry may succeed where social means have failed to give the young outlet for their individualities.

American teenagers attending a movie in the Ginza are conspicuous not only by virtue of sheer size and more explorative clothing, but by their generally louder, more outgoing good humor. The ability to easily vent reactions shows up particularly clearly if one compares the response of young movie audiences. Last year, we saw the last James Bond film, "You Only Live Twice," which had Japan as its primary locale. It was a Saturday night, and the audience was heavily stacked with still uniformed highschool students, university students (carrying the ubiquitous paperbacks which themselves are invariably covered with brown paper dustjackets), and Shinjuku (the most swinging of Tokyo's various satellite downtowns) hippies replete in individualistic clothes and disgusted slouches. All were waiting, we guessed, not only for the spy gadgetry but for an opportunity to pass judgment on the ways in which Japan had been portrayed. Yet the first Tokyo scene including a geshia being transported in a man-powered rickshaw - a sight rare enough to provoke Japanese stares in contemporary Tokyo - passed without a murmur, and the relabelling of the New Otani Hotel, which served as a chemical company in the film, drew only scattered laughter. Nothing, in fact, neither slapstick nor brutality, brought what I would call an honest roar of response. The single strong reaction of the evening came from the American teenagers in attendance. At one point, Bond is told that the Japanese masseuse is responding to the hair on his chest (Japanese men apparently don't raise it there.) whereupon he quotes an Oriental proverb: "Bird never build nest in bare tree." This was, with typical Japanese self-consciousness, not translated in the subtitles.

Many of the apparent changes in American life would seem to have been spurred by the needs of individuals, more than those of classes, to find and project themselves in reaction to monolithic models of economic and social success. Though the children of the occupation period have given the Japanese a wiff of racial tension, this is a problem of individuals, not groups. The emergence of youth is certain to become an extremely serious question, though. The discontinuity between parents and children reaches far deeper there than in this country. Not only mores but diet, the treatment of women, the manner in which business and academic relations are conducted, living accommodations, furniture styles (Chairs have replaced cushions, for example, and the changes involved are more than just a matter of perspective. The word for "sitting" in Japanese when applied to chairs is akeru, or "to hang oneself," clearly indicating the precarious, even foolhardy nature of the activity.), writing methods (The ideograms or kanji, are more and more being replaced by their phonetic equivalents as rendered in the hiragana phonetic alphabet.), and so on. I would think that social disruption between youth and age in Japan is quite in-

evitable; and while it does not involve, at this point, the very difficult matter of racial accomodation and assimilation that we have in America, it may be even more disruptive. Though it is difficult to pinpoint, one has the impression frequently that many of the imported Western institutions and processes, and much of its hardware is used facily but without deeply rooted understanding. Certainly the reverse is true, where Oriental things are transferred to the West. This process, in miniature, can often be observed in language, when a borrowed word assumes either a very specialized meaning and is applied to a situation corresponding to one small segment of its original significance, or a highly generalized significance, out of proportion to its original use. Hampered by lack of direct experience or the appropriate technical apparatus, the Tokyo versions of the psychedelic discotheque, for instance, tends to bore, rather than to bend, the mind. Their instincts are sure, but the speed at which they are already developing and industrializing makes it difficult for them to diversify at the same time.

Now that we have settled somewhat more into the American life again, other, more subtle and far more disturbing aspects of change are emerging. During the past few years, I have found myself frequently referring to the United States in terms of the ease of obtaining goods and services. Wrestling in Japanese with a salesman or clerk, trying to wait patiently while the ritual of wrapping proceeds, mentally converting centimeters to inches or Japanese "large" to US "small," and making various other cross-cultural allowances, we often longed for the land of 24-hour supermarkets and inevitable availability. But if Detroit and environs is a reasonable sample, our fading euphoria will soon have entirely disappeared.

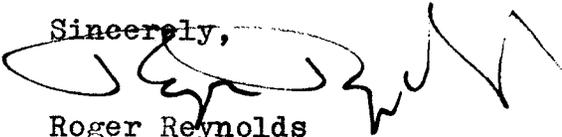
Shopping centers would seem to be handy only if one is eager to tap the pool of carefully standardized products. Outlying branches explain that they have little storage space and thus a thin stock, while the main store downtown is badly staffed and forced to cater to a lower-income central-city clientele. The size of supermarkets has expanded to the point that employees don't know what products are carried nor where they might be kept if they were in stock. Fresh fruits and vegetables can rot while in transit across the vast reaches between delivery platform and display counter. A call to a Greyhound terminal at 11:00 on Sunday evening brings on an answering service imploring you not to hang up because the lines are unusually busy, and an identical response is forthcoming the next morning at 6:00. The same for airlines of all sizes. A clerk at a local electronics supply house (contained in a large building which has become too cramped for the supermarket it used to hold) was genuinely astonished when I protested over the fact

that every item I requested was either "special order" or came only in predetermined (how determined?) optimal lengths, sizes, or numbers, carefully encased in plastic, and all costing a uniform, asymmetrical \$1.19.

More revealing, even chilling, was another event. Two small girls, aged five and eight, casually announced around sunset that they intended to walk around the block. The adults, engaged in conversation, didn't register the meaning until several minutes later. Suddenly their mother asked where they were, recalled their intention, and dashed from the house. Everyone else followed in great agitation. Karen and I were puzzled. We were staying at my parents' home in a relatively new, upper middle-class neighborhood of Detroit, and we could not imagine, from our own experience, what danger could exist on those shaded streets. Fifteen minutes later the children returned unharmed, while exhausted adults converged again on the house from all directions. The frantic mother assured herself that all was well and the evening went on. Later, we began to inquire about the reasons for such a state of panic, something unthinkable in this area three or four years ago, and received the beginning of what seemed an endless collection of stories concerning abductions, molestings, instances of exhibitionism, beatings, and so on. All had taken place within the past half year in this quiet WASP residential neighborhood.

Since that evening, conversations have more specifically raised the specters of fear and bewilderment, of pessimism amid the comfort of backyard barbecues and pools. We are, as yet, in no position to judge the full extent of the concern that lies beneath the surface of this community, nor to evaluate its nature. It seems certain, though, that it is far more than a simplistic product of the black challenge to middle-class values. We understand far better, now, the malaise that American visitors to Tokyo were trying to voice, and find ourselves no better able to articulate it. Still, we are glad to be here feeling it, watching with utter disbelief as the major political parties nominate and desecrate with apparent indifference to the urgency of the times and the concerns of the people.

Sincerely,



Roger Reynolds

Received in New York September 3, 1968.