How far is the introduction of Western civilisation beneficial to the Eastern nations possessing a culture of their own?

In the inevitable inequality of human achievement, as revealed in the story of mankind no less than in the history of nations and individuals, we may trace the working of a natural law of reversion. This principle of give and take is universal in the whole vast web of the universe, and is shown clearly in the inter-relations of the world’s inhabitants. Thus it is that we see today the resurrection of a continent, in the awakening of Asia from a torpor of centuries under the stimulus of the forces of European civilisation. The West, possessing what we are pleased to call a higher civilisation, as the result of collective advances which place it in the vanquard of the race, has succeeded in imposing that civilisation upon the Oriental peoples while these were in a condition little fitted to receive it. And so the epoch that beheld the consummation of western progress and Oriental education in the decade of 1914, has also beheld the unchanging East in the throes of change, and beholds to-day a new Asia rising on the ashes of the old. It is only natural, in the face of mutual criticism, that the question should be asked as to how far the East has benefited from contact with
The West.

Since the conclusion of the Great War, the claim of the white race to superiority has not gone unchallenged, and the very presence of the white man in the East has served as a pretext for stronger attack. Yet we need only consider the Western nations in comparison with the rest of mankind to realise that they are unique in respect of growth of knowledge, collective power, organisation and human co-operation. These are the influences that have been most instrumental in bringing about metamorphoses amongst the Eastern nations. It is a commonplace, but none the less true, that "Europe is the political continent", whereas Asia is the religious. And it is this very preoccupation with religion that excludes the oriental peoples from demanding and exercising political rights. Asia's refusal to admit this fact has been cited as the fountain-head of her present political unrest; for, absorbed in contemplation of the invisible world, she can never claim the same natural or acquired facility for government as the West. As Sir Henry Maine has judiciously observed, Asia is a caricature of 'status' compared with a Western civilisation of 'contract'.

For, although the present situation in Asia seems to indicate a return of the dynamic force which on three occasions in the past has driven a spear-head of Eastern conquest into the
very heart of Europe, yet, the natural condition of the East is static. In some respects, this may seem all the more surprising, as the kaleidoscopic variety of the Frangais of the Orient presents to our view a picture of diversity and change. Rather than an impression of unity and conformity. Nevertheless, until the beginning of the present century, the great Eastern peoples, who had carried many of the arts to a high degree of perfection before those who now exploit them had emerged from barbarism, were buried in a trance so profound that four hundred years of outside interference were required to arouse them. The present fervor may be no more than a temporary animating from the wings of established order, but the old order is certainly changing. What of the new? If Asia has indeed caught a vision of her higher destiny, is what extent is it due to western notions, and how much of it will draw its life from western sources?

This question inevitably touches upon the favorite theme, so often exploited by cheap journalist and alarmist authors, of the "Revolts of Asia." For that "great movement" the result of many factors—some of which are wholly outside the scope of our subject—ironically connected with the influence of European civilization. Whether it is more than a passing fever due to the alien virus of western ideas only the future can show. But, although we are assured that this
Striving effort at self-determination on the part of the
oriental nations is essentially the outcome of an historic
process of many years standing, yet we cannot overlook
the fact that it has been greatly accelerated by a con-
cerred resistance to the inroads of European influence.
The most conspicuous feature, then, of the modern East,
a movement so wide spread that it constitutes a
question of universal importance, is in great part
a result of the introduction of western civilisation.

It is surely not a digression at this point,
to pause for a moment to notice what is intended
by this vital question. For, without a clear under-
standing of the issues at stake in Asia to-day,
it is scarcely possible adequately to estimate the
tent and nature — beneficial or detrimental — of
western influence. We have, then, in the vast area
of the Asiatic continent, the meeting-ground of two
distinct civilisations, established on fundamentally
different ideas and principles. East confronts
West — the ancient possessor and the modern
intruder. Now, after many centuries, the tide has
turned, and the spirit of Eastern apathy is swiftly
making to a flood. No longer do the East and
the West face each other as possessors and possess
ers, but rather as rivals claiming an inheritance
on conflicting terms. On one side is the indis-
putable right of birth, on the other — to put
it simply — the right of conquest. Supporting the
former claim as the paramount right of the
noble to live unmolested in the land of his
fathers, under as little or as much administrative authority as he chooses to tolerate, but, above all, under his own authority. In support of the latter, and, indeed, largely justifying it, is the sum of resulting benefits — the benefits of stable government, the maintenance of law and order, the fostering of internal economic development, and the inestimable accompaniments of scientific progress. As we come to the crux of the whole matter — are these benefits real, and to what extent do they outweigh the consideration of native rights?

In dealing with Asia at all, it is difficult to sense the true atmosphere and conditions prevailing in what seems to the European watcher an immense and at times bewildering phantasmagoria of shifting national elements. However, our province is limited inasmuch as we are concerned only with those eastern nations possessing a definite culture of their own. Here we have by no means a clear-cut division, for, assuming it true that 'The Orient begins at the midst of the East,' there is the Near East to be considered, as well as the teeming peoples of further Asia. But for the purposes of this study, which can in no way pretend to be comprehensive, it should be sufficient to deal with the great representative nations and cultures of the Orient. Now undoubtedly the three offering best opportunity for examination are India, China and Japan. Each of these constitutes
a rich historic civilization which has come under the alien influence of the West. The degree of impact varies in each case, while in each case we see much remaining of the old idea in a system absorbing by a thousand channels the newer spirit of western ideas. What has been the result?

In India, whatever may have been the motives first leading to its acquisition, Britain, as the representative of modern civilization, is endeavouring today in the face of almost incalculable difficulties, to pursue the altogether admirable policy defined in the Government of India Act of 1919. That is to say, Britain is taking the existing foundation—a relic of former dynastic and ancient cultures from time immemorial—and attempting to work into the scarred fabric all that is best of western methods and ideas. No we have our excellent opportunity of studying the effects of modern civilization on an eastern people, more particularly since in India alone has Western ascendancy been translated into terms of direct rule. Thus the introduction of the primary accompaniments of the European system has been a comparatively simple matter, and we see in India the Western principles of science, industry and representative government applied in varying measure to a mixed native people. It is a great experiment, of course, and as yet...
we cannot answer completely for its success or failure. But let us consider something of what it has achieved.

First and foremost, Britain has guaranteed the 'Pax Britannica' — India, for so many centuries a helpless prey to foreign conquerors, is at least secure in that regard. No small part of the gain has been the keeping of domestic harmony in a community divided by such fanatical hatreds as influence the Moslems and the Hindus. Inestimable relief has been offered from varieties of famine and disease, while the contaminating vices of that latter menace in'typhus lines as waged tenaciously. It is difficult for any westerner to conceive of the conditions existing in India even to-day, but the ghastliness of these scourging practices should only remind us of what has been in the past, and is no more. The insepascible lot of the Indian.

Widows at the present time, a Paradise in comparison with what it was in the dark days before British rule. Then again, science and industry, those inseparable adjuncts of the western system, may have been introduced with all their advantages. Thus India reaps the benefit of all the mechanical appliances of our civilization, with the consequent stimulus of economic and material development.

Now thus all. Such a list might be prolonged indefinitely — benefits which western civilization, and western civilization alone, can give to a nation which has spent its existence,
for hundreds of years, in a backwater of human progress. Education has been responsible for an increased mental receptivity, with a corresponding intellectual and political reaction. Moreover, the principle of Democracy, that fundamental ideal of representation so peculiar to the nations of the West, has been gradually introduced. It is doubtful, of course, whether the Eastern mind will ever comprehend the meaning of the democratic principle, in which the sovereign power is vested in the will of the people. In the same way, it is doubtful whether the East will ever comprehend the scientific attitude towards life, well defined as the ultimate aim of Western civilisation in the words of a celebrated scientific economist: "With power where religion could only exhort us, to the reality which art and music have dreamed of, science will compel us or science will destroy us, so that henceforth civilisation shall be either for all or for none." But it is certain that the destruction of tradition and authority, the traditional and indigenous forms of government, and the adoption - however superficial - of the scientific point of view, have constituted the most significant reforms in modern Asia. We do not claim for a moment that these innovations have been entirely beneficial in their effects - in some ways, they have done much harm, and have proved extremely disruptive and disintegrating factors. But, speaking...
generally, they have worked their way in as liberating, emancipating and elevating forces, that is to say, as distinct advantages attendant upon the introduction of western civilisation. So that, for this particular case, we may sum up the position in the words of a great British legislator: 'India has gained more, far more, than she has lost by British rule.'

The epitome of the more obvious benefits of western influence in the East, applies equally to the other Eastern nations. In China, of course, we have a more recent question, for here we find a close contact between western civilisation and that which is natural to the old Eastern Empire, without any justification for the interference beyond the most primitive of reasons. When, some certain years ago, the most ancient dynasty in the world fell in a single night, to be replaced by a Republic on western lines, it was felt that the process of modernisation was complete. That the step was premature, the condition of China to-day bears convincing evidence. But we are heartened by the spectacle of a national government emerging from the chaos of conflicting parties, and the new phenomenon in the growth of a central unifying machinery for the whole vast nation. China has felt, possibly more than any other Eastern people, the antecedent springs of labour in the new birth, but when the hour is past, we may with confidence anticipate the growth of a new nation, turning aside from
The purely naturalistic activities imposed on Japan years by the Powers, and divesting her hardly won freedom to science, art and economic progress.

Passing from China on travel to the Japan of to-day, we find a people who have deservedly won the title of "The Westerners of the East." For western civilisation in Japan is no empty shell, but a naturalised crop which has already come to flower. In the space of twenty years, Japan has developed from an insignificant island state in an amount exclusion into one of the great powers of the modern world. The story of this liberal and lucid movement in this marvellous little country, which has cast the whole of centuries in the span of a lifetime, is perhaps the most stimulating chapter in recent reform. And although we are told that the recognition of the failure of Japan's great imperialistic experiment has resulted in a complete change of thought and policy, so that to-day she strives after excellence of civilisation in other spheres than material aggrandisement and territorial expansion, still we cannot forget how much has been done by western influence.

In renewing their never ending quest, the Japanese people are turning once more upon themselves, exploring their own resources of spirit and seeking a way to victory along paths that are linked to the glories of the past. But the Japanese themselves would be the last to deny that the garden of their present prosperity came from the West.
In the light of the rising sun of Japan, the
new dawn breaking across the Orient has been revealed,
showing the full Renaissance of Asia to the wondering
eyes of Western eyes.

In these representative eastern nations, then,
we observe the results of European curtailment, introduced
upon a steadily broadening scale. How deep the roots
have struck, as yet we may scarcely judge, for
the East, which has the things of the invisible and
supernatural world as more significant than the
events of our visible earth, must always remain
more or less of a mystery to the impulsive, feudal
Westerns. Deep-buried in the womb of the future
lies the ultimate destiny of East and West, whether
the East will work out science from religion, or the
West religion from science, we may not know.
Perhaps the two will meet on a higher plane —
the plane of common humanity. At least, for
the present, we may watch the dual endeavours to
found a happy, co-operative and progressive community
for all mankind. In this great task the West has
played a dominating part for over three centuries;
it has often erred grievously and scored its record with
blood. Yet on the whole, the judgment ... will hold
its own: the world is better for Western energy
and Western light. 'Nowhere is this more true
than in those nations of the Orient,' with their
ancient cultures, who have found in these
alien forces the promise of a new life.
APPENDIX

As books of reference, I have consulted:

Asia in the 20th Century - A. F. Willey

Western Races and the World - F. R. Marson

The Reawakening of the Orient - Shirl, Frumm, Butler

The Orient and the Occident - Sir Valentine Chorot

The Problem of China - B. Russell

The Religious and Social Problems of the Orient - M. Ameshik

Mother India - Katherine Mayo

The Revolt of Asia - Kipling

- and other manuals and periodicals.