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## THE HERITAGE OF EASTERN ASIA

BY

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the publication of twelve monographs on modern Oriental culture beginning January, 1932, and continuing bi-monthly for two years as special numbers of THE OPEN COURT magazine.

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AMIDA  
Japanese

*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

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THE NEW ORIENT SOCIETY MONOGRAPH SERIES

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## THE HERITAGE OF EASTERN ASIA

A. EUSTACE HAYDON

The University of Chicago

THE pulse of the planet has grown feverish in the last century. The leisurely ages of the past in which it was possible for cultures to incubate and develop during centuries in comparative isolation are forever gone. All the world's peoples find themselves hurried by science and the machines into a new cosmic climate where problems, hopes, ideas and ideals multiply, in the midst of which traditional culture patterns lose significance and vitality. East and West are at last interested, not by choice but by necessity, in common problems and tasks which involve the destiny of the whole human family. Attitudes of cultural superiority no longer avail. The imperative is upon Orient and Occident alike to find the path into the future together. It is not a question of imposition of cultures, nor of cultural syntheses nor merely of interpenetration of cultures. The future battles everywhere for emancipation from the past. In the new world cultures there will be a unity because of the nature of our problems and our knowledge: there will be diversity because of the cultural heritage of the ages. This then is an attempt to understand the heritages of culture with which the peoples of Eastern Asia enter the new age.

The drama of world history has a central theme—the irrepresible drive of human desires for fulfillment. The cultures of the peoples are the more or less successful means of leading the desires of men in society to their goal. The basic pattern is woven about fundamental physiological needs—of food, sex and security. Out of group solidarity in the satisfaction of these needs emerge the earliest approved moral values. But when man desires not only to live but to live well, when his understanding of the nature of his world is enlarged and his practical mastery of the material environment is more effective, his interest centers on the higher values of life. The way is then open for the nobler refinements of social

living, for more specialized organizations and disciplines, for philosophy and art.

Yet every culture has its own individuality, conditioned by the nature of the geographic environment, the peculiar problems of its history, the fortunate or unfortunate accidents of time, its relations with other peoples. Thus any culture that has a long history is infinitely complex. Some elements may have a depth of thousands of years, may carry the marks of a score of changes in emotional significance in the drift of the centuries; some may be mere relics carried in the stream of a larger complex; some may be primitive forms rationalized out of all relation to their original meaning and function; some are novelties of yesterday. There is a certain hardness about a cultural element—custom, ritual, symbol—so that to the observer it may seem to be the same for ages, though its cultural significance may change. This problem of depth and time, of rationalization and interrelation of elements in a complex whole is the *pons asinorum* which the outsider must cross to enter into the understanding of the soul of a people.

In the cultures of the modern world the problem of change is central. Structures that have stood the storms of centuries are now crumbling. Institutions which to the historian have had a clearly-defined cultural significance in the life of a people are now acquiring a new cultural meaning for the modern generation. Symbols have an altered emotional value for the aspirations of a new age. Modernism is a world-wide fact. Change in the historic past moved with a slower tempo. The influence and effects of trade relations were absorbed gradually. The thrust of a conquering army shocked a generation and then the old rythm of life was resumed, the conqueror and his gifts of culture added to the ancient pattern. When waves of ruthless destruction overwhelmed a high culture, the early world required centuries to build on the ruins a new synthesis.

But now change is swift and radical. Titanic forces crowd all the races of mankind together into one vast economic interrelationship. The grasping fingers of the machines reach into the most remote recesses of the earth for raw materials. The lines of trade cross all seas and all frontiers. Family habits, social customs, community organizations, traditional modes of living are altered over all the world. The ancient balance of the social order is disturbed. Evils increase and are more sinister because the source from which

they spring is unknown. Maladjustments appear in the individual, in the village life, in group, class, racial and international relationships. The old world is vanishing before the effective magic of the machine. A new cultural orientation is inevitable and it will involve the fundamental principles of philosophy and religion. Science has not only introduced the virus of change into the social organism but has also given us a new interpretation of the universe, of the place and status of man, of the evolution of morals, laws and religions, of the function of gods and institutions.

Under all the changing embodiments of culture through the ages runs the unconquerable drive of the desires of men for the satisfactions of the complete life. This creative force does not fail. The phoenix arises from its own ashes. Out of the dissolving cultures of the past new forms and structures based on new philosophies of life are emerging. To the observer of world change the most fascinating phase is the creative transformation of the "unchanging East."

The purpose of this sketch of the heritage of Eastern Asia is not to trace origins, nor to write history, nor to discuss theories concerning the culture problems involved, but rather to present the characteristic pattern of cultures in which the soul of each people has expressed itself in the past and to indicate the trends of re-orientation today.

## INDIA

**I**N the story of man, the human individual is a fragile and transient factor. The waves of the generations rise and pass swiftly. Two things continue, changing and immortal, the biological and social heritages. The first is the product of millions of years of biological evolution and, in the germ cells, transmits the learned experience of physiological adjustment to the kind of planet in which man lives. It is relatively stable and slow to change. The second, or social heritage, is the bearer of the learned experience of a people in their age-old struggle with the problems involved in winning the values of a good life. The generations are born into it, shaped, controlled, guarded and consoled by it. Their desires are patterned and channeled to goals approved by it. They make their contribution to it and disappear. It remains. Because of this quality of continuity of the cultural heritage, it is possible, in spite of the changes of the centuries, to speak of the soul of a people. The ages of ex-