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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: