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THE PROSPECTS FOR THE AFRICAN CULTURE

A Case of the Comparative Study between A frican and Japanese Culture.

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During the last half century, Africa has undergone great change. Recently, it occurred to me that within this time-period major developments have taken place roughly every fifteen years, and knowledge one day is no longer valid the next. For example, Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold sedar Senghor, Jomo Kenyatta, and Julius K. Nyerere, once leading lights in Africa who guided their countries to nationhood, were rejected by the next generation. However, in the case of Senghor, a proponent of dialectics, he actually welcomes this because he sees denial as a sign of progress and the dynamics of history. Be that as it may, no matter how much Nkrumah,s Pan-Africanism, Senghor,s Negritude, and Nyererets belief in Ujamaa be rejected, a certain portion of their thought would not have died, but transcends history and at times seems to come back to life like a Phoenix.

The relationship between blacks and whites, African and European, negro and white culture, forms a basic axis for tracing these rapid changes in contemporary Africa in a broad sense that also encompasses culture. The same is true for looking at and studying the future. The reason lies in the grime reality of the slave trade and colonial rule carried out by white men. When these relationships are looked at from a cultural perspective, the spotlight falls on the Negritude movement, a cultural movement flourished in Paris in the 19303 that centered around Leopold Senghor, a poet and former president of Senegal, Aime Cesaire, who came from the island of Martinique in the Caribbean, and Leon-Gontran Damas from Guyane. These poets who belonged to the Negritude School directly attacked the assimilation policy established by France for its colonies under the slogan, ttrejection of assimilationf, In their poetry, they extolled the beauty of Negritude and the splendor of traditional African culture, and by awakening Africans to a sense of their own dignity clearly set up Negritude in opposition to the idea of white supremacy, which France

had fashioned to rationalize its colonial rule.
The French attitude of those days, for example, was manifested even in Andre' Gide, being considered the leading European intellectual of the day, whose disparagement of Africans can be seen in his Voyage au Congo (1927). (Africans instinctively sense this type of disparagement lurking even behind the European social anthropology pioneered by Levi Strauss and E. Pritchard. Hence this point should be taken fully into consideration when dealing with Africa from the point of View of cultural anthropology.)
In this sense, although the contents of the Negritude movement themselves are criticized as being too abstract and conceptual, as a notiflcation of the beginning of a showdown aimed at normalizing the relationship between negro and white cultures, this movement can be considered a key cultural movement in terms of seeking equality between the two cultures. The locus classicus of this movement was Cesairets poetry collection, Cahier diun retour au pays natal (made public in 1939; published in 1947), which deals with the anger of the black people who had been sold as slaves in the Caribbean and the yearning that people who had lost their roots felt for the ancestral African continent.
The relationship between the two cultures can be divided into roughly flfteen-year time-periods counting backward from 1930. The notorious Berlin Conference took place in 1885; it marked the subjugation and colonization of Africa by whites, and thus is known as the 1tPartition Congressit The last black resistence to it, that of King Samoli of Guinea, ended about fifteen years later in 1898. The king met a violent end as a prisoner in 1900. But 1900 was also when the lawyer H. Sylvester Williams from the Caribbean opened the first Pan-African Congress in London, and thus marks the beginning of a different type of black resistance movement. A little less than fifteen years later the World War I broke out; blacks from America and Africa were sent to the front as soldiers, and blacks increased their power relatively speaking against whites in the form of the debt they imposed on whites. It eventually was linked to the Negritude movement in the 19305, which aimed at revolutionizing the consciousness of negros. The Ne'gritude movement should be viewed as a movement to restore the rights of blacks, who sought to regain a normal, positive relationship vis-a-vis whites, in place of the negative relationship forcibly imposed by the Berlin Conference. The movement to restore the rights of Africans and resolve the negative relationship in turn can be broken up into fifteen-year intervals: the end of the Second World War in 1945, and independence in 1960, known as the Year of Africa.
For blacks, the period between 1945 and 1960 was a time of organiza-

tion in preparation for independence, which could be seen as repayment for blacksl cooperation with whites in the Second World War, when several times more blacks served than in the World War I. In order to train personnel to run the state after independence, fundamental reforms were carried out in the education system under the administration of the former colonial powers. Capable Africans steadily acquired a European type of education and management skills. For example, the highest educational institution was elevated from the level of a college to that of a university college, and then to a university. In the Francophone countries, Dakar University (in Senegal) and in the English-speaking world, Makerere University (Uganda) in the East and Ibadan University (Nigeria) in the West became centers of learning that ambitious youths aspired to as a gateway to success. More outstanding students went to study at universities in Britain and France, where they absorbed the advanced culture of Europe and learn how to assist in the modernization of their own country. They were like Japanese writers of the Meiji period such as Mori Ogai, Natsume Soseki, and Nagai Kafu, who combined the Japanese spirit with the Western learning. Representative writers from this period include Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. The titles of Achebels flrst two novels, Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease, come from poems by W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, who at the beginning of the twentieth century perceived that the cycle of modern European civilization had ended at the close of the nineteenth century, and that white civilization had entered a period of change. The reason that Achebe used their verses as a title was because he had the same sort of insight about Africamthat it was entering precisely the same period of metamorphosis. Even so, although Achebe kept a f1xed distance from white culture, it is impossible to deny that he felt heavy pressure from it at this time. As Gerald Moore, a pioneer in the study of African literature, has aptly pointed out, even Soyinkals A Dance of the Forests, a play from his early period, is heavily influenced by Shakespearels A Midsummer Nightls Dream. It is common knowledge that he later developed his own dramaturge theory by blending traditional African and classical European theatre while admiring the absurdist dramaturge of Beckett and Pinter. In other words, this period was still one of total absorption in the all-powerful European culture. In the French-speaking world, on the other hand, the ne’gritude advocated by Senghor was undergoing major substantive changes during this period. In short, there was a major shift toward negritude that was open to the world, and away from a closed form of ne’gritude. The latter, which proudly rejected white culture and all white things, had locked itself up exclusively in what could be called a stronghold of negritude, which Senghor himself de-

scribed as Hthe negritude ghetto?
The impetus behind Senghorls awakening to this ghuman type of negritudel, was provided by the two years he spent as a prisoner beginning in 1940. During that time, he saw the narrow-minded racism of the Nazis before his very eyes, and his loathing for Nazism aroused self-hatred regarding the closed type of ne'gritude, which took the same position on ltpurity of bloodll as the Nazis. While a prisoner, he realized the truth about llracial mixturesll in the process of organizing and systematizing the knowledge of anthropology and folklore he had acquired thus far. As Senghor himself said, HThe course of the Negritude movement at the end of the Second World War was established as a result of discovering that, without exception, all the great civilizations of the Mediterranean beginning with Greece are the product of biological and cultural mixturefl Out of this arose Senghorls theory of a mixed culture, which provided the framework for his thought thereafter. It is expressed in his poem thew Yorkll, where he asserts that the only way to revive the enervated European culture is to infuse its white blood with black blood. At the same time, in order to display this open type of negritude to the world, Senghor participated in launching Presence Africain, the oldest quarterly cultural magazine in Africa which began in 1947. Thereafter, he led the world of African thought as its most powerful advocate. In a criticism of Sartre, Senghor said, nNegritude is not a dialectical upbeat but the downbeat? (It is not the antithesis but the thesis.) At the very least, by this point a reversal of white and black culture had already taken place in his mind. However, criticism of ne'gritude emerged around this time (i.e., in the 19505), especially among English-speaking writers, including Sembene Ousmane from his own country of Senegal. In particular, the South African writer, Eslkia Mphahlele, for example, said, uTo Africans, negritude is perfectly natural; it is not even worthy of a slogan. . . . Whether it is used for artistic activities or as a concept for struggle, to us negritude is just so much intellectual talk, a cult? Wole Soyinka of Nigeria declared, llA tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces. A tiger does not stand in the forest and say: 1 am a tigerf When you pass where the tiger has walked before, you see the skeleton of the duiker, you know that some tigritude has been emanated therefl Compared to their counterparts in Francophone countries who were subjected to the pressure of white culture in their youth as a result of the assimilation policy, these writers in English-speaking countries had grown up under indirect rule and therefore were able to preserve rather the traditional local culture, relatively speaking. For them, there was not much need to contrast ne'gritude so sharply against white culture. Moreover, by around 1960, the blacks themselves had matured and no

longer felt the need to confront white men as tensely as in the 19305. Mphahlele,s remark also gives us a glimpse of the differences that existed in the Africansl environment. Nkrumah,s criticism as a Fan-Africanist 11Pan-negroism is an obstacle to the solidarity of the African nations? is also conspicuous as an attack on the reverse-racism aspect of negritude.

During the following fifteen-year period, namely, from 1960 to 1975, as the African countries gained independence one after the other, they proclaimed Africanization to be their most urgent need. Africanization denotes the process after independence whereby Africans took over the posts of the white men who had monopolized the key positions in the government under colonial rule, and the period was marked by great advances in this direction. However, only the elite, a privileged class referred to as 11white Africans," reaped the benefits of independence. These were the people who had studied under white teachers at the only one university in the country and had gone off to study further in Europe. They were steeped in European education and could not sever the deep bond linking them to the former European overlords. Independence not only did not beneflt the common people; the 11white Africansl, hagrantly abused their privileged position through tyranny, chaos, and corruption, and the gap between the rich and the poor deepened while the despair of the populace increased daily, creating the foundation for a series of military coup-dletats.

The novel, The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born (1968), by Ayi Kwei Armah from Ghana and the short story, The Spideris Web, by Leonard Kibera from Kenya are two works that urge social reform depicting satirically the tyranny of these 11white Africansll and the despair of the people. The system of rule by these uwhite Africans? who remained rigidly tied to white capital economically and culturally, was perceived of as neocolonialism. Since around 1975, a cultural movement has sprung up across the African continent seeking to wipe out the negative structure of colonialism and neocolonialism, which had continued since 1885, and restore relations between white men and black to a normal, positive structure in the everyday world rather than in an abstract, conceptual realm, as in the case of Senghor.

Among the older generation, the central figures in promoting the cultural movement at this time of reckoning are Ngugi Wa Thionglo and Micere Mugo, who took upon themselves the task of relentless self-criticism like Frantz Fanon, who devoted his life to wiping out the traces of white culture in which he had been steeped deeply. They directed all their energy to eradicating the residue of white culture, which formed a sediment in their subconsciousness. They stood at the forefront of the opposition movement, and were banished from their

homeland as a result of their antiestablishment activities.
A major role has also been played by younger authors who studied African culture under black professors at universities, which had been completed Africanized and remodeled. Even so, when it came to a final parting from this white culture, the appearance of two novels during this period that allegorized the humiliation caused by white culture in terms of prostitutes must be seen as very symbolic. The first one, Sacrifice, was written by Kole Omotoso from Nigeria in 1974. The basic theme of this novel is posed in terms of the question: IiCan the future be perfect for a people whose past is imperfect (that is, slavery, colonialism) and present merely continuous (that is, neo-colonialism, mutual self-destruction)?lt The novel depicts the early life of the illegitimate child, Lana Siwaju, whose mother was a prostitute. In the end, the mother commits suicide, and the last scene in the novel depicts her offering herself as a living sacrifice on behalf of Africais bright future. In other words, the violation of Africals virginity and its degradation under colonial rule are superimposed on the fate of a prostitute, with the prostitute being depicted as a sacrifice that has to be devoted to the Africa,s future and as a symbol of the ignominious past. Hence the path leading to the ttpureli modernization ofAfrica involves flrst of all burying this ignominious past; only then will Africals illustrious future open up. The other work, Petals ofBlood (1977), is a historical novel that was written slowly over a period of hve years, and thus is memorable for the author Ngugi himself. In it, the brothel run by Wanja, a prostitute-turned-madame, is depicted in terms of restitution, as having to be burned in the end to purify Kenya, which had been humiliated by neo-colonial tools of foreign capital.
Around this time, the slogan IIAfrican literature in African languages for Africanslt began to be proclaimed in response to this kind of cultural trend that attempted to wipe away the ignominy and subjugation that white culture imposed. For example, Achebe and Ngugi took the position that Africansi real feelings could only be conveyed in their mother tongue. They began in earnest to include Igbo and Gikuyu words in their own poetry and novel, and Ngugi has recently carried this one step further by writing his novels and plays in Gikuyu first, and then simultaneously publishing an English-language ver51on.
A similar kind of movement has taken place in the French-speaking world during the same period. In 1977, the cultural magazine Presence Africain, a bastion of the movement to promote negritude, passed the one-hundred-issue mark. To commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of its publisher, the Society of African Culture, a series of special issues were published between 1976 and 1977 on the iiNegro-

African Cultural Identity? They called for the founding of a new negro civilization and the renaissance of black civilization. In other words, behind this lay the basic recognition that the benefits of independence were monopolized by a small group of Africans, by ttwhite Africansll who were in conspiracy with white capital and could not be separated from it. It was realized that only way to be saved from this cultural crisis was to be surrounded by the common people and reshape the African cultural identity in order to overcome the new indirect economic exploitation, in other words, neocolonialism, which had replaced direct political exploitation by white men. The energy to promote this new cultural movement was to be tapped from the world of oral literature deriving from folktales, which the common people had preserved deep down from time immemorial, and of which Africa was said to be an endless treasure house.

Thus far, I have traced the arduous path by which the power relations between the white and black cultures changed dramatically every fifteen years or so since the partition of Africa in 1885, in the course of which Africans changed the negative structure to a positive one. I have also explained the Itinevitable logic" of the cultural situation in Africa since 1975, approximately a century after the Berlin Conference: namely, the arrival of the decisive stage in the separation from white man,s culture in Africa, and the growing movement to create IIAfrican culture for Africans? The crucial moment is now at hand to create a new African culture, but the most urgent task for Africans at this point is to create a unique African value system to serve as the nucleus of that culture. It happens to be a time when modern European civilizrttion is showing unmistakable signs of decline, and the tremendous enthusiasm and will on the part of Africans to establish a new African value system as the cornerstone for the new civilization of the twenty-first century have the aura of a mission.

While being involved in African literature during the last twenty years and studying the course of UtOpian English literature, I have come to think of European Modern civilization as beginning with the fifteenth century and closing this cycle of Modern civilization at the end of the nineteenth century. I consider the twentieth century (in the first half of which mankind experienced barbaric destruction in two world wars on a scale never known before) as a time of groping in search of the next new cycle of civilization. In that sense, I think that the time has arrived for Japanese to stop vainly pursuing the phantom of modern European culture, and reexamine our own traditional culture from a new perspective: namely, we should consider how traditional Japanese culture can contribute to the new civilization in the twenty-first century.

In 1979, Scnghor established the Univcrsitc dcs Mutants asa aplacc to experiment with the creation 01 this new kind 01 world Livilization. He chose L15 ’d location the Island 011 (iorcc, whcrc Africans were once gathered together and shipped 011115 slaves to America and Caribbean Islands. According to thc UniversitLL guidebook, the goal of the Univer-sitL’1 is as follows:

lLL1 culture proprc L1 joucr CC r61c11c, pcut6trclasc111c11culturc occiden-1L1lc", importL’c ct impoch par 1L1 colonialismc. Qucls quc soient les 111L4ritcs indeniablcs dc ccttc culture, il apparait aujourd’hui que son curacterc unilathal, privilc’giant csscnticllcmcnt la domination techni-que dc 1L1 nature, conduit, du liait dc son hL’igc’monic mondialc, a mettre cn peril 1211)leth cntitrc par lc gaspillagc inconsidc’rc’ dcs ressources et la pollution, sans pour autant r6$orbcr la miserc ct lcs ineEgalith sociLilcs ct nationalcs.

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The goal of a mixed culture, Scnghorls ideal, undeniably permeates this statement, but even discounting that one can clearly see the direc-tion, commonly shared by Africans, which African culture is now 111L1di11g in.

19110111 thc Meijipc11i0Ll(1868-1912)o11, Japan pursued modern Euro-pean culture exclusively in order to promote Modernization of our country (and since 1945 A111c11iL1L1n culture) to such an extent that we have lost sight 01 something cxtwmcly important By heading tradi-tional JL1pL111CSL Lulturc 111 the dirLLtion being sought by the A1ricans now, 1 think that L1 new path will own up Lnabling us 10 rLdiscover what we have lost and revitalize traditional Japanese Lulturc L15 we head into the lwcnty- first cc1111111y.Tl1c interest l have dcvclopcd in LOTIP pLuLLtivc11cscu1cho11A111LL111L111L1 JLimeLsc Lulturc 1n thcl List 10w years in tact stems 1110111 this 1Lrvcnt wish.

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taken by African writers who, hoping also to de-Europeanize African culture completely, aim to create a unique African value system and make it the nucleus for the new Civilization in the twenty-first century. One pattern focuses on folk culture; the other involves heroic epics. A leading writer for the first pattern is Okot pIBitek in Uganda. His first poetry collection, Song of Lawino (1966; the version in the Acoli language was completed in 1956), extols traditional African culture and the beauty, splendor, and indestructibility of its manners and customs. It is told through the voice of a beautiful, young woman named Lawino, who steadfastly resists the white manis culture impinging dangerously on the Acoli tribe in northern Uganda.

In this collection of poetry, p1Bitek satirizes the elite men (the 11white Africansii) imbued with European culture who act overbearing and haughty in public but internally are insecure and uncertain. In his collection of essays, Africais Cultural Revolution (1973), pIBitek passionately appeals to Africans about the need for the regeneration of traditional African culture, which was facing a crisis of life or death, the victim of modern life where a sham culture resulting from over-Europeanization was rampant. He calls for a cultural revolution. Incidentally, in the introduction to this work, Ngugi criticizes piBitekis limitations, saying, IIWhile I agree with piBitekis call for a cultural revolution, I sometimes feel that he is in danger of emphasizing culture as if it could be divorced from its political and economic basis? In other words, a cultural revolution by itself is useless in overcoming neo-colonialism. The year 1975 marks the beginning of the age when Ngugi and Micere Mugo are in the limelight (neither of whom can return to their homeland because of their activities as dissidents). Because the play they wrote together, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi (1976), has recently been performed in London, Ibadan, Harare (where it was translated and performed in the Shona language), Johannesburg and elsewhere around Africa and the play has become the most popular work in Africa today.

While leading the Mau Mau warriors in the war of independence in Kenya, Kimathi, the hero of the play, hides in the mountains of Aberdare, where he conducts a daring guerilla war against the British army. He was a legendary flgure similar to Robin Hood, who died on behalf of the liberation of the Kenyan people. The play depicts the trial where Kimathi, who has been taken prisoner, is tried. The judge, who has been bribed by the white people, and civilians (Iiwhite African?) try every possible means to persuade him to convert, but Kimathi stands by his beliefs firmly, and the play ends with him being shot. Ngugi and female writer, Mugo, were fellow students at Makerere University in the 19605. They had a plan to write this play in 1971, but were unable

to realize their conception, and then when they became colleagues in the Department of Literature at Nairobi University in 1974, the task of writing the play hnally proceeded quickly. The work has linked the two of them closely, and displays the strong inhuence from ptBitek, who was teaching at Nairobi University at the time.

Deep embedded in Ngugits consciousness is a basic awareness that even after independence Kenya continues to be dominated culturally and economically by foreign imperialists (particularly, of Britain and the United States, as well as Germany and Japan). He also senses that the present government run since 1966 by the KANU Party, which reached a peak under Kenyatta, has been completely taken over by tools of foreign capital. In order for Kenya to end this cultural subordination and attain complete independence, the most urgent task is to become deeply absorbed in the lives of the common people (the peasants and workers) and forge a truly popular culture based on the traditional culture that the people inherently possess in their native language. For this reason as well, it can be argued that there was a need to collect stories about Kimathi and build him up as the true embodiment of folk culture by showing him as a product of the people and the true hero in the liberation of the people of Kenya instead of Kenyatta.

Ngugi also helped to found the Kamiriithu Educational, Cultural and Community Centre in the Kamiriithu community in the belief that itA writer does not create on his own, but rather writes in concert with the people, while learning from themW He used this as the setting for a creative writing experiment jointly with the people; the play, I Will Marry When I Want, was the result ofthat effort. However, the performance of the play, which was sharply critical of the ltcompradoril culture, angered the government authorities, and for the entire year of 1978 Ngugi was held as a political prisoner in the Kamithi Prison. The novel he wrote in Gikuyu on toilet paper while in prison was later published under the title of Devil 0n the Cross (1980; English trans. 1982), and it further enhanced his popularity as a martyr.

Mugo has collected legends and stories about Kenyan women living in the countryside and is currently engrossed in writing a history of the women who served the cause of Kenyan independence-for example, the heroine Me Kitilili who walked all around the country from 1912 to 1914 organizing warriors to fight against the British.

Solomon Mutsuwairols Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe (1983) also falls in the same category. It tells the story of the life of Mapondera, a soldier from Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) who fought bravely against Cecil Rhodes white rule. The story, which was published in 1983, was woven together from legends and records. As the history is still very fresh, both writers have aroused the ire of the

current government and been banished from the country-an aspect that distinguishes this type. The Healers (1978) by A. K. Armah of Ghana, and the aims of Presence Africain mentioned above also fall in this category.

The second type might be called heroic epics. Whereas the first type draws on very recent history, these reconstruct from oral legends the lives of the great emperors, the embodiment of African values who ruled the African continent before the white llswallowsil liew from Europe and governed black Africa as a colony. The works create an African value system based on the essence extracted from the lives of these sagacious emperors. One example is D. T. Nianeis Sundiata_An Epic of Old Mali, a work about the sublime King Sundiata, who built the great Mali Empire in West Africa in the thirteenth century. Another one is Mazisi Kunenels epic, Emperor Shaka the Great, depicting the life of Shaka, an enlightened ruler and military genius, which has been translated into Japanese. Shaka was an epoch-making ruler who created a powerful Zulu kingdom by unifying the peripheral tribes in southern Africa in the first part of the nineteenth century. Shaka is still idolized all over Africa even now.

Also falling into this category is a film, The Life of King Samoli, Sembene Ousmanels masterpiece which will take another few years to complete. Sembene represents an unusual combination in Africa as a writer-director. He began his career as a novelist and then suddenly began to make f11ms, and his prodigious talent as the greatest intellect that modern African has produced has earned him the highest respect inside and outside of Africa. What was it that made Sembene despair about print culture and turned him in the direction of movies? It can be said to stem from his frustration about the inability of a written culture based on the French language to convey accurately the essence of either oral African literature, the great legacy of a non-literate culture, or the African value system, to Africans, whose literacy rate is still low. The development of whole matters seems natural, given Sembenels position as someone who lives as one of the people, as someone standing always on the side of the people who earnestly hopes to improve their lives. Moreover, he hates and attacks the abuse of power and has continued to oppose those who spoil the traditional culture.

In this way, the problem of written vs. oral culture naturally comes to the fore when analyzing the approach of African writers to traditional culture. In Japan, a recent decline in reading has been noticed among young people, and lately there has much talk about the crisis in the culture of the written letter, which has supported modern European culture during the last five centuries since Gutenburg. At this point, I would like to introduce a few examples of how Africans regard

oral culture in relationship to the written letter.
First of all, Mazisi Kunene has declared, liWritten culture is feudal; in other words, it supports a privileged elite and is too biased in favor of academism. In contrast, oral culture belongs to the masses and common people? This point is particularly applicable to Africa with its low rate of literacy, but that makes ears of those in competitive societies in the advanced industrial countries burn, which are biased in favor of written culture. During a visit to Japan in 1983, Niane made the following comments about this oral culture, which permeates every aspect of African social life, including in the field of law and medicine: uTo talk about oral culture is to talk about the development of Africafl And, ltCultures that center on the written letter occupy only a very brief period in the long , long history of mankind." According to Niane, ttOral culture is based on the masses; thus orally transmitted epics over a long period of time have been passed down from generation to generation, enduring rigorous criticism in the process. Historically speaking, the degree of accuracy of the oral literature is greater than in the case of written records. Even today, a group of professional reciters (kataribe in Japanese) called griot exist in Senegal. They recount legends and stories as well as the history of the royal family and society. After undergoing special training to enhance their memories, they recite oral literature before the masses once or twice a year, when they are severely criticized by the people. Through this process, the oral literature recited by the griot is further polished in terms of accuracy? I vividly recall Niane,s saying with a laugh, HWhen one griot dies, it is as great a loss as the burning of one library?
Looking at the situation regarding traditional Japanese culture, until the Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters) was recorded around the beginning of the seventh century, Japan formed culture without written letter same as Africa, and consequently retained a rich, outstanding oral tradition. It continues until today, along with the introduction of ideograms from China, and the invention of the Japanese katakana and hiragana syllabaries, which are derived from the Chinese characters. To that extent, the Japanese, too, should be able to uncover and display the essence of oral culture of high quality. I cannot help feeling that this forms the starting point for conducting comparative cultural research on Japan and Africa. I would therefore now like to seek an opening by presenting several examples suggesting this possibility.
The first one concerns communal cosmology constructed on the view of the animistic world. The Nigerian writer, Amos Tutuola, wrote a tale called The Palm Wine Drinkard(l952), a contemporary reworking

of an oral tale about spirits and gods living in the tropical rain forest which he had heard from elderly person when he was a Child. The following scene takes place at the beginning of the story:

But when my father noticed that I could not do any work more than to drink, he engaged an expert palm-wine tapster for me. . . . When he reached the farm, he climbed one of the tallest palm-trees in the farm to tap palm-wine but as he was tapping on, he fell down unexpectedly and died at the foot of the palm-tree as a result of injuries. . . . Both my friend and I dug a pit under the palm tree that he fell down as a grave and buried him there.

Later, the narrator says:

When I saw that there was no palm-wine for me again and nobody could tap it for me, then I thought within myself that old people were saying that the whole people who had died in this world, did not go to heaven directly, but they were living in one place somewhere in this world (we call this place lAraki-no-miyat in Japan). . . . One fme morning I took all my native juju and also my fatherls juju with me and I left my fathers hometown to find out whereabouts was my tapster who had died.

So the Palm Wine Drinkard sets out for the ttdeadsl town," in other words, the land of the dead to find out his dead tapster. Along the way, deep in the forest (the land of trees) he encounters everywhere savage beasts, strange threatening creatures, spirits ominously conspiring with the forest, along with myriads of deities. Whenever he meets them, the Palm Wine Drinkard says, uI myself am a deity. I am ajuju man. I can do anything in this world. I am the father of the gods." He can transform himself endlessly by means of jujutsu using juju, a kind of incantation, transcending dangerous places, and wandering through frightening forests. Arriving finally in the town of the dead, the Palm-Wine Drinkard entreats the palm-wine tapster to go back with him. The latter refuses sadly, saying that tihe could not follow me back to my town again, because a dead man could not live with alives." As Gerald Moore remarks about this episode: ItIt forms an intriguing parallel with the ancient myth of the deities Izanagi and Izanami in the Kojiki in Japan, where they are separated by Yomo-tsu-Hirasaka Hill in the netherworldHi (We call it also Ne-no-Kuni, meaning the land of the root of the tree in Japan.) Indeed, on reading The Palm-Wine Drinkard, I could not help equating it with the Kojiki. In Japan, where even though my translation of the tale is ordinarily accepted as a fan-tasy, it strangely enough keeps on selling about three thousand copies a year, and continues to be read in particular by young people. I secretly think that the reason is because the innate communal realism that the

Japanese possess inside themselves deeply like Africans, stimulates a latent sense of young people and awakens in them the innate primitive consciousness of the Japanese: namely, there we have a joint animistic attitude toward myths and cosmology shared with Africans.

Secondly, I would like to touch upon the subject of animism. African intellectuals who visit Japan show alike their keen interest in Shintoism. They seem to feel a powerful response to the indigenous Japanese view of religion, centering on the myriad gods and tutelary deities (t(jigumi or something like tehil in Aehebels novel) and the communal animism, whieh underlie Shintoism. I myself have been struck by the similarity to Japan of the shrines that are part of the primitive religion of the Yoruba tribe in the Oshobo area of Nigeria.

Animism is indigenous to Africa. Even Senghor, who was enrolled as the membership of llAeademie Franeaise in 1984 and received a great deal of attention as an African who is almost a French, said: HUntil l9l3, l was raised as an animist under the protection of my uncle on my motherls side. Even now, thanks to my uncle, I have not lost the feelings of the peasants." He also said, ltWhen I write poetry, animism lies at the undercurrent of my poems. But when I make a political decision, it is based on the European rationalism? Moreover, Senghor has remarked, tilt is negro sentiments that form the roots of mixed culture, and a Western kind of rationalism is grafted onto itfl

HWhat l have learned from Franeell, he also says, llis not the substance of ideas but the method of producing them and a sense of how to structure them? Senghorls remarks reflect a fundamental awareness that although Africans excel in terms of their sensibilities they lag a step or two behind in terms of reasoning ability, and lack a methodological and structuring mind and the capacity to abstract. In other words, the theory of a mixture, a Senghorian version of dialecties, derives from this situation in the sense of filling in the missing areas.

Professor Mohamadou K. Kane oti Dakar University, who is also from Senegal, like Senghor, is very knowledgeable about Japanese Haiku. a classical Japanese literary form divided into seventeen syllables, can in fact be seen as an art that developed on the basis of animism. Kane has made the followingy observation about Senghorls poetry, a product oil the outstanding African sensibility, and about animism in Africa: tlAliriea cannot be thought of separately from animism in the sense that spirits are always pereeived in nature. Although there are Christian and Islamic countries in Africa, even there animism deeply permeates the lives of the people, and its illuenee remains very strong. (Sembenels movie Ceda’o is about the discord between animists and Islam). . . . lior example, Senghor was

born into a Christian family, and was strongly enough iniiuenced by Christianity to think of becoming a minister. But for all that everyone of his poems clearly reveals the spirit of animism. He does not treat nature simply in biological terms, or consider it as something inert; it is full of vitality, and various symbols are scattered through it. In this way, Senghor depicts nature as something that is alivef, Kane also says that Iipoetry lies inside things? These remarks capture the essence of haiku and depict a man who truly understands the haiku-art.

For a long time, animism was unfairly suppressed as unscientihc, barbaric and backward, by the modern European spirit waving aloft the banner of science. In appreciating the revival of animism, I must at this point say something about the different attitude toward nature held by Europeans, who live in an individualistic society and Africans, who live in a communal society: a subject linked to a fundamental problem concerning human existence, the relationship between man and nature. Regarding the way Africans comprehend things in nature, Mazisi Kunene has remarked. iiThings Iin naturel exist in terms of the innate value of the qualities that they possess, and at the same time in terms of the value we humans assign to themwin other words, in terms of a dual valuefi To put it another way, when a poem says lithe flower is beautiful? it in no way means that the iiower itself is beautiful. The flower is beautiful because the flower innately possesses a quality that matches something that we humans in human society recognize as being beautiful (a double value). In other words, beauty is realized at the point where the force (NTU in Zulu cosmology) of the flower and human force echo and respond to each other. According to Zulu cosmology, everything in the universe is composed on the basis of NTU (that is,f0rce). All of nature, from flowers and mountains to elephants and human beings, consist of things or phenomena generated by NTU. To that extent, the universe forms an animistic world where NTU are in rapport with each other, and all things live in this world on a completely equal footing, totally free of distinctions connected with superiority or inferiority. However, in Europe in early modern times, as Sir Francis Bacon,s INew Inductive Methodl shown in his epoch-making Utopian book, iIT/Ie New Atlantis" (1627) clearly demonstrates, Inature, as its concrete state is considered in abstract terms, and principles are deduced from it, leading to further developments in science and physics.

As historical Changes in the sense of ilexploitation,l show, lnaturei at first was developed by means of scientific power to benef1t for mankind. Then, in the nineteenth century, excesses in scientific development were accompanied by not the development but the exploitation of nature. An individualistic society centering on human beings ac-

celerated the way to subordinate nature to man. One can see this in terms of modern European art and literature. As the title of Wilhelm Worringerls Abstraktion und Einfu'hlunq, a typical treatise on aesthetics in modern Europe indicates, the highly self-conscious and individualistic European artists imposed their aesthetic sense subjectively on objects in nature. As a result, they reached a point where it was possible to spoil the innate beauty of nature by ignoring nature,s ItforceII and one-sidedly infusing human sentiment into it. Heading with Kunene and Senghor, Africans concerned about the present state of civilization see the rupture between man and nature as being manifested now in a critical form such as the destruction of the environment and an impasse in European civilization. I fully agree. I think that this is precisely the very point where the significance of the revival of animism lies. I think that the contemporary significance of haiku also lies here, for haiku verses are predicated on an equal, reciprocal relationship between the nature intrinsical and manls sensibilities.

Thirdly, I would like to mention proverbs. Any Japanese educated before the Pacific War or the Second World War is all too well aware that proverbs have merged deeply into the rhythm of daily life in Japan (for example, IiStrike while the ironls hot/i ttAfter a storm comes a calmfl and IILook before you leapi,). The proverbs have been providing the underpinning for Japanese behavior, and have become a guiding principle as wisdom about daily life. Also, as children we have had plenty of experience being scolded by old people who cited proverbs. There are also pastoral sayings that evoke a warm sense of ones native soil, such as yanagi n0 Shita n0 dojo (tta loach beneath a willow treei,), which suggests that good luck does not always repeat itself.

There are two theories about the etymology of the Japanese word kotowaza (ttsayingII or ttproverbii). One is that it means Itverbal skillh or ttthe technique of speaking.H The other theory follows the school of thought espousing the idea of kotodama (lithe mystical power of words"), as seen in the work of the eighteenth-eentury linguist and literary scholar, Motoori Norinaga. Yanagita Kunio, the founder of modern folklore studies in Japan, adhered only to the interpretation of the word as Iiverbal skillfi and explained it in a broad sense in terms of the world of oral literature. (A detailed explanation can be found in his KOShO bungei 10 wa nam'ka (What is Oral Literature?1, Katowaza n0 Hanaslii (On Proverbsl, and Nazo to kotowaza lRiddles and Proverbsl). l myselfthink of Japanese proverbs as the essence of the Japanese peopleIs wisdom about life. They represent the sum total of the cultural legacy which the Japanese deep down within our subconsciousness have received and accumulated from our ancestors, and have been transmitted orally since ancient times.

In Africa, proverbs are widely used, especially in the daily lives of the Fanti, Zulu, Mongo, Banbara, and Igbo people. On how Africans view proverbs, C. L, S. Nyembezi says: iiThe proverbs are a collection of the experiences of a people, experiences some of which have been learned the hard way. Those experiences are stored in this special manner, and from generation to generation they are passed on, ever fresh and ever true/i (tiZulu Proverbs,,)

Emmanuel Obiechina focuses particularly on the social function of proverbs, when he writes:

The man who proverbializes is putting his individual speech in a traditional context, reinforcing his personal point of view by objectifying its validity, and indirectly paying tribute to himself as a possessor of traditional wisdom. So the use of proverbs, instead of individuating, both communalizes and traditionalizes a speaker. The effort of the traditional user of proverbial language is not to express his distinctiveness from the rest of the people but indicate attachment to the community and its linguistic climate. (liCulture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novelii)

In other words, through the act of using proverbs in everyday life, Africans live in midst of traditional African culture and embody African values. Moreover, Chinua Achebe, who comes from the Igbo in Nigeria, in his representative works Things Fall Apart (1955) and Arrow of God (1964) draws heavily on Igbo proverbs to describe the varied psychological attitudes of tribal members responding sensitively to major changes taking place as a result of the white manls invasion. For example, the uncertainty and fear of newly-coming change are expressed in the form of iiWhat one does not know is much, much bigger than oneself? The position of those who feel that one should adapt to change is expressed thus: iiA man must dance the dance prevalent in his time? In this way, Achebe tries to give proverbs substance while seeking the assimilation of the self with tradition. In short, proverbs play a major role in enhancing the concrete universality of Achebeis novels in terms of the development of the plot and the contents.

Thus far I introduced three aspects that have a common basis in Japanese and African culture to suggest an idea of how Japan can contribute to the formation of a new civilization in the twenty-first century through a comparative study of the two cultures. Finally, I would like to mention briefiy several examples involving the study of comparative culture, which are already in the process of taking shape. As this is only a beginning, my remarks are only very preliminary.

I have already commented on haiku, and will refrain from talking at length about it here. I would just like to mention a couple of points. First of all, a haiku contest sponsored by the Japanese Embassy in

Senegal was held in 1979 on behalf of the people of Senegal. The contest is now entering its tenth year, and the number of people who write haiku is growing rapidly.

Secondly, Professor Kane made the following remark about the benefits of haiku from the point of view of Africans:

Haiku has given young Senegalese who aspire to become poets an exeellent opportunity to regain a link with nature, that is, bone-dry nature, damaged nature, and, at the same time, nature colored by traditional animism tat is full of life beyond material things. By writing that kind of African nature in haiku_for example, cracks in the earth from drought_the Senegalese people have been able to return to nature. to perceive nature, and return to themselves.

His remarks indicate the high value that Africans attach to haiku.

Next I would like to mention comparative research regarding the traditional theatre. Koli Agovi, the head researcher at the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana, was once despair about the present state of African culture and said, sensing a feeling of crisis:

HContemporary African eulture has lost continuity with the traditional culture, and is completely poisoned by white culture? He says that he was saved by a trip to Japan. On seeing the traditional Japanese theatre forms, Nah, Kabuki, and Bunraku, he says, itThe confusion disappearedfl The reason is because he perceived that the tsum total of the eternal, unchanging traditional eulturel in Japan consisting of order, beauty, and harmony is firmly crystallized in these theatre forms.

Agovi published an excellent and extremely illuminating article on comparative culture in Japan, llCultural Presenecs in Japanese Theatre: An Al’rieanls Experience of Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku" (Bungaku; November 1983). In conjunction with animism, I would like to introduce here a passage dealing with che close relationship between man and supernatural phenomena that appear in the form of deities and wandering spirits2"

Although this exists mainly in the Noll theatre, its elements overtlow into Kabuki and lfunru/t’u. The world of the living and the dead are brought together by auditory and visual spectacle. The ebullienee of colour, costume, make-up, stylised movement, dr iams, chants and invocations, the use of bells and sumism. instrumental musie, helps to dissolve the demarcation between the two worlds, thereby creating a carefully balaneed atmosphere of reality and illusion, where communication lines are freely assumed and messages, obligations, and promises are mutually exchanged or shared. It is certainly not by ehanee that verbal elementsaehunts, reeitals, songs, dialogue and narrative-predominate over movement and action in this theatre. For the emphasis is on direct eommunieation. lt is as if in both Noll and

Bunraku, Africals verbal traditions of drama-the epic and the folktale-have been extracted and brought to life again on the Japanese stage. The Joruri narrator and his samisen instrumentalists, for example, are not very different from an ensemble of Griots performing Sundiata. Nor are they different from the folktale artist or the Ozidi Saga performer whose skill in oral delivery tshapes the wordl and builds a lsolid structurel of dramatic stories, often supported by a repertoire of songs, music and dance. In both traditions of dramatic art-the Japanese and the African_the medium of words is used to transform social and historical reality into fiction, and in the context of a willing suspension of disbelief, invest both human beings and non-humans alike with each otherls attributes thereby facilitating easy communication between the two separate worlds.

These insights by Agovi teach Japanese anew about the need to re-examine their own traditional culture from a fresh angle, namely, the search for a new civilization in the twenty-first century.

And, finally, Professor C. Wanjala, of the University of Nairobi, has said that he was deeply impressed by the thought of the Ainu, who worship fire as the root of all things, and bears as sacred objects, which he had heard about in Hokkaido, the northern part of Japan. He was also struck by Shiga Naoyals novel, Anya Karo (A Dark Nightls Passing). I look forward to his writing cultural studies comparing Japan and Africa with pleasure, in which the Japanese are bound to find very suggestive.

Kane, Niane, Agovi, and Wanjala, as well as Sembene all came to Japan at the invitation of the Japan Foundation. Sembene, who came to Japan in February 1984, explained the purpose of his visit to Japan this way: ltl came to Japan because I wanted to ascertain with my own eyes the ability of traditional Japanese culture to survive. If traditional culture and an advanced technological civilization have truly succeeded in living together in present-day Japan, it will provide a splendid model for the future of Africaf,

On the Japanese side, we must be fully prepared to meet and not betray their expectations. We must participate whole-heartedly in the creation of a bright new civilization belonging to the twenty-first century, and carry out our share of the responsibility.

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