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THE CHRYSANTHEMUM

AND THE SWORD

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图书在版编目（CIP）数据

菊与刀 = The chrysanthemum and the sword ：英文 /（美）本尼迪克特（Benedict，R.）著. —南京：译林出版社，2014.1

（字里行间英文经典）

ISBN 978-7-5447-4535-2

Ⅰ.①菊… Ⅱ.①本… Ⅲ.①英语－语言读物②民族文化－研究－日本 Ⅳ. ①H319.4：K

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字（2013）第242947号

书　　名　菊与刀
作　　者　〔美国〕鲁思·本尼迪克特
责任编辑　陆元昶
特约编辑　王正磊
出版发行　凤凰出版传媒股份有限公司
　　译林出版社
出版社地址　南京市湖南路1号A楼，邮编：210009
电子信箱　yilin@yilin.com
出版社网址　http://www.yilin.com
印　　刷　北京京都六环印刷厂
开　　本　640×960毫米　1/16
印　　张　15.25
字　　数　204千字
版　　次　2014年1月第1版　2014年1月第1次印刷
书　　号　ISBN 978-7-5447-4535-2
定　　价　20.00元

Ruth Benedict (1887—1948) was an American anthropologist and folklorist. She can be viewed as a transitional figure in her field, redirecting both anthropology and folklore away from the limited confines of culture-trait diffusion studies and towards theories of performance as integral to the interpretation of culture. She studied the relationships between personality, art, language and culture, insisting that no trait existed in isolation or self-sufficiency, a theory which she championed in her 1934 *Patterns of Culture*.

The Chrysanthemum and the Sword is an influential 1946 study of Japan. It was written at the invitation of the U.S. Office of War Information, in order to understand and predict the behavior of the Japanese in World War II by reference to a series of contradictions in traditional culture. The book was influential in shaping American ideas about Japanese culture during the occupation of Japan, and popularized the distinction between guilt cultures and shame cultures.

凤凰壹力
PHOENIX-POWER

总 策 划：贺鹏飞
责任编辑：陆元昶
特约编辑：王正磊
装帧设计：Metis 灵动视线 · 张莹
销售热线：010-85376701
投稿信箱：phoenixpower@126.com
官方网站：www.yilibook.cn
书店支持：字里门间 BELENCRE 连锁书店

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Japanese men and women who had been born or educated in Japan and who were living in the United States during the war years were placed in a most difficult position. They were distrusted by many Americans. I take special pleasure, therefore, in testifying to their help and kindness during the time when I was gathering the material for this book. My thanks are due them in very special measure. I am especially grateful to my wartime colleague, Robert Hashima. Born in this country, brought up in Japan, he chose to return to the United States in 1941. He was interned in a War Relocation Camp, and I met him when he came to Washington to work in the war agencies of United States.

My thanks are also due to the Office of War Information, which gave me the assignment on which I report in this book, and especially to Professor George E. Taylor, Deputy Director for the Far East, and to Commander Alexander H. Leighton, MC-USNR, who headed the Foreign Morale Analysis Division.

I wish to thank also those who have read this book in whole or in part: Commander Leighton, Professor Clyde Kluckhohn and Dr. Nathan Leites, all of whom were in the Office of War Information during the time I was working on Japan and who assisted in many ways; Professor Conrad Arensberg, Dr. Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson and E. H. Norman. I am grateful to all of them for suggestions and help.

RUTH BENEDICT

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Chapter 1

Assignment: Japan

The Japanese were the most alien enemy the United States had ever fought in an all-out struggle. In no other war with a major foe had it been necessary to take into account such exceedingly different habits of acting and thinking. Like Czarist Russia before us in 1905, we were fighting a nation fully armed and trained which did not belong to the Western cultural tradition. Conventions of war which Western nations had come to accept as facts of human nature obviously did not exist for the Japanese. It made the war in the Pacific more than a series of landings on island beaches, more than an unsurpassed problem of logistics. It made it a major problem in the nature of the enemy. We had to understand their behavior in order to cope with it.

The difficulties were great. During the past seventy-five years since Japan's closed doors were opened, the Japanese have been described in the most fantastic series of 'but also's' ever used for any nation of the world. When a serious observer is writing about peoples other than the Japanese and says they are unprecedentedly polite, he is not likely to add, 'But also insolent and overbearing.' When he says people of some nation are incomparably rigid in their behavior, he does not add, 'But also they adapt themselves readily to extreme innovations.' When he says a people are submissive, he does not explain too that they are not easily amenable to control from above. When he says they are loyal and generous, he does not declare, 'But also treacherous and spiteful.' When he says they are genuinely brave, he does not expatiate on their timidity. When he says they act out of concern for others' opinions, he does not then go on to tell that they have a truly terrifying conscience. When he describes robot-like discipline in their Army, he does not continue by describing the way the soldiers in that

Army take the bit in their own teeth even to the point of insubordination. When he describes a people who devote themselves with passion to Western learning, he does not also enlarge on their fervid conservatism. When he writes a book on a nation with a popular cult of aestheticism which gives high honor to actors and to artists and lavishes art upon the cultivation of chrysanthemums, that book does not ordinarily have to be supplemented by another which is devoted to the cult of the sword and the top prestige of the warrior.

All these contradictions, however, are the warp and woof of books on Japan. They are true. Both the sword and the chrysanthemum are a part of the picture. The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways. They are terribly concerned about what other people will think of their behavior, and they are also overcome by guilt when other people know nothing of their misstep. Their soldiers are disciplined to the hilt but are also insubordinate.

When it became so important for America to understand Japan, these contradictions and many others equally blatant could not be waved aside. Crises were facing us in quick succession. What would the Japanese do? Was capitulation possible without invasion? Should we bomb the Emperor's palace? What could we expect of Japanese prisoners of war? What should we say in our propaganda to Japanese troops and to the Japanese homeland which could save the lives of Americans and lessen Japanese determination to fight to the last man? There were violent disagreements among those who knew the Japanese best. When peace came, were the Japanese a people who would require perpetual martial law to keep them in order? Would our army have to prepare to fight desperate bitter-enders in every mountain fastness of Japan? Would there have to be a revolution in Japan after the order of the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution before international peace was possible? Who would lead it? Was the alternative the eradication of the Japanese? It made a great deal of difference what our judgments were.

In June, 1944, I was assigned to the study of Japan. I was asked to use all the techniques I could as a cultural anthropologist to spell out what the Japanese were like. During that early summer our great offensive against Japan had just begun to show itself in its true magnitude. People in the United States were still saying that the war with Japan would last three years, perhaps ten years, more. In Japan they talked of its lasting one hundred years. Americans, they said, had had local victories, but New Guinea and the Solomons were thousands of miles away from their home islands. Their official communiqués had hardly admitted naval defeats and the Japanese people still regarded themselves as victors.

In June, however, the situation began to change. The second front was opened in Europe and the military priority which the High Command had for two years and a half given to the European theater paid off. The end of the war against Germany was in sight. And in the Pacific our forces landed on Saipan, a great operation forecasting eventual Japanese defeat. From then on our soldiers were to face the Japanese army at constantly closer quarters. And we knew well, from the fighting in New Guinea, on Guadalcanal, in Burma, on Attu and Tarawa and Biak, that we were pitted against a formidable foe.

In June, 1944, therefore, it was important to answer a multitude of questions about our enemy, Japan. Whether the issue was military or diplomatic, whether it was raised by questions of high policy or of leaflets to be dropped behind the Japanese front lines, every insight was important. In the all-out war Japan was fighting we had to know, not just the aims and motives of those in power in Tokyo, not just the long history of Japan, not just economic and military statistics; we had to know what their government could count on from the people. We had to try to understand Japanese habits of thought and emotion and the patterns into which these habits fell. We had to know the sanctions behind these actions and opinions. We had to put aside for the moment the premises on which we act as Americans and to keep ourselves as far as possible from leaping to the easy conclusion that what we would do in a given situation was what they would do.

My assignment was difficult. America and Japan were at war and it

is easy in wartime to condemn wholesale, but far harder to try to see how your enemy looks at life through his own eyes. Yet it had to be done. The question was how the Japanese would behave, not how we would behave if we were in their place. I had to try to use Japanese behavior in war as an asset in understanding them, not as a liability. I had to look at the way they conducted the war itself and see it not for the moment as a military problem but as a cultural problem. In warfare as well as in peace, the Japanese acted in character. What special indications of their way of life and thinking did they give in the way they handled warfare? Their leaders' ways of whipping up war spirit, of reassuring the bewildered, of utilizing their soldiers in the field—all these things showed what they themselves regarded as the strengths on which they could capitalize. I had to follow the details of the war to see how the Japanese revealed themselves in it step by step.

The fact that our two nations were at war inevitably meant, however, a serious disadvantage. It meant that I had to forego the most important technique of the cultural anthropologist: a field trip. I could not go to Japan and live in their homes and watch the strains and stresses of daily life, see with my own eyes which were crucial and which were not. I could not watch them in the complicated business of arriving at a decision. I could not see their children being brought up. The one anthropologist's field study of a Japanese village, John Embree's *Suye Mura*, was invaluable, but many of the questions about Japan with which we were faced in 1944 were not raised when that study was written.

As a cultural anthropologist, in spite of these major difficulties, I had confidence in certain techniques and postulates which could be used. At least I did not have to forego the anthropologist's great reliance upon face-to-face contact with the people he is studying. There were plenty of Japanese in this country who had been reared in Japan and I could ask them about the concrete facts of their own experiences, find out how they judged them, fill in from their descriptions many gaps in our knowledge which as an anthropologist I believed were essential in understanding any culture. Other social scientists who were studying Japan were using libraries, analyzing past events or statistics, following developments in the written or

spoken word of Japanese propaganda. I had confidence that many of these answers they sought were embedded in the rules and values of Japanese culture and could be found more satisfactorily by exploring that culture with people who had really lived it.

This did not mean that I did not read and that I was not constantly indebted to Westerners who had lived in Japan. The vast literature on the Japanese and the great number of good Occidental observers who have lived in Japan gave me an advantage which no anthropologist has when he goes to the Amazon headwaters or the New Guinea highlands to study a non-literate tribe. Having no written language such tribes have committed no self-revelations to paper. Comments by Westerners are few and superficial. Nobody knows their past history. The field worker must discover without any help from previous students the way their economic life works, how stratified their society is, what is uppermost in their religious life. In studying Japan, I was the heir of many students. Descriptions of small details of life were tucked away in antiquarian papers. Men and women from Europe and America had set down their vivid experiences, and the Japanese themselves had written really extraordinary self-revelations. Unlike many Oriental people they have a great impulse to write themselves out. They wrote about the trivia of their lives as well as about their programs of world expansion. They were amazingly frank. Of course they did not present the whole picture. No people does. A Japanese who writes about Japan passes over really crucial things which are as familiar to him and as invisible as the air he breathes. So do Americans when they write about America. But just the same the Japanese loved self-revelation.

I read this literature as Darwin says he read when he was working out his theories on the origin of species, noting what I had not the means to understand. What would I need to know to understand the juxtaposition of ideas in a speech in the Diet? What could lie back of their violent condemnation of some act that seemed venial and their easy acceptance of one that seemed outrageous? I read, asking the ever-present question: What is 'wrong with this picture'? What would I need to know to understand it?

I went to movies, too, which had been written and produced in

Japan—propaganda movies, historical movies, movies of contemporary life in Tokyo and in the farm villages. I went over them afterward with Japanese who had seen some of these same movies in Japan and who in any case saw the hero and the heroine and the villain as Japanese see them, not as I saw them. When I was at sea, it was clear that they were not. The plots, the motivations were not as I saw them, but they made sense in terms of the way the movie was constructed. As with the novels, there was much more difference than met the eye between what they meant to me and what they meant to the Japanese-reared. Some of these Japanese were quick to come to the defense of Japanese conventions and some hated everything Japanese. It is hard to say from which group I learned most. In the intimate picture they gave of how one regulates one's rejected it with bitterness.

In so far as the anthropologist goes for his material and his insights directly to the people of the culture he is studying, he is doing what all the ablest Western observers have done who have lived in Japan. If this were all an anthropologist had to offer, he could not hope to add to the valuable studies which foreign residents have made of the Japanese. The cultural anthropologist, however, has certain qualifications as a result of his training which appeared to make it worth his while to try to add his own contribution in a field rich in students and observers.

The anthropologist knows many cultures of Asia and the Pacific. There are many social arrangements and habits of life in Japan which have close parallels even in the primitive tribes of the Pacific islands. Some of these parallels are in Malaysia, some in New Guinea, some in Polynesia. It is interesting, of course, to speculate on whether these show some ancient migrations or contacts, but this problem of possible historical relationship was not the reason why knowledge of these cultural similarities was valuable to me. It was rather that I knew in these simpler cultures how these institutions worked and could get clues to Japanese life from the likeness or the difference I found. I knew, too, something about Siam and Burma and China on the mainland of Asia, and I could therefore compare Japan with other nations which are a part of its great cultural heritage. Anthropologists had shown over and over in their studies of primitive people how valuable

such cultural comparisons can be. A tribe may share ninety per cent of its formal observances with its neighbors and yet it may have revamped them to fit a way of life and a set of values which it does not share with any surrounding peoples. In the process it may have had to reject some fundamental arrangements which, however small in proportion to the whole, turn its future course of development in a unique direction. Nothing is more helpful to an anthropologist than to study contrasts he finds between peoples who on the whole share many traits.

Anthropologists also have had to accustom themselves to maximum differences between their own culture and another and their techniques have to be sharpened for this particular problem. They know from experience that there are great differences in the situations which men in different cultures have to meet and in the way in which different tribes and nations define the meanings of these situations. In some Arctic village or tropical desert they were faced with tribal arrangements of kinship responsibility or financial exchange which in their moments of most unleashed imagination they could not have invented. They have had to investigate, not only the details of kinship or exchange, but what the consequences of these arrangements were in the tribe's behavior and how each generation was conditioned from childhood to carry on as their ancestors had done before them.

This professional concern with differences and their conditioning and their consequences could well be used in the study of Japan. No one is unaware of the deep-rooted cultural differences between the United States and Japan. We have even a folklore about the Japanese which says that whatever we do they do the opposite. Such a conviction of difference is dangerous only if a student rests content with saying simply that these differences are so fantastic that it is impossible to understand such people. The anthropologist has good proof in his experience that even bizarre behavior does not prevent one's understanding it. More than any other social scientist he has professionally used differences as an asset rather than a liability. There is nothing that has made him pay such sharp attention to institutions and peoples as the fact that they were phenomenally strange. There was nothing he could take for granted in his tribe's way of living and

it made him look not just at a few selected facts, but at everything. In studies of Western nations one who is untrained in studies of comparative cultures overlooks whole areas of behavior. He takes so much for granted that he does not explore the range of trivial habits in daily living and all those accepted verdicts on homely matters, which, thrown large on the national screen, have more to do with that nation's future than treaties signed by diplomats.

The anthropologist has had to develop techniques for studying the commonplace because those things that are commonplaces in the tribe he was studying were so different from their counterparts in his own home country. When he tried to understand the extreme maliciousness of some tribe or the extreme timidity of another, when he tried to plot out the way they would act and feel in a given situation, he found he had to draw heavily on observations and details that are not often noted about civilized nations. He had good reason to believe they were essential and he knew the kind of research that would unearth them.

It was worth trying in the case of Japan. For it is only when one has noted the intensely human commonplaces of any people's existence that one appreciates at its fun importance the anthropologist's premise that human behavior in any primitive tribe or in any nation in the forefront of civilization is *learned* in daily living. No matter how bizarre his act or his opinion, the way a man feels and thinks has some relation to his experience. The more baffled I was at some bit of behavior, the more I therefore assumed that there existed somewhere in Japanese life some ordinary conditioning of such strangeness. If the search took me into trivial details of daily intercourse, so much the better. That was where people learned.

As a cultural anthropologist also I started from the premise that the most isolated bits of behavior have some systematic relation to each other. I took seriously the way hundreds of details fall into over-all patterns. A human society must make for itself some design for living. It approves certain ways of meeting situations, certain ways of sizing them up. People in that society regard these solutions as foundations of the universe. They integrate them, no matter what the difficulties. Men who have accepted a

system of values by which to live cannot without courting inefficiency and chaos keep for long a fenced-off portion of their lives where they think and behave according to a contrary set of values. They try to bring about more conformity. They provide themselves with some common rationale and some common motivations. Some degree of consistency is necessary or the whole scheme falls to pieces.

Economic behavior, family arrangements, religious rites and political objectives therefore become geared into one another. Changes in one area may occur more rapidly than in others and subject these other areas to great stress, but the stress itself arises from the need for consistency. In preliterate societies committed to the pursuit of power over others, the will to power is expressed in their religious practices no less than in their economic transactions and in their relations with other tribes. In civilized nations which have old written scriptures, the Church necessarily retain the phrases of past centuries, as tribes without written language do not, but it abdicates authority in those fields which would interfere with increasing public approval of economic and political power. The words remain but the meaning is altered. Religious dogmas, economic practices and politics do not stay dammed up in neat separate little ponds but they overflow their supposed boundaries and their waters mingle inextricably one with the other. Because this is always true, the more a student has seemingly scattered his investigation among facts of economics and sex and religion and the care of the baby, the better he can follow what is happening in the society he studies. He can draw up his hypotheses and get his data in any area of life with profit. He can learn to see the demands any nation makes, whether they are phrased in political, economic, or moral terms, as expressions of habits and ways of thinking which are learned in their social experience. This volume therefore is not a book specifically about Japanese religion or economic life or politics or the family. It examines Japanese assumptions about the conduct of life. It describes these assumptions as they have manifested themselves whatever the activity in hand. It is about what makes Japan a nation of Japanese.

One of the handicaps of the twentieth century is that we still have the

vaguest and most biased notions, not only of what makes Japan a nation of Japanese, but of what makes the United States a nation of Americans, France a nation of Frenchmen, and Russia a nation of Russians. Lacking this knowledge, each country misunderstands the other. We fear irreconcilable differences when the trouble is only between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and we talk about common purposes when one nation by virtue of its whole experience and system of values has in mind a quite different course of action from the one we meant. We do not give ourselves a chance to find out what their habits and values are. If we did, we might discover that a course of action is not necessarily vicious because it is not the one we know.

It is not possible to depend entirely upon what each nation says of its own habits of thought and action. Writers in every nation have tried to give an account of themselves. But it is not easy. The lenses through which any nation looks at life are not the ones another nation uses. It is hard to be conscious of the eyes through which one looks. Any country takes them for granted, and the tricks of focusing and of perspective which give to any people its national view of life seem to that people the god-given arrangement of the landscape. In any matter of spectacles, we do not expect the man who wears them to know the formula for the lenses, and neither can we expect nations to analyze their own outlook upon the world. When we want to know about spectacles, we train an oculist and expect him to be able to write out the formula for any lenses we bring him. Some day no doubt we shall recognize that it is the job of the social scientist to do this for the nations of the contemporary world.

The job requires both a certain tough-mindedness and a certain generosity. It requires a tough-mindedness which people of good will have sometimes condemned. These protagonists of One World have staked their hopes on convincing people of every corner of the earth that all the differences between East and West, black and white, Christian and Mohammedan, are superficial and that all mankind is really like-minded. This view is sometimes called the brotherhood of man. I do not know why believing in the brotherhood of man should mean that one cannot say that the Japanese have their own version of the conduct of life and that