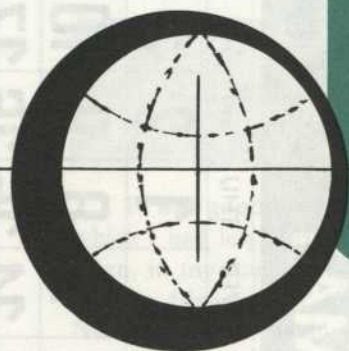




PHILIPPINES

Christmas in the Philippines

by Mamie Martel, M.I.C.

It would be interesting to note the many varied customs relating to Christmas still celebrated in various parts of the Philippines. Space and time being limited I will note only those I have observed in the province of Rizal, in Manila more particularly.

Remote preparation starts in mid-November, when air waves begin to carry familiar carols and songs. Boys and girls wander from house to house singing with gusto the familiar hymns learned at home or in school. According to an old tradition, the best food is offered to the carolers on their rounds. Caroling is an activity that quickens the sense of brotherhood among Filipinos.

The most typical Christmas decorations are star-shaped lanterns. Competition runs high. These lanterns are fashioned out of strong translucent coloured paper mounted over a wooden frame in the shape of a star. Sizes may vary from tiny six inches ones to the large models measuring twenty-five inches. An electric bulb is fixed inside the frame and these colourful decorations are hung in front of every home,

drawing the admiration of all who pass by, especially at night when shadows fall. On December 24, prizes are awarded to the makers of the most beautiful lanterns exhibited. Judges are often at a loss to know to whom the best award should go.

An old custom which still holds good, even in modern Manila, is the novena of Dawn Masses or *Misa de Gallo* offered in immediate preparation for Christmas. Members of a band usher in the beginning of the novena, on December 16, by rousing people at the unholy hour of 3:00 a.m. to attend the 4:30 Mass. Upon their return home, the people partake of a substantial meal to make up for their early rising. The principal item on the menu is the *bihingka*, a delicious pancake eaten with butter or syrup.

Midnight Mass is not different from ours. The only difference is the setting of tropical greenery around the Nativity scene. We Canadians somehow wish we could add wisps of snow here and there on palm fronds or on thatch roof.

WISDOM

OF NATIONS —

CHINESE WISDOM

Once upon a time, a Chinese sage was granted the privilege of travelling to heaven and hell. In this latter place he found a number of emaciated men and women squatting around a huge dish filled with appetizing rice. They were dying of hunger because their chopsticks were as long and as cumbersome as sampan paddles. As they

found no way of handling them, they remained famished. This spectacle so frightened the sage that he fled to heaven. There he found a great many men and women also gathered around a huge pot of steaming rice. Their chopsticks were similar to those of the other group, but they had found a way of handling them. Each fed the other and all were cheerful and content.

The following are a few of the thousands of Chinese proverbs which reflect the wisdom of ages:

The sandal wood tree imparts its fragrance even to the axe that hews it.

A hundred men may make an encampment but it takes a woman to make a home.

What the child says, he has heard at home.

Better do a kindness at home than walk miles to burn incense.

Be not disturbed at being misunderstood. Be disturbed rather at not having been understanding.

The two words "pure" and "leisure" no money can buy.

The man who cannot smile should not open a shop.

EVERY MAN, EVERY WOMAN, EVERY CHILD IN NEED IS OUR NEIGHBOUR

Pope John Paul II

1980

JANUARY

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SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

SEPTEMBER

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DECEMBER

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IT'S GOOD TO BE HOME

by Lucy Hsu, M.I.C.

It was good to be back in Peking which I had left thirty years ago. How often, in my dreams, I had visited my family, friends and acquaintances... Now it was the real thing — I was here among them, and how happy I was!

I spent a whole month in the city. In spite of many difficulties and of sufferings of all kinds, I experienced the tremendous love of God for me and for my family during this home visitation. At every turn, I felt him there guiding me, inspiring me what to say and what not to say.

Before going to Peking, I dreaded being unable to withstand the emotional shock such a visit was bound to have for me. Now that I look back, I see how the Lord really helped me. I listened for hours to my relatives and friends relating the sad events they had gone through. It was surprising how I could listen peacefully and calmly to everyone, for I have a natural tendency to be afraid. I felt an inner strength given me minute by minute. Thank God for this great favour.

I could not pray at my parents' grave for the tablet had been destroyed during the cultural revolution. In spite of this, I did not feel bitter towards those who had committed this outrage. Every time I recall this deplorable behaviour, I pray to the Lord. «Forgive them... They did not know what they were doing, and even if they did know, forgive them just the same.»

I did not go to Peking merely for the sake of meeting my family. I also had in mind to find out if Christianity was still alive in China. People still have faith. Some of my friends told me how they prayed in the course of their daily lives.

Before meeting my dear ones, my head was full of questions of all kinds. But as soon as I found myself in their midst, all I could do was listen to their tales of pain and woe. My sister and a number of my friends confided that they would have committed suicide if they had not had faith in God. I thank him for having given them strength and courage.

On my way back, I felt grateful for everything and sang a vibrant Magnificat in my heart. But I also felt sad and poor. One of my dearest aspirations had been to gather my relatives and friends to pray together. I thought we could share, as a group, our religious experience. Nothing of the kind happened. I had to behave with utmost discretion. There was no chance to organize any Christian gathering. What I shared about my religious and missionary commitment, I did on a private basis. Perhaps that was all the Lord wanted of me... I accepted my "poverty" and praised him through it. May he compensate for what it was impossible for me to do.

Now that I am back in Tak Oi and recall my visit to Peking, I can only say, "It is really good to be home!"

THE MODERN

JAPANESE

REMAIN

JAPANESE

Some people may be tempted to think that Japan lies in the countryside, hiding somewhere in the rice fields. This is what it was like for centuries. Farmers created the wealth which built the old Japanese civilization. But not many live in the countryside nowadays. The lucky ones get rich by selling their precious plot of land to encroaching cities. One third of all Japanese now live in the megapolis sprawling four hundred miles between Tokyo and Osaka.

This also is Japan, the Japan of today. To the western eye it may look like an imitation of any modern city in the West. But, bits of the old Japan remain tucked away in corners where one would least expect to find them.



*May each Christmas as it comes
find us more and more like him
who became a little Child for our sake.
Best wishes to you all and grateful thanks
for your precious collaboration.*



The more closely you look at Tokyo or at any other large Japanese city, the less familiar it becomes. There is something special here and this is energy. Japan is a northern country, a world away from the languors of tropical Asia. Energy here is of a special sort. The modern Japanese have the knack of and the need for doing things together. It is perhaps the same cooperative rhythm their ancestors learned working in the rice fields. They are good at being together. Their genius for living and working in groups is surely one reason for their success at borrowing from the West. It is a genius which perfectly fits the needs of a modern industrialized society.

The Japanese have been able to borrow and yet, to an extraordinary extent, to remain the same. It is not what they do that makes them Japanese so much as how they do it. You might think that the young Japanese have gone Western. They seem to have a yen for every kind of foreign fads. Perhaps they are not as revolutionary as they look. They may only be going the way some of their ancestors have gone before. We must not forget that the Japanese have been borrowers for many centuries.

In the big cities, at night the jumble of neon signs look Japanese enough. But the Japanese got their writing system from China centuries ago. China was then to Japan what the West became a hundred years back — a treasure house from which to borrow gadgets, philosophies, arts, and religions. A Japanese factory looks much like a factory anywhere else in the world. However, it has a certain rhythm of its own which begins with morning gymnastic exercises and continues on the assembly line. The Japanese have borrowed but somehow stayed themselves. Foreign ideas are fitted into their scheme of things. Very often they are

made to work out better than the original.

How the Japanese behave towards one another — that is one way they put their distinctive mark on even the least Japanese seeming situations. The only ones who do not follow strict rules of behaviour are the children. For the first few years of their life they can get away with breaking most of them but discipline catches up with them as soon as they go to school. With so many people crowded together, life would be intolerable if the Japanese failed to observe elaborate social rules. Politeness and discipline are part of the knack of working together. Such rules are all the more necessary in a country where people have such strong emotions.

The passions acted out openly in the Kabuki theatre are no less strong in real life. In daily encounters they are kept under strict control. Japanese emotions have a way of slipping towards sadness. The cherry blossom is cherished because it fades and falls so soon. In the old days, it was the brown chrysanthemum that was admired by connoisseurs. The passing of the seasons proves that neither beauty nor

happiness lasts. You can mourn the glory that has gone; you can never recapture it.

However modern Japan may look, the Japanese have a strong feeling of being different from other nations. They live in a small crowded country. It is made even smaller by the mountains that push the population into the few areas of habitable land. The people themselves are Japan's greatest natural resource. Much of the food and almost all of the fuel and raw material come from outside. The Japanese can never afford to take things easy.

This feeling of being a people apart dies hard. You perceive this even in Tokyo. Here, right in the middle of this monster city, shimmers the cool moat, and rise the noble walls of the Emperor's palace. It should not be looked upon as just another bit of leftover history. Instead it should be honoured as the fortress that lies somewhere inside almost every Japanese, however modern or Western he may look to outsiders.

Condensed from scenario of documentary film, "Where Is the Real Japan?"

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