

Interview with Basil Scott, co-author of the book *Two Pilgrims Meet*

Two Pilgrims Meet – the Search for Reconciliation Between China & Japan

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

Relations among nations often resemble those among human beings – a mixture of love and friendship but also bitterness and hostility. This is certainly a reflection of the complex nature of humans and the counterpoint of good and evil. When nations confront each other, people in those nations suffer from the damage, sometimes economic and sometimes physical due to war. In order to prevent such disasters, we need to seek reconciliation. This can require tremendous time and effort. In addition to economic and foreign policies, we may need something more human, and religions and philosophies may have some role to play.

Two Pilgrims Meet, published by New Generation Publishing in 2016, is a book about the role of religions and philosophies in this search for reconciliation. We interviewed Basil Scott, co-author of the book. He and his co-author Prof. Minoru Kasai are firm believers in the potential of Gandhian ideals for the betterment of humanity.

(Interviewed on July 12, 2021)

Introduction

JS: Could you give a brief self-introduction and tell a bit of background regarding the book?

Scott: Although I am English, I grew up in China, and spent 20 years in India. I first met Prof. Kasai when I went to India to study at Banaras Hindu University in the 1960s. We discovered that we had something important in common. During World War II, when we were boys, we were both living in Shanghai. I was in a Japanese prison camp with my parents. Minoru was in a Japanese settlement in the city. He was the first Japanese I got to know after the war. Meeting with him turned into a reconciliation experience for me – as we prayed together every day and became close friends. Forty years later we met again, first in Cambridge and then the next year in Japan, when I visited his home in Tokyo and we went together to Shanghai to see the places where we lived in the war. That is when we decided to write this book together on reconciling enemies and the amazing story that we have lived.

Mutual Learning of Histories of Nations

JS: China and Japan have a very long history of interaction and exchange. Do you know any good books written in English regarding their histories?

Scott: We both recommend the book by Ezra Vogel entitled *China*



Basil Scott

and *Japan: Facing History*, published in 2019 by Belknap Press, Harvard. Vogel was able to read both Japanese and Chinese and his book is based on his experiences in the countries as well as just reading. In 1979 his book *Japan as Number One* became a bestseller in Japan. Later in 2011 he published a book on China entitled *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. This became a bestseller in China where it has sold more than 1.2 million copies. In the book, Vogel deals carefully with the past relations between China and Japan. The first two chapters cover the periods 600-838 and 838-1862, which is the period when China and Japan were part of the same cultural family. It is only when you go to the 19th to 21st centuries in the remaining chapters that you come to the period of conflict. We must remember that for

the bulk of time, China and Japan have been good friends. It does explain it well.

JS: For the younger generation in Japan and China who have not experienced the war nor the period of bitterness between the two nations, the crucial responsibility of the past should be to learn about exactly what happened and how to prevent hatred from rising again. How do you think such a mutual learning process could be organized?

Scott: Facing history is very important for the younger generation. For the present generation the situation is not satisfactory. Young

people in China tend to receive their information about the war period between China and Japan from 1937-1945 from Chinese TV and films, which are hostile to Japan; while Japanese school textbooks tend to gloss over the war period without much detail of the damage inflicted on China by the Japanese military.

Efforts have been made by historians from Japan and China to rectify this by producing joint histories of the war period. In fact, in 2006 the governments of China and Japan agreed to launch their own Joint Historical Research Project. The final report in 2010 presented a compromise with two separate views of the war and not a joint account. A book of a different kind was published in 2012 called *Toward a History Beyond Borders* written by distinguished Japanese and Chinese historians addressing “Contentious Issues in Sino-Japanese Relations”.

Unfortunately, there are no current collaborative programmers in operation dealing with the war period. However, Prof. Liu Cheng, a historian at Nanjing University, is hoping to bring historians together from Japan and China as part of his work as UNESCO Peace Chair Holder in China based in Nanjing. Everyone knows about the miseries inflicted by the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but how many in Japan know or care about the Nanjing massacre? Prof. Cheng has been working on collaborative programs with Japanese and Chinese scholars, and to bring together the descendants of victims in Nanjing and Hiroshima. He was set to come to Tokyo last year before Covid-19 intervened.

Student Exchanges Leading to Friendship

JS: It is very important to continue dialogue. If we can continue to meet and talk with each other, the hatred and bitterness will dissipate. Among the various types of dialogue, how do you see the role of students and youth exchange programs between China and Japan? Would it be possible to establish a program similar to Erasmus in Europe?

Scott: This is of immense importance. After World War II in Europe the governments of France and Germany both encouraged students to visit each other’s countries. As a result, as many as 7 million young people in the 16-25 age group took part in these exchanges. This created a totally new environment by the young people who were not involved in the war. This paved the way for the formation of the European Union, in which nothing of major importance is decided without the agreement of France and Germany.

That is a very powerful example of the importance of student exchange. Currently there are no programs for student exchanges promoted by the governments of China and Japan. So your suggestion of an Erasmus-type exchange program would be very beneficial. In Europe the Erasmus program enables 300,000 students a year from 37 countries to visit member universities for 3-12 months, including learning another language. This is working extremely well. If a similar program was established in East Asia for students from Japan, China, South Korea, Mongolia, the Philippines, and other Southeast Asian countries, it would immensely encourage

people. Also, I know that many Japanese students are coming to China simply to learn Chinese. Erasmus is a very good model, but at the moment there are only a few similar programs involving just a few students from Tokyo and Beijing; they are not grand programs.

Tourism: Another Means to Reconciliation

JS: Tourism could be another channel for achieving reconciliation. After the pandemic is over, Chinese and Japanese will start visiting each other’s country again – would this be conducive to reconciliation in your opinion?

Scott: Tourism is also important for reconciliation between China and Japan. Tourism has grown between China and Japan from a total of 90,000 in 1980 to 900,000 in 1993 and 2.4 million in 2014. In 2019 there were almost 10 million Chinese tourists visiting Japan. This is immensely important because Chinese tourists are almost always impressed by Japan.

For example, one of my Chinese friends in Shanghai has been hostile to Japan despite all my efforts to convince her otherwise. But last year she and her husband went to Japan for the first time and are now enthusiastic about Japan. What we now need are more Japanese visitors to China. Many went in the past and stayed to work in China. Now the Japanese government could aid tourism to China by promoting tours that take Japanese to the best in China, especially to see the sites of ancient China as in Xian and to natural beauty spots such as those in Yunnan Province.

Dialogue Between Think-Tanks for Shared Vision

JS: There are other channels for reconciliation. To enhance the contribution of the two nations to global peace and prosperity in the post-pandemic era, they would need a shared vision of the future of the world. How do you see the dialogue between think-tanks of the two nations regarding the global economy, security, the environment, and so on?

Scott: We address the question of a shared vision in our book, and it is of fundamental importance.

Currently the governments of China and Japan are not working together as they have in the past. So, as you suggest, it may be necessary for academics and others to take this forward through joint discussion. The topics for urgent mutual discussion are clear and you are right to mention global economy, security, the environment, and energy. Of these the most promising could be environmental issues as the world is having to face urgent questions concerning the future of the planet. They should engage China and Japan equally because both are very concerned about the future of global warming and degradation of nature and so many other environmental issues. Energy is of course very important, as is security, but the one now with the potential for most discussion is

global warming and the future of the planet. It is important for both sides to listen to each other and agree on a joint vision for the future. In Japan you have many peace museums that could exhibit and listen to victims from China, and China can also give prominence to Nanjing as a UNESCO Peace City, so that is another way forward. Both sides must listen to each other.

It should surely be possible to invite Japanese and Chinese experts to discuss what each country can do to limit carbon emissions and to use different materials and processes for industrial development that save the earth from destruction.

A completely different approach would be to follow the example of South Africa where Desmond Tutu launched the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to enable victims on all sides to tell their stories. For the victims of Hiroshima and Nanjing to share their stories, so that both sides listen to their conflict narratives, is a valuable way forward. Conflict stories are always selections that eliminate events that do not fit in with the patriotic perspective. So experiences outside the usual national version of history are a rich source of new insights that encourage respect for the opposite country.

“Blessed Reality”

JS: One very impressive aspect of your book is the notion of “blessed reality”, which describes the positive nature of human beings. How can this idea of “God’s reality” be promulgated among all peoples?

Scott: “Blessed reality” is Prof. Kasai’s description that sums up his experience of being awakened to God’s reality. This is indeed a crucial question. When the modern world seems totally closed off to God’s reality, how can we hope for reconciliation inspired by belief in God? Primarily because God works through individuals. Reconciliation does not depend on numbers. As Einstein put it, “That which counts can rarely be counted.” It is often individuals who change the world.

For example, Nelson Mandela came out of prison after 27 years, not full of bitterness to launch a war as everybody predicted, but rather to work for peace, and even invited his chief jailer to be his guest at his presidential inauguration. In China the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Liu Xiaobo in 2010 – he was in prison, but he was also a Nobel Peace Prize winner. Before that, the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994 was awarded to Kenzaburo Oe, who sought as he said in his acceptance speech to speak “for reconciliation with the rest of mankind”. It is easy to overlook the fact that in China there are estimated to be about 100 million Christians, and there are many more millions who visit Buddhist temples. In Japan you will know better than I do about the influence of Buddhism and traditional Shintoism. It has not disappeared and is very much still here.

So what looks impossible for God to do in our media-dominated world is not as difficult as it appears. It is not, however, something that we can organize. Our book is full of examples of those who have been made aware of the blessed reality and it has brought about

reconciliation in China and Japan between former enemies despite decades of bitterness. In particular, we can look at Prof. Kasai’s own experience after the miseries of Japan’s destruction at the end of World War II; he sought for a glimmer of hope and found this in Christ. So breakthrough is still possible – by God’s grace not by human cleverness and arrogance, to use Prof. Kasai’s words.

JS: The episode of Takamori Soan is very impressive – it is really showing us that spiritual values can be demonstrated in a small local community rather than a large nation or urban area.

Scott: Yes, spiritual values can be demonstrated in a community, but it doesn’t have to be confined to a small community. The ideal, the vision can spread to others. The community of Takamori Soan near Fujimi is so impressive to me because of its memorial garden to the victims of Japan’s military aggression during the war in China, Korea, and other neighboring countries. There are separate memorials for the victims in each country. The central memorial, in Japanese, cries something like this: “In the sea of infinite, ceaseless tears I stand for ever.” In other words, I weep forever for what we have done to our brothers and sisters in China and Korea during the war. Those are powerful words. There are many Peace Museums in Japan, but none proclaim with such heart-rending words Japanese sorrow for the victims in China. I wish everyone in China could read and believe these words. Yes, it is a small community, but a community can become a movement, because it shows the real way out.

JS: The book also mentions Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. Can Article 9 be considered a declaration to support “blessed reality”, meaning that all people in the world are brothers?

Scott: A tremendous question. As Prof. Kasai has written, Article 9 is fundamental as it expresses the universal revulsion of ordinary Japanese after the war against the miseries of warfare and bombing. “Never again” was their cry and their longing. We suffered, everyone suffered. We never want to go through that again. That is what I thought too in my prison camp.

The trouble is that we are now led by people who did not go through the horrors of a world war, which caused misery in every continent. We are all brothers and sisters of the one human race. How could we be guilty of killing so many members of the one human family to which we all belong? This includes creation in God’s family. It is not just human beings that are part of God’s family, but nature as well. As Prof. Kasai discovered when he met Martin Luther King, and heard him say: “Reconciliation is not for the future, it is for now.” We should treat each other as brothers and sisters now, not in some future world. Article 9 is extremely important and as Prof. Kasai pointed out, this was not imposed by the United States: Japanese wanted it, and it came as blessing to him in Kyushu and all the people around him.

JS: Today, there seems to be a very serious social divide between the rich and poor, the elites and non-elites. Would this peaceful thought be effective in tackling this serious social divide?

Scott: Prof. Kasai feels very strongly about this social divide between rich and poor. It seems that now there may be a way forward through the movement for saving the planet as this does involve young people. My grandchildren are more concerned about saving the planet than anything else. That we are all brothers and sisters in the same human family should affect the way we live and the way that we treat each other. Many have thought this, but so far we have not found a way to eliminate the divisions between rich and poor. The movement for saving the planet may be the way out, uniting many across the world to save the earth from destructive methods. Awareness of the misery inflicted on many of our brothers by inhuman means of industry for the sake of profit may awaken us to the necessity of treating the planet and its human members with care and generosity.

Gandhi's Philosophy Highlighted

JS: You first met Prof. Kasai in India many years after the childhood of both of you in China. You both seem to have been influenced by Gandhi's philosophy, particularly in that all religions purport that love would create something great, but hatred leads to nothing.

Scott: For Prof. Kasai, Gandhi is immensely important. He has inspired generations of students at the International Christian University in Tokyo to follow Gandhi's principles of peace and *satya graha*. *Satya* means Truth and *graha* indicates holding firmly to truthful means. So this differs from pacifism by emphasizing the necessity of living and practicing truth in politics and in everyday life and using it as a force for reconciliation. For Gandhi, reconciliation and justice require non-violence, but also insistence on truthful action.

In my case Gandhi was a force for peace and reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims. He was totally against the division of India along Hindu/Muslim religious lines into Pakistan and India. When Muslims were being slaughtered in Calcutta in 1947 during the Partition of India, Gandhi went to Calcutta to stop the rioting and to save Muslims from Hindu violence at the risk of his life. We deeply respect his simple lifestyle. The universality of Christ's message of sacrificial truth and peace was echoed by Gandhi, and Prof. Kasai and I certainly agreed on this point.

JS: It might be somewhat easy to convince older people of the importance of love and the futility of hate. For young people, however, it might be a bit more difficult to convince them of the utility of love. In that regard, education has an important role to play.

Scott: Indeed. As you say, the media dominates everything and turns people in a different direction and almost blanks God out entirely. As with the movement emphasizing saving the planet, with my grandchildren there is an emphasis of the need for peace with animals as well as with human beings. A peace movement is against destruction and violence. It must go further, but it may be something that we can use as a starting point.

Magazine on Intercultural Exchanges

JS: Mutual learning about each other's cultures could potentially mitigate aggressive nationalism. Would it be a good idea to publish a magazine on intercultural exchanges, for example showcasing films and literature from Japan to young people in China and vice versa?

Scott: Yes, I think this is a very good idea – to have a magazine on intercultural exchanges. Japanese films are highly appreciated in China. Prof. Kasai certainly appreciated the work of Japanese film-actor Ken Takakura, whose movies were very popular in China. When he died in 2014, the Chinese minister of foreign affairs said that he had been the bridge between China and Japan. Chinese newspapers described him as an ambassador for Japan in China. Deng Xiaoping imported Japanese films into China where they became very popular. When we think of the 1,000 years of cultural involvement between Japan and China, there is an immense amount to be shared. Certainly, Japan appreciated and drew upon Chinese culture a great deal, and China sent its best to Japan. Similarly, the best in Chinese literature should be shared with Japanese young people. Youth need to be aware of the best in each other's cultures, as this is a real way forward and there is a lot to explore. It can also involve modern Japanese films and some things in China that can also be used.

JS: In conclusion, we can say that ceaseless communication through conversation, tourism, education, think-tank talks and so on could champion the notion that love is everything and that hatred produces nothing.

Scott: Beating hatred together is a beginning, but does not solve everything. When I met with Prof. Kasai in Banaras, if that is all we did then nothing would have happened, but we went deeper, and God intervened and exposed us to the blessed reality and united us in the discovery of God's presence.

JS

Written with the cooperation of Joel Challender who is a translator, interpreter, researcher and writer specializing in Japanese disaster preparedness.