

The Sense of Humor to See Through Human Hypocrisy To the Memory of the Late Professor Ronald Dore

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Ronald Dore passed away in Bologna on November 14, 2018, at the age of 93, after being in hospital for nearly ten days due to breathing difficulties. I am told that his passing was very peaceful.

Even in his late eighties, Dore visited Japan once a year and stayed in an inexpensive guesthouse. He appeared to have no desire for creature comforts and his tastes were by no means epicurean—he was always content with cheap *sushi*. However, when it came to discussion on academic issues or international affairs, he was instantly eloquent and sharp in wit. If I responded vaguely or quickly to his ideas, he would always push me to offer a definite opinion.

While his great academic achievements need no lengthy introduction, some brief remarks are necessary.

From his first book *City Life in Japan* (1958) to *Shinohata: A Portrait of a Japanese Village* (1978), his distinguished monographs share several common elements. Firstly, they always presented firm, empirical evidence, gathered from thorough fieldwork carried out over long periods, or, as in the case of *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (1964), from intensive study of a truly extensive range of historical materials.

Secondly, as a classic sociologist, Dore provided a comprehensive picture of society—social relations, structure and function—by paying close and wide attention to politics, economy and culture.

Thirdly, he had a deep interest in the effects of influential theories or the common ways of thinking of the time, which appeared to be hypocritical to him. Striving to identify the truth, he unveiled the faults of prevailing theories or myths and presented an alternative perspective or approach in place of

them. A clear illustration of this is his first work *City Life in Japan*, in which he simultaneously criticized on the one hand the unilinear theories of social and economic evolution—such as Marxian theories and the simplistic theory of development that does not take into account the ‘late development effects’ of catching-up society which often accompany the geographical shift in the focal area in the international economy—and on the other hand the theory emphasizing the uniqueness of Japanese culture exemplified by Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), which labelled Japanese society and culture only as the peculiar. Dore enlightened readers in and outside of Japan by disclosing these hypocrisies on the basis of unshakeable evidence.

City Life in Japan not only provided his remarkable definition of Confucian ethics, but also drew in all its readers with warm and heartfelt portrayal of small families or neighborhoods that were filled with laughter despite their daily struggle with poverty and hardship after the war.

Fourthly, Dore’s ability to reach such brilliant conclusions could be attributed to his international comparisons, largely of Japan and the UK, and also to his own ‘sense of humor to see through human hypocrisy.’ By ‘hypocrisy’ he was generally referring to the popular social theories and ideologies in a certain society of that time.

Dore maintained this basic stance throughout his subsequent works. In that sense, it is particularly important to look at one of his major works, *British Factory - Japanese Factory* (1973). After explaining causally the contrasting phenomena of the ‘British Disease’ and ‘Japanese prosperity’ by investigating the employment practices and industrial relations of both countries, he reached a bold and noteworthy conclusion; that is, that the

‘backward’ UK should catch up with the ‘advanced’ Japan.

We need to carefully ascertain to what extent Dore’s interpretative schema of Japanese economic development and modernization can help us to understand the individual process of development followed by South Korea, Taiwan, China and the Southeast Asian nations and to gain foresight into the way ahead for other impoverished societies.

In the 1990s, dark clouds hung low over the advanced societies. The strong winds of financialization, globalization, and neo-Americanization began to blow, and in China the great cogs of the ‘Socialist Market Economy’ began to turn vigorously. This era after the collapse of the Cold War structure may not have seen ‘The End of History,’ but it was seen as the age of ‘Capitalism contra Capitalism.’ In these circumstances, Dore had begun to view things more critically, having transitioned over half a century of Japanese study from Japanophile to Japanologist, and from Japanologist to Japanophobe, as noted in *Genmetsu* (*Disillusionment*, published in 2014). Moreover, in his short book *Dare no tame no kaisha ni suruka* (*Who is the Company to be for?*) in 2006, he drew the conclusion that a ‘shareholder revolution’ had occurred in Japan at the beginning of the twenty-first century. While this bold hypothesis comes in the form of a fierce polemic, it is true that a

number of ‘worker shareholders’ have emerged in the onset of the ‘pension society.’ The question to consider is what impact the increasing influence of such worker shareholders might have on Japanese postindustrial society.

Dore’s fertile mind was truly broad and deep. Among his lesser-known works is a sharp and timely comment on international politics. In ‘Human Progress...?’, the final chapter of his last work *Cantankerous Essays* (2015), Dore made reference to the accumulated experiences of international peace conferences—the Congress of Vienna (1815), Congress of Versailles (1919) and San Francisco Congress (1945)—noting that we have stepped gradually toward ‘more rational collective world government.’ In the midst of anxiety over the emergence of the New Cold War, Dore ultimately posed a serious question for us: “Does this mean that the fourth and decisive step is only likely to be taken after one more disastrous battle for world hegemony?”

Dore has left us with outstanding works that will no doubt continue to be read across the societies and generations for many years to come. Now, as we honor his passing, is the time to offer a respectful nod of gratitude and farewell. Sayonara, Dore-sensei!

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