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Ohio State Engineer

Title: An Electrical Engineer in Japan (Conclusion)
Creators: Bibber, Harold W.
Issue Date: Feb-1936
Publisher: Ohio State University, College of Engineering
Citation: Ohio State Engineer, vol. 19, no. 4 (February, 1936), 14-15.
URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/35271>
Appears in Collections: [Ohio State Engineer: Volume 19, no. 4 \(February, 1936\)](#)

AN ELECTRICAL ENGINEER IN JAPAN (Conclusion)

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Food, Drink and Entertainment

The writer must admit that there were certain items of food in the Japanese diet to which he could never quite accustom himself; they were perhaps a bit too exotic for his taste. Outside of these, however, he was able to eat and relish Japanese food, strange and unfamiliar as some of the articles of diet are at first sight. The fact that in the native Japanese fashion an oven is not used in the preparation of food means that there are never any baked dishes. When food is not broiled, or cooked in deep fat, it is served in its natural state, or if a vegetable, it is perhaps pickled. In this country we are quite accustomed to eating raw oysters with great zest, but the Japanese go us one better, and eat certain very delicious kinds of fish raw, in thin slices that are customarily dipped in soy bean sauce. In the place of bread one becomes used to eating rice, and nowhere in the world is rice better cooked than in Japan. Not all of the rice is raised in the country, some being imported from Siam and India. Nothing is eaten on the rice; it is taken plain, but eaten in combination with other foods, it possesses a flavor all its own. In contrast with many other oriental countries the Japanese are not much given to highly seasoned or spiced dishes. They are able to appreciate very delicate flavors, sometimes even below our threshold of taste.

As far as beverages are concerned, beer is quite common these days, being made in the local breweries. The other common alcoholic drink is a light rice wine called "sake," which is taken hot, as its flavor seems more pleasing then. There is no native distilled liquor, and the Japanese are a very temperate people. Tea is, as has been previously mentioned, the commonest, and—one may say—the national beverage. In the foreign-style restaurants, of which there are now several in all big cities, black tea with lemon and sugar if one wishes, may always be obtained. Coffee is available too, but so far the Japanese have not taken to its use.

As an item of entertainment during a dinner at a restaurant in the native style, interspersed between courses may be two or three dances by the geisha. These are performed to the accompaniment of one or two musical instruments, usually of stringed-type, and the girls make use of beautiful costumes, kimonos and sashes, with exquisite fans that are opened and closed during the dance to add interest and variety. In some ways the geisha

dances remind one in their angularity and posturing of some of the most modern developments of the dance as an art in this country.

Inland Travel

Perhaps a few words about travel outside of the big cities would not be out of place. While there are some good roads between the big cities, the network of highways is not yet sufficiently extensive to allow of the same degree of automobile travel which obtains in this country. The writer usually used the railway service, steam or electric interurban, which enables one to go almost everywhere, is on time, and thoroughly comfortable. There are a few things to which a foreigner must become accustomed in railway travel. In the first place the 42-inch gauge makes high speed somewhat rougher than it is in this country. The width of the cars is correspondingly narrower and this applies as well to Pullman berths in sleeping cars. The Japanese have adapted their trains to the necessities of their own climate and local situations very nicely. For example, on sleeping cars that pass through mosquito infested districts in summer they provide an individual mosquito net for each passenger, fitted to his berth so that it completely encloses him. Thus, insects which enter during stops at stations when the door is carelessly left open will not disturb the traveler's slumber. Many of the main lines through mountainous country where there are frequent tunnels have been electrified, so that the smoke nuisance has been eliminated. To be taken at high speed through the beautiful Japanese countryside in the spring or summer without smoke or cinders is a really delightful traveling experience, even though one's object in travel may be business.

If one leaves the railroad for more remote sections of the country, particularly in the mountains, he will find motor roads from the stations leading up to the resort hotels, as the Japanese themselves are very appreciative of the bounteous beauties of their country. Where motor roads do not yet exist, there are trails or paths over which the rickshaws can be drawn, or in which one may be carried in the native Japanese fashion in a sort of hammock swung from a pole carried on the shoulders of two coolies. Until one has had the experience of being carried in a swinging hammock along a narrow path cut

out of a cliff high above a roaring stream in the gorge below, he has missed some of the thrills which life in Japan may bring to him.

An interesting, if somewhat uncommon form of travel involves the use of flat bottomed boats handled by very skillful boatmen, which afford a ready means of egress from the interior of the country. The Japanese rivers are usually very fast and have quite a few rapids, so that there are ample thrills to a day's run down such a stream. The Japanese have not been backward in adopting any devices that will lighten labor where there is much to be accomplished by so doing. For example, in order to get boats up a river in which there is a very swift current and where the sides are so precipitous in so many places as to make towing with a rope pulled by men on a tow-path extremely difficult, a 12-cylinder engine with a regular airplane propeller was mounted on a raised frame, toward the stern of a large boat, and used to pull a string of other boats up the stream. To use a marine propeller in the river would have meant frequent breakage due to hitting submerged rocks, stumps, and logs, as the Japanese rivers are used in connection with any logging operation that may be carried on.

Here and There

Among other interesting experiences that one may have in the country is that of bathing in some of the natural hot springs that are quite common. Usually the water is piped from the spring—sometimes in bamboo pipes—to the bath rooms of the hotels, but occasionally one may find an open air pool in which to take a dip. The temperature is usually high, all that one can stand for a very short time, and the mineral content is widely varied in different parts of the country.

Away from the big cities the street scenes are often novel and unusual. A shrine celebration in a country town with everyone in holiday attire, the shrine car carried through the streets by poles resting on the shoulders of a group of young men, the gaily costumed priests and their attendants—such are some of the interesting pictures which one carries away in his mind.

With the tremendous enthusiasm of the Japanese for the improvement of the material aspects of their civilization, the modern conveniences of life in the big cities, the comfortable means of travel, and yet the quaint life and interesting customs which still remain in the country districts, an American can hardly help leaving the country with regret, and having always a strong desire to return again some day.
