

# India's Influence On The Japanese Alphabet

By E. E. SPEIGHT

WE have heard a good deal of the spread of Indian trade and religion and architecture to Malaya and the island of Java long ago, but there are many who do not know that more than one thousand years ago it was usual for Indian people to travel into the heart of China. In the three centuries from A.D. 600 to A.D. 900 the old civilization of China was at a high pitch, and there was communication between the two great countries both by sea and along the trade-routes leading over the Himalayas.

Indian culture, in the forms of religion, art, astronomy and mathematics flowed out over the world, to the East as well as to the West. In the splendid Chinese capital city of Loyang, we are told, there were more than ten thousand Indian families at one time, and over three thousand Buddhist monks.

Here is an astonishing thing. The Chinese people have for three thousand years used a form of writing which em-

ployed thousands of characters, so that writing and reading have been too hard a task for the common people. But the Japanese, who also use these Chinese characters, have an alphabet of forty-seven letters as well, and this has helped to make it possible for practically all the Japanese people to become literate. The greatest of Japanese writers of English, Kakuw Okakura, in his fine book, *The Ideals of The East*, gives praise to the Indian teachers in Loyang for having helped in turning certain of these thousands of Chinese characters into letters of an alphabet. So, India has not only influenced the civilization of China and Japan by introducing Buddhism and learning, but she also helped to provide Japan with a simpler system of writing for the masses.

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There is in Japan an interesting story about the mixture of races in old Loyang. It tells of three travellers meeting there. One was Chinese, another came from India, and the third from Japan. The Chinaman said: "We three are like

a fan, of which China is the paper,  
India the radiating stick, and our  
Japanese guest the pivot by which  
we open and shut the fan."

Here is a poem about Loyang  
written by a Chinese Emperor a  
thousand years ago:

A beautiful place is the town of  
Loyang;

The big streets are full of spring  
light.

The lads go driving out with  
harps in their hand;

The mulberry girls go out to the  
fields with their baskets.

Golden whips glint at the horses'  
flanks.

Gauze sleeves brush the green  
boughs.

Racing dawn, the carriages come  
home.—

And the girls with their high  
baskets full of fruit.