

Mokusatsu

Asked what he would undertake first,
Were he called upon to rule a nation,
Confucius replied: 'To correct language ...
If language is not correct
Then what is said is not what is meant;
Then what ought to be done remains undone;
If this remains undone, morals and art will deteriorate;
If morals and art deteriorate, justice will go astray;
If justice goes astray
The people will stand about in helpless confusion.
Hence there must be no arbitrariness in what is said.
This matters above everything.'

Asked to surrender in World War II,
The Japanese employed the word 'mokusatsu'
In replying to the Potsdam ultimatum.

The word given out by the Dome news agency
Was interpreted in Washington as 'treat with contempt'
Rather than 'withholding comment' - pending a decision –
Its correct meaning.

The American concluded that their ultimatum had to be
rejected;
The boys in the back-room could play with their new toy.
A hundred and forty thousand people lay around in helpless
confusion.

Today 'peace' is mistranslated and means a seething stalemate
Instead of calm;
'Strength' is mistranslated, and means paranoid force
Instead of right-minded confidence;
'Defence' is mistranslated and means the psychotic accumulation of weapons
Instead of the exercise of skill;
'Testing' is mistranslated and means the detonation of a
nuclear device and
the release of radioactive clouds
Instead of a tentative experiment;
A 'disarmament treaty' is mistranslated and means
dismantling obsolete
weapons in the face of economic constraints,
Ritually attended by a spurious euphoria;
'First strike' is mistranslated
And means last strike;
'Safety' is mistranslated,
and means danger.

By Heathcote Williams