

A SACRIFICED GENERATION¹

CHINA'S STUDENT VICTIMS OF A HYBRID CULTURE

BY PAUL SCHEFFER

SINCE coming to China I have visited many universities, where I have been particularly interested in learning how the students live. Their lodgings form a striking contrast to the magnificent libraries, assembly halls, gymnasiums, and laboratories with which those institutions are so generously provided. The question intrudes itself, why should huge sums be spent for such buildings while the young people who use them must sleep and study in cramped, dark, dank, cellarlike Chinese lodgings? It is a psychological question how far the traditional low scale of living of the young Chinaman should be permitted to continue while he is surrounded by all the luxuries of a typical well-endowed American college. Moreover, when students are forced to sleep four or six together in cavelike closets so small that their beds touch each other, the effect of these confined quarters on their health must be considered. And this means more than physical health alone.

No teacher with whom I have talked in China, with a single and not very convincing exception, has failed to lament the radicalism of the students — a radicalism that is not only political but also social. I do not attach much weight to all the talk about foreign influence in such matters. In China, as in other countries, such explanations

are chiefly an excuse for dodging facts. One reason why these students are radical, in my opinion, is that they must live in the miserable way they do, in the cellarlike dens in which I have found them in both South and North China. Such surroundings undoubtedly influence their opinions. They live as a proletariat. What they see all around them fills them with social discontent; and it is significant that the first phase of social injustice against which they protest is bad housing. To make matters worse, most of China's universities have been set down in the congested quarters of her great cities.

It is very interesting to call upon these students in their lodgings. I have been surprised and saddened to see how little of Old China their rooms contain. Here and there, perhaps, one sees a survival of artistic taste, such as a fairly good Chinese painting on a wall; but side by side with it invariably hangs one of those impossible, tasteless European color prints with which the Commercial Press of Shanghai, a Chinese firm which does remarkably fine press work, has flooded the whole country. Old standards have been undermined — hopelessly so in the conscious life of these young men. They have lost touch with their ancient culture, and they have not gained a real touch with the new culture they seek. They waver between the two, and none of these sixteen- and twenty-

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year-old boys will ever get a solid intellectual footing in the world.

Every student I have visited has had a little shelf of books in his room — half of them textbooks, half books selected to suit his personal taste. I have been struck by the amount of English as well as Chinese poetry, and of English history, these young men read. American works are not as common as one would expect from America's influence here. And then photographs — one or more sweethearts, and pictures of friends. It seems to be bad form to display photographs of one's parents or relatives; they are never visible. Then there will be a number of little trifles and curios, practically all from some other country — oftentimes views of great European and American cities. Over one student's bed I saw hanging pictures of Western statesmen from Cæsar to Lincoln and Bismarck. A few suggestions of American college life — bright-colored caps and sweaters — are generally lying about. And then a very striking thing, sometimes vehemently denied by their teachers: over every third bed, on an average, hangs a picture of Sun Yat-sen, and over every fourth bed, I should say, a picture of Lenin or Trotskii. Photographs of Lenin as a baby are particularly popular. So these universities, which owe their resources so largely to the munificence of the United States and Europe, face toward Moscow.

In fact, nearly all of them receive financial assistance from America, and many are entirely supported from that country. But Western culture, when transplanted to China, becomes something different from what it is in its own home. That, of course, is to be expected, but it is a fact we do not sufficiently ponder. We do not pause to consider what the result is to be if our Western lands, with America leading

at a Ford-output pace, refashion thousands and thousands of the sons of this unfathomable nation into a distorted image of their own children.

Numerically, returned students from America are the predominant type among these products of export culture. They are not particularly popular either with foreigners or with their own people. America has taught them a certain theoretical knowledge, — often inadequate enough in practice, — and has given them a veneer of college spirit, and also pert manners that emphasize the difference between New York and Peking. They acquire that peculiar American push and aggressiveness that are often so disconcerting even to Europeans. Added to this is apt to be a passion for sports.

China has been appalled, moreover, to learn that her young sons, when they get back from the United States, although they have no inclination to throw bombs, are nevertheless nihilists at heart. They return convinced that their country is hopelessly behind the times, superstitious, and out of date — that as it exists to-day it should be wiped off the map. They see how incapable China is of competing with Western science and enterprise in any field of thought or action. They have absolute faith in Western ability, but rarely have they actually acquired it. They come home feeling that China is on the other side of the globe. This attitude is aggravated by the fact that the returned student's native land no longer affords him opportunities that measure up to his ambitions. He is dissatisfied. More than that, he has also had his eyes opened to the shady side of American civilization. Should he later rise to high office, as he often does just now in Peking, he is seldom a friend to the hospitable country that gave him his education, and is quite ready to pay back her favors in bad

coin. Nevertheless, he is not happy in China.

People say that this inner contradiction is not so strong in students who have been educated in Europe, especially if they have attended institutions in small towns. The tempo of European life differs less from that of China than from that of America. Europe has more repose, more depth. The two older cultures have a quicker understanding of each other. But there is always danger that the powerful influence of the West, in whatever continent it is exerted, will estrange the young Chinaman from his native land, blind him to her real merits, and divide him against himself. No one sees these dangers more clearly than do the best native teachers in China, most of whom have acquired their education in the United States or Europe. Consequently Chinese opinion is experiencing a strong reaction against the returned student, against his type of mind—a reaction that originated among the Chinese themselves but that has the sympathy and support of many foreign teachers in this country.

As a result the conviction is rapidly growing that the modern Chinese university must not confine itself merely to familiarizing its students with Occidental thought and science, but that it must also foster a purely Chinese culture competent to criticize discriminatingly the culture of the West. A renaissance of Chinese classicism equipped with modern scientific methods is beginning. I should hasten to add that this movement is still in its initial stages; but it has indubitably begun. For example, I hear it said everywhere that young Chinamen must not be sent abroad, to Harvard or to Freiburg, until they are thoroughly grounded in modern Chinese philosophy and scholarship.

The university student who has been educated in Western schools in China presents a somewhat different problem, but one quite as difficult as that of the returned student, or even more so. While away from home, at least, the latter has not been embittered by a constant conflict between the new and the old. He has unconsciously passed from a Chinese mental and physical environment into that of the West. But the young Chinaman at home is in continuous contact with two worlds, and never for a moment can he forget the conflict between them. An American tutor in a large university supported with funds from the United States told me that his students, when they came back from vacation, were generally worn out and unfit for study until they had had time to recuperate. They had drunk too deeply during their vacation of the already unfamiliar Chinese life, with its irregular hours and its varied amusements, and they had been constantly harassed by the differences between their own new way of living and thinking and those of their families—the universal tragedy of the younger generation multiplied a hundredfold. Let me repeat, parenthetically, that the cultural traditions of this country have deep roots—far deeper in many ways than our own traditions have in us Europeans or Americans. In spite of these difficulties, however, I imagine that it is better, more natural, more wholesome, for a young Chinaman to acquire his Western education at home, without transplanting to another continent.

I have observed that the students from the warm southern provinces are more active, enterprising, and intellectual, if you will, than their northern brethren, but that they seldom have strong nerves. They are as a rule emaciated, high-strung, excitable, easily worried, and prone to discontent.

They by no means lack self-confidence, but they seldom possess the hail-fellow-well-met self-assurance of the returned student from America. I have become acquainted with amiable, charming, alert-minded, wholesome young fellows from the interior provinces, but the great majority, except those from the North, have faces furrowed with restlessness and discontent. I recall seeing the same expression on the faces of so many students at our universities in Germany right after the war.

But these young Chinese are 'college boys,' ranging from fourteen to twenty years of age, who have acquired only a smattering of information on subjects that our maturer students at home are forced to learn deliberately and thoroughly. They come from all parts of China, sometimes from thousands of miles away. They are admitted to their schools upon examination, and, as there are accommodations for only a fourth or a fifth of the number who apply, they are mentally picked men. They must all feel, no matter how immature they may be, that they are preparing for an uncertain and ill-defined career; that they will eventually become, not Americans or Europeans, but something much more complicated and problematic. They learn more mechanically than our students do. Language is a formidable obstacle to acquiring foreign culture; for English, the vehicle through which they commonly receive it, is for them a blurred and foggy medium of thought. A German instructor in an inland university, which is struggling along with most inadequate support, told me that his students had even threatened to strike if he did not dictate his lectures to them slowly and distinctly enough to be taken down word for word, so that they could be learned by heart.

Naturally a lively fight is going on

over the heads of these young people as to whether foreigners or Chinese should manage these institutions. The Chinese are slowly but steadily gaining ground. Many Americans, who outweigh all other Western nations in China both in numbers and in influence, have resigned themselves to the idea of eventually turning over their educational work to Chinese administrators. Having once adopted that idea, they are vigorously pushing it, their first step being to appoint Chinese advisory councils to assist the American college presidents. This is the programme, for example, of the huge Rockefeller Foundation. The English are much less ready to yield this point, and insist that the Chinese are not competent to educate themselves in Western fashion. But among the schools I have visited, those that seem to me the best conducted, at least so far as externals are concerned, and that have the most contented and cheerful-looking students, are those entirely under Chinese management. The number of these native schools has multiplied during the last twenty years from ten to about three thousand, and they are supported in nearly every instance by the bounty of wealthy Chinamen. They are mostly in North China, and that counts for a good deal. To be sure, Peking, with its twenty thousand students, is quite as turbulent as Shanghai with its twelve thousand, or Hankow with its numerous missionary schools, or Taiyuanfu with its model university in the remote province of Shansi with six thousand. Taiyuanfu is comparatively free from Occidental influence, but there, as elsewhere, the responsible authorities complain of the constant disturbances and the revolutionary spirit among the young men in their charge. More than one hundred thousand students are to-day receiving a Western education in

China, and wherever I went I heard complaints of their disorderliness.

It made me indignant to hear young Chinese employees condemned by practically every European or American with whom I talked as 'stupids,' 'conceited fellows,' 'good-for-nothings,' 'insolent smarties.' In the first place, the teachers of these young people are themselves oftentimes revolutionaries and chauvinists. In the second place, we Westerners are chiefly responsible for the type of young Chinaman with whom we have to deal to-day. China has long ceased to be the paradise of the easy-going business man. Last of all, the young men of this generation feel, with some justification, that the defense of their country's autonomy and independence rests on their shoulders. No one else seems prepared to undertake it. They are the shock troops of the counterattack against foreign usurpation. When incidents occur like the tragedy in Shanghai a year ago, it is because Peking and Moscow depend on the students to defend their cause.

No wonder, then, that these young imaginations become inflamed. Neither Old China nor the Christian West has given them the moral stability and the stern lofty idealism needed in such a crisis. They are revolutionists. The profiteering spirit of the Occident, which is naturally dominant in the treaty ports, does not give them the inspiration they require. The West offers them for the most part a knowledge that sweeps them off their feet instead of strengthening and stabilizing them. What holds them fast, if they have any anchorage at all, is not our Western standards but the traditions of Old China, which themselves are melting in this flame.

Therefore to-day the youthful ideals, the deepest intellectual interests, of these young people revolve around

Moscow, whose leaders have pursued a very tactful course toward nascent New China. The Soviet Government has cunningly allied itself with Chinese patriotism, which is becoming the strongest and deepest sentiment in the nation. It has hitched its wagon to this star, hoping to transform the Chinese national revolution into a social revolution. That suggestion fascinates the young Chinaman of the present generation. It gives him something definite to work for, a new world-vision to fill the vacuum that we have made by destroying his respect for and loyalty to the China of tradition without putting anything in its place.

I do not mean, of course, that every young Chinaman in the universities is a Bolshevik. Even Moscow's most enthusiastic emissaries have been brought to a halt by discovering in the very height of their propaganda that they could not foretell what their teaching would become when transmuted by the Chinese mind. Marx, whom everybody was reading three years ago, was only a passing fashion. Nevertheless, this is an absolute fact: Russia is the only country in the world that Young China, the China of to-morrow, likes — so far as it can like anything foreign; although, to be sure, this sympathy, if we can call it by that name, is but a modification of the hatred of other foreigners.

This explains, I imagine, why the students educated at home, and not the returned students, are the leaders in China to-day. The latter are apt to combine American business shrewdness with Chinese commercial keenness — not always a pleasing mixture. They cannot understand the sentiment that impelled a young patriot orator, as actually happened last summer, to bite off the end of his finger and throw it into the midst of his audience in order to show the intensity of his hatred for

England. It leaves them, with their acquired Yankee prejudices, cold when they see dozens of their young countrymen, as happened last summer, fall into convulsions in the fury of an anti-foreign demonstration, so that several had to be carried to the hospitals for treatment. The real enthusiasts are among the home students, who resent the superior, patronizing, blasé air of their traveled colleagues. It is still a question to which the future of China belongs.

This future is the query that you read in the weary, excited, inquiring eyes of this turbulent young generation. China is creating an educated proletariat more restless and rudderless even than that of Tsarist Russia, and at the same time less controllable and more sensitive to foreign influence.

I have intentionally dwelt on the darker side of this student question, on the problem it presents to the best of the foreign and the Chinese teachers here — most of whom are noble, tire-

less, devoted men. The corrective forces of social self-control, which the philosophy of Confucius has drilled into this nation for untold generations, are still powerful. After all, the young Chinaman may prove readier to submit to the influence of authority than to the teachings of revolt. I believe he is easily guided if there are competent men to guide him. But China lacks a national leader; she lacks the prophet she so urgently needs. Consequently the revolutionary ferment that has germinated in the heads of these young students has spread to the farthest corners of the land, until it quivers in the nerves of every coolie. And it is more than possible that this intellectual generation, upon whom such a heavy burden has been thrust, will be sacrificed; that it will fall into the abyss between Occidental and Oriental culture; that its members will be the ritual living victims buried beneath the corner stone of New China.

MR. HOUGHTON REPORTS¹

BY JACQUES CHASTENET

EUROPE has learned nothing since 1919. Balance-of-power ideas have as much authority there as ever. The League of Nations, instead of promoting permanent peace, has become a new Holy Alliance less efficient than the old one. Germany is still treated as an enemy country. Her Continental conquerors, in spite of their hypocritical

professions, refuse to take any real step toward disarmament. France is at the head of this criminal policy. The countries of the Little Entente are simply her satellites. England's racial affinities with the United States teach her some wisdom, but her Foreign Office, controlled by political considerations in Asia, has permitted itself to be drawn into the fatal orbit of the Quai d'Orsay.

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