

## CHAPTER XIII

### HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA

China, like Italy and Greece, is frequently misjudged by persons of culture because they regard it as a museum. The preservation of ancient beauty is very important, but no vigorous forward-looking man is content to be a mere curator. The result is that the best people in China tend to be Philistines as regards all that is pleasing to the European tourist. The European in China, quite apart from interested motives, is apt to be ultra-conservative, because he likes everything distinctive and non-European. But this is the attitude of an outsider, of one who regards China as a country to be looked at rather than lived in, as a country with a past rather than a future. Patriotic Chinese naturally do not view their country in this way; they wish their country to acquire what is best in the modern world, not merely to remain an interesting survival of a by-gone age, like Oxford or the Yellowstone Park. As the first step to this end, they do all they can to promote higher education, and to increase the number of Chinese who can use and appreciate Western knowledge without being the slaves of Western follies. What is being done in this direction is very interesting, and one of the most hopeful things happening in our not very cheerful epoch.

There is first the old traditional curriculum, the learning by rote of the classics without explanation in early youth, followed by a more

intelligent study in later years. This is exactly like the traditional study of the classics in this country, as it existed, for example, in the eighteenth century. Men over thirty, even if, in the end, they have secured a thoroughly modern education, have almost all begun by learning reading and writing in old-fashioned schools. Such schools still form the majority, and give most of the elementary education that is given. Every child has to learn by heart every day some portion of the classical text, and repeat it out loud in class. As they all repeat at the same time, the din is deafening. (In Peking I lived next to one of these schools, so I can speak from experience.) The number of people who are taught to read by these methods is considerable; in the large towns one finds that even coolies can read as often as not. But writing (which is very difficult in Chinese) is a much rarer accomplishment. Probably those who can both read and write form about five per cent, of the population.

The establishment of normal schools for the training of teachers on modern lines, which grew out of the edict of 1905 abolishing the old examination system and proclaiming the need of educational reform, has done much, and will do much more, to transform and extend elementary education. The following statistics showing the increase in the number of schools, teachers, and students in China are taken from Mr. Tyau's *China Awakened*, p. 4:--

1910	1914	1917	1919
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Number of Schools	42,444	59,796	128,048	134,000
Number of Teachers	185,566	200,000	326,417	326,000
Number of Students	1,625,534	3,849,554	4,269,197	4,500,000

Considering that the years concerned are years of revolution and civil war, it must be admitted that the progress shown by these figures is very remarkable.

There are schemes for universal elementary education, but so far, owing to the disturbed condition of the country and the lack of funds, it has been impossible to carry them out except in a few places on a small scale. They would, however, be soon carried out if there were a stable government.

The traditional classical education was, of course, not intended to be only elementary. The amount of Chinese literature is enormous, and the older texts are extremely difficult to understand. There is scope, within the tradition, for all the industry and erudition of the finest renaissance scholars. Learning of this sort has been respected in China for many ages. One meets old scholars of this type, to whose opinions, even in politics, it is customary to defer, although they have the innocence and unworldliness of the old-fashioned don. They remind one almost of the men whom Lamb describes in his essay on Oxford in the Vacation--learned, lovable, and sincere, but utterly lost in the modern world, basing their opinions of Socialism, for example, on what some eleventh-century philosopher said about it. The arguments for and

against the type of higher education that they represent are exactly the same as those for and against a classical education in Europe, and one is driven to the same conclusion in both cases: that the existence of specialists having this type of knowledge is highly desirable, but that the ordinary curriculum for the average educated person should take more account of modern needs, and give more instruction in science, modern languages, and contemporary international relations. This is the view, so far as I could discover, of all reforming educationists in China.

The second kind of higher education in China is that initiated by the missionaries, and now almost entirely in the hands of the Americans. As everyone knows, America's position in Chinese education was acquired through the Boxer indemnity. Most of the Powers, at that time, if their own account is to be believed, demanded a sum representing only actual loss and damage, but the Americans, according to their critics, demanded (and obtained) a vastly larger sum, of which they generously devoted the surplus to educating Chinese students, both in China and at American universities. This course of action has abundantly justified itself, both politically and commercially; a larger and larger number of posts in China go to men who have come under American influence, and who have come to believe that America is the one true friend of China among the Great Powers.

One may take as typical of American work three institutions of which I saw a certain amount: Tsing-Hua College (about ten miles from Peking), the Peking Union Medical College (connected with the Rockefeller

Hospital), and the so-called Peking University.

Tsing-Hua College, delightfully situated at the foot of the Western hills, with a number of fine solid buildings,[97] in a good American style, owes its existence entirely to the Boxer indemnity money. It has an atmosphere exactly like that of a small American university, and a (Chinese) President who is an almost perfect reproduction of the American College President. The teachers are partly American, partly Chinese educated in America, and there tends to be more and more of the latter. As one enters the gates, one becomes aware of the presence of every virtue usually absent in China: cleanliness, punctuality, exactitude, efficiency. I had not much opportunity to judge of the teaching, but whatever I saw made me think that the institution was thorough and good. One great merit, which belongs to American institutions generally, is that the students are made to learn English. Chinese differs so profoundly from European languages that even with the most skilful translations a student who knows only Chinese cannot understand European ideas; therefore the learning of some European language is essential, and English is far the most familiar and useful throughout the Far East.

The students at Tsing-Hua College learn mathematics and science and philosophy, and broadly speaking, the more elementary parts of what is commonly taught in universities. Many of the best of them go afterwards to America, where they take a Doctor's degree. On returning to China they become teachers or civil servants. Undoubtedly they contribute

greatly to the improvement of their country in efficiency and honesty and technical intelligence.

The Rockefeller Hospital is a large, conspicuous building, representing an interesting attempt to combine something of Chinese beauty with European utilitarian requirements. The green roofs are quite Chinese, but the walls and windows are European. The attempt is praiseworthy, though perhaps not wholly successful. The hospital has all the most modern scientific apparatus, but, with the monopolistic tendency of the Standard Oil Company, it refuses to let its apparatus be of use to anyone not connected with the hospital. The Peking Union Medical College teaches many things besides medicine--English literature, for example--and apparently teaches them well. They are necessary in order to produce Chinese physicians and surgeons who will reach the European level, because a good knowledge of some European language is necessary for medicine as for other kinds of European learning. And a sound knowledge of scientific medicine is, of course, of immense importance to China, where there is no sort of sanitation and epidemics are frequent.

The so-called Peking University is an example of what the Chinese have to suffer on account of extra-territoriality. The Chinese Government (so at least I was told) had already established a university in Peking, fully equipped and staffed, and known as the Peking University. But the Methodist missionaries decided to give the name "Peking University" to their schools, so the already existing university had to alter its name to "Government University." The case is exactly as if a collection of

old-fashioned Chinamen had established themselves in London to teach the doctrine of Confucius, and had been able to force London University to abandon its name to them. However, I do not wish to raise the question of extra-territoriality, the more so as I do not think it can be abandoned for some years to come, in spite of the abuses to which it sometimes gives rise.

Returned students (i.e. students who have been at foreign universities) form a definite set in China.[98] There is in Peking a "Returned Students' Club," a charming place. It is customary among Europeans to speak ill of returned students, but for no good reason. There are occasionally disagreements between different sections; in particular, those who have been only to Japan are not regarded quite as equals by those who have been to Europe or America. My impression was that America puts a more definite stamp upon a student than any other country; certainly those returning from England are less Anglicized than those returning from the United States are Americanized. To the Chinaman who wishes to be modern and up-to-date, skyscrapers and hustle seem romantic, because they are so unlike his home. The old traditions which conservative Europeans value are such a mushroom growth compared to those of China (where authentic descendants of Confucius abound) that it is useless to attempt that way of impressing the Chinese. One is reminded of the conversation in Eothen between the English country gentleman and the Pasha, in which the Pasha praises England to the refrain: "Buzz, buzz, all by steam; whir, whir, all on wheels," while the Englishman keeps saying: "Tell the Pasha that the British yeoman is

still, thank God, the British yeoman."

Although the educational work of the Americans in China is on the whole admirable, nothing directed by foreigners can adequately satisfy the needs of the country. The Chinese have a civilization and a national temperament in many ways superior to those of white men. A few Europeans ultimately discover this, but Americans never do. They remain always missionaries--not of Christianity, though they often think that is what they are preaching, but of Americanism. What is Americanism? "Clean living, clean thinking, and pep," I think an American would reply. This means, in practice, the substitution of tidiness for art, cleanliness for beauty, moralizing for philosophy, prostitutes for concubines (as being easier to conceal), and a general air of being fearfully busy for the leisurely calm of the traditional Chinese. Voltaire--that hardened old cynic--laid it down that the true ends of life are "aimer et penser." Both are common in China, but neither is compatible with "pep." The American influence, therefore, inevitably tends to eliminate both. If it prevailed it would, no doubt, by means of hygiene, save the lives of many Chinamen, but would at the same time make them not worth saving. It cannot therefore be regarded as wholly and altogether satisfactory.

The best Chinese educationists are aware of this, and have established schools and universities which are modern but under Chinese direction. In these, a certain proportion of the teachers are European or American, but the spirit of the teaching is not that of the Y.M.C.A. One



can never rid oneself of the feeling that the education controlled by white men is not disinterested; it seems always designed, unconsciously in the main, to produce convenient tools for the capitalist penetration of China by the merchants and manufacturers of the nation concerned. Modern Chinese schools and universities are singularly different: they are not hotbeds of rabid nationalism as they would be in any other country, but institutions where the student is taught to think freely, and his thoughts are judged by their intelligence, not by their utility to exploiters. The outcome, among the best young men, is a really beautiful intellectual disinterestedness. The discussions which I used to have in my seminar (consisting of students belonging to the Peking Government University) could not have been surpassed anywhere for keenness, candour, and fearlessness. I had the same impression of the Science Society of Nanking, and of all similar bodies wherever I came across them. There is, among the young, a passionate desire to acquire Western knowledge, together with a vivid realization of Western vices. They wish to be scientific but not mechanical, industrial but not capitalistic. To a man they are Socialists, as are most of the best among their Chinese teachers. They respect the knowledge of Europeans, but quietly put aside their arrogance. For the present, the purely Chinese modern educational institutions, such as the Peking Government University, leave much to be desired from the point of view of instruction; there are no adequate libraries, the teaching of English is not sufficiently thorough, and there is not enough mental discipline. But these are the faults of youth, and are unimportant compared with the profoundly humanistic attitude to life which is formed in the students.

Most of the faults may be traced to the lack of funds, because the Government--loved by the Powers on account of its weakness--has to part with all its funds to the military chieftains who fight each other and plunder the country, as in Europe--for China must be compared with Europe, not with any one of the petty States into which Europe is unhappily divided.

The students are not only full of public spirit themselves, but are a powerful force in arousing it throughout the nation. What they did in 1919, when Versailles awarded Shangtung to Japan, is well told by Mr. Tyau in his chapter on "The Student Movement." And what they did was not merely political. To quote Mr. Tyau (p. 146):--

Having aroused the nation, prevented the signature of the Versailles Treaty and assisted the merchants to enforce the Japanese boycott, the students then directed their energies to the enlightenment of their less educated brothers and sisters. For instance, by issuing publications, by popular lectures showing them the real situation, internally as well as externally; but especially by establishing free schools and maintaining them out of their own funds. No praise can be too high for such self-sacrifice, for the students generally also teach in these schools. The scheme is endorsed everywhere with the greatest enthusiasm, and in Peking alone it is estimated that fifty thousand children are benefited by such education.

One thing which came as a surprise to me was to find that, as regards modern education under Chinese control, there is complete equality between men and women. The position of women in Peking Government University is better than at Cambridge. Women are admitted to examinations and degrees, and there are women teachers in the university. The Girls' Higher Normal School in Peking, where prospective women teachers are taught, is a most excellent and progressive institution, and the spirit of free inquiry among the girls would horrify most British head mistresses.

There is a movement in favour of co-education, especially in elementary education, because, owing to the inadequate supply of schools, the girls tend to be left out altogether unless they can go to the same school as the boys. The first time I met Professor and Mrs. Dewey was at a banquet in Chang-sha, given by the Tuchun. When the time came for after-dinner speeches, Mrs. Dewey told the Tuchun that his province must adopt co-education. He made a statesmanlike reply, saying that the matter should receive his best consideration, but he feared the time was not ripe in Hunan. However, it was clear that the matter was within the sphere of practical politics. At the time, being new to China and having imagined China a somewhat backward country, I was surprised. Later on I realized that reforms which we only talk about can be actually carried out in China.

Education controlled by missionaries or conservative white men cannot give what Young China needs. After throwing off the native superstitions

of centuries, it would be a dismal fiasco to take on the European superstitions which have been discarded here by all progressive people. It is only where progressive Chinese themselves are in control that there is scope for the renaissance spirit of the younger students, and for that free spirit of sceptical inquiry by which they are seeking to build a new civilization as splendid as their old civilization in its best days.

While I was in Peking, the Government teachers struck, not for higher pay, but for pay, because their salaries had not been paid for many months. Accompanied by some of the students, they went on a deputation to the Government, but were repulsed by soldiers and policemen, who clubbed them so severely that many had to be taken to hospital. The incident produced such universal fury that there was nearly a revolution, and the Government hastened to come to terms with the teachers with all possible speed. The modern teachers have behind them all that is virile, energetic, and public-spirited in China; the gang of bandits which controls the Government has behind it Japanese money and European intrigue. America occupies an intermediate position. One may say broadly that the old traditional education, with the military governors and the British and Japanese influence, stands for Conservatism; America and its commerce and its educational institutions stand for Liberalism; while the native modern education, practically though not theoretically, stands for Socialism. Incidentally, it alone stands for intellectual freedom.

The Chinese are a great nation, incapable of permanent suppression by foreigners. They will not consent to adopt our vices in order to acquire military strength; but they are willing to adopt our virtues in order to advance in wisdom. I think they are the only people in the world who quite genuinely believe that wisdom is more precious than rubies. That is why the West regards them as uncivilized.