

The Problem of the Cultural Hybrid

By Quentin Pan

The company of such a person cannot be wearisome to the foreigner or meaningless to the Chinese (or isn't it?), though it may be both to those who think that China's salvation is not to be found in a wholesale transplantation of everything that is identified with "modern cultural conditions."

From a letter to the Editor by A Tourist.

The author of this passage has certainly put his fingers on one of the weakest spots of modern China; although he has misunderstood what was intended to mean by "modern cultural conditions" which the present writer happened to use in a previous article. The misunderstanding will appear evident to the reader after an acquaintance with the following paragraphs.

The present writer has preferred to call a person who is "wearisome to the foreigner" and "meaningless to the Chinese" a cultural-hybrid, taking culture in a very general sense. Such a person is of course most easily found among that class of individuals whom we have, for want of a more respectable term, called returned students. The returned student is indeed the cultural hybrid par excellence. As we are again on the annual run of seeing big batches of students off to other countries, particularly America, the writer has thought it proper to cast a few reflections upon the whole movement of studying abroad, and he does this in lieu of saying bon voyage to those who are about to embark for their oversea destinations.

The Cost of Cultural Hybridity:—In recent years a good deal has been written about the returned student and his social worth. The general tone has been one of doubt, if not downright dissatisfaction. In public life, he has of course always been an important factor—an a priori indispensable factor; but it has been asserted that unless he served in the capacity of some strictly technical expert and was thus able to stay on his job for longer periods and with fewer distractions, he has not infrequently heaped confusion upon the state of affairs already advanced in confusion. This has been true in politics, in public finance, in education and in any other field of activity where, according to old Chinese usage, technicality is not such a necessary condition for tolerable success.

The returned student of the more sedentary types does not of course take any active part in public duties. But he is nevertheless important, for he has set himself to the task of formulating and introducing theories of reform. Though often of doubtful value and soundness, their theories have not failed each to command a following. For the last ten or fifteen years, need we remind ourselves, China has been a veritable hot-bed to which have been introduced all kinds of social theories, tenable or untenable, ranging from nationalism at one end to anarchism at the other, with all brands of socialism dispersed in between, each championed by its introducer as the nostrum for China's evils. Fortunately

ly the hot-bed has not been enough heated up, and not all theories have taken root. But the confusion born of a reckless propaganda on the one hand and of an immature mentality to which such propaganda, in the name of thought movements naturally and strongly appeals on the other is already enough appalling. And for this the returned students must be again held responsible.

Nor is the returned student any happy specimen in his private life. Of all types of modern Chinese he is perhaps of the most awkwardly situated in family relations. His ideal of the so-called small family system necessarily makes him at logger-heads with his parents. He holds very singular opinions as to mate selection, and this in its turn leads to many unpleasant experiences which are so common in recent years that they have ceased to have much attraction for the tattler. His standard of living, his ideas about household economy may at times become potent raisers of differences of opinion in the family circle which is so unfortunate as to have to include a gray-haired generation.

Such is more or less the predicament of a great many returned students. The writer has put it down in very comprehensive terms, for the simple reason that it is either of common personal experience or is now very generally admitted.

Now why is it so? The usual answer is that we are living in a period of transition, and that people as a rule become mal-adjusted during such periods, and that the returned student simply suffers more because of his leading social position. But this cannot be the true answer, for the transition and whatever it implies have been largely brought about by no others than the returned student himself and his congeners.

The true answer is to be found in the peculiar cultural status of the returned student. Although by birth Chinese, he has become by discipline American-Chinese, British-Chinese, Japanese-Chinese, German-Chinese, French-Chinese, or some further combination of these, as the case may be. Or, better truth to tell, he is neither sufficiently Chinese nor sufficiently foreign or non-Chinese to stand by himself as a harmonious, integrated, self-confident cultural entity. He is a non-descript, like the bat in the old fable. In short, he is a hybrid, if the writer may be permitted to borrow a perfectly respectable biological term. Now obviously if the hybrid does not fare well in the world of nature, neither would it in the realm of social and cultural life. It violates in both cases the principle of continuity and established harmony.

Adaptation versus Individuality:—But this must not be taken to mean that cultural hybridity is to be unconditionally depreciated, that is, that any coming together and fusing of cultures through such agencies as the returned student should be done away with. Certainly no. To persist in the analogy, hybridity might mean increased vigor, greater viability, and wider range of variation, provided, in the first place, that the nature

and worth of the two culture parties are sufficiently known, and in the second, that only selected elements on both sides are allowed to come together. In short, successful hybridity follows, and follows only, rational discrimination and selection.

Now has our movement of sending students abroad adhered to anything like a discriminating and selective principle? The answer is unequivocally no. If there has been any principle at all, it has been one of *laissez faire*. In our extreme eagerness to adapt ourselves to the twentieth century world, and particularly after a long series of humiliating defeats, we simply plunged headlong into the process known as Westernization, of which the movement for studying abroad forms a central part. It was thought at that time that by so exerting ourselves we might make a pretty deep dive and thus hasten the process of re-adjustment; but the actual outcome was that we found ourselves, as we still do, in a whirlpool.

It does not seem to have occurred at all to those responsible for the movement that while adaptive modification of our cultural life was imminently necessary, it could not mean wholesale substitution of cultural modes and patterns, that is, at the cost of sacrificing our original individuality altogether. Modern students of anthropology have seen fit to condemn those Christian missionaries who, through their eagerness to save more souls, were responsible for the breaking up of some of the indigenous cultures of Polynesia and elsewhere, in our eyes lowly and but poorly developed as they were. Wherefore? Because it is desirable that a culture once having achieved some degree of individuality is best left alone to maintain and develop that individuality, to the ultimate enrichment of the cultural stock of the whole of mankind. Now it is precisely this individuality that we Chinese, thanks to the returned students, are rapidly forfeiting.

For we have been taking up practically everything that the Western peoples have to offer us. We have been assimilating the technical methods and material advantages of Western Science,—which is desirable and perhaps inevitable. But we are also revolutionizing, after Western patterns, our social ideals and institutions, our conception of values, and our ethical standards,—which is undesirable and by no means inevitable.

The rationale of this distinction is readily seen, when it is remembered that, in the first place, while we easily admit that we are technically inferior to the West, it would be much more difficult to convince ourselves that Western social and ethical standards and institutions are any better than ours, even for those of us who have a love for the exotic; and in the second, that while any accretion in technical knowledge and methodology means a sure advancing step toward a better life, any fundamental change in our social and ethical standards would result as it already does, at least for a time, in an upset of the social equilibrium, to recover which would require years and decades. The distinction will appear still more evident when we realize that whereas technical knowledge is objective and may be possessed by all with impunity, social values and institutions are subjective in the sense that they have

developed as a result of a people's individual modes of adapting to a particular physical and cultural environment.

This is no a priori theorizing. Let us turn to Japan for practical evidences. Japan began to be westernized as early and as eagerly as we did. She has also had a movement for despatching students abroad. But throughout the decades, she has held dear certain guiding principles, one of which seems to have as its basis the distinction that we have just been discussing. We have perhaps often wondered why, in spite of her rapid industrial development, her varied and valuable contributions to science, the social life of Japan has in its more fundamental aspects remained what it was before 1868. According to authorities like Dr. Inazo Nitobe and Mr. Tai Chih-tao, bushido is still the national code of conduct; the Japanese family is as intact as ever; the same old ideals of womanhood hold today as they have held for centuries. The reader must have observed for himself how Japanese families and womanfolk resident in this country are still impermeable to the frivolities of modernity, for instance, voluntary childlessness and hair-bobbing. In fine, the returned students in Japan and others who are responsible for her recent development have raised the material and technical life of their people to a higher plane without undermining the national and cultural unity that we identify as Japanese.

Evidence of equal validity may be sought in our own history. About fifteen hundred years ago, we may recall, there was a movement or rather a series of small movements for Buddhist students to go to India. Between the fifth and eighth centuries of the Christian era, from two to three hundred went. It is true that the system of thought and beliefs which they brought back did not have much in common with the established social philosophy of the Chinese. But it is also true that those who participated in the movement did so largely of their personal faith and intellectual interest (and the intellectual appeal of Buddhism is unsurpassed by any other religious or quasi-religious system), and they entertained no idea of transplanting to China the social habits of the Hindus at that time. It is true that the grosser elements in Buddhism did at times cause serious social disturbances by converting excessive numbers of young men and women to religious celibacy; but it is also true that such disturbance never went unheeded by the government, which forced, for instance in the year 626 of the Christian era, just in the midst of one of the most notable waves of student emigration, thousands of monks and nuns to return to secular life. A review of the incidents that led up to this drastic measure will show us that our ancestors knew better what social and cultural unity and continuity means to national solidarity.

In our discussion so far, it is seen that while adaptation is a necessary condition to survival and progress, it does not pay to go so far as to lose all individuality a people originally has. In appropriating the elements of a foreign culture, it must be kept in mind that we the appropriators are the constant factor, and not they from whom the appropriations are made. To use a

Chinese expression, there shall be no compromise as regards the relative positions of the host and the guest. To be more specific, while we would like to harness all technical knowledge for a richer and happier life, we must not let our land be the dumping ground of all kinds of ungrounded social theories, and ourselves the raw material for false reformers to experiment with. At present we are doing just the reverse, and it is up to the better disciplined leaders of the future, who will be again largely returned students, to make amends.

Too Much of a Fad:—But the absence of a selective principle may be described in much more definite terms from our annals of student emigration. As a result of our failure to distinguish the social and ethical from the technical and scientific in the assimilation of Western culture, there has never grown up a comprehensive policy as regards the prescription of courses of study, the proper attitude towards Western standards and institutions, such as religion, the family, relation between the sexes, the different scale of social worth, theoretical and actual, and the like. Except in the case of a few of the government students in the early part of the movement, the selection of studies has been largely left to the discretion of the students and their families. This does not mean that there should be a hard and fast prescription of courses for every student going abroad: no authority can do that. But it does mean that a general and proper apportionment of different types of men of expert knowledge who are needed should be made so as to lessen the social waste and inefficiency necessarily attendant upon any transitional period.

As an example of social waste the writer may mention the excessive numbers who specialized in political science in the past. Personally the writer takes this to have been one of the most undesirable aspects of the movement for sending students out, for it has been at the root, among other factors of course, of the chaotic political condition of the past few decades. This is still true today. A smack of mechanics or any kindred subjects at least does no harm to national economy, but a smack of political science, which is by the way more easily acquired than most other subjects, at once swells the officialdom, to which the Chinese are known to have had close enough an affinity even before the introduction of the democratic idea that "everybody is by natural right a political animal."

As to the lack of a proper and critical attitude towards Western standards and institutions the writer will not stop to discuss, for it is too obvious. The returned student of the past years has brought back with him anything ranging from the acknowledgement of a fictitious heavenly father at the expense of the earthly parents who gave birth to him, to the eating of fish on Fridays. Lately we have heard so much about the "modernization craze," we wonder who are at the back of it, besides the foreigner and the suggestible public.

But the absence of any selective principle is nowhere better illustrated than in the quality of the students themselves. Aside from a small number of "government students" who had undergone some form of competitive examination, and were better prepared for ad-

vanced learning abroad, the rest, including the "private students," who are going out in ever increasing numbers in late year, constitute as a whole a pretty haphazard lot. Some were very young; others were but poorly prepared for any advanced subject or even in the language in which all studies would have to be made; still others had no idea of what to take up even days after arriving at their destination. For most such students, there remained one form of preparation that was always beyond reproach, and that was financial support, for they usually came from wealthy families; and there remained also one line of progress of which they were capable, and that was an undue raise of their standard of living, which their eager acquisition of the superficialities of Western cultural life necessarily entailed; and such superficialities they infallibly brought back, having had no thought whether they would fit at all into the scheme of things Chinese. This is perhaps not to be wondered at, as some of them were intellectually immature to judge things properly, and others were too unprepared to reach anything like intellectual maturity.

To the reader who thinks that such a state of affairs is a part of the social drift and hence not amenable to control, is invited to refer again to the Japanese experience. To mention but a few particulars which have seldom failed to impress the thoughtful, the Japanese student abroad is usually older, sometimes much older than the Chinese, which implies of course greater maturity and wider and deeper acquaintance with the cultural background of his own country; he usually specializes in some strictly technical subject and is already the holder of an academic degree when he embarks; and above all he has a set purpose to learn what is only deemed necessary. The Japanese student may be poor in pronunciation and awkward in etiquette, but he ultimately fulfils his mission, that of re-adjusting Japan with the least possible waste to the modern world. And the Japan of today is precisely what her returned students have made her, a nation of great technical efficiency—an efficiency which, however, has left the social and moral order of the people practically unmolested. Japan has not failed, in this matter of sending students abroad as in others, to select.

Is There a Future?:—The present state of affairs is of course not going to last. Nobody in his senses would hold that the movement in its present magnitude and unwieldiness should be continued forever, for that would imply that China will never be able to recover or to retain a relative cultural homogeneity. The present state of hybridity must indeed go, and all individuals concerned—the hybrids of various degrees—must gravitate to the new cultural forms which are sure to be made and are already in the making.

But before a change for the better can be effected, a fundamental attitude towards student emigration and towards being a returned student must be first cultivated. At the outset it will be remembered that no movement is itself an end, but always a means to an end. It cannot be too often stated that our end is the adaptation or adjustment of China to the twentieth century world. We simply had to adjust ourselves, and while adjusting,

we cannot help forfeiting a part of our former cultural individuality. Thus viewed, the movement for sending students abroad is no more than a humiliating concession on our part. We hate any infringement upon our political sovereignty; we clamour for tariff autonomy; but in the more fundamental matter of knowledge, of thought, of scientific discoveries, we rest satisfied in being second and third rate imitators, and there is absolutely no prospect of when our obsequious mimicking is going to cease and a new era of cultural autonomy and independence will be ushered in. Sending students out and receiving students back has become such a yearly routine and matter of course that perhaps many who have been so favored have dreamed that their great-grandchildren might be even better returned students than themselves, or rather there is no thought for the morrow!

Studying abroad per se must cease to be the cultural ideal of many well-to-do families and aspiring youths. The general public must learn to look upon it no longer as something in itself laudable, but rather as a dangerous experiment to launch upon both for the individual and for the community, which he will come back to serve.

Labor's Responsibility in National Reconstruction

By S. K. Sheldon Tso

The past few years have witnessed some significant changes in the mental attitude of the Chinese workers. The great mistake is to entertain the notions that class is naturally hostile to class and that the wealthy and the working men are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict. Thus communistic agitation which is lurking behind the screen of suppression, may eventually burst out. In fact, China is facing the problem of poverty instead of the unequal distribution of wealth. The remedy for such an economic wound lies in production, and the only thing that will benefit the teeming millions of China is industrial leadership and managerial ability. A radical socialistic system cannot be adopted until there is enough wealth to pay the varied interests of capital and labor. On the one hand the imperialistic aggression of the Powers has brought about misery and wretchedness which weigh so heavily and unjustly on the vast majority of the Chinese people. On the other hand, the communistic agitators have been bent on making use of this economic position of Chinese workers to pervert their judgment and to instigate them to revolt. In view of this situation, it appears to be an imperative task for social science students to suggest a constructive policy for labor during this period of reconstruction.

The first important point in connection with the task of the workers is the organization of unions with far-sighted and enlightened policies. At present most unions in China do not state their principles, aims and policies definitely and truthfully, and are oftentimes imbued with communistic ideas. This is probably due to their insufficient understanding of true unionism. It is, therefore, necessary for them to bear in mind some fundamental principles. For instance, the main object

Having thus acquired some critical knowledge of the movement for studying abroad as we are having it today, and a more discriminating attitude towards it, we may touch upon the point of formulating a selective policy to be put into effect partly through an enlightened public opinion and partly through comprehensive governmental regulations. Such a policy, partly to reiterate, must consider as a minimum two things: first, the technicality of the subject in which the student is going to specialize; and the second, the degree of intellectual maturity of the individual. The first is to insure his serviceability upon his return in the difficult task of readjusting China to the world, one part of the task being the multiplication of his kind, through his own training, that is, the replenishing of his profession by specialists who will be saved from the necessity of going abroad. And the second will enable him to assume a critical attitude towards Western usages and morals, which guards against the assimilation of anything frivolous, superficial, promising to be disruptive of our own social and moral order, and inconsequential to the task of readjustment with which we are confronted.

of a union is to obtain continuous employment for all members at the highest possible wage rates and under the best possible conditions with respect to hours. Union leaders must realize this fact: "If they are effectively to promote the interests of their members, they must at the same time promote the success of their industry," as Prof. Fitch said. Thus the constructive leadership should show the way to larger opportunities by encouraging the increase of workers' usefulness in production, and every caution must be taken to avoid the development of class antagonism, as it would only bring about disasters instead of welfare. Thus a spirit of co-operation should be promoted between the workers and employers.

Apart from the question of co-operation, some of the specific demands of labor should also be considered. For instance, wages are the most common interest of average working classes. Of course, it is possible for workers to get a more equitable share from their employers through collective bargaining. But it must be remembered that the share of wages is derived from the available goods that are produced by the co-operation of labor and capital. There is certain limit beyond which their demand cannot be met. "When equity has done its utmost, a further increase in well-being must depend upon an increase in the supply of goods available for distribution."

As a means of increasing the productive ability of workers, the leaders must devise means to enlarge the mental horizon of the rank and file by fighting from within instead of fighting from without. Workers' education furthers this line of procedure. In the United States the movement began with the idealistic Jews in the clothing industry of New York City, and spread