

## THE LITTLE CRITIC

### Who Are The True Chinese?

**T**HERE is a class of foreigners in China whose idea of Chinese culture is entirely derived from their contact with the so-called high-class Chinese. These latter are distinguished from the ordinary Chinese by the fact that, as a rule, they can converse with the foreigners in their own tongue, and that furthermore, since they bathe ordinarily three or four times a week, they do not smell nearly so bad as the rickshaw coolies. As likely as not, these high-class Chinese are returned students from abroad and are therefore most vociferous in their praise of western civilization. At the same time, however, they never fail to make the point clear that the traditional Chinese civilization has also a good deal that is of permanent value to commend itself not only to the Chinese but to the Europeans and Americans as well. In their dealings with the foreigners, they generally make an effort to live up to the reputation of the Chinese gentlemen—that is to say, they always try to be polite and courteous, sometimes even to a fault.

Although these Brahmins of Chinese society are in the habit of holding themselves aloof from the pestilential masses, they nevertheless are not totally devoid of sympathetic feelings toward the latter. At any rate, they have no objections against the lower classes of people in the abstract, in spite of the fact that they may look down upon them in the concrete. When they are angry with the rickshaw coolies, for instance, they would call them *Chu Lo*—pigs—or even kick them from behind. But when they are writing a learned dissertation on the Standard of Living of the Rickshaw Coolies in Shanghai, they would sentimentally refer to the poor fellows as “our hard-working and much oppressed brethren and comrades.”

These high-class Chinese are, I admit, charming companions to have around when one is giving a tea party. But it would be grievously mistaken for the foreigners to think that they are as a matter of fact the true representatives of the Chinese race. On the contrary, if anyone is really anxious to know the Chinese as they are, they should go to the coolies and the peasants, instead of the writers and the university professors. In this respect, I know of only two foreigners who can truly be said to have a genuine understanding of the Chinese people. I refer to Mrs. Pearl Buck and Bertrand Russell. In his book on China, Russell frankly expressed his admiration of the Chinese farmers by saying that they are the backbone of the Chinese nation. Similarly, Mrs. Buck has depicted the Chinese peasants as typified by Wang Lung in such a way that all are convinced that with all their faults and failings, they are the salt of the earth.

In an article contributed by Mrs. Buck three years ago to *The Critic*, we find her addressing the following impassioned words to the young patriots of China: “I whom

you would call a foreigner stand humble, not before you nor your great buildings, not your great plans for the future, all well though these be. I stand humble before the quality of your common people, the farmer, the wheelbarrow-men, the small shop keeper, the silk weaver, the slave and servant in the great house. These I would, if I were a patriot, show to the world. Among these have I seen such courage, such kindness, such a simplicity in the way they take the exigencies of their lives, such supreme honesty and realism in facing the common facts of our human life upon this earth that to me there are no people greater on the earth than these! I should like the whole world to see them as they are. There is a beauty to me greater than any beauty in China in the poor earthen house of a farm family, in the poverty of a vendor's life endured with such spirit as he endures it, in the rickshaw man's patience. How dare you be ashamed of such as these!”

Who are the true Chinese? That is our question. If we may trust Bertrand Russell and Mrs. Pearl Buck, they are certainly not to be found drinking Martini cocktails in the drawing rooms of the Shanghai élite.

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