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The Chinese university of the past and the future

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THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY

O F T H E P A S T A N D T H E F U T U R E .

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In the past China has had no great University which has exerted a lasting influence over the people arousing them to strive for literary excellence, to seek knowledge from all sources that they might be of use to their country. The Chinese government has however adopted a system of examinations which have stirred millions of men to a knowledge of the Chinese classics not for knowledge but that as a reward they might hold office. These examinations are not properly understood, for the opinion has been gaining ground that their value has been over rated, and that they are to be held responsible for all the shortcomings of Chinese intellectual culture. The truth is just the reverse. These shortcomings are referable to other causes, while for nearly a thousand years this system of literary competition has operated as a stimulating and conservative agency, to which are due not only the merits of the national education, but its very existence. If we would study the University of China we have simply to study these examinations, for all the schools and all the colleges are preparing their students to pass these examinations.

Its primary object was to provide men of ability for the service of the state, and, whatever else it may have failed to accomplish, it is impossible to deny that it has fulfilled its specific end in a remarkable degree. The mandarins of China are almost without exception the choicest specimens of the literary class. It is their duty to encourage the efforts of students, to preside at the public examinations, and to visit the public schools. So identified, indeed, are the mandarins with all that constitutes the intellectual life of the Chinese people that foreigners have come to look upon them as a favored class, like the Brahmins of India, or as a distinct order enjoying a monopoly of learning, like the priesthood in Egypt.

Nothing could be further from the truth, those stately officials, for whom the people make with such awe-struck deference, are not possessors of hereditary rank, neither do they owe their elevation to the favor of their sovereign, nor yet to the suffrages of their fellow citizens. They are self elected and the people regard them with deeper respect, because they know that they have earned their position by in-

tellectual effort. Dr Martin says : "In this genuine democracy China stands unapproached among the nations of the earth ; for, whatever imperfections may attach to her social organization or to her political system, it must be acknowledged that she has devised a most effectual method for encouraging effort and rewarding merit. Here at least is one country where wealth is not allowed to raise its possessor to the seat of power ; where the will even of an emperor cannot bestow its offices on uneducated favorites ; and where the caprice of the multitude is not permitted to confer the honors of the State on incompetent demigogues".

The institution that accomplishes these results is not an innovation on the traditional policy of the Empire. The germ from which it sprang was a maxim of the ancient sages, expressed in four syllables - Chu hsien jen neng. - "employ the able and promote the worthy;" and examinations were resorted to as affording the best test of ability and worth. Of the great Shun, the model emperor of antiquity, who lived about B.C. 2200, it is recorded that he examined his officers every third year, and after these examinations either gave them promotion or dismissed them from the service. The subjects he examined them upon are not known very well.

More than a thousand years after the above date, at the commencement of the Chin dynasty we are able to find what the examination consisted in. The Chinese had become a cultivated people and all candidates for office were required to give proof of their knowledge of the five arts, - music, archery, horsemanship, writing and arithmetic.

Under the dynasty of Han a thousand years later, we find the range of subjects for the civil service examinations largely extended. The Confucian Ethics had become current, and a moral standard was regarded in the selection of the competitors - District magistrates were required to send up to the capital such men as had acquired a reputation for "filial piety" and "integrity". In addition to this the intellectual examination was two-fold - First as to the skill in the six arts ; secondly, as to their familiarity with one or more of the following subjects, the civil law, military affairs, agriculture, the administratiion of the revenue, and the geography of the Empire with special reference to the state of the water communication.

Coming down to the present day, we find the simple trials instituted by Shun expanded into a collossal system, which may well claim to be the growth of four thousand years. Scholarship is a very different thing now and a man cannot hope to succeed without years of toil.

The candidates for office - those who are acknowledged as such in consequence of sustaining the initial trial - are divided into three grades of Hsiu - tsai, chu jen, chin shih - "Flowers of talent", "promoted scholars", and those who are "ready for office". The first trials are in the district city and are presided over by the chancellor.

About two thousand competitors enter the lists, ranging in age from the precocious youth just entering his teens to the venerable grandsire of seventy winters. The candidates for this degree are narrowly examined when they enter the hall, their pockets, shoes, wadded robes, and ink stones, all being searched, lest precomposed essays or other aids to composition be smuggled in. When they are all seated in the hall in their proper places, the wickets, doors, windows, and other entrances are all guarded by men, and pasted over with strips of paper. The room is filled with anxious competitors arranged in long seats, pencil in hand, and ready to begin. The theme is given out and every one writes off his essay and hands it to the board of examiners ; the whole day is allotted to the task and a gun is fired to announce the time when the students can disperse.

The chancellor, assisted by his clerks, occupy several days in sifting the heap of manuscripts, from which he picks out some twenty or more that are distinguished by beauty of penmanship and grace of diction. The authors of these are honored with the degree of "Flower of Talent" and are entitled to wear the decorations of the lowest grade of mandarin.

Once in three years these Flowers of Talent repair to the provincial capital to engage in competition for the second degree or "Promoted Scholar". The number of competitiors amounts to nearly ten-thousand and of these only one in a hundred can be admitted to the coveted degree. The trial is conducted by special examiners sent down from Pekin ; and this examination takes a wider range than the preceding. No fewer than three session of nearly three days each

are required,and the themes are assigned with a special view to testing the extent of reading and depth of scholarship of the candidates. The manner in which these subjects are handled can be best illustrated by introducing part of an essay ,upon this theme : "When persons in high stations are sincere in the performance of relative and domestic duties,the people generally will be stimulated to the practice of virtue". It is a fair specimen of the style of the Chinese essayist

"When the upper classes are really virtuous,the common people will inevitably become so. For,though the performance of relative duties by superiors does not originate in a wish to stimulate the people yet the people do become virtuous,which is a proof of the virtue of sincerety. The difference between a person filling a high station and one of the common people,consists in the department assigned them not in their relation to heaven ; it consists in a difference of rank,not in a difference of natural feeling ; but common people constantly observe the sincere performance of relative duties in people of high station. In being at the head of a family and preserving order amongst the people of whom it is composed,there should be sincere attention to politeness and decorum. A good man placed in a high station says ; "Who of all these are not related to me and shall I receive them with mere external forms ? The elegant entertainment,the neatly arranged tables,and the exhilarating song,some men esteem mere forms,but the good man esteems that which dictates them as a divinely instilled feeling,and attends to it with a truly benevolent heart". This will show what a delightful task the examiner have to examine seventy or eighty thousand essays of which this is but part of one.

The victor still receives neither office nor emolument ; but the honor he achieves is scarcely less than that which was won by the victors in the Olympic games. He is one of a hundred,each of whom was a picked man ; and as a result of this second victory he goes forth an acknowledged superior among ten-thousand scholars.

In the Spring of the following year he proceeds to Peking to seek the next higher degree,attainment of which will prove a passport to office. The contest is with the Promoted Scholars of the Empire,but the chances are more in his favor ; and if the Gods are propitious his future is made. As a usual thing he is not devout but now he

burns incense and gives alms. If he sees a fish floundering on a hook, he pays its price and restores it to its native element. He picks struggling ants out of a rivulet made by a recent shower, or rescues bits of printed paper from being trodden in the mire of the street.

This examination is severe lasting three days. The candidates are put in cells three feet by four and high enough to stand up in, the furniture consists of two boards one to sit on and one to write. Confinement in this cramped position, where it is impossible to lie down is exceedingly irksome, and is said to cause the death of many old students.

If his name appears among the favored few, he not only wins himself a place in the front rank of the lettered, but he plants his foot securely on the rounds of the official ladder by which he may climb to the highest position in the Empire without the help of rank or friends. All this advancement presents itself in the distant prospect, while the office upon which he immediately enters is one of respectability and it may be of profit.

But it is obvious that a competition which excites so profoundly the interest of the whole nation must be productive of very decided results. It leads to the selection of the best talent for the service of the public and besides it exercises a profound influence upon the education of the people. She has but few colleges and no universities except on paper in the modern sense of the word. Yet it may be confidently asserted that she gives a most effective patronage to learning. So powerful are the motives addressed to them that the whole body of scholars who once enter the examination-hall are devoted to study as a life-long occupation. The Mayor of Tien-tsin related with pride how, on gaining the second degree, he had removed with his whole family to Peking, from the distant province of Yeinnan, to compete for the third ; how at each triennial contest he had failed, until, after more than twenty years of patient waiting, at the seventh trial, and at the mature age of three score he bore off the coveted prize. In a recent list of ninety-nine candidates of the second degree, sixteen are over forty years of age, one sixty-two and one eighty-three. The average of the whole number is above

thirty and for the third degree is much higher.

We thus have a class of men, numbering in the aggregate some two or three millions who keep their faculties bright by constant exercise. If these men are not highly educated it is not the fault of the competitive system, which proves its power to stimulate them to such prodigious exertions ; but of the false standard of intellectual merit established in China. In that country letters are everything and science nothing.

The type of Chinese education is not that of our modern schools: but when compared with the old curriculums of languages and philosophy it appears by no means contemptible. A single paper intended for the last day of the examination for the second degree, may serve as a specimen. It covers five subjects - criticism, history, agriculture, military affairs and finance. There are twenty questions under each head. It may be that these are not treated in a scientific manner but they could not be answered without an extensive knowledge of Chinese literature. One question under each of the five heads is all that our space will allow us to introduce. I. "How do the rival schools of Wang and Ching differ in respect to the exposition of the meaning and the criticism of the text of the Book of Changes ? II. The great historian Sze Ma Ch'ien prides himself on having gathered up much material that was neglected by other writers. What are the sources from which he derived his information ? III. From the earliest time great attention has been given to the improvement of agriculture. Will you indicate the arrangements adopted by the various dynasties ? IV. The art of war arose four thousand four hundred years ago, different dynasties since that time have adopted various methods to regulate the use of the militia and standing armies, the mode of raising the supplies for the army, can you state these. V. Give an account of the circulating medium under different dynasties and state how the currency of the Sung dynasty corresponded with our use of paper money at the present day. "

The fact that a place is found for subjects of this class is full of hope. Dr Martin says "It indicates that the door, if not fully opened, is at least sufficiently ajar to admit the introduction of our western sciences with all their progeny of arts, a band powerful

enough to lift the Chinese out of the mists of their Mediaeval scholasticism and to bring them into the full light of modern knowledge."

In this statement he seems to ignore the fact that the officials and mandarins and students themselves have been the ones who opposed all progress and the great majority of the uprising against foreigners have been secretly fomented and encouraged by the literature. They seem to cling most tenaceously to the old dead system of the past, and the new schools at Tientsin, the North University and the University of Peking and the New University at Shanhai have been founded through the efforts of men like Li Hung Chang who started their careers as soldiers or were educated abroad as Wu Ting Fang the embassador at Washington and Lou Fung Loa the embassador at London, and received their places not in the regular way but through the influence of Li Hung Chang.

If the new condition, of affairs in China caused by the Boxer uprising and the exposure of the condition of the government, does stimulate the Board of Examiners to require a knowledge of western Science in the examinations then a field has been opened up for the denominational Universities that is simply unlimited, as the government schools are turning their attention largely to military science and mechanical, electrical, and civil engineering.

For already the colleges for higher education established in the large cities of China act as a reconciler, and afford a platform upon which the leaders among the Chinese and the leaders of the Christian church can stand together. The need of more schools of great universities cannot be better shown than by giving the list of those now at work upon the field, which shows their inadequacy. There is a college at Canton : the American Board College at Foo Chow : the Methodist Colleges at Peking and Nanking : the American Board College at Tanchow : St John's Episcopal College at Shanhai : the M. E. South College at Shanhai : an the Anglo-American College at Fuchow : and the Presbyterian College at Way Shen. Several of these at the present time are in ruins as the result of the Boxer Movement. And none of them are large enough or have money enough to become a great university. This will only be possible if the missionaries of each

province unite their forces and their means and build one school which shall be Christian but not denominational, some may think this unwise but what the heathen world needs is not creed but Christ and especially is this necessary as by the very last mail comes the unpleasant news that all the Christian Americans and English have been asked to resign from the Imperial University even Dr Martin after nearly forty years of service, has been dismissed, because they have talked too much about the Boxer Movement. And Japanese are to be put in their places who although they may be good teachers are not Christians. And if China is to be revived in the next ten years it will depend largely upon the Christian influence brought to bear upon the young men who are beginning to simply throng the schools : seeking to know something of the life of the world beyond their shores and shall they not be allowed to see for themselves the light of the world which has given to the Western Powers their strength and spirit.

And if the colleges intend to accomplish the regeneration of China there are certain features that must be adopted.

I. The institution must be evangelical. Not that the institutions are to be Theological Schools or Bible Institutes. The one distinguishigg feature will be that the word of God shall have the place of honor.

II. The teachers must be men of God who can lead the students to Christ by their personality, they must be men who can attract the students by the magnetism of their characters.

III. If they cannot compete with the Government Schools in every branch, they must be superior in the lines they do teach.

IV. The students should be self-supporting as far as possible. And though there are many other features that could be named as useful to a great institution still they would simply be suggestions as no school has been as yet been governed by them, but it is to be hoped that the rumor which has come will prove true that the missionaries of the province of CHili have united including ooth English and American societies.

And may we all pray and work that the Sleeping Empire may be awakened, and that bigoted spirit of the Chinese literature may be changed into one of earnest desire for knowledge of the truth. And in seeking to master chemistry, and physics, zoology and geology and

engineering they may be mastered by the spirit of the Lord Jesus.

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