

WHY CHINA'S "UNEQUAL TREATIES" MUST GO

A. GORDON MELVIN

TO-DAY, many who a year ago stood for the continuance of extraterritoriality, and of the "unequal treaties" with China, stand so no longer. A year ago there was no Chiang Kai-shih, no "Three Principles of Democracy", no Revolution, no New China. To-day these things are upon us with all the emphasis of reality, while the Revolution brings with it two dangerous riders, Russian communism and whisperings of world-change. But world-change or no, we must on with the dance. It is too late to draw back. The day when the tide could be stopped is gone for ever. There is nothing for the foreigners to do but capitulate, and do so generously.

Two reasons explain why the present treaties and foreign privileges in China must go. One of them is that the problems involved have intruded themselves from the realm of theory into the realm of practical things. It is no longer a time to hold meetings and discussions, or to write articles discussing the pros and cons of the Chinese situation. The time has come to do something, and that right quickly. It is no longer any time to consider what this or that one thinks, or to comment upon the reasonableness or unreasonableness of Chinese demands. It is no time to consider internal conditions, or give just judgments on the basis of an extraterritoriality report. The report on extraterritoriality was unsigned by the Chinese delegate, because he dared not see what his fellow countrymen were deliberately blind to. The practical situation is just this. Extraterritoriality and foreign privilege in China must go, or the foreigner must go himself. The foreigner cannot remain in China and enjoy the protection of any idea or agreement unpalatable to the Chinese. He and all his works must become subject to local control, or he must "get out."

The Chinese people to-day are not arguing these matters. They are not considering whether this is right or wrong. The Christian Chinese is not concerning himself with the question of whether national action is Christian or not. He is not taking the concrete situation into account. He is not thinking of maladministration of justice in Chinese courts, of unsanitary conditions

or lack of modern development. These things are all forgotten as abandoned idols. All such realities have given place to his own hopes. He has definitely turned away from the things that are, and is living in the world of his dreams. China is not a land as other lands are, governed by the people for the people, with a sound and honest government, and an opportunity for the individual to fulfil his own being. The native thinks of Old China wearing a new garment, reincarnated in a new century—of railroads, industrialization, manufacture and trade; of prosperity, supremacy and glory. These things are more real to him than reality. He lives in this world of imagination, and is determined to substitute it for the real world around him, until he transforms the world to the colour of his own desires.

The fundamental premise of the Chinese is not an outcome of the real world but of this ideal world, and in this ideal world there is no foreigner. It is a Chinese world, and in it the Chinese rules with his ancient enemy beneath his feet. If the foreigner wishes to come paying homage or bearing gifts, he will be welcome; but he must be prepared to kow-tow to the Emperor of Nationalism. Every Monday morning China bows three times before the portrait of Sun Yat-sen, the prophet of the Revolution, and the foreigners, missionary and all, bow too—or leave for home.

It is clear how fruitless it would be to argue this. The foreign formula has been "Reform yourself, and we will talk to you." This merely enrages the Chinese. Perhaps the foreigners think it shouldn't, but it does. To the native all reforms are already accomplished in embryo. Just as evolution would insist that the universe was all rolled up in some age-old primeval cell, so the Chinese believes that a prosperous future is rolled up in the present. The country is not open to conviction; she is not open to argument; she is not open to persuasion in this matter. This is the main reason why the treaties must go. When a warrior decides to ride through to his objective, he does not pause though he die in his attempt. That is China's state to-day. The decision is already made. No matter what the cost, she will drive through to her objective. She is willing to die in this cause, but not to abandon it.

The second reason which makes the abolition of foreign privilege inevitable is the emergence of a newer and a real New China. This is a China that has definitely broken with the past, and deliberately and determinedly gone whoring after gods which, if they are not false, are certainly foreign. The Chinese no longer wants the foreigner. The wants to be a foreigner himself, a naturalized and

nationalized foreigner. A virus of western civilization has at last infected the masses. The lot is cast to determine future ways, and the nation is to become modern.

Slowly this New China man has been taking the place and position of the Old China man. For a generation now, the schools have been preparing him and the world has been longing for him. Now that he is here, he has forgotten to make himself agreeable or courteous. The mission school began to make him, and has continued the process, assisted by the American Boxer Indemnity fund, John D. Rockefeller and other philanthropists. John Dewey and Bertrand Russell have each had a finger in the pie, and missionaries would call it a dirty finger. Russia has not forgotten to be neighborly, in a lending and borrowing sort of way. For years the process has been going on, and as it progressed the multiplication of newspapers—magazines—printed propaganda—has been filling the minds of Chinese youth with a ferment of ideas which no human mind could keep in control.

Consider what must be the mental content and national experience of educated leaders who are now reaching the age of thirty-eight or forty. What thoughts and ideas are crowding and jostling in the mind of the ebullient student classes! The movement to reform and adopt modern ways of doing things became urgent after China's disastrous defeat at the hands of Japan in 1895, and the subsequent leases of concessions to European powers had a profound effect upon the native mind. Foreign countries could no longer be ignored. The attempted reforms of the Emperor Kuang Hsu followed. The Empress Dowager, who at first blocked Kuang Hsu's decrees, soon reversed her policy and became in turn a reformer. The old system of examinations was abolished; a school system of the Western type was set up. Students poured into Europe, America and Japan. Translations of foreign books were made, and there was an insatiable thirst for the new learning. Hurrying on the heels of these things came the Revolution of 1911, introducing revolutionary ideas and a call to patriotism, following the modern Chinese method of first setting up the shadow and then attempting to fill in the substance. The military movement was followed by a popular or civilian intellectual movement, which might be called the popular National Movement of 1919. This was due to a combination of causes. In the first place, the students who had flocked abroad to study were beginning to return, and attempting to find a place, in spite of a somewhat unenthusiastic welcome back home. Trained in methods of developing material wealth and in the teaching of modern learning, they set to work

at the difficult task of developing industry and commerce, of founding universities, of educating the rising generation in new ways of thinking. Foreign lecturers of note and with tendencies toward radical thinking were invited to China, and gave lectures to the *intelligentsia* which were broadcasted in the new magazines. They were widely discussed, and became the mental pabulum of youngsters in high school and early college. Here these young students obtained what was by no means education in the fundamentals that could give balance and develop calm judgment. On the contrary, lacking any solid background of learning, these intellectual babes were fed on the froth and foam of a new philosophy,—moral, economic and social. Their minds became a topsy-turvydom of ultra-modernism, and the diametrical opposite of the conservatism of the parental generation. When the dailies and weeklies and semi-monthlies spread by newly developed postal communication and railways to the furthest corners of the land, they could not fail to produce a mental craze in the minds of young people. It was as though a child brought up on bread and milk should suddenly take to smoking cigars and drinking whiskey. There thus developed in China a student class, radical in tone and superficial in thinking, isolated from and rebellious toward every tradition and doctrine sacred to their parents, and led by a group of young intellectuals lacking in the balance and moderation which age and experience alone can give.

Filled with an exaggerated idea of their own importance, prodded to desperation by the pricking of new ideas and by those who preached to them their special responsibilities, the students began their programme of patriotic intractability. They felt that they were fitting themselves to become the vocal organs of the masses. The student movement quickly became national in character and fanatical in complexion. It used every means of what is known as passive resistance. Students sat in public places and wept, until foreigners felt like calling them maudlin snivellers. That very conduct which the foreigner considers contemptible was regarded by the Chinese as heroic. The patriotic movement was whipped into fervour by such spectacular acts as Ma Tsun's attempt to beat his brains out by bumping his head on a stone pillar in the Tientsin chamber of commerce, and the kneeling of the Tientsin students for five hours on the ground in the scorching sun in their attempt to secure permission to parade the streets. The gaining of this right in such an unusual way partly explains the incessant parading and banner waving of the Chinese students,—a most extraordinary phenomenon. The mind of the student is

on fire with patriotism. Unselfishness and self-sacrifice on the part of the young people is one of the most encouraging signs in the present revolutionary movement.

The remarkable success of the southern or revolutionary project which broke out in the summer of 1926 and has produced the present turmoil is to be explained for the most part by its identity with the intellectual and social movements just outlined. Wherever the Southern armies have advanced, they have been welcomed by the student population as military crusaders of their own cause. The Northerners have in the student classes within their territories an internal enemy that is sapping away their vitality and waiting only to welcome the advancing armies of the South. Gradually the North is borrowing its platform from the South, and making a bid for popular support by professing to be representative of ideas differing from those of the Southerners only in an open opposition to Bolshevism. There is thus in China to-day an intellectual and patriotic unity never known before. This unity is directed toward the establishment of a modern China, and the elimination of the foreigner and his iniquities.

The most interesting thing about the new Southern Government is its capability. What China needs to-day is an efficient, progressive, honest and well-organized modern government. There are many things about the new régime which lead observers to hope that it may have more of these desirable characteristics than that which went before. The officials high up in the government are almost without exception experts, with modern foreign training. Eugene Chen, the Minister of Foreign Affairs,¹ for example, was born abroad and his native tongue is English,—an advantage in his recent conversations with Mr. O'Malley, Great Britain's representative, which may have had no small influence in averting trouble. Mr. Soong, of the Department of Finance, is a Harvard graduate student. These men are labouring against colossal difficulties. They are hampered in their proceedings by radical elements in the government, which the absence of Chian Kai-shih on military campaigns makes it difficult to handle.

The Chinese are past masters at gaining their ends by bluff and effrontery. A Chinese thief caught with the goods in his hand will insist "I didn't take it!" If one gives Mr. Chen credit for using strange methods to obtain his purposes, rather than cannon and warships, one will be more charitable toward him. Even though he may be guilty of diplomatic impertinence and braggadoccio, certainly there is a statesmanlike attempt to do the right thing in the negotiations with Mr. O'Malley concerning the

1. This article was written at Wuchang, China, three months ago —EDITOR

Hankow and Kukiang concessions. This willingness and ability to settle delicate matters by negotiation is a most encouraging characteristic of the Southern Government.

In short, the Southern Government begins to show signs of being a real Government, and this is one of the most significant changes in China to-day. Ever since the fall of the monarchy in 1911, a series of phantom Governments has been set up in Peking, professing to be representative of and responsible for China. Again and again the foreign powers have been disappointed and deceived in their dealings with these self-styled Governments, until the foreign diplomat has lost his respect for and reliance upon the Chinese. So many times has his hope been raised only to be dashed to the ground, that he can hope no longer. He has a tendency to feel that no Chinese administration can be respected, trusted or depended upon in any way either to fulfil its agreements or live up to its promises. If he regards the new Southern Government as but a fresh manifestation of the old malady of militarism, it is not to be wondered at. If he is unwilling to trust the assurances of the Southern Government, it is not surprising. One does not expect a story-teller to begin suddenly telling the truth, nor a kleptomaniac to become honest over-night. It is only to be expected that the assurances of the Southern Government should be accepted guardedly, until concrete evidence is forthcoming that its intentions and abilities are not of the old order. The Nationalist foreign minister is addicted to such flamboyant statements as that in which he said "The extension of Nationalist control to the British concession in Hankow is in itself the amplest guarantee that the lives and property of British and other nationals in the concessions shall and must be protected by my Government." The trouble is that previous experience does not permit the foreign diplomat to believe this statement without reserve. As a matter of fact, it is only a part truth; for while the property of British subjects in Hankow has not been protected in any complete sense, and for some days British and foreign citizens could not safely appear on the street, nevertheless no lives have been lost, and this is immensely to the credit of the Nationalist Government. In truth there seems to be much more in the statement than would at first appear. When we consider the constant difficulties the Government has had, it seems to have made numerous sincere and successful attempts to protect the rights and properties of foreigners. In its agreements with great Britain concerning Hankow and Kukiang, property rights have been recognized and respected. A sincere attempt has been made to keep troublesome rowdy elements in the population

in reasonable check. A simple example is found in what has just happened when a regiment of soldiers boarded the English river liner *Tuckwo* at Hankow, and demanded to be taken down stream to Kukiang. British ships in port cleared for action, and British soldiers boarded the *Tuckwo*. The present writer was himself on board when Chinese officials arrived and quickly ordered the soldiers to disembark, the whole matter being settled in an hour or so. It is difficult for the new Government to control activities of their representatives and armies in places out of direct communication with the capital. Unfortunate events may, therefore, happen in some places in spite of the wishes of the Government, and deliberately sensational false reports so becloud the issues that little can be done. Such situations are inevitable during the turmoil of Revolution. But on the whole there is much which might lead one to hope that the Southern rulers may be the most satisfactory persons to deal with, that China has ever had.

The practical and progressive policies of the Government are obvious, and there seems reason to believe that reforms will actually be put into practice as soon as a practical opportunity arises. There have been notable improvements in Canton in road development, city construction and communication. The Canton-Hankow railway, the last link of a line which will be trans-national from North to South, is rapidly progressing, and there are signs which indicate that it will be managed efficiently. The gates and walls of the city of Wuchang, the new capital, are actually being pulled down, a preliminary step in civic development which is both essential and promising.

Whatever the attitude of the powers might have been a year ago, they have now committed themselves to a policy of liberalism which it would be equally foolish to abandon or to pursue too conservatively. There is danger of confusing the old policy with the new, and of not going far enough. It is too late now to consider whether a liberal policy is wise or foolish, right or wrong. The foreign nations, having once set their hand to the plough, should not draw back. They have decided to recognize the changes in China, and they should recognize them to the full. When I was a boy, my copy-book taught me that there were two kinds of men, those who were really honest and those who were honest because it is the best policy. The time has come for the foreigners to go the whole way with China, if not because it is their friendly wish and desire, then because it is the best policy, the only policy which will fully recognize the facts.

It would be absurd to blunder on without recognizing the two elements which make it necessary to assist Chinese aspirations. The first of these is the Chinese determination to have foreign privilege abolished, the second the presence of a new Government which promises to be capable and reliable. The Chinese are determined to have what they want. They might be crushed to temporary submission by a foreign war, but their spirit and determination would never be truly crushed. It would smoulder on until it burst again with greater fury under more favorable conditions. The human spirit will not be suppressed, and the aspirations of the Chinese people are a welling up of that spirit. Now is the first and last opportunity of the West to make a gigantic bid for Chinese help in world civilization. Russia made just such a bid by her revolutionary policy in handing over completely her Chinese concessions and relinquishing special privileges in China. This was taken by the Chinese as a gesture of friendship, and gave Russia a solid foothold in the country. China will not fail in returning full payment, with nothing over. She will throw Russia over as soon as Russia's real friendship fails, and she will make real friends with any real friend from the West, most of all with Great Britain if Great Britain has most to offer.

Consequently the best thing that the foreign powers can possibly do is to be generous. The best thing that France, England and America can do is to cancel those obligations voluntarily, and willingly. If they do not wish to do these things for humanitarian or ethical reasons, they might as well do them because only thus can they meet the practical and real situation in world politics to-day. Here is an opportunity for the idealist and the business man to meet on a common platform. The only practical thing for the foreign nations to do is to cancel their special privileges at any cost, and to do it with a flourish, a gesture and a smile.