

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE FUTURE

ON a deliciously warm and quiet spring evening in 1925 we were sitting, a little company of Chinese and foreigners, in one of those peaceful old Chinese gardens which are hidden behind the myriad street walls of Peking. The yellow roses shone dimly through the dusk, great jars with blossoming oleanders stood as sentinels around us, and the perfume of the wistaria stole about our heads like a caress with every tiny breeze.

Our host, one of the leaders of medical reform in China, wished to bring a traveling fellow-countryman, one of America's most famous heart specialists, into touch with the cultural thought of Peking. The material stimulants were very simple, — tobacco and Chinese tea. Our host considered that the exchange of thought should be the main thing.

The conversation soon slipped into the usual channel, the situation in China.

"Tell me," said the guest of honor, "how things are with this civil war that you talk so much about. I found the railroad trip from Shanghai to Peking quick and comfortable, even according to our standard, and this magnificent old city is so peaceful that one would like to stay here always to sit and dream in these shady gardens. Where is this war?"

"China is large," said one of the young Chinese,

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"but what happens in this country is condensed by your newspapers into a few lines, while in reality the various theaters of war are hundreds of miles apart. Furthermore they do not fight everywhere at the same time. Sometimes it has been warm enough here in Peking."

"How long has this civil war lasted?"

"Nine years, if we reckon from the rising against Yuan Shih Kai, or perhaps we should rather say fourteen years, counting from the revolution."

"But how is it possible that China can hold together, apparently intact, during this long internal struggle?"

"Why, Doctor C——," one of the foreigners now struck in, "the situation is so peculiar that I should prefer to explain it by an imaginary parallel in your own country.

"Suppose the government at Washington had for nine years past had no real influence outside the capital but was, on the contrary, compelled to make a compromise between the changing ideas of the contending generals. Suppose, further, that a doctrinaire demagogue had started an independent government in New Orleans in an attempt to come into touch with and win recognition from certain foreign powers, threatening at the same time to make a punitive expedition against Washington. Assume that the southwestern states, California, Arizona and New Mexico, had declared themselves independent under a rebellious general. Imagine two uncommonly powerful generals in almost unbroken feud with each

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other ruling, one in the northwestern states—Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana—the other in the rich northeastern states between the Great Lakes and the Atlantic; these 'independent' generals meanwhile receiving aid in money and war munitions, one from England, the other from Japan, while the Canadian Soviet Republic was exciting your students with red propaganda and acting especially in collusion with the demagogue down in New Orleans. Picture that this condition had lasted nearly a decade and that the military operations of the opposing generals have been increasing in area and are being conducted with growing bitterness. You have there an imaginary parallel which applies to the conditions in this country."

"Such civil wars," Doctor C—— remarked, "would in a few months shatter our great industries, cripple commerce, destroy finance and sink the country into complete anarchy. How is it possible that after such a frightful and protracted ordeal China shows such little sign of desolation?"

Doctor Wang, a dapper little Chinese doctor who spoke English with a characteristic laconic pregnancy, gave the desired explanation.

"The Chinese are always a primitive agricultural people without any great manufactures. Their simple life is only locally and superficially touched by the internal strife. The most important thing is, however, that the Chinese from earliest times have created a far-reaching system of self-government, which applies not only to provinces but to the smaller

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administrative units such as the *hsien* (district) or even to the separate village. Certain provinces which in these years of unrest have been badly administered and have suffered long from war and banditry are in a very pitiable condition. But a certain amount of progress has been made everywhere, especially as regards the higher education and the ability of the students to consider the misfortunes of their country and feel responsible for its deplorable condition. The province of Shansi under its "model governor", Yen Hsi Shan, has enjoyed almost complete peace and has made remarkable progress in popular instruction, in the uprooting of banditry and opium, the doing away with foot-binding and pigtails, the improvement of hygiene, street paving, etc. In the three northeast provinces, which constitute Manchuria, there has been, under the excellent management of Chang Tso Lin, increased colonization, improved agriculture, the development of communication and exports. In spite of Chang Tso Lin's war with Wu Pei Fu, Manchuria is a rich and flourishing country."

"Thank you, Doctor Wang; your explanation has helped me to understand in some degree the great power of resistance in your people. But tell me, when and how do you expect the end of this chaos?"

Dr. Wang replied, "We Chinese are always drawing wisdom from our classics, always taking guidance from history. Our realm has many times before been in a state of dissolution, and it has often been decades before we again had a central government. This time we have faith that there will again be a

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consolidation. The great body of the people are sound and industrious, the national debt is small compared to the natural resources of the country, and the impulse of renaissance can be felt in many ways. That we shall again have a national government, all educated and thinking Chinese are convinced. But as to when this shall be no one knows at present; it may be soon, it may be only in our children's time."

"Do you expect that this renewal of government will come through a parliament or do you count on other forces for this constructive work?"

"Our experiments with parliamentary government have been so depressing that nobody expects any good from that quarter, at least not before we get a really representative congress. Possibly, if the situation becomes absolutely desperate, there will be spontaneous coalitions, secret societies, student clubs and peasant volunteer armies, which will play their part as the expression of a stronger popular urge toward unselfish patriotic reform. But our real hope, the one solution on which we truly rely is that we shall find a great leader, a strong man, who can unite China with cannon and the executioner's ax, if necessary, a fearless and far-sighted statesman who can build up a modern society and yet preserve what is valuable in our old culture."

"What sort of man do you think this national leader will be? Will he belong to any of the familiar historical types, this man who is to fit your hopes?"

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Doctor Wang smiled. "They say that Marshal Feng Yü Hsiang dreams of becoming China's Mussolini, but the type of the Italian dictator hardly corresponds to our wishes. Up to now there has been too much pose and too little actual achievement. But there is another modern dictator whom we would gladly have as our countryman. Mustapha Kemal, who began his work when his apathetic land lay crippled in the relentless grip of the great European powers, he who in opposition to a degenerate dynasty created a capital inaccessible to foreigners in a peasant village of Anatolia, he who with a newly formed army threw the Greeks in panic out into the sea, and who finally without a sword-blow forced the great powers to quit the field — Mustapha Kemal should be our man." A stern tone had come into the little doctor's cultivated voice.

"I hope," said Doctor C——, "that you Chinese will soon find the strong man whom Doctor Wang foresees. But it seems to me that every step China takes toward adapting herself to modern conditions takes you away from the good old traditions of literature, art and morals. I fear that the values indispensable, not to you alone but to the whole world culture, are being jeopardized in this leveling process."

"No, Doctor C——,"— it was now the famous Chinese philosopher, the man with the sunny smile and lively movements of the hands, who spoke — "it is not so dangerous as you believe as to the values which are about to disappear. The revolution,

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to be sure, swept away all the splendid official costumes and the handsome, in its way unique, dragon banner, which has now been replaced by an uncommonly banal five-striped flag. Sometime we may possibly take back the dragon flag and the beautiful costumes, when they are no longer connected with the idea of imperial power. But they will certainly be costumes of another cut, for the discarded court costumes, like the clothes we still wear, are of Manchu cut with long narrow sleeves and buttoned up to the neck. The genuine old Chinese garments of the Tang and Sung dynasties were open at the neck, with long facings and wide sleeves. The Japanese kimono is really a survival of the old Chinese dress. Should we ever bring back the colorful official garments with dragon and phoenix motifs, it will not be the dress of the Manchu times but an older type from the ancient, purely Chinese dynasties.

"In general the modern renaissance movement is connected with a great interest in the old Chinese culture from the times before the barbarous Yuan and Ching dynasties, the Mongolian and the Manchu. What we love to go back to are the great philosophers in the last stage of the Chou dynasty, the stern statecraft of the Han period and the richly flourishing art of the Tang and Sung dynasties.

"It is a common mistake among foreigners to believe that we, when we adopt their engineering, natural science and medical training, also assume their outlook on life, their philosophy, religion and morals.

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"It must be remembered that we have the same tendency toward imitation as the Japanese, who, when they were barbarians, took from us their first culture and now learn with such willingness from the occidentals. We are inclined to take advantage of the technical assistance which the materialistic civilization of the West puts at our disposal, but our own revered cultural inheritance we shall never give up, never.

"Let me make the whole matter clear in a simple picture. Have you seen our old heating stoves, great fire containers without stove-pipes which are still used in most of the homes here in Peking?

"Now imagine that a Chinese scholar is sitting at home working on a philosophical treatise. He has only a stove of the old sort, which fills his room with smoke and smell. One day he decides to have installed a cast-iron stove of the American type with a pipe to carry off the smoke. He has to stop work for a day while the new warming apparatus is put in. When he resumes his writing, the work proceeds with joy and energy in the smokeless room, but his system of philosophy is hardly influenced by the American stove."

Doctor C—— laughed. "Tell me," he said, "have you any direct evidence of a new interest in national culture, modern as well as ancient?"

"Yes, since we have got rid of the official system with the literary examinations, new means have appeared for the study of our people, our speech and our historical monuments. Let me show you some day

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the Sinological Institute at our university, where we are busy just now arranging the enormous archive material of the early dynasties which we have just succeeded in obtaining from the Forbidden City.

"But I can relate you a little episode which illustrates better perhaps than anything here in Peking the widespread interest in the study of folklore. We have in the Sinological Institute a section for the study of folk songs and the simple tunes that are sung out on the roads and fields. A couple of days ago we received from the province of Chekiang a recent exhaustive publication containing hundreds of such popular melodies, a collection representing years of work but of which we had hitherto had no suspicion."

"Is it likely," inquired Doctor C——, "that the new spiritual revival which we all hope for in China will offer any essentially new contribution to world culture?"

"Here too history is our guide," said Doctor B——, the English anthropologist. "In ancient times China made various valuable additions in the interchange of Eastern and Western culture. Berthold Laufer, the learned Sinologist at Chicago in his work 'Sino-Iranica' has noted twenty-four kinds of agricultural products the knowledge of which was carried from China to Persia and farther west in exchange for a great number of cultivated plants from the West which were brought eastward to China. Among the former were the peach, the apricot, and tea.

"The light garments closely following the lines

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of the body which the beauties of imperial Rome used to wear were made of silk from China. The secret of how these wonderful fabrics were obtained was long preserved by the Chinese, and Latin authors related stories so extraordinary as that silk was combed from trees.

"A young American Sinologist, Professor Carter of Columbia, has followed step by step the progress of paper and the art of printing from China to the West. China thus gave to us Europeans the technical means which paved the way for the religious reformation and made possible the general enlightening of the people. In the discovery of the compass, which guided us to America, and of gunpowder, which broke the feudal power of the Middle Ages, the Chinese has also a share.

"In our time it is the West with its machine culture which has given tools for Chinese renaissance.

"Perhaps sometime it will again be the task of the East to direct the evolution of the world with a new departure. One thing we should be able to learn to-day from the sons of Han: viz., to preserve a national culture alive through thousands of years. While the civilization of the bronze age in Egypt, Crete and Mesopotamia began to be demolished by barbarians before our era, the Chinese alone upon earth preserved and developed their culture in unbroken sequence of four thousand years, and they alone of all peoples have preserved their land in undiminished fertility through millenniums."

There was silence around the table for a time, while

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a servant silently came forward and replenished the teacups.

From outside came the monotonous call of a street merchant and the quick patter of a rickshaw coolie. On the large street to the east tooted an automobile horn. Old and new were blended in a way that is peculiar to Peking.

And around our soft-speaking, dreamy group slept the wonderful city, revered with its glowing memories of three mighty dynasties, majestic in the wide simplicity of its extent, enchanting in the quiet beauty of its palaces and temple gardens, and alluring in its rich promise for the future.