

CHINA CHIEF PROBLEM IN MAINTAINING WORLD PEACE: Country Is Backward ...

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New York Times (1857-1922); Mar 21, 1920; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times

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CHINA CHIEF PROBLEM IN MAINTAINING WORLD PEACE

Country Is Backward Politically Because Its Gaze Is Backward, and Its Enormous Natural Riches Are a Temptation to Stronger Powers

ONE outstanding fact in the world situation is that permanent peace cannot be assured among the nations until there is an adjustment of relations between the backward and weaker peoples on the one hand and the more advanced and powerful on the other. There must be a settlement based upon justice between the stronger and the weaker and upon equality of opportunity for the stronger. Trade and social contact among all peoples are increasing enormously year by year. The development and availability of the resources of the more backward countries are essential for the continued progress of the more advanced and, it is unnecessary to say, for the betterment of conditions among the less progressive as well.

We little realize how large a share of collisions in the past have arisen from the desire of great powers to exploit their less powerful neighbors. The immediate cause of the late war was the intention of Austria to make Serbia commercially and politically a mere appendage of herself. For centuries the scramble for annexation or control of territory in the outlying regions of the earth has been going steadily on.

The desired adjustment could be accomplished in either one of two ways: First, by such accession of the power of the weaker nations, either separately or by combination, as to enable them to resist attack. There is no present prospect that this will become possible. A second method would be the adoption of the principles embodied in the League of Nations covenant, so excellently set forth by President Wilson and by many publicists of broad outlook, such as provision for mandatories in colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them; also the provision for the protection of the territorial integrity and political independence of members of the League against external aggression.

There have been numerous declarations by responsible Ministers and heads

of nations against further exploitation of backward countries and for the adoption of radical changes in relations with them. Indeed, this seemed to be a dominant note at Paris while the treaty was under consideration.

In the settlement of these all-important problems the future of China stands out far more prominently than that of any other country. Our accomplished Secretary of State, the late John Hay, is quoted as having said of that country: "Whoever understands this mighty empire, socially, politically, economically and religiously, has the key to the world's politics for the next three centuries."

Assuredly the past history of this empire is most remarkable and the future possibilities are vast. Among such large countries as Russia, Brazil, Canada, Australia, and, it must be admitted, even the United States, China is at the head of the list in natural advantages for agriculture. Her superiority consists in the essentials of soil, rainfall and climate. The ranges of mountains which encircle China in the interior have been sending down their rich detritus for untold centuries. The Peking dust of the late Autumn and Winter, while annoying, is a constant addition to the fertility of the lands of Northern China.

Though there are ranges of mountains and large areas are periodically submerged by floods, the proportion of the area susceptible of cultivation is larger than in any of the countries named. Rainfall is abundant. The climate is wholesome for life and health and makes possible the raising of all the products of the temperate zones and many of those of the tropical regions. Two crops a year are the average.

Mineral resources, while only partly explored, are of vast extent and great variety. The mighty River Yangste, navigable much of the year by ocean steamships for nearly six hundred miles from its mouth and extending far inland, affords a means of communication for a much larger population than any other river of the world. The surface and physical contour of China are such

as to make the building of railways and canals comparatively easy.

Great National Resources.

It is by no means the result of chance that China is the most populous of all countries. Bounteous nature has afforded her that position. In industry no people can surpass the Chinese. In mental quickness and susceptibility for improvement by education they manifest excellent capacity. Without scientific instruction they may be counted among the best of farmers. Stimulated by the pressure of population upon the means of subsistence, they surpass all other peoples in their long established habits of frugality and in utilization of all possible resources.

In the magnitude of public works such as the Great Wall, the Grand Canal, with a multitude of smaller artificial waterways, no people of ancient or modern times has equaled them, and that notwithstanding the triumphs of modern science and engineering. The more their ancient records and books are examined, the more the marvel of their early proficiency in science and literature is brought to light. But in the face of all these facts conditions are deplorable.

China is surely a land of wonderful contrasts. Once she might claim to be the strongest, now she is the weakest of nations. There is the greatest similarity of manners, customs and ideals among all her millions, but the greatest inability to work together on national lines. There has been the longest continued study of political problems, but the least facility in reaching a practical solution of them.

In whatever involves the collective action of a people, decadence and inefficiency are manifest. Many of the

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great public works and monuments, surpassing those of Egypt or Greece, and which were once the pride of China, are now useless or have fallen into decay. Tens of millions have perished from famines and floods without any effective effort to prevent recurrence of these disasters.

Present-Day Contrasts.

The contrasts of the present with the past are not more striking than those of the present. Millions of soldiers of stalwart physique and exceptional endurance can be recruited for service, but Chinese armies have been an object of ridicule among military experts. Even now, while hundreds of thousands are in camps all over China, bandits are roaming about at will in almost every province, terrorizing the people, sometimes taking possession of towns and cities, levying tribute and demanding ransoms. In the World War, when not more than 5,000 German soldiers were holding Tsing-tao, no attempt was made by these immense armies to restore this city to China.

The difference between the private individual and the official class is marked. Probity is a trait of the Chinese. A coolie might safely be trusted with a treasure, yet, although men of high ideals and patriotic aims have been numerous in governmental positions, all the methods of graft, corruption and knavery of the Orient and the Occident rolled together in one mass would fall short of the dishonest practices prevalent in Chinese officialdom. Many in high positions have been bribed to betray their country's most vital interests.

Inefficiency, dishonesty and disloyalty

have characterized public administration.

What are the reasons for this pathetic condition of a people possessed of so many splendid qualities? Why is China like a stranded hulk, helpless and immovable? It is difficult for any one to give an adequate explanation, but there are certain facts which stand out prominently.

First of all the thought of the typical Chinese is so absorbed in the past that it is impossible for him to grasp the spirit or utilize the benefits of modern civilization. The better days were centuries ago. Customs and methods hoary with age should be followed. Ancestral worship is the accepted religious cult, and the conduct of every man should be guided by that which he regards as the wish of departed ancestors. Their spirits are hovering about and they will surely return to bring disaster and punishment unless he renders to them due reverence and performs the prescribed rites for their repose. In turn the ambition of the Chinese is to have numerous children and grandchildren to succeed him and reverence his memory. Thus there is not only a backward outlook, but the family is the centre of social and political life.

Looking to the Past.

No human being has ever exercised quite the same influence upon so many millions in moral and intellectual conceptions as Confucius, who lived 2,400 years ago. His teachings are still very largely accepted all over China as the final authority, both in morals and politics. It is pleasing to note the high standards of conduct which he laid down. He must be ranked as one of the world's philosophers. But even he looked to the past. Many of his epigrammatic maxims were plagiarisms from those who lived before him. The whole substance of his doctrine was to select the best of things that are, and not to try untrodden paths of indulgence in aspirations for the unknown. In his influence all has been static and nothing dynamic. He has been aptly called the arch-conservative. More even than

other Orientals of his time, he entertained a disparaging opinion of woman, and would relegate her to a menial position. His influence in this regard has survived, and thus the helpful assistance of half of humanity has been diminished in the development of the social life of China.

Until 1903 the competitive examinations which were the avenue to office had to do only with the classics of more than two thousand years ago. An answer or expression of opinion not derived from these was ground for the rejection of a candidate. Deep-rooted conservatism was, of course, the result.

Too much stress cannot be laid upon the fact that from 1644 to 1912 China was ruled by the alien Manchu dynasty, which always constituted a class apart from the people and forbade intermarriage between the Chinese and the Manchus. To this day the Manchu women wear a distinctive dress. The soldiers upon whom the Emperors relied were recruited from their race and the descendants of those who in the seventeenth century aided in overthrowing the preceding dynasty. In nearly all provinces Tartar Generals were in command. There is probably no recorded instance of the absence of amalgamation between the ruling class and those over whom they ruled for so long a time.

The inevitable result was a feeling of repulsion for a Government which had nothing in common with the people. The rulers were regarded as oppressors. This repulsion was powerfully reinforced by the fact that the functions of the Central Government were so limited as to confer no appreciable benefit upon the great mass of the population. Its activities were for the most part confined to such foreign relations as existed and the maintenance of an army, the principal aim of which was to sustain the dynasty in power. Modern improvements conducted by the Governments of today, such as roads, schools and provision for the general welfare of the people, were initiated, if at all, by local Governments or private associations.

The contact of the Chinese with Peking was in the payment of taxes and in the rendering of services which meant little for himself or his community. The vast extent of the country and the absence of means of communication emphasized the lack of touch with the authorities of the nation and the separate interests of the different portions. The inhabitants of one province or locality knew little and cared little for what was transpiring in any other. Today multitudes may be found who hardly know whether they are living under a republic or a monarchy. Education, though of a high standard among a few, is sadly lacking. It is stated that only one-tenth of the men and a much smaller proportion of the women can read. It is probable that this estimate is much too large.

Governmental Backwardness.

Until recently there were no newspapers of any considerable circulation to convey information or exercise an influence upon public opinion. Of late, it is true, many have been started. It is said that there are as many as sixty published in the Chinese language in the City of Shanghai alone.

The result of all these conditions is that the Chinese are a people, not a nation, an aggregation of families and clans, so distinct in their aspirations and interests as to create almost insuperable obstacles to unity and political organization. With most of them life is a constant struggle for daily bread, and in that struggle the obligations of each day are primarily to relatives and neighbors. Thus loyalty is not to any Government, but to family and friends.

In circumstances like these, the growth of many centuries, a republic was established eight years ago. It has certainly experienced untold difficulties. No change in the form of administration can be expected to accomplish an immediate transformation in the ideas and customs which control the political life of a people. Just what the situation now is, and what the future may be, must be considered in later articles.