

THE NEW CULTURE MOVEMENT IN CHINA

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Fourth Morrison Lecture

The fourth annual Morrison Lecture on “The New Culture Movement in China” was delivered in the Lecture Theatre of the Australian Institute of Anatomy, Canberra, on Tuesday evening, 10th May, 1935, by Dr. W.P. Chen, the distinguished Consul-General for China in Australia. Her Excellency Lady Isaacs and party from Federal Government House were present.

The chair was occupied by the Hon. R.G. Casey, M.P., M.C., Assistant Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia, who represents Corio, Victoria, in the House of Representatives. In Corio is situated the City of Geelong, the birth-place of Dr. Morrison. Apologies for absence were received from Mr. Ah Ket, barrister-at-law, Melbourne, Mr. F.J. Quinlan, formerly Chief Electoral Officer for the Commonwealth, and Mr. W.J.L. Liu, one of the founders of the Lectureship, who is absent in Shanghai.

The Theatre was crowded, and many were unable to gain admission. After the address Lady MacKenzie held a reception and supper in honour of the distinguished Lecturer in the Northern Museum of the Institute.

Address

It is my great privilege that opportunity has come to me to make a further contribution to the series of George Ernest Morrison Lectures, established to honour the memory of that great Australian. In delivering

the inaugural address of 1932, I felt keenly my responsibility. That my sojourn in the Commonwealth has endured so long as to bring to me the honour of giving this second Lecture, fills me with deep appreciation.

I have chosen as the subject of my discourse "The New Culture Movement in China". Such a subject will enable me to place before you the New Literary Renaissance with which is incorporated the New Knowledge and the New Life Movement. It is the opinion of the founders of the Lectureship that cultural knowledge must accompany trade, if it does not actually precede it. If I can convey to you some knowledge of the cultural movements in China, I will feel that I have paved the way for a better understanding, not only culturally, but commercially.

One of the most significant phases of modern Chinese thought is directed towards the building of a new Chinese culture based upon the teachings of the late Dr. Sun Yat Sen. The revolution of 1911 was an epoch-making event in the history of China, not only because it gave birth to the Republic, but because it led to the birth of a New Culture.

China has built up for herself a civilization that has stood for hundreds of generations. This civilization existed under the rulership of Emperors. With the overthrow of the reigning Emperor in 1911, government by the people became an established fact. To-day this democratic Government is engaged in adjusting the nation's civilization to modern requirements. Were China to have had peace within her own boundaries since the revolution, great progress would have been made. But armed attacks have suggested to the Chinese that, for their country to survive, she must be strong in arms. If this idea were to take root, the future outlook would be dark. The Chinese have been a great conquering race in the past, and their indifference to death and their powers of endurance have made them excellent soldiers. There is a Chinese proverb which says, in effect, "Meekness and endurance will conquer force." Such is, indeed, true of the faith of the Chinese race. Fortunately, history has taught that armed strength is powerless against peaceful resistance. Unless exasperated beyond endurance, China is unlikely to seek salvation in warlike expansion.

The best brains of the Chinese race have always been devoted to intellectual pursuits. The greatest benefit that the world will derive from the awakening of China will almost certainly be found in intellectual cooperation. Everything of Western origin that the Chinese adopt is transformed beneath their touch. When they have thoroughly studied the thought of the Western world, their intellectual training and their rich stores of experience make their criticism of Western ideas of outstanding interest. English has been chosen as the second language of China, so that English will be the chief medium through which will be studied the science, the philosophy and the poetry of the West. Anglo-Saxon nations will thus be the first to gain by contact with Chinese thought, and it is their

special duty to interpret to the Chinese the civilization of the West. The arrangement that has been made under the terms of the Boxer Indemnity Agreement for an interchange of professors between England and China is a step in the right direction. But the study of Chinese subjects has not so far been pursued in England with the thoroughness it deserves. France, Germany and Russia are all ahead in this respect, yet a true understanding of China is much more necessary to England than to either France or Germany.

It is intended to describe in the following statements how certain phases of Chinese culture have been changed, and how these changes have taken the particular course they have taken. My listeners will first of all need to understand that cultural changes of great significance have taken place and are taking place in China. These changes have brought about the rejuvenation of an old civilization. Slowly, quietly but unmistakably the Chinese Renaissance is becoming a reality.

Before proceeding to discuss the New Literary Renaissance it is necessary to remind you that China in the past had two distinct languages—the written language of the classics and the spoken language. The problem of the reformers was the problem of finding a suitable language which could serve as an effective means of educating the millions of children and illiterate adults. They admitted that the classical language was difficult to write and learn, and for thousands of years incapable of being spoken or being verbally understood. Therefore, it was not suited to the education of the masses. But they never thought of giving up the classical language in which was written and preserved all the cultural traditions of the race. Also, the classical language was the only linguistic medium for written communication between various regions with different dialects, just as Latin was the universal medium for all Europe. For these reasons the language of the classics must be taught throughout the schools. All school texts from primary to University were written in this classical language, and teaching consisted of memorizing texts, which had to be explained word for word in local dialects. Many attempts were made to institute reforms, scholars and missionaries endeavouring to work out systems. But these scholar reformers, while advocating change, would not consider for one moment that these expedients would replace the classical language altogether. Indeed, the spoken language was regarded as the vulgar jargon of the people.

The solution of this problem originated from the Chinese students in American Universities. They discussed it, and wrote articles for Chinese and American journals on the subject. These were read but attracted little comment. One of the students, however, by name Hu Shih, who returned from America and joined the National University in Peiping in 1917, gave more serious thought to the whole problem, seeing that it was really one

of a suitable medium for all branches of Chinese literature. The question now became, "In what language shall the new China produce its future literature?" He answered himself by saying, "The classical language can never be the medium of a living literature of the people. No dead language can produce a living literature." And so he proposed that the *pei-hua*, the vulgar tongue of the vast majority of the populace, should be elevated to the national language of China, to the position enjoyed by all the modern national languages of Europe. It was one thing to declare this, it was another to convince the intellectuals. It says much for his personality and strength of character that in the next few years his influence had extended, and the revolution in literature had spread throughout the country, the youth of the nation finding in the new literary medium an effective means of expression. Everybody wanted to express himself in a language which he could understand and in which he could make himself understood. In short, the literary revolution had succeeded in giving to the people a national language.

This student is now my illustrious compatriot, Dr. Hu Shih, Professor of Philosophy and Dean of the College of Letters in the National Peiping University of Peiping, China, who has been known to the West for many years as the father of the Chinese Renaissance. His name is identified with the whole process of cultural transition. He it was who in 1917 first caused to be published simultaneously in America and China "Some Tentative Suggestions for the Reform of Chinese Literature." The editor of the new liberal monthly who published the Chinese article responded with an article entitled "On a Revolution in Chinese Literature." In this article he said, "I am willing to brave the enmity of all the pedantic scholars of the country and hoist the great banner of the 'Army of the Revolution in Literature' in support of my friend Hu Shih.' On this banner shall be written in big characters the three great principles of the 'Army of Revolution'—

1. To destroy the painted, powdered and obsequious literature of the aristocratic few and to create the plain, simple and expressive literature of the people.
2. To destroy the stereotyped and monotonous literature of classicism and to create the fresh and sincere literature of realism.
3. To destroy the pedantic and unintelligible literature of the hermit and the recluse, and to create the plain speaking and popular literature of a living society."

The New Literary Renaissance which, as previously stated, had originated abroad, was taken up seriously by a number of professors at the National University of Peiping in 1917. This movement was at first violently opposed by conservative scholars, but they offered no argument in defence of the classical language and literature, and their opposition only helped to spread the new movement. In the meantime mature

students of the University, well trained in the cultural tradition of their country, saw in the new movement a striking similarity to the Renaissance in Europe, and they published a new monthly magazine in 1918 called *The Renaissance*. Three prominent features in the new movement reminded the students of the European Renaissance. Firstly, it was a conscious movement to promote a new literature in the living language of the people to take the place of the classical literature. Secondly, it was a movement of conscious protest against many of the ideas and institutions in the traditional culture, or, if you prefer it, of freedom versus authority, and thirdly, it was a movement led by men who knew their cultural heritage, and who tried to study it under the modern methods of research. It captured the imagination and sympathy of the youth of the nation as something which promised and pointed to the new birth of an old civilization.

Following the students' movement, the National University of Peiping arose to a position of national leadership in the world of thought, and the literary movement was hailed by the newly-awakened youth of the provinces as a most welcome emancipation, and new periodicals published in the living tongue sprang up in almost every city. Expression soon became a passion of the new generation, who found in the spoken language an effective means of interpreting their feelings and aspirations. All of a sudden the movement became nationwide, spreading like wildfire. In 1920, the Ministry of Education ordered that, beginning with the following academic year, the living national language instead of the classical should be taught in the first two grades. In 1928, the National Government in Nanking ordered all text-books to be written in national language, at the same time prohibiting the use of text-books in the classical language. It is a conservative estimate that three-quarters of all new text-books published during the last eight years are in the spoken language. Thus began one phase of the new culture movement known as the Literary Renaissance.

Before continuing with its further discussion, it might be well to review the historical background, which will reveal other periods of Renaissance. The rise of the great poets in the T'ang dynasty and simultaneously the movement for a new prose literature modelled after the style of the classical period, represented the First Renaissance. Such important developments of the Sung dynasty as the great reform movements in the eleventh century and the subsequent development of a powerful secular philosophy may be regarded as the Second Renaissance. The third originated in the rise of the dramas in the thirteenth century, and the rise of the great novels in a later period, together with their frank glorification of the joys of life, while the revolt in the seventeenth century against the philosophy of the Sung dynasty and the development of a new technique in classical scholarship in the last 300 years may be called the Fourth Renaissance. While each had its important role to play, each suffered from a common

defect—the absence of a conscious recognition of its historical mission. These new movements came and went, never completely dethroning the old, and the Government throughout continued to hold literary examinations on the classics, and men of letters continued to write their poetry and prose in the classical language.

The new Literary Renaissance of the last two decades differs from all the early movements in being a fully conscious and studied movement. Its leaders knew that they wanted a new language, a new literature—a new language as the effective medium for the development of the literature of a new China. They wanted a literature that would be written in the living tongue of a living people, and would be capable of expressing the real feelings, aspirations and thoughts of a growing nation.

This Renaissance was a result of intimate contact with the civilization of the West. Contact with strange civilizations brings new standards of values with which to compare existing standards, and reformation is the natural outcome of such contact.

The rise of the spoken language to dignity and fame is almost a romance in itself. For centuries the language of education was the language of the classics, but the language of the people was that of the theatre and the novels. These were the people's classics. From them they learnt practical wisdom, manners, speech, historical glimpses, religion, humour and even such military tactics as they knew. It was also the living tongue of the people that served as the medium through which artistic and literary talents found expression. The folk songs expressing the love and joy of rustic lovers and village singers, the new songs of dancing girls have been directly responsible for the creation of two most important branches of literature—the epic and the drama. Prose literature, the novellette, the serial novel and popular legends each have a place in the early literary development of the nation.

We have traced the development of the New Culture Movement as it applies to the literature and language of the people. We have yet to see how the Government has planned to educate the masses. Educational conferences compiled a complete programme, brief extracts from which will show that mass education was the chief concern. Under the scheme now in force, every illiterate is given four months' schooling in simple reading and writing. When possible every citizen of four years' education is utilized as a teacher under this mass education scheme, and every public philanthropic building is utilized as a class room. Special attention is given to the training of teachers, to the establishment of elementary schools in interior and rural districts, and to the vocational aspect of secondary education. For higher education, the policy of strengthening existing institutions, of encouraging extension work in universities and of increasing research institutes and graduate schools is

being maintained. Besides the education of the masses, social education lays emphasis on the establishment of museums, libraries, art galleries, lecture halls and recreation halls. Economic problems and civic training are brought to the attention of the populace.

It is not to be supposed that the realm of the press could escape the change which has taken place in every department of national life in China, be it politics, finance, communication or education. Of the means of communication that the Government promoted during the past decade, the most remarkable in progress are the postal and radio telegraphic facilities, on which the press depends for the transmission of messages. The policy of newspapers has changed with the years. Formerly publishers regarded editorials and military and political matters as their principal items; international, economic, educational and social received little attention. But with the past eventful years, and the progress in education and the new learning, the reading public has turned to the newspapers for information on widely different subjects. Nanking, the seat of Government, has become the heart of China's new press system. Since 1931 evening newspapers have come into successful operation. With regard to the printing itself, there are also signs of progress. The rotary press has taken the place of flat plate roller paper press, which in some instances has in turn given place to super-speed rotary press. Colour printing and photo-engraving equipments to facilitate graphic news and pictures have also been installed.

A study of the origin and trend of the New Literary Renaissance must be incomplete without reference to its effect on the people. The new education has produced changes far more revolutionary than the modest curriculum would seem to warrant. The old education was purely classical and literary; the new is meant for every one as a training for citizenship. A new world, far more interesting, is being brought within the comprehension of every boy and girl. New ideas and ideals are being instilled, and new ambitions developed in the minds of school children and parents alike. And with the advance in school grade and the growing complexity of the thoughts that come with the new contact with the cities, troubles are increased. Newspapers have added to them. But perhaps the most conspicuous change is the re-arrangement of the social classes in Chinese society. The old tradition of class division gave the scholar highest rank, with the farmer, the artisan and the merchant in scale of that order. The merchant with money power was never really at the bottom of the social scale, for he was able to buy his title of high office, which the poor scholar attained by literary examinations. But the scholarly class cherished only contempt for the merchant who held office through the power of money, and no scholar would give up his literary future for the contemptible profession of money-making. But with the rise of new industries, new trading companies and new banks, a highly-educated personnel was

required; modern trained students took up jobs with business concerns, and the merchant classes, which previously could not buy social esteem with money, have been elevated by raising their own intellectual level by the more general education available.

The same may be said of the soldier class. Held in contempt by the public, the success of the student armies of the cadet schools attracted the nation. The study of military organization, of strategy, of manoeuvres, and the training by these students of others intellectually equipped to receive such training, have raised the prestige of the soldier. Military drill is finding a place in the school curriculum, and in some instances is demanded by the students. It is even given in some girls' schools, although nurses' training is more common.

Other professions have been opened up to those who have benefited by the new fields of literature available to them.

Perhaps its greatest effect is on the old family life. Young students who have left their homes to get advanced education in the cities have found it difficult to return and work there. They have come under new intellectual influences, and new social contacts have made them dissatisfied with the old ways of life of their ancestral villages. New ideas and strange temptations play on these young people. They disagree with the old ideas of filial duty, and their criticisms receive the approval of thousands of their generation. They break betrothals made for them, and often discontinue that most ancient of customs—ancestral worship. This breaking up of the old family life is one of the great achievements of China's social progress. It removes the burden of maintenance of the incompetent members of the family from the more enterprising members of it. The old form of repressing individuality, for the sake of the well-being of the whole, is swept aside. The individual is released from the collective responsibility of the whole family, and assumes his rights and duties as an independent member of a larger society—the nation.

With the coming of the New Literary Renaissance as part of the New Culture Movement, came new knowledge. Now that the literature had been simplified, and the great masses of the people were being educated, it is obvious that new worlds of thought and action were open to them. It is not to be supposed that all would follow the same trends. There were those who remembered the traditions of 4,000 years, and despite new ideas and new literary revivals, decided that the precepts of their ancestors would still remain their precepts. Others, and these were mostly young people, went to other extremes. They were able to study the modern trend of thought and action of the West, and in their enthusiasm often went even beyond the West. This drastic change in the younger generation caused the Government some concern, and brought to it the necessity for the reactionary movement known as the New Life Movement.

Following closely on the New Literary Renaissance, and of great significance is the New Life Movement. Initiated and sponsored by General Chiang Kai-Shek, it has now attracted such nation-wide attention that associations of the New Life Movement have been formed in nearly all the principal cities of China. Mass meetings and eloquent speeches proclaimed the Movement everywhere. But the habits of a nation cannot be changed by speeches, eloquent though they may be. Officials themselves must set a noble example. Prior to the launching of this Movement, provincial leaders had already started the reformation of their people. The Chairman of Honan Province advocated the early rising of his subjects, since one's mental power can be best exercised in the early morning. In effect, he advocated daylight saving. The noted leader of Shantung Province confined his attention to moral reformation, instructing Government departments to hold memorial services regularly with compulsory attendance. He admonished his subordinates to value time and dispense with night life. In Hunan Province the Chairman led a movement to introduce simplicity in life, including economy and frugality. He stated that, unless his subjects could return to the old and virtuous life, the country could not be brought to re-birth. These local movements were significant, but did not attract outside attention until General Chiang himself urged the people to return to old virtues, observing the virtues taught by the sages, embodied in Li, Yi, Lien and Chih. The interpretation of these virtues may be summed up thus: Li means regulated attitude (of mind as well as heart); Yi means right conduct; Lien means clear discrimination (honesty in personal, public and official life); Chih means self consciousness (integrity and honesty). These interpretations are given in "An Outline of the Principles" by Generalissimo Chiang.

With General Chiang as the central figure it is anticipated that his example and precept will have a strong appeal to the masses, and there is every reason to believe that the movement will attain tremendous impetus as time goes on. The depth of the wisdom of China's sages is indeed profound. It is like a living fountain of pure water, ever flowing to satisfy the spiritual thirst of the Chinese masses. Each age goes back to that wisdom afresh in order to drink at the fountain head. At present General Chiang and his colleagues, as they go forth with the fearless steps of youth, are endeavouring to lead the people back again to simple living and high thinking or the right conduct of life, which has been much disturbed by the impact of Western civilization in the last 60 years. Madame Chiang, a worthy advocate of her husband's principles, has expressed the belief that China's greatest hope lies in this reform, which aims to preserve all the best of China's ancient culture and to blend it with those parts of Western culture which China needs. Under the stimulus of the movement, she said that China, given peace and prosperity, would become a strong nation within ten years.

This New Life Movement is nothing less than a revival of Confucian thought. It has been the policy of the Chinese National Government to preserve and resurrect all the good things which are typical of China's great past. The recent revival of the worship of Confucius indicates clearly this policy of action. It will have the effect of restoring Confucianism to its place in directing national progress in the future. Of course, much of the literature of Confucius will need to be revised and rendered in the vernacular, and many outworn traditions incidental to its own particular age must be discarded. What is urgent is that the valuable elements in the Confucian teachings are made practicable to the environment of the present day. The land and people of pastoral simplicity such as are akin to those of Confucius' time have been vanishing before the onrush of railroads and the rise of factories. The adoption of mechanical inventions from the West has forced upon a large number of the people the machine and science mania, which, in turn, has inspired them with a new self-assertiveness. The rushing pace of their daily movements by means of machines is wearing off their old sense of propriety and ritual. Instead of being engrossed in the old virtues, the upper and middle classes are thinking more of achieving something, especially along material lines. Indeed, the stress and strain of modern life is exercising tremendous changes upon them. Now that these changes have become stabilized, we find the nation turning again to the vital force of Confucianism to restore the balance of moral and material things.

From the ancient society of Confucius' times to the nationalist order of to-day, China has progressed far towards modernization. New Government and social institutions remodelled on Western lines are in full swing. Yet in the renewal of the veneration of Confucius may be seen a timely recognition of the historical continuity of the position occupied by Confucianism in the formation of the Chinese nation. At the bottom of this recognition is the desire of the National Government to revive the national spirit as well as to rehabilitate the original Chinese culture.

Of special interest, therefore, was the attendance in August of last year of delegates from the Government at the impressive memorial services to celebrate Confucius' birthday in the principal cities of China.

A portrait of Confucius was placed on the table in front of that of the late Party Leader, Dr. Sun Yat Sen. This will go down in history as a memorable fact, and will have far-reaching effects in influencing the social and political progress of the Chinese nation. As late as 15th January of this year, an edict was issued by the Government that all Universities and middle and primary schools in the country are to utilize the outline of the New Life Movement drawn up by General Chiang Kai-Shek, as supplementary material in classes.

The first anniversary of the New Life Movement inaugurated in 19th February, 1934, was officially observed in Nanking at the meeting of the Government Head-quarters. The President spoke on the meaning and significance of the movement, and reported on its activities and achievements for the year. He summarized the objects of the movement thus: To reform bad habits and customs, to enforce discipline and orderliness, and to revive traditional Chinese virtues. Similar meetings in celebration of the occasion were held in the principal cities. The founder, General Chiang Kai-Shek, in outlining the policy for the coming year, stated that the consolidation of the directing forces in the movement was of paramount importance. The main work should not be entrusted to one class, but should be regarded as the concern of political, military and educational circles, particularly in the education of students, who should set an unimpeachable example to the rest of the Chinese people. They should volunteer to be standard bearers in the movement for the rejuvenation of the Chinese race, and broadcast to the nation the slogan, "We do our part."

One is tempted to ask, "Is this revival of Confucian worship reactionary?" To many educated Chinese it would seem to be so. Indeed, after all the changes of the twentieth century, Confucianism may appear to be a relic of the conservative past.

It might well be asked, "What caused the decline of Confucianism?" The dawn of the twentieth century saw the waning of its influence. Several causes contributed to its decline. Following her opening up to foreign intercourse, China has been rapidly undergoing a course of modernization. With the impact of Western contact, the Chinese people have been driven to break more and more with the past. Every phase of their lives, mental, social and political, which had been grounded on Confucian concepts, has gone forever. Political and social institutions established along Western lines have been placed on trial.

The thought of the West has come into China and found minds ready to receive it. One of the best things that the West has to give to China is science. Science has shown the wonders of the universe, adding to men's knowledge and happiness. Science, too, has made all sorts of machines to travel fast and far, to fly through the air and go under the sea, to send messages over long distances by cable, telegraph, radio and telephone. Wonderful discoveries for the prevention and cure of illness have been made, and epidemics are lessened thereby.

The Chinese did not have this scientific knowledge. Two thousand years ago they had wonderful inventions and discoveries—the compass, paper, printing, porcelain, herbs and so on, but had not developed what is known as pure science. Yet, strangely, many of the things which the

West now regard as highly scientific were in existence in China many centuries ago, but the things that were done were being done because they had been handed down for generations so to do, and they were done well. This is where the great difference between East and West lay. The Chinese knew how to do things, but they had no research departments to show them why things were done. An instance illustrative of this point is to be found in one of the ancient traditions of the Orient. Every year the agricultural inhabitants of a certain area followed the custom of their ancestors by fasting and praying for a period of three days. At the end of that time they went into the highways breaking branches from the date trees. Praying and silently communing they carried these back to their properties on which their own dates grew. Then a vigorous shaking of the bushy branches on their own trees completed the pretty ceremony. In this way they invoked the pleasure of the gods, and fruitful trees were sent to them. A scholar returning from a nearby city scorned the tradition of his ancestors, and preached enthusiastically to his illiterate elders that it was superstitious to carry on this antiquated ceremony. Consequently he did not perform the annual ceremony with his fellow men. At harvest time, his trees bore him no fruit. Those of his elders and friends were heavily laden. His neighbours taunted him, saying "You have received better education than we. You say we are superstitious; why is it that we have a harvest and you have not?" He blushed, but could make no reply to their taunts. The following year he returned to the ways of the ancient tradition, and his crops flourished. A few years later scientists proved to that community that the trees of the hills were the male species of the trees of the lowlands, and this shaking of the branches caused the necessary fertilization. Thus it will be seen that the Chinese people for centuries have known how to produce certain crops though they lacked the necessary scientific knowledge to tell them *why*.

In conclusion, I would express a personal note. When in my moments of quiet thinking I reflect that the old religions, the old traditions and the old cultures of China remained practically unchanged during a period of 2,000 years, and yet, during my lifetime China has been awakened from the slow rhythm of past ages by new forces, compelling startling and revolutionary changes, I realize just how fortunate I am to be participating in these movements. I realize, too, my responsibility in interpreting to the West some of the processes through which the old cultures are assuming new and vital forms. If I have succeeded in conveying to you some impressions of the problems facing the leaders of modern Chinese thought and the achievements of those leaders, I am well content.



Morrison in Peking, 1894