

CHINA REVIVES CONFUCIANISM

BY CYRUS H. PEAKE

SINCE the day, four years ago, on which the Japanese began the military occupation of Manchuria which led to the establishment of "Manchoutikuo," a series of significant developments have occurred in China which reveal a conscious effort on the part of the government to revive Confucianism. In the spring of 1934 General Chiang Kai-shek launched the "New Life Movement" aiming at the moral regeneration of the Chinese people and their leaders. It emphasizes the traditional Confucian virtues of *li*, *i*, *lien*, and *chih*, which may roughly be rendered—proper decorum, righteous conduct, honesty, and self-respect. A code of ninety-six articles was promulgated regulating individual and social conduct. It is believed that the proper observance of these simple rules of daily conduct will give expression in accordance with Confucian tradition, to the corresponding inner virtues of honesty, integrity, loyalty, and self-respect.

A few months later, the Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang decided to include the birthday of Confucius in the list of the national holidays of China. As a consequence Confucian temples in various parts of the country are being refurbished, and on the birthday of the Sage, proper ceremonies are to be there conducted by the local officials in the time-honored manner. Last August high officials representing the National Government traveled from Nanking to Chü-fu in Shantung, where the direct lineal descendants of Confucius now live, to conduct ceremonies at the temple erected to his memory. The government has appropriated a considerable sum of money to be devoted to the renovation of this temple and its surrounding grounds.

The drift toward the establishment of Confucianism as a state cult can also be seen in the new title given the eldest living male descendant of Confucius. In the early part of the present year it was decided to change his title from that of "Duke of Extended Sagehood," conferred in 1233, to "Sacrificial Official for the Late Teacher." Thus the old title reminiscent of the monarchy and aristocracy was abolished as not being in harmony with the spirit of

a republican regime, and at the same time the new title conferred reveals the close connection with the reviving cult to the government. Further evidence of the trend toward reverence of the past took place in April of this year when three government leaders representing the Kuomintang and the national government visited the alleged tomb of the Emperor Huang Ti, the mythological founder of Chinese civilization. There they conducted ceremonies followed by the placing of wreaths upon the tomb. A few days later these same officials visited the nearby tombs of ancient kings of the Chou dynasty (1122-249 B. C.) and performed similar ceremonies.

Another indication of the drift of the times in China is the increased interest in the Confucian classics. Conservative groups, who have been advocating the replacement of the classics in the school curricula are in some parts of the country achieving their purpose. In the provinces of Hunan and Kuangtung the simpler classics are now being taught in the primary schools.

The loosely coordinated movement to revive Confucianism indicated in these events is essentially conservative, if not reactionary. It springs immediately out of the loss of Manchuria. This major political catastrophe appears to have ushered in a new period in China's political and national development. The failure of the Western powers and the League of Nations to stem Japan's aggressions has induced a psychological change in the outlook of Chinese leaders. The belief that they must rely more upon their own resources, spiritual as well as material to regenerate their nation morally and physically finds repeated expression in leading editorials and in the speeches of leaders in various walks of life. The emphasis now is on "Reconstruction" and "Regeneration" through a slow building up from within. Movements and programs designed to achieve these aims seek broad popular and local support essential to success in the highly integrated and traditionally localized Chinese society.

China's foreign policy since the Mukden incident has likewise undergone a marked change. Whereas before 1931 under the Nationalist Kuomintang government, a policy of "revolutionary diplomacy" was carried through in a highly charged anti-foreign atmosphere, since that time practically all overt mass opposition to foreign imperialism has disappeared. This is not to be interpreted to mean that the government nor the vocal elements of the populace are resigned to the loss of Manchuria, nor that they have abandoned all efforts to recover sovereign rights relinquished in the series

of "unequal" treaties and agreements signed in the course of the past century. Only the methods have changed. The anti-foreignism engendered through textbooks, periodicals, and the platform coupled with the "revolutionary diplomacy" of the 1927-to-1931 period is now understood as being a prime factor in initiating the series of events which led to the occupation of Manchuria by Japanese forces. Likewise the half-hearted attempts of certain great powers having vital interests in China to stem Japan's advance is attributed to the influence of certain governmental and business groups in those countries who believed that Japan in curbing the excesses of the Chinese nationalists was fighting their battle as well, by putting off to a still more distant future the time when they must give up their special privileges in China.

Hence necessity has dictated a change of policy. Stunned by Japan's drastic action and forced upon imminent threat of further territorial losses, the Nanking government has forsaken "revolutionary diplomacy" based on a negative anti-foreign type of nationalism. Open student demonstrations have been almost wholly suppressed or driven underground, and the boycott of Japanese goods has been on the whole effectively curbed. The easy successes of Japanese armies on Chinese soil has poignantly impressed on the leaders of China the weakness which still afflicts the state from a political and military point of view. This weakness they perceive arises from two sources, the one of a spiritual or moral character resulting in lack of political unity and the other of a material or economic character which limits the military strength of the nation. Until these two basic weaknesses are eliminated the nation must abandon hope of attaining full national sovereignty and the recovery of lost territory. This may take a generation or fifty years they realistically assert, but like the ancient Chinese worthy who slept on his mat for ten years to remind himself that he must return and recover his lost territory, they assert they will not lose sight of their ultimate goal.

In order to build up the economic strength of the country, the government has within the last few years launched upon an extensive and elaborate program of economic reconstruction. The problem of improved communications still remains uppermost. Some railroad building has been undertaken, but more energy has been expended in auto road construction, the amount of mileage of which has increased several fold in recent years. Agricultural rehabilita-

tion has been receiving more attention in the last few years than ever before. Rural credit societies and marketing and purchasing cooperatives are being organized. In the industrial field the National government plans through the recently acquired control over the tariff to protect home industry as well as to foster it through direct subsidies. Likewise, through national bureaus for testing and grading, it is planned to improve and produce uniform tea, silk, and other commodity exports to accelerate foreign-trade expansion. In these and other ways the government is striving to achieve economic reconstruction as a prelude to the establishment of a strong state capable of recovering its full administrative and territorial sovereignty.

In a country which for centuries has been under the all-pervading influence of Confucian moral concepts the belief persists that programs for material reconstruction will be of little avail if there is not accompanying moral regeneration. Before attempting to set forth in more detail the factors which gave rise to the present Confucian revival and to evaluate its strength and nature, it would be well first to trace briefly the cause of the decline of Confucianism under the Republic. With the establishment of the Republic in 1912 the classics were eliminated from the curricula of the schools and, except for a brief attempt at a revival of Confucianism under President Yuan Shih-k'ai in the years 1913-1916, the attack upon the cult by the modernized and nationalistic intellectuals and students has had increasing success until the current revival set in last year. There are three outstanding reasons for this abandonment of Confucianism. In the first place, its long association with the monarchy and its emphasis upon loyalty to the emperor made its persistence under a republican regime appear highly anachronistic. Moreover, the factions favoring the retention of its teachings were monarchists at heart as revealed in the efforts to place Yuan Shi-k'ai upon the throne. Secondly, it was the formalized embodiment of all that was held to be conservative and, therefore, an obstacle to the modernization of the state, particularly in its emphasis upon respect for elders, and the necessity for maintaining the all-embracing authoritarian family-system sustained by ancestor worship. From this angle it was seen as a restraining force preventing the citizens of the new republic from giving their fullest loyalty to the state in patriotic service because of prior allegiance to and dependence upon the family. It was held, therefore, to be a hindrance to the

spread of modern nationalism which the awakened intellectuals had discovered in the west and which they were more or less consciously imitating and fostering. Finally, those who had drunk deeply from the wells of western science and rationalism dubbed it another religion to be abolished, along with Buddhism and Christianity, as out-moded superstitions suited to a less advanced stage of social advancement than at present exists. As Ch'en Tu-hsiu, one of the outstanding leaders of young China and a founder of the first Communist party expressed it, "That which makes the people of Europe actually superior to all nations is their positive science. Science and reason have made an end to ignorance and superstition." The decline of Confucianism was held to be a necessary prelude to the establishment of a modernized nationalistic state capable of claiming and securing utmost loyalty from all its members.

These three points of criticism explain in part the development of one of the more striking paradoxes of the modernization of China: a gradually expanding and intensifying nationalism in conflict with a people's idealized and formalized social and intellectual heritage. In the haste to modernize—a haste forced upon them by the repeated aggressions of the Western powers and Japan which threatened the very existence of the state itself as a territorial unit—the modern Chinese have in the confusion and bewilderment of a revolutionary period sought to uproot their old culture and commence *de novo*. That they, one of the most historically conscious of all peoples, suddenly appeared to be deaf to all the lessons of history only serves to heighten the piquancy of the paradox. The intellectual and educational leaders uncritically and naïvely hoped to create within a generation the western ideal of an individualized body of citizens living in and effectively running a modern democratic state. Faith in the old culture thoroughly shattered, they attempted through the literal translation of western studies and textbooks on political theory and civics to create this modern type of citizen through an expanding modern educational system. They felt they had found an adequate cohesive substitute for Confucianism in the attempted formation of a body of democratic, individualized citizens who would be supremely loyal to the political state.

Before, however, the new experiment was allowed even a fair amount of time to work itself out, the inevitable foreign aggressions upon the weak and divided nation were renewed. This time foreign interference resulted in the massacre of students and civilians in

Shanghai, Canton, and elsewhere in May and June 1925. Immediately there appeared a violent form of anti-foreign nationalism which denounced on the one hand the imperialistic powers and on the other the excessive westernization, particularly of the educational system. The appeal of the conservatives to call a halt to revolutionary efforts at modernization was not to be heeded at this time. The Kuomintang party which for years had been restricted to a minor political role at Canton gathered strength, through Communist guidance, from the tide of anti-foreignism sweeping the country. In the summer of 1926 the party launched its northern campaign to wrest the country from the grasp of the oppressive war-lords and to free it from the control of the imperialistic powers. Its relatively well-trained military force, ably supported by an effective propaganda technique which broadcast its aims widely over the land, accounted for the striking success of the northern drive. In the spring of 1927 the capital of the Nationalist Government was set up in Nanking and with the fall of Peking a year later, control over a greater part of the country has been achieved.

Once seated in power a rapid move toward the right occurred within the party and the government. The communists were driven from the party, and one military campaign after another was launched to overthrow the successive communistic regimes set up in various localized areas. The government turned toward the landlords and the rising industrial and financial bourgeoisie for financial support. In order to win their confidence, it not only combatted the communist movement, but also suppressed and regulated the labor unions and the student movement. Time was needed to consolidate its position and to extend its more effective control over the country. Nevertheless, the waves of revolutionary emotionalism and anti-foreignism which the party had consciously fostered and upon which it rode into power continued to sweep through the land. The local Kuomintang headquarters not being under the effective disciplinary control of the Central Executive Committee continued to agitate for the recovery of national rights. In Manchuria they were particularly effective in promoting a policy designed to thwart Japanese efforts to consolidate and expand their economic control over the area. Hence arose the series of incidents which finally culminated in the occupation of the area by Japanese forces and the subsequent establishment of "Manchoutikuo."

The shock of these developments brought the inevitable reaction

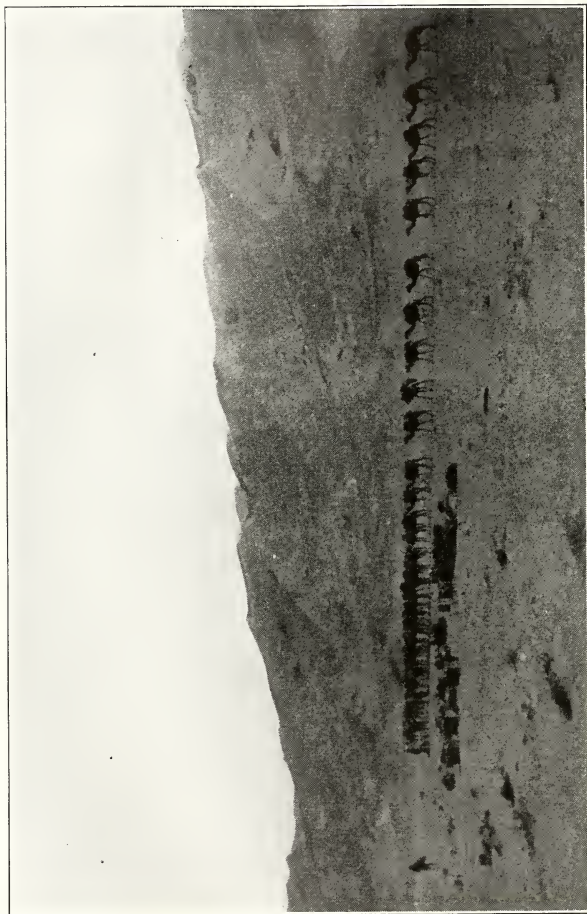
and the heeding of more conservative counsels with the rapid decline of the revolutionary spirit. In this atmosphere the loosely coordinated efforts at the revival of Confucianism have taken place. They were designed to restore to the people confidence in their own cultural heritage and through that in their racial and political destiny. While the New Life Movement has not yet identified itself formally with the term Confucianism its emphasis and spirit is essentially in harmony with the basic concepts which cluster around the word. Other governmental measures already taken are a further and more positive indication of the drift of the times toward a Confucian revival.

It is of course at this time impossible to foretell how far or how long the movement will continue to grow. There may be only a brief interlude before another period of revolutionary activity sweeps the country submerging the remaining vestiges of the old culture and carrying the nation further along the way toward modernization. As long as the present political set-up, characterized by Japan's hegemony, persists in Eastern Asia, one can predict with considerable assurance that the movement for the revival of the old moral culture will continue to grow in strength. The steps taken to establish the state of "Manchoutikuo" on the Confucian principles embodied in the term *Wang Tao* or "Kingly Way" under Japanese guidance is a clue to this possibility. There the official revival of a modified Confucian cult has become a well-established fact. Moral teachings drawn from the Classics have found their way into the class-rooms of the expanding educational system.

In Japan itself, Confucian teachings have been retained in the schools throughout the period of modernization and industrialization. Japanese leaders attribute the strength of the Empire in part at least to it. The lessons to be learned from their neighbor's striking success in meeting the West on its own terms and still retaining the essence of their own peculiar cultural heritage, which in large measure they had centuries earlier inherited from China, has not been entirely overlooked by the Chinese. The first modern system of education adopted under the Empire in 1903 was modelled upon the one then in vogue in Japan. The study of the Confucian classics found an important place in that system. The elimination of the classics from the school system since the establishment of the Republic caused one writer to lament the fact that "what was cast out as stone in China was retained as jade in Japan." Many conservatives

in China have attributed the country's weakness from a political and military point of view as well as the moral degeneration of the people to the abandonment of the nation's cultural heritage. For the time at least, the warnings of the conservatives are being heeded and their advice is beginning to be carried out.

Finally, the attempt to appraise the strength and longevity of the present revival of Confucianism necessitates the consideration of factors operating in countries outside of the Far East. World tendencies at present toward national economic and cultural self-sufficiency sustained by an intense form of integrated nationalism lend further strength to the reaction now prevailing in China. In 1840 China's door was forced open by British guns and since that date it has remained open, partly by force and partly by the wish of the Chinese themselves, not only to western and Japanese commercial and financial exploitation, but also to admit all aspects of western thought and practice. Now the door is closing again. China like many another nation is seeking to pull itself up largely by its own bootstraps. The answer to the question as to the future of the present tendencies toward a Confucian revival, like the answer to many another question as to the future course of events in China, is to be found nearly as much in the course of events in the world at large as in China itself.



Photographs by A. R. M. Richards

CAMEL CARAVAN NEAR WADI BEIHAN