

## An Open Letter To Dr. Lin Yutang

A NOTE.—I have been privileged to read this open letter addressed to me before it goes to press. As I promised in my Preface, I shall be willing to assist anybody, who wishes to contradict me with very convenient material. However, I fully appreciate all expressions of difference of opinion and in fact rather enjoy them. I wish only to state here that I am a peasant boy of Fukien, and proud of it, for I have a seal with the four characters "Peasant Boy Of Lungch'i." I have assisted at harvest and caught fish and shrimps in mountain streams and gathered fuel on the mountains. No one can accuse me of not knowing the farmers of China, for they are my people and not the long-gowned gentry, nor the English-speaking Chinese in foreign dress. My grandmother was a peasant woman of extraordinary muscular prowess and could drive men out of our village at the point of a carrying pole. My father was a pedlar of sweets and rice and occasionally an amateur dealer in bamboo shoots in his boyhood. He knew what it meant to carry a heavy burden and some of his hard experiences were recounted by him to us children over and over again as a lesson for charity to common labourers. As an old Christian pastor, he once fought a tax collector for taxing one hundred and twenty cash out of a bundle of two hundred cash of fuel gathered on the mountains by an old man and carried thirty *li* to a village fair. So I may be justified when I say that I know the joys as well as the sorrows of Chinese farmers. The only masses that I really do not know are the factory workers in the treaty ports, the "proletariat" in communist phraseology. They seem to be brutalized as far as I can see in Shanghai. But they after all are only a very small percentage of the Chinese population whose great majority are the farmers.

I do not intend to go into different points touched by Mr. Yao. I wish to thank him for presenting his point of view. I cannot help remarking, however, that in southern Fukien there are round three-storeyed communal houses, forming a kind of round citadel thirty or forty feet high, entered through a big stone gate and with all the related families living together drawing water from the same well in the middle of the round courtyard. This strictly applies to the farmers and if this is not communal family system of living, I do not know what is. This merely shows how easy it is for two Chinese to contradict each other, or for a Chinese to say that a foreign author on China is incorrect in his or her facts. I wish merely to say that both Mr. Yao and myself are right. It is also useless to quarrel over the point whether the Chinese are conservative or progressive. Conservatism cannot refer to the purchase of new strains of silkworms or the use of tractors or availing oneself of the telegraph office. When the Chinese take to sending telegrams instead of sending letters by imperial couriers because a telegram from Peking to Canton takes an hour and the imperial couriers took a month, they are neither progressive nor conservative—they are merely practical. By conservatism I mean conservatism of the spirit and the feeling the Chinese people give me that they will go on with their essential pattern of life. And by this, again I do not mean the English-speaking Chinese, but the great bulk of Chinese farmers who are my people.

LIN YUTANG.

Dear Dr. Lin:—Your book, *My Country and My People*, has given more delight than I expected. I am not at all surprised at your lucid, pleasing style with which I have been long acquainted, nor at your rich, hearty good-humor in which your writings have always abounded. What really impresses me is that you have successfully held out your honest personal opinion from cover to cover, and have done it so thoroughly that your book is at the same time an autobiography of exceptional quality. And I am one who thinks with Oscar Wilde that all good books are autobiographical.

In my opinion, it is this honest personal opinion that gives your book a distinct value apart from other considerations. The fascinating quality of your book is, to use your own expression, its being so "familiar, chatty and personal" that one feels as though you are

talking with him over tea cups. This is why I like your book. But, this is also why I can not help differing from many of your viewpoints. You have predicted in your preface that you would offend many writers about China, especially your own countrymen and great patriots. You certainly have not offended me, for I am not a formidably great patriot anyway. And, if you should find in this letter something at variance with your thoughts, it is only the honest personal opinion of a *bona fide* reader of your book.

To begin with, let me tell you what I think of the title of your book. Doubtless, it is very well chosen in so far as it subtly hints of the familiar, chatty, and personal features of its contents. Personally, however, I do not think it is a very *fit* title. There can be no dispute that throughout the entire book you have written about China and the Chinese people. But it seems to me what you mean by "my people" is merely the ruling intellectual class in its broad sense rather than the four hundred millions as a whole. I got this impression from my first reading and it was confirmed by a second and more careful perusal. In numerous instances where the Chinese people are referred to in your book, the implication is definitely confined to the Chinese intelligentsia only. For instance, the chapter on woman's life is entirely devoted to those who had bound-feet in the past and wear high-heels today, not to those who once insisted on carrying you in a sedan-chair up those hills in the outskirts of Soochow. And it needs no explanation that there is a whale of a difference between the two.

I do not think you have intentionally ignored the Chinese masses at large, because there is a remark in the first chapter that "in dealing with a country the common man cannot be ignored." But somehow you have made the Chinese intellectuals the basis of your discussions and neglected to bring the common people on as frequently as they deserve.

There is no doubt that the Chinese people have a common historical tradition and written language, and a cultural homogeneity. And, such characteristics as pacifism, lack of science, and so forth, are common to them as a whole. But there are other qualities which only belong to a particular class of people by reason of their special social and economic status and, therefore, do not necessarily apply to the Chinese people in general. In your book, for example, the section on the racial degeneration of the Chinese people is true, so far as urban China is concerned, but not so with rural China. The Chinese peasants are doubtless under-fed but they are strong, healthy, robust, industrious, and have great respect instead of "contempt for physical prowess." In my childhood, I had considerable contact with farmers and I can still remember the genuine pride in their eyes when they told me how many bundles of rice they could carry on the shoulder, how many furrows of land they could hoe between sun-rise and sun-set, and so on. Even

in the case of marriage, the match-maker usually refers to the would-be bride's manual skill and physical soundness as the most important portion of her dowry. The same thing must be more or less true with the rank and file of workers and artisans and the like.

The difference between the peasants and the ruling intellectual class in China is very much akin to that between the serfs and the feudal lords in medieval Europe. Such a difference co-exists with, and is a result of, the difference in the mode of living as determined by economic status. The large family system, for instance, is purely a product of urban China. In the country, though it is not unusual that a whole village bears one family name and has a common ancestral temple, the different branches of the family tree live separately in detached houses which have an average of only five members in each. They are economically independent of one another, instead of living together in one huge house on the inheritance of their ancestors and at one another's expense. As a result, they are much more social-minded and not so selfish, family-minded as the urban intellectuals. They live in a primitive manner but are more communal in their mutual relations. Whenever there is a public occasion such as the annual procession in honor of their gods, it is participated and financed by all villagers. Where dykes are needed for prevention of flood, the work is shared by all able-bodied villagers. In any parts of China, the peasants are known to have organized themselves in a military way against the invasion and looting of bandits and soldiers. They have also developed a system of mutual credit loan known as *ho-hui* (合會) to save one another from economic embarrassment. Instances like these are numerous, all pointing to the fact that the Chinese peasants who constitute some eighty per cent of the Chinese population—and I take them as illustration for their numerical superiority—are quite different from their urban brothers.

I have enumerated the above facts merely to show that more than eighty per cent of the Chinese people do not live like the Chinese intellectuals and should not, therefore, be justified or condemned by the conduct of the latter. The Western readers of your book, I am afraid, will take it for granted that the phrase "my people" covers all Chinese without exception. This is why I personally do not think the title of your book a very fit one.

But this is a question of *cheng min* (正名), or "propriety of name," having nothing to do with the real value of your book. In my present capacity as a reader of your book, I really think it is the most comprehensive and interesting book written about China, abounding in keen insight, careful study, and profound observations. It seems to me that the first Prologue, the chapters on the Chinese character and social and political life, and the Epilogue are the most enlightening of all. These parts in particular and the book as a whole should be read by anyone who desires to have a really sound

knowledge of China. I especially wish Western authors who intend to write about our country, to commit to memory your first Prologue before putting anything down in black and white.

I do not want to comment upon your opinion of our government and officialdom. It is a dangerous subject for discussion anyway, so far as we Chinese are concerned. The Chinese people know full well what their government and "public servants" are, even without any elementary knowledge of political science. But I doubt whether they will enthusiastically indorse your idea of the Great Executioner unless they are sure that he has enough sense of justice and fair-play to cut his own throat! Is it not true that in the past one or two years, several petty officials who were found guilty of opium traffic or other forms of corruption, had been actually shot? Well, that's the Great Executioner at work. But that's that, and the least said the best understood.

Now, let me drop this dangerous question and take up a safer, or rather the more dangerous, one—the problem of the Chinese woman. In your chapter on woman's life, you have expressed your doubt as to whether women have really been suppressed in China. However, suppression is a word that may be easily given a horribly extreme interpretation. The Chinese women probably have never been suppressed in the extreme sense of the word. Still the fact remains that they have been suppressed somehow or other. In her recent book entitled *Facing Two Ways*, Baroness Ishimoto of Japan has given us a most pathetic picture of the sufferings of the daughters of the Land of the Rising Sun. What she has depicted, I think, is applicable to the Chinese women of yesterday to a large extent. And yet, she is a baroness!

I agree with you that the ideal of "helpful wife and good mother" is a healthy social conception of the Chinese people. However, I must qualify my statement in the light of historical perspective. In China and in the outside world at large, social changes of the most fervent and kaleidoscopic nature have been taking place, and will not arrive at a state of comparative stability until a new social order finally evolves from, and supercedes, the existing one. At the moment we are not clairvoyant enough to discern what the future social structure will exactly be. We only know that the change is inevitable because the march of civilization always forsakes the beaten track of good old days. The Great War has borne testimony to the competence of women in numerous activities which were previously thought to be beyond their capacity. The great changes that had taken place in the past few decades in China indicate the boundless possibilities in the future. As widowhood is already deemed obsolete by our sisters today, it is quite possible that wifehood and motherhood will incur the same fate when our grand-daughters inherit the Earth. We can never tell. So we had better leave the question unsolved for the present.

Though I have read your chapter on literary life with true delight, I can not but regret that you have not written more about the Literary Revolution. It is the New Culture Movement that actually blew the old culture to pieces like a hurricane. Its significance is not merely confined to the substitution of the vernacular for the classical language, but rather involves a great revolt of the Chinese youth against their family, society, government, Western imperialism, and Confucianism and religion in general. The period between 1917 and 1932, that is from the beginning of the Literary Revolution to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese "Shanghai War," may be aptly described as an age of "down with's!" The West is perfectly aware of the great difference between China today and China twenty years ago, but has too little knowledge of the background for understanding the causes of all the seemingly strange and abrupt changes that have taken place. I sincerely hope, therefore, that you will considerably expand the section on literary revolution before your book goes into second print. There is no question that you possess first-hand knowledge of the background, and you are one of the few who have an enviable command of English to put it clearly before the Western public.

Your portrayal of the Chinese character has both the charm of a Chinese painting and the allurements of a delicate porcelain Buddha. It may be best described by your own words with reference to the Chinese painting: "Somehow the picture before us has undergone an inner process of transformation in the artist's mind . . . so true to life and yet so different from it." This, I believe, is the charm of all good pictures whether they are painted or written. At any rate, when one writes about something too great for laboratory experiments, one has to resort to generalizations. And generalizations are always so true and yet so different from the truth.

There is one quality, however, which seems to me not altogether typical of the Chinese people—conservatism. The Chinese people, as a matter of fact, have all the appearance of conservatism but are the least conservative in reality. I need not prove my statement by calling any ultra-modern Chinese "social-star" to the witness stand. A few examples from the most "conservative" peasants will serve the purpose just as well. Several years ago, a returned student from Japan brought back with her some sample eggs of the Japanese scientifically bred silkworms and recommended them free of charge to the villagers in the suburbs of Soochow. At first, they had suspicion of that young lady's intention, since the larva turned out to be hairy and extremely hideous looking. As a result, all except one of the villagers threw away the strange worms for good. The one who gave the hairy creatures a trial, however, was compensated with thick, white, beautiful cocoons. And the next year, the returned student had not enough eggs to sell to the scrambling villagers at her door, though she had anticipated the situation and prepared a large stock for sale. My personal experience with the peasants

proves that their readiness to accept new things and changes is quite remarkable. Many years ago, a peasant woman working in my home had a serious case of appendicitis and, when my mother sent her in a sedan-chair to a missionary hospital, how she did wail and protest! She was made to undergo an operation by an American surgeon whose strange appearance and gleaming steel perfectly justified her screaming on the surgical bed. She was cured and ever after that she was ready to go to the wild-looking American even if she only suffered a slight bruise. There have been all sorts of tales concerning the Chinese stubborn refusal to go into a missionary hospital. The truth is not that the Chinese are too conservative to receive the Western medicine, but that the strange appearance and hell-for-heathens attitude of the missionary doctors are no inspiration for confidence.

In many respects, of course, the Chinese people are lagging behind the West. But this is only the result of our backwardness in the field of science, industry, and politico-economic development. A man who insists on riding in a hansom cab every morning several miles down to his office on the Bund while a streamlined automobile is within his means and at his elbow, may be described as conservative. But a peasant who hoes his land because he does not know there is such a thing as a tractor—and even if he did know, could not afford to buy it—can we say he is conservative?

Such is the distinction between conservatism and backwardness. The former is a mental habit, the latter a result of arrested economic development. From my own experiences and observations, I have been at a loss to see such conservatism in our people. The benighted masses of China are by no means diehards. They are uneducated, living in low and primitive conditions far away from the centers of modern culture. They do not know what to change and their state of living does not permit of anything new. But once they are driven by calamities of nature or man-made disasters to seek a living in a modern city, they take to changes as fish take to water.

You seem to think that "as regards the true temperament of the Chinese race and the large mass of people who either read Chinese only or read nothing at all, conservatism will always remain." You also tell us, "Most important, however, is the fact that Chinese do not want to change." These contentions, I have to say frankly, have failed to convince me, because I do not think conservatism does necessarily co-exist with backwardness, and because I believe the backwardness of the Chinese people is a result of arrested economic development, not an evidence of conservatism. There are, of course, extremely conservative persons in this land who do not want to change. Some Chinese, for instance, still refuse to have their queues cut and, not many years ago, the late famous Shanghai Chinese doctor, Chang Lung-pan (張聾聲), or "Chang, the Deaf," used to

create a public sensation whenever he went out in his old-fashioned sedan-chair. But such persons may be found anywhere all over the world and should not be taken as examples of the conservatism of the Chinese people.

I have no intention to save China's face because I do not feel ashamed of her at all. What I have said above must, therefore, be taken not as a defense, but rather as a different point of view.

This letter must be concluded here or it will grow into a book itself. But before I end it I must let you know that I think your effort of interpreting China may turn out to be fruitless in spite of your having put so much of yourself into the "job." Doubtless, you have distanced Western writers in the same field and, what is more, you have actually given elaborate explanations, you have even resorted to philosophizing, and so on. And you have done well. I have not the slightest doubt that your Western readers will smile slyly at their cook-boys, after going through your book, and feel themselves enlightened or pretend to have understood the Chinese

people as well as their "pidgin." Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that understanding, unlike knowledge, cannot be acquired through going to lectures, attending classes and, least of all, through reading books. So long as the drawing-room authority on China refuses to transcend his "three-mile radius" in the treaty ports and to live among the Chinese people like a good neighbor, he will forever remain a drawing-room Sincist (I have coined this word to distinguish him from a Sinologue) and die without understanding the "Chinaman."

This is the unhappy truth. This is why your book will never be able to make the drawing-room Sincist understand us. Its failure is, in fact, already in existence before it is written. Nevertheless, I think your book is one of the few best books yet written about China, and I wish to recommend it with all my heart to the general reading public including those who read for pleasure and not merely for knowledge.

Yours very sincerely,  
Yao Hsin-nung.

Shanghai, October 28, 1935.

## Some Salient Facts Of China's Agricultural Problem

By C. Y. W. MENG (孟長泳)

GENERAL Yen Shih-shan, the "model governor" of Shansi, in his resolutions to be introduced to the 6th Plenary Session of the Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang, is said to have proposed the "abolition of the private ownership of land" and the enforcement of "public ownership of land". The governor launched a bitter attack on the present "land system" in the country in the "excessive concentration in the ownership of land to some people", and in "not giving farmers enough farm area to cultivate", and pointed out that the present communist uprisings in China are "due to the Chinese agricultural problem and land system," which, to the model governor, must be reformed before the "red troubles" could be extirpated. According to his "land scheme", the village administration shall issue bonds, which are not to bear any interest, for the purchase of land in the village. After purchase all land in the village is to be regarded as owned by the village and not by individuals. The nature of the land shall be redetermined by the authorities. It shall then be divided among the villagers for cultivation. The amount of land each villager is to cultivate is to be determined by his ability and age. Farmers between 18 to 58 years of age are to be considered qualified for field work. When a young man reaches 18 years of age, he must report at the village administration to receive his lot of land, while those who have reached 58 years of age must also report at the village administration and return their lots to the latter.

A village assembly is to be convened at regular intervals to decide how the land in the village should best be used. In case the assembly decides that a certain piece of land should be cultivated by collective

labor a collective farm should be organized. In case the land in the village is not sufficient for distribution, thereby leaving some farmers without land to cultivate, the village administration is to be held responsible for securing employment for such farmers. On the other hand, if a village has more land than its people can cultivate, this must be reported to the authorities, who will make arrangements to remove the farmers from overpopulated villages to cultivate such surplus land.

His proposal has aroused much interest and attention among the Chinese people and has met with approval as well as opposition. Dr. D. Y. Lin, generally known as China's foremost agricultural and forestry expert, in his speech delivered before the Tsingtao Lion Club on August 24, 1935, also pointed out the seriousness of the Chinese agricultural problem, and laid special emphasis on the "smallness" of the size of the farm for the farmers in China. He said, "On the basis of the total population of the country, this limited area of cultivated land works out to 3.4 *mow* per person, or on the basis of the total farm population, there is only 4 *mow* per person. The smallness of this per capital area is obvious when we come to think that in the United States there are 19 *mow* to a person according to total population, and as many as 71 *mow* to a person according to total farm population."

Land is indeed fundamental to agriculture. The amount of land farmed by each farm family composes an economic unit, and an adequate size of that unit naturally determines the success or failure of agriculture as a whole. Recognizing that a census has not yet been taken on a national scale in China as in most foreign countries, and that the existing data covering the size of farm area