

Chinese Publications

IT is a well known fact that though China is found sadly lacking in good publicity, yet the political and economic phases of her national life is better taken care of than her thought life. Unless a foreigner can read Chinese, what the Chinese authors write and the Chinese public reads is a closed book to him, save through translations which may now and then be made. In this respect, China's thought life is more fortunate in that it is not misrepresented as she often is in political issues. It is to fill this gap in publicity that we propose to bring out this special number on Chinese publications.

Even a casual observer will notice certain conflicting tendencies. The cleft between the right and the left, discernable in any country, is very pronounced in China's publication world. In contrast with the publication of the old Chinese books, there are Marxist writers right and left. The Marxists may not count as a factor in China's politics, but Marxist dialectics has very little opposition in the field of intellectual discussion. In fact, nowadays one can scarcely read any discussion of social problem without coming face to face with the materialistic interpretation of human history in one form or another. Nevertheless this Marxist principle is not so popular as it was a few years ago.

The publication of old Chinese books has been viewed with no small amount of alarm by the staunch supporters of westernization of China. To them this is distinctly reactionary. But any keen observers need but to recall the state of the early days of the literary revolution to remember that even then, when China's intelligentsia seemed all agreed that the old classics and literature were no longer fit for this 20th-century world of ours, they merely agreed to have them safely confined to a place where they would be no longer a source of danger to poison the public and especially the youth. Even then no one thought of burying the old Chinese classics. The reaction to the literary revolution set in almost on the heels of the revolution, and soon crystalized in the study-the-classics movement which centered in the then Southeastern University (predecessor to the present Central University). Dr. Hu Shih, commonly regarded as the chief exponent of this literary movement, admitted the necessity of studying the classics, but he would restrict it only to scholars who are especially interested in them. Truly a literary tradition that is centuries old—yea, even milleniums old—cannot be uprooted in a day, nor a decade. However, there is a difference between the public opinion then and that of today regarding classics. The public had little or no use for the Chinese classics then, but the public is reading them today.

In connection with the revival of interest in old Chinese books, it may be observed that there is a slight movement away from the vernacular style. This is to be explained on the ground that a new servicable style in prose has not been developed, while the old literary tradition has not altogether vanished. When the literati cried

in the early 'twenties that we need a plain simple language, we naturally adopted the vernacular style and attempted to write as we speak, pointing to English, German, and French as our models. And we translated well known works of these languages wholesale. Now, although these foreign languages can be written exactly as they are spoken, this is seldom done. But our translators aped after the originals and soon we developed a style which looks like Chinese vernacular, but isn't. This "new eight-leg" style is even worse than the old. For whatever you may say against the old literary style, it is neat and it is beautiful. The Chinese grammar is simplicity itself, but our translators of the early 'twenties discarded Chinese grammar for the unwieldy English grammar. Besides, we have accumulated hosts of expressions which are as fit for Chinese prose as half-an-inch long finger nails are for typists. On the other hand, the majority of the people who make up the reading public are well acquainted with the old Chinese style. The old standards for literary excellence, therefore, persist. It was not long before the reading public became dissatisfied with the new Chinese prose style. There are masters of the vernacular style, too, who have been steeped in the old classics. These masters naturally do not like the unwieldy style and it was they who in 1934 cried for the need of a new and less cumbersome style, not fighting shy of occasional literary expressions. The supporters of the vernacular style were obliged to abandon its name *pai-hua* and raise a new standard, *ta-chong-yu*, (the language of the masses) to rally the forces of literary revolution. But this rally around the new standard has not yet wrought wonders.

Translations also show distinct improvement. In the early 'twenties any one so inclined could easily become a translator and get his translation published, though it was full of mistakes. Much mud-raking of these faulty translations followed, with the result that translation has become less and less a fad and more and more serious undertaking for those who really are well acquainted with the particular work to be translated. This is distinctly an improvement over the conditions that existed in the early days of the literary revolution.

As pointed out elsewhere in this issue, we are leaving the translation stage and are entering upon creative stage. There is, of course, no distinct break of the two stages, but in the early days creative efforts are more amateurish, smaller in volume. Books on social sciences published in the early 'twenties usually cost from thirty to sixty cents, but today any book worth publishing at all is worth somewhere around one dollar at least, and there are many books that cost much more. The increased size of books indicates a healthy sign of more stable life that enables writers to devote more time to their work. Moreover, amateurishness is gradually disappearing, though dogmatizing still persists, as everywhere. Only the dogmatic usually do not get further than magazine articles.