

## National Renaissance Historically Considered\*

BY CARSON CHANG (張君勱)

A NATION, if it is to have some distinction and to make its contribution to the world, must have its national expansion and some outstanding achievements in the field of politics, law, philosophy or arts. In other words, a nation must have military prowess as well as a proud record on the cultural side before it can fulfill its mission. This is fully illustrated in the world history of any period, but I will pick out a few instances from the European history. The Greeks were able to resist the Persian invasion and later they produced Plato and Aristotles and made their contributions in the fields of arts and architecture in the age of Pericles. By these distinctive contributions of theirs we come to know the Greek people. We may, for another example, take Rome. The Romans were great conquerors and they subdued all the peoples around the Mediterranean Sea, even the Gauls in the north and England across the channel. Their contributions are law and organization. Or let us take the English, the French, and the Germans from the more recent European history. The contributions of the English are many and well known in the fields of politics, navigation, commerce, and the experimental philosophy. For France, there were René Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy and Jean Jacques Rousseau, the author of "Social Contract" and father of the revolutionary concepts. In Germany, Dr. Dollingen was proud to say that Germany holds the equilibrium of the world's thought, in that she absorbs ideas from all quarters, modifies them and re-exports them, and that it would be hard to find any other nation in the world as many-sided in gifts and as gifted in the genius of untiringly sorting out and creating the worthwhile as the Germans. Do we not see from his boast how highly the German people regard themselves? The first important task of a nation in this world is to exist. For its own existence, it must achieve stability in politics, in economics, and in its thought life. When the nation has done so, then it can have its territorial expansion. Now, such self-aggrandizement is criminal from the enemy's point of view, but from the expanding nation's viewpoint, it is an achievement. That is to say when a nation is at the height of its power, it has the urge to forge ahead and it seeks to expand in all directions.

With this introductory explanation we may now proceed to discuss our own history. In the past our historians are wont to take the Ch'in (秦) dynasty to separate two distinct periods of our history: the three dynasties of Hsia, Shang, and Chow (夏,商,周) before Ch'in which constitute the ancient age; and the period from Ch'in down which is known as the Middle Ages, often spoken of not in a very complimentary sense.

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This way of defining our historical ages is not without reason; because, first, the first emperor of Ch'in burned all the books and massacred the scholars leaving an everlasting mark in our cultural history, secondly, the old way of demarcating the field was done away with by the Ch'in officials, and finally feudalism was destroyed at the time of Ch'in.

But when we examine our history with an eye on the rise and fall of our nation carefully, we at once see the lack of logic in grouping the Ch'in and the Han (漢) dynasties when our national strength was at its height with the Wei (魏) and the Chin (晉) dynasties when our nation was at its low ebb. During the reign of the first emperor of Ch'in, his soldiers kept the Hsiungnus far away in the north and he built the Great Wall, while in the south his power was felt as far as Poyueh (百粵) where we find today the province of Kwangtung. During the reign of Han Wu-ti the territory west of the Great Loop of the Yellow River was conquered and added to the Chinese territory, which means that the Han dynasty had over two thousand li in the north more than Ch'in. And in addition to this, Chang Ch'ien opened up the territory in the west so that the tribal states both north and south of the Tianshan range all became tributary states to China, and to the southwest even as far as present Yunnan Han's influence was felt. In the time of East Han, Pan Chao and Kan Ying further extended Chinese territory in the west, and Ma Yuan conquered the state of Cochin in present Indo-China. Certainly the Chinese nation expanded more in the Han dynasties than in the dazed by the many centuries of reign enjoyed by the Chou Chou or even the Ch'in dynasty, and yet our historians sought our golden age in the latter instead of Han. Our people soared high in the realms of literature and philosophy during the time of Eastern Chou, but its energy for expansion was wasted in the feudal states warring one against the other. These two periods of our history may be compared with the brilliant achievements of the German philosophers in the 17th and 18th centuries which were followed by their political success in the 19th century.

There are yet other reasons for grouping the two Han dynasties together with Eastern Chou. Although there is no such thing as a pure race, and although during the time of Eastern Chou our people inter-married with other peoples, yet the racial mixture then was never so much as when the five Mongolian races disturbed China during and after the two Chin dynasties. So the Chinese people were relatively pure down to the two Han dynasties. So too was the thought life of the people. Although Buddhism was introduced during the time of Han, it did not become popular or begin by its thought to influence the Chinese until after the two Chin dynasties.

The disturbances caused by the five Mongolian races in China, besides introducing a new strain of blood to the

Chinese people, also produced, as everywhere else when the fusion of different races takes place, great social upheavals. Among these we may mention (1) the introduction of Buddhism and the real headway made by it, (2) the usurpation, by the Taoistic philosophy, of the place formerly occupied by Confucius, and (3) the moving of a large number of the relatively pure Chinese from the north to south of the Yangtse. In short, from the relatively pure Chinese stock, the people became more fused with the Mongolian blood, they replaced Confucius with Buddha for their teacher, and the center of culture moved from the Yellow River valley to the Yangtse valley.

After the three centuries of fusion and confusion, the Chinese people emerged once more victorious. It is true, the people were no longer purely Chinese, and the social customs and organization also changed a good deal, but the military exploits of the first few emperors of the Tang dynasty were indeed glorious achievements. They conquered the Mongols in the north and northwest of China proper. Korea was also subdued. Cochin and China in the south paid tributes to Tang emperors. Japan sent her students to study in China. In the field of literature among the belles-lettres writers there were Han Yu and Liu Chung-yuan while among the poets were Li Po and Tu Fu. Han, by his various essays tried either to discredit Buddhism or otherwise to restore Confucius to the place he once occupied in the Chinese thought life. This was indeed a movement for the revival of the old culture of the Chinese people and in the best sense of the word a national renaissance. A little later Ouyang Hsiu and Sun Ming laid the cornerstone for the Sung philosophers. In other words, after the fusion with alien blood the Chinese people regained their racial consciousness and their traditional concepts. This is the second age of great activities and achievements of the Chinese people, and the literature and military prowess of the Tang dynasty together with the philosophy of the Sung dynasty formed the outstanding contributions of this age.

After this China once more suffered from foreign invasions. Even beginning from the Sung dynasty we see invaders from the north establishing themselves in North China, as the states of Liao and Chin (金), which was succeeded by the Yuan dynasty that ruled over China for less than a century and then the Manchus established their overlordship over us for over two and a half centuries. Although in between the two dynasties of foreign rulers our people did gain their independence under the Ming emperors for over 270 years, yet the foundation of this dynasty was due more to the misrule of the Mongol than to anything else, and such a brief period of independence from foreign yoke can in no way be accounted as a real renaissance.

It is true that we assimilated the foreigners who conquered us, but the fact remains that we were the conquered and we did not fulfill our mission of maintaining our independent existence as a race, not to say expansion. What is there to be proud of when we were the subdued people, even though we could assimilate the conquerers?

What have we got since the Sung dynasty except the Sung philosophers, Wang Yang-ming's novel teaching that knowing is doing, and the few officials who chose to die rather than surrender to the Mongols and the Manchus? It is also true that although foreigners reigned, yet the officials who actually determined the government's policy and ruled China were Chinese, and that the Chinese geniuses showed themselves in these periods in belles-lettres and scholarship in textual criticism of the classics, nevertheless their achievements cannot compare with those of the Eastern Chou or even of Sung and Ming scholars. Of the military strength of the Chinese people, what can we proudly say?

However, we did inherit something from these foreign dynasties, both in our blood and in our territorial aggrandizements: Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, etc. But our people have been living, as it were, on the inheritance of our forefathers. If we don't realize the situation we are in and act accordingly, we shall soon find all our legacies gone. Have we already forgotten the loss of Manchuria and Jehol?

After our contact with the Europeans during the middle part of last century, we have been contented with superficially copying the Europeans, on the cultural side or in the field of politics. We have not earnestly tried to be ourselves. Spiritually or culturally we have completely surrendered to Europe, while materially we are satisfied with consuming what others produced or at best profiting by other people's discoveries and inventions. But we must realize that we can gain nothing without paying a price for it, and that if we persist in continuing in the present course, we shall one day become bankrupt culturally, politically, and economically.

We must also realize that the low ebb of our nation did not begin with the Opium War nor the rule of the Manchus, but dates back to the time of Liao, Chin, and Yuan. What mission has our people fulfilled since then, and what achievement has it made? We must realize that the life of a nation is in the achievement, without which mere existence is not much different from death. If then we are to achieve something worthwhile, we must have on the cultural side the following elements: racial consciousness, patriotism, intellectual capacity and depth of thought, national will, and self-confidence.

If every one of our people had the first two qualities, the Japanese would not be able to hire those poor creatures to set fire in Chapei or to create disturbances in Tientsin. And these two characteristics are capable of surprisingly easy cultivation. In Ting Hsien, Hopei, where the farmers had received the most elementary education through the one-thousand-character texts, when a mass meeting was called in connection with the Shanghai hostilities, over two thousand persons, many of them old men and women, attended and a collection of over \$240 was made. Considering that these people would spend only a few coppers when they get sick, the result was most encouraging.

On the intellectual side I may point out that its relation to our national renaissance is closer than it may at first appear. The luxuriance of the intellectual blossom of the Eastern Chou was followed by the exploits of the Han dynasties. The grafting of Buddhism into the Chinese thought life was followed by the military prowess of the Tang dynasty. But at present we are intellectually at a low ebb. Our fashionable donnas ape after the fashions set by Paris or London, and our periodicals are choked with articles discussing the five-year plan of Soviet Russia or fascism, when we ought to be re-evaluating our intellectual heritage, or selecting what is suitable to our conditions that the West has to offer us.

The national will of a powerful nation is forcefully expressed in its domination over other peoples, but it is the driving urge that makes the aspiration of a weak nation a reality, as in case of Italy in Mazzini's time or Germany in Bismarck's time. When we have singleness of purpose and strong desire for it, even a weak nation can attain its goal.

Self-confidence is the belief that you are better than other people and you can achieve something. When we have this self-confidence, actions will surely follow, and we shall be able to brave all difficulties in our way.

On the other hand, if we are lacking in these qualities, and are contented with copying the result of other peoples' intellectual efforts or any most fashionable movement of the moment, then the Chinese nation is doomed indeed. When other people want concessions or leased territories, we have no choice but grant them. When Japan wants Manchuria, we can do no more than attach our signature to the Tangku truce.

Let every one of us ask ourselves this surging question: Is the Chinese nation doomed, or shall we have another national renaissance?



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