

schools of philosophical and political thought were used. Candidates for the civil service in particular were tested for instance in the knowledge of documents and memorials.

3. New Commentaries on the Confucian classics were written by Wang An-shih and candidates were required to use them for the preparation of State examinations.

Wang An-shih And His Critics

By T. K. CHUAN (全增嘏)

NEXT to Wang Mang (王莽), Wang An-shih is probably the most misunderstood person in Chinese history. Both of them were reformers, and reformers, as a rule, are apt to arouse resentment and criticism on the part of those who are by nature conservative. In the case of Wang An-shih, he was sorely abused not only by his contemporaries but also by the historians and scholars after him. He was held in contempt by the intellectual and moral smugs of his time, because of such extreme utterances of his as "extraordinary phenomena in nature are not to be feared", "opinions of others are not worth considering", and "the example of our ancestors need not necessarily be followed." In attempting to break with tradition and to cut out a new path for himself, Wang An-shih was in fact fighting a battle against the world. He was slandered by his enemies, and estranged from his friends, all because he had the courage to introduce laws and institutions which were departures from the old order.

The opponents that Wang An-shih had to deal with while he was still living were all orthodox Confucianists. But, despite their profession of moral rectitude, many of them were not above the vice of petty perjury. In order to defame Wang An-shih, they stooped even to forgeries and fabrications. The most notorious of these forgeries is an essay entitled "On the Detection Of Villainy" (辨奸論) commonly attributed to Su Hsün (蘇洵), the father of Su Tung-p'o (蘇東坡). This essay, which is to be found in practically every anthology of Chinese prose, is said to have been written by Su Hsün before Wang An-shih came to be entrusted with affairs of state by Shen Tsung (神宗), the Sung emperor. Su Hsün was credited with having discerned the rogue in An-shih, even when he met the latter only for the first time. The central argument of the essay reads in translation as follows. "It is in our nature to clean our faces when dirty, and to wash our clothes when soiled. But here is a person, who is dressed like a prisoner and a captive, and eats the food fit only for dogs and swines. With ruffled hair and a face like a mourner, he talks constantly of poetry and the classics. Surely, such a person could not be considered as behaving in the way that Nature meant him to! Persons who try to differ purposely from Nature must in fact be big scoundrels like Suh Tyau (豎刁), Yi Ya (易牙) or Kai Feng (開方)."

The authenticity of this essay had never been questioned until the Tsing dynasty, when Li Fu (李紱) pointed out that it couldn't have been genuine, because it was not listed among the collection of Su Hsün's works, reprinted in the Ming dynasty (明刊嘉靖集). The authorities generally cited to support the claim that it was actually penned by Su, however, are Chang Fang-ping (張方平), who was supposed to have written the memorial for Su Hsün's tomb-stone, and Shao Peh-wen (邵伯溫), who is

known for his collection of anecdotes called *Wen Chien Lu* (邵氏聞見錄). But the curious thing to note about them is that the wording they both used in telling the way that the essay had come to be written is exactly the same. Granted that Shao was quoting Chang, he should at least have mentioned the latter's name. The very fact that he didn't, however, makes it look rather suspicious, as if Shao were the man who had forged both documents. That such must have in fact been the case is the judgement of Tsai Shang-hsiang (蔡上翔), who produced a critical biography of Wang An-shih in 1804 (王荊公年譜考略). According to Tsai, Peh-wen, like his father Kang-chieh (邵節康), was opposed to the reforms of Wang An-shih; and it was he who faked not only Su Hsün's essay on the detection of villainy and Chang Fang-ping's memorial, but also the memoir and the diary of Ssu-ma Kwang (涑水記聞; 溫公日錄), in both of which the character of Wang An-shih was drawn in the most unfavorable light. (Ssu-ma Kwang also disagreed with Wang An-shih, but he at least was a gentleman. In fact, the following passage from a letter of his to Lü Hui-ssu (呂誨叔) definitely shows that he couldn't have had indulged in personal attacks upon Wang An-shih: "Wang An-shih in literary ability and purity of character possessed many points of excellence above his fellows, but he was not a practical man, and he was too fond of pursuing wrong ideas. . . . But just as we have corrected the defective features of his policy, he has passed away. (*Fickle folk will doubtless find innumerable pretext for reviling him, but, in my opinion, the Court ought to honor him with special courtesy, and so tend to repress such baseless talk.*)"

That Wang An-shih was untidy in appearance might of course have been true, but one doubts whether he was really so bad as he was described. In fact, the slanderous statements with regard to his alleged unhygienic habits are all based upon a story, which points, if anything, only to his tremendous energy and devotion to books. The story goes that when An Shih was serving under Han Chih (韓琦), later better known as Han Wei Kung (韓魏公), in Yangchow, he was accustomed to read far on into the night and get up so late and so hurriedly that he had no time to wash before going to the office. Be that as it might, to argue from it, as Su Hsün was supposed to have done, that he was therefore a villain at heart is, to say the least, unwarrantable, if not indeed downright illogical. Such reasoning is, one may go one step further to say, not only logically untrue but also morally unsound, because the motive behind it is one of malice only. But, however it may be, it is, as an example of Confucian criticism of Wang An-shih, truly one of the best of its kind.

One of the best of its kind, I said, because other similar examples could also be found. For instance, when Lü Hui

(呂誨) of the Censorate in the court of Shen Tsung impeached the reformer, all he could think of saying against the latter was that he was partial to his relatives, that he was arrogant, that he was self-willed and so on and so forth. Lü Hui made this purely personal attack upon Wang An-shih, of course, for a good reason. According to the dynastic histories, Lü wanted to incriminate a certain official for having submitted a memorial to the throne, appealing that the emperor's brother should be transferred from the court to a principality. Wang An-shih, however, protested that the official had not really committed any crime, so that in the end he was not punished. "Lü Hui", in the words of the historian of *Sung Shih* (宋史), "vexed beyond measure at this failure of his attempt to incriminate the memorialist, and in hatred of Wang An-shih for the attitude he had taken up on the question, submitted this indictment." Such then is the much vaunted magnanimity of the orthodox Confucianists!

Confucianists, as a rule, are extremely servile to old customs and traditions. When any reform is proposed, they generally object to it on the ground that it has never been tried in the past. Thus it was when Wang An-shih wanted to introduce the Militia Act, Feng Chin (馮京) raised the quibble that the first of the Sung emperors—Sung-Tai-tsu—had gained and consolidated an empire without using farmer-soldiers. Another official, Wen Yen-po (文彥博), also frowned upon the Act and urged that after all the way to help the emperor was by way of inculcating moral principles, and not to seek to strengthen the empire by taking such military measures.

The Militia Act was designed to strengthen national defence and to meet the pressing need of the country for thorough-going military reform. Due to the opposition on the part of the Confucian scholars who disbelieved in the cultivation of force, the Act was finally rescinded after the death of An-shih. Commenting upon the Act, Chen Ju-chi (陳汝錡) of the Ming dynasty was of the opinion that its rescission was the chief cause of the downfall of the North Sung dynasty. To quote him: "The dynasty of Sung was weak and decadent from the military standpoint. The power and authority of the old military leaders were dissolved in their wine-cups. The border forces got weaker and weaker. . . . Then like a peal of thunder the Tartar hordes rolled on. Capturing Shuchow (朔州), Taichow (代州), and Taiyuan, they marched via Taming (大名: Peiping) and Chichow (薊州), and appeared before Kaifengfu. After the removal of the capital to the south, the Southern Sung began to complain that the calamity was due to the lack of men, and that even if they had had the men they lacked the spirit that was required to deal effectively with the emergency." "But", Chen Ju-chi continued, "if the Militia Act [of Wang An-shih] had not been rescinded, if the people had been trained at the proper seasons, they would have become accustomed to obeying military orders, they would have had weapons in their homes, and the fighting spirit in their blood. In which case, even if the Tartars had advanced within the borders they could not possibly have marched so many thousands of miles without opposition. But as it was, they rushed

on like a river that had burst its banks with nothing to stem the flood."

After the removal of the Sung capital to Hangchow, the party that had been antagonistic to Wang An-shih became quite influential at court. It was then the fashion to look upon him as the culprit responsible for the loss of China's territory north of the Hwai River. An-shih was made the "scape-goat" and object for lampoon by popular novelists. One reads in the *Ta Sung Hsuan Ho Yi Shih* (大宋宣和遺事) for instance: "The root of all the troubles which terminated in the fall of the North Sung dynasty lies in the person of Wang An-shih, who introduced to court his son-in-law Tsai P'ien (蔡卞) and also Tsai Ching (蔡京), and let the two kill off all those loyal servants of the Sung Empire." (Historically, that is, of course, incorrect. Tsai Ching became powerful only after Wang An-shih's death, while Tsai P'ien was never even given any important post while his father-in-law was still living.) Again, in a popular novel called "The Headstrong Minister" ("拗相公"), An Shih came in also for some very hard knocks. In it, we learn for instance that the people disliked him so much then that they even called their pigs by his name.

These popular *contes* were written toward the close of the South Sung dynasty. At that time, in spite of the popular hatred of Wang An-shih, enlightened people began to judge him with more leniency and think of him not so much as a scoundrel but as a well-intentioned pedant with very little practical sense. It is true, Lu Chiu-yuan (陸九淵), the famous philosopher, in an essay written after he had visited Wang An Shih's temple, went so far as to compare the reformer to Chow Kung (周公) and Yi Ying (伊尹). But then he was only one of the very few of that age who were appreciative of Wang An Shih's real worth.

Throughout the Yuan and the Ming dynasties the popular estimate of Wang An-shih remained practically unchanged, and it was not until the age of the Manchus that people began to recognize that the reformer had been grievously misrepresented in the canonical histories. Scholars began to take an interest in his life and in his political writings. Critical biographies of him such as Tsai Shang-hsiang's *Ching Kung Lien Pu K'ao Lio* (荆公年譜考略) and Yang Hsi-ming's *Lien Pu Twei Lun* (楊希閔著年譜推論), appeared, and in them, for the first time, impartial judgments were passed on his theories and achievements. These books, together with Liang Chi-chao's brilliant study published about thirty years ago, are instrumental in rescuing the political work of Wang An-shih from the oblivion in which it remained for so long, and to them every student of Chinese history and culture ought to feel grateful.

In our day, foremost among the champions of Wang An-shih is Dr. Hu Shih, who, in an essay written several years ago, reaffirmed Liang Chih-chao's thesis that the Sung prime minister is the greatest statesman that this country has ever produced. Recently, General Chiang Kai-shek, too, has expressed his admiration for the reformer and has ordered that lectures on his political and economic doctrines

THE LITTLE CRITIC

"Lady Precious Stream"

(Played by a Chinese cast, under the direction of Aline Sholes and S. Y. Wong, produced by the International Arts Theatre on June 25-26 at the Carlton Theatre, Shanghai).

The International Arts Theatre is to be highly congratulated on its presentation of *Lady Precious Stream*, which was the first performance by a Chinese cast of an old Chinese play in English rendering. With the beauty of the English of Mr. S. I. Hsiung, the translator, and the light hilarious character of the comedy, the artistic world of the West is now familiar. It would be interesting to review the book strictly as a translation, and from a comparison with the original operatic scenes from which the English play was pieced together and fashioned into a new unity, determine how much of the success of *Lady Precious Stream* was due to the original, and how much to Mr. Hsiung's talent. I am afraid such a comparison will be rather in favour of Mr. Hsiung. It will be seen then that while Mr. Hsiung follows the dialogue of the original in many places, he is no servile compiler, but has during the composition allowed his pen to take him where his fancy leads. It is obvious, for instance, to note more differences of outward form, that there is no singing in the English version, and that the characterisations of the personages on their first appearance at the stage cannot exist in the Chinese text, those delightful characterisations in short paragraphs which are, of course, entirely missed by the theatre-goer, but are so enjoyable to the reader. Also it is obvious that such play upon the words 'inspiration' and 'perspiration' does not exist in the original. But it is exactly in these divergences from the Chinese that we see the playful fancy and the creative urge of the translator, and who could condemn him for breaking off from the trodden path on looking at the finished result? Suffice it to say here that this certainly is no work of a Berlin professor or a museum curator, who is always so accurate, so correct, so learned and so heavy of spirit. If an academic scholar had undertaken the translation, I am sure it would have fallen flat. The comedy is hilarious and gay, and it seems the translator has caught the spirit of its gaiety and handled his work literally as the spirit moveth him.

(Be it parenthetically noted that our judgment of the *Western Chambers*, whose translation Mr. Hsiung is working on at present, will be by a different standard. For the *Western Chambers* is in Chinese a literary masterpiece of the first order; every word and every

be given to the officials in training at Nanchang. At long last, it seems therefore that truth has triumphed over unreason, and that the malicious lies about Wang An Shih perpetuated by the orthodox Confucianists in the past will no longer be believed in by the people. It all goes to prove too that the good that men do sometimes *does live* after them!

syllable of its lines seems to be saturated with and ooze poetry, and less liberties can be taken with it than in the present case. I would exact of the translator of *Western Chambers* the same demands as made of the translator of a Shakespearean play, unless the translation is frankly admitted as a mere adaptation for the English Stage.)

But I am not going to comment on the play itself, but rather on its performance by the brilliant cast of Chinese amateur actors. The cast was so uniformly good that it would be difficult and unfair to choose any one for particular praise. I wonder if others have noticed it, but the silence of Golden Stream was as effective as the eloquence of Silver Stream, her sister, since silence becomes a good Chinese woman. I don't mean to say that she played better than the others, but have mentioned the fact to show that everyone fell naturally into his or her role, and that the success of the performance was essentially the success of direction.

The acting of the English play, with its Chinese tempo, Chinese stage gestures and Chinese technique presented, of course, at first rather a weird effect. Here a necessary conflict is inevitable, that between the quicker tempo of natural English and the slower tempo of Chinese gestures and, on the whole, it must be said that the players have struck a medium that is fairly satisfactory. The Princess presents a different problem. The Princess, for instance, as played by Elsie Soong, has got a Hollywood touch to her that may well be envied by Clara Bow. No conflict exists for her; she has just thrown the Chinese theatrical technique to the winds. If one would like to see what the modern Chinese woman could come to under a different breeding and social environment, the best way is just to look at the Princess. But it should be realized that her part requires such a freedom as a necessary contrast to the Chinese matron in the Celestial Empire at home. No doubt, the translator had intended the Princess and the Minister of Foreign Affairs as sly hits at modern European manners, and in the spirit of jollity and gay playfulness, we could well afford to let chronological accuracy go by the board. But I suspect that the Princess, as Elsie Soong played it, is an individual creation of hers, being a piece of feminine modernity that neither the translator would have dreamt of, nor an English actress would have the audacity to put upon the stage.

We mustn't forget *Lady Precious Stream* herself, played by the beautiful and vivacious Tang Ing. She was a sweet, young thing and a spoilt daughter, as *Lady Precious Stream* should be, and her overflowing vivacity gave a basic sustenance of jollity so essential to the play. I was struck, however, more by her tragic parts, for it is easy with Tang Ing to be gay and giggling, and I had rather trembled for her tragic moments, in which she did rise to the occasion. If anything, she inclined a just little too often to relapse into her gay natural smile. Also I should like to see her changed, in Act Three, into a mature woman after eighteen years of parting and absence. If the Chinese stage tradition requires that she remain a sweet, young thing after eighteen years of hardship and sadness, then to hell with Chinese tradition.