

# PACIFIC AFFAIRS

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## TWO WINGS OF ONE BIRD

### A Chinese Attitude Toward Eastern and Western Civilizations

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*Translated by Lucius C. Porter*

*"The steam boiler should not ridicule the immaturity of the clay pot; the man on a wheel-barrow has no right to praise his own 'spiritual civilization' and scorn the 'material civilization' of him who rides in the tram."*

There is current today an entirely baseless but very poisonous popular opinion which stigmatizes Western civilization as "materialistic" and honors Eastern civilization as "spiritual." This opinion though really very old, has recently reappeared with fresh vitality. In the past, when Eastern people suffered oppression by Western races, they turned to this view-point to offset ridicule and to comfort themselves. Within recent years the effects that followed the Great War have led a group of Westerners into a despondent reaction against the culture based on modern science. From time to time one even hears from Western scholars expressions of worship for Eastern idealism. These expressions, although representing nothing more than the pathological psychology of a single period, fit in exactly with the insane self-praise indulged in by Easterners. As a result considerable fresh glory has been given to old-fashioned influences in the East.

I do not wish the reactionary young people who deal with this problem to be without exact definitions or clear statements. Those who now speak loftily of "spiritual civilization" and "materialistic civilization" have had no common standards to form the basis of the discussion. In consequence they have produced nothing more than wordy, polemical articles on superficialities, and have been quite unable to reach fundamental explanations. I intend to state first a few basic conceptions as standards for the discussion.

1. "Civilization" means the general achievement of a race in adjusting to its environment.

2. "Culture" means the forms through which the life of a given civilization is expressed.

3. Two causes lead to the creation of a given civilization: One the material cause, which includes all the variety of forces and material substances in the natural world. The other, the spiritual cause, which includes the intellectual capacity, feelings and ideals of a race. Every civilization is produced by human intelligence and wisdom making use of the matter and energy of the natural world. There is no spiritual civilization, and none that is merely material.

I feel it is unnecessary to discuss these three conceptions in detail, since all those who have investigated this problem agree to them. A clay pot and a huge iron boiler, a sampan and a great steamship, a wheel-barrow and an electric tramcar — these are all products of civilization, manufactured by human wisdom making use of the matter and energy of nature. These influences, which are alike in having a material basis and equal in being the products of human ingenuity, differ only in being simple or complex and in

the ingenuity with which they were contrived. There is surely, no fundamental difference between them. The steam boiler should not ridicule the immaturity of the clay pot; the man on a wheel-barrow has no right to praise his own "spiritual civilization" and scorn the "material civilization" of him who rides in the tram.

What I do wish to discuss is (a) What is a purely materialistic civilization? (b) Is Western civilization materialistic?

Those who worship the so-called spiritual civilization of the East say: "Modern Western civilization gives undue emphasis to material and physical enjoyment, and neglects psychological and spiritual needs: it is, therefore, a strictly materialistic civilization." Let me first point out the assumption of a conflict between spirit and body which underlies this view and which I regard as fallacious. I firmly believe that a spiritual civilization must necessarily build on matter. To increase man's enjoyment of material things and add to physical ease and comfort, is to take the path that leads to a liberation of human energy through which man will not be required to spend all his strength in getting a bare living, but will be given surplus energy to satisfy spiritual needs.

An Eastern philosopher has said: "After food and clothing are sufficient, honor and disgrace can be distinguished. After a regular stipend is guaranteed, good manners can be appreciated." Such a saying is not meant to drag in the economic interpretation of history, it is everyday common sense. The great human tragedy is to be found in the countless numbers of men who sweat blood to make a living and yet never secure the minimum joys of life, and never escape freezing and famine. An even greater human tragedy is this: That prophets and scholars seeing the freezing and the famine of multitudes, and unable to discover means for adding to their happiness, should still feed them with such hypnotic phrases as "Please Heaven and accept fate," "Be content," "Accept poverty," thus causing them to comfort and befool themselves.

It is not surprising that such self-deception and self-comfort have led to a habit of laziness. Fanatics go even further, perverting nature, punishing the body, all in search of an illusory spiritual comfort. From self-deception and coddling of themselves they go on to self-abuse and even to suicide. The way of life becomes a way of death. All these results come from taking the same mistaken course—the disregard of fundamental human desires. Those who follow that course rebel against Heaven and pervert human nature. The outcome is an indolent society in which the majority will be unwilling to put forth any effort to satisfy essential human needs, and unwilling, as well, to take a single step in search of intellectual and spiritual development.

The particular characteristic of modern Western civilization is its full recognition of the importance of material enjoyment. In my view Western civilization is built on three primary conceptions: (1) The search for happiness is the aim of human life. (2) Therefore poverty is a sin. (3) Therefore ill-health is a sin. Borrowing an old Eastern saying, this may be called "the civilization of the enriched life." Poverty is a sin, therefore open up new sources of wealth, increase production, improve manufacturing methods, expand business. Sickness is a sin, therefore extend medical research, develop public hygiene, emphasize physical training, prevent contagious diseases, encourage eugenics. Happiness is the aim of life, therefore work for comfortable adjustment to circumstances, convenient transportation, clean towns, beau-

tiful arts, well-ordered society, clean government. Any survey of the arts, science, laws of modern Western life will, indeed, reveal many murderous machines and institutions that plunder and oppress, yet we cannot but admit that the fundamental spirit of the West tends toward the enrichment of life. Has this civilization of the enriched life really neglected man's mental and spiritual needs? Is it in truth a purely materialistic civilization?

### The Intellect

Let us begin that inquiry in the intellectual field. The chief characteristic of the spiritual side of Western civilization is its science. The fundamental spirit of science is the search for truth. Man, during his life on earth has endured the compulsion of environment, the commands of habit, the decrees of superstition and tradition. Truth alone enables one to win freedom, to gain strength, to penetrate the sanctities of wisdom. Truth alone enables you to break through the bondage of environment, gives you power to control heaven and seize the earth, so that, fearing neither heaven nor earth, you can advance to real manhood. To know is one of the greatest of man's spiritual needs. The older Eastern civilization not only made no provision for meeting this need, but actually thought to block it and eradicate it. Thus it was that ancient Eastern sages have said, "Know nothing", "Give up knowledge", "Cut off thinking", "Ignorantly follow the plan of God." This is to stand in awe of the difficult; it is to adopt laziness. Can such a civilization praise itself for satisfying spiritual needs?

A lazy Eastern sage has said, "Our life has limits, but knowledge is limitless. For the limited, to press upon the limitless is hazardous." Therefore they urged men to sit quietly and clarify the mind so that without thought or reasoning they could in submission meet whatever came upon them. With such wild talk the self-deceived have deceived others. Such is the madness of man's self-praise. Truth is deeply hidden within affairs and objects. Unless you go forth and search deeply it will never appear. Scientific civilization teaches men to train themselves in sense perception so as to gather truth bit by bit, neglecting not a single hair, but gathering up the very tiniest item. This is the sole approach to truth. Nature is a very sly and slippery devil: only by beating and torturing her can she be forced to bare the truth. The idler who will neither think nor reason will be forever a fool quite outside the doorway of truth.

The indolent Easterner will say, "Truth is inexhaustible. How can man's longing for knowledge ever be satisfied?" Quite so, truth can never be completely revealed. But science will not hold back for such a reason. Scientists know that truth is infinite, that knowledge is infinite: none the less they have their satisfactions. There is the joy of advancing even an inch, there is a satisfaction in gaining even a foot. From the days of Newton to those of Pasteur and Edison, time and time again there has been such joy as that. Though but a dot or a drop be added, it is still progress; though each step be taken with hesitation still there is satisfaction. Such joys of the spirit the lazy inactive saints of the East have never dreamed of.

A fundamental difference between East and West lies at this point. On the one hand self-inflicted refusal to think or reason: on the other ceaseless search for truth. Friends! which type of civilization will satisfy the demands of your spirits?

Secondly, let us examine man's emotional and ideal needs. There is no need to speak of literature and art, for surely all Easterners able to open their eyes and look about the world admit that Westerners have not slighted these

two important fields. Let us rather discuss ethics and religion. Outwardly modern civilization has not yet broken connections with the older religions, and for this reason the new civilization has not yet understood the building of its new religion and ethics. But we who study history should not fail to point out the new spiritual and ethical trends implicit in the new civilization.

### **The Emotions**

The development of science which has exalted reason, has led to more exact and refined methods for seeking truth, has advanced critical capacity, and has, thereby, gradually reduced to a minimum the superstitions of religion. Even this minimum faith—belief in the existence of God and in the immortality of the soul—is questioned. The first characteristic of this new religion is its rationalism. Using the weapons of science, modern civilization has opened up a new world and has discovered countless new truths, gaining a mastery over innumerable natural forces, compelling electricity to haul cars and the ether to carry messages. Truly it has performed many marvels able to shake the earth and open the heavens. The increase of man's power has slowly given him added faith in himself. Gradually the former faith in heaven's decree has given place to confidence in man himself. This is the second characteristic of the new religion, its humanism. The expansion of knowledge has not only increased man's capacities, it has also widened his vision and broadened his heart, it has enlarged the scope of his imagination and strengthened his sympathies. The gain in material enjoyment has given men surplus energy to devote to the needs of others. Expanded sympathies and increased abilities have given birth to a new social ethics. This is the third characteristic of the new religion.

Earlier generations sought consolation within the realm of feeling and emotion. In consequence they did not hesitate to sacrifice the demands of reason and were ready to rely on faith alone. Without asking for proof they believed in spirits, in divinities, in God, in heaven, in paradise, in hell. The science of today cannot rely solely on faith in such fashion as that. But science does not belittle emotional consolation. Huxley has well said: "Within the field of surgery or biology, when I face even the smallest sort of difficulty I cannot hope for results unless I take pains to accept nothing that lacks complete proof. Am I justified in setting aside such strict requirements when seeking a solution for the very mysteries of human life?" This is to recognise fully the demands of our spiritual nature. When we buy an acre of land or a row of houses we require a deed. As a basis for man's highest hopes shall we do without proof and blindly believe? This demand for proof may be called the rationalism of modern religion.

Formerly men endured the ordering of nature without ability to investigate her secrets or resist her cruel tyrannies. In consequence they were constantly in awe of the natural world. Worship of objects and animals, fear of demons, reverence for spirits, "Serving the Lord in fear and trembling," these attitudes were all due to man's lack of confidence in his own power. It was impossible for him not to rely on a supernatural power. Today men are different. Man's own power has overcome countless natural forces. The aeroplane flies above without hindrance. The submarine dives to the depths of the sea. Reaching into space man measures the constellations. Nearby he examines the infinitesimal. This two-handed animal with a brain has already become the lord of the universe, he cannot but honor himself.

Such is the humanized religion of today. Confidence in man is greater than confidence in Heaven. We wish no illusions about the "four forms of

abstract contemplation" or "the six paths to divinity." We wish rather to become in this world wise and learned, men who can rule the heavens and seize the earth. We believe in the infinite future of man. Perhaps we do not believe in the immortality of the soul, but we do believe in the holiness of personality and the sacredness of human rights. Such is the humanism of the new religion.

### **Social Consciousness**

But the most important factor in modern ethical religion is its social trend. Religion in earlier generations, on the whole, stressed individual salvation. The earlier ethics stressed self-cultivation. Even when a religion expressed responsibility for the masses of men and when ethics expressed the need of charity toward all there was, still, no way in which to begin, no strength for actual achievement. The more attention was fixed on the subjective field, the less could one see the field of objective reality. The more that the performance was conducted with the puppets of intangible consciousness, the less was there strength left for meeting the practical problems of the external world. Just so, during 800 years of rational philosophy in China no one could see the cruel inhumanity of the bound feet of 200,000,000 women. "Understand the heart, observe the inner nature", could bring no relief to human misery and poverty. Abstract contemplation could lead only to the waste products of inactivity and ignorance.

Modern civilization did not begin with religion, but the new religion has been a natural product of that civilization; it did not enter its path through the doorway of ethics, but a new ethics naturally resulted. The nations of Europe of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were pirate states. Adventurers like Columbus, Magellan and Drake were simply grand pirates. They were after gold and silver, spices, ivory and slaves. But such adventurers and the merchants they carried along with them opened up a new world of boundless extent, expanded men's vision, inspired men's imagination, and, at the same time increased the wealth of Europe. In connection with this the industrial revolution began, fundamental changes in production took place, capacity for production was greatly increased. For two or three hundred years the enjoyment of material goods has been increased, while at the same time the areas of human sympathy have been extended. This extension of human sympathies became the basis for the new ethics and the new religion. Struggling for one's own liberty one thought of the liberties of others. The demand for individual freedom did not find a limit in the requirement not to infringe the freedom of others; it went on to the point of seeking the freedom of the greatest possible number. Seeking welfare for oneself one must necessarily think of the welfare of others. This was expressed by the philosophy of Utilitarianism in the phrase "the greatest good of the greatest number," which became the goal of human society. These were all socializing tendencies.

The new articles of faith of the Eighteenth century were Liberty, Equality, Love. The new religious faith of the late Nineteenth century was socialism. This is the new spiritual civilization of the West, it is a spiritual civilization the East has never possessed. To be sure the East has had a religion of love and has had the ideal of public land and of communal ownership. But these were merely paper documents which never became important factors in social life. They never became forces determining individual life and had no far-reaching influence on Eastern civilization. It was not so in the West. Liberty, equality, love, became the revolutionary watch-words of the Eigh-

teenth century. The American and French revolutions, the European movements of 1848, the American Civil War, all these were struggles under the revolutionary banner of these three ideals. The national constitutions of the United States, of France and of the South American republics, all were products of the mighty influence of the same threefold ideal. The overthrow of ancient social classes, the rejection of autocratic government, universal equality of all men before the law, the guarantee of a four-fold freedom of conscience, of thought, of speech and of the press, which has formed the bulwark of revolution, the actual achievement of universal education, the liberation of women, the feminist movement, the realization of political rights for women—these are the actual manifestations of the new ethics and new religion. These are not empty discussions confined within the pages of a few philosophies. These are important factors in the modern social and political structure of the West. They have become already forces that determine human living and direct the course of practical affairs.

In the Nineteenth century the defects of individualism were gradually revealed. The misery within the capitalistic system was also gradually made plain. Far-sighted men saw that institutions based on individualistic competition could not realize the ideals of true liberty, equality and love. To beg for justice from the hand of capitalism was like "asking a tiger for its skin." Two courses only were open for escape from the situation. One was to make use of the power of government to curb capitalism and guard the oppressed classes. The other course lay in the organization of the oppressed classes for a direct attack upon the oppression and exploitation of capitalism. Out of this situation the great variety of socialistic theories and movements have been born.

Modern western civilization had for its foundation the primacy of individual welfare. As a consequence property rights had been recognized. From the middle of the Nineteenth century this right has been fundamentally shaken. Governments may impose heavy income and inheritance taxes; property cannot continue as a purely private possession. So too, labor has been looked down upon in the past. But even capitalistic institutions have given labor extensive rights of organizing, and within the last decades labor organizations have become factors of great influence upon society; leaders of the labor parties have gained political power in the great states of the world, the general strike has brought to terms the most powerful governments, while workers and farmers have become the able governing class in Russia.

This great social movement is still in its period of growth. Yet results are already clearly manifest. Social legislation in every country and social control of working conditions are the solid achievements of this great movement. Not merely paper plans, they are all important factors in the new modern civilization. This is the socializing phase of the new religion and new ethics.

Perhaps certain old-minded Easterners will say. "This is all a struggle for power and profit, how can it be called religion or ethics?" It is just at this point that we see a fundamental difference between East and West. On the one side there is quiet acceptance of one's appointed lot, quiet acceptance of poverty, desire to please heaven, non-resistance, endurance of misery. On the other side there is dissatisfaction with one's appointed lot, dissatisfaction with poverty, unwillingness to endure misery, determined struggle, continuous improvement of the present environment. The Easterner, seeing a rich man, says, "His ancestors cultivated virtue." If poor himself, he says, "My ancestors did not cultivate themselves." He says "Fate determined these conditions." Not so the Westerners. They say, "The inequalities of wealth

and poverty, the misery of circumstances, are all the results of bad institutions; but institutions can be improved." Then they struggle, not for power and profit; they fight for freedom, for equality, for justice. The struggle is not exclusively for the selfish advantage of the individual. The outcome of the conflict is "the greatest good of the greatest number," and this is not to be gained by sitting with folded hands repeating the name of Buddha. It must be fought for with ardent effort. My friends, after all which type of civilization can satisfy your heart's desires?

### In Brief

Let me now summarize my critique of Western civilization. It is a type of civilization clearly based on the search for human happiness, and has certainly increased in many ways the material enjoyment of mankind. But it is equally clear that it has been abundantly able to satisfy man's needs on the spiritual side. On the intellectual side by using exact and refined methods it has sought for truth unceasingly, it has explored the inexhaustible secrets of Nature. On the side of religion and ethics, this civilization has overthrown superstitious religions and has established rational belief; it has overturned divine authority and built up a humanized religion; it has rejected an unknowable paradise and vigorously sought to build up a human kingdom of happiness, a heaven on earth; it has exposed the selfishness of individual salvation and has endeavored to use all the strength of new knowledge and new idealism in advancing a completely socialized religion and ethics, energetically devoted to the greatest good of the greatest number.

The chief characteristic of Eastern civilizations is "Contentment." The chief characteristic of Western civilization is "Discontent". The contented Easterners have been satisfied with a mean and miserable life, and so have not sought to increase material enjoyment; they have been satisfied with dullness and ignorance, and so have not cared for the discovery of truth nor for the invention of machines; they have been satisfied with the existing environment and the destiny it imposed, and so without conceiving of the control of Nature they have only sought to please Heaven and accept fate; without conceiving of the reform of institutions they desired only to fulfil the duty of their appointed lot; without conceiving of revolution they have simply become a docile and submissive people. Such a civilization, submissive to the orders and commands of the material environment, unable to escape, unable to use man's intellectual powers to modify environment or to reform conditions, is the civilization of a lazy and unprogressive people, a truly materialistic civilization. Such a civilization can only repress the spiritual demands of mankind. It would be impossible for it ever to satisfy those demands.

With Westerners the case is quite otherwise. They speak of "divine discontent." Discontent with material conditions has given birth to the modern age of steel, the age of steam, the age of electricity. Intellectual discontent has given birth to the age of science. Social and political discontent has given birth to the age of democracy with free political institutions, with a society based on the equality of men and women, with its cry for the sanctity of labor, with its socialistic movements. Divine discontent has been the motive force in every reform and in every advance. Here is a civilization that makes full use of man's intelligence and wisdom in a search for truth that will free his spirit so as to control nature for man's use, so as to reconstruct the physical environment, so as to reform political and social institutions, so as to secure the greatest good of the greatest number. Such a civilization should be able to satisfy man's spiritual needs; such a civilization

is truly spiritual. It is not a materialistic civilization, but a veritable idealistic one.

To be sure, truth has no limits, there is no limit to material enjoyment, no limit to mechanical invention, no limit to social improvement. But each individual thing has its own sort of happiness. Each improvement in a machine carries its own peculiar satisfaction. Each reform in social institutions carries its own particular delight. Today results are not realized; tomorrow or next year may see achievement. Where pioneers fail followers may carry on to success. Under circumstances of limitless progress, each single step may still bring rich happiness to him who makes the effort.

Such a spirit as this the great poet Tennyson has put into the words of the hero Ulysses, as he sings:

“Yet all experience is an arch where-through  
 Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades  
 Forever and forever when I move.  
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!”

Note: This article was written for the Japanese monthly, “Reconstruction”, and the translation appeared in the “Contemporary Review” (China), No. 83.

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## **EUROPE MEETS THE INSTITUTE**

By J. MERLE DAVIS

The following is a composite of the report letters sent by General Secretary J. Merle Davis to President Ray Lyman Wilbur from the European centers where Mr. Davis was transacting official Institute business during the past several months. New contacts were made with the British Council, and tentative contacts with groups in Moscow and Holland. This is the first of a series of three articles by Mr. Davis on his European tour. Next month we publish a report of his Geneva contacts.

### **In Historic Moscow**

We entered Russia through Berlin, Warsaw, and Brest-Litovsk. The trains were crowded as far as the Russian frontier and we had to stop over twenty-four hours at Warsaw, since only one daily international express is operated through from Berlin and we were late in making reservations. I had written to Mr. Tchitcherin, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, explaining my purpose in desiring to enter Russia and asking for permission to go to Moscow. I also sent a duplicate of this letter to Mr. A. Losovsky, General Secretary of the Red International of Labor Unions, asking him to see that my request was acted upon by the Foreign Office. Before leaving Geneva I had a letter from Mr. Losovsky, stating that he had secured permission from the Foreign Office and that an order for my visa would be awaiting me at the Soviet Embassy in Berlin.

On arrival in Moscow we put up at the Savoy Hotel, where to our surprise we found Viscount Goto (father-in-law of Mr. Y. Tsurumi) with Mr. Tamon Maeda, former vice-Mayor of Tokyo and other Japanese whom we had known in Tokyo.

I approached the Moscow situation through the Red International of Labor Unions, the most powerful of all the groups in U. S. S. R. I carried letters of introduction from M. Albert Thomas, Director General of the Inter-