

Sailing in the Western Wind

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Abstract

First in a series of six articles concerning Christianity and evangelism within the contexts of the two very different systems of contemporary USA and the overseas-born Chinese, this article identifies elements of Western influence on Chinese culture and Chinese Christianity.

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I. PRELIMINARY INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

This is the first of a six-part series on Christianity in the East and the West within the contexts of the two very different systems of contemporary USA and the overseas-born Chinese. The plan is to first identify the elements of Western influence on Chinese culture in general and Chinese Christianity in particular in order to call for the formulation of Sino-theology for contemporary Chinese, making our Christian faith relevant in the anticipation of a new millennium and to be better received by non-Christian Chinese. Then it is to show that there are also elements of Eastern influence (Easternization) on the contemporary American culture, leading to the discussion of cultural clash or mutual enrichment of the East and the West. The series of six is meant to be both descriptive and provocative.

II. INTRODUCTION

There are undeniable elements in the contemporary Chinese culture as factual evidences of Western influence. Let's begin with food: corn, potato, tomato, egg-plant, peanut, pepper, pine-apple, etc. were introduced from the West into China either directly or indirectly. In addition, many items in the daily life of individual Chinese are of Western origins: vocabulary (e.g. 烏托邦, 模特兒, 冰淇淋), dress (洋服), calendar (the adoption of AD vs. the lunar calendar), cooking style (e.g. 西餐), transportation (e.g. the use of bicycle, motor cycle, car, train), communication (e.g. telephone, satellite, inter-net, etc.).

III. MULTI-DIMENSIONAL AND MULTI-LEVEL WESTERNIZATION

The extensiveness and comprehensiveness of Western influence on the Chinese culture is beyond the individual level; it is institutionalized collectively and internalized personally. Various dimensions of contemporary Chinese culture have been westernized. Only seven selected aspects are summarized below to highlight this reality.

A. Science & Technology

Western missionaries were the key people who introduced Western science and technology into China. For instance, early in the 17th century, Jesuit missionary Trigault (1577-1628) brought to the emperor a collection of 70,000 volumes of foreign language from the Pope, and then 400 titles of translation into Chinese were produced by Jesuit missionaries to introduce Western science and technology. Later Protestant missionaries, such as Calvin Mateer, Timothy Richard, W.A.P. Martin, systematically translated into and extensively published in Chinese to introduce Western science and technology to China.

After the repeated humiliations by the superior military power of the Western nations, Chinese leaders, such as Lin Tze-hsu (林則徐), Tseng Kuo-fan (曾國藩), Li Hung-chang (李鴻章), Chang Chih-tung (章之洞), were eager to save China by adopting Western science and technology. The following events were clear cases of this kind: during the Self-Strengthening Movement of 1860-70 period, there was the establishment of shipyard and machinery, the founding of Ship & Sale Bureau (輪船招商局) in 1872, the Kai-ping Mining (開平煤礦) in 1876, the Nan-bei Electric (南北電線) in 1878, the telephone company in 1905, the use of cannon and battleship during the time of Emperor Kuang-Hsu (光緒) of the Ch'ing Dynasty (清朝) in late 19th century, etc.

B. Military & Weaponry

During the Tai-ping Rebellion, the officials of the Ch'ing Dynasty discovered the effectiveness of Western weaponry. In 1862, the government purchased seven battle ships and one supplier ship from Britain and started the trend of importing Western war technology. In 1866, Tso Tsung-tang (左宗棠) founded the first modern military training school in Fu-jian (福建). Later Naval Academy was established. Many were sent by the government to enroll in military academies to learn the Western warfare methodology.

Since the first Sino-Japanese War of 1895, the imperial government of the Ch'ing Dynasty initiated the Western style military training program. This marked the beginning of a large scale military westernization, and Yuen Shih-kai's (袁世凱) German style training of the army was one of the notable cases. In 1923, Sun Yat-sen (孫中山), the founding father of the Republic of China, sent Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) to Europe for an exposure to the Western military program. In 1924, upon his return from the West, Chiang founded the Huang-po Military Academy (黃埔軍校) to train the revolutionary force to fight against the warlords.

C. Politics & Ideology

In 1842, through the writing of Wei-yuan (魏源, 《海國圖志》), the Western parliamentary system was introduced to China for the first time. In the 80's of the 19th century, after their visit to the West, imperial officials proposed to institute parliamentary system in China. During the Hundred Days Reform (百日維新), leaders like K'ang Yu-wei (康有為), Liang Ch'i-ch'ao (梁啟超), etc. had advocated the parliamentary system and in 1906, petitioned to implement a constitutional monarchy system.

In 1912, the first Congress in China (南京臨時參議院) was established, patterned after the British and the German one. In 1911, at the founding of the Republic of China (RC), Western democracy replaced the Chinese imperial system and the leader was Sun Yat-sen, who was the Founder of the Republic and a Christian, and was educated in the Western systems of Hawaii and Hong Kong. He traveled abroad extensively during the period of 1895-1911, absorbing Western ideology and instituted Hsen-jon-hue (興中會) among overseas-born Chinese. Among the supporters of the revolution, many were Christians and graduates of missionary/Western schools. The political ideology of the Republic was Sen-min-ju-yi (The Three Principles of the People, 三民主義 : 民族, 民權, 民生) which included the spirit of Christianity and Western democracy.

After the successful communist revolution in 1949, the Marxist-Engel ideology of the West began to strongly entrench in the mind of many leaders. Though Mao Ze-dong (毛澤東) did not follow the communist orthodoxy, his contextualized version deeply impacted the country and the people for many years to come. Leaders like Zhou En-lai (周恩來, educated in France) and many others had embraced the Western political ideology and imposed the Western way on the populace for decades.

D. Education, Sports & Social Service

1. Education:

1865 The imperial government established Tun-wen-guan (同文館) — the earliest official modern academy for foreign language study with multiple grades as in the West.

1872 Sending students overseas became one of the government's policies. Many who were educated in Europe and the USA returned to China and formed a powerful force for the socio-cultural change.

1887 Mathematics of the West was included as a subject in the civil examination for recruiting officers.

1895 Bei-yen-si-sur-tang (北洋西學堂, 即北洋大學前身) was founded after the model of Harvard and Yale.

1919 The May Fourth Movement was the pivotal point of cultural shift in modern Chinese history. Leaders and participants were students/youths who had either received Western education or had been influenced by the Chinese YMCA. It was characterized by a strong anti-traditional Chinese and pro-Western spirit — to employ Western science, democracy, human rights, etc. to usher in changes in China.

1922 The RC government instituted a new public school system, following the American system and the educational philosophy of John Dewey.

2. Sports:

British soccer was introduced to China when Shanghai became a major city in the 19th century;

Western style of physical exercise, track and field, long-jump, hurdles, swimming, gymnastic, etc. was introduced into Chinese schools through instructors from the West.

Modern sports became popular in the Chinese society through schools and the YMCA. For instance, basketball was invented in the USA in 1891 and seven years later was introduced to the Chinese in 1898.

In 1890, the first Sport's Day with competition took place at St. John's University, a Christian school.

3. Social Service:

Missionaries from the West rendered social services, by meeting the needs of the Chinese society, assisting missionary efforts and practicing Christian charity. Among them were Calvin Mateer, Timothy Richard, W.A.P. Martin, Young J. Allen, James Legge, Alexander Williamson, John Fryer, etc. who contributed in founding schools, translating Western publications (in science, technology, religion, etc.), fighting against opium addiction, promoting education for female Chinese, etc.

1895 The formation of the Chinese YMCA provided human resources in modernization.

1919 Educational institutions founded by missionaries and funded by the church were: 16 universities, 400 high schools, 2,000 primary schools (also 400 hospitals).

E. Language & Writing

The first person who used Latinization for the study of Chinese language was the Italian missionary, Matthew Ricci (利瑪竇) in the Ming Dynasty.

After the failure of the Hundred Days Reform, Wang-zhao (王照) fled to Japan. He later employed the Japanese way of phonetics to pioneer the use of Pu-tung-hua (普通話) — using the Mandarin of Beijing as the standard and utilizing radicals of Chinese language to write Chinese phonetically. In 1913, Chang Tai-yen (章太炎) advocated the use of the radicals from archaic language of the Han Dynasty to develop Chinese phonetic alphabets (注音字母) which were standardized by the government as a unified Romanization system.

In 1928, the government officially announced that Romanization and ju-yin (注音) were to be used simultaneously.

Hu Shih (胡適), educated in Cornell and Columbia, was the first Chinese scholar / educator who promoted the modern Chinese (白話文) to replace the archaic literary Chinese (文言文). With the popular use of the modern Chinese language, Chinese mind set was freed from the centuries-long traditional way of thinking. Henceforth, the Chinese writing

assimilated the Western style of punctuation systems, borrowed Western words[(e.g. 摩托, 幽默, Mr. Democracy (德先生) , Mr. Science (賽先生)] and employed the English syntax (e.g. voice, tense, case, gender, etc. as in the case of 3rd person, singular pronouns: 她, 它, 牠, 祂 ; passive voice: 我被他打 ; tense: 已經吃過了) .

The first Chinese publication with the Western style of punctuation was the British trained scholar Yin-fu's 1904 publication (嚴復, 《英文漢話》) . The current practice in Chinese writing (i.e. sideway from left to right instead of the traditional vertical direction from top to bottom, and the use of punctuation) is of a Western origin.

IV. CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA - SAILING IN THE WESTERN WIND

As early as the T'ang dynasty, Christianity of the Nestorian version was brought to China by missionaries. It was not until the repeated military defeats of the Ch'ing government by Western nations, and hence with the opening of free ports and the signing of the unequal treaties, then Christian missionaries came along with the gun-boat policy of the West. The understanding of the historical contexts of the coming of Christianity to China in the T'ang and Ch'ing dynasties will shed light on the two questions: 1) Why Chinese resent the entering of Western missionaries and why they resist Christianity considering it as a foreign import? 2) How extensive and how comprehensive were the Western influences on the Chinese Christian church institutionally and the expression of Christian faith theologically?

Even well-educated Chinese nowadays would have mistaken Buddhism as being indigenously Chinese (false! for it was imported from India via the silk road of West China) and perceive Christianity as being imported from the West (false again! for Christianity was originated in the "near-East" of Asia Minor). In the second article of this series, we shall review the Western elements in Chinese Christianity and reflect on the "why" and "how" of theologizing in the Chinese way.