CHINA'S PART IN THE WAR

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It is not the purpose in this paper to enumerate the contributions, important as they are, which China has already made to the progress of civilization; nor is it to suggest how she can best aid in that reconstruction of the world's social, political, and economic fabric which will have to be taken in hand immediately after the close of the war. The sole aim is to consider how China may most speedily and effectively bring to bear her enormous but hitherto latent strength upon the accomplishment of the one object that concerns any of us at the present moment—the winning of the war.

Too much time has been lost already. It was evident from the first that China must pursue in connection with the war one of two courses; she must either maintain her neutrality, or she must enter the conflict on the side of the Entente nations. In either case her resources were available for use by those nations.

Now, China, as everyone knows, is capable of producing in vast quantities the very things, cereals, coal, iron, cotton, and wool, for want of which our civilization is suffering so keenly, while internal transportation problems present no insuperable difficulties. As a necessary preliminary step, however, to the utilization of this source of strength, a carefully worked out and well concerted plan of action was essential in order to avoid injustice to any individual nation, whether China herself or any other. Here again, as has happened so often at various crises in the course of the war, lack of foresight, of cohesion and coördination, of singleness of purpose, have stood in the way, and nothing has been accomplished.

It is probably too late now to make any effective use of China's vast material wealth in connection with the war,

since at least two years must elapse before it could begin to make its influence felt; and it is scarcely conceivable that the war will not have reached its turning point, one way or the other, before that time.

China has, however, one asset, and that her most important one, the utilization of which to any extent requires no joint action on the part of the allied nations, which so far from demanding extensive and costly development work before it becomes available, is ready for instant use, and which is capable of exerting an effect of the utmost importance upon the fortunes of the war. This asset is her labor.

China has endured for millenniums as a thoroughly integrated social complex which no shock of foreign conquest or domestic disturbance could destroy or even seriously modify. For ages in this region of southeastern Asia there has been going on a somewhat slow but none the less steady evolutionary process which has resulted in the development of a type of mankind, forming something like a quarter of the total population of the globe, whose most salient characters are courage, industry, patience, physical energy, sound morality, respect for law, and a cheerful, optimistic outlook upon life generally. These are the qualities which experience has shown to be those best fitted for achieving success in the struggle for existence. The enduring character of Chinese civilization is the proof of that. That these qualities are also just the ones needed for the successful prosecution of the war is equally clear.

It appears not to be generally known in this country that this tremendous reservoir of man power is already being drawn upon on a comparatively large scale. In both England and France Chinese labor of a very high and efficient type is being utilized in a great variety of ways. This is done not merely to effect the release of additional men for the combatant force, but also to increase the actual production and transportation capacity. Already the number recruited for this purpose is nearing the quarter-million mark, if it has not passed it, and still these men are being rushed across by the thousands. There can scarcely be too many of them. Fortunately the supply is inexhaustible.

These members of the Chinese Labor Corps, as it is called, are all picked men. As is well known, the population of China may be divided roughly into two distinct types. One, that occupying the southern half of the country, is of medium or short stature and is connected racially with the populations of Malaysia, the Philippines, and Japan. The other, taller and better developed physically, occupies the northern provinces and is related to that group of the human family of which the eastern Mongols, the Manchus, and the northern Koreans are representative members. There are also very fundamental differences between the cultures of northern and southern China, into which, however, it is not necessary to go here.[1]

It is from the northern provinces that the men of the Labor Corps are recruited. Very high qualifications are insisted upon, mental, moral, and physical. The corps is under regular and rigid military discipline, the men being under the charge of regularly commissioned officers of the British service who, through familiarity with China or for some other special reason are better able to make themselves useful in this work than as members of the combatant forces.

The pay provided for the members of the corps is much better than anything that they could earn in China, while very liberal allowances are made for their families during their absence and in the event of death or disability. Naturally their physical well-being is most carefully looked after, provision is made to keep them amused and cheerful, and there is, finally, a strict stipulation regarding their repatriation after the close of the war. That these men have already proved their usefulness is evidenced by the efforts made to increase their numbers, and there is indeed scarcely any limit to the variety of ways in which they may be profitably employed, in the loading and unloading of ships and railway trains, in road-making and construction work of all kinds, and above all in agriculture—in the production of that food which, we are told, is to win the war.

[1] See the very valuable paper by Dr. Berthold Laufer, entitled "Some Fundamental Ideas of Chinese Culture," in *The Journal of Race Development*, Vol. V, No. 2, October, 1914.

Upon the steamer in which the present writer returned to America early in the present year there were about a thousand of these men, all passenger accommodation except that of the first class having been taken over for them. Each man was dressed in a neat uniform of dark blue modeled upon the garments to which the North Chinese laborer is accustomed, and bore upon his left arm a red brassard with his number in the corps. Each was also provided with a stout waterproof canvas dunnage-bag containing his kit and personal belongings. As a body these men left little to be desired. Almost all were young, and though full of fun and good natured horseplay they were docile, orderly, neat, and thoroughly amenable to discipline, while a well developed esprit de corps had already begun to show itself. To a man they appeared to be in robust health, strong, willing, and capable of working both hard and continuously. After the regular morning health inspection, deck sports were held, tugs-of-war and the like, and there was nothing at all perfunctory about the way in which they entered into these. Among the men were several with a particular gift for waggery and buffoonery, a sort of thing quite as much appreciated in China as it is elsewhere, and these individuals were constantly exercising their talents for the edification of their comrades. That they were well fed goes without saying; the rations were ample, and of much better quality than those to which the average Chinese laborer is accustomed at home.

These men were not simply mercenaries, enlisting in this enterprise and risking attacks by submarines on the voyage and aeroplane raids once in cantonments in England or France, merely for the sake of wages higher than they could hope to earn in their native villages. There was apparent among them, in spite of their rollicking, devil-may-care good nature, a genuine feeling of responsibility and seriousness, a very real desire to reflect credit upon themselves, upon their families, and upon the newly established Chinese Republic of which they were citizens. The reality and depth of this sentiment were shown in the clearest possible way by the contents of the letters which they wrote home during the

voyage across the Pacific. In these there was manifest almost without exception an astonishingly clear comprehension of the issues at stake in the war, and also a sincere anxiety on the part of each man to "do his bit" toward bringing about an Allied victory.

Another idea, quite widely prevalent among these men, was especially significant. It was that in time they would return to China, after learning a vast deal about the ways of the Occident and the factors which contribute to success under the conditions of modern civilized life, and that they would then be in a position to aid in the advancement of their own people.

There was nothing jingoistic in this, nothing of resentment for the humiliations inflicted upon China by the various European powers under the Manchu régime; nothing, in short, even remotely suggestive of any menace to the peace and welfare of mankind, once China attains that place among the nations of the world to which she is justly entitled. The Chinese philosophy of life is not an aggressive or a predatory one. It is, on the contrary, based more firmly probably than that of any other nation upon the principles of justice and democracy and fair play for all. The so-called "Yellow Peril" was in the main nothing but a very clever piece of camouflage on the part of H. I. M. the Kaiser, an attempt to divert the attention of the world from the true source of future peril. So far as it has ever had any real existence at all, it has been due to the nomadic nations of Central Asia, the barbarous Huns, Bulgars, Magyars, Mongols, and Turks, whose gigantic raids have from time to time overwhelmed large portions of the civilized world, and from whom civilized China has suffered in precisely the same way and to a far greater degree than have the nations of Europe. It can not be too often reiterated that it is not the color of a man's skin, but the mode of his life and the manner of his thinking, that render him a menace or a blessing to his fellows.

The question hitherto has been, "What can America do to help China?" It is perhaps not too much to say that but for the stand taken by this government during the

early years of the present century, China would now have been partitioned by the European powers, if not into actual dependencies, at least into protectorates and "spheres of influence," in which event the opportunity now presented to the Chinese people for the working out of their own salvation must have been postponed for many generations. Again, the return of a large part of the Boxer indemnity, so frequently adverted to as an example of American love of justice and bona fides, has probably exerted a greater influence than any other single episode in the entire course of China's relations with the western powers, in winning her to a willingness to give modern civilization a fair trial, and to adopt therefrom such elements as shall enable her to bring her own material culture abreast of the times. Few, probably, of the peasants and carriers and muleteers and boatmen with whom one comes in contact in traveling through the interior of China ever heard of the Boxer indemnity and its return, or of John Hay and the Open Door; but everywhere one finds prevalent a feeling that somehow Americans are particularly good friends of China, that they have no territorial aspirations endangering her integrity, and that both as a nation and as individuals they are actuated by those same motives of justice and logic and fair play which exert so powerful an influence upon the Chinese mind also.

It is fortunate from every point of view that this friendly feeling should exist. Especially is this true just now, because the time has arrived when, if the people of the United States choose to do so, they may, with China's friendly cooperation, remedy a deficiency fraught with as great peril to the cause of civilization as any that war conditions have revealed. This deficiency is in the supply of agricultural labor, regarding which complaints are constantly being voiced on every hand.

We hear it reiterated—and it can not be repeated too often—that food is going to win the war. The supplying of the necessary food was one of the responsibilities assumed by us upon our entry into the war, as a part liquidation of the debt we owe to those peoples who have been fighting

our battles for us across the Atlantic while we have been making up our minds that we were not too proud to do our own fighting. If then, for any reason whatsoever, the people of this country fail to increase the production of foodstuffs up to and even beyond the amount required to supply adequately all the peoples depending upon us, there will have occurred one of the most tragic and most inexcusable instances of national betrayal to be found in the history of the world. The failure of the North German princes to support Gustavus Adolphus against the Imperialists, the way in which Austria repaid Poland for rescuing her from the Turk in 1683, or the recent defection of Russia from the common cause, will appear meritorious acts by comparison.

Suppose we ask ourselves, "Are we providing an adequate supply of essential foodstuffs for our Allies and ourselves? Does there exist anywhere, either here or abroad, any shortage of food that can be traced to insufficient production in this country? Does there remain anywhere in the United States any land, suitable for agricultural uses and not otherwise employed, that is not being utilized to its maximum capacity?" The answers to all these questions are painfully clear. The situation then is this: that as long as any lack of food exists anywhere among the peoples of the Entente nations capable of being remedied by increased production here in America, just so far do we as a people fail in the performance of one of the most important parts of the responsibility which we voluntarily assumed a year and more ago. Further, the blame for every death from malnutrition among our Allies which might have been prevented by increased food production in this country may rightly be laid at our doors. There was no constraint upon the people of the United States in accepting a state of war with the Central Powers, save that laid upon us by the common foe. We took nearly three years in which to consider the advisability of such a step, and the responsibilities which it would entail. If, then, after pledging certain definite forms of assistance to our new Allies—forms among which the supply of provisions occupied a

prominent place—we violate our pledges, through apathy, indifference, or any cause whatsoever, we shall find, at the close of the war, that we have been fighting most effectively on the side of Prussianism and autocracy.

The reason constantly given for the failure to increase the output of food is of course that it is impossible to find farm workers. All sorts of makeshift expedients are resorted to, and heralded in the press as indications of the terrible earnestness and intensity of purpose with which we have undertaken the prosecution of the war; whereas, in point of fact, such expedients are simply additional proofs, if any were needed, of the well meaning dilettantism and failure to utilize all available resources which have charterized the action of the United States in every war in which they have taken part. Instead of resorting to such pathetically inadequate makeshifts as the taking of our boys and girls out of school and putting them into the fields, it would be perfectly possible, if the people of this country so willed it, to supply ourselves with as many laborers as were needed; not immature or inexperienced children who should be at their books or their play, but grown men of fine physique, practical farmers, accustomed to grow on a given piece of ground two and three and even four times as much as the American farmer is able to produce.

That this could be done most easily and effectively, our trans-Atlantic Allies have already demonstrated. Nor would there follow any disturbance whatever in the equilibrium of our own somewhat delicately balanced body politic. The northern provinces of China are a reservoir, simply inexhaustible, of farm laborers of the best type, strong, intelligent, sober, law-abiding, and skilled to the last degree in the art of coaxing from the soil the utmost yield possible in the way of food for man and beast, and that, too, without at the same time impoverishing the soil itself. These men are accustomed to farming under all possible aspects, from practically desert conditions, where constant irrigation is essential, to those obtaining in the swampy regions bordering the coast and the great rivers, where drainage and flood control instead of irrigation are the determining factors.

The objection may be urged that the Chinese farmer is not accustomed to the growing of such crops as he would be called upon to raise over here. Nothing could be further from the truth than to assume that the Chinese farmer confines himself to the production of rice. Rice, particularly in the north, is eaten only by an infinitesimal part of the population. The standard cereals with the Chinese, except in the south, have been since prehistoric times wheat, barley, and millet, while within recent times the dietary has been enriched by the addition of maize and sweet and Irish potatoes from the New World.[2] There is not a single one of the more important products of our fields and gardens in the growing of which the northern Chinese farmer is not past master, while the list of valuable food plants which he is in the habit of raising includes very many varieties of which we in this country have not so much as heard.

Another objection which it is conceivable might be raised against the use of Chinese farm labor in this country is that the methods of agriculture as carried on in China are so hopelessly dissimilar to those practiced by our farmers as to render the plan utterly unfeasible from the start. The answer to this is simply, that it is not true; there is no dissimilarity worth mentioning, aside from the greater intensity and intelligence with which the Chinese farmer applies the methods common to both countries. The writer has repeatedly been impressed, in traveling through the country, by the resemblances between the farming processes actually in vogue in northern China and those to be seen in this country, particularly in those regions where the use of farm machinery has not yet attained great proportions. One sees the same ox-drawn carts, the same utensils—wooden pitchforks and rakes, clumsy mattocks and spades and hoes, rude scythes and cradles and sickles—which were used universally in the days of our grandfathers, and which

[2] May not the remarkable acceleration in the rate of increase of the population of China which has taken place in the past two centuries in spite of famines, plagues, and massacres on a scale of which the Occidental mind has no conception be ascribed in part, at least, to the addition of these three items to the food supply?

still survive in many localities. The sheaves of wheat and barley are tied in the same way, and the strawstacks about every farmstead look precisely like strawstacks everywhere. At most, the differences in method between Chinese and American agriculture are no greater than those to be witnessed in this country between the broad and level western farms with their large application of machinery, and the small rugged hillside farms of our eastern states, where primitive methods still to a great extent prevail.

Looking at the importation of Chinese labor in this country from still another point of view, the fear might, it is conceivable, be honestly entertained that where it was collected in large numbers the safety and peace of the countryside would be imperilled. Such a notion, to anyone at all acquainted with the ingrained orderliness and respect for law and authority of the Chinese agrarian population, would appear laughable. Unfortunately however the ideas prevalent in this country regarding the Chinese are inspired largely by recollections of the Boxer outburst; by sensational photoplays and melodramas staged in some impossible "Chinatown," with highbinders and opium smokers and slave girls as characters; and by the addresses of a few misguided exponents of the Gospel—exceptions, it is only just to say, to the great majority of their class—who feel it incumbent upon them to display in as lurid a light as possible the evil qualities of "the Chinaman at home" in order to swell the size of contributions to the cause of his conversion.

Bad characters exist in China, naturally, as they do in all countries; but it is the writer's conviction, based upon a somewhat extended experience with both types, that the American "bad man," be he native Anglo-Saxon, or half-breed Mexican outlaw, or New York gunman, is a very much more evil and treacherous and generally undesirable sort of person than is his Chinese confrère. And in both countries, it must be remembered, these types are the exception. Of the great mass of the population in China, and particularly of the rural population, it would be easy to multiply instances of the good qualities, drawn from the re-

ports of large numbers of properly qualified observers. For considerations of space, however, the writer will content himself with a statement of the conclusions at which he himself has arrived, after a residence of eighteen years in various parts of the Far East, and after travels which have taken him through twelve of the eighteen provinces into which China proper is divided.

Chinese ideals of right and wrong are practically the same as our own, and are probably on the whole somewhat better lived up to. Respect for the marriage tie and for the aged is carried considerably farther in China than is the case in this country. That there are certain practices which, though recognized as vicious, are carried on more or less openly in China is certainly true; whereas with us, though probably more generally prevalent, these practices are resorted to only in secret and furtively, being ignored or hushed up by all respectable people. The virtue of charity has also been cultivated in China to a very great extent, contrary ideas notwithstanding; the existence of beggars in such vast numbers is sufficient proof of that, if other were lacking. Repeatedly the writer has seen humble pedestrians, trudging along, pack on back and stick in hand, stop and drop a few cash into the outstretched bowl of some blind or crippled or leprous unfortunate, and upon inquiry the motive given has been the wish to "acquire merit in the next life." This motive will no doubt appear inadequate to people whose lives are governed by the yearning to "lay up treasure in Heaven;" but that it is efficacious in inducing acts of a charitable nature will have to be admitted.

Again, the writer has been repeatedly impressed by the apparently reckless way in which fruits, cooked foods, and sweetmeats, exposed for sale on stands along the road, were left entirely unwatched. Any fruit vendor in this country who left his applecart unguarded in a busy thoroughfare, whether in town or in country, would be apt, on his return, to find his stock depleted; but such appears not to be the case in China, in spite of the fact that more or less acute hunger is the constant and familiar companion of a great

majority of the poorer classes. That thieves of course exist in China is not to be disputed, although their number is probably nothing like what it would be in this country were a like condition of grinding poverty and insufficiency of the most elemental needs of life to occur. It can not be emphasized too strongly that the Chinese laboring class is as honest and law abiding and reliable as that of any country in the world, and far more so than that of many of the countries which have been permitted to dump upon our shores the dregs of their population without a demur upon the part of our statesmen at Washington or our patriots in the back blocks.

It is a commonplace that where large bodies of laborers of European or African race are gathered together in this country, as for instance in mining or railway construction camps, drunkenness, prostitution, and disorder occur, sometimes reaching proportions which render them a serious menace to the more permanent and orderly portion of the community. Such a state of affairs would be unthinkable in a camp of Chinese laborers in this country. They are not drunkards, prostitution would be out of the question for more reasons than one, and among them it is not customary to prosecute their personal vendettas with the aid of stiletto or razor or revolver; their quarrels, in fact, rarely get beyond the point of vigorous personal abuse, particularly since the abolition of the queue has deprived would-be combatants of a convenient point d'appui.

As regards the question of repatriation, that should present no difficulties whatever. The laborers, if organized under some plan similar to that already put into practice with such good results by our Allies, would be under what would amount to military control from the moment of their enlistment until they were discharged again in their native land. That any considerable number of them, or any of them at all for that matter, without European style clothing, without funds, without a knowledge of the language or of the country, should be able to escape from surveillance, conceal themselves until the hue and cry died down, and, finally, establish themselves over here in economic compe-

tition with our own people, is an idea which does more credit to its propounder's imagination than to his mental equipoise.

About the utility and practicability, then, of such an auxiliary force of farm laborers during the present crisis there can be no question, provided always that the plan is worked out and carried into operation by individuals familiar with the actual needs of the situation, with questions of transportation, and with the modes of thought and the manner of living of the peoples of the Far East. Such a plan, it is evident, would speedily supply the shortage which is universally admitted to exist in the supply of farm labor, and supply it, moreover, with a class of men more skilled than any in the world in the getting of food from the soil—"farmers of forty centuries," as the late Prof. F. H. King called them in his classical little book on the agriculture of the Far East. This class of labor would not come into competition with any in this country, first, because it would be under direct governmental supervision and not in the open labor market at all; and second, because the class of labor with which it might compete is practically nonexistent. If food is to win the war, it is surely more practical to enlist in its production a large force of experienced, industrious professional farmers, than to urge commuting business men to cultivate their backyards before and after office hours, or to set school children to work and expect them, with their lack of strength and experience, to make any effective contribution to the food supply of the allied nations.

There is, moreover, another advantage in the plan, only second in importance to the primary one that it enables us to increase the food supply more surely and speedily than in any other way. It is taken as a matter of course that such a force of laborers would be repatriated as soon as possible after the close of the war. Naturally, the signing of peace will not bring about by some miraculous means an instantaneous abundance of food and other material needs, and months will elapse before nations now organized for war

can transform themselves into communities organized for peace. Nevertheless sooner or later this force of Chinese farm laborers would return to its native land. Instead, however, of returning the same untraveled, ignorant, unsophisticated individuals who left it to go to the United States, they would have undergone a training in American ideals and material culture and standards of living which could in no other way be given so advantageously to such great numbers of men. These men, upon their return to China, would scatter far and wide through the country, returning each to his native village, as every Chinese hopes to do; and there they would become advance agents, as it were, for American ideas and ideals, American products of many kinds, American notions in regard to the standard of living, of material comfort, of political and social and economic and educational processes—of all that group of ideas and of material facts which taken together form that particular type of civilization, founded upon liberty and law, which we regard as peculiarly our own and for the right to perpetuate which we are now fighting on the battlefields of Europe. In no other way could America so quickly and effectively aid her sister republic to find herself and establish herself upon those solid foundations of democracy and constitutionalism upon which we ourselves have built.

We affect to look with pitying contempt upon the aims of those misguided Oriental nations which have until recently endeavored to keep themselves free of contact with the nations of the west by pursuing a strict policy of exclusion of all foreign persons, products, and ideas. The motive behind this policy was of course the desire to ward off danger to national independence, just as our motive in pursuing an Oriental exclusion policy, in so far as it is not based on ignorant race prejudice pure and simple, is the desire to ward off possible economic dangers. These dangers, however, are not to be permanently averted merely by building dams and dykes against them. The flow of a river is not to be stopped by building a dam across its bed. Sooner or later the current will overtop the dam, or burst it asunder, and the ensuing flood will be more destructive than the danger which the dam was built to avert.

It is no longer possible for nations to shield themselves behind "Chinese walls" of seclusion and isolation, as we have tried to do hitherto. The Orient tried it and failed, and the same result is bound sooner or later to overtake a like attempt on the part of the Occident. The only solution, then, is to overlook no opportunity to extend a helping hand to the Orient, to aid it in every possible way in its efforts to advance, to grasp the essentials of modern civilized life, and to assimilate its standards of living to our own. In this way, and only in this way, can the danger of future economic competition of a disastrous nature be avoided. The Oriental is quite as susceptible as is his Occidental brother to the pleasure to be derived from creature comforts and luxuries, and he is equally averse to having these taken away from him once he has become accustomed to them. The reason why our present standards of living do not exist in China is the same which explains their nonexistence in the Europe and America of only a few generations ago; modern means of communicaton, of transportation, and of the application of machinery to the numberless processes of modern civilized life have not yet been introduced. The country is predominantly agricultural. Commerce, manufactures, mining, and transportation have yet to be developed to the point where they can begin to afford a livelihood to any very great part of the population. Political ideals will have to crystallize in the shape of definite, well thought out, generally accepted and consistently followed policies, both domestic and foreign. Until these changes take place standards of living and the crowding of population upon the limit of food supply will improve but slowly. The presence in China of a great army of men in the prime of life who have been in close personal contact with our American civilization in its manifold aspects would have an influence simply incalculable in aiding that country to accelerate its adjustment to modern world conditions with the least friction or waste of time and effort. The effect, too, upon the extension of American commerce after the war, through the foothold that would thus be gained in the Chinese markets, will at once suggest itself to every thinking man.