

## I. ABSENCE OF THE SOCIAL MIND

**The** Chinese are a nation of individualists. They are family-minded, not social-minded, and the family mind is only a form of magnified selfishness. It is curious that the word "society" does not exist as an idea in Chinese thought. In the Confucian social and political philosophy we see a direct transition from the family, *chia*, to the state, *kuo*, as successive stages of human organization, as in such sayings as "When the family is orderly, then the state is peaceful," or "Put the family in order and rule the state in peace." The nearest equivalent to the notion of society is then a compound of the two words, *kuochia*, or "state-family," in accordance with the rule for forming Chinese abstract terms.

"Public spirit" is a new term, so is "civic consciousness," and so is "social service." There are no such commodities in China. To be sure, there are "social affairs," such as weddings, funerals, and birthday celebrations and Buddhistic processions and annual festivals. But the things which make up English and American social life, *viz.*, sport, politics and religion, are conspicuously absent. There is no church and no church community. The Chinese religiously abstain from talking politics; they do not cast votes, and they have no clubhouse debates on politics. They do not indulge in sport, which binds human beings

together, and which is the essence of the English and American social life. They play games, to be sure, but these games are characteristic of Chinese individualism. Chinese games do not divide the players into two parties, as in cricket, with one team playing against the other. Teamwork is unknown. In Chinese card games, each man plays for himself. The Chinese like poker, and do not like bridge. They have always played *mahjong*, which is nearer to poker than to bridge. In this philosophy of *mahjong* may be seen the essence of Chinese individualism.

An illustration of Chinese individualism may be seen in the organization of a Chinese newspaper. The Chinese run their papers as they play their *mahjong*. I have seen Chinese daily papers so edited as to require an editor-in-chief whose only business is to write editorials. The man in charge of domestic news has his page, the man in charge of international cables has his, and the man in charge of city news again has his own ground. These four men handle their respective departments like the four hands at a *mahjong* table, each trying to guess what the others have got. Each tries to make up his set and throws out the unwanted bamboo to the next man. If there is too much domestic news, it can conveniently flow over (without warning, as far as the reader is concerned) to the page for city news, and if this again has too much copy, it can conveniently flow over to the murders and conflagrations. There is no necessity for front-page make-up, no selection, no coordination, no subordination. Each editor can retire at his own good time. The scheme is simplicity itself. Moreover, both the editors and the readers are born individualists. It is the editor's business to publish the news, and the reader's business to look for it. They do not interfere with one another. This is the journalistic technique of some of the oldest, largest and most popular daily papers in China to this day.

If you ask why there is no coordination, the answer is, there's no social mind. For if the editor-in-chief tries to initiate reforms and fire the city editor for obstruction, he will run up against the family system. What does he mean by interfering with other people's business? Does he mean to throw the city

editor out and break his rice-bowl, starving all the people dependent upon him? And if the city editor's wife is the proprietor's niece, can he throw him out? If the editor-in-chief has any Chinese social consciousness, he will not attempt such a thing, and if he is a raw American-returned graduate of the Missouri School of Journalism, he will soon have to get out. Another man who knows Chinese social ways will get in, the old scheme will go on working, the readers will go on hunting for their news and the paper will go on increasing its circulation and making money.

Some such psychology is hidden behind all Chinese social intercourse, and it would be easy to multiply examples showing a lack of the social mind truly bewildering to the twentieth-century Western man. I say twentieth-century man because he has received the benefits of nineteenth-century humanitarianism, with a broadened social outlook. As a typically bewildering example, which is yet truly representative of Chinese thought regarding social work, I quote verbally from the *Analects Fortnightly* (a magazine devoted to unconscious Chinese humor) reporting the speech of a native warlord regarding the movement for mass education. The young people caught with the modern American enthusiasm for social service organized a movement for "annihilating literary blindness." So saith the General, therefore, in a speech: "Students ought to work at their books and not meddle with public affairs. *The people do their own business and eat their own rice, and you want to annihilate the people!*" The persuasive argument is this: the illiterate are not interfering with you, why must you interfere with them? Those words, so short, so forceful, are yet so true because they come direct and undisguised from the speaker's heart. To a Chinese, social work always looks like "meddling with other people's business." A man enthusiastic for social reform or in fact for any kind of public work always looks a little bit ridiculous. We discount his sincerity. We cannot understand him. What does he mean by going out of his way to do all this work? Is he courting publicity? Why is he not loyal to his family and why does he not get official promotion and help his family first? We decide he is young,

or else he is a deviation from the normal human type.

There were always such deviations from type, the *haobsieh* or "chivalrous men," but they were invariably of the bandit or vagabond class, unmarried, bachelors with good vagabond souls, willing to jump into the water to save an unknown drowning child. (Married men in China do not do that.) Or else they were married men who died penniless and made their wives and children suffer. We admire them, we love them, but we do not like to have them in the family. When we see a boy who has too much public spirit, getting himself into all sorts of scrapes, we confidently predict that boy will be the death of his parents. If we can break him early enough, well and good; if not, he will go to jail and ruin the family fortune besides. But it isn't always as bad as that. If we cannot break him, he will probably run away from home and join the public-spirited brigands. That is why they are "deviations."

How is such a state of things possible? The Chinese are not such heathens, deep drowned in their sins, as the Christian missionaries would imagine, although here the word "heathen," with all the force of Christian contempt and condemnation, seems eminently applicable. It would be better if the missionaries tried to understand them and attack the evil from its source, for back of it is a social philosophy different from theirs. The difference is a difference of point of view. The best modern educated Chinese still cannot understand why Western women should organize a "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals." Why bother about the dogs, and why do they not stay at home and nurse their babies? We decide that these women have no children and therefore have nothing better to do, which is probably often true. The conflict is between the family mind and the social mind. If one scratches deep enough, one always finds the family mind at work.

For the family system is the root of Chinese society, from which all Chinese social characteristics derive. The family system and the village system, which is the family raised to a higher exponent, account for all there is to explain in the Chinese social life. Face, favor, privilege, gratitude, courtesy,

official corruption, public institutions, the school, the guild, philanthropy, hospitality, justice, and finally the whole government of China—all spring from the family and village system, all borrow from it their peculiar tenor and complexion, and all find in it enlightening explanations for their peculiar characteristics. For from the family system there arises the family mind, and from the family mind there arise certain laws of social behavior. It will be interesting to study these and see how man behaves as a social being in the absence of a social mind.

## II. THE FAMILY SYSTEM

There was formerly no such word as "family system" as a sociological term; we knew the family only as "the basis of the state," or rather as the basis of human society. The system colors all our social life. It is personal, as our conception of government is personal. It teaches our children the first lessons in social obligations between man and man, the necessity of mutual adjustment, self-control, courtesy, a sense of duty, which is very well defined, a sense of obligation and gratitude toward parents, and respect for elders. It very nearly takes the place of religion by giving man a sense of social survival and family continuity, thus satisfying man's craving for immortality, and through the ancestral worship it makes the sense of immortality very vivid. It breeds a sense of family honor, for which it is so easy to find parallels in the West.

It touches us even in very personal ways. It takes the right of contracting marriage from our hands and gives it to those of our parents; it makes us marry, not wives but "daughters-in-law," and it makes our wives give birth, not to children but to "grandchildren." It multiplies the obligations of the bride a hundredfold. It makes it rude for a young couple to close the door of their room in the family house in the daytime, and makes privacy an unknown word in China. Like the radio, it accustoms us to noisy weddings, noisy funerals, noisy suppers and noisy sleep. And like the radio, it benumbs our nerves and develops our good temper. The Western man is like a maiden who has only