

Geography in History

BY MARK STARR

(Concluded)

CHINESE civilization is not so old as those of Egypt and Mesopotamia. National unity after repeated invasions is first to be found under Shi-Hwang-Ti (200 B.C.), who ruled an empire spreading south from the Hwang-Ho and the Yang-tze-Kiang rivers. Then follow the Han dynasty down to A.D. 220, four hundred years of division between North and South, complicated by the presence of invaders, and then the Tang dynasty down to about 900. Down to the time of Jengis Khan in the thirteenth century, other dynasties headed the kingdom. After the vast conquests of the Mongols—who swept as far west as Poland—other names—Yuan and Ming—appear as the ruling houses. The Manchu conquest about 1700 lasted till recent years, when it was thrown off and a Republic declared. This record of changing dynasties seems to contradict our idea of a static China, but it must be remembered that in China, as well as in other Asiatic States, "the structure of the economical elements of society remains untouched by the storm clouds of the political sky."

Cathay was known to medieval Europe. Travelers, such as Marco Polo and Catholic missionaries and the traders of the Italian towns, got into contact with the court and land of the great Khan. The riches of Cathay were one of the incentives to the voyages of discovery in the fifteenth century, which found the New World of America. Trading contact has been continued right on through the absorption period of the Mongol and Manchu conquerors, and now there is an increasing demand, not so much for trade, as for permanent "concessions." Thanks to the Imperialism of the European powers, and of her near neighbour Japan, the sleep of China is gone for ever. After this briefest of historical outlines, we can pass on to the explanation promised.

China is located for the most part in 20 degree to 40 degree of latitude, which includes the 30 degree to 35 degree in which all the other early civilizations were located. Here there are no great extremes to overpower man, and stunt by great heat or cold his development. The changing seasons provide foresight and adaption of work methods by not too abruptly changing conditions. In a favored oasis near the Tarim Lake, and after in the sheltered river valley of the Wei Wo, and then on to the great deitac plain through which runs the Hwang Ho, and from this the Yellow River, spreading southwards, was born and developed the Chinese civilization.

But the early settlers needed protection from nomad foes, as well as a temperate climate and the fertile soil of the river valleys. Fairgreaves ("Geography and World Power") explains the earlier advances of Egypt by the more complete protection given to its fertile ribbon of land by the Sahara. Any orographical map will show a black patch to the west of China, the Tibetan plateau—"the roof of the world"—which flanks by the aid of the Gobi Desert, the whole of the Western side of China. The Great Wall of the North (214 B.C.) was not needed on the western side. Not only did the plateau protect, but it tapped and still taps the rain-bearing winds, and thus is the watershed to the rivers on which Chinese civilization is based. The traditional isolation of China, her self-centred literature, and her past opposition to all outside influence is derived from the

isolating barriers which gave to the first Chinese the protected chance to dig and ditch, and use the early plough in their great and exceedingly fertile plain. The waterways of China, as irrigation and spade culture spread south, played the part of the Roman roads in preventing any great diversity of life and culture, and so preserving homogeneity.

This oneness of society was proof against the many invasions of the invaders from the steppes, who were again and again absorbed, because not only was this alluvial plain fertile, but extensive. Pressure was dissipated before the seaboard was reached, and the conquered people forced out to become subject to new geographic controls. From this arose the predominant peaceful character of the Chinese and the absence of continued war and slavery. Government remained a patriarchal despotism with agriculture, carried by small holdings in the rich loess, as the chief industry. The military caste of Assyria is absent, and the national hero is he who has engineered a canal or deepened the river bed to prevent the flood. The dominant caste is made up of the intellectuals who have mastered the intricacies of the revered classics. The cities are fortified and the people more warlike only in the North because of the constant attack and influence of the hardier invaders.

From these brief suggestions of the results of location and temperature, of the desert and plateau in affording isolation and protection, of the rivers as they bring down water and soil from the mountains to join with the light and friable soil (the loess) brought by the winds from the desert to the extensive land of rivers—from these we can turn to another factor which greatly influenced Chinese life.

China is a solid land mass of one-and-a-half millions square miles, with an unindented and relatively very short coast line of 2,500 miles. The numerous bays, inlets, and adjacent islands of Greece do not here beckon the early mariner to adventure on an inland sea. Contrast China with Norway. The Norsemen there were driven into seagoing by the sterility of their soil. The Chinese, though often practising infanticide towards the female children, have only in modern times been sending forth to America and Australia some of its huge population of nearly four hundred millions. The large returns of peaceful agriculture destroyed any possible attraction of trade. China was self-sufficient, and its inhabitants were not lured into schemes of conquest or to dare the dangers of the ocean by tales of accumulated riches in other outside lands. Wars were defensive and fought by landmen against landman invaders. No fiords helped them to sail their boats. A Mediterranean, with its many leaping off points and its nursery for seamen, was missing in Chinese conditions. Formosa, an island within sight of their quarter circle coast, was only colonized in the fifteenth century when European traders had already appreciated its products. From the brush with the Japanese in the latter half of the sixteenth century to the growing connection established by the traders, and on to the opium wars of the nineteenth century and the modern inroads of Imperialism, new forces, new ways of approach, and new invaders are coming in from the ocean, no longer the barrier of primitive times, but now a source of dangerous contact. China was static so long as she remained subject to the unchanging geographic controls. Her powers of absorption, and the reasons behind her isolation, can be now easily understood. But now new technique in transport, the economic needs of our modern social system and its "Powers," are threatening to revolutionize China and her ways. China was large enough to absorb her old land invaders; she is, however, now in danger of being swallowed up by the foes who come from the seas. Who knows there may yet be another land invasion by Russian Communists against the last stronghold of a decrepit Imperialism in China. The incalculable riches of bituminous and anthracite coal, the

ironstone and other metals, combined with a huge supply of cheap labor power of a to-be-appropriated peasant class—these are the attractions which will cause the "Powers" to remove for ever the isolation of China. The Manchus made the Chinese wear the queue (pigtail), but the Imperialists will force them to wear the less obvious but more degrading chains of wage-slavery. The land of rivers will become the land of steamboats, the railways and the telegraph. Already the isolation, the literature and alphabet, dress and manners, are being changed. China will not merely play a passive part in these great changes. The Japanese already have, especially, made rapid strides in European "culture."

Just as we have seen how geographical conditions determined that the Far East did not disturb the West, so we could trace the same control in the early development of the Western Powers, who now so aggressively approach the East. For, while commodities needing sale and capital seeking investment cannot be explained by natural geographical conditions because they result from artificial man-made social relations, if we attempt to explain why the outside Imperialist countries are in a more advanced stage of development, the early influence of the same factors and controls as we have examined affecting China would have to be considered.

This topic has more than an academic interest. It shatters once and for all the nonsense about the "innate" virtues of particular races. It helps us to understand world politics and acquire a world outlook. And, finally, it opens up to the mind the rich diversity of the earth and its contents awaiting the intelligent use of the world-wide Labor movement.

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PLATFORM

Socialist Party of Canada

We, the Socialist Party of Canada affirm our allegiance to, and support of, the principles and programme of the revolutionary working class.

Labor, applied to natural resources, produces all wealth. The present economic system is based upon capitalist ownership of the means of production, consequently, all the products of labor belong to the capitalist class. The capitalist is, therefore, master; the worker a slave.

So long as the capitalist class remains in possession of the reins of government all the powers of the State will be used to protect and defend its property rights in the means of wealth production and its control of the product of labor.

The capitalist system gives to the capitalist an ever-swelling stream of profits, and to the worker, an ever-increasing measure of misery and degradation.

The interest of the working class lies in setting itself free from capitalist exploitation by the abolition of the wage system, under which this exploitation, at the point of production, is cloaked. To accomplish this necessitates the transformation of capitalist property in the means of wealth production into socially controlled economic forces.

The irrepressible conflict of interest between the capitalist and the worker necessarily expresses itself as a struggle for political supremacy. This is the Class Struggle.

Therefore we call upon all workers to organize under the banner of the Socialist Party of Canada, with the object of conquering the political powers for the purpose of setting up and enforcing the economic programme of the working class, as follows:

- 1—The transformation, as rapidly as possible, of capitalist property in the means of wealth production (natural resources, factories, mills, railroads, etc.) into collective means of production.
- 2—The organization and management of industry by the working class.
- 3—The establishment, as speedily as possible, of production for use instead of production for profit.

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