

PROBLEMS OF CHINESE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP: A PRELIMINARY PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

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THERE is perhaps no problem which is attracting more attention among thoughtful Christian workers in China to-day than the problem of Chinese Christian leadership. Much has been written about it. Many are discussing it. Various points of view have been presented and serious efforts to solve the problem have been made. Recently (February 1921), I presented my views on the main outlines of this problem in an article in the *Chinese Recorder* as the background for discussion of the problem. In this brief paper it is my aim to make an attempt to probe into a more difficult phase of this question, viz., to study the psychological factors involved.

Few people have made a psychological analysis of the worker's attitude, partly because the problem itself is a difficult one, for to try to make a psychological analysis of the attitude of any group of men and women engaged in a particular endeavour is by no means an easy task: partly because no one cares to be frank enough to lay bare his own feelings and to betray his own inner secrets, for in making a psychological analysis of the mental attitude of one's fellow workers one can hardly avoid reflecting one's own mental leanings and prejudices: and finally, the task is not always a pleasant one, for few people would like to have their mental life revealed, discussed and scrutinized. One who is indiscreet enough to tell exactly what he sees will surely bring refutations, criticisms and even condemnations upon his own head. And yet, as I have been

thinking over this problem, I feel that an attempt along this line must be made. However naïve and crude the analysis may be, it may make some contribution to the right understanding of our problem, and right understanding is the first step on the road to success in solving a problem as complicated and difficult as this one.

We have been constantly asked two questions. First, why has the Church not been successful in securing the right Chinese Christian leadership? Second, why cannot missionaries always retain the Christian leaders in their work with them after they have secured them? Frequent and continuous interviews and discussions with my fellow countrymen on these two questions have given me many answers. The predominant note which runs through all these answers is that the Chinese Christian workers often find it difficult to work in the Christian missions under the missionaries. This is unquestionably a most alarming and a most critical phenomenon, for in my opinion, an efficient and genuinely Christian co-operation between the missionaries and the Chinese is the keynote for any successful Christian work in China, not only to-day but for many years to come. Undoubtedly, some of the grievances which the Chinese present have good foundation, and perhaps missionaries in some cases also make their plausible and acceptable counter-defence. But, in all cases, if we are consistently Christian, willing to try to understand each other, we must make an effort to compare the feelings and attitudes, as well as to make allowances for individual differences and temperaments. Our question, therefore, resolves itself into this:—Is there any psychological difference between the life of a missionary and the life of a Chinese worker, with him, or under him, in the same mission, engaging in the same tasks? A convenient way will be to begin with a missionary's life and compare with it the life of a Chinese co-worker.

I. The missionary life has the element of heroism. This is developed from the instinct of conquest which is

so dominant in the human race, especially among the western nationalities. The interesting romance of pioneer missionary life is passing away as China is rapidly being modernized, but even so, the average missionary who is sent out from Europe and America is still enjoying a privilege at the very start which becomes a source of help and inspiration throughout his missionary career. The average missionary before he sets out to a mission field goes through a kind of experience briefly as follows :—

A period of serious attention to religious problems raised by an appeal from a Student Volunteer Movement Secretary, or some missionary who presents to him a vivid and impressionist picture of the needs of mission lands, followed by a series of discussions and deepest mental struggles, ending with a decision which is spiritually consecrating and mentally thrilling : an application to the mission board, the eager expectancy for its acceptance and in some cases meeting with difficulties which have to be overcome in order to avoid rejection. The acceptance means another mental thrill. Consultation with the family, the pastor, and fellow members of his church brings again a state of mental reaction : some may ridicule him, others may advise against the scheme, others encourage it, but all this somehow will give the mind which has already reached its decision added strength and a feeling of the importance of its decision. The plan for support very often means the linking up with a definite church or society which puts him on a pedestal as their delegate, representative, or foreign pastor. The average congregation or membership of the missionary society still live in an atmosphere created by early romantic tales of missionary work and look upon this new candidate, not only with tenderness and affection, but also with admiration for the warrior that goes to the front. Farewell speeches, meetings to send him off, pledges of loyal support, requests and promises for constant news and communications and many odds and ends antecedent to his

sailing add to the thrilling experience of becoming a missionary. Now, undergoing such a mental process, no one except he who is absolutely devoid of feeling can be free from that sense of heroism which accompanies him from the wharf where he steps off from his native land throughout his journey to the mission station where he is destined to work. Letters from home and answers back, reports to his home and news back, all tend to keep this sense of heroism alive. Visits during furloughs and opportunities for presenting his work before the home constituency, everywhere greeted with eager, expectant eyes of old and young, finally, very often the more difficult departure from the civilization in which he has been brought up for mission lands where he has experienced quite a few difficulties during his period of service, again strengthen this sense of heroism. And, sometimes, the failure of the home constituency to give the adequate support which he is trying to secure during his furlough also contributes to such a sense of heroism. Such a sense of heroism is consciously or unconsciously supporting a missionary throughout his missionary career, and in hours of trial and in moments of despair it often sustains him. There is a growing number of new missionaries who are taking the missionary life as an ordinary life proposition, and to some of these there is not only very little sense of heroism, but they even regard some of the 'send offs' and other paraphernalia as a positive nuisance. But such new missionaries are still too few to represent the whole.

Compare this with the mental life of the average Chinese Christian worker. He may be a so-called mid-way convert, one who started his life as a non-Christian but became a Christian in later years. His conversion and public confession was often tinged with a sense of heroism. His connexion with the church and the becoming of a member of the staff in a mission, however, sometimes may be a transference from a poor and unhappy living into a more religious and spiritually helpful environment. In such

cases there is hardly any ground for the development of a sense of heroism. In other cases being cut loose from his relatives and other social relationships, a momentous decision is often involved. Although his decision may require just as much mental struggle or even more than that of a missionary, yet there is a fundamental difference between the two. In the case of the missionary it is the developing of the instinct of conquest, while in the case of the Chinese it is the instinct of submission developed into the complex of self-renunciation.

He may be a second generation Christian. That is, he is a child of Christian parents. In this case he has been brought up in a Christian environment, and very often a mission environment. He may have received his education in mission schools and colleges and has been urged throughout his school career to join the Christian service. But this is often strengthened by such factors as economic necessity, obedience to parents' injunctions and to agreements and promises which he had made with the missionaries at the beginning of his academic career. He is not without some sort of mental struggle in making the final decision to choose Christian service as his life work. A conviction that Christian work is worth while has always entered into the decision. In these cases there is neither the soil for the development of the instinct of conquest nor for the instinct of submission.

Both these cases are devoid of all the thrilling experiences which a missionary is privileged to have antecedent to his departure from his native land and those which he received during his furlough. The average Chinese Christian worker in Christian missions under missionaries is living a faithful, dutiful, placid and routine type of mental life. He has no furlough, no change, no correspondence with dear ones from a distant land, no reports to make to a supporting constituency. His life moves among the hard-working missionaries, and repeats the same thing over and over again every year. Unless there is a

persecution or outbreak there is nothing which rouses his sense of heroism. He is usually not given a responsibility that calls for it either.

II. Missionary life has a sense of accomplishment which finds its root in the instinct of workmanship, the importance of which modern psychologists have just begun to realize. The average missionary is given a good deal of responsibility after a few years of language study. This is partly due to the constantly expanding nature of the work and the lack of sufficient workers, the number of whom is continually being depleted by sickness, furloughs, marriages and deaths. He is either taken into full partnership with the senior missionary to do such work as a man can do under such circumstances, or he is sent to look after a sub-station and sometimes a new station. When he is with the senior missionary he is one of the ruling princes. When he is alone at a sub-station he is the monarch of the station. His word usually carries. With the exception of those churches and mission stations where the relationship with the Chinese and the divisional responsibility has been efficiently organized and fixed, the Chinese usually takes orders from the missionary, whether he is young or old, new or a veteran. The missionary has a chance to carry out his ideas and plans, subject only to the limitations which are imposed upon him by the lack of funds or the unwritten but stern authority of a senior missionary's experience. But he can feel, in spite of limitations, that whatever he plans or has started to do is his work and that he is doing it. If he is a man of ability, initiative and resourcefulness at all, he has all the freedom he needs to put his ideas into tangible form.

Now compare this with that of his Chinese colleague. He is, nine times out of ten, made to understand that he is a helper and a helper only. The word 'helper' has been so successfully 'rubbed into him' intentionally or unintentionally, that it has become an accepted fact and it means that he should take orders and attend to his duties

as an obedient servant. He is not to take any initiative without having that initiative approved by his missionary superior. Of course, all this has its historical reasons. For in the beginning of missionary work in China the type of Christian workers available were for the most part of the type which could only serve as obedient servants, and missionaries, with their training and education, were easily their superiors, so there has been developed this habit which has been confirmed by practice and accentuated by individual temperament. In some cases, in their over-anxiety some missionaries who take the attitude of protective paternalism are afraid to give the Chinese authority in order to avoid the mistakes of learners. The latent possibilities of many of the Chinese workers have thus been denied a chance to develop and those who perchance are born with initiative and independence find the atmosphere rather oppressive. The average Chinese Christian worker has hardly any feeling of accomplishment, such as that which undoubtedly serves as a mainspring of inspiration in the life of the missionary.

III. Closely allied with the sense of accomplishment is the sense of proprietorship, which is a complex developed from the instinct of possession and has long been recognized by psychologists as a very powerful instinct. Missionaries enter into their work with the feeling of responsibility. The work is the work of their own church, denomination or mission board. The missionary is their representative. To them he is responsible for the money spent, for the time and energy which he himself puts into his work. The preparation of annual reports, the frequent gatherings of his fellow missionaries, all contribute to a full realization that he is not only *doing* something, but that *he is the proprietor* of something. He feels, consciously or unconsciously, something like the manager of a firm with so many hired employees. He is responsible for their salaries and the regular working of the machinery.

There is hardly any missionary of any ability at all

who at the end of his first period of service, on his way home for the first furlough, does not feel that he has done something. It is 'my work,' he can say proudly and often justly. If it is a school, he is invariably the principal, actually or *ex officio*. If it is a hospital, he is the director. If it is a church, he is the final authority. And, although the gradual development of the church organizations are giving the Chinese representation and voice in some of the missions, yet even there there is ample room for the missionary to feel that the work is his. However modest the project, however little success it may have, the missionary can and does always feel that he is doing something, and whatever accomplishment may result, that he has the rightful claim to it. This sense of proprietorship is strengthened very often by the necessity for making appeals for funds and support in his home land, for in making such appeals one has to work up in himself a vivid imagination and a sense of importance. The fact that the funds from the mission board and other sources of the mission finance must go through the hands of the missionary, and be distributed by him, also serves as a stimulus to strengthen the sense of proprietorship.

Meetings are usually held by missionaries themselves to decide questions of salary, plans and appointments of the Chinese workers very much after the fashion of secret meetings of a board of directors, and the results of these deliberations are kept away from the knowledge of the Chinese workers. There is, of course, plenty of reason for such action; the most common one is the desire to relieve both the missionaries and the Chinese from certain embarrassments which, according to some missionaries, are unavoidable. In some of the missionary bodies where representative church government has been in vogue there is more publicity and the lessening of such unpleasant experiences, notably among the Methodist Episcopal Mission and the American Board.

Ordinarily, if a Chinese worker should make any pro-

posals for changes or new plans, he is reminded of the fact that the money is not available, but to the bewilderment of some simple-minded folk there seems always to be some way for securing money for most of the plans the missionaries propose. Moreover, Chinese Christian workers are very rarely given an opportunity to make their way in society outside of the church, so as to enable them to raise such money as is available from Chinese sources. Facing the poverty of the mass of the Chinese Christians, the Chinese Christian worker is helpless whenever he is reminded of the fact that the one who has the purse has the right of control. To make a long story short, justly or unjustly, the Chinese Christian worker is made to feel that he is a hired man. It is only a sense of the duty of the employee which urges him on in his work. There is no sense of proprietorship. He in his modesty, and society in its ignorance, both agree that the work is not his.

IV. The instinct for social approval which permeates through one's life in a very subtle way finds an interesting development in a missionary's life. The missionary being brought up in a Christian country has seen the Christian ministry at its best, though, of course, sometimes at its worst too! But the word 'ministry' brings up a series of mental pictures of the things which are familiar to him. The dignity, the ministerial position, the height of its education and training, the breadth of its service, the usefulness to a community and the reverence that the community feels towards it, the contributions made by ministers to their country, the many-sided activities in which the minister participates, the sway which the minister holds over the mass of the people through his eloquence and personality, all this contributes fire to the imagination. Anyone who has worshipped in a congregation where a first class Christian minister is preaching, or has seen a minister at a Christian home at the hour of his visitation, sees enough to convince him that a minister has a real place and that the ministry is a noble call-

ing. The missionary is conscious of the fact that he is a Christian minister *par excellence*, not only in ministering to the congregation but in doing so under the most difficult circumstances in a foreign country and in a foreign language. It is a noble calling indeed. This sense of the estimation of his calling is often a sweetening of the bitter hardship of the missionary life and kindles a glow of courage in some of the most perplexing situations.

There is also another interesting phase of it. When a missionary preaches to a Chinese congregation he usually receives good attention, sometimes because his hearers really understand and appreciate the sermon, and at other times because they do not understand what he is talking about. Rarely is there any opposition. A missionary told me that this is too humorous to mention, but it has its tragic phase because it often makes the missionary feel that he is receiving unanimous social approval.

His Chinese colleague has never seen the Christian ministry in any other form than that which is represented by the average missionary. A foreigner speaking a foreign language, living in a foreign way, is trying to preach a sermon through a language which is not his mother tongue, struggling now with one kind of heavy burden and now with another, not welcomed by the public for the most part and received with indifference by the rest. He has been an object of ridicule and sometimes an object of fear. When the Chinese look at their own fellow missionaries, they see thus far a system of hired help, subjected to missionaries' orders and largely composed of men who have little or no chance for improvement, repeating what the missionaries have taught them. Noble exceptions there are, but too few to create an impression such as one would receive from a bird's eye view of the Christian ministry in Christendom. For in China there are scarcely any good traditions connected with the ministers, save those of martyrdom, and no intimate relationships between the Christian ministry and the Chinese people, save records of

famine relief, some elementary education, and a few sporadic reforms and attempts of the missionaries to reform the Chinese life. Indeed, the most outstanding thing the Chinese Christian or non-Christian associates with the Christian ministry is that of foreign invasions, unjust treaties, loss of Chinese natural resources seized under the pretext of the deaths of missionaries. It is no exaggeration to say that no Chinese in China has yet seen the glory of the Christian ministry at its best, except some of those who have been abroad. Thus that which helps the missionary has not helped the Chinese Christian worker.

V. The instinct of the herd has naturally been developed and brought into the focus of consciousness among the missionaries. They are in a foreign land, living among people whose customs and ways of living are different from theirs. Naturally they feel the tie of kinship strongly. Sometimes they have to stand together through difficulties and perils, and a genuine sense of comradeship is developed, just as much by circumstances as by the degree of the attainment of Christian virtue among them. Their mutual appreciation and mutual affection is developed in a more marked degree than it would have been if they were in their own country. Differences among themselves there must be, but they usually keep them behind the curtain, and when the question of any problem involves the presentation of facts to the Chinese they present a united front. When one wishes to probe deeply into the problem of the getting along together of the Chinese Christian workers and the missionaries, one cannot ignore this phase of missionary life, for when difficulties do come between missionaries there is more than one way to solve them. There are missionaries who hold views in theology too progressive for their colleagues, yet they can still find their positions safe and their cordial relationships with the other missionaries unimpaired, because they happen to come from the same state or the same old town or the same old seminary. Their relationship, together with the strong

instinct of the herd, holds them together. When similar difficulties arise between missionaries and the Chinese Christian workers, nothing but the strength of genuine Christian love can help the situation. In some cases breaches are formed and gaps deepened although over the surface Chinese courtesy throws a mantle.

Under this head comes also the problem of language. The difficulty in language always forms a barrier between the Chinese and the missionaries, although the latter may understand and speak fluently the Chinese language. For very often here and there a little phrase or short sentence may clear the atmosphere to a remarkable degree, and pregnant expressions often push the button which opens the door of love. There is enough experience to show that when Chinese Christian workers have mastered the English language they find it is much easier to get along with the missionaries, and not unfrequently missionaries too find it easier to get along with them, for then they can take and give hints where in other cases they often have to resort to cumbersome statements.

The habits of living are also very important. People of the same or similar habits of living can appreciate each other's needs and sensibilities better. With a little thoughtfulness they know how to pay attention and also how deliberately not to pay attention to certain things. All this contributes to oil the wheels of the machinery. The wide differences between the habits of living, with all good intentions, undoubtedly have created some of the unpleasantnesses between missionaries and the Chinese Christian workers, each grating on the nerves of the other.

The Chinese Christian workers do not have the peculiar stimuli which come from residence in a foreign land such as missionaries have. They are, in other words, living the normal, uneventful life which does not give occasion for working up of the instinct of the herd, which often overcomes all obstacles and binds people together.

This is a very rough analysis of the various instinctive

tendencies that are playing a leading rôle in missionary life and the resulting contrasts they make between the lives of missionaries and those of the Chinese Christian workers. They have been presented in a rather accentuated form. Our data, however, are not speculative, but based on actual experience. We cannot make hasty generalizations because China is too big. Conditions in various parts of the country are not uniform enough, for any generalization to cover 'all sorts and conditions of men.'

This analysis will naturally call for remedies. Remedies, however, cannot be suggested without examining the trouble in each individual case in its particular locality. For general guidance the following course may be offered :—

(1) There should be some sort of organization or other means which may put the spirit of renunciation which is prominent with monastic orders before the Chinese Christian workers. It should be an outstanding fact that the Christian ministry calls for men of the highest qualifications with the highest possibilities, but with deliberate self-renunciation to go into Christian work for God, for the Church and for China.

(2) In all missionary policies there should be sufficient provision for Chinese Christian workers to share the sense of accomplishment with the missionaries. The Chinese should be given full opportunity to bring out what is best in them on an equal footing with the missionaries, and in doing so the missionaries must follow closely the spirit of 'He must increase but I must decrease.'

(3) In all missionary work the Chinese Christian workers must be given an equal share of authority over whatever is possessed by the mission, recognizing that if everything that belongs to the mission and to the Church belongs to the Head of the Church, all those who labour in His name should share a sense of proprietorship. Conditions must be made so that the Chinese Christian workers can establish themselves not only within the Church but also outside of the Church, so that they can become men of influence and respect among their fellow countrymen. This will open the way for them to get support from Chinese sources. Immediate steps must be taken to nullify the stereotyped notion that since money comes from foreign countries, missionaries must have the sole control of it. The argument that by doing so the Chinese will be spurred to work for self-support seems to be fallacious. The one thing that such a policy has thus far brought about is the unexpressed but constantly felt sting of being under the economic control of foreigners. For the sake of Christian work, missionaries must not only give the Chinese a chance to serve, but also give them every possibility to get the credit for the service, making

the Chinese Christians and non-Christians feel convincingly that the work is theirs, and that they are serving God and serving their people, but not serving foreign corporations.

(4) There should be concentration of effort in establishing a few really first class churches which can be in a few centres in China, strong enough in equipment to create opportunities for service so that they can be looked upon as models. No pains should be spared to train adequate leaders for these model churches and to place in their hands responsibilities such as never have been placed upon Chinese Christian workers heretofore. Give China a glimpse of the glory of the Christian ministry and you will find responding hearts. Such model churches and model ministry will be more effective than any number of speeches and appeals made by even the most earnest student volunteer secretary with superhuman oratorical ability.

(5) Education, higher education, for both the Chinese Christian worker and the missionary is one of the very important solutions that will remove the obstacles which prevent harmonious working together of missionaries and Chinese Christian workers. One of the prominent and successful Chinese Christian leaders recently said at one of the private conferences where the question of relationships between the missionaries and the Chinese are frankly discussed, 'other things being equal, all depends upon the education of the Chinese Christian worker and of the missionary.' A gradual modernization of the habits of living among the Chinese will eventually remove much of the irritation, but high enough education for both parties will be needed always.

No one who attempts to discuss the problem of Christian leadership in China can close his discussion without adding an expression of appreciation of the noble Christian missionaries who by their lives and examples have shown themselves to be genuine servants of the Lord. Their devotion and their efforts to serve the Chinese have become sources of inspiration to Chinese Christian workers. *One must also emphasize in the strongest terms that any solution of the problem must rely upon the outpouring of the spirit of love and of humility which is always the basis of effective co-operation in any form of Christian work.* This spirit, and also a thorough going reform of the missionary policy, together with an honest change of attitude on the part of some missionaries will bring us the result we desire.

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