

CHINA IS NO LONGER THE HUMBLE NATION

By NATHANIEL PEPPER

A FEW years ago, when Chinese nationalism was becoming aggressive and anti-foreign incidents were occurring all over the country, a conference was held in an American city to discuss the situation. In the course of the debate a correspondent who had long been stationed in the Far East arose to explain why he believed the powers ought not to yield to China's demand for restoration of its sovereign rights.

"I feel toward China," he said, "as I feel toward my 11-year-old boy. I care for him but I would not let him drive an automobile." In the same way, he went on, developing an argument long familiar to those who know the East—China must mature and show its sense of responsibility before it can be trusted to exercise the privileges of an independent nation.

Whether there is material for satire in the assumption of paternal airs by a native of a Middle Western State, which only three generations ago was a wilderness, toward a race which was highly civilized 2,000 years ago and centuries before Columbus was governing fairly efficiently an empire as large in area as the United States, there was nevertheless a certain anticipatory wisdom in the correspondent's words. Unconsciously he hit the point. For China has grown up, somewhat precipitously and not in the sense connoted in the orthodox argument, but it has grown up.

Furthermore, China is aware of the fact. It is conscious of its newly discovered strength and reveling in the consciousness. It may even be said to be swaggering somewhat. One who knew China in the old days and returned there

now could put in a sentence the contrast with ten or fifteen years ago. China is feeling its oats. And in that sentence also lies the explanation of most of the events which have produced the succession of international crises in China from the Washington conference to the recent conflict with Russia.

It may be that, like individuals, nations repeat in their development all the stages in the biological evolution of the species. It may be that the symptoms of the passing of adolescence are alike for nations and for individuals. There is much evidence in that direction. Wherever nationalism in its world-wide spread has taken root in what are called backward nations it has manifested itself in the same way—that is, in the way of the youth newly emerged from adolescence. In all of them there is a self-conscious determination to obtain recognition of equality and to demonstrate it, by being unreasonable if necessary. The demonstration is aimed not only at those who have previously withheld equality. It is as much for their own benefit. Naturally, they are not yet in their inner hearts quite sure of equality, and they want frequently renewed evidence.

There is something paradoxical in talking about the "adolescence"

In Nationalism She Has Rediscovered Her Old Strength And Now She Is Demanding Her Place in the Sun

and the "growing up" of races already old and overlaid with history. It is just this air of lofty patronage, so long endured by peoples like the Chinese and Hindus, that has goaded them to intransigence. As a matter of fact, nearly all the so-called backward peoples are only old. That is, they are not yet uprooted from civilizations antedating the machine age. They are backward as England and France and Italy were backward in the sixteenth century. But the machine created a new world, and China and all other Eastern countries in bringing themselves, willingly or unwillingly, into harmony

its government bending to the dictates of the powerful States of the world, much of its territory shorn away, its capital occupied by foreign troops, its people swallowing the humiliations of the conquered, their conquerors living among them, a lordly minority with all the privileges of conquerors. In law, business, public and social relations, on the very streets of the port cities, the Chinese had to make way. And he who defied the rule of the mighty had cause to rue it.

Then suddenly, unexpectedly, almost automatically, the bonds were either struck off or loosened. At any rate they ceased to bind. The

England would have permitted itself similar liberties on its own soil. Then the Nationalist party, which had been the butt of its anger, swept into power. The British Government became conciliatory. Word was spread to British residents in China that the intervention for which they were clamoring was out of the question and that they, too, would have to adopt a conciliatory policy toward the Chinese. Finally, the Nationalists captured Peking and established the new government at Nanking. The North China Daily News suddenly changed its tone—too suddenly. It became at least impartial, giving praise where

barrows tore up the pavement. Beggars bedded themselves down on it on filthy matting. It was a refuse heap. And the venturesome European or American who tried to walk there was more than likely to be spat upon and shoved into the street.

Once the writer talked to a foreigner who had lived in Hankow for years and remained through that period.

"You can imagine what that meant to us," he said, "when you realize that before that time an ordinary Chinese was not even allowed to walk on the sidewalk along the Bund."

And he said it wholly unconscious that he was saying all that was necessary to explain the situation.

In Shanghai there is now an acrid controversy over what is called the Provisional Court, the echoes of which are already occupying various

Foreign Offices. The court was originally established to handle civil and criminal cases among the Chinese population of the International Settlement. Two judges sit, one foreign and one Chinese, and theoretically the foreigner, who is always a Consul or Vice Consul, was only present as consultant. But until two years ago the theory did not have even the dignity of a pretense. The Chinese judge was merely an ornamental figure. If he was consulted at all on the decision to be given in a case it was only as a formality. His function was to say "yes" and sign the judgment sheet. And the writer has been present in that court when the decision was first pronounced and then the Chinese judge consulted.

After the Nationalist revolt the court was reorganized. Since then the Chinese judges have been appointed by the

Chinese Government and not by foreign Consuls as they used to be. And Chinese judges have a more positive voice, even the deciding voice. But foreign judges, being less complaisant than the Chinese judges used to be, now make vigorous protests when they disagree with the Chinese judge's decision and there is a deadlock which is aired in all the newspapers and usually attains the proportions of a controversy. There have been a dozen such in the last year, one even resulting in the court's failing to sit. Each disagreement when examined on its merits is usually found to be on a minor point. The Chinese Government is now formally demanding the rendition of the court to complete Chinese control, which the foreign governments have thus far refused.

WHAT taxation means under these changed circumstances may be imagined. Until a few years ago foreign property in China was immune from Chinese taxation. Whatever the legality of this may have been, the fact was that no taxes were paid. It need not be said that that, too, has changed. In fact, if the Soviet Government can be accused of organizing the military campaign and the



"They Are Not Yet Uprooted From Civilization Antedating the Machine Age."

with this new world, are in this sense having a rebirth. In this sense they have been growing up. In the conventional sense the phrase is manifestly absurd.

In the process of growing up the first sign is the coming of nationalism. That is to be seen already everywhere in the East. With the first successes of nationalism coming of age is attained. With coming of age there sets in a difficult period of readjustment, a period in which justifiable assertion of self-respect is mixed sometimes with unreasonable self-assertiveness and an understandable desire to pay off old scores laid up, when such nations were weak and subject to the will of others. Since all the backward nations came under the domination of those which emerged from backwardness earlier, there enters the complication of foreign relations. It is this complication that brings about crises.

China is in the last period now. Chinese nationalism has won more than opening successes. Essentially it is already conclusively triumphant. Chinese nationalism has succeeded beyond the hopes of the most optimistic young Nationalists. That this success has gone to China's head is indisputable. It is difficult to see what else could be expected. For seventy-five years China has been a conquered nation,

mighty have lost their might or do not use it. The diplomats who once pounded the tables before frightened Foreign Ministers and threatened to bring up gunboats for emphasis now come talking respectfully. Their ultimatums no longer terrify, as Moscow has just discovered. In personal relations the rule of the mighty no longer prevails. The Chinese no longer has to make way. In fact, he rather spreads himself to enjoy the luxury of paying back, and being human, he is not only getting even. By way of solace and because he can, he is going further and rubbing it in.

A GOOD illustration is the incident of the North China Daily News, the most influential British newspaper in Eastern Asia. For years the North China, as it is called, was the spokesman of the die-hard point of view. It could sincerely say, as it now vociferously does, that it was not anti-Chinese. But it uncompromisingly opposed China and what Chinese believed to be China's interests and did so with an Olympian air. It gibed unceasingly, patronized loftily and sneered at all efforts of the progressive and reform party while scolding because China did not reform.

No opposition party organ in

praise was due while still reserving rights of criticism. But on the whole it adopted a policy of friendliness toward the new régime.

A few months ago a series of articles appeared criticizing the National Congress of the Kuomintang or Nationalist party. An edict went forth from the government barring the North China Daily News from the mails. Now, that was an arbitrary action, unjustified in itself or by the practices of modern governments. The articles in question were fair and moderate in expression and the North China Daily News had for some time been sympathetic toward the government. But that action cannot be judged by itself. It can be understood only against the background of years of carping, hostile criticism of everything Chinese. The Chinese Government was paying off an old score. It was unfair, but it was human.

Another illustration is from Hankow in 1927. Chinese mobs, it may be remembered, overran the barriers of the British concession area and took possession. After diplomatic negotiations, the territory was formally ceded back to China. For months it was difficult, sometimes impossible, for Europeans to go along the promenade on the Bund, or Yangtse River shore. Ragged coolies swarmed it. Wheel-

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propaganda for the beginning of the revolution, then foreign business, notably British and American oil and tobacco interests, can be said to have provided the sinews of war for the revolution's successful conclusion. For they have under compulsion provided much of the revenue to support the Nationalist armies.

Because that is the choice for all foreign business now, it is becoming increasingly difficult to do business. The Chinese are making the most of their new opportunities. Armies have to be maintained and both the central and local governments are chronically on the edge of bankruptcy. And there is high moral satisfaction in meeting the needs out of those beyond reach before. Foreign business is being hampered not only by the amount of taxation but by uncertainty, for when agreement is reached with the central government to pay a lump sum, a local military leader a few

hundred miles away calmly puts on his own 5 or 10 per cent.

To apply the test of legality to China's acts in this period is irrelevant. It is irrelevant, for example, to ask whether its seizure of the Chinese Eastern Railway was legal. China seized the railway because Russia had by force wrested from it the right to build the railway and because China now had the power to take it back. China has ample precedent. As between itself and the Western world there has never been any arbiter but force. China can make a good moral case for itself. Moreover, and more important, it is now wielding power for power's sake, to prove that it has the power.

There is the probability that this stage will be of short duration. The Chinese are a conspicuously reasonable people. In the interval, however, the relations between China and the Western world will be strained.

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