



THE CHINESE STUDENT MIGRATION TO TOKYO

JOHN RALEIGH MOTT 1865-1955

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THE CHINESE STUDENT MIGRATION TO TOKYO

BY

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‘When China is moved, it will change the face
of the globe.’

—NAPOLEON.

The Chinese Student Migration to Tokyo

THE most striking fact in the student world in recent years has been the migration of such large numbers of Chinese students to the capital city of Japan. It was only ten years ago that two young men went from Shanghai as the first officially commissioned students of China to study in Japan. As recently as six years ago, when I was delivering a lecture in the Imperial University in Tokyo, I observed a few Chinese students in the audience and on inquiring the number of Chinese students then in Japan was told that it probably did not exceed a score. Two years later the number had grown to 500; the next year it exceeded 2,000. In the following year the Chinese students came over to Japan at the rate of about 500 each month so that by the end of that year, 1905, there were over 8,000 of them in Japan. In the autumn of 1906 the Japan Mail stated that there were then fully 13,000. Mr. Brockman, national general secretary of the Association movement of China, who was in Japan at that time, said that every steamer coming from China brought large numbers of these students and that

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on one vessel there were over 1,000. Last spring at the time of the Conference of the World's Student Christian Federation, there were in Tokyo, according to the estimate of the Chinese Ambassador, not less than 15,000. Since then the number has decreased, but according to the latest reports it still exceeds 10,000.

In the history of the world there has been no such extensive migration of students from one land to another in so short a period. Many American young men and women have gone to Europe to study but probably at no time has their number exceeded 2,000. Each year may be found in the universities of Great Britain and the United States a few scores of students who have come all the way from India. In the Swiss universities are to be found hundreds of students from Russia and from the countries of south-eastern Europe. When Japan turned from her Oriental exclusiveness to learn what the Occident had to teach, she had at the most 1,700 of her youth in American colleges and a few hundreds in the universities and schools of Europe. Even in the Middle Ages, when great throngs of students streamed from different parts of Europe to sit at the feet of such intellectual leaders as Abelard, the number coming

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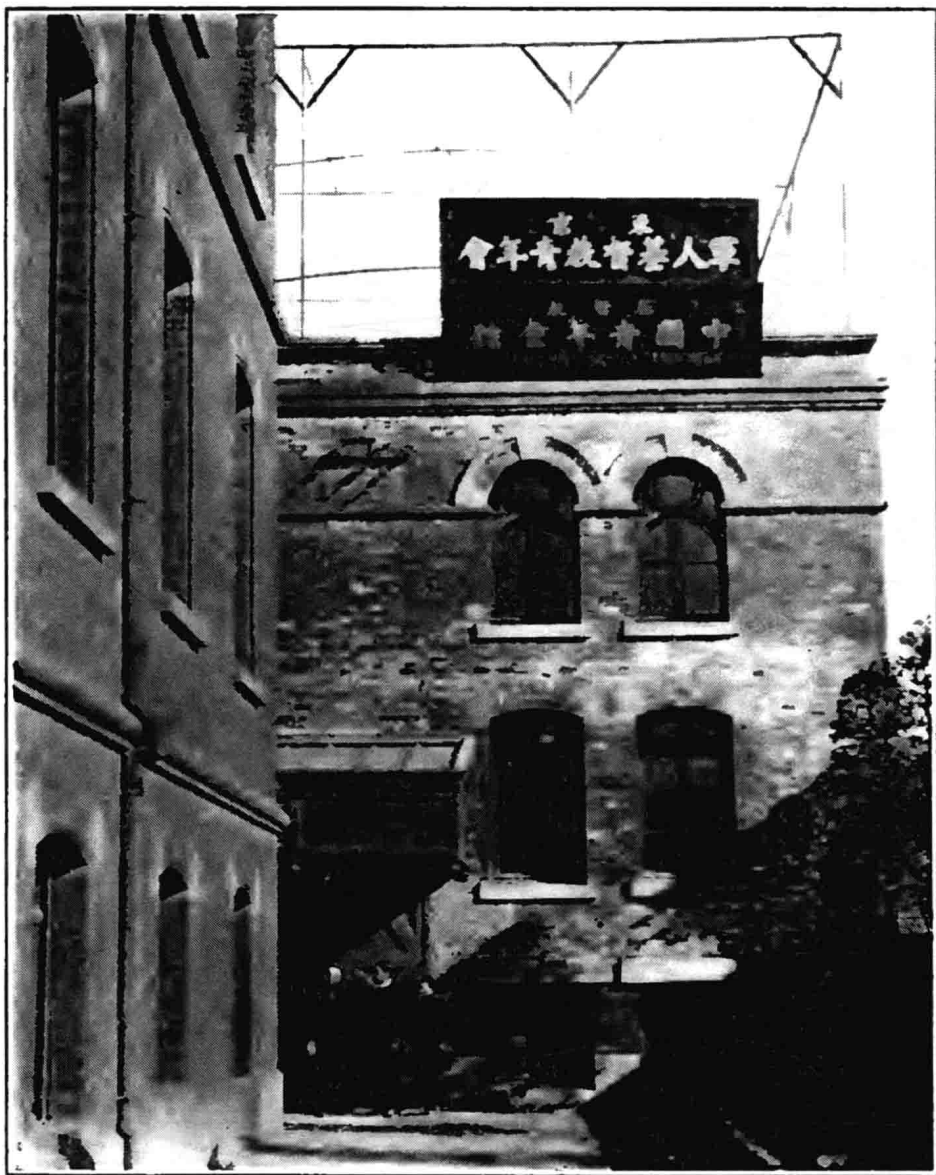
from other lands never swelled to such dimensions as those which characterize this remarkable exodus of Chinese students. Here we find not several hundreds, but several thousands of young men who have come out from the proudest nation, the most conservative nation, the most secluded nation—aptly called the Walled Kingdom—to sit at the feet of their conqueror in order to learn the secret of her progress and power.

These Chinese students have come from every province of China. As one studies the accompanying map of China which shows the sources from which over 10,000 have come, he is impressed with the fact that over 600 have gone to Tokyo from the westernmost province, Szechwan, which stands before the gates of Tibet. It is said that this involves a journey, which, in point of time, is more than equivalent to that involved in going around the world. Even more striking is the fact that the largest number from any one province, 1,250, have come from Hunan, which was the last province to admit missionaries to residence and which less than a decade ago was resisting the introduction of the telegraph. As these students have been drawn from all parts of the Chinese Empire, their

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exodus may well be regarded as a national movement.

In the early stages of the migration fully half of the students were sent to Japan by various provincial and local governments of China. It is said that of those now studying in Tokyo probably not more than one third are supported by Government funds. The others have been sent by wealthy families, by groups of poor families, by guilds, and by various other organizations and societies. The motives actuating these young men are various. Some have come out of mere curiosity. Others have come with earnest and sincere desire to learn what Japan has to teach. Many have been powerfully influenced by the thought that study in Japan is a sure path to political preferment. It is doubtless true that practically all of these students are more or less animated with the patriotic desire to prepare themselves to do something for China. While a certain number spend their time in idling, in political agitation, and in dissipation, it may be said that, speaking generally, this great body of students is dominated by more serious purposes. They have been drawn largely from the highest and best classes of China. Many of them have



Chinese Branch, Tokyo Young Men's Christian Association.



Reading Room, Chinese Branch, Tokyo.

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had good training in the Chinese literature and among them are not a few degree men. A census taken under the direction of the Chinese Government showed that the average age of these students is twenty-three. Only a few score among them are women students. Very few come over to Japan as Christians. While in China, most of them were not only non-Christian in sentiment but also anti-Christian. As a rule they have cut off their queues and adopted European dress.

Japan was not prepared for any such inrush of Celestial Rhodes scholars nor were the Chinese sufficiently well educated in Western learning and methods to make the best use of the advantages afforded by the Japanese system of education. Only a comparatively small number have been found eligible to enter the higher Japanese institutions of learning. It became necessary either to establish institutions expressly for the Chinese or to add Chinese departments to existing institutions. Probably over one half of all the Chinese students in Tokyo are now attached to less than a dozen institutions. The others are scattered through some forty other schools or are studying privately. Just as in the case of the Japanese students, the largest concentration of

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Chinese students is found in that division of Tokyo known as Kanda, and two thirds of the total number of Chinese in Tokyo are working in institutions within a circle the diameter of which is not over three miles.

Recently, as has been pointed out, there has been a decline in the number of Chinese students in Tokyo. This is partly due to the action of the Chinese Government in its efforts to eliminate the political agitators and those who had identified themselves with the revolutionary propaganda. Another prominent cause has been the attitude of the Japanese educators and others in discouraging the coming or remaining of short-term students. Many had come over with the thought that within a few months they could acquire the Western learning and prepare themselves for rapid advancement. These so-called rapid-finish students are now refused permission to flock to Japan, and instructions have been sent to the Chinese provincial authorities to discourage their coming. There is also a growing feeling among Chinese teachers and leaders against their young men going to Japan save for special and advanced studies. The reduction in the number of students owing to these causes will be recognized as a great

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advantage. The elimination of the undesirable elements has served to magnify the opportunity presented by those of more serious purpose who remain. Even though the Chinese Government should withdraw all the students sent over at her expense there would still remain the large majority now in Tokyo who have come at private expense. It requires no prophet to see, now that the tide has set toward Tokyo, that there will be, for years to come, thousands of the most ambitious and capable Chinese youth studying in that city. While increasing numbers will journey for this purpose to Europe and America, much larger numbers will continue to go to this intellectual capital of Asia owing to geographical proximity, economic considerations, racial affinity, linguistic advantages, and the great prominence of Japanese influence in China.

The moral and religious conditions surrounding the Chinese students in Tokyo are most alarming. They are in the midst of influences tending to materialism, to extreme radicalism, and to gross immorality. The old anchors of Confucianism and Buddhism have been cast off. They are removed from parental oversight. They are free from all their old restraints. Al-

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though most of them are married, their wives have been left behind. They are constantly exposed to obscene story-tellers, dancing girls, low theatres, and houses where vice is cheap and "safe" and therefore doubly dangerous and deadly. They have come from a country where the place of woman is in seclusion. They find themselves in a city where thousands of Japanese girl students are allowed to run about almost as freely as boys and where the attractions of impurity are almost always present. Many of their boarding houses are little better than houses of ill-repute. They are cut off largely from the good influences which might come from the Japanese because they have little knowledge of the Japanese language. They are exposed to the active forces of agnosticism and skepticism. There is a general tendency to throw off all religious restraint. There is a feverish and restless demand for change. Until very recently Chinese political agitators have industriously tried to fill the minds of these students with anti-Christian and anti-foreign ideas. It may be questioned whether any body of students in the world have been thrown into a greater vortex of temptation or been exposed to graver perils.

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The Young Men's Christian Association movement of China and Japan was the first agency to recognize the urgent need of putting forth special efforts to help these young men who were thrown as strangers in the midst of a strange city. The first thorough investigation of the situation was made in December, 1905, by Mr. D. Willard Lyon, one of the national traveling secretaries of the Chinese Associations. As a result of his masterly report the Association movement of China decided to undertake a comprehensive campaign on behalf of these students. When their action was reported to the local missionary conference of Shanghai that body passed the following resolution: "We have learned with profound thankfulness that the General Committee of the Young Men's Christian Associations of China, Korea, and Hongkong, on which are representative missionaries from all parts of China, has determined upon such an effort. This organization seems to us a providential one for undertaking a work of this kind." During 1906 the Association inaugurated a special campaign and sent over from China Mr. Clinton, one of its most efficient secretaries, to take charge. The co-operation of a number of the missionaries and Chinese workers