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CHINESE AFFAIRS

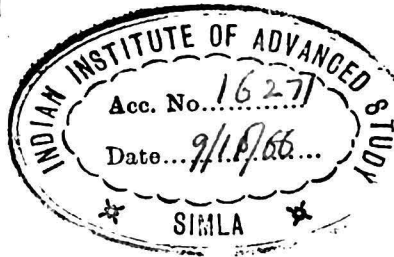
BY

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CHINESE AFFAIRS

LORD LAMINGTON, on taking the chair, said he desired to say a few words before the lecture, as he had to leave to go to another meeting. He expressed extreme regret that on account of the heavy fog the audience was not larger, for Mr. Ch'en had prepared a most interesting paper. The most important topic he touched on was in regard to the internal state of China at the present time. It was a matter which they had previously discussed in that Society, and one upon which various theories prevailed. But it was particularly interesting to get an indication of what would be the probable evolution of Chinese government in the opinion of one so fully entitled to the respectful consideration of his views as Mr. Ch'en. They would find that he was, on the whole, optimistic as to the changes that had taken place in China, and believed them to be a lasting settlement and for the good of that vast country. He would then enter upon questions of the relation of China to her foreign neighbours—a field of fertile discussion. Respecting Mongolia, he would show that Russia had practically annexed that great Province, and in relation to Southern Manchuria he recommended a close understanding between China and Japan. The paper seemed to him, from the glimpse he had been able to obtain, very sound and wise in respect to this policy toward Japan. Mr. Ch'en also dealt with the Thibetan question. He was sure he would recognize that Great Britain by no means wished to hold or possess any territory in that country so long as we could feel that Thibet would not be occupied by any other Power in such force as to constitute a danger to the defence of India. He believed that that would be the position taken up by anyone in this country who had thought out the question. Regarding our foreign policy generally, he felt that Great Britain was in a very critical position so long as we bound ourselves to alliances which would not procure for us any very great benefit, and which might lead us at any time into very serious entanglement indeed.

I

Since my arrival in London I have been constantly questioned on the subject of the stability of the Republican régime, which has been established in China. Is it likely to endure? Learned sino-

logues and retired Consul-Generals from our Treaty ports assert, and on the alleged authority of the Confucian classics, that China and the Chinese are not adapted for such a system of government. Their views appear actually to involve the suggestion that the descendants of a people who had a settled polity and practised the craft of words and enjoyed the manifold gifts of learning when London, in the words of Mr. Lloyd George, was "but a little pagan hamlet on the Thames," that such a people are unfit to learn and do what younger and newer-born nations have achieved in the sphere of government, because, so it is said, we believe that the gracious rains will not fall and ripen corn for the people if a "Son of Heaven" prayeth not for it! There are others of the same type of political commentators who complain that the peasant knows nothing of the vast changes which a "noisy minority" are endeavouring to effect; as if, forsooth, China—and for that matter, any other country, England or America, for instance—can or must be governed by the "man with the hoe." There are yet others who hold that, although the accumulated and rich stores of Western life and experience lie ready for our guidance, we ought to show more courtesy to the traditional theory of constitutional development which prescribes a transition from absolute monarchy, through a limited monarchy, to republicanism. The good people of this class argue as if it would be necessary for a country, knowing only pea-nut-oil as an illuminant, to use kerosene and gas before introducing the electric light.

But it is also said—and the partial truth seems to have gained currency among some serious observers—that the fate of all Eastern communities which have attempted political reform in the sense of Western thought appears to be political enfeeblement as well as loss of territory. Turkey is cited as a precedent in which the theory has been concretely verified, and Persia is indicated as another case which is in the process of a completer demonstration. The argument is that what has happened to Turkey, and is in course of happening in Persia, must also happen to and in China. The argument, however, lacks validity.

A common feature of all Eastern peoples is the personal and absolute nature of the system of government existing in their respective countries. And, in a sense, with the possible exception of England, this was true of the countries of Europe down to the French Revolution; although the king who asserted *l'état, c'est moi* never claimed France in the exact and proprietary sense in which our Imperial rulers affirmed their right to China and her people.

It is unnecessary to labour the obvious point that the feet of no nation, obeying not laws but the whims of an absolute master, can frequent the free thoroughfare of western life and progress. While the old conception of a king or sovereign *master* necessarily connoted a thing owned, and therefore the ruler's ownership of his country, some of the European races have succeeded in developing a monarchical system in which—the technical language of the “books” is deliberately eschewed—the ownership of the country has been transferred from the sovereign to the people. The popular explanation assigns this fundamental change to the feudal contest between the territorial barons and their kings, and, later on, with the rise of the cities and great towns, to a similar struggle waged against the former by the kings and their burghers and freemen, and, finally, to the mighty agency of the revolutionary period in Europe. The theory, however, is somewhat inadequate, since France has failed repeatedly in her attempts to establish a limited monarchy. It is impossible thoroughly to go into the matter in this place; but it may be observed in passing that the factor of race has exercised an influence on the constitutional development of European politics which the orthodox writers have failed adequately to consider.

Whatever the true reason may be, it is, of course, clear that the facts of Eastern life call for and demand a totally different consideration. In Eastern societies the idea that the country must be the property of the Sultan or the Shah or the Emperor is so strong and tenacious that not even Japan, with all her supposed modern constitutionalism and military prowess and material progress, has been able completely and truly to achieve the Western conception of good government. The Emperor is still a demi-god, to whom all and everything belongs and is assigned; the people are nothing, except in the sense of tools for the accomplishment of Imperial ends. It matters not that these ends are shaped by a Military Camarilla who are in reality the inheritors of the old Shogunate; the country belongs to them, not to the people. And what is true of Great Japan—whose success is the result of her “individual racial type,” and other causes special to the Japanese, and not to any other modern nation—is true still more of poor Cossack-harassed Persia, and, in a very real sense, of Turkey. Listen to the “sound and mature” counsel of the pundits and doctrinaires who asseverate it as a sort of law of nature that an absolute monarchy must first become a limited monarchy before a Republican form of government can be adopted by an Eastern

people, and you will always witness the fate of a Persia or a Turkey. Retain your Shah or your Sultan, and no application of constitutional embroidery to the Imperial robe will serve to effect a real and genuine change in the mind and outlook of the *people*, who will continue—who must continue—to regard the reigning monarch as their literal master and the owner of the country. And it is because this truth was realized by us that the Nanking Settlement of the Revolution found expression in the existing system of Republican rule. We resolved to shatter the monarchical idea; and by that daring and dramatic act of history, we have been forced to realize that, there being no longer an Emperor, the country belongs to the race who has been in possession of its ancient soil for the myriad years that have passed since our ancestors first settled in the valleys of our great rivers. And along with the idea that the country is a common and national possession, we are also learning that its governance is a matter which concerns—not, as under the old system, a single person or a single family like the Emperor and his house—but the nation as a whole, whose prosperity and welfare must be the aim and end of good government.

In support of these views I can cite no greater authority than the President. It is true that before the event of the Republic he held views which not a few shared with him, on the nature of the government adapted to our ancient country with its settled traditions, customs, and habits. The event which he thought fallible has happened; and he, like others, are now wiser men and know that we are possessed of the stuff whereof a vital democracy is made. In a notable message, which was handed me for publication on the anniversary of the Revolution, the President referred to the significant change which was being wrought in the temper and outlook of our people regarding national aims and policies and affairs. "The old system of government," he went on to remark, "based itself on the welfare of the particular dynasty that ruled in our country from time to time, and nothing was done, or permitted to be done, which was not calculated to promote and safeguard the individual and personal interests of the reigning Emperor. With the momentous transaction which has given us the Republic, a newer and truer conception of government has been born. We no longer have an Emperor, and so it has come to pass that our people are realizing that the country is a national and common possession, whose good government must be based on the idea which inspires the national life of all the advanced communities of

foreign countries, namely, that the end of good government is the good of the people. It is in this great sense that the men who have been entrusted with the high powers of state are governing the country; they regard themselves as in truth National Trustees, whose duty is to act and rule to the end that the fruits of their work and labour shall be enjoyed by the people."

The utterance is clear; and I suggest that it contains a complete answer to the pessimists and the political prophets who indulged, and still indulge, in woeful vaticinations regarding the stability and permanence of the Republican régime in China. We are an ancient people with a political inheritance, which, no more than a year ago, fettered us to the feet of an autocracy whose entire system was structured on the personal welfare of an Emperor; but, within the narrow cycle of a twelvemonth, our people—in particular those of the class whom Luther meant when he exclaimed that "God Almighty governs the world through a few chosen men"—have reversed the teachings of forty centuries, and are dedicating themselves to the mighty work of adapting our civilization—it witnessed the rise and fall of empires in the valleys of the Nile and Euphrates—to the aims and needs of a polity whose central demand is the good of the people. And we are conscious that the work will abide, because it is being fashioned out of materials which have withstood the destructive force of centuries.

II

I now pass to a consideration of some other Chinese affairs relating to our frontier dominions—Manchuria, Thibet, Mongolia.

In the course of an article published some time ago, Count Okuma suggested that of "all the governments of the world, the Cabinets of Tokyo and London should meet the Chinese situation with the strongest determination to uphold the territorial integrity of China and maintain the *status quo* in the regions of Eastern Asia." These are wise words, and it is to be hoped that the views of the venerable Japanese statesman will receive the careful attention of the military party in Japan who dominate, it is alleged, Japanese policy in respect of Chinese affairs. One of the aims of that policy appears to be the overt assertion of a sphere of influence in South Manchuria, as well as, it is said, in Inner Mongolia, preparatory and leading to the ultimate annexation of these portions of Chinese territory, and their incorporation into the continental dominions of Japan. Now I purpose to submit in this

connection one or two considerations which appear to call for a revision of Japanese policy, *vis-à-vis* China in South Manchuria. In the first place, the realization of Japanese ambition in that region will at once create a frontier problem with Russia, assuming that the latter also satisfies her ambition in North Manchuria, which, of course, is a necessary corollary to Japanese action in the south. In spite of understandings, *ententes*, etc., it is indubitable that the ultimate interests of Russia and Japan necessarily conflict, and, eliminating the deflecting influence of a strong China, must, at Russia's "selected moment," develop into another tremendous struggle. Disregarding for the moment the desire of Russia to avenge the disasters of the campaign of 1904-5 (which lurks in the breast of every patriotic Russian), Japan will be confronted with one of the most insistent demands of Russian policy in the Far East. As long as Russia remains, and continues to be, an Asiatic Power, the necessity of consolidating and enhancing her Far Eastern possessions will imperiously force her to seek an ice-free port. The acquisition of such an outlet is regarded by her as an imperative act of political destiny. Without it, her marvellous work in Asia will remain a gigantic torso. To fulfil destiny, Russia's path must lead her to the Liao-tung Peninsula. But this necessary aim of her Far Eastern policy stands in direct conflict and opposition to the vital interests of Japan; because the rise of a strong Russian Navy in Far Eastern waters will menace the life, if it does not actually mean the doom, of the Island Empire.

The creation of South Manchuria into a strong and effective buffer zone will therefore be a gigantic undertaking, and it will involve a scale of expenditure and labour comparable only to what we are now witnessing in the naval rivalry between England and Germany. Is Japan capable, with her limited resources, of waging with Russia the struggle of preparation for war which a "buffer" policy in Manchuria must involve? Admittedly she is not rich, and her people have reached, nearly if not practically, the limits of their taxable capacity. In spite of the most skilful and scientific manipulation of her budget, it is apparent that her financial difficulties are not small, and the impression left on the minds of those who are best fitted to judge is that she is living a sort of hand-to-mouth existence. In these circumstances is it wise for Japan to embark in South Manchuria upon an undertaking practicable only upon the expenditure of energies and resources which ought properly to be applied to the improvement

and amelioration of her own internal conditions? Is it not on the other hand political sagacity, nay, obvious common sense, for her to listen to the wise advice of Count Okuma and, instead of combining and conspiring with a country that is clearly actuated by the lowest motives of opportunism and latent hostility to the yellow man in order to compass the political enfeeblement of China, to adopt an alternative policy of aiding and assisting a kindred nation—we are all men of the same stock—to develop her national strength and convert Manchuria into a strong and powerful portion of the Chinese Republic?

Consider the meaning of such a Manchuria. Besides barring Russia in her seaward march to our waters, will it not serve as a "buffer" to Korea, "which points like a dagger towards the heart of Japan"? Instead of being forced to launch into a scheme of expenditure which she can ill afford in order to protect frontiers in Manchuria, Japan will be able to direct and apply national energies, which would be absorbed in such an "adventure," to more vital ends and purposes. In this way a singularly grave and gigantic burden, which otherwise would rest on Japan alone, will be largely shared by, if it is not wholly thrust on, China. Politically and otherwise, the Chinese solution of the Manchurian problem is natural and logical and makes for the national safety at once of China and Japan *vis-à-vis* Russia. To both countries the Muscovite is a common danger, and while he continues to be such a peril—which is likely to be permanent, since his Far Eastern march will always be directed towards our waters—the vital interests of China and Japan will necessarily dictate a mutual policy of "understanding," if not alliance, which is likely to elicit from China the recognition of the necessity of naval supremacy to Japan, girt around as she is by the seas, and a consequent shaping of one aspect of Chinese Foreign Policy.

III

I come next to the question of Thibet. In your school-books of geography, the children are taught that Thibet is part of China. But if the ultimate meaning of the policy which appears to inspire the utterances of some of the people who are accustomed to think "Imperially" on the subject is rightly interpreted, English youths must at no distant date learn a new lesson concerning the political division of the countries of the world.

It is not denied that the sole and perhaps only interest of Great

Britain in Thibet lies in her anxiety for the ultimate security of India. The British contention is that if Thibet is in the effective possession of a Power which harbours designs on the Peninsula, the stability and permanence of British rule in India will become an uncertain quantity. But we point out—and no one who brings a fresh mind to the subject can deny it—that China will never care to descend upon India, because the only two reasons which can dictate and influence her to the adoption of an aggressive Indian policy do not and will never exist. Unlike Russia, China can never wish to reach the sea through India, as she already possesses a littoral unmatched within the seven seas; nor will she ever see in the plains of India fit regions for colonization when the time arrives for the migration of her people outside the limits of our historical provinces. The case, however, is different with respect to the only other power which can menace the Indian Empire—Russia. One cannot insist too much upon the cardinal political truth that, whether it is in the direction of Scandinavia, or (as some are beginning to suggest) of the North Sea across Prussia, *if* France with the aid of her ally avenges Sedan, or of the Balkans, or of Persia, or of India, or of the Liao-tung Peninsula, the ceaseless search of Russia is for the ice-free seas. The existence and reality of Russian designs on India have never been more clearly stated than in a significant article which appeared some months ago in the semi-official *Novoye Vremya*, the most widely circulated newspaper in the Russian Empire. Dr. Dillon translated and reproduced the article in the *Contemporary Review*, and he described the writer of the article, M. Menshikoff, as the most gifted and influential of publicists in all the Russias. M. Menshikoff holds that “so long as Russia continues to be the one European Power which has advanced close to India, she will always seem dangerous to England. *On the other hand, nothing less than the loss of India by England, whatever cause may bring about this loss, can establish lasting peace between us and England.*” There is no ambiguity here, and be assured that when the pear is ripe the brigand-hand will be swift to rifle it, in spite of *triple ententes* and solemn words. “You are always talking to me of principles,” Alexander I. once sneered at Talleyrand, “as if your public law were anything to me. I do not know what it means. What do you suppose that all your parchments and your treaties signify to me?”

But the political preaching of M. Menshikoff will never pass beyond the stage of innocuous propaganda if and so long as a

strong and united China holds sway in the region of the Tableland. To conquer India, Russia must first conquer Thibet. And here the point is reached which must be emphasized and upon which attention must be rivetted. The interests of China and the interests of Great Britain in Thibet are, in the sense of practical politics, identical. Is not therefore the true British policy in the Tableland clear and plain? We are told that England is influenced in her Thibetan policy by no desire to hear the steps of an English sentry on the walls of the Potala, and that a policy of "adventure," of territorial aggrandizement, is repugnant to her. The declaration is not questioned, but we maintain that a forward policy involving the appointment of a British Resident at Lhasa must lead necessarily and inevitably to the ultimate annexation of the Tableland, if England means, in Thibet, to entrench her Indian frontier against Russia. To imagine that Thibet can be maintained as a purely buffer state, with Russia on one side of her and China on the other, is idle and, I fear, lacking in seriousness. The truer policy, suggested by a more prescient view of the question, is to transfer to China the main, if not exclusive, task of protecting the frontiers of India by developing Thibet as an integral part of a strong and united China. That is the course which a wise statesmanship indicates to English statesmen as the path of safety and security for their Indian Empire.

IV

Coming to the Mongolian question, I am free to confess that it is not easy for a Chinese to discuss it with academic calm. The action of Russia in granting to Djebzoun Damba-Khutukhta and the other cattle-breeders of Outer Mongolia, a recognition fundamentally more important—it is the creation of a new state according to the interpretation of the *Times*—than that which is still denied to the Chinese Republic by England and the other Powers, is a violation of the law of nations, callous and *disgraceful*, even though the perpetrator is the Power that broke the Treaty of Paris in 1870. And one's mood and temper is not improved when leading English journals refer to the Cossack deed without a single note of dissent or protest, although England has repeatedly affirmed the independence and territorial integrity of China, and, only a few months ago, Sir Edward Grey led us to believe that his country desired to see a "strong and united China." But we are now in the days of the *Triple Entente*.

Some little time ago, the semi-official organ of the Russian Legation in Peking published an article on the Russo-Mongolian Convention, which was understood to embody the official Russian view of the transaction. The contention is that Russia has been forced to deal with the living Buddha of Urga, because China failed to accept her invitation to negotiate—I quote the words of the Russian organ—“ un arrangement afin de définir la situation radicalement modifiée par suite de la proclamation d'indépendance de la Mongolie.” While Russia can claim no right to interfere in the domestic affairs of China, it must be conceded that if the declaration of Mongolian independence caused an entirely new situation to arise *vis-à-vis* Russia, the latter might reasonably claim from China the conclusion of some arrangement safeguarding Russian interests to the extent that they were endangered or menaced by the action of the Living Buddha or Khutukhtu. But has the declaration of Mongolian independence affected Russia in the sense suggested? It is an admitted fact that the Khutukhtu has been and is still so sensitive to Russian advice and influence that it is not easy to describe him, in a political sense, except as a tool and medium of the Russian Government. It is not denied that, during the early days of the Revolution, there existed a certain degree of political unrest in Mongolia; and, when the fate of the late dynasty was under national decision, that unrest crystallized into a threat of Mongolian secession if China foreswore monarchical traditions. The Abdication Edict, however, had a most favourable and salutary effect on the political restlessness of Mongolia; and it is undoubted that forces were soon at work which would certainly have secured the adhesion of all the Mongolian Princes and Dignitaries to the Republic. The direction of the new current was perceived by the men who inspire and control Russian policy respecting Outer Mongolia; and at once active measures were initiated to create and develop the factitious aspiration of the Mongolians for “independence.” By overt and open acts as well as by the consecrated methods of frontier-politics, a movement of independence was started in a section of Outer Mongolia, encouraged and assisted by and with alien men and roubles. The agitation finally centred around the puppet Khutukhtu of Urga, who is now alleged to be learning the creed of Jean Jacques Rousseau from Russian lips!

In these circumstances, it would be frivolous to suggest that the action of the Khutukhtu has compromised or jeopardized the rights and interests of Russia. It can be asserted as a known and

unchallengeable fact that the political activity of the Khutukhtu has left the Mongolian situation absolutely unchanged and unaltered in the sense that could alone warrant Russia to intervene in Chinese affairs with respect to Outer Mongolia. The Russian authorities have been challenged to cite one single instance in which Russian interests have been truly menaced by the action of the Khutukhtu or any single respect which has been or is likely to be affected by it. Except in this sense, it must be repeated that there is no validity in the Russian contention that the declaration of Mongolian independence created a situation which called for and exacted international adjustment between China and Russia.

The Chinese Government, therefore, knew that the reason which alone could legitimately justify Russia to act in Mongolia did not and could not exist. But interpreting the Russian Note on Mongolia in the sense of the statement which, publicly and diplomatically, had been communicated to China—*i.e.*, that Russia was opposed to any *military* development of Outer Mongolia which might increase the burden of her military forces on her Siberian frontiers—the President and his advisers decided to countermand the military expedition which had been ordered to Outer Mongolia and to adopt a policy of conciliation towards the Mongolian insurgents. In other words, the Chinese Government answered what it was led to understand was the real and main purport of the Russian Note, not on paper, but in actual deed. The Russian suggestion that the Chinese Government is responsible for the Russo-Mongolian Convention may be true—but only on the principle of the casuist who fixed the responsibility for a robbery on the victim, on the ground that the thief could not rob if there had been no goods to be robbed !

DISCUSSION

COLONEL SIR THOMAS HOLDICH (who had taken the chair when Lord Lamington left) said that Mr. Ch'en had travelled over so wide an area of international policy that he doubted whether anyone present could discuss fairly with him all the serious problems he had put before them. For his part he should be sorry to express any opinion regarding the ultimate effect of those extraordinary changes which were now gradually overspreading China. It seemed to him a perfect marvel that it should be possible for a country occupying so large an area of the world's surface to jump straight away from perhaps the most autocratic form of monarchical government into Republicanism. It would be interesting to know from the lecturer how the people of China, those in the remoter districts far away from the centres of government and of political movement, regarded these great changes. Did they carry on their usual methods of life precisely in the same way as before, or were their social relations in any way affected by the extraordinary events of the last twelve months? As regards Japan and Manchuria, he did not feel confident to express any opinion. But in respect to the Chinese occupation of Thibet he had naturally formed some views after having served so long on the frontiers of India. He was convinced in his own mind that Russia under no conceivable circumstances would ever find a way to India across Thibet. It was not a matter of military policy, and he doubted whether it was a matter of any vast political significance to England whether China was able to retain her hold on Thibet, which she had had some difficulty in doing lately, or whether she did not. He had not been able to see that Russia was much of a menace to India. She certainly was not on that side, and if any difficulty occurred which involved any aggressive movement on the part of Russia, it would be not by way of Thibet, but on the other side by way of Persia. But for the time being he thought we had absolutely nothing to fear even in that respect. He was not quite sure that he gathered the exact meaning of Mr. Ch'en's words about England having a Resident at Lhasa, a fact which would inevitably lead to annexation. He could not follow this argument. We had ministers in various remote parts of the world, and they represented this country well, and were, no doubt, exceedingly useful in their own particular spheres. But it would be very serious

for us if every Minister imagined that he was the precursor of annexation in any country in which he represented England.

In reply to Mr. E. R. P. Moon, the LECTURER said that Mongolia is not a province of China in the sense in which that word is applied to the eighteen historical provinces.

The proceedings closed with a vote of thanks to the Lecturer, proposed by SIR THOMAS HOLDICH, who said he could quite understand the diffidence shown by members of the audience in speaking on the intricate problems raised by Mr. Ch'en. His paper certainly gave them a great deal to think about, and they accorded him their most cordial thanks for the clear and concise way in which he had put his views on the great questions of Chinese policy.

