

Studying Abroad: the Mightiest Movement in Modern Chinese History

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Editorial

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In the past thirty years as China implemented its economic reform and open door policy, Chinese interests in overseas education intensified among not only scholars but also the general public, and the number of Chinese students going abroad has grown sharply. This policy was uttered by late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping who delivered a speech in June 1978 advocating scholars and students studying abroad. Deng's policy, however, was old when it was uttered.

The Study Abroad Movement actually began in the mid-nineteenth century; Yung Wing happened to initiate this movement by more an accident than any design. Born to a poor peasant family in 1828 in a small village called Nanping not far from Macao, he was sent to a missionary school by his father. He later transferred to the Morrison Education Society School in Hong Kong. Yung was a smart student; and when Rev. Samuel R. Brown, a Yale-educated minister and the principal of the school, returned to the United States in 1847, he brought Yung with him. Yung entered Yale College in 1850, and earned a B.A. degree four years later. He returned to China in 1855 and became one of the pioneer reformers in the Self-Strengthening Movement and helped Zeng Guofan establish the Jiangnan Arsenal in Shanghai, the first modern arsenal in Chinese history. He then was appointed as a diplomat and China's spokesman in the United States while China in its foreign relations transformed from the traditional tributary system to the modern nation-state system.

This movement is in itself a long-lasting and influential event deserving marked attention which is sure to attract. Inspired by Yung's success, beginning in 1872 Qing government organized the Chinese Education Mission and sent 120 young Chinese students to be educated in the United States. When studying abroad, these young Chinese boys were anxious to learn not only new knowledge but also new ideas. They began to dress in Western styles, abandoning their Manchu robes, and many of them cutting off their queues, which actually foreran one of the biggest social reforms in Chinese history to stop dressing in traditional Chinese clothes and cut off Chinese queues at the beginning of the twentieth century. These students also brought the advanced Western science and technology back to China and became modernization leaders. Zhan Tianyou, for example, was known as "the father of Chinese railroads," while Tang Guoan became the first president of prestigious Qinghua University.

The story is not rare. In 1879, Sun Yat-sen went to Honolulu to join Sun Mei, his brother who had a business in Hawaii. He was enrolled in the Anglican missionary Iolani School and in 1883 graduated from Oahu College. During this period though Hawaii was still an independent kingdom, it was rapidly influenced by the United States, especially the ideas of democracy and republic; some Americans and local progressives were preparing to overthrow the kingdom. We may face the essential fact that the political development in Hawaii had a strong influence on Sun Yat-sen during the formative stage of his life. There is little question that at this stage of his life the seeds of his future values, plans, and eventual contributions to modern China were planted. After being back in China, he advocated and initiated revolutionary activities to overthrow the Manchu rule. The success of the 1911 Revolution and the establishment of a Western-style republic marked the end of the Chinese dynastic history first time in 4,000 years, a great turning point in Chinese history. Sun Yat-sen is therefore recognized by both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China as the Father of Modern China.

Thousands and thousands of Chinese went to Western countries and Japan to study especially after the turn of the twentieth century. We may mention another example of Cai Yuanpei. After studying in the Universitat Leipzig of Germany from 1907 to 1911, Cai became the leading liberal educator of China in the early twentieth century. He was known for being the first Minister of Education of the Republic of China, President of Peking University, and the founder of the Academia Sinica, the highest national academic institution. John Dewey once compared Cai Yuanpei with the presidents of such prestigious universities as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and Columbia and pointed out that these Western university presidents were no match for Cai Yuanpei because Cai had turned Peking University into China's first modern university. Evidence indeed suggests that the complete Chinese modern education system began from Cai Yuanpei. Behind all of his work for improving China's education system lay the values and knowledge which had become part of him during his European days.

Likewise, Hu Shi was a Western-educated scholar who helped establish the vernacular as the official written language, a literature revolution in Chinese history. After graduating from the Chinese Public Institute, he won a Box Indemnity Scholarship to study in the United States. He earned his B.A. in 1914 from Cornell University and completed his doctoral dissertation under John Dewey in Columbia University in 1917. During his years in the United States, Hu Shi was influenced by Harriet Mouroe's *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, which advocated verse writing in plain language. While at Cornell in 1915, he began to promote writing in the written form of modern Chinese. After returning to China, he published in 1917 an article entitled "On Literature Reform", which launched the Vernacular Movement. Transforming written Chinese from a classical form to vernacular style, the movement without doubt is a literary revolution, one of the most important turning points in Chinese cultural history.

History abounds with similar examples. Chen Duxiu in 1902 enrolled in the Tokyo Higher Normal School and studied at Waseda University in Tokyo in 1906. Li Dazhao also studied political economy from 1913 to 1917 at Waseda University before returning China. After the Russian Revolution, Li spread Maxism to Chinese by publishing articles, establishing Maxist Research Society, and urging students to go to the countryside to disseminate "humanism and socialism." Assisted by Comintern agents, Chen Duxiu founded the first Communist group in Shanghai in May 1920, arranged for the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* late in the same year, and was elected the first General Secretary of the provisional central committee of the Chinese Communist Party in July 1921. We may face the essential fact that as the vanguards and the founders of the party, Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu initiated the magnificent Chinese Communist movement.

Many students also went to European countries, Japan, and the United States to study military. We may cite an example of Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese political and military leader from 1928 to 1945. After studying for a short time at the Baoding Military Academy, Chiang Kai-shek went to Tokyo Shinbu Gakko (Tokyo Shinbu Military Academy) in 1907 where he spent three years for his military studies. He also served in the Japanese army from 1909 to 1911. In Japan he joined Tongmenghui (Chinese United League), a precursor of the Kuomintang (KMT or Nationalist Party); he returned to China in 1911 and served in the revolutionary forces. Under his leadership, Kuomintang launched the Northern Expedition (1926-1928), which led to the end of the warlord disorder and realized military unification of China. In the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), he again led China to fight one of the bloodiest wars ever fought in Chinese history. Obviously like other Chinese returnees, Chiang regarded China with great affection and wanted to serve the country of his birth.

Thousands of Chinese students especially went to the United States to study science and engineering. Deng Jiaxian and Qian Xuesen provided notable instance of their contributions. Deng received his doctorate in physics from Purdue University in 1950. Immediately after his graduation, he returned to China and devoted his life to the construction of China's atom and hydrogen bombs. In China, he is respected as the "Father of China's Nuclear Program." Qian had a similar experience. He won a Boxer Rebellion Indemnity Scholarship and went to Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1935 to study engineering and earned a Master of Science degree there later. He received his doctorate from Caltech in 1939 and returned to China in 1955. Because of his contribution to produce China's intercontinental ballistic missiles and reconnaissance satellites, he was regarded as the "Father of China's Space and Missile Programs."

There is little doubt that serious attention must be devoted to Deng Xiaoping. In 1919 and 1920, more than 1,000 Chinese students went to Europe by the work-study programs. Among the group to France was Deng Xiaoping, who joined Communist Youth groups later there. After Mao's death, Deng became the father of China greatest economic reform and introduced the Open Door policy in 1978, which altered the world economic landscape. In these years China has entered upon process of fundamental leap. We may point out the astonishing fact that China's economy grew at an average annual rate of 13% from 2003 to 2011 and surpassed Japan as the world's second-largest economy. There was no spot on this earth where there had been greater economic progress made within the past thirty years than in China.

This economic miracle has facilitated and promoted the pre-existing trend for Chinese studying abroad. The economic prosperity has produced more and more wealthy families that can invest a large portion of their savings for their children's overseas college education. According to China's Ministry of Education, in 2014, 459,800 Chinese students going abroad, of which 36,800 were supported by public and employer funding sources, and 423,000 were self-funded. Now there are more than 270,000 students from China in the United States alone, more than a third of all international students in the country. According to a recent record, it can be learned that at UIUC, which has the largest number of international students among public universities in the United States, about 5,000 of its students are from China. This number is expected to grow. Studying abroad is

a ready resource, and the students have a strong desire to learn from other countries in order to contribute China's knowledge, technology, and progress. And more and more young students are waiting for leave from their native towns and the admissions from universities in the United States, European countries, Japan, Australia, and other countries. As the most numerous people on the face of the globe, a few score thousands may appear a mere dribble. The enthusiasm and passion heartened by them admit no doubt.

Chinese studying abroad is simply the mightiest movement in modern Chinese history. When Deng Xiaoping made his speech in 1978 stressing China would send more students to study abroad, he fully realized how important it was to China's future progress. The speech was evidence at the outset of the wisdom of this sagacious statesman. It is, therefore, apparent that the power of young Chinese mind has been, and will continue to be, kindled by overseas education and burn on the land beneath which rest the bones of the inventors of gunpowder, of paper, of compass, and of printing. The influence of the Studying Abroad Movement was so particularly noteworthy and all-round in modern Chinese history that we cannot fail to regard it as one with peculiar significance and importance.