THE PROMOTION OF CHINESE STUDIES

That the next decade will see a striking increase in American interest in Chinese studies is no very daring prediction. In the domain of politics and economics, the large number of works daily coming from the press on current Far Eastern affairs and the activities of such organizations as the Institute of Pacific Relations demonstrate the growing realization of the truth of John Hay's dictum that the world's peace rests with China. The fact, however, that the East, in general, and the Chinese world in particular, has an important contribution to make in the humanistic and social sciences is only now receiving belated recognition. The immensity of this contribution can be suggested by the recital of a few pertinent facts. It has been estimated that prior to 1750 more books had been published in Chinese than in all other languages combined. As late as 1850, Chinese books outnumbered those in any other language. Even in 1928, the largest publishing house in the world is located not in New York, or London, or Paris, or Berlin, but in Shanghai. And little of the literature thus produced is ephemeral, for the Chinese penchant has been towards history, topography, philosophy, poetry, and commentary on the classics, all saturated with a serenity and a height of tone that might well be emulated by more sophisticated literatures. Indeed, it would be no very difficult task to maintain the thesis that in none of the world's civilizations has knowledge for its own sake played so prominent a part over so long a time as in that of China. It is evident, therefore, that if we are to hope for the final solution of our linguistic and philological problems, the satisfaction of our antiquarian or archaeological curiosity, and the construction of an adequate philosophy or a complete historical synthesis, we cannot disregard the lessons learned by a vigorous and intelligent people, numbering one-fourth of the population of the globe, through three thousand years of continued and varied culture.

Of all this have Occidental, and in particular American, scholars only the slightest inkling. It is true that there are American
sinologists, but anything like organized sinological study, on a scale comparable with, say, Semitics or Indology, is non-existent. What progress has been made in translating to the Western world the culture of the East is the result of the labors of French, English, Russian, and German scholarship. Of the hundreds of American universities and colleges, only a few even scratch the surface. Some offer courses in Chinese art; courses in Chinese history usually cover nothing but the political and economic factors governing Chinese relations with the outside world, and one looks almost in vain for any organized study of cultural contacts. Only in three or four institutions of higher learning is it possible to secure even elementary instruction in Chinese language and literature. It is much easier to become an initiate in the mysteries of an ancient language whose whole record comprises a number of sculptured stones or clay tablets, than it is to obtain the key to an immense and living literature which can boast a single encyclopaedia of over eleven thousand volumes.

This is a condition that ought not to exist, and the signs of the times portend that it will not exist much longer. The recent establishment of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, to mention only a single important development, is a most promising indication of awakening interest.

The Council's interest in the civilizations of the Far East, particularly China, is of long standing. At its first meeting, in 1920, the late Dr. Paul S. Reinsch, at that time president of the American Political Science Association and later a delegate to the Council from that body, proposed through Mr. Waldo G. Leland a discussion of methods of instruction and research in the history of these civilizations. The proposal, however, lay dormant until the establishment of a permanent secretariat and executive offices provided the machinery for extending the Council's activities effectively into those fields, such as Far-Oriental studies, which do not come immediately within the purview of any of its constituent societies or whose exploitation requires the collaboration of a number of them. As soon as this condition of affairs existed (1927), the Council at once turned its attention to this vast and uncultivated domain, whose extent, in Berthold Laufer's apt
metaphor, may be compared to the wide Pacific, while what we know of it is only San Francisco Bay.

Meanwhile, the officers of the Council had devoted much thought, and canvassed such opinion as was available, as to the manner in which it could best exert its efforts. It seemed desirable, in consideration of the present vague and incoherent condition of our knowledge of the subject, that a survey be made, which should have as its object the description of the field in order that the growing interest in it might be focussed on the most promising opportunities and the most pressing needs. The Permanent Secretary presented, consequently, to the Council at its annual meeting on January 28, 1928, the suggestion that it engage in the compilation of a survey of Asiatic (particularly Chinese) research. The Council looked with favor upon the project and referred it to the Executive Committee for elaboration. The latter, at its meeting on March 10, 1928, discussed it further and authorized the Chairman to appoint a committee to develop a definite plan for which financial support could be sought.

At about the same time the American Oriental Society in its annual meeting of April 1928 in Washington went on record as approving the encouragement of research in Far Eastern civilization. The significance of this action lies in the fact that the efforts of this society have, on account of American apathy toward Chinese studies, been, during the last fifty years, almost entirely devoted to the Indic and Semitic fields. The presence of these Orientalists in Washington, moreover, offered a favorable opportunity to secure authoritative advice on the question of the advisability and feasibility of the proposed survey. Such members of the Oriental Society as were interested were, accordingly, invited to meet in an informal conference in the executive offices of the Council. Five members responded, Mr. Arthur W. Hummel, curator of the Oriental Collection, the largest collection of Chinese works outside of China, in the Library of Congress; Mr. Carl W. Bishop, associate curator of Oriental Art in the Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C.; Mr. Benjamin March, curator of Far Eastern Art in the Detroit (Mich.) Institute of Arts; Dr. George H. Danton, professor and head of the department of German in
Oberlin College, formerly professor of German at Tsing Hua University, Peking; and Dr. Truman Michelson, of the United States Bureau of Ethnology. All agreed that some such survey was advisable, but urged that for the present it be restricted geographically to China itself, since the inclusion of other parts of Asia, valuable as they are in the development of Asiatic culture, would so increase the difficulty of compiling the information needed as to jeopardize the success of the entire undertaking. The other countries of Asia might, however, be recommended for further survey.

As a result of this conference, the Council, on May 9th, engaged Dr. Danton to prepare a preliminary plan for a survey, which could be presented to the proposed committee when it should be formed, or to a conference of sinologists called for the purpose, if it should be deemed advisable to call one. Throughout the summer Professor Danton and the Assistant Secretary collaborated in the production of this preliminary draft, which was completed and distributed during October and November to about fifty scholars throughout the country who, it was thought, would be interested in its contents.

The authors of this plan had in mind something in the nature of, though possibly not on the same scale as, Sandys's *Companion to Latin Studies*, or the similar *Companion to Greek Studies*. They proposed a volume of about four or five hundred pages which would serve as (1) a manual for the student beginning the study of sinology, (2) a reference work in which the more advanced sinologist could find a concise statement of the condition of and facilities for research in those fields with which he is not immediately familiar, and (3) a handbook of interest to the general public in familiarizing it with the importance, the stage of advancement, the needs, and the possibilities of modern sinological research. The plan covered about thirty mimeographed pages, and comprised outlines for a survey of the present state of sinological research, both in machinery and in content.* It was submitted intentionally as a decoy without any predilections on the

* The full text of the plan in its final form is printed herewith as Appendix No. 1.
part of the authors as to its finality or its value, but with the feeling that its ends would be attained if it induced more desirable ducks to settle around it. They felt that it would serve to give to the deliberations of any conference convened to discuss it a certain definitiveness not always evident in the proceedings of conferences. The scholars to whom it was addressed were invited to criticize its general purport and its specific provisions. The most important general criticisms were three. First, that the basis of the classification adopted was a purely Western one. Hence it resulted that certain fundamentals of Chinese civilization were omitted, such as guilds, secret societies, and divination, or received insufficient, as in the case of agriculture, or excessive, as in the case of the novel, emphasis. It was further pointed out that such a survey, after all, would give us an analysis of Chinese culture but not a picture of it; that it was necessary to synthesize as well as to analyze. Finally it was suggested that the encyclopaedic nature of the program militated against its accomplishment. The time, it was asserted, was not yet ripe for the conciseness of statement necessary to compress our knowledge of the vast subject into a small volume. Many specific additions and a few corrections were indicated.

On the whole it seemed to develop from this discussion that the several proposals suggested in the memorandum differed both in importance and in the possibility of their accomplishment. Consequently it was thought wise to separate them into three distinct plans, each of which might be discussed on its own merits. This was accordingly done and another memorandum was distributed, describing

I. A manual of Chinese studies
II. A survey of the facilities for instruction and research in Chinese subjects
III. A series of proposals and suggestions for the improvement of those studies, particularly in America.

Meanwhile consideration of the project had indicated the advisability of calling together a rather large conference to discuss the problems connected with it. It was expected that, in the
nature of things, this conference would not confine its discussion to the proposed surveys, but would range the whole field of Chinese studies and constitute itself a general congress for the promotion of research in that domain. On October 6th the Executive Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies authorized the calling of such a conference and provided for the payment of the expenses connected therewith. Invitations to it were sent out with the memorandum described above and before long forty of the scholars addressed had signified their intention of attending. These included not only persons who were fully entitled to the designation sinologist, but others, officers of learned societies and professors of linguistics, history, and other subjects having a Chinese phase, whose assistance and advice might be considered desirable.* This First Conference for the Promotion of Chinese Studies met on December 1 in the Biddle Memorial Room of the Harvard Club of New York City. It lasted from nine-thirty in the morning until four-thirty in the afternoon and attacked the problems presented to it throughout the entire day with unrelenting enthusiasm and interest. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that, both in the quality of its membership and in the nature of its activities, it was as significant a gathering as it was an interesting one, and that it marks an important step in the advancement of this almost untouched, though exceedingly vast, field of learning.

From its deliberations there emerged a consensus of opinion on the following points:†

1. The cyclopaedic nature of the proposed Manual of Chinese Studies renders its immediate execution impracticable, since there are so many gaps in our knowledge of China and so few facts that can be definitely stated as true. The value of such a compilation is, however, evident, and we should look forward to the day when it shall be realizable.

2. A survey of the organization of and resources for research and instruction in Chinese studies as described in the memorandum should be immediately undertaken.

* A list of those in attendance is annexed to the appended Proceedings.  
† The full text of the proceedings of this conference is appended to this account as Appendix No. 2.
3. A directory of sinologists throughout the world is eminently desirable. The definition of sinologist should be liberal and should include anyone who is in a position to make a significant contribution to our knowledge of Chinese civilization.

4. The universities and colleges of the country must be made aware of the importance of and the opportunities presented by Chinese studies.

5. The most pressing needs of research workers in Chinese studies are
   a) bibliographies, catalogues, and indexes of both Chinese works and Occidental works on China, and
   b) the establishment of fellowships and scholarships which will enable research workers to use the immense treasures in the Library of Congress at Washington and will permit them to study in China or Europe.

6. It is desirable that the work begun by the Conference be continued
   a) by calling another conference at an early date (the meetings of the American Oriental Society in Cambridge in April, 1929 offer an attractive opportunity)
   b) by requesting the American Council of Learned Societies to create and maintain a standing committee on Chinese studies, to whom the deliberations of this conference shall serve as instructions.

In many respects this last recommendation was the most important step of the day. Its significance lies in the fact that such a continuation committee would be a permanent body constantly endeavoring to promote Chinese studies in America and to carry into effect the suggestions of such conferences as might be held from time to time. It might be pointed out that the present Mediaeval Academy of America, whose creation was undoubtedly one of the most notable contributions of and to American learning within the last decade, grew out of just such a committee of the Council for the promotion of medieval studies. In the present instance, the formation of a new learned society is not in prospect, nor is it, in a great many ways, desirable, since the various phases of the study can be amply taken care of by the existing Oriental Society and the associations devoted to the individual disciplines. It is, however, much to be hoped that some permanent organization can be given to the sinologists of this country through which
their activities can be assisted and coördinated. The Conference nominated seven of those present to membership on the committee if and when it should be formed: Berthold Laufer, Arthur W. Hummel, Kenneth S. Latourette, Carl W. Bishop, Lucius C. Porter, Lewis Hodous, and L. C. Goodrich.

Too much cannot be said for the enthusiasm and interest of this small band of scholars who came, many of them from considerable distances, and gave their time and their effort to the success of this conference. Not the least valuable feature of the meeting was the opportunity it gave many workers in the same field to become acquainted with each other, an opportunity which had never before presented itself.

The Council has adopted the recommendation of the Conference and has created and will maintain for a limited period or until other arrangements can be made a standing Committee on the Promotion of Chinese Studies.* This committee held its first meetings in Washington on February 16–17, 1929,† and decided to take immediate steps toward the compilation of the proposed survey of the organization of and facilities for Chinese research throughout the world. It further determined to call a second conference of persons interested in the field on April 3rd, 1929 at Cambridge, Massachusetts, in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society. Preparations for this conference are well under way and there is every prospect that, as a result of the labors of a number of sub-committees which the Committee has created, definite shape will there be given to plans for the future expansion of American sinology.

We hope that the conference and the establishment of the standing committee mark a new day in the history of American participation in Chinese studies. If, as the new historians tell us, the event and the times are functions of each other, the new day is upon us. For there is no mistaking the existence of a revival of interest in the things of the Far East. And it cannot be too strongly affirmed that this interest must not only afford satisfaction to an antiquarian curiosity, or indulge an appetite

* The membership of this committee is given in Annex G to the appended Proceedings.
† Proceedings of these meetings are published as Appendix No. 3.
for the bizarre, or eventuate in a hodge-podge of chinoiserie such as distinguished the eighteenth century; it cannot but lead to a broadening and deepening of our philosophy; it cannot but contribute to that new synthesis for which the past hundred years of historical analysis has been laying the foundations. Here, as everywhere else in connection with things Chinese, one can do no better than quote the words of Berthold Laufer, “We hold that a truly humanistic education is no longer possible without a more profound knowledge of China. We endeavor to advance the scientific study of China in all its branches for the sake of the paramount educational and cultural value of Chinese civilization, and thereby hope to contribute not only to the progress of higher learning, but also to a higher culture and renaissance of our civilization and to the broadening of our own ideals. We advocate with particular emphasis the study of the language and literature of China as the key to the understanding of a new world to be discovered, as the medium of gaining a new soul, as an important step forward into the era of a new humanism that is now in process of formation.”

Mortimer Graves.