

# Good book review about shanghai express

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## **Introduction**

In every country, literature is a sort of mirror that reflects all changes in society. The Shanghai Express by Zhang Henshui is a good example of Chinese literature and helps us to understand the nature of Chinese modernization. This social and psychological portrait of modern China pays special attention to the issues of gender, class, and modernization.

## **Modern and traditional China**

Each country that has a period of modernization, experiences the same problem of the conflict between traditions and modern patterns. China's response to European model of modernization produced turmoil and chaos. China demonstrated the specificity of its national spirit and responded with feebleness. The author describes the picture of the carriage: " The steam heat in the car didn't work too well to begin with, and so every window was tightly closed against the cold. To make things worse, seven out of ten passengers were smoking sigaretttes" (Henshui, 1997. p. 33). This example is good enough to depict the modern vehicle in traditional Chinese society. We could consider the reaction of Chinese population to the new wave of influence towards the traditional world. The concept of " progress" inflated the tree of Chinese civilization and led to the fever of the whole organism. Actually we could assume that China, as the epicenter of the closed model of the world, was well adapted to a breakdown of the old model. Japan coped with the intervention despite the fact that the country was weaker much than China. Western influence was lethal for China. The State disappeared, and the country was disintegrated into warring militias for thirty years.

Chiang Kai-shek government represented China on the world stage only formally. Until the Communist victory in 1949 Chinese state ceased to exist. Chinese civilization destroyed the concept of " progress" and was unable to cope with the shock of civilization. What could China, that have actually invented gunpowder and even poison gas, answer Western guns and rifles? What could China oppose to the industrial revolution?

Chinese science was not far behind the west, it had its own laws of development. Chinese science could thoroughly examine the human body and possess natural ways of treatment, potentially more correct than western methods of intervention. But, technical progress was quite alien to the traditional society because it would change the traditional relations. China could not cope with the concept of civilization of the West and collapsed.

How did the concept of " progress" enter China? In Japan, it developed as a linear expansion of the state. With China the situation was different. The Celestial Empire was extremely weak, and easily surrendered to the impact of Western imperialism, than fell into the inner turmoil. The character scene of the novel: " The first, a tall man in military uniform, looked down the corridor The next two were foreigners, bearded priests in long black robes" (Henshui, 1997. p. 55). We could consider this scene as the way how the Chinese perceived the Western influence. Really, who were the Western people to the Chinese – soldiers or Christian priests?

Together with the concept of " progress", the eschatology was slightly expressed in Buddhism and almost not expressed in Christianity, Taoism and Confucianism. The old China experienced the Apocalypse, and naturally after

it a new China should have been born. Revolutionary eschatology divided in two branches, the Kuomintang and the Communist.

Kuomintang branch overcame eschatology fast enough to follow the traditional civilization parcels. Communist eschatology, on contrary, turned out to be extremely viable. Multi-year armed struggle of the Communist Party of China lasted until 1945, in fact due to the power of this revolutionary eschatology. The destruction of nearly all the foundations of the old society and the construction of a completely new had a very special meaning for China.

China gives us three ways of reactions of the East on the West influence. First one is distemper, however, this reaction can't be considered to be a phenomenon, a stage in the development of civilization. It could be the vertical part of the stage, the transitional period. The second one is an aggressive rejection of traditional structures, followed by the struggle for the triumph of the West. Such type of reaction, of course, should be considered as an independent historical and civilizational phenomenon. That was the reaction of the segments of Chinese society, focused on the Chinese Communist Party. There was also another type of reaction that included the idealization of the Western democracies, based on the same self-abasement. Finally, the third type of reaction was the takeover of Western art artifacts with significant preservation of traditional structures. This phenomenon came out of the turmoil and became self-sufficient. It was typical for the segments of Chinese society, focused on the Kuomintang.

Another topic for the discussion is a problem of the traditional structure of society in modern conditions. China cultivated the prevalence of climatic

factors over motivational. Chinese people were embedded to nature, adapting to it. They acted as a total on all levels of the interaction with the nature. Such attitude imprinted on the whole range of social relations, and prevented conflicts within society. Social relations were regulated by subordination of the junior to senior.

Stratification of Culture gave dynamism to the European society, it accentuated individuality, personal motivation and creativity. These features provided a high level of productive forces, science and trade. They created an appropriate management system, the market and democracy that became the essence of the Western civilization. Trade and entrepreneurial culture, that violated the principles of family relations, was totally unacceptable in China. It was alien to the cult of agriculture and community work, where the introverted culture and spiritual values were dominating. The state system of the traditional China reproduced the archetype of family relations. The patrimonial organization, multiplied by the ethnic homogeneity of the population, prevented the formation of inequality.

The Western influence led to the decomposition of the community and the emergence of classes. Confucian ethical standards as a natural tool for solving social problems were broken at once, and modern society had to produce new controlling mechanisms. Sun Yat-sen predecessors were unsuccessful in attempts to realize the need for a radical change of system. They couldn't understand the necessity of new management and intellectual standards. Modern leader combined the two main tasks for China, the pursuit of world leaders and the regime change. Sun Yat-sen made the most important contribution to the social and political thought of China by the idea

of a violent revolution. He was the first to link the reform to the destruction of the old and to the establishment of new institutions. But, the Xinhai Revolution was only enough for scrapping old cars. Being the main defender of the crumbling fragments of the state, militarism became a temporary economic and political form of survival of the traditional culture.

China had to embark on the path of borrowing the Western technology and creating its own military and partly civil machinery industry. It was the only way to overcome the crisis of the Qing Empire. Particular attention was paid to the modernization of the army and navy, equipping them with European weapons. The thesis of " self-empowerment" was strictly selective and limited. It mostly referred to the use of technical innovations in the European part, and it was the individual reaction to the Chinese modernization.

The new China was a bad combination of the European and the traditional Chinese society. The policy of " self-empowerment" was the worst kind of modernization. It showed the most protracted way out from the national crisis, an archaic variant of strengthening China. Confucian norms of behavior and the entire way of life and traditions could not exist anymore. The Chinese saw the Western powers like enemies who destroyed " the greatness of Heaven," and decomposed traditional Confucian principles.

## **Works Cited**

Henshui, Z. Shanghai Express. A thirties novel. Hawaii press, 1997. Print.