

PEOPLE FROM FIVE SIDES

By T. F. HSU

To all foreigners who visit Shanghai and even to many who live there permanently all the Chinese inhabitants of the city are simply "Shanghai Chinese." But odd as it may seem, the natives of Shanghai actually form an almost negligible fraction of the community and the outsiders are the backbone of the city's Chinese population.

Mr. Hsu, though born in Shanghai and knowing it inside out, considers himself a native of Ningpo, his ancestral home.—K.M.

SHANGHAI AND NEW YORK

The Chinese community in Shanghai is composed of people, to use an old expression, from "five sides"—the four corners of the country and from the city itself. A Shanghai Chinese today is quite unlike a native of the Shanghai of a hundred years ago, when it was still a mudflat on the Whangpoo; and modern Shanghai dialect differs radically from the real Shanghai dialect once spoken by the residents of the fishing center which has grown in the course of a century into the sixth largest city in the world. Today, a typical Shanghai Chinese represents the characteristics of all the provinces in the Yangtze delta, if not all the provinces along the central and southern China coast. And modern Shanghai dialect is a mixture of practically all dialects of China proper.

Superficially one might be tempted to compare the Shanghai Chinese community to New York with its population composed of such varied nationalities and races. However, in spite of the influence of so many foreign tongues upon it, the New York dialect is very little different from that of Chicago, whereas the Shanghai dialect can hardly be understood in Hankow. Nor are the national and racial differences in the population of New York as pronounced as the provincial distinctions among the Shanghai Chinese, who, though showing some

mixed characteristics and speaking a mixed dialect, never forget that they are not natives of the city. They still believe that "a tree may be a hundred feet tall, but the fallen leaves return to the root"; hence, though they may prosper in Shanghai, they do not lose sight of their native place or ancestral home.

NATIVE GUILDS

This loyalty to their native places gave rise to the establishment of various native guilds, each representing people from a certain province, city, or district, and working for their interests. The activities of a native guild are many-sided. Under its auspices, for instance, mass weddings are held in which the sons and daughters of its members are married in a single impressive ceremony witnessed by a leading figure from the same district. It also cares for the poor and sees to it that destitute persons from its district are repatriated.

The guild works for the welfare of its home district too. It may petition the government for the removal of a magistrate whose administration has irked the home district. It may also issue somewhat arbitrary orders forcing undesirables from the mother district to leave Shanghai. A few years ago, for instance, the Ningpo Native Guild in Shanghai used its influence to force several Ningpo troupes

specializing in popular music off the stage and air because it considered their performances an unnecessary exposure of the shadier side of its home town.

GUILDS AND COFFINS

One of the most important activities of these native guilds, however, is to serve the dead. Some of the larger guilds in Shanghai maintain an elaborate and efficient system for the sole purpose of serving bereaved families, rich or poor. These funeral departments are usually subdivided into two sections, one handling the sale of coffins and the other being in charge of the coffin depositories. Both operate on a non-profit basis, and their activities can well be considered the first example of a co-operative in China.

The coffins are graded into several qualities for members of various economic strata. However, in order to preserve the "face" of the poorer classes, these qualities are not identified as first, second, third, etc. Instead they are identified by a sequence of characters taken from a passage in a Chinese classic, thus hiding the grade of quality and the economic position of the buyer. In a way the coffin sales department of a guild reminds one of Hollywood producers, as even the poorest quality they have is labeled as "great" or "magnificent."

The wealthier Chinese likes to buy his coffin during his lifetime. If he has a son, it is the heir's duty to present his father with a good coffin. He can go to his guild and order a coffin many years in advance, so that each year a new coat of Ningpo varnish may be applied to his "future abode."

For the poor the coffins sold by the guilds are much cheaper than those obtainable in the ordinary coffin shops. Most of the native guilds issue coupons to their poorer members entitling them to coffins at a nominal payment of a few dollars. Only rarely are the guilds called upon to donate a coffin entirely free of charge, as no decent Chinese

would "sleep" in a free coffin. The nominal payment technically enables him to avoid the misfortune of being buried in a donated coffin.

HOTELS FOR THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

On the outskirts of Shanghai one can find imposing structures maintained by the various guilds. These are the coffin depositories, where coffins may be kept for a long period pending burial. Chinese like to be buried in their native place, which is not necessarily their birthplace. They want to be laid to rest near the tombs of their ancestors. Hence the necessity for institutions where the coffins may be kept for some time until the preparations for shipping the body home have been completed. Since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war and the resultant interruption of many lines of communications, these depositories have gained added importance.

The Ningpo Native Guild, one of the largest in Shanghai, maintains two such depositories, each covering several acres of ground, on the southern and northern outskirts of Shanghai.

The depositories are hotels for the dead. Each has various grades of accommodation ranging from what might be called "suites" to "flops." In a "suite" the "guest" has the privilege of a room to himself. Then there are rooms shared by two, four, or six, and finally the "flops" where coffins are just piled one on top of the other and crowded together to the capacity of the large hall.

Although conducted like a hotel, the depository offers no such attractions as "bridal suites," because a clear line is drawn between the sexes. Not even the coffins of a married couple are allowed to share a room. The female ghost, it is argued, would resent the company of other male ghosts, even when escorted by her husband.

During the Tsing Ming (Tomb-Sweeping) Festival in spring, the Chung Yuan

(All-Spirits) Festival in summer, and the Winter Solstice these guilds charter special steamers or trains for the transportation of the coffins to their native places where they are to be laid to rest.

In addition to these activities the native guilds also maintain hotels for the living in the form of dormitories.

"FACE" AND THE BARBER'S COUSIN

While the existence of these native guilds encourages the provincial differentiation among the Shanghai Chinese community, occupational differences also contribute their part toward the maintenance of such differentiation.

These occupational differences may be attributed to the deep-rooted Chinese feeling of "face." New arrivals in Shanghai always go to their relatives, however distant they may be, and the latter, to gain "face" by obtaining jobs for them, tend to introduce the newcomers to their own profession. Thus a barber's cousin on arriving in Shanghai will often land a job in a beauty parlor; and a wharf coolie's nephew has a better chance to follow in his uncle's footsteps than any other calling.

Statistics compiled by the Shanghai Municipal Council reveal, for instance, that practically all of Shanghai's thousands of rickshaw pullers come from a part of China generally known as "Kompo," or "north of the (Yangtze) river." A rickshaw puller's distant cousin has a greater opportunity of becoming a "human horse" than a wharf coolie because it is only in the former field that he can avail himself of connections. He has the best chance to learn his trade by running behind his cousin's rickshaw, thereby becoming familiar with the roads, traffic regulations, and the delicate art of bargaining for a fare.

Practically all the Chinese police constables in the International Settlement of Shanghai are natives of Shantung or Hupeh, provinces renowned for their sturdy sons.

WHARF COOLIES, BANKERS, AND PAWNSHOP ASSISTANTS

Among the army of wharf coolies, who day after day carry heavy loads to and from the multitude of steamers calling at Shanghai, the great majority comes from Shantung. Almost all the fish hawkers are from Ningpo, while the vegetable hawkers are mainly natives of Shanghai, having better connections with the local farmers.

There are also pronounced provincial distinctions in the higher professions. Natives of Ningpo and Shaoshing, prosperous districts in eastern Chekiang, dominate the native banks and exchange banks. Almost all pawnshop assistants are from Anhui province. The four largest Chinese department stores in the city are dominated by Cantonese, and their influence extends to the smaller ones as well.

Even the domestic servants in foreign households show a clear provincial distinction. Most of the servants in European families are from Ningpo, while those in Japanese families are either from Tsungming Island at the mouth of the Yangtze or from northern Kiangsu. In foreign restaurants one more often than not finds Ningpo waiters.

Provincial distinction can also be found among the personnel on public vehicles. On a tramcar, for instance, the driver is most likely a native of northern Kiangsu, while the conductor comes from districts adjoining Shanghai. The same applies to the busses, where the tough-looking drivers are mostly natives of northern provinces and the conductors are southerners.

It will be generations before most Chinese can forget their native places and become entirely loyal to the city where they now live and earn their living. As long as they follow the example of the falling leaves and return to "the root" they will not easily forego the ancient custom of being buried near their ancestral tomb. Shanghai, this teeming city of millions, will long continue to be called "home" by only a few hundred thousand Chinese.