

THE MAGAZINES OF CHINA

By DOE CHING

Ever since the success enjoyed by the article "The Magazines of Japan," published in the first issue of "The XXth Century," we have been looking for an article dealing with Chinese periodicals. This turned out to be a difficult proposition. In spite of her enormous number of magazines with their huge figures of circulation, Japan offers a relatively simple and unified picture. It is just the other way round with Chinese magazines. Owing to frequent breaks in the history of China, as well as to the vastness of the country, a survey of China's magazines, in spite of their small number and modest circulation, is no easy task.

Mr. Doe Ching of Shanghai has collected the material published in the following pages, which deals only with publications in the Chinese language. We hope our readers will appreciate it, not as a complete work, but as the first step towards the systematic study of the subject.—K.M.

THE history of Chinese magazines is a short one. The main reason for this is the general state of illiteracy throughout the country until fairly recent years.

Although China has an ancient civilization, the majority of her people were unable to read. The Chinese believed that only those who had talent deserved education, with the result that the whole educational system was adjusted to this idea of training the select few. The old social rating in China—scholars, farmers, artisans, merchants, and soldiers—is enough to show the respect enjoyed by the scholar, the man who could read.

So literature became something which was produced by and for a tiny minority of educated people. Poets, novelists, and even dramatists wrote their works practically for their own amusement. They never dreamed that centuries later people would be able to earn a living by writing.

EARLIEST BEGINNINGS

That which had the greatest resemblance to a magazine in ancient China was the collection of poems by contemporary poets. What usually happened was this: some ten or more scholars organized a society and assembled once or twice a month at a fixed place to eat, drink, and write poems. When the poems were

completed the chairman of the society collected them and made several copies of them. These copies were given to other poets for criticism. These collections of poems were distributed regularly and were free of charge.

The first real magazine was not started until the last years of the Ching Dynasty, when, at the end of the nineteenth century, a magazine called 繡像小說 ("Pictorial Novel") was published. It contained fiction as well as illustrations from the pens of famous scholars and artists. This magazine was printed only for free distribution to the friends of these scholars and artists who could appreciate their work.

Before the Revolution, Liang Zun-kung, the famous revolutionary leader, brought out a magazine in Japan. It was called 新民叢報 ("New People"), and its purpose was to urge revolution and to explain the meaning of liberty and equality to the people. This monthly, which was, of course, forbidden by the Imperial Court, was the first political magazine in the history of Chinese magazines.

After the Revolution, the Commercial Press, which was the largest modern Chinese publishing house, started to take an interest and the magazine business began to develop. 小說月報 ("Novel")

and 東方雜誌 ("Eastern Miscellany") were the two most popular periodicals. The former was a collection of novels, and the latter dealt with international economic and political problems. When "Novel" ceased publication, it was substituted by 小說世界 ("Novel World"), which was regarded by the public as a very valuable magazine. However, this publication, too, was discontinued about 1917. "Eastern Miscellany" continued to appear until the outbreak of the Greater East Asia War, having been published in Hongkong after the Commercial Press had moved there in 1937.

When the bookstores discovered that magazines represented a new and profitable line for them, they all began to devote their attention towards it. Strong competition developed, and many new magazines were published. But most of these contained nothing but stories, with only very few of them paying any attention to more serious problems.

STRIKING NAMES

With so much competition in the field of ordinary story magazines the Commercial Press began to look for new scope. A nation-wide student movement in 1916 gave them the idea for a magazine called 少年雜誌 ("Young Man"), suitable for junior middle-school students. This new ground also entailed competition, and the Chung Hwa Book Company started publishing 小朋友 ("Little Friend"), written for senior elementary-school pupils. These magazines were soon followed by many others designed for young people and even kindergarten children.

In order to attract attention, the publishers began to use striking names for their magazines such as 紅雜誌 ("The Scarlet Magazine"), issued by the Universal Book Store, which occupied a red building; 半月 ("Half Moon"), a bimonthly publication; 禮拜六 ("Saturday"), a weekly appearing every Saturday; 紅玫瑰 ("Red Rose"), which took the place of "The Scarlet Magazine" when the latter ceased publication; 紫蘿蘭 ("Violet"), which competed with "Red Rose";

偵探雜誌 ("Detective"), containing translations of "Sherlock Holmes" and other stories; and 五銅元 ("Five Coppers"), which was sold at the rate of five coppers. All these magazines were very popular and had large circulations.

Incidentally, all the English names of the above-mentioned publications and most of the following ones are our own translations. There may in some cases have been recognized English translations of the titles, but we have not been able to trace these.

LITERARY FEUDS

This competition between the magazines went to unexpected lengths. Since there are no recognized grammatical standards for classical Chinese, the editors of these magazines competed in the literary style of their publications. Some of them preferred a plain, straightforward style, while others insisted on "beautiful," complicated language. This competition led to bitter literary feuds among the editors, with articles in one magazine criticizing the form of writing of other magazines. These arguments gradually took up so much space that the readers began to complain that what they wanted to read was stories and not editorial arguments.

It was at this time that the publishers began to realize that, in order to increase their sales, new fields must be opened instead of adding to the number of story magazines. So 婦女雜誌 ("Woman") and 教育雜誌 ("Education") made their appearance, soon to be followed by many other magazines of the same type.

Only one field remained more or less neglected, that of politics. In 1914 a magazine called 甲寅雜誌 ("The 1914 Magazine") came out. Its aim was the discussion of the new constitution and of other political problems. Later on, the well-known statesman T'ai Chi Tao published another magazine called 民權報 ("The People's Rights"). The purpose of this magazine was to criticize the administration, to expound the importance of the people's rights, and to cure the ills of old tradition. Both these magazines

had only a limited circulation, but they were certainly worth reading.

TRAVEL, HOME, AND PHILOSOPHY

When the China Travel Service was established in the twenties, it published a magazine called 旅行雜誌 ("Travel") in order to stimulate interest in travel. It contained illustrated articles describing the scenery and sights of certain places, how to get there, the customs of those districts, and their special products. This magazine ceased publication only a year ago.

A new force that appeared in the magazine-publishing field in the early thirties was the advertising companies, which started publishing their own periodicals in order to advertise the products they represented. Most of these publications were, naturally enough, directed at the likeliest customers—women. The most popular of these new magazines was 家庭 ("Happy Home"), published by the China United Advertising Company, in which such housewives' problems as cooking, decorating, cleaning, educating the younger generation, and the care of babies were discussed.

Of course, there were also magazines dealing with history and geography. Representative of these were 越風 ("The Wind from Yü." Yü is the ancient name for Chekiang) and 遛經 ("Leisurely Philosophy"), the former being published in Hangchow and the latter in Shanghai. Comparatively speaking, the latter was much the better. In 1937 the publishers moved to Hongkong and brought out a new magazine called 大風 ("Great Wind"), which ceased publication at the outbreak of the Greater East Asia War.

"HUMOR LITERATURE"

In the early thirties, a great change in the form of writing occurred. The new form was known as "humor literature" and was initiated by Dr. Lin Yutang. The first magazine of this kind was 論語 ("The Wisdom of Life"), most of whose articles dealt with the little things in human life and were written in a somewhat sarcastic style. The magazine immediately enjoyed a tremendous

popularity, and soon many other magazines appeared along the same lines. For a time these humorous magazines surpassed the circulation of all other magazines.

The idea of translating articles from foreign magazines and thus introducing Western literature and customs to China was undoubtedly a good one. So a magazine called 西風 ("West Wind") was brought out, whose contents consisted only of translations of carefully selected material. "West Wind," which also had a very big circulation, ceased publication only recently. Then there was also the Chinese counterpart of *Reader's Digest*, called 文摘 ("Digest"). The editors read through all the large Chinese magazines, picked out the best articles, and condensed them.

MOVIES AND GOSSIP

Of all the various types of magazines, movie magazines, of which there were several kinds on the market, were the most popular. Some of them were devoted to foreign pictures, while others centered around Chinese cinema productions. The contents of these magazines were very similar to those of their American models, that is to say, they were made up of articles about the lives of movie stars, studio jokes, and reviews of new films. The stage, both the classical Chinese opera and the modern Chinese stage play, also had its magazines. Besides discussing stage problems, they contained articles on the lives of actors and actresses and the history of certain plays.

All these magazines appeared periodically—some once a week, some once a month, and so on. But there is also a kind of daily magazine in China, called "mosquito papers" because they are so small, being only one sheet of paper. Although they are printed in the form of newspapers, their nature is that of magazines. The "mosquito papers" never contain any news, but one is sure to find some interesting stories and gossip about well-known figures in society.

BUSINESS AND PHOTOGRAPHY

There were also a number of commercial houses which published periodicals

dealing with their particular type of business, such as insurance, pharmaceuticals, etc. Perhaps the best known of these is 永安月代 ("Wing On Monthly") published by a department store in Shanghai. This magazine enjoys quite a good circulation, which is obviously due to the fact that its contents are made up of stories interspersed with advertising. Another monthly of a high standard that should be mentioned here is 醫療新報 ("Bayer Medical Journal"), written for the medical world.

As in every other country, there were also special publications devoted to the arts and sciences as well as to agriculture, hygiene, etc. Since these periodicals were directed at very limited circles, mostly students of those particular subjects, their circulation was not very high.

As regards picture magazines, these appeared almost as early as the other magazines, but did not develop as well. The earliest pictorial magazines consisted of series of pictures drawn by some artist. These manuscripts were very beautiful and delicate, but it took a long time to finish them. Later, when photography was developed, new picture magazines appeared consisting mainly of photographs. Since the price of such magazines was necessarily rather high, very few of them managed to survive long. However, there are two which may be mentioned here: 良友 ("The Good Friend") and 時代 ("Time"). Both of them had a good circulation. Moreover, they were also liked by foreigners who wanted to know something about Chinese life, since the explanations of the pictures were printed both in Chinese and English.

Shanghai has always been the center of Chinese magazine publishing. With the exception of "The Wind from Yü," the periodicals published outside of Shanghai, i.e., in Peking, Canton, and elsewhere, can be disregarded. As a result of this situation, the outbreak of hostilities in Shanghai in 1937 entirely disorganized the magazine business. Many of the publishing companies had to fight with financial difficulties. Some closed their

doors, while others moved to Hongkong and thence into the interior. The outbreak of the Greater East Asia War finally delivered the deathblow to the old order, so that practically all magazines published before 1937 have ceased to exist.

IN WITH THE NEW

However, the people of China still wanted to read magazines, and it was not long before entirely new magazines made their appearance. The Publicity Bureau of the Chinese National Government in Nanking has done much to aid this new development. Among the most successful of the new publications are 政治月刊 ("Politics"), 女聲 ("Woman's Voice"), 科學畫報 ("Science"), and 小說月報 ("Novel"), all well worth reading. In spite of the many difficulties due to the war situation, the editors of these magazines have always managed to obtain the best possible articles for their respective fields. There is also a magazine called 人間味 ("Human Taste"), published in Nanking, which should be mentioned here.

An example of extraordinary success is presented by a magazine that is entirely new in type for China. It is called 萬象 ("Ten Thousand Elephants") and, although it is written for popular entertainment, it contains not only stories and serials but also articles on every possible subject. In spite of its being little more than a year old, it has already found two imitators: 萬歲 ("Ten Thousand Lives") and 大眾 ("The Public").

Another periodical that can look forward to a bright future is 雜誌 ("Magazine"), which was republished quite recently. In its first numbers, the editor requested his readers to send in suggestions for the improvement of the magazine, and in the February issue he mentioned some of the suggestions received and indicated that they would be followed, or had already been followed.

The tradition of the "humor literature" has been taken up by 古今 ("Ancient and Modern"), which contains articles reminiscent of those in "The

Wisdom of Life." And the old movie magazines have found a far superior heir in 新影壇 ("New Movie World"), published by the China Film Production Company. The circulation of this latter magazine has already surpassed that of even the most successful of the old movie magazines.

CIRCULATION AND FINANCES

In comparison to other countries, the circulation figures of even the popular Chinese magazines are not overwhelming. Nevertheless, in spite of all the handicaps imposed by war, two of the most popular of the new magazines—"Ten Thousand Elephants" and "New Movie World"—have reached circulations of 30,000 and 25,000 respectively. As a matter of fact, the demand in both cases exceeds the supply.

In order to obtain and maintain a large circulation, magazine publishers must always try to keep the price of their periodicals as low as possible. But since printing costs and the cost of paper are extremely high, the publishers cannot possibly cover their expenses merely by the sale of their periodicals. Thus they have to look elsewhere for financial support, either to advertisements or to private persons or public bodies. At present, most magazines try to increase their income by taking advertisements. However, many large advertising accounts are handled by advertising companies, and these latter publish their own magazines. This, of course, does not make it any easier for other magazines to obtain advertisements.

As for getting support from private persons, I remember one example which can be used as an illustration. General Chang Tzu-chung, the former Governor of Shantung Province, once sponsored a magazine called 新魯月報 ("New Shantung"). Nearly half the articles in it praised this general's administration. The magazine was sold very cheaply but, thanks to its rich sponsor, it continued to be published for a long time.

Rich people who want to become famous can support a magazine and use

it as an instrument toward reaching their goal. For instance, there are "cabaret magazines," containing secrets about the lives of dancing girls and sponsored by some famous dancing girl.

Publishers like to print novels in serial form, for they can republish them in book form if they have proved successful. Since the author receives only one fee for his work, these re-publications sometimes mean a considerable increase to the publisher's income.

THE SIDEWALK BOOKSTALL

In the early days of China's magazines, there was no proper distributing system for periodicals. People who wanted to get a certain magazine had first to find out what bookstore published it or, if it was not published by a bookstore, who was the agent for it. But as the magazine business expanded, special magazine companies were established which are the agents for every kind of magazine.

Nowadays it is even more convenient to get the magazine you want. When you take a stroll down a street you will often find, usually at the end of a block, a wooden shelf managed by a boy or an old man. On this shelf are spread out all kinds of popular magazines. Should the magazine you want not be on the shelf, you can ask the boy or the old man to get it for you tomorrow.

Those who cannot afford to buy a magazine can go to the magazine company and read the magazine they want in the shop. They do not have to pay anything, but they are warned to take good care of the magazine.

On the whole, the magazine business in China still lags far behind that of other nations in the world. However, the Government as well as the publishers and the public fully appreciate its importance and have all contributed towards its development. Since magazines form an important instrument of national education, we hope that the publishers will continue the trend of eliminating second-rate periodicals and concentrating all their efforts on their more valuable publications.