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The Rockefeller Foundation, China, and Cultural Change

Frank Ninkovich

In 1915, on hearing of the Rockefeller Foundation's desire to set up a medical school in Peking, Paul Reinsch, the United States minister to China, remarked approvingly that the foundation's plans were "in full accordance with the traditions of our past relations with China, where the activities of our people have been religious, cultural and educational in a far greater measure than they have been commercial." Reinsch's comment highlights two key elements of the relationship between the United States and China: the vital role that policymakers assigned to the cultural dimension of that relationship; and the conviction that the management of cultural contacts was properly a non-governmental function. The Rockefeller Foundation's attempt over the course of forty years to channel China's modernization in a liberal direction epitomizes the marriage of national interest and private policymaking. At the same time, the Rockefeller experiment in the management of ideas also provides an example of how an important aspect of United States foreign relations can be understood "less from the study of diplomatic correspondence in government archives than from an examination of extragovernmental forces."¹

Despite the fact that the bulk of its expenditures would be made in medicine, the foundation always defined its purposes in sweeping civilizational terms that transcended its seemingly narrow focus on medical matters. That expansive outlook first became evident in the educational origins of its China program, which articulated the cultural objectives that would become the hallmark of its handling of Chinese affairs. In October 1906 Ernest DeWitt Burton

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¹ Paul Reinsch to Wallace Buttrick, Dec. 1, 1915, box 1, series 1, RG 4, Rockefeller Foundation Archives (Rockefeller Archive Center, North Tarrytown, N.Y.); Morrell Heald and Lawrence S. Kaplan, *Culture and Diplomacy: The American Experience* (Westport, Conn., 1977), 6. The philanthropic origins of United States cultural diplomacy are surveyed in Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938-1950* (Cambridge, Eng., 1981), 8-23. For a summary of the overseas cultural activities of the philanthropic foundations between the two world wars, see Merle Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad: A History* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1963), 301-38.

of the University of Chicago wrote to Wallace Buttrick of the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board with an idea that seemed, to Burton, "nothing less than magnificent": the creation in China of a university modeled on the University of Chicago. The university's interest in the proposal—inspired by a returned China missionary alarmed at what seemed to be a runaway Chinese cultural nationalism—came at a time when many thoughtful Americans were becoming concerned about the course of Chinese development. Recent events such as the Boxer Rebellion, the boycott of American goods in protest over immigration restrictions, and the Chinese rush to be educated in Japan were signs of a growing hostility to Western tutelage. Betraying his anxiety to a group of students, Burton told them that "China is like a boat shooting the dangerous rapids of the great river in Yangtze." The arrangement whereby the remission of the Boxer Indemnity was earmarked for the provision of American-style education was one attempt to counteract those ominous developments; Burton's proposal, which emphasized the transplantation to China of institutional structures as well as knowledge, was another.²

John D. Rockefeller and his advisers eventually proved receptive to the idea. Through the lucrative operations of Standard Oil in the Far East and through his regular contributions to the American Baptist Missionary Society, Rockefeller had a long-standing personal interest in China. More important, his closest adviser, the Baptist minister Frederick T. Gates, who had a fondness for educational schemes and who was a prime mover in persuading Rockefeller to fund the University of Chicago, smiled on the plan and was its most enthusiastic promoter. As early as 1905, when arguing that Rockefeller ought to expand and systematize his giving, he had suggested presciently the creation of "a fund for the promotion of Christian ethics and Christian civilization throughout the world." At the same time that Burton was setting his ideas to paper, Gates was independently sounding out the various American missionary societies about the feasibility of a similar proposal.³

The result was the creation in 1908, under University of Chicago auspices, of the Rockefeller-funded Oriental Education Commission, headed by Burton, to survey at first hand the possibilities for philanthropic action. Although deeply committed to the Christian evangelization of China, Burton was

² Ernest DeWitt Burton to Buttrick, Oct. 27, 1906, box 1, series 601A, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; William M. McKibben to Andrew MacLeish, n.d., *ibid.*; Burton, speech draft, n.d., box 4, series 1, Ernest DeWitt Burton Papers (Regenstein Library, University of Chicago). For the contrasting approaches of the Boxer Indemnity scholarship program and the Rockefeller philanthropy, see Peter Buck, *American Science and Modern China, 1876-1936* (Cambridge, Eng., 1980), 46-90.

³ Burton to Buttrick, Nov. 26, Nov. 30, 1906, box 1, series 600, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Frederick Taylor Gates, *Chapters in My Life* (New York, 1977), 209. For the importance of China to Standard Oil and John D. Rockefeller's missionary interests, see Allan Nevins, *Study in Power: John D. Rockefeller, Industrialist and Philanthropist* (2 vols., New York, 1953), II, 391; and Alvin Moscow, *The Rockefeller Inheritance* (Garden City, N.Y., 1977), 74-75. For Frederick Taylor Gates's interests and influence, see Raymond B. Fosdick, *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation* (New York, 1952), 80-82; and John Z. Bowers, *Western Medicine in a Chinese Palace: Peking Union Medical College, 1917-1951* ([New York], 1972), 30-31.

equally interested in assisting that nation's successful modernization, the two processes being in any case interdependent in his view. Harry Pratt Judson, president of the University of Chicago, believed that a research university in China would effect "almost a social revolution" by inculcating new standards of individual and social morality, by means of "a training in new conceptions of political and social organization." Not surprisingly, then, the commission's report concluded that rationality, in particular the scientific rationality embodied in Western universities, was the solution to the riddle of China's successful modernization. A research university would "develop the scientific spirit, high moral ideas . . . and greater strength of character." Like a gyroscope, the university would act as a moral stabilizer while also providing the dynamic intellectual resources needed to plot China's new historical course.⁴

Those recommendations, although they coincided nicely with Gates's desires, soon proved impracticable. For one thing, because of the expectation that a secular institution would face demands for Chinese control, the prevailing fear of Chinese dishonesty and incompetence rendered such a course "out of the question." Probably a greater impediment was the considerable hostility of the missionary boards, always a powerful influence in Rockefeller councils, to the idea of secular education. Checked by their veto power, Gates devised an alternative scheme that he hoped would satisfy all concerned. "Might we not do in medicine in China what we had failed in our attempt to do in University education?" he asked. Thinking along the same lines, Jerome D. Greene, secretary of the newly incorporated Rockefeller Foundation, argued in 1913 that an investment in medicine "would light a lamp which would burn for centuries." Warming to the idea, the foundation invited a number of prominent educators and representatives of the major missionary societies to its offices in January 1914 to debate how best to deal with China's future.⁵

The most common analogy used by those present at this conference to describe China's situation, one that would become the leitmotif of foundation analyses over the years, pictured China as a feudal society poised at the brink of modernity. As a subsequent foundation report would conclude, the advent of the Chinese Republic, besides marking a change of government, also offered "the brightest time for striking at the roots of superstition." Inasmuch as all the participants viewed the Chinese as a flawed and backward people, more than superficial assistance would be required to remove the "radically false views of life and radically false views of nature" that formed the greatest barri-

⁴ Ernest DeWitt Burton, "The Christian University and the World-Wide Mission of Christianity," *Christian Courier*, Sept. 19, 1907, p. 2; Harry Pratt Judson to Starr J. Murphy, April 24, 1909, box 4, series 1, Burton Papers; Ernest DeWitt Burton and Thomas Crowder Chamberlin, "Report of the Oriental Education Commission of the University of Chicago," vol. II, Dec. 1909, pp. 348, 399-413, box 1, series 600, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Burton to Judson, March 11, 1909, box 4, series 1, Burton Papers.

⁵ Mary E. Ferguson, *China Medical Board and Peking Union Medical College: A Chronicle of Fruitful Collaboration, 1914-1951* (New York, 1970), 14; Jerome D. Greene, "Educational and Other Needs in the Far East," Nov. 22, 1913, box 24, series 900, RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Jerome D. Greene to Burton, Dec. 22, 1913, box 4, series 1, Burton Papers.

cade to progress. Of China's many deficiencies, the most frequently mentioned, and the one considered to be the most serious, was the lack of what was called "the scientific spirit." Among others, Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University, deplored the traditional reliance on intuition and meditation, in contrast to "the inductive method of ascertaining truth." Abraham Flexner, assistant secretary of the General Education Board, also lamented "the inability of these people to grasp the inductive method—to put two and two together." Progressive Chinese, the conference participants believed, were conscious of those inadequacies and would welcome American educational assistance in effecting cultural, as well as technological, modernization.⁶

A few of the participants, Burton among them, continued to press for the adoption of the university project in the belief that a medical program was more a palliative than a fundamental cultural cure, but they received only a polite hearing. Not only did the original objections still apply, but the Rockefellers, recently embroiled in a long and noisy brouhaha over congressional incorporation of the foundation, were anxious to avoid controversial involvements. More important to the defeat of a purely educational program, however, was the majority belief that a medical approach, besides deflecting domestic and foreign criticisms, could serve as the catalyst for a cultural metamorphosis.⁷

True, an investment in medicine seemed preferable for narrow practical reasons. If one argument in favor of a China program was the nation's so-called plasticity, by the same token the ongoing possibility of disruptive turmoil would make long-term planning very difficult. Because medicine was presumed to be relatively noncontroversial, it seemed to offer the greatest assurance of continuity. According to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., medicine was "a non partisan work and one which would interest all of the people regardless of the government changes." A counterpoint to the cautious approach, however, was the thrilling vision of a China purged of its traditionalism, one day leading the world in medical knowledge. Given the Rockefeller success in reorienting American medical education on a scientific basis, the foundation seemed in a position, as Gates's son exuberantly put it, "to give super-medicine to China." Shortly after the conference, the foundation created the China Medical Board (CMB) and after further study decided to build a first-rate medical school in Peking.⁸

⁶ China Medical Commission of the Rockefeller Foundation, *Medicine in China* (New York, 1914), 89; "China Conference of the Rockefeller Foundation, January 19 and 20, 1914," verbatim minutes, pp. 4, 56, 97, 103, box 26, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Charles W. Eliot, *Some Roads towards Peace: A Report to the Trustees of the Endowment on Observations Made in China and Japan in 1912* (Washington, 1914), 5.

⁷ Burton to Frederick T. Gates, Feb. 9, 1914, box 5, series 1, Burton Papers; Paul Monroe to Burton, Feb. 12, 1914, *ibid.*

⁸ Frederick L. Gates Diary, Aug. 11, 1915, p. 2, box 33, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Jerome D. Greene, "Memo on the Rockefeller Foundation," Aug. 12, 1913, box 21, series 900, RG 3, *ibid.* The idea of China as a traditional society that possessed the potential for a radical leap to modernity is not so paradoxical as it may seem. A similar notion has

Gates's approach seemed also to make sense in the large view. Although the idea of a research university was rejected in favor of a proposal that seemed to emphasize a healing mission, all the early talk of implanting the "scientific spirit" was not forgotten; the foundation would continue to view medicine as an alternative means of promoting the original goal of a rationalized China. As John D. Rockefeller, Jr., explained at its dedication ceremonies in 1921, the Peking Union Medical College (PUMC) was intended to be an excellent medical school, but it had another, more important, role to play: to offer the best of Western civilization "not only in medical science but in mental development and spiritual culture." That the latter was more than an incidental or secondary purpose was confirmed some fifteen years later by the CMB trustees, who stated the foundation's objectives in more explicit, if somewhat stilted, fashion: "There can be no doubt, though scarcely expressed but well understood nevertheless, that the chief result to be attained was the creation of an example on Chinese soil, of how a technique has become available of acquiring knowledge of natural phenomena by scientific methods." The aim, they concluded, was not to impart Western scientific technique per se but "to develop the circumstances under which Science flourishes."⁹

The importation of modern scientific knowledge and technology was bound to be revolutionary, but as the foregoing statement suggests, the trustees had something even more portentous in mind: the implantation of a self-sustaining ethos and culture of science. They sought to nurture a professional tradition that was itself hostile to tradition, one that, in the words of Edward Shils, in its eagerness to discover the unknown "denies the validity of knowledge drawn from the past in whatever sphere science is conducted." If science is, as Robert K. Merton has maintained, "organized skepticism," its acceptance also entails "a latent questioning of certain bases of established routine, authority, vested procedures, and the realm of the 'sacred' generally." With the inherent tension between science and tradition as a basic postulate, the founders of the CMB counted on the introduction of the "inductive method" to tradition-bound China to produce the most far-reaching cultural transformations. Indeed, according to John Mott, their purpose was nothing less than to "establish ideals in a country where everything depends on customs and traditions." Implicit in that view was their belief that the diffusion of the scientific outlook would stimulate a liberal approach not only in the

been stated more recently in the form of a "law of evolutionary potential," which holds that less-developed societies have a leapfrogging potential for moving to new and comparatively advanced levels of development, in part because of the developmental drag caused by the greater specialization of "muscle-bound" modern societies. Elman R. Service, "The Law of Evolutionary Potential," in *Evolution and Culture*, ed. Marshall D. Sahlins and Elman R. Service (Ann Arbor, 1960), 93-122.

⁹ *Addresses and Papers: Dedication Ceremonies and Medical Conference: Peking Union Medical College, September 15-22, 1921* (Peking, China, 1922), 64; China Medical Board, Inc. trustees, memo, [1936], box 14, series 601, RG 1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives. For a description of lingering religious influence and resentment against the secular orientation of Peking Union Medical College (PUMC), see Mary Brown Bullock, *An American Transplant: The Rockefeller Foundation and Peking Union Medical College* (Berkeley, 1980), 66-70.

intellectual realm but, by extension, in politics as well, for science and a liberal polity seemed to them to depend on the same basic values.¹⁰

In its progressive emphasis on the leadership of a small cadre of medical experts and on the education of a scientific elite, its preference for medical research over more populist approaches to medical care, and its promotion of quality over quantity, the PUMC was narrowly conceived. That narrowness was purposeful, however: its founders sought to use highly concentrated means for the achievement of great ends. Their faith in the capacity of medicine as science to serve as the vehicle for a cultural revolution in China was rooted in a positivist tradition that assumed, in George W. Stocking, Jr.'s, words, that "in a fundamental sense, culture and the growth of rationality were one and the same." According to that view, which was based on a "rationalistic Victorian conception of man" that had more in common with nineteenth-century evolutionist doctrines than with modern anthropological concepts of culture, societies evolved in a universal pattern from primitive, irrational forms to modern, liberal-rational entities. At the same time, however, that approach was part of an emerging pragmatist perspective that had as one of its central tenets, according to one historian, "a belief that inquiry itself could stabilize and sustain a culture." Science, maintained foundation executive Wickliffe Rose, "determines the mental attitude of a people, affects the entire system of education, and carries with it the shaping of a civilization." In any event, if the scientific attitude was in fact the "genius" of modern civilization, a cultural core that eventually permeated and absorbed the peripheral areas, then from the foundation's perspective to concentrate solely on the essentials made sense.¹¹

In their faith in their ability to manage the introduction of Western rationality, the CMB's founders were in perfect accord with E. B. Tylor's dictum that "the science of culture is essentially a reformer's science." According to the prevailing horticultural analogy, that scientific core could be transplanted from culture to culture, with far-reaching consequences. Typical was the remark of one foundation representative, who wrote while in China: "If a living root were planted, with fruit and seed, how rich and fertile the soil might prove to be." Similarly, Roger Sherman Greene, the PUMC's first resident director, was talking about more than medicine when he hoped that

¹⁰ Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago, 1981), 100-01; Robert K. Merton, *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, ed. Norman W. Storer (Chicago, 1973), 264; Elvin Hatch, *Theories of Man and Culture* (New York, 1973), 22; "China Conference of the Rockefeller Foundation, January 19 and 20, 1914," p. 141.

¹¹ George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., *The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911: A Franz Boas Reader* (New York, 1974), 221; George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York, 1968), 105; Morton G. White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt against Formalism* (New York, 1949), 53; David A. Hollinger, "The Problem of Pragmatism in American History," *Journal of American History*, 67 (June 1980), 92-100; Waldemar A. Nielsen, *The Big Foundations* (New York, 1972), 56. For criticisms of the emphasis on science, professionalism, and elitism, see E. Richard Brown, "Rockefeller Medicine in China: Professionalism and Imperialism," in *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad*, ed. Robert F. Arnove (Boston, 1980), 123-46; and Bullock, *American Transplant*, 44-47.

"a little help wisely applied from outside might set in motion internal forces that would themselves produce results of the greatest benefit." The belief that cultural change would occur by slow diffusion of the scientific ethos to the tradition-bound masses was inarguably elitist, but the foundation hoped that, as with the progression from seedling to forest, the PUMC's effects would in time be widespread. The foundation's outlook was also, undoubtedly, self-serving; no altruism is altogether devoid of self-interest. Given all that, however, it was a species of idealism, partly because of its liberal historicism, but also because of the underlying conviction that ideas, rather than power, were the key to fundamental social and cultural change.¹²

In principle, at least, the CMB was an experiment in mutual adaptation, or acculturation, whose goal, as described by Paul Monroe, was "the amalgamation of the culture of the West with that of the East so that the best of each may be retained and the least valuable of each eliminated." On the symbolic level, the architectural design of the PUMC, with its traditional sloping tile roofs disguising the modern two- and three-story buildings beneath, was selected deliberately "to make the college not something imposed from without, but an agency which shall in time become an intimate, organic part of a developing Chinese civilization." In another concession to Chinese cultural sensibilities, the institution's founders intended it to become autonomous, with responsibility and control gradually passing to the Chinese. If the devolution of responsibility was the "ultimate aim," however, it would perforce be reached only through "a painfully slow process" of acculturation to Western scientific values. Paradoxically, according to that formula, the Chinese could assert their individuality and independence only after they had satisfactorily internalized universal—that is, liberal-rational—ideals. Despite all the references to two-way traffic, for the time being at least the thoroughfare of scientific internationalism would be a one-way street.¹³

The foundation's cultural ambitions were evident also in the choice of a nonmedical man, Roger Sherman Greene, Jerome D. Greene's brother and a veteran of the consular service in China, as resident director of the PUMC. Roger Sherman Greene viewed the PUMC as an instrument of international functionalism, as another device to produce the interdependence that Emile Durkheim called "organic solidarity." In Roger Sherman Greene's words, "by working together in international trade, in communications, education, scientific research, public health, and other normal human activities, the final step to some form of political organization that shall safeguard the peace of the world may prove less difficult and less revolutionary than it has hitherto

¹² Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (2 vols., Boston, 1874), II, 453; Frederick L. Gates Diary, Dec. 15, 1915, pp. 488–89, box 33, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Roger Sherman Greene, paper prepared for joint conference of National Medical Missionary Association of China and Medical Missionary Association, Jan. 1917, box 25, *ibid.*

¹³ Paul Monroe, "A Report on Educational Conditions in China, Rockefeller Foundation," [Autumn 1913], p. 2, box 9, *ibid.*; "The CMB: A Memorandum on Purpose, Policy, and Program," Dec. 3, 1919, box 25, series 601, *ibid.*; Rockefeller Foundation, *Annual Report, 1917* (New York, 1918), 44. See also the carefully worded rationale by Raymond B. Fosdick. Fosdick, *Story of the Rockefeller Foundation*, 91.

appeared." At the same time, consistent with the metascientific purposes of the PUMC, he recognized that functional interdependence could be cemented only by the diffusion of universal, scientific norms. He realized also that this transvaluation of values could be achieved only with difficulty, and he was not shy about warning graduates of the premedical school of the value conflicts that their modern scientific education would bring them. "You will free yourselves from many errors and prejudices that have limited you in the past," he told them and predicted that, in moments of crisis, "you will feel the necessity of holding firmly to the truth as you see it, and frankly avowing the new faith to which you have come." Although harboring no illusions about the difficulties of deracination, Roger Sherman Greene suffered no doubts concerning its desirability.¹⁴

For the first ten years of its existence, the CMB set about energetically in its mission to regenerate the Chinese spirit. It erected an imposing physical plant and undertook the promotion of advanced research and special studies, the training of doctors and nurses, and a program of fellowships and grants-in-aid to missionary medical institutions. The CMB's activities were furthered also by the extracurricular interests of its resident director, who maintained close ties with the American diplomatic community in Peking. Roger Sherman Greene was instrumental in channeling the second remission of the Boxer Indemnity into the creation of the China Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Culture, which, "devoted to the development of scientific knowledge," nicely complemented the Rockefeller Foundation's cultural interests in China.¹⁵

In the mid-1920s, however, the status of the CMB and the foundation's attitude toward its China program underwent a significant change, partly as a result of events within China, partly for financial reasons, and partly because of a reorganization of the foundation. In China an upsurge of nationalism produced a series of regulations from the Ministry of Education that demanded at least nominal Chinese control over private educational institutions. For the CMB, the message was painfully clear: the time was fast approaching when Chinese influence within the medical school would be predominant. More important, perhaps, as a cause for concern were the unexpectedly heavy demands that the PUMC had placed upon the foundation's financial resources. To deal with those problems, the foundation in 1928 separated the CMB from the foundation, incorporated it as a separate entity, provided it with an endowment, and placed it on a diet of decreasing annual subsidies in the hope of stanching the financial hemorrhage. With Chinese representation on the

¹⁴ Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (Glencoe, Ill., 1960), 111-32; *Addresses and Papers*, 52-53; Roger Sherman Greene, address delivered at opening of the second year of the PUMC premedical school, Sept. 1918, box 62, China Medical Board of New York, Inc. Records [Rockefeller Archive Center]. For a biography of Roger Sherman Greene, see Warren Cohen, *The Chinese Connection: Roger S. Greene, Thomas W. Lamont, George E. Sokolsky and American-East Asian Relations* (New York, 1978).

¹⁵ Bowers, *Western Medicine*, 40-44, 47-60, 63-75; Ferguson, *China Medical Board*, 13-59; Bullock, *American Transplant*, 78-95; Roger Sherman Greene to Marjorie K. Eggleston, June 15, 1925, box 53, series 1, RG 4, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.

PUMC board and with Chinese administration of the college, but with funding and high policy continuing to emanate from New York, it was hoped that both Chinese sensibilities and the foundation's desire to retain ultimate control could be satisfied.¹⁶

The severance of the CMB from direct foundation supervision and the cessation of what had been an open-ended budgetary commitment were the results also of some disillusionment with the PUMC's performance. The foundation expressed a growing concern, as one memorandum later put it, with "assuring a greater return on the Foundation's previous large financial investment, particularly in connection with the PUMC." Gates, by now a foundation elder statesman, noted in an acerbic 1927 memo to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., that China was in anarchy, with little prospect of stability, and concluded that "we should for the present reduce our commitments to the minimum and await developments." His skepticism was perfectly consistent with the original belief that the PUMC and medicine were not ends in themselves. As always, the foundation made policy judgments in terms of its major goal of influencing the course of Chinese civilization in a liberal direction, and here it found little evidence of substantive achievement.¹⁷

The reappraisal was related to an organizational and philosophical ferment then taking place within the foundation that had the indirect effect of downgrading its medical experiment. A reorganization of the various Rockefeller philanthropies in 1929 and their placement under the umbrella of the Rockefeller Foundation in a new divisional structure produced a greater centralization and articulation of purpose. That reorganization was in part the result of a feeling that Rockefeller giving had developed "historically"—that is, chaotically—and that a bureaucratic hardening of the arteries, accompanied by the development of vested interests, was preventing a more rational use of funds. To provide a badly needed sense of direction, the foundation adopted "the advancement of knowledge" as its guiding strategy, a principle that had been implicit in much of its giving but that only now received systematic articulation.¹⁸

Those changes, far from signaling an end to its interest in China or in its objectives, enabled the foundation to define more sharply the relationship between ends and means. In 1924 Flexner stressed that "progress depends, in the first instance, on neither money nor machinery, but on ideas—or, more accurately, on men with ideas. . . . It is with ideas rather than projects that the Foundations must concern themselves." Therefore, with the exception of the global campaigns against disease conducted by the International Health Divi-

¹⁶ Bullock, *American Transplant*, 48–65; George Vincent to Roger Sherman Greene, Dec. 13, 1927, box 13, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Thomas M. DeBevoise to Raymond Fosdick, Dec. 18, 1926, *ibid*.

¹⁷ Selskar M. Gunn, "China and the Rockefeller Foundation," Jan. 23, 1934, box 12, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Frederick T. Gates, "World Philanthropy," Jan. 7, 1927, box 3, Frederick T. Gates Papers [Rockefeller Archive Center].

¹⁸ Vincent to Roger Sherman Greene, Dec. 18, 1925, box 13, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; report of Committee on Reorganization, Nov. 5, 1926, box 19, series 900, RG 3, *ibid*.

sion (IHD), the focus would henceforth be on the funding of research rather than on education in general or on operating programs.¹⁹

Crucially, however, the new emphasis was on knowledge that could be applied, not on knowledge for its own sake. Influential figures such as the lawyer Raymond B. Fosdick, soon to become the foundation president, believed that scientific analysis and tested fact should be made available for social purposes, to the point that he could speak almost mystically of "the possibilities of ultimate social intelligence." Reflecting that new instrumentalist orientation, a resolution adopted by the trustees early in 1929 stipulated that henceforth "the possibilities of social experimentation were to be kept constantly in mind." A few years later a foundation officer stated more bluntly that policy would aim at "the advance of knowledge, with the idea of social control as a general guiding line."²⁰ From that perspective, the problem with the PUMC was its ivory tower preoccupation with pure research, not its emphasis on science and knowledge.

The reorientation took place in a decade when the fledgling social sciences appeared to be on the verge of a takeoff in their development, which the Rockefeller philanthropies had done much to promote. The foundation perceived nothing sinister or undemocratic in the renewed faith in the possibilities of scientific social intelligence. As Edmund E. Day put it, "If we cannot get anywhere with the scientific attitude in the social field, if we cannot effect anything like substantial control on the basis of scientific study of social phenomena, then the prospect of civilization assumes different color." It seemed as much a matter of historical necessity as of ideology to pursue the new branch of knowledge to its widely ramifying frontiers.²¹

Granting the beneficial consequences of the change of direction, some trustees, nevertheless, blanched at its practical implications. "We used to be so careful about entering politics," moaned Frederick Strauss, thereby illuminating one reason behind the foundation's earlier fixation with medicine; the new approach seemed to him to be "loaded with dynamite." His objections were overridden, however, by the arguments of Fosdick, who reassured Strauss that the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, another family philanthropy, had long been engaged in such funding and that, moreover, foundation interests were adequately protected by a policy of indirect funding. "If there is any taint about this work," he concluded—a point that he was not prepared to concede in any case—"the taint is once removed."²²

¹⁹ Abraham Flexner, memo, Jan. 18–19, 1924, box 22, series 900, RG 3, *ibid*.

²⁰ Raymond B. Fosdick, *Chronicle of a Generation: An Autobiography* (New York, 1958), 275–78; resolutions adopted Jan. 3, 1929, box 1, series 910, RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; "Report on the Conference of Officers of the Rockefeller Foundation and General Education Board, October 10–11, 1938," box 23, series 900, *ibid*.

²¹ Social Science Division staff minutes, Jan. 14, 1930, box 1, series 910, RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Donald Fisher, "American Philanthropy and the Social Sciences: The Reproduction of a Conservative Ideology," in *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism*, ed. Arno, 238–39. For social control as "a central theoretical thrust" of sociologists by 1920, see Morris Janowitz, *The Last Half-Century: Societal Change and Politics in America* (Chicago, 1978), 39.

²² Henry van Wesep, notes of informal meeting of Rockefeller trustees, officers, and directors at Princeton, Oct. 28–30, 1930, box 22, series 900, RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.

The new concern with social research merged with the foundation's traditional interest in public health to produce a comprehensive approach to social control. By 1930 the foundation was displaying interest, through the IHD, in promoting holistic programs of community development in southeastern Europe. Foundation officers increasingly discussed whether the foundation was "equipped or prepared to undertake a program looking towards the systematic and uniform advance of all essential phases of life in a restricted area, hoping thereby to meet the full needs of the community rather than an isolated need such as public health." That pattern of thinking, revealing an awareness that public health was necessarily bound up with social, economic, and political conditions, led inexorably to the conclusion that planned improvements in public health demanded the application not only of medical expertise but also of the knowledge derived from the various social sciences. Viewing those functional interconnections in a broad political and historical context, foundation officers hoped that the development of prosperous and stable communities would ultimately "produce a form of Government which would bring increased welfare and well-being to the people." As it turned out, that all-inclusive conception of rural reconstruction received its most extensive trial not in Europe but in China.²³

The Rockefeller Foundation's China program in the 1930s was the brain-child of Selskar M. Gunn, a foundation vice-president and director of the IHD's European programs. In mid-1931 Gunn visited China and was displeased with what he saw. Using a phrase that was sure to catch the attention of foundation policymakers, he reported dramatically that "Western civilization is under fire in China." The government in Nanking left him with the feeling, as he related to foundation president Max Mason, that "it was more like a group of youngsters running a high school society rather than the affairs of a country of 450,000,000 people." Another visit caused him to question, given the prevalence in China of amateurism and rampant nationalism, the value of the PUMC as an instrument of modernization. "It is a fair question if the results obtained are commensurate with the effort," he wrote. Gunn concluded that the foundation's program in China was "no longer in touch with the times or the best we could find." Rather than admit defeat, however, Gunn argued that the foundation was still "singularly well adapted to take a significant part in helping China in its struggle for stability and progress."²⁴

What Gunn and his associates had in mind was prosaic in description but breathtaking in conceptual sweep. While on the surface concerned with questions of agricultural economics such as animal husbandry, veterinary medicine, and plant breeding as well as with equally down-to-earth problems such as sanitation and public health, their ambitious proposal was nothing less than a design for comprehensive social planning. In that schema, "rural

²³ Selskar M. Gunn, statement in brief summary of the conference of trustees and officers at Princeton, Oct. 1930, box 4, series 911, *ibid.*; mimeographed excerpt from George K. Strode diary, Feb. 25, 1931, box 1, series 910, *ibid.*

²⁴ Selskar M. Gunn, "Report on Visit to China, June 9–July 30, 1931," box 12, series 601, RG 1.1, *ibid.*; Selskar M. Gunn to Max Mason, Jan. 23, 1934, *ibid.*

reconstruction" was a euphemism for broad social reform under social scientific auspices. Foundation policymakers recoiled only at making explicit what they had in mind. Typical of their caution was Day's warning that "it is unwise to put rural reconstruction in China explicitly under the caption of social planning. To do this has no advantage, and some manifest disadvantages."²⁵

As the program was conceived, the goal of helping China was only incidental to the larger experiment in social control and planning that would bridge what was recognized as the existing "disjunction between scientific research and social practice." Indeed, Gunn justified the program before the trustees with the argument that China "provides the social sciences with something which has heretofore been lacking, namely, a 'laboratory', where experiments can be carried on under controlled conditions." Gunn's assistant in China, John B. Grant, held out the prospect of broader applications. He argued that "demonstration of principle can take place in China long before it will occur in this country due to the absence of vested traditional interests in the former." Grant's view exemplified the belief that traditional societies possessed fewer structural impediments to accelerated modernization than existed in the industrialized societies. The Committee on Appraisal and Plan, reporting to the foundation trustees in December 1934, agreed that "indeed there is a sense in which China might become a vast laboratory in the social sciences, with implications that would be international in scope." Although Gunn had hoped to integrate his multidisciplinary program with the foundation's other divisional interests, the China program was inaugurated in 1935 as an enterprise outside the foundation's existing bureaucratic structure. The program's autonomy was in itself a sign of the importance attached to it.²⁶

The instrument originally selected to implement the China program was the Mass Education Movement under the leadership of Yale-educated Y. C. "Jimmy" Yen. Following World War I, Yen had created, under Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) auspices, a literacy program that relied on the one thousand most commonly used Chinese characters, which were imparted in only ninety-six hours of classroom work with the help of specially devised textbooks and educational techniques. By the mid-1930s Yen claimed to have provided forty million Chinese peasants with basic reading skills. On the assumption that literacy was only a means to improving the conditions of life,

²⁵ John B. Grant, "Principles of the China Program," March 1935, box 14, *ibid.*; Edmund E. Day to Gunn, June 25, 1935, box 12, *ibid.*; John B. Grant interview by Saul Benison, 1960-1961, transcript, pp. 350-52, Columbia Oral History Collection (Columbia University, New York). Fosdick somewhat disingenuously discusses the experiment under the heading of "Agriculture." Fosdick, *Story of the Rockefeller Foundation*, 183-84.

²⁶ China Program Progress Report, July 1, 1935-Feb. 15, 1937, box 13, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; John B. Grant to Gunn, Oct. 25, 1934, box 2, *ibid.*; report of the Committee on Appraisal and Plan, Trustees' Conference, Dec. 11, 1934, box 24, series 900, RG 3, *ibid.* Peter Buck argues that Americans were faced with a choice between socially irrelevant science or scientifically irrelevant social programs, either of which would ensure some form of Chinese backwardness. The rural reconstruction program, by blending science, reform, and politics, was designed to overcome that dilemma. Buck, *American Science and Modern China*, 220.

Yen branched out into new fields, tackling matters such as scientific agriculture, cooperative marketing, public health, and, not least, the integrity of local government. Gunn described his initial meeting with Yen as "one of the most inspiring accounts of any activity that I have heard." The premise was that, by the bootstraps of research and education, one could pull the Chinese peasant out of his poverty and backwardness. By 1935 the Chinese government had given Yen the run of a county (*hsien*) of 400,000 population as a field for his experiments, and Gunn proclaimed his success to be "one of our major interests in China."²⁷

Yen's work had one major drawback, however. From the foundation's perspective, the Mass Education Movement's usefulness lay mainly in promotion and application rather than in the process of research, which was more properly the sphere of the universities. The foundation's purpose was, after all, "to bridge the gap between knowledge and its utilization," and knowledge must be developed by academic experts. Thus when Yen ran afoul of provincial authorities in mid-1936, the foundation saw this as a "blessing in disguise" and took the opportunity to recast the rural reconstruction program along lines more in harmony with its social scientific bent. In April 1936 Grant formed the North China Council on Rural Reconstruction (NCCRR), which represented a number of leading Chinese universities in addition to Yen's organization. The NCCRR, viewed as "a more logical and permanent social training and investigative organization," soon became the centerpiece of the China program.²⁸

In its desire to achieve practical results, the foundation early had decided to provide support "chiefly to projects which have government connections." The rationale for that approach, as well as an explanation of the foundation's enthusiasm, was evident in the justification for a grant to the NCCRR in 1937:

In China, which is very backward and less organized [than the United States], it is possible for universities to obtain the actual operation of government organizations through the appointment of university staff members to important administrative positions, such as magistrates, commissioners of education, civil affairs, etc. This control, at least at the beginning, is fundamentally important and essential if the social sciences are to be provided with what might be termed opportunities for controlled laboratory facilities.

Through the creation of departments of economics, public works, social administration, and civil administration and by its authority to nominate officials, the NCCRR was in a position to bring together research, training of personnel, and political administration in a single, all-encompassing package.

²⁷ Extract from 1931 Gunn report, box 7, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Gunn to Mason, March 23, March 24, 1935, *ibid.*; Grant interview, 325A, 325B. In 1929 John D. Rockefeller, Jr., personally contributed \$100,000 to Y. C. Yen's organization. Roger Sherman Greene to R. H. Tawney, Nov. 24, 1932, box 7, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.

²⁸ Gunn to Mason, Sept. 9, 1935, box 14, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Gunn to Fosdick, Sept. 25, 1936, box 7, *ibid.*; mimeographed excerpt from Confidential Monthly Report to Trustees, Feb. 1937, box 10, *ibid.*

Thus the revised organization appeared to provide a unique opportunity for combining knowledge with power.²⁹

A survey of the foundation's grants provides a clearer picture of its intentions. In addition to funding the obligatory programs in composting, developing modern farm implements, controlling gastrointestinal diseases, and plant and animal breeding, the foundation made more socially oriented expenditures. It awarded funds to studies of birth control since it viewed population increase as "an outstanding problem" for China. It provided moneys for transforming elementary schools into "integrated schools" that would become the "dynamic source of activities of all kinds" (each village schoolteacher to be a "generalissimo" who would coordinate and guide village activities). Adequate library services, vocabularies and grammars for adult education, studies of educational finance aimed at a more equitable distribution of funds, research aimed at finding out "how . . . the unsophisticated rural Chinese really think," public health programs, funding for a clearing house for rural reconstruction efforts throughout the country, fellowships—all those and more were intended, as a progress report stated, to constitute "a comprehensive experimental program of research, education and application, designed to bridge the gap between a rural medieval society and twentieth century knowledge."³⁰

Overshadowing these plans was the question of the Nanking government's willingness to back a program of social reform in the countryside that was bound to upset vested interests. Unfortunately, Chiang Kai-shek's dilemma would remain unchanged for years to come: the existing system, by perpetuating inequities in land tenure, played into the hands of the Communists; but a program of thoroughgoing reform aimed at eliminating the Communist danger would undermine the elites that formed the mainstay of Chiang's regime. In any case, the foundation was by no means unaware of the political pitfalls awaiting it. "What concerns me in terms of the China program," Gunn wrote to Fosdick early in 1937, "is to arrive at a conclusion as to the real honesty of the Chinese Government in connection with its National Reconstruction program." A letter from Mayling Soong Chiang (Madame Chiang) intended to offer praise and encouragement for the foundation's experiment, might also have caused serious concern. While lauding the idea of rural reconstruction, Madame Chiang also confided that it fit in nicely with "the spirit and aims of the New Life Movement," a reactionary, neo-Confucian drive that harmonized only superficially with the foundation's objectives in China.³¹

The potential differences with Chiang's regime never came to a head, however, as the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937 marked the

²⁹ Grant authorization #37148, April 7, 1937, *ibid.*; John B. Grant interview, 331.

³⁰ See grant authorizations 4, 6–10, 35–36, [1937], box 10, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Franklin Ho interview by Crystal Lorch Seidman, 1965–1966, transcript, pp. 112–13, Columbia Oral History Collection. For details of the rural reconstruction program, see James C. Thomson, Jr., *While China Faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China, 1928–1937* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 140–48.

³¹ Gunn to Fosdick, Feb. 23, 1937, box 14, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Mayling Soong Chiang [Madame Chiang Kai-shek] to Gunn, Feb. 5, 1937, copy in box 12, *ibid.*; Thomson, *While China Faced West*, 152–60.

effective end of the China program. At first, the effects of the war were not all negative, for the transfer of the major Nationalist institutions to western and southwestern China provided opportunities as well as setbacks, especially for Yen's organization. It directed complete political restructurings in Hunan and Szechwan, and the establishment of a school of public administration further strengthened its connection with the government. One of the foundation representatives on the scene even argued that the Mass Education Movement was now in a position "to lay the foundation for a reformed political system."³²

That view turned out to be wishful thinking. Overall, as Gunn acknowledged to Fosdick, the outlook for the China program was "pretty wretched." Because the experimental field areas of the NCCRR were in the war zones, all field work had to be relocated and started afresh. More seriously, the universities, which formed the institutional core of the program, were either under Japanese control or had been forced, with all the attendant disorganization, to relocate. Even assuming containment of the conflict and continued Nationalist interest and funding, relocation and reorganization under wartime conditions could accomplish relatively little. Problems of distance, transportation, and communication were great enough effectively to bury the idea of a program based on cooperating educational and political institutions. After a period of oscillation between despair and renewed hopes of success, by 1939 the NCCRR was clearly "a dormant or inactive body." Consequently, the foundation pursued an "orderly liquidation" of the program by providing tapering grants to the main institutions over a period of four years. Those outlays were justified as "conservation" grants that sought to hold together the assembled experienced personnel, in the hope that they might find postwar employment under governmental auspices.³³

The foundation's fascination with China and the emphasis on socially applied research were also evident in the projects funded by the Humanities Division in the 1930s. Despite some calls for the addition of a humanistic dimension to the foundation's China policy, prior to the appointment of David H. Stevens as director of the Humanities Division in 1932 it had provided funds mostly for arcane antiquarian studies and conservative work in graduate schools. With its new interest in social control, the foundation replaced its rarefied view of culture with a determination to put cultural values to practical use. Soon the foundation's aspirations in that area turned decidedly nonacademic, as the "controlling purpose" became "to increase the importance of cultural values in contemporary life." The new consensus

³² Grant to Gunn, May 11, 1938, box 7, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Selskar M. Gunn, "Recommendations for China Program, 1939-1940," March 24, 1939, box 13, *ibid.*

³³ Gunn to Fosdick, Dec. 30, 1937, box 14, *ibid.*; Gunn to M. C. Balfour, Sept. 9, 1940, *ibid.*; Thomas B. Appleget to Gunn, March 1, 1940, *ibid.*; transcript of telephone conversation between Gunn and Fosdick, Jan. 24, 1940, *ibid.* Another factor in the decision to terminate the program was a growing disillusionment with Yen's administrative talents. M. C. Balfour complained that "he seems to be mostly words, words, words!" Balfour to Gunn, Jan. 1, 1940, box 12, *ibid.*; Grant, memo, July 24, 1937, box 14, *ibid.*; Gunn to Balfour, Dec. 12, 1939, *ibid.*

demanded that "the values of the humanities be brought more directly into contact with daily living." As Stevens later put it, the humanities "have no part in 'pure research', or in antiquarian knowledge for its own sake; their reference is always to human conduct and expression."³⁴

In 1934 the Humanities Division announced an explicit interest in promoting international understanding through cultural means. Stevens was convinced that the humanities, like the sciences, were internationalist in thrust and that they could advance the same progressive cultural mission. His thinking was informed by a universalist Enlightenment belief that an interchange of cultural values, in addition to reducing international tensions caused by misunderstanding, would result in "the discovery of common origins for differentiated national ideas and ideals." The program was also culturally relativist in the sense that it stressed cross-fertilization and cultural trading while it specifically rejected "selling" ideas and even outright giving in the spirit of charity. Yet in this mixture universalism predominated, with the result that practice often differed from preachment. For example, after praising the idea of cultural autonomy, Stevens could still conclude that "the usual distinction of developed and backward countries is as sound with relation to cultural interests as for public health."³⁵

With Stevens assuming the role of "patron saint" in Far Eastern studies, China became the main focus and model for the humanities program in cultural relations. The foundation implemented the program partly by funding satellite organizations such as the Institute of Pacific Relations and the American Council of Learned Societies, which were concerned with improving United States–East Asian relations at the intellectual level. Some of the foundation's money went also into building the archival and bibliographical tools of a new bilingual scholarship. The most important step, however, was a program of fellowships by which Chinese and American scholars could become acquainted with each other's cultures, thus becoming interpreters of their societies and ambassadors of mutual understanding and goodwill. The foundation envisioned the training of new, strategically positioned educational elites who would have influence beyond their relatively small numbers: "It is highly desirable [that] attention be given to the placing of these men at strategic points of national influence. They and their followers will produce the translations and the official expositions . . . that will help the next generation to live in a 'spherical' world." In that view cultural interchange, education, and political internationalism were interlinked parts of a single evolutionary process of mutual accommodation. That the United States lagged behind the more nationalistic European powers in its promotion of Asian

³⁴ David H. Stevens, "Time in the Humanities Program," Sept. 1949, pp. 1, 7, box 2, series 911, RG 3, *ibid.*; David H. Stevens, "Aims of the Program in the Humanities," Nov. 18, 1934, p. 1, *ibid.*; "Report of Committee on Appraisal and Plan," Dec. 11, 1934, p. 73, *ibid.*; "The Humanities Program, A Review of the Period 1934 to 1939," Oct. 25, 1939, p. 8, *ibid.*

³⁵ Mimeographed extract from agenda of Special Trustees Meeting, April 11, 1933, *ibid.*; David H. Stevens, "The Humanities in Theory and Practice," March 31, 1937, pp. 5–6, *ibid.*

scholarship was an additional factor in the decision to speed the program's development.³⁶

For the humanities the central problem of internationalism was language, both in its role as a barrier to communication and in its possibilities as a vehicle of improved understanding. One facet of the internationalism of the 1930s was a renewed interest in an auxiliary international language—auxiliary, because native tongues could not be replaced in the foreseeable future. Linguistic internationalists were divided into two camps: those who favored the adoption of a constructed language such as Esperanto, whose chief virtue was its relative freedom from the taint of cultural imperialism; and those who advocated the spread of a living language such as English, whose main selling point was its already widespread use. The main thrust of linguistic reform in the 1930s, however, was the desire to address the nuts and bolts issues of the language question. According to the anthropologist Edward Sapir, the idea of an international language was no longer discussed solely in idealistic terms but was “more and more taking on the aspect of a practical or technological problem and of an exercise in the cleaning up of the thought process.” Once the technical breakthrough was achieved, though, its implementation was another matter.³⁷

The foundation's contribution to the solution of those problems was to foster the spread within China of the system of Basic English, a creation of the pioneering linguistic work of the English scholars I. A. Richards and C. K. Ogden. Ogden and Richards felt that the future lay with English, not least because it was technically analyzable into a compact number of 850 words and operations that provided all the essential meanings. Indeed, in their remarkable attempt to get at the essence of language, the two felt they had achieved an age-old dream: the distillation of a “limited set of words in terms of which the meaning of all other words might be stated.” Explaining the structure and function of Basic English, Richards frankly avowed the internationalist purpose behind his technical innovations. “We can no longer risk letting any large section of the human race live in separation,” he argued, “cut off from the fullest possible communication with the rest.” By 1940 over one hundred books, including of course the New Testament, had been translated into Basic English.³⁸

³⁶ David H. Stevens to Gunn, June 22, 1933, box 1, *ibid.*; “New Program in the Humanities,” April 10, 1935, box 3, *ibid.* For David H. Stevens's role in Far Eastern studies, see Robert E. Yahnke, ed., *A Time of Humanities: An Oral History: Recollections of David H. Stevens as Director in the Division of the Humanities, Rockefeller Foundation, 1930–50, as Narrated to Robert E. Gard* (Madison, 1976), 61–69. One of the Rockefeller fellows was a young scholar by the name of John King Fairbank. Stevens to Gunn, June 22, 1933, box 1, series 911, RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.

³⁷ Edward Sapir, “The Function of an International Auxiliary Language,” in Herbert N. Shenton, Edward Sapir, and Otto Jespersen, *International Communication: A Symposium on the Language Problem* (London, 1931), 93; Herbert N. Shenton, “A Social Problem,” in *ibid.* 13–18.

³⁸ I. A. Richards, *Basic English and Its Uses* (New York, 1943), 5, 18, 26; mimeographed excerpt from Trustees Confidential Bulletin, April 1940, box 1, series 911, RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives. Actually, Basic English displays characteristics of both a constructed and a living language. See Mario Pei, *One Language for the World* (New York, 1958), 234–35.

The Orthological Institute of China, which Ogden and Richards formed in 1933 to implement their linguistic idealism, soon became the recipient of Rockefeller Foundation grants. It conducted experimental classes, taught courses in a number of universities, experimented with radio broadcasts, and undertook the translation into Basic English of Chinese and English classics. After war broke out in 1937, the institute concentrated its work in Kunming under the direction of Robert Winter of Tsinghua University. With the cooperation of the Ministry of Education in Yunnan province, it hoped to train enough teachers to staff the schools adequately. As with the rural reconstruction program, however, the war spelled the effective end by 1943 to the foundation's role.³⁹

The practical task of the Orthological Institute was to institutionalize the effective teaching of Basic English in Chinese middle schools. Between the immediate technical objectives and the long-range internationalist aims, however, lay an intermediate set of ideological assumptions concerning Chinese cultural requirements. Richards and R. D. Jameson of Tsinghua University sought to reorient Chinese intellectuals away from their classical humanist concerns into modern scientific modes of thought. According to Jameson, the program's object was "to make available to Chinese the logical or analytical habit of thought which has been the cause of much of our own progress in the sciences." It was, presumably, an antidote to what he termed the "synthetic" habits of Chinese thought. Pleading for continued funding for the institute in 1939, Richards argued that "the mental quality, as I see it, of the future China may turn upon it." For all its originality, that linguistic experiment represented but another twist in the foundation's continuing concern with inculcating the spirit behind the scientific method as a basic cultural trait.⁴⁰

With the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Rockefeller Foundation's cultural initiatives in China, for all practical purposes, came to an end. Although foundation staffers continued to express a concern with China's world-historical destiny reminiscent of that voiced thirty years earlier by foundation patriarchs, the isolation and chaos of wartime China, a ruinous inflation, and an unadvantageous rate of exchange precluded any new program departures. The postwar years proved equally unpropitious for action as the social and political upheavals of civil war ruled out any substantive expenditures. If anything, the civil war furnished convincing arguments for divestiture, and in 1947 the foundation took the opportunity to sever its commitment to the

³⁹ "The Orthological Institute," n.d., box 48, series 601, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; grant proposal, May 15, 1942, *ibid.*; memo by John Marshall, April 26, 1944, box 13, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ R. D. Jameson, "Notes on the Present Position of Basic in China," March 7, 1935, box 48, *ibid.*; I. A. Richards to Stevens, March 8, 1939, *ibid.*; mimeographed excerpts from Trustees Confidential Bulletin, April 1940, box 1, series 911, RG 3, *ibid.* At the same time that he sought to introduce Western analytical concepts to the Chinese with a minimum of cross-cultural confusion, I. A. Richards wanted classical Chinese humanist thought to remain accessible to Western and Chinese scholars. I. A. Richards, *Mencius on the Mind: Experiments in Multiple Definition* (London, 1932), xiii.

PUMC, which had long been a substantial and worrisome drain on its financial resources. Thus until the Nationalist-Communist conflict ground to a military decision in 1949, the various foundation divisions were reduced to waiting anxiously for opportunities that never came.⁴¹

What can we make of that forty-year experience? That the foundation's programs were, at least in part, successful is unquestioned. The foundation introduced Western medicine—to be adapted by the Chinese to their own purposes, to be sure—and, in a number of other disciplines, both Chinese and Americans derived badly needed knowledge of each other as a result of the foundation's generosity and foresight. These were always secondary objectives in the foundation's hierarchy of priorities, however. Through a variety of instrumentalities—medical, social scientific, and humanistic—its overarching goal had been to influence the course of Chinese civilization and to channel it in a liberal-democratic direction. If measured in terms of the cultural objectives that it proclaimed repeatedly, the most striking feature of the foundation's involvement was the disparity between the immensity of its ambition and the meagerness of its results. If that was cultural imperialism, it was characterized more by hubris than by hegemony, as China's culture refused to fit itself to the pattern of the foundation's vision.⁴²

Despite its fixation on the scientific ideal, the Rockefeller strategy was guided less by objectivity than by what modern social science, somewhat belatedly, has come to recognize as an ethnocentrically distorted vision of the modernization process. A factually complex historical relationship between modernity and tradition was converted, in the foundation's belief system, into mutually exclusive ideal types, a polarity that was further rigidified by a normative overlay in which modernity was identified with virtue and tradition with vice. That all-or-nothing thinking in which modernization was equated with Westernization, American-style, left little scope for the operation of what has been called the "modernity of tradition," whereby modernization can be based on indigenous values and institutional structures that are both more adaptable and pertinacious than imagined. Most parochial of all, perhaps, was

⁴¹ Joseph Willits, memo, Sept. 30, 1942, box 23, series 900, RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives; Willits and Roger Evans, memo, Jan. 4, 1944, box 13, *ibid.*; Fosdick, memo, March 29, 1944, *ibid.*; Fosdick, memo, Oct. 21, 1946, box 12, series 601, RG 1.1, *ibid.*; Ferguson, *China Medical Board*, 197–98.

⁴² For the foundation's assessment of its achievements, see Raymond B. Fosdick, "Foreword," in Ferguson, *China Medical Board*, 5; and Fosdick, *Chronicle of a Generation*, 274. For the charge of cultural imperialism, see Brown, "Rockefeller Medicine in China." This accusation seems excessively dramatic. Although imperialism is a form of power, not all power relationships, the cultural variety included, are imperialistic. Any contact between cultures at different levels of development is bound to be asymmetrical and is more sensibly described, at least initially, in terms of power differential than of empire. A sensible criterion for determining the existence of "informal imperialism" is what Tony Smith calls "effective domination," something the foundation hardly exercised over Chinese culture (the desire to achieve it is something else again). Tony Smith, *The Pattern of Imperialism: The United States, Great Britain, and the Late-Industrializing World since 1815* (Cambridge, Eng., 1981), 6. Moreover, the adoption of a culture of science, with all the dilemmas implied in such a course, is an objective that most developing societies themselves choose, sooner or later, to pursue. Finally, although the foundation assumed otherwise, it seems clear today that science can be promoted in a wide range of political contexts.

the foundation's transparently historicist faith in the inevitable triumph of the liberal World Spirit, a faith that made no allowances for the less reassuring outcomes of the real historical process.⁴³

Those assumptions, so beguiling in theory, appear to have had little connection to hard realities. Nowhere was the foundation's idealistic innocence more evident than in its stubborn faith in the capacity of ideas to effect fundamental social change. By reducing internationalism to the internationalism of science, it based its hopes on an intellectual formula that ignored the social and political determinants of scientific endeavor; and in choosing to stress the causal efficacy of science, foundation planners neglected the fact that science, which was at least as much consequence as cause in the history of Western development, would also have to come to terms with Chinese history.⁴⁴ The idea of modernization through science, although favored by a few Chinese intellectuals, never provided a serious alternative to the idea of a politically grounded transformation, with the result that the foundation's political strategy consisted of little more than naive faith that its purposes would somehow be acceptable to the powers that be. That position amounted, despite hopes to the contrary, to a dissociation of knowledge and power that isolated the foundation's modernizing ambitions from the revolutionary realities of Chinese politics.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the foundation's experience was not irrelevant to America's China policy, past or present. From the standpoint of institutional development, the pioneering experiments in cultural relations, as in so many other areas of public policy where corporate philanthropy took the lead, provided a classic example of the transition from private to public management.⁴⁶ After the foundation's efforts faltered in the late 1930s, the federal government soon stepped in to take up the slack as the State Department's newly created Division of Cultural Relations launched a China program of its own in 1942. Discontinuities existed, of course, especially in the department's eagerness to promote the diffusion of liberal political ideals in contrast to the foundation's recondite emphasis on the culture of science. Such differences aside, the State Department's cultural efforts, which relied heavily on the enthusiastic co-

⁴³ For typical revisionist views of modernization, see Samuel P. Huntington, "The Change to Change: Modernization, Development, and Politics," *Comparative Politics*, 3 (April 1971), 293-98; Joseph R. Gusfield, "Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change," *American Journal of Sociology*, 72 (Jan. 1966), 351-62; and Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago, 1967), 3-14.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Merton, *Sociology of Science*, 266, 272-73, 278.

⁴⁵ For a similar conclusion with respect to education and politics, see Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations, 1916-1952* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 247-48. For the debate within China over the value of science and liberal rationalism, see D. W. Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought, 1900-1950* (New Haven, 1965), 3-160; Jerome B. Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), 94-135; and Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 333-37.

⁴⁶ Nielsen, *Big Foundations*, 379-80; Robert H. Bremner, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago, 1960), 3; James A. Field, Jr., *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776-1882* (Princeton, 1969), x.

operation of the philanthropic and educational establishments, closely resembled in conception and execution those of its philanthropic precursors. Thus to the extent that the pre-World War II United States can be said to have had an organized policy of cultural relations at all, it was a private policy heavily influenced by corporate philanthropy.⁴⁷

If the foundation's practices were precedents for the government's debut in the specialized realm of cultural diplomacy, its assumptions also transcended their immediate philanthropic locus by virtue of their lodgment in high policy. That was less a result of direct influence than of a common cultural outlook, for the foundation's views were at the same time reflections of basic American values and expressions of the American belief that the progress of world history was shaped more by cultural processes than by power relationships. Consequently, we cannot be surprised to discover those beliefs as a crucial ingredient in America's Open Door policy, an official doctrine that envisioned the creation, in the ritual phrase, of a "strong, democratic China." The Open Door policy has usually been thought of as an economic strategy designed to maintain the United States' position in the shifting East Asian power balance. If a "strong, democratic China" was indeed the desideratum of United States policymakers, however, it is more accurately comprehended in terms of modernization, which, as C. E. Black argues, can be thought of "primarily as acculturation—the adoption of the culture traits of another society." In contrast to the official diplomatic record, which understandably focuses on reporting the dramatic political upheavals in East Asia, the Rockefeller experience reveals in their pristine form some of the cultural assumptions underlying United States policy.⁴⁸

For all its obvious shortcomings, we cannot dismiss the Rockefeller effort as so much quixotic idealism or "sentimental imperialism," if only for the negative reason that straightforwardly political or imperialistic techniques would have been even less effectual.⁴⁹ We can, however, draw a more positive conclusion as well. Although their diagnosis of China's ailments proceeded from excessively ethnocentric assumptions and although their prescription for recovery lacked an appreciation of the need for revolutionary political medicine, in their dogged attachment to cultural modernization foundation thinkers nevertheless grasped the essentials of the historical situation with a more solid appreciation of the national interest than those who viewed China from the avowedly "realistic" perspective of balance of power and political ideology. For in their realization that international dynamics went beyond

⁴⁷ Wilma Fairbank, *America's Cultural Experiment in China, 1942-1949* (Washington, 1976); Frank Ninkovich, "Cultural Relations and American China Policy, 1942-1945," *Pacific Historical Review*, 49 (Aug. 1980), 471-98.

⁴⁸ Michael Schaller, *The United States and China in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1979), 71-73; Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations* (New York, 1967), 117-24; Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: An Interpretative History of Sino-American Relations* (New York, 1980), 41, 51, 250; C. E. Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History* (New York, 1966), 50.

⁴⁹ James C. Thomson, Jr., Peter W. Stanley, and John Curtis Perry, *Sentimental Imperialists: The American Experience in East Asia* (New York, 1981), 310-11.

the commonplaces of power politics and in their intuitive insight into the growing international importance of modernization, they were essentially correct in their interpretation of the broad sweep of history.⁵⁰ Their imperfect, culture-bound understanding of historical dynamics contributed to numerous ironies and misperceptions in the Sino-American relationship, some of them tragic. As the present Chinese leadership's concern with modernization and science attests, however, that understanding at least had the virtue of being historically relevant to questions that remain of fundamental common interest and continue to bind the two nations together.

⁵⁰ For arguments stressing the coequal status of modernization and power, see Edward L. Morse, *Modernization and the Transformation of International Relations* (New York, 1976), xiv-xviii; Marion J. Levy, Jr., *Modernization and the Structure of Societies: A Setting for International Affairs* (2 vols., Princeton, 1966), II, 734; and Ralph Pettman, *State and Class: A Sociology of International Affairs* (New York, 1979), 65, 264-65.