

Chapter 2

Evaluation of Chinese Student Fraternities in America

One of the most remarkable phenomena of Chinese student life in America in recent years is the rapid growth of fraternities, secret or semisecret. It will be out of question for an outsider to give any cross-sectional view of the whole phenomenon. But upon one who is deeply interested in things social and psychological, and who in one way or another has friendly relations with many members of the fraternities, the phenomenon cannot fail to make a very strong impression. Many other outsiders, who have either thought that the grapes are sour or have never thought about the subject at all out of sheer aloofness, have indeed been indifferent and silent. This, of course, is not a reason why the problem, as such, should not be seriously studied and appraised; for to a student, and such we all are or should be, nothing, if it could be helped, should escape his attention. Study and appraisal of any social problem, let it be further stated, does not, when properly orientated, come into collision with the generally accepted liberal principle of noninterference.

It is interesting enough to look into the problem purely as an intellectual one. But the problem means more. We deem it not only pertinent, but imperative that it now be entitled to the public's attention. It affects deeply, for good or for bad, the Chinese student life in this country at this hour; and it threatens, for good or for bad, to affect the social life of Chinese communities in the near future, because, for real or ostensible reasons, the individuals now connected with the phenomenon, will be the guiding forces of these communities, especially as the phenomenon itself is very likely to be carried back on such individual's return trip.

There have been many guesses made to explain the genesis and development of secret or semisecret fraternal orders among Chinese students here. The institution is peculiarly non-Chinese. It is certainly true that secret fraternities for political reasons have existed in China; the late Dr. Sun Yat-sen was once a leading figure of

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some such organization. Secret fraternities for antisocial pursuits of many “colors,” it is also true, have come into notice and are still to be found. But it will be next to imbecility to identify the present secret fraternities among us with either kind, justifiable or even honorable as it sometimes was. Fraternities of quite another type known collectively as the “Orders of Gold and Orchid” have found a place in our cultural history, but these were usually composed of not more than half a dozen individuals and were not secret or even semisecret; they were simply friendships sanctified, not through humiliating initiations before ordinary mortals, but in the awe-inspiring presence of the spirits of ancestors and of Nature.

The secret and semisecret fraternal orders among us are *adaptations*. They are Western, and particularly American, as we shall soon see. We shall also notice that these adaptations did not come about as a result of conscious deliberation, but are rather unconscious makeshifts to “meet” the exigencies of American life. Some of these fraternities are Greek lettered, although it must be owned that many of their members will be at a loss to name the entire Greek alphabet in its original symbols; their knowledge of the Greek letters would be indeed no more than their ignorance of the etymological significance of a few simple characters of their native tongue. Other fraternities suggest, at least one would gather from their titles, possible affiliations with “The Royal Riders of the Red Robe,” “The Knights of the Flaming Sword,” “The Loyal Order of the Moose,” etc., so peculiarly American. In short, most of the titles embody symbols of a religious, militant, biological, and etymological significance of which our forefathers never dreamt.

The secret and semisecret fraternal orders among us thus appear, grossly, to be unconscious and unthoughtful adaptations of some of us to American life. Such an inference on the part of the public is at least justifiable in view of the fact that it has been denied, by the very nature of the case, a thorough understanding of the internal operations of these organizations; and be it further noted, no public should be insensitive enough as to be fully unaware of the existence of something which, for good or for bad, will soon affect its own welfare, and to neglect to pass judgments thereupon.

But the verdict “unthoughtful adaptation” does not by any means exhaust the question. There must be deeper causes leading to such an adaptation.

It is said that in this matter of fraternities, as he is in many other matters, the Chinese student simply obeys the very primary psychological dictum—imitation. It goes without saying that the factor of imitation, so fundamental in human behavior, plays its part; and there are doubtless some among us who put so high a price upon American culture as to insist on learning everything it has to offer. In college, they rub elbows with members of many Greek-lettered fraternities; as workers getting practical experience, they come into knowledge of fraternal organizations of a business and recreational nature; and they take to it.

An explanation based upon the law of imitation alone, however, is far from sufficient; and, besides, it is derogatory and unjust to the individuals concerned to be labeled mere mimics.

Studying in a foreign country is a mighty precarious and discomforting business. It is often embarrassing. In fact, the mere thought of being away from home for so long a distance both in time and space, and of having to endure the bustling and jostling of much city life, in extreme contrast with the tranquility and self-sufficiency which many of us enjoyed as country lads, shakes our nerves and makes us reach for some prop, lest we fall. From without, there is the inexorable phantom of race prejudice, haunting one wherever one goes. In many cases, such a phantom is literally a phantom; it is a product of our own mind; nevertheless, it is effective as a factor in inducing changes in our behavior. Such feelings, it is true, are mitigated to a large extent by the efforts of foreign friends who show a great deal of ethical and religious interest in us. But, then, we feel we are patronized; these friends, we think, do not really understand and have high regard for us, they are kind to us for professional and obligatory reasons. Thus, between the state of stranger and protégé, the average Chinese student is left to oscillate, and many there are who do not know where to hold themselves and be at peace.

Now we are nearer the explanation. But we need another factor to make it at least plausible. In the absence of a large number of compatriots, a Chinese student thus situated has certainly a hard time in adjusting himself. But when there is a sufficiently large number of his countrymen present, such as in some of the big cities, the problem resolves itself into a much simpler one. Individuals similarly situated would soon band together to form a *compact* unit, and by their mass alone, they gradually refuse to further oscillate and soon attain a state of relative equilibrium in which they can rest. In other words and to dispense with the figure, such Chinese students, by gathering themselves into *close* units, succeed in warding off the unfavorable influences, real or imaginary, attendant upon the mere state of being outlandish, from around them. As separate individuals they are more self-conscious than self-confident in the presence of a strange, if not hostile, environment; but by so grouping together, their overdeveloped self-consciousness, which is often painful, is dulled and their self-confidence strengthened, thus making life more bearable.

But were I to stop here, I would miss the whole point of making the study at all; and although I myself hold the above explanation fundamental, very few others would be convinced of its correctness. Collateral and more special reasons must be given.

In a preceding paragraph, the words “compact” and “close” were italicized, for here lies a very significant point. It deserves some scrutiny. It seems that mere banding together is not enough to help the individuals feel less acutely the storm and stress of life in a foreign community. They must be more adherently welded together. “Societies” or even “clubs” are too commonplace, they must have “fraternities”; “membership” or even “friendship” is too prosaic, and they must have “brotherhood”; the expression of willingness to abide by the rules of the fold must be “sanctified,” and initiation, with its tasteful salts and acids, slips into the shoe of a simple ceremony. The individuals as individuals shall be so humiliated at the outset that his wishes and activities in the future shall not run counter to those of the group which means so much for all. The public shall not be permitted to poke into the affairs of the group, nay,

it shall remain ignorant even of its existence. In a word, it must have exclusiveness, for exclusiveness alone insures security. And what we have is secrecy and semisecrecy, which characterize most, if not all, of the fraternities.

But wherefore must this extreme longing for security, one would ask. Here, we tread upon the ground of a small but real bit of American philistinism. There are, it is reported, more than 600 fraternal orders, in one form or another, in existence today in the United States, and over 7 % of the population belongs to them. It is further remarked that these fraternal orders usually have their nuclei in the small towns, and that they supply, with their secrecy and other paraphernalia, a real psychological need called forth by the deadly monotony of democratic conventionalism. Again, it was pointed out, whereas there is a sense of self-insufficiency and inferiority in all of us at one time or another, it is especially potent in some individuals, so much so that they must try hard, unconsciously, to cover it up by collecting themselves into groups, oath-bound and protected with an inveterate veil of secrecy. "It is particularly strong," says Professor Mecklin, in the case of the Ku Klux Klan, "in the man of narrow outlook who chafes under a sense of his own insignificance and grasps eagerly at the mask and robe as a means of gratifying wounded pride or cowardly spite."

Now, how much of this is true with the secret and semisecret fraternal orders among the Chinese students? It would seem that if the phenomena are more or less of the same nature and have their roots in a more or less similar soil, the same explanation would more or less apply. Our explanation would be different from theirs in degree, but not in kind.

In the first place, it will be argued that the fraternal orders among us do not constitute a small town movement. On the contrary, it is in the metropolitan cities that we find them most active. Quite so. But let us examine more closely. When we say that the deadly monotony of small town life is a cause in producing the fraternal orders of the American citizens, our emphasis is not on "small town life," but on its "deadly monotony." And here we have our explanation. A great number of Chinese students, it is true, are living an extremely urban life, where attractions and distractions abound. But what of it? In a foreign community, with but restricted financial resources to take advantage of the cultural facilities, with no families to share his emotions, with a heavy schedule of class or laboratory exercise if he is a regular student, or a drab routine of office or factory work if he is getting practical experience, it would be nothing short of an act of Providence if the average Chinese student does not turn, in the course of a few years, into a veritable Babbalanja so skillfully presented by Mr. Sinclair Lewis. Metropolis or small town, it makes little difference to an average Chinese student; to him drabness and dreariness, circumstances have so conspired to ordain, is the lot, and therefrom he must find an escape.

But we are not through. We often hear it said that in America, and as a part and parcel of philistinism, respectability has taken the place of morality, at least in practice. Unfortunately, there seem to be not a few among us who have acquired quite a smack of this American idea, motivated, of course, by slightly different causes. From the very beginning, we were made to feel that we are unofficial representatives of China, and our resolution was: wherever we go, we will be good bills and posters for our motherland. Such a resolution is admirable, provided the individual

so resolving has enough stuff in him to appear in some way a finish product of an Oriental culture and has enough nerve to be frank and true to facts where the motherland fails to live up to her best. Such “unofficial representatives” of course cannot be too many; and with their absence, the resolution degenerates; it does not break down, but it comes to center around rather insignificant matters; and lo, we have among us respectability.

Now respectability in small town life is a direct causal factor in producing drabness, and an indirect one in the formation of the fraternal orders, in the case of American citizens. With us, the daily scrupulous attentions bestowed upon ourselves, upon other people, and sundry other affairs, all for “social” reasons and for fear of being in the least offensive to others, put a heavy premium upon the nerves. With the free atmosphere, we enjoyed in our boyhood and early youth, such exacting conventionalities are indeed great contrasts. “When you enter a foreign country, learn first its rules of conduct” is indeed a bit of commonsense international ethics understood and practiced by our forefathers; but such a traditional saying, when carried to its extreme, and for weaker souls, is very pernicious; it smothers the spirit to differ and enhances the desire to conform, to follow the line of least resistance, and it is upon conformity and complacency that respectability and moral stagnation rest. We are here to show our differences as Chinese, and we need no apology for doing so. We miss the entire idea of truly representing China, which, as a national and cultural unit, is so very unlike America or any other country. As at present, many of us are no longer *foreign* students, but, upon our own initiative, we are going through a process of rapid assimilation, which the American government has never intended for foreign individuals of our status.

The above appears digressive. But it is not to be denied that all these facts tend to increase the tedium and monotony of our sojourn here. The very fact that some of us are being rapidly Americanized explains partially their status as members of fraternal orders, a characteristic American institution. Furthermore, it must be noted, the rapid assimilation going on is after all exotic to our racial psychology and early upbringing, and, as a result, consciously or otherwise, some mental conflict is bound to arise, which makes the yearning for escape all the more acute.

Then there is another factor, and a very important one. To many foreigners, it would seem that most Chinese students, during their stay here, enjoy absolutely no sexual life, and have little emotional outlet. While this of course is not exactly the case, nobody among ourselves will be so blind as not to admit that there is a great deal of self-restraint or repression going on. Some are already married, but have wives at home and these are often unsatisfactory; others, in great majority, are yet unsettled. There is a great disparity between the number of girl students and that of boy students; and even for pure and simple “social” purposes, it is extremely hard to find an equitable distribution. The company of American girls, though not unwelcome, is after all not so very desirable, as may entail racial and biological consequences. Dancing halls are indeed inviting, but these, again, heavily tax the purse, and as students, few can afford to frequent them.

The fraternity, as we have already intimated, serves a functional purpose. It is able, at least to some extent, and after a fashion, to solve some of the problems just

enumerated. In the absence of a normal amount of association with the opposite sex, some psychological inversion is bound to take place, and this the fraternity life proposes to harbor and satisfy. Further such an assortative grouping among the boy students simplifies the question of sex distribution. Henceforth, it appears, a good number of boy students will act as a unit in keeping company with the girls, whose status is now slightly comparable to that of the sponsors among the cadets of some of the Midwestern universities. Such girls are called, somewhat endearingly, "adopted sisses."

An individual in situations such as described above soon finds his way into a fraternity, or, if he does not, he has not yet the chance. Or, if he is of a rather individualistic type and has enough leadership and personality at the same time, he will organize one himself.

There of course cannot be too many leaders. While the Chinese students as a whole are often taken to be quite a selected group by foreigners, it will be flattering ourselves to say that all of us are potential leaders. As a matter of fact omitting the sore spots at one end and a few really brilliant ones at the other, we form a pretty mediocre lot. Under an apparent eagerness to learn, an evident brain capaciousness to store information—the retentive power of the Chinese students, as compared with students of other countries, is said to be proverbial—and a sincere desire to adapt, even only to relatively insignificant matters, most of us have passed for superior students and made a very favorable impression. But, I am afraid, such is not the real case. Better and truer judgment will come when we are no longer students as such. At least one American student of psychology has intimated that the adaptability of Chinese students to modern cultural situations is only apparent, is short-lived, and perhaps soon stops after the end of college life—an alleged fact which explains the backwardness of the country despite repeated attempts at reconstruction.

This appears again to be running off the tangent. But the central point is that there are among us many who do not think clearly, who find it hard to make independent judgments, and who lack sufficient self-reliance and must find their self-expression (here somewhat paradoxical), not as individuals, but in groups, in which the individual as such is submerged. An individual of this description forms a good recruit for fraternities once already organized.

Here in a group of like-minded compatriots, he is finally at home. Here, a kind of psychological affinity between the members obtains. He addresses other brothers and is so addressed in return, and there is congeniality. He shall go through a sort of ordeal called initiation resembling the third degree—the one difference being that the one presses something out of, the other presses something into, the person. He shall not know the details of the process until he cannot help knowing them, else, we may be sure, he might have to reconsider his decision. But he is more than compensated for that; he is now within the fold and feels warmly its impact around him and for him. He soon comes to think that the ordeal is after all a mere form, like the baptism of the Christians (whom, by the way, he has often affected to despise). Finally, he comes to regard the ordeal a necessity. It *is* a necessity, of course, for the preservation of the group. He will before long have the pleasure of seeing some others going through the same process. No matter what religious affiliations he has,

it is here, in this matter of fraternity initiation I take it, that he experiences an enforced but real bit of mysticism—a sense of absolute surrender.

But with reference to friends and acquaintances of the outside world at large, the member of a fraternity is still an absolute individual. But he is now different. He has acquired a new status and belongs no longer to the common lot. He has a whole cohort of “brothers” behind him. He is to be envied. Under the cover of secrecy or semisecrecy, he is now also something of a mystery, to be so recognized, but not to be unveiled. Theoretically and from the above analysis, we would expect that his secrecy cannot be too absolute; he must at least make known the simple fact that he is now a member of a certain fraternal order. Absolute secrecy would defeat the purpose for which it is used. And this appears to be the reason why while the public is practically wholly ignorant of the *modus operandi* of the fraternal organizations, it is usually informed, through some channel or other, as to who are the *fratres* and who are not, and is able, further, to tell their particular affiliations with unwonted precision.

The reader may object to the above on the ground, first, that there are many strong men in the fraternities who are also recognized leaders by the student public at large; and second, that most, if not all, of the fraternities have as their immediate purpose the cultivation of friendship through mutual assistance, and as their more remote purpose the redemption of China through their cooperated service.

It would be far from me to have neglected these phases of fraternity activities. Personally I have a good number of friends and acquaintances in the fraternities whom I myself have long acknowledged to be leaders of no mean caliber. I have also been led to notice that considerable progress has been made along the lines indicated in the latter part of the objection. Individuals who until their admission into a fraternity were of an unduly reserved and self-sufficient type, have since their admission become sociable and fully convinced of the value of the principle of mutual aid. At least one of the more serious-minded fraternities has launched a program for the reconstruction of China to be carried out later on, and it is already in the process of preparing a sinking fund.

To all these high-minded endeavors, I pay my due respect. There are indeed many who sincerely believe that organizations in the form of fraternities can do a good deal more for their members and for China than mere professional societies or patriotic groups, in which close cooperation and sympathy are not guaranteed. While I do not myself subscribe to such a belief, I fully sympathize with those who cherish it, for reasons to be shown in a latter part of our discussion. But it must be said that the manifest phases of fraternity life enumerated above do not really come into conflict with my contention in a psychological analysis of the problem. They do not constitute valid grounds for an objection. Nay, they even throw sidelights on the truthfulness of the psychological background of fraternity life. A more detailed examination of the validity of the objection raised will now follow.

No matter what group activities one joins and no matter how heartily and honestly one joins them, there is always a personal equation—a borrowed term to denote the sum total of the wishes and desires, conscious or otherwise, of the individual—which

lies behind and demands, through the group, expression. This personal equation has long been termed with much opprobrium selfishness. It *is* selfishness; but none needs necessarily to be ashamed of it. It is in everyone of us; and so long as it results in good to the individual without encroaching upon other individuals, it is not readily to be condemned; and if it results in good to others at the same time, as it often does, so much the better. Indeed it will not be far from truth to say that all social endeavors are based upon mutual selfishness, a basis which does not in the least detract the worth of such endeavors. It may also be said that altruism is a roundabout expression of egoism, and an extremely valuable expression at that.

It appears, therefore, that no social group exists purely for disinterested and idealistic purposes. The fraternal order is no exception. At best, such ideals as embodied in a constitution represent some common practical beliefs of the members as a whole, apart from the selfish (in its nonmoral sense) ends that each in his own way pushes to attain. At worst, these ideals are mere platitudes, moral abstractions, and stereotypes, which have been instilled into the minds of the individuals from childhood, and what is more unfortunate, they are often taken advantage of by unscrupulous leaders to perpetrate truly antisocial deeds.

The fraternities among us, it must be credited, do embody ideals at their best. Cooperation and patriotism, let us further remember, are two practical ideals in which the Chinese as a race have hitherto proved to be rather deficient.

But the existence and practice of ideals do not by any means invalidate my proposition that the fraternity is an adapted institution on the part of some of us to *American* life, with all the psychological and sociological implications outlined in this discussion. The ideals of the group and the wishes and desires of the individual are coexistent. We tend to take cognizance only of the former, because they are manifest, whereas the latter are masqueraded, often behind the very ideals.

We must now come to meet the objections based on the point of leadership. We have already seen how fraternity members play the relative role of followers and how they find satisfaction out of so playing. Now, the role played by the leaders is no less a psychological necessity, though of a somewhat different nature. No healthy individual will absolutely spurn a bit of "agreeable inflation of the ego," when he is offered one; and the so-called leaders are just those who by their own resourcefulness and personality are able themselves to regulate the valve, so to speak, so that the amount of inflation is kept constant or increasing without stretching themselves to the breaking point. This much is at least true of all leadership, that of the fraternal commonwealth not excepted.

To be more concrete, I will cite two reported instances. One student among us was approached to be a member of a certain fraternity. He courteously declined. The reason was, as he later told others, that he was *unwilling* to be "one of their standard-bearers and to march in their train." Now to be a "standard-bearer" as understood by the Chinese is in no sense complimentary, and no individual, this gentleman thinks, with sufficient personality and independence of judgment would fain be one. The second instance is more significant. During the early history of the

fraternity movement, a student, a man of great business ability, was denied admission by a fraternity; thereupon he organized one himself. The two rival fraternities are still living and prosperous. These two instances well testify to the fact that to be a leader does not have a peculiar kind of psychological satisfaction—an agreeable inflation of the ego; and that in playing the part as one the individual is not, and cannot, be motivated by ideals alone. This is pointed out without any defamatory implication, for, as we have already hinted, the will to dominate in the leader and the willingness to be dominated in the follower, when they are properly meted out and do not lead on the one hand to tyranny and to docility on the other, constitute no social menace; in fact, they are essential for social progress.

In this connection, we must recall a very important question which for years past has confronted the Chinese student as a body and our younger generation in general. It has been noticed for some time that *esprit de corps* is woefully deficient among us. We do not cooperate. Maybe we lack true leaders who can make us work together willingly and harmoniously. But the more important reason is, I think, that altogether too many want to play the first fiddle; and of course no orchestra can be formed. During a recent rather elaborate social entertainment given by the Chinese students in an eastern city, three different individuals ridiculously contested for the chairmanship that the affair was almost dropped and that, unable to reach a decision, the office was finally given to a girl student, with whom, as a matter of course, none is manly enough to compete! There is at bottom a wrong philosophy. If Western education has unwittingly done any harm to us at all, it is this: it has awakened the petty ego in us without showing us, as a better system of education should and will do in the future, how petty it is! In following the will-o'-the-wisp of an eighteenth century Western view of society, we have left behind us and forgotten the torchlight in the injunction which Mencius quoted, "Not to be able to command others, and at the same time to refuse to receive their commands is to cut one's self from all intercourse with others." "If I cannot issue orders, I can at least refuse to accept any" is the "social sense" of not a few of us.

To remedy this unfortunate situation, the fraternity has again stepped in; for group life must go on. In ordinary times, big organizations are not feasible among us. Smaller organizations of a professional nature are workable, but not very successfully. But the fraternity, the secret fraternity fares well! Why? The constituents are the same; the fundamental social outlook is the same; but the psychology has changed. As we have all along noted, the components of a fraternity are not mere members, discrete and unrelated, but brothers, organic and indivisible; and being brothers, why should they not work together? *Con*-sanguinity suggests *sym*-pathy. We all know the difference between a social affair and a family affair, into the execution of the latter few need to be coaxed. The difference between the members has now resolved itself into one of mere age, and not of ability or talent; for in a fraternal order one leads as a big brother and another follows as a younger one. The rugged stones have become pebbles, and there is little friction; and all this is due to a twist of psychology. This is no new discovery on the part of the fraternity organizers; it is age-old; it forms an essential part of the Christian religion,

which, with its “fatherhood” and “brotherhood” (and “motherhood” and “sisterhood” in addition in the case of Catholicism) has long been a “family” affair; else, we may be sure, it could not have been invincible.

We are now in a position to appraise the problem.

We have seen that the fraternity forms a part of the adjustment that some of us made to an American environment; that it supplies a psychological need in a great variety of ways—in a word, it is a means to social control among us. Inasmuch as it is helping some of us, as a more or less exclusive group, to make life more worth living, due credit should be accorded to the institution.

But the Chinese students taken together form a much bigger social group than the members of all the fraternities combined. Real social control and welfare, therefore, must have reference to the Chinese students as a whole, not to the same in separate and discrete units. From such a standpoint and one we should take, the fraternity as an institution, while very “social” in the vulgarly accepted sense of the term, seems almost unsocial, or even antisocial. This indictment is by no means hastily made; it has its basis on the practice of secrecy or semisecrecy, which characterizes most, if not all, of the fraternities. To the social value of this important phase of fraternity life we shall now turn.

In 1897, during a period in which secret societies greatly flourished in America, a book of essays entitled *Secrecy and Citizenship* was published by some Congregationalist ministers. The opposition as herein expressed were based on political, moral, and religious grounds. We will neglect the religious issue, but examine the other two which bear upon our problem.

Secret societies, it is argued, are unpolitical and unsocial. They are incompatible with free democratic institutions, “citizenship in a free state seeks the equal welfare of all the members of the same. . . . But an oath-bound, exclusive, secret society—whether a monastery, a convent, a lodge of Jesuits, or of Free Masons, the Mafia, or the Clan-na-Gael, or whatsoever else refusing to permit the state, that is the whole people to know its purposes and methods, closed in by hostile and repelling barriers, shutting out the state and its representatives as such—not only has no place as a friendly and essential body within the state, but is contrary to the purpose and character of all those other groups, which make up the essential parts of the state” (*Secrecy and Citizenship*, quoted by J. M. Mecklin in *Ku Klux Klan*).

While the Chinese students in this country do not form a state, they nevertheless constitute a social and in a sense political group, and as such the above characterization and disapprobation of secret societies will apply. Viewed from within, the fraternity may be a centre of friendly intercourse, but from without, the student world at large, it has not unfrequently proved a source of disturbances. In general, it is felt as a spot with referred pains refusing to be definitely located and traced. In student activities, it becomes the hotbed of “politics” to which the public can point but vaguely. For individuals of a same interested group and with real ability to monopolize, a number of offices are in itself not to be condemned, indeed sometimes to be welcomed, provided the fight is open. In the absence of openness, which alone guarantees the public from being abused, it is no wonder that suspicions

of all sorts have made a series of targets out of the fraternities. The more secret the order, the stronger and more numerous the suspicions.

In activities of a "social" nature, the same is true; and here the fair sex is again involved. Evidences there are that certain fraternities have practically, though perhaps unwittingly, put a patent on some of the girls; and consequently not a little jealousy and ill-feeling have come to pass between different orders, especially on important "social" occasions.

Why must the fraternities keep secret or semisecret? Apart from the psychological explanation I have attempted to give on a preceding page, there have been conjectures from without and justifications from within. Some of the conjectures, if proved, would tend to discredit the organizations altogether; they paint all fraternities embryo political cliques soon to replace those now in power; they indeed maintain that not a few "politicians" so gestated are already in field. While I am no idealist and have not too much faith in the goodness of human nature, I cannot restrain from suspecting that strictures so wild cannot have come but from those who not uncommonly proclaim the grapes sour on not being able to reach them. For there is the other side to the shield. Secrecy or semisecrecy is often justified by the members on the grounds of expediency. One fraternity has explained to the effect that unless they keep silent for the present, their plans for serving China in the future may be disrupted or frustrated, and they are not particularly in the mood to count the eggs without having them first hatched; again, that unless publicity is withheld, too many may want to come in and thus destroy the homogeneity which belongs to a smaller group and is necessary for close cooperation, and they do not feel disposed to incur the displeasures of others in denying them admittance. Secrecy, they further explicate, will be dispensed with as soon as the organization is full fledged and ready for public service.

Now who is to judge? As long as the curtain is down, fraternity life will remain a topic of curiosity and adverse criticism to officious individual outsiders and a cause of anxiety to the general public, no matter how much one chooses to explain. It is decidedly a bad policy. Besides, it has always appeared to me that in insisting on the point of secrecy, aside from the psychological significance which their members would gladly disown, the fraternities have betrayed considerable weakness in spite of the compactness of their union. In their fear for jeopardizing their constructive schemes, they show a lack of sufficient self-assurance and of unity of purpose. Undue caution, which is often indistinguishable from want of courage, is divulged in their unwillingness to offend others to whom admittance is denied. A policy of expediency is in itself a precarious one, for its helpfulness is not insured; and it looks particularly unattractive in view of the pressure which the outside world is bound to bear upon it and the anxiety such pressure may call forth from inside the group. It is not to be surprised if the policy has up to the present done more harm than good to those who practice it.

The public should be tolerant to those fraternities which are secret mainly to expedite matters which are worthy and honorable (that they are such will first have to be assured); but from those who think that, in shutting themselves up in close compartments, they derive pleasure from defying and nonplussing the bigger

community outside, such tolerance must be withheld, not to say those which have come to harbor and foster petty politics, tending to make student life abroad all the more disreputable. A fraternity so veiled and fortified will soon cease to be a mystery and stronghold; it is then a social nuisance and as such deserves to be socially persecuted. It may not be out of place for me here to quote a piece of news from a recent issue of the *New York Times*; it will show how the Americans themselves have become tired of secret societies, while we only begin to have them! It reads:

High school students who are members of school fraternities may lose their diplomas if new regulations proposed before the Board of Education banning secret societies are acted on favorably by the Board's Committee on Law, to which they were referred yesterday.

The by-law provides that "a member of a secret society, secret club or secret organization shall be declared ineligible to membership in honor society or organization in the schools, to receive any scholastic honor, to hold any school or class office or to participate in any school or class election or in any public school exercises or athletic or any contest as a representative of the school."

It is further provided that a student participating in any of the above activities shall sign a declaration that he is not a member of a secret society. If the pledge is later proved to be untrue the student will be debarred from receiving the diploma.

Just imagine if the Chinese Student's Alliance and the various educational missions were to pass such a law!

There is current among fraternity members another ground on which they justify the practice of secrecy. It is held that secrecy keeping is a part of an individual's inalienable right, and no one should be so impudent as to question it. What fallacious logic! As separate individuals, they and all of us have a certain amount of privacy with which the public is not supposed to meddle. But individual privacy is not the same as group secrecy. As components of a group which belongs to a bigger one, the individuals become social units, and being such they owe to the community as much fairness and squareness as necessary for common welfare. From justifications like this, it is indeed to be lamented that we, at least some of us, who assume the responsibility of introducing Western culture to China should be so parrot-like in our pursuit and yet making blunders even in the simple capacity as transcribers.

The second objection raised in *Secrecy and Citizenship* is based on moral reasons. Secret fraternities are immoral, because no man can bind himself by oath or pledge to keep secret what he does not yet know without thereby bartering away his moral freedom. This is the fundamental error in all the secret orders which vitiates everything in connection with them. . . . What the individual has thus pledged himself to keep secret may prove, when he comes to it, to be a legitimate object of secrecy, but he did not know this when he made his oath. If, on the contrary, the things which he learns, as he goes forward, prove to be iniquitous or for other reasons deserving publicity he finds himself bound, in the most emphatic way, by his own promise, not to divulge them. He must, therefore, either violate the plainest demands of his conscience and abide by his oath of secrecy or obey the present behests of duty, make known the things which he has learned, and thereby confess the sin committed

in the beginning. . . . [This situation] inevitably induces a degree of moral blindness and indifference to duty, [and it] creates among the members of the order a habit of concealment, an indirectness of speech amounting often to actual falsehood; the result is permanent impairment of the sense of truth and of truthful expression (*Secrecy and Citizenship*, quoted by J. M. Mecklin in *Ku Klux Klan*, pp. 211–212).

Now, anyone who has the slightest acquaintance or connection with the fraternities among us will find the above quotation extremely relevant even in view of the fact that some of them are only partially secret. In one fraternity at least, the exact nature and details of the initiation process are withheld from the candidate until it is too late. In this respect, it is a veritable trap from which retreat is impossible. I do not propose to enter into the moral argument at any length. It suffices to say that both as a disinterested on-looker and a friend and well-wisher of many fraternity members, I have come to see that the fraternities, if they persist in the present state of affairs, are undoubtedly tending in the direction with all its deviated paths pointed out in the above quotation. “A habit of concealment and an indirectness of speech” are often noticed when the slightest allusion is made to the question of fraternity.

Besides secrecy or semisecrecy, there are other phases of fraternity life which are of social significance. I shall desist from going into them, except perhaps the economic phase of which a word may be said. Some of the fraternity members, especially of one fraternity, who assume a sort of aristocratic genteelness with all its flourishes known as etiquette and social graces, will prove someday quite a burden for the old horse—the practical, prosaic, and poverty-stricken China—to pull. But we hope she will be more than compensated by the cooperative service of their fellow members who are less prodigal and more provident.

No matter whether the problem is viewed socially, individually, or psychologically, its keynote can be found, I think, in the single word, *estrangement*. As social groups the fraternities have estranged the whole Chinese student public. Strong indications are not wanting that there is a good deal of interfraternity estrangement due to “political,” “social,” and other reasons. As social individuals, the fraternity members have estranged their former friends and associates. The reader, if he is a nonfraternity man, will undoubtedly recall the disconcertment he felt when he discovered that a close friend of his had been initiated into a fraternity without in the least so informing him. In the case of associates for professional reasons, it is not infrequently found that interests are now divided; that the fraternity men have preferred cooperation based on secret or semisecret brotherhood, to that going abreast with open and fair competition, and have come to abandon their former affiliations, altogether or at least in spirit. There has been a decided lowering of interest in professional organizations since the spread of fraternities.

But above and worst of all is the estrangement that an average fraternity member creates in himself. This is psychological. In acting on the belief that secret fraternity life will insure cooperation and success, he barter away, as already said, his sense of independent judgment and moral freedom. In going through the process of initiation, he loses a part of his initiative. He may be weak as a personality, but in joining a fraternity, he virtually admits himself to be irremediable by his own efforts.

What wonder if it is often speculated that a mediocre individual, who would inevitably lose in the open struggle for existence and power, finds an easy refuge in secret fraternal organizations, where, by playing the role of a “younger brother,” he will in the course of time be smuggled to victory; and this often at the expense of really able and independent spirits who do not care to march under fraternity banners!

An average fraternity member simply does not understand what cooperation means, and the share that he as an individual is supposed to partake. Openness, fair competition, the realization of one’s own and others’ abilities and weaknesses, and the willingness to properly acknowledge them and thus determining the relative role of leaders and followers are factors at the root of true cooperation. As able-bodied and intelligent social individuals, not as autistic and make-believe “brothers” must we work together. For real service and lasting success, there is no psychological shortcut. This is no moralizing to one who perceives how easily we slip into the slough-pond of make-believe and mystification and thus fail to see facts squarely in the face. He who is willing to be so beguiled by his own psychology will soon find a stranger in himself.



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