

LI Zhenying

My Expectations for Russell (1920)¹

Yesterday in the evening, quite a few groups of people gathered on the local pier. They were gathering to welcome the great British philosopher Mr. Bertrand Russell, who has arrived on his first visit to China.

I also took part at the welcome reception, having been able to listen to Russell's elegant speech from the back seats. Thus, a plenitude of thoughts and feelings have occurred to me, about which I intend to write here.

England is the most liberal country in the world (unfortunately the same cannot be said about how it treats its dependent territories), which is why revolutionary parties in all countries in the World all consider it to be a haven for exiles. (For example, in the past, the famous anarchist Kropotkin (Kelupaotejin 克魯泡特金) also lived in this country.) England itself also produced a great many libertarian writers. In the past this included authors such as Byron (Bailun 擺倫), Shelley (Shali 莎裏) and others, while more recently such authors grew too numerous to count.

Since the reorganization of "Beida 北大" (Peking University), in China we have actually got the phenomenon of a "renaissance" (*wenyi fuxing* 文藝復興).

1 Li Zhenying 李震瀛 (1920). "Wo duiyu Luosu de xiwang 我對於羅素的希望 (My Expectations for Russell)." *Juewu 覺悟 (Minguo ribao 民國日報)*, October 15, 1.

Thus, the chance to enlist the most famous scholars from foreign countries and assemble them in one single room is yet another unique opportunity. Last year, following an invitation of the university, the American Dr. John Dewey assumed the post of a professor there. His teachings are very fashionable in China at the moment; all scholars of the country are desperately turning to them for solutions for all kinds of problems. It is rather unfortunate, however, that Dr. Dewey's theories are not complete (i.e. thorough), which is why they have become a great disappointment for the young. Hence, many colleagues at Beida are determined to refute his theories. American academia is not exactly a paragon of excellence. Compared with the other most advanced countries in the World, such as England, Russia, Germany, France or Italy, America is still no match for these. This was the reason why Washington Irving (Huashengtun Ouwen 華盛頓歐文) recognized that after European civilization reached America it was critically degenerated. I believe that the major enemies of American culture are religion and capitalism. Until these two things are toppled, in America there will be no space for reform. Dr. Dewey is one of America's greatest philosophers, and I cannot criticize him for that. But we must not regard his theories as sacred. The only acceptable way, however, is to try to understand things by amplifying our own way of looking at things.

Just because we have lost our hopes about Dr. Dewey, we must not despair about Russell. We must recognize that, nowadays, Russell is one of the most thorough social reformists. Because he has repeatedly received lessons from the government, he cannot but have a thorough awareness (*juewu* 覺悟, "enlightenment"). If one takes a look at his work *Roads to Freedom*, one will be able to notice that in it Russell discusses socialism, anarchism and syndicalism (*hegongtuan zhuyi* 和工團主義) in an astoundingly thorough manner. I believe that his awareness is far beyond his age, and hence also expect that the lectures which he is going to deliver in China will most certainly be even more profound. I also hope that he will deliver a more complete lecture on the *Principles of Social Reconstruction* than the last time. I hope that, unlike Dewey, in lecturing about "social philosophy" he will also not refrain from speaking about "political philosophy", as humanity cannot divorce itself from politics. Our deepest hope is that he will lecture about an extremely pure form of "social philosophy". Although I refuse to believe that Russell will be able to completely fulfil our expectations, I still believe that he will be much more successful in doing so than Dewey. But what we hope above all is that "the pupils will surpass their teacher" (*houlai jushang* 後來居上).

I have a deep admiration for Russell's personal character. In the turbulent times of the Great War, when governmental parties and capitalists of all

countries were all behaving like ferocious beasts, he was willing to sacrifice everything to be able to declare himself as a “conscientious objector” (*liangxin de dikangzhe* 良心的抵抗者) and openly oppose the war. Because of that he was sentenced to a half year in prison. This sentence, however, was not only incapable of harming him, but quite the opposite, made him to gain a more complete realization and become an extreme reformist – an anarchist scholar.

Speaking about these things I also recalled that when America first entered the war, the world’s most famous anarchists, Goldman and Alexander Berkman, also composed essays in which they argued against it, for which they were sentenced by the American government to two years’ imprisonment. They were released from prison only last year, after which in pursuit of the happiness of freedom they returned to Russia.

Nowadays in China it is often the case that whenever someone is making some trouble they already call him an anarchist. As soon as the peoples’ opinions get just a bit more intense, they are already branded as extremists. Does such a thing as extremism really exist in the world? The only ones who can really be called extremists are those governments and capitalist who are so fond of unleashing killing sprees.

Despite the fact that Russell’s father was an English Earl, Russell himself is still only a commoner. Unlike figures like Tolstoy, Kropotkin or Saint-Simon, he simply cannot be described as an aristocrat at all. Originally, in English peerage only the eldest son was able to inherit his father’s titles, while all other children had no relation to them whatsoever. They were also not given much wealth, only enough to buy some books and sustain their lives. Because this kind of system existed in England, in English history the eldest sons of nobility, who inherited all the titles, never really exerted themselves to show their skills and abilities. They simply enjoyed their high positions and lived in comfort, unwilling to handle affairs with sincerity or seek knowledge. Only the younger ones were making great efforts and stood out amongst their peers. Russell – a second-born son – also grew up in the same circumstances. Without struggle (*fendou* 奮鬥) there is no room for survival (*shengcun* 生存). This is a special lesson of English history. Hence, only difficult conditions can give rise to a genuine human talent. Our youth must engage in some hard work indeed!

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(Translated by Jan Vrhovski)