

Welcome Speech for Russell at the Chinese Lecture Society (1920)¹

The Lecture Society (*Jiangxueshe* 講學社) together with the Academy for Fine Arts welcomed Russell and Miss Black. Around 100 people attended the welcome reception, which was chaired by Wang Daxie (汪大燮). At the beginning of the reception, Liang Qichao delivered a speech on behalf of the Lecture Society welcoming Russell and Miss Black. Concurrently, he also explained the aims of the society as well as the reasons why the society has asked Russell to come to China. The speech went as follows:

Following its establishment, the first person whom the Lecture Society invited to China was the great philosopher of the new era, Bertrand Russell. It really is a great honour for us to welcome Mr Russell here today. First, however, I shall use this opportunity to explain the main objectives of the society.

With respect to the Chinese cultural movement, we have always advocated “absolutely unrestricted and maximal import” (*juedui de wuxianzhi jinliang shuru* 絕對的無限制盡量輸入), because, today, the entire world has already been reached by a destiny of reform. Within this destiny, we naturally also have to go through a period of scepticism and experimentation, which is

1 “*Jiangxueshe huanying Luosu zhi yanji* 將學社歡迎羅素之演詞 (Welcome Speech for Russell at the Chinese Lecture Society).” *Jiaoyu gongbao* 教育公報, 7(12), 23-4. The speech was also published in the *Chenbao* 晨報 newspaper (November 10, 1920).

why numerous schools of thought have emerged one after the other, which although on the surface inevitably portray numerous contradictions, each of them have still opened up the potential for achievement in the future. In the end, each one of them has its own beneficial influence. Speaking just about the nature of learning, of course there is no such thing as absolutely good or absolutely bad learning. No one can pass the judgment which says that for today's China this kind of learning is suitable while that one is not. I believe that China is a country of such vastness and richness, that our intelligence and talent, if compared with the population of any other civilization or country, can in no way be considered inferior. Now, in the time of our intellectual hunger, the concern for pursuing the truth is critical. It is as if a severe winter has finally turned into a warm and pleasant spring, and long dormant tree shoots, flowers and buds are just starting to open up. We must seize this opportunity and cultivate it, making it flourish. For that there is only one method: the absolute freedom of research. Hence, regardless of what kind of theory, as long as it has got value, we must import it, enabling people of all orientations to research such interesting theories to the fullest. Even though, on the surface, the directions which they will take may not be identical, their fruits will always bring some kind of progress to the culture as a whole. I also think that, perhaps, China can serve as a perfect testing ground for all kinds of different systems of ideas studied by scholars around the world today, something which cannot be successfully implemented in Europe, because Europe has already reached a time when its old habits are difficult to alter. Though it has got many systems that are clearly known to be good, it has got no method to realize them. Europe would have to make a great sacrifice and experience great hardship and pain to attempt this, and we still do not know how successful it would be. While, in the recent past, social progress in China has been relatively slow, we were able to observe how the progressive European states all embarked on a wrong path, and [later also] how the medicine they used to heal their ailments slowly gained the upper hand. Now, China still resembles a blank piece of paper which has not yet been imprinted with any colours. Which is why it still is not that difficult to get China on a good path. Observed from this point of view, our cultural movement is not only the responsibility of China, but in fact is a responsibility of all humanity. As to what plan would be the best one to select, we can only decide through liberal research and after we have conducted various kinds of experiments. Today, we only have to continue importing all kinds of theories without any restrictions. A choice which is different with that of the German people, will naturally bear most favourable results in the future. However, if we create scholarship individually, then it is also no doubt that everyone should end

up following their own convictions, and thus will not necessarily agree with each other. As far as the Lecture Society is concerned, it presents an opportunity for introductions. As long as they have got some value, we shall, indiscriminately of their method of approach, set out to introduce such theories. It is as if we have opened a big store. If the merchandise is of good quality, we shall always deal with it, not relying on whether people like to buy this or that kind of product. I often say that the decay of Chinese scholarship started with the Han Dynasty, when the hundred schools were dismissed in favour of the court's recognition of the Six Arts of Confucianism. If one wants to honour something, one has to dismiss something; regardless of whether that which is honoured or dismissed is correct or not, it is always an attack on the freedom of thought. Therefore, we have to open our doors widely and welcome in all the valuable teachings that exist today. To be able to teach and transfer all those theories is the main aim of the Society. This time, we take great pleasure in having invited Mr Russell and Miss Black. Because we believe that what the world needs the most today is the idealization of life and making ideals more true to life (*shenghuohua* 生活化). Mr Russell's theories are most able to satisfy this demand. What do we mean by making ideals more true to life? We humans need ideals, but if we divorce these ideals from our lives, then the ideals turn into empty playing with shadows (*wan-nong guangjing* 玩弄光景). Much of the philosophy which China has generated over thousands of years cannot be described as bad. The same can also be said about a great deal of philosophy which has been created in Europe since the Ancient Greeks. However, even though they are good on their own, because most of these ideals are so far away from ordinary life, we simply cannot gain any benefit from them. Therefore, the ideals we require need to be closely interlinked with our current lives. And what is the idealization of life? Is it possible that humans would not be willing to live without ideals? A life without ideals becomes meaningless. It is hardly the case that we spend a few decades in this world just to be food-eating machines. We consider our lives valuable only because we live for a kind noble goal. And this is why we require ideal lives. Today, scholars in all countries are moving in this direction. But probably the first and most successful of such scholars is Mr Russell. Many of you have already read his works, and I suppose that many of you are already familiar with their general idea. So that when later you are listening to his lectures, you will naturally be capable of understanding the content, without any further explanations needed from my side.

The most noteworthy thing I shall now speak about is Russell's personal character. Because he is against war, he was subjected to the severe interference

of his country's government. Later, because of his propagation of the ideal of great harmony (*datong* 大同) and his resistance to nationalism, he was ultimately sentenced to six months in prison. The book *Roads to Freedom*, which we have all read, was completed in his first few days in prison. After he was released from custody, he continued spreading his ideology with even greater passion. This is the genuine attitude of an independent and fearless scholar, a towering figure in humanity's struggle for freedom. This time, he has travelled not much less than ten thousand miles, so that, on the one side, we would be able to hear his lectures, and on the other, receive the transformative influence of his outstanding personality. In these two regards we shall not let him down, and shall instead prove ourselves worthy of his journey.

I also have a special request for Mr Russell. To explain it, I shall first make an analogy by telling a short joke. Since time immemorial, in our novels there kept appearing an immortal (*shenxian* 神仙) called Lü Chunyang (呂純陽), who was searching for men who would be able to renounce this mortal life and prosperity and become his disciples. Often, he tested people with the method of transforming stone into gold, using it as a way of gathering disciples. On one occasion, however, he ran across a peculiar gentleman; Lü took out a piece of rock, turned it into a grain of gold and gave it to that person, who refused to take it. Lü then created an even larger piece of gold and offered it to him again. Again, the man refused to accept the gold. Upon that, Lü created a small pile of gold and offered it again to the gentlemen, who again did not want to accept his gift. This made Lü Chunyang very happy. Having been convinced that he had finally found a pure hearted and desireless person, he asked him: "What exactly do you desire to have?" And the man replied: "I want to have your fingers." At this very moment we also want Mr Russell's fingers. And what exactly are his fingers? What we want him to bestow upon us is the method he himself uses in his scholarly research. If we will use his method in our research, we will naturally be able to obtain same kind of knowledge as he has. By so doing, however, we shall not turn into a second Lü Chunyang. But will we also be able to turn stones into gold? I sincerely believe that Mr Russell can understand and forgive the Chinese people's fervour for attaining erudition. And he will definitely greatly satisfy their needs. Today, speaking on behalf on the Lecture Society, I would like to extend our wholehearted welcome to Mr Russell, wishing him good health!

In turn, the speech was translated into English by Ding Zaizheng (丁在征), which was followed by a response from Russell. Here is a brief summary of his speech:

A moment ago, when I was listening to Mr Liang's speech, I felt great admiration for him. Although, for now, my fingers are still very much attached to my body, in the future, I will be most willing to give them to you. Although the European governments are very powerful and very capable of handling affairs, powerful governments are usually intimately related to the capitalists. A powerful government can still commit both good and bad deeds, while, if a government lacks power, it can neither carry out good deeds nor commit bad deeds, which is still slightly better than those powerful governments that can carry out good deeds.

As a current method for reforming China for now your humble comrade would put off advocating socialism and advocate developing the national sources of revenue instead. I believe that at present China ought to start with education, with education for common people. After the knowledge of the common people has been increased, only then China should proceed to adopting socialism. If, akin to Russia, where socialism and communism were adopted in a very short time before its common people were educated, China was to adopt it without having previously gone through this process, then a disaster could not be avoided. As regards the aspect of education, what China must urgently pay attention to now are the tools used in education: these need to be simplified. I have heard that learning Chinese characters is abnormally difficult. In comparison with Western countries, in China the process of learning the script is about four or five years longer. If, in the future, Chinese academia would want to become balanced with other countries, then the time Chinese children spend learning the script would have to be further increased for another four or five years. This clearly indicates that a major impediment is bound to be faced by Chinese academia. I hope that China will do its best to simplify its script. Adopting pinyin, for example, would also be a simple way out. As regards the scope of education, China needs to take elementary education as its starting point, letting all commoners receive appropriate education. Your humble comrade believes that Westerners' are obsessed with authority (power). China's strength resides in the fact that its people have always been less addicted to it than the former. Chinese people must not forsake China's advantages, while at the same time it must also do everything in its power to take over the advantages of the West. If in the future China will make progress day after day, then, who knows, in the end the Western people might even have to emulate China instead.

(Translated by Jan Vrhovski)