

THE GIFTS OF THE OLD CHINA TO THE NEW

 S.H. Roberts

A plea for the exchange of more real information between Australia and China, instead of political speeches and details of hostilities, was made by Professor S.H. Roberts, Challis Professor in Modern History at the Sydney University, when delivering the Morrison oration at the Institute of Anatomy on Monday. The Prime Minister (Mr. Menzies) was present.

Australia was on the verge of developing its own Pacific foreign policy, said Professor Roberts. Its future place in the new Pacific was being called into existence. Isolation of the past had gone, and Australia was no longer a distant appendage of the British Empire, safeguarded by geographical remoteness and by the British navy.

“We are a Pacific power,” he said. “China is by far the most populous Pacific power, and she is undergoing vast changes of which no man can see the end. The nations of the Pacific must come together unless that ocean, in a time when the centre of gravity in world affairs is shifting outwards from the befogged chancelleries of Inner Europe, is to be given to a future of rapine and a merciless struggle for material power.

Professor Roberts appealed for Commonwealth aid to provide facilities for Chinese studies, as were provided for Japanese studies at Sydney University. It was incredible that up to now we have had to depend on religious or philanthropic bodies to enable us to hear Chinese scholars.

Professor Roberts, after emphasising the gifts of the Old China to the new, analysed the position to see how far a New China had emerged. The main problem has been to blend two civilisations. This problem was attacked by Chancellor Tsai of the Peking National University after 1916 and later by the Kuomintang. A veritable revolution was accomplished by the transformation of the colloquial into a written language.

Despite exhaustive searches in archives and libraries, we have been unable to obtain Professor Roberts's lecture, given on 5 June 1939. In its stead, we provide the text of an article entitled “New China and Australia: Morrison Oration: Professor Roberts at Canberra” which was published in the Canberra Times on 7 June 1939. The article is reproduced here by permission of the Canberra Times.

This made possible mass education, and for the first time, vernacular papers were made available to the peasants, a revolution comparable to the Renaissance and the invention of printing in Europe.

Although 80 per cent of the people of China are still farmers, industrialisation is exerting a constantly widening effect, said Professor Roberts.

The present war has prevented the full implementation of the Four Year Plan in industry and has directly caused a transplantation that may vitally affect the whole future of the Pacific zone.

“Expelled from Shanghai, a Chinese industry has trekked west, into Szechuan, Yunnan and Kweichow,” he said. “The building of a new China in the west is one of the greatest schemes of national planning in our time. Displaced farmers followed the industrialists, bringing into realisation one of the oldest plans of Sun Yat-Sen.”

Dealing with China and the outside world, Professor Roberts pointed out that Britain holds 49 per cent of foreign investments in China, and Japan only 24 per cent.

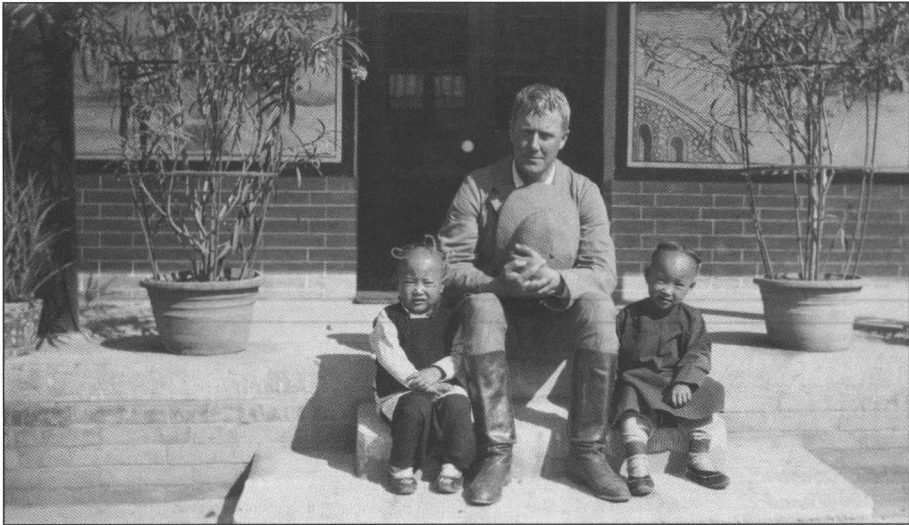
Suggestions for an all-embracing Pacific Pact have been made, but the speaker maintained that simplest solutions based on general principles solve little, and that events since the war have shown that the path to peace is to be secured not so much by wide statements of ideals as by regional pacts of non-aggression. The speaker envisaged a gradually widening and overlapping system of pacts and guarantees between neighbours. The Pacific cannot be a Utopia—it can be a good neighbourly region.

The Chinese Consul-General (Dr. Pao) attended the lecture and moved the vote of thanks to Professor Roberts. He said that Australia's contribution and influence in world affairs were growing every day. Modern China had proved herself a nation capable of bettering her people and of collaborating with other nations in achieving her national aim of co-existence and co-prosperity.

“It seems to be the fashion nowadays,” he said, “that in readjusting international relations one often discusses trade relations first. But trade, which depends upon goodwill and scientific economic co-operation, cannot be developed without a proper understanding of the parties concerned. Exchange of real information would certainly help to bring closer existing cordial Sino-Australia relations and form the key to the future of the world which depended upon the understanding of China.”

The oration was founded by a group of Sydney and Melbourne Chinese citizens to perpetuate the memory of the late Dr. George E. Morrison, son a former headmaster of the Geelong Grammar School, who became China correspondent for the London “Times” and confidential adviser to the Chinese Government for a time.

Dr. Pao expressed the appreciation of the founders in Professor Roberts' lecture.



Morrison seated on steps with two Chinese children