

## A CHINESE SCHOLAR VIEWS BUSINESS

The word "business" conveys the idea of being busy. To us Chinese scholars, and in fact to all Oriental philosophers, to be busy is distasteful. Why should we always be busy? What is it all for? Are we too busy to live? I think one can live much better without being busy, and I am sorry to see that there are many people in the world who are too busy to live.

Are we too busy to die? Death is forever awaiting us, and we do not have to speed its approach.

I can never understand or be accustomed to modern western life, especially the American business man's life. Every one is busy every moment — hurry, rush, pull and struggle.

One of our popular T'ang dynasty (618-906 A.D.) poets once expressed his lamentation in the following lines: "All events are experienced

with too much anxiety. No one ever takes time to rest before he dies."

We Chinese believe that human life is composed of two phases: the positive or active, and the negative or passive. It is vastly important that we should balance them well. We have always been carefully taught to apply our positive or active forces inwardly, that is to say, spiritually, ideally, mentally and morally. The negative or passive forces should be directed to opposite ends.

In other words, we should sublimate our possessive instincts toward the acquisition of knowledge, virtue and invisible property, the ambition for conquest should be turned to the conquest of ourselves — our own evil thoughts, our bad habits and our vicious practices; the fighting spirit should be led toward literary and artistic

contests or muscular and physical training. In our outward and material life, we prefer to live simply, humbly and economically.

We have also been taught that, when in government position or any official capacity, we should conduct our positive or active forces toward public utility, and our negative or passive forces toward private ends. The things which belong to the community or which are for the good of the public must be well taken care of, improved and perfected, while one's private belongings are negligible from the eyes of a statesman or philosopher.

Now, consider some basic theories held in the psychology of the western business man from the viewpoint of a Chinese philosopher.

First, we find in this country a firmly established money standard; in other words, a dollar-and-cent measurement of human activities and their values. I cannot agree that material conditions are the only determining factors of history. I can still less agree with the idea that national welfare and personal success are in-

dicated mainly by the numerical figures of incomes and expenditures.

More pernicious yet is the growing conviction that everything is purchasable with money or that every phase of civilization can be valued only in terms of merchandise.

Money, though a very convenient means of life, is certainly not the end. Why should we sacrifice everything, even our lives for the accumulation of money, and reduce ourselves to machines and mechanisms? Unless there is some property in a nation or in a person that cannot be corrupted or bought by money, that nation or that person is not worth living.

Second, the belief in the struggle for existence by the creation of a busy and noisy world is increasingly unbearable. It is necessary to work earnestly and diligently; it is also necessary to work with ease, quiet, and good taste. The best efficiency test is not how to exert one's ability and exhaust one's strength, but how to preserve them and recreate them.

So, a restful night is of importance to a working day, and the leisure hours are invaluable to the busy minutes. Until one knows how to regulate his labor and tranquilize his mind, he does not live but simply exists. Here again we must not mistake means for ends. Strife is but one phase of life: it is neither its final aim nor its original purpose.

Third, we notice a tendency to promote luxury and extravagance for society as well as for individuals, and thus bring about the habit of money spending. One of the greatest American business men, has emphatically admonished the American youth to spend all the money he can make and then allow himself to be driven by the burning desire for new wants, that he may be induced to make more money for its realization. He advocates that the standard of life for both society and individuals will be lifted by more money spending and more money making.

To be sure, such a policy does actually enrich the state, but it inevitably disturbs people's minds and

menaces also their moral and physical orders. This in turn reacts upon the psychology and social conditions of the community. Social unrest, insanity, crimes, and revolutions are its natural outcomes.

Fourth, a new maxim is current in the business world, that discontent and dissatisfaction are the motive forces for improvement and progress. Mr. Kettering, President of General Motors Research Corporation, wrote recently in *Nation's Business*: "In our particular line our chief job in research is to keep the customer reasonably dissatisfied with what he has."

It is a plain truth that if people are dissatisfied with the things they have, they will always long for something else and try to get it if they can afford it. In this way the business man will always make his money out of those who are striving harder and harder to catch up with the fashions and styles.

Such persons are life-long slaves of their material desires and vanity illusions. They are forever burdened by the increasing weight of

their self-made harness and lashed in the most merciless manner by the whip of an invisible master day and night. Death will be their only deliverance. Of course, it is possible that they are satisfied so long as they fulfill their desires? But how long will this last? There are always more desires, and always something else more desirable.

Aside from all this individual torture, the waste for society as a whole is also very great.

We must work, and work hard, for spiritual realization, mental enlightenment, moral perfection and cultural attainment. But in all matters that lie outside of ourselves, we must learn to take them lightly; to enjoy them if we happen to be with them — possession is, however, not necessary — and to be still content if we must live without them. Life is always easier and happier for those who desire less, and depend less upon,

things outside of themselves.

Furthermore, we must work and work hard, for the improvement and the advancement of the community, the state, the nation, and above all, for humanity, for it is humanity that will live long and not we. When we work for the benefit of humanity, any merit surely lasts, but when we work for the benefit of ourselves, all merits become void upon our death or before.

Therefore, we do well to apply our positive or active forces toward that which has a spiritual significance and is good for mankind, and our negative or passive forces toward that which has only material value and is good only for ourselves. Only those who possess spiritual wealth can overlook material wealth; only those who love humanity know how to deny themselves. — *By Kiang Kang-Hu, condensed from The Nation's Business (November, '29).*