

With Bertrand Russell in China

Since there is much more to Bertrand Russell in China than can be covered in this brief article, I have prefixed the title with "with" to make it clear that it was my part as Russell's interpreter that I am going to write about.

Russell arrived in China less than a month after I returned to China after studying in America for ten years. I had been called back to teach mathematics and physics at Tsing Hua College in Peking. But on August 19, 1920, the third day of my arrival in Shanghai, I was asked by the newly formed Lecture Society to be Russell's interpreter. This society was formed by the Progressive Party, led by men like Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao, Chiang Po'Li, Fu T'ung, *et al.* My friends the Hu brothers, Hu Tun-Fu and Hu Ming-Fu, and (unrelated) Suh Hu (later better known as Hu Shih) warned me not to be misled by people who invited Russell here just to enhance the political prestige of their political party. When Chin Pang-Cheng (better known as P.C. King), President of Tsing Hua College, was approached about borrowing me to interpret for Russell, he agreed, provided that I did not leave the Peking locality. As a matter of fact, the Lecture Society was organized right in Peking and before I had taught a full month at Tsing Hua, I was on my way to Shanghai to meet Bertrand Russell arriving on October 13. This was what I wrote in my diary for that date:

Bertrand Russell looked very much what I had expected from photographs and descriptions, except that he looked stronger, taller, and more gracious-mannered than I had thought. He looked like a scholar. It was easy for me to get acquainted with him thru mutual acquaintances at Harvard.

Before going to Peking both Russell and Miss Dora Black gave lectures in Shanghai, Hangchow, Nanking, and Changsha. I usually interpreted for them in Standard Mandarin. But, having always been interested in the Chinese dialects, I tried the Hangchow dialect in Hangchow and the Hunan dialect in Changsha, the capital of the province. After one of the lectures at Changsha, a member of the audience came up and asked me, "Sir, which county of the province are you from?" He had not realized that I was a speaker of Mandarin imitating Hunanese imperfectly and assumed instead that I was a Hunanese speaking Mandarin imperfectly. On the same trip I had to interpret a speech by Governor T'an Yen-k'ai into English and somebody else interpreted Russell's. It happened that there was a total eclipse of the moon that night, to which Russell referred in his usual witty manner. But the interpreter left out that best part of his speech and repeated only the usual after-dinner polite words.

It was quite a job getting settled in Peking. Having found a house at No. 2 Sui-An Po Hutung in the eastern part of the city, we had to find an English-speaking servant-cook, as I was in no way obliged or qualified to do that sort of interpreting. Mr. Russell and Miss Black used the main northern part of the courtyard and I moved out from Tsing Hua College to join them in the eastern and western apartments. People very easily got used to the idea that Mr. Russell and Miss Black lived in the same apartment, although it was a revolutionary idea of recent origin that a boy and a girl should meet each other at all before they got married. As a matter of fact, I myself was very much concerned with the problem of breaking an engagement with a girl I had never met and was much occupied after my return from America to settle the matter, especially as I began to know and was attracted to a Miss Buwei Yang, who was running a hospital in Peking. This made it all the more attractive to move from the Tsing Hua suburb into the city.

On November 5, 1920, I interpreted an interview with Russell by Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao. This was my first meeting with Liang, whose writings



Russell standing on the Tartar Wall in China, during his year as professor in Peking University, 1920.

had had a great influence on the young men of our generation. November 7 was the date of Russell's first regular lecture. It was on problems of philosophy, held on the Third Campus of the National Peking University. There was an audience of some 1500 people. I find in my diary I noted that "there is more pleasure to speak as interpreter than as the original speaker, because the former gets the response from the audience."

Other topics Russell lectured on included analysis of mind, idealism, causality, theory of relativity, gravitation, and symbolic logic. As a matter of fact, one reason for getting me to interpret for Russell was my dissertation had been on problems related to logic. The locality of the lectures alternated between the National University of Peking and the Teachers' College, which had a very large auditorium. Once I spent too much time with my girl friend Dr. Yang and arrived almost ten minutes late, while Russell stood helplessly on the podium. Seeing that I had come in with a girl, he whispered to me, "Bad man, bad man!"

I also interpreted Dora Black's lectures. Although the topics were mostly socio-politically oriented, which was outside my line, I found them fairly easy to translate. Once, before a large audience at the Women's Normal School, Miss Black mentioned something about unmarried men and unmarried women. There being different words in Chinese for "marry" for men and for women, I happened to use the wrong verbs and it came out something like "men who have no husbands and women who have no wives", at which the audience roared with laughter, of course. When the speaker wondered why they were so hilarious, I had to whisper to her, "I'll have to explain it to you later, it'll take too long now."

Besides the regular lectures there were organized small seminars and study groups for Russell's philosophy and a *Russell Monthly* was published under the editorship of Ch'u Shih-Ying.¹ I myself had of course to attend and join these activities. Add to this my activities in getting disengaged from the girl I didn't know, so that I could get married to the girl I did learn to know and love, plus translating *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and making National Language Records, it was a wonder that I had nothing more than frequent colds from overwork and overexposure during those chilly northern months.

Now Russell fared much less well than I did. With all his radicalism in thought, he was a perfect English gentleman in manners down to the last detail in dress, a habit which almost cost him his life. On March 14, I went with him to Paoting, about 100 miles south of Peking, where he lectured at the Yu Te ("cultivate virtue!") Middle school on the subject of education. It was still wintry and windy and he lectured as usual without an overcoat while I shivered beside him even with my overcoat on. Three days after his return to Peking, he ran a high fever and was attended by Dr. Dipper of the German Hospital in the Legation Quarters. After being brought into the Hospital, he became worse. March 26 was a black day for me. First, there was news from Dr. Yang, saying that her colleague Dr. Yu had died of the plague on a trip to Manchuria to survey the epidemic there. Then I got word that my maternal grandmother had had a stroke in Soochow, of which she died a few days later. That evening I was called to the hospital. I reported in my diary for that evening:

Prof. Dewey made out form for Mr. Rus. to sign. He was weak but seemed quite clear what he was doing. He could mutter "power of attorney?" [to Dora Black, that is], then tried to sign. The doctor was afraid "er kann nicht." But he did scribble out B. Russell. He could recognize me and called me in, whispered "Mister Ch'." He called Dewey by name and said "I hope all my friends will stick by me." I stayed for a while talking with Mr. Brandauer of the oxygen administrator.

The next day Dr. Esser said that Mr. Russell was "more worse". But by March 29 Miss Black reported that Russell was better. From then on he improved steadily until he was discharged from the hospital and returned to the house. Meanwhile a garbled Japanese report said that Russell had died. When the report reached Russell himself, he said, "Tell them the news of my death was very much exaggerated."

During the weeks of Russell's convalescence, I was busy finishing my translation of *Alice in Wonderland*, meeting with members of the Committee on Unification of the National Committee, and, what was of greater personal concern, going to Shanghai to conclude the business of breaking my engagement with the girl I had never met and then to marry the girl I did know and love. On June 1, 1921, with my friend Hu Shih and Buwei Yang's friend Miss Chu Cheng to sign as witnesses, we were married just by moving to a house on Hsiao Yapao Hutung. When we asked Russell whether our no-ceremony wedding ceremony was too conservative, he replied, "That was radical enough."

July 6 was the last day Russell and Black gave lectures, followed the next day by a farewell party given by Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao, at which Ting Wen-Chiang (better known as V.K. Ting) made a very good send-off speech.

On July 11² we saw John Dewey off in the morning and saw Mr. Russell and Miss Black off in the afternoon.

So this is the end of my story of the year with Bertrand Russell in China. After that my wife and I had the opportunity of seeing him once every few years. In 1924 we saw him at Land's End in Penzance (where Gilbert and Sullivan's Pirates came from), and had access to what he called the Inaccessible Beach. In 1939 we saw him briefly at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley, California. He said that by the time China wins, the sacrifice in having to become more and more totalitarian would

not be worth the victory. He ordered, with great disapproval, such strange drink as 7-up for our children. In 1941 Professor Ernest Hocking of Harvard invited me to his departmental lunch, at which Mr. Russell reported on placement surveys, an unusual topic for him to discuss. In 1954 we visited with him in his London home in Richmond and had the pleasure of meeting Edith Russell for the first time. Finally, in 1968, we took a taxi from London to Plas Penrhyn, Penrhyndeudraeth, Merioneth, on the west coast of Wales and had tea with the Russells. On this occasion I thanked him for the gift of a pun. For one of his few popular lectures in Peking had been on "Causes of the Present Chaos in China." When after his return to England I informed him of the birth of our first child, Rulan, he said in reply, "Congratulations! I see that you are among the causes of the present Chaos in China." But in his *Autobiography* (II, p.127), he attributed that pun to me. The last view of him was when he and Lady Russell stood at the door, Chinese fashion, and waved to us as we were leaving, until we were out of sight. After his decease we received two letters from two Lady Russells, Dora and Edith, on the same day.

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¹Copies of the first two issues of this rare journal are in the Russell Archives. [Ed.'s note.]

²In Russell's *Autobiography* (London: Allen & Unwin 1968), II, p.132, he wrote "on July 10th we were able to leave Peking," which does not agree with my diary.