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## The "Confucius" of the First Normal School

"Confucius" was the nickname given to one of the teachers in First Normal School by the students because of his impeccable conduct. He did not know that I was married and he tried to interest me in his daughter, Yang K'ai-hui. However, after his death, he became father-in-law to Mao Tse-tung. The real name of "Confucius" was Yang Huai-chung.

Mao Tse-tung often remarked that Yang Huai-chung had been a great influence in his life. He was also known as Ch'en-chi, and he came from the Pan Tsang village of the district of Changsha. He called his study the *Ta Hua Chai* and he wrote this name on all his notebooks.

Mr. Yang was a very learned person and he was endowed with a strong personality with which he enforced upon himself a very strict moral code. His conduct was at all times beyond reproach. He was so familiar with the doctrine of Confucius that his friends and his students regarded him as if he were a reincarnation of the great sage.(21)

He had spent his youth studying philosophy and when he was thirty years old, he began to study English. Later he traveled abroad, first to Japan, then in Great Britain, where he obtained a degree in philosophy at Edinburgh University. Subsequently he undertook further studies in philosophy in a German university. Thus he had acquired quite an appreciable knowledge of both oriental and occidental standards. During the first year of the Republic, he returned to Changsha from Germany and was immediately invited by First Normal to accept a teaching position.

First Normal was the richest school in Changsha. Not only did students receive free board and lodging, but also their books and clothing. Under the Emperor, they had also received pocket money. For this reason, as may be imagined, it was not easy to pass the entrance examination. Each of the sixty-three districts of Hunan Province submitted the names of their twenty best students, but not

more than five of these passed the preliminary examination. When I took this examination in Siangsiang, eighty of the hundred aspirants were eliminated. In the second examination, only a fifth of the five hundred passed. Students were thus carefully selected, and the same may be said of the faculty, who were well-trained and some of whom were famous personalities. They received good salaries and when vacancies occurred, teachers were often drawn from a distance, such as Shanghai, or Anhwei, and other provinces. This explains why Mr. Yang remained in Changsha where he taught logic, philosophy, and education.

After the summer vacation when I returned to school, I found the students discussing the fact that we were to have a new teacher who was said to be especially good. Naturally everyone was curious to see what he was like. When classes began, we saw him coming toward us in the distance. He walked very slowly and, when he entered the classroom, we saw that he was about fifty years old, clean shaven, with a swarthy complexion. His eyes were deep set and rather small. He spoke awkwardly and read the whole of his lecture, without repetition and with no opportunity for explanation or discussion. The hour passed and everyone was deeply disappointed. Within the week other classes also commented on the poor impression made by Mr. Yang in his classes. Heads of the classes held a meeting and as a result urged the Director to ask Mr. Yang to change his method of teaching and to explain his text. A fortnight later at another meeting, it was proposed that the Director be asked to dismiss Mr. Yang, and if he refused, all the classes threatened to strike. At the time I was president of these delegations and I opposed the suggestion. I contended that although Mr. Yang did not speak fluently, if one read his printed text, he would find it most valuable. These texts were the result of his own study and experience and were very different from those which were merely composites of others' books. I felt that we should wait till the end of the semester to see what practical results we had accomplished before making a drastic decision. Ch'en Chang, the head of the second class, agreed with me and eventually they accepted my suggestion and settled down to work.

After this meeting I talked with several of my best friends, Hsiung Kuang-ch'u, Ch'en Chang, and others, to discuss how we could get

our schoolmates to understand Mr. Yang's teaching and to appreciate it. The only way seemed to be to persuade them to read his written texts carefully. Also, it was important for us to explain and interpret Mr. Yang's "Confucian" personality to them.

Mao Tse-tung had not yet had an opportunity to attend Mr. Yang's lectures since he taught only the upper classes and when he first came to school Mao was three years below me.

Within two months, everyone who attended Mr. Yang's lectures admired and respected him. Although he did not talk much in class, each short statement meant a great deal. His really was the Confucian style of speaking. Within a year, the entire school accepted him and he became the "Confucius of First Normal School." Other schools in Changsha invited him and he conducted classes as far away as the high school at the foot of Yao-lu Mountain. Soon he was known to students throughout the city as "Confucius."

Every Sunday morning my friends, Hsiung Kuang-ch'u, Ch'en Chang and I visited Mr. Yang's home to discuss our studies together. We read each other's notebooks, talked over our problems, and returned to school after lunch. Many of the phrases in my notebook pleased Mr. Yang so much that he copied them for himself. He was pleased with my work, and on my examination papers, he often gave me the maximum mark of 100 and added "plus 5." Once Mao Tse-tung wrote an essay which he called "A Discourse on the Force of the Mind" (*hsin li lun*) and Mr. Yang gave him the famous 100 plus 5 mark. Mao was very proud since it was the only time he received such a high grade, and he never tired of telling people about it.

Mr. Yang wrote several works which were never published but which remained in manuscript form. After his death, his son Yang K'ai-chih sold them to Mr. Yi P'ei-chi, an ex-Minister of Education, without realizing that, since his ideas were very different from Mr. Yang's, this gentleman would not appreciate the true value of the writings. Apparently the works were lost after Mr. Yi P'ei-chi's death.

After six years of teaching in Changsha, Mr. Yang received a telegram from Chang Shih-chao, former Minister of Education in Peking, advising him that he was invited by the President of Peking University to go there to teach. He left Changsha for Peking in the summer of 1918 and took a house in the Tou Fu Ch'ih Hutung where he

remained several months. Soon I went to Peking and lived in Mr. Yang's house and later we were joined by Mao Tse-tung. So we all three lived together for a time.

In January 1919, I left for Paris and several months later, I received a letter telling me that Mr. Yang was dead. While he was in Changsha, he had had an especially large tub made for him. He filled it with cold water and each morning took a bath, immersing himself completely. He continued this practice of a cold bath in Peking, saying, "Every day one must do something difficult to strengthen one's will. Cold water not only strengthens the will; it is good for the health!" I think the cold bath in the icy Peking winter may have been one cause of his death.

In his diary, Mr. Yang paid me a compliment which he repeated on several occasions in public: "My three most notable students, of the several thousands I taught during my six years in Changsha, were first, Siao Shu-tung; second, Ts'ai Ho-shen; and third, Mao Tse-tung. The three best women students were Tao Szu-yung, Hsiang Ching-yu, and Jen Pei-tao."

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### *Miss Yang K'ai-hui, Who Married Mao Tse-tung*

Mr. Yang had two children—a son, K'ai-chih, and a daughter, K'ai-hui. K'ai-hui was the younger. She was rather small in stature and round-faced. She looked somewhat like her father, with the same deep-set, smallish eyes, but her skin was quite white, since she had inherited none of his swarthy skin. In 1912 when I first saw her, she was seventeen years of age and studying in the Changsha Middle School.

From that year, when my two classmates, Hsiung Kuang-ch'u, Ch'en Chang and I visited Mr. Yang's home every Sunday morning to discuss our studies, we had lunch with them and then returned to the school. At the table we were always joined by K'ai-hui and her