

China's Silk Industry and the American Market

BY DON D. PATTERSON

CHINA silk has long held world fame for its exquisite texture and its fineness. It was the seeking for this silk and the spices of Asia which brought Columbus to discover the continent of America and which was also an incentive to Marco Polo in his cruises to and sojourns in this nation. There is in China at the present time a commission of the Silk Association of America which comes on a similar mission—a mission to investigate producing conditions and to recommend such changes as are necessary in the production of raw silk in the nation of China in order that it may meet with greater favor in the markets of the United States. This commission, which is headed by Charles Cheney, president of the Silk Association, and of Cheney Brothers, silk manufacturers, and composed of: Emil J. Stehli, Stehli Silks Corporation; George A. Post, Post and Sheldon; John D. Dunlop, John Dunlop's Sons; William C. Cheney, Cheney Brothers; Ramsay Peugnet, secretary-treasurer of the Silk Association; Daniel E. Douty, general manager, U. S. Conditioning and Testing Company, represents the largest silk manufacturers of the United States and the largest buyers of the raw silk products of the Far East.

THE importance of the visit of this committee to the Chinese filature owners, the cocoon merchants, and others interested in the silk trade of the country is to a certain degree inestimable. Since the signing of the armistice the United States has been consuming 85 percent of the world's raw silk and because of this condition the merchants of China have received the commission warmly and with increasing enthusiasm and interest. In the entertainments and tours of inspection both in Shanghai and Hangchow, which have occupied

eggs. This movement has received support from the Silk Association of America and has enlisted the interest of the Chinese government. However, if the government would take a more intense interest in the movement both from a moral and a financial standpoint the start would be made toward better raw silk in China. Again the methods of the Chinese in their filatures are not on a modern basis and necessitate increased production expenses when used by American manufacturers. The commission has recommended the use of the reeling methods such as are employed in Japan in preparing the raw silk in preference to the present single reeling methods now employed. In the filatures there is a laxness of supervision and an ignorance of modern methods which hampers the Chinese product.

THE lack of uniformity and the tendency to permit the quality to deteriorate when once established under a certain chop by the Chinese producer has also brought criticism from the American manufacturers. They emphasize the importance of maintaining uniformity and quality so that when an established chop is purchased there can be no question of what the shipment will contain. This point was covered by Shen Lien-fong, vice-chairman of the Shanghai Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, and president of the Cocoon Guild, in a recent talk, in which he advocated the establishment of a Chinese-American conditioning and testing house for the national raw silk market, a report from whom would accurately show to the purchaser in America the actual quality, size and other conditions of the cargo shipped.

the interest of commission since their arrival in the former city, they have been plied with queries as to methods and requirements by Chinese, both of the silk industry and of the correlative commercial bodies. The situation as it stands today is matter of what the Chinese will do themselves to meet the demands of the American manufacturers and importers. The position of the American manufacturer, as expressed by Charles Cheney in a talk at a dinner given at the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, Shanghai, is that they are ready and willing to buy all of the raw silk production of China, even though improved methods and increased production bring it to ten times its present total, providing the Chinese themselves will meet the demands made.

THE basic error in the production of raw silk in China begins with the seed or egg from which the worm is hatched. In China approximately 80 percent of the moths laying the silkworm eggs are diseased, rendering the cocoon useless for manufacturing purposes. This percentage is enormous as compared to Japan where it runs approximately from 10 to 20 percent. The methods of China are haphazard and unscientific as compared with those of Japan. This work is being undertaken by the International Committee of Sericulture, which is maintaining schools at Shanghai, Nanking, and other cities in the producing areas, in an attempt to give to the Chinese cocoon raisers disease free

CHINA has in her raw silk industry the opportunity to become the leading nation in its export and a factor in world commerce. Twenty years ago Japan exported raw silk to the United States to the amount of \$20,000,000. In 1920 her exports amounted to \$400,000,000, one-third of her total exports and 90 percent of the raw silk bought by Americans in the market. It is not necessary to indicate further the great impetus to Japanese industry in general brought about by the bringing of such an amount of money into the country. Compared with the amount of territory available in the two countries for silk production and the conditions maintaining, China could outstrip her neighbor in a surprisingly short time and control the majority of the world's raw silk. A step in this direction was indicated by Shen Lien-fong, who stated that propaganda to make the silk industry universal in China was being contemplated by the merchants concerned, with the aid of the Chinese chambers of commerce and the government. Should this be realized it is easily imaginable what the returns to China

would be each year from this trade. No fear need be experienced of a saturated market and a consequent internal deterioration of the industry. There will be, of course, attendant upon this increased expenditures to the Chinese producers in bringing up the standard of their product and while the immediate benefit to them will be little or nothing, the success of Japan needs only to be referred to as an example of the future gain which will be forthcoming. It may be a matter of several years to convert the Chinese producer to this point of view but once its importance is properly stressed he will undoubtedly fall into line and comply with all requirements.

THIS obligation, however, is not all upon the Chinese. In reeling improved raw silk the American manufacturer should realize that there should be more Americans actively in the raw silk field in China, men who have been educated to know the needs of the market of the United States, men who actually represent the American consumers and men who are sufficiently well trained to be able to instruct the Chinese as to how to comply with American standards. At the present time the American representation in the raw silk industry in China—that is, men actually in the field and in daily contact with the Chinese producer—is almost

negligible. This also would involve increased expenditure, this time on the part of the American consumer. This field was touched by Mr. Douty, who visited China in 1917 lecturing and instructing in methods of sericulture and production, but the demands made by other connections upon Mr. Douty's time did not permit his remaining in the country. To summarize the needs of the Chinese raw silk market would be to advocate Chinese-American cooperation, the Americans bringing the new methods into the China field and the Chinese responding by a vastly increased production of a higher quality and standard.

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