

The Enterprise of Returned Students

BY HOLLINGTON K. TONG

HERE is an example what an American returned student, who has specialized in industrial chemistry in an American university and obtained some practical training in an American factory, can do upon his return to China if he means to persist in pursuing his profession and to refrain from coming in contact with officialdom. Three and a half years ago, John Wang, a graduate of Columbia University, started the Hua Pei Tannery at Tientsin with a capital of \$5,000 and put into practice what he had learned in the United States. Today his tannery is doing nearly a hundred thousand dollars worth of business and has increased its capital—with the possibility of further increasing it tenfold to a million dollars. Although his undertaking is a small one, Mr. Wang has successfully demonstrated what an American or European student, who has been equipped with necessary trainings, can do along industrial lines for the benefit of the people.

Since its establishment, Mr. Wang's tannery has experimented with the tanning of half a dozen different kinds of skins by means of modern methods, and succeeded in producing calf skins for shoe-uppers, sheep skins for gloves, horse leather for police and army shoes, and other skins, whose quality is not inferior to that of the skins tanned in foreign countries. He is gradually creating a market for the products from the Hua Pei Tannery. Up to the present, only local dealers in Peking and Tientsin are using his leathers. In a short time dealers in Kalgan, Harbin and Mukden, who usually use Japanese leathers, will make use of his products.

The Hua Pei Tannery is also exporting a small amount of half-finished skins to foreign countries, namely, pickled skins and crusted or half tanned skins. China has never before exported skins in a half finished condition, and this is the first time in Chinese industrial history, Mr. Wang believes, that Chinese skins in a half finished condition are actually wanted in the foreign market. This undoubtedly gives encouragement to those who are engaged in experimenting with the tanning of skins along modern lines.

On the advantage of foreign firms purchasing pickled skins rather than raw ones from China, Mr. Wang, in an interview with the writer, gives the following reasons:

"To export skins with the hair and flesh on is both uneconomical and untrustworthy. Uneconomical, because every export and import man knows that freight and duties are the two big items to combat with. Fortunately pickled skins are classified as raw goods in all countries, so do not have to pay more duties weight for weight, than the unpickled. But when freight is considered the gain for the pickled skins is almost twice over the crude skins, for roughly speaking a two pound goat skin will weigh less than one pound after pickled—a penny saved is a penny gained."

"Raw skins are untrustworthy, because when skins are covered up with hairs on the one side and dirt on the other, even the most experienced skin experts often make great mistakes in the selection. If he picked up a nominally good and cast off a real good stuff, he commits at once a double error. Now, pickled skins, on the other hand, are plain to everybody, so every detail can be accurately

determined before any attempt is made for shipment, thus avoiding many possible risks."

Here is another example of what a Chinese young man receiving commercial training in America can do in furthering commercial interests of the nation. The Union Trading Corporation of Tientsin, which is marketing the products of the Hua Pei Tannery, is being managed by another returned student from America, H. Chi, also a graduate of Columbia University. Mr. Chi took up a commercial course while in New York, and is therefore well versed with the technique of the export and import business. Although the demand for skins and leathers abroad is rather slack at the present time on account of the post war conditions. Wang and Chi believe that the situation would soon change and that the two companies which they are managing will have all the possibilities of developing into big enterprises. In fact, all the large undertakings, Mr. Wang points out, had their humble beginning, if they had a proper start. Besides marketing the products of the tannery, the trading corporation is also doing other export and import business.

Friends of the tannery are endeavoring to enlarge it by inviting cooperation of American tannery experts and business men. Dr. Paul S. Reinsch, former American Minister to China, and now adviser to the Chinese government, and Representative Leonidas C. Dyer from Missouri, are some of the distinguished Americans who have taken a deep interest in Mr. Wang's adventure, and have been trying to make connections with the firms in the United States for him. Plans have already been made for the future expansion, of his industry which will call for a capital investment of over a million dollars.

Upon the raising of the desired capital, the new factory will still be located in Tientsin, which, in Mr. Wang's opinion, is one of the best localities for tanneries. First of all, Tientsin is centrally located both for hides and tanning materials. The supply of sheep skins is drawn from Chihli, Shansi, Shensi, Manchuria and Honan, and the supply of cow hides is obtained from Shantung. Tanning materials such as vegetable extracts from hemlock, oak, chestnut, etc. are easily procurable in the Tientsin market.

In his big scheme, Mr. Wang desires American cooperation. He said that in recent years signs have not been lacking of the feasibility of Chinese-American cooperation in the export and import business.

"But we would like to see also a joint movement," he added, "to develop China's home industries in which a large number of men and women can be employed and the change from raw material to finished products can be effected right here in this country."

Being an enterprising man, Mr. Wang, while trying to secure American capital for his undertaking, has started a shoe factory on a small scale. In this factory Western shoes are made on order, and the leather used is the product of his tannery. Suit cases, money bags, gloves, belts, foot-balls, and many other leather products are also made in the shoe factory. It is Mr. Wang's plan to make the factory in the future an independent organization and invite specialists from foreign countries to build it up and to make it a Chinese-American enterprise.

Upon his return from America, Mr. Wang decided not to enter into official life or even not to become a teacher. Official life, he said, is too soft and too corrupt to suit him. School life is too theoretical and unproductive in an industrial way for the present at least. Therefore, he started a tannery

with a capital of \$5,000, subscribed mostly by Tsing Hua professors. Gradually the tannery has grown in size, and Mr. Wang has enjoyed the greater confidence of his supporters in the success of his scheme. At present high officials like Yih Kung cho, High Industrial Commissioner, and the Minister of Communications, have interested themselves in his tannery.

Mr. Wang first graduated at the University of Wisconsin in 1914 with the degree of A. B. Later he took up the course of leather industry at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, and upon the completion of that course, studied at Columbia University where he specialized in industrial chemistry. He has already engaged another graduate of Columbia, T. P. Hou, who has been recently graduated, to take up the chemistry part of the work in his tannery.

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