

Two Obituaries of Sifo (Shifu)

Various

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La Ondo de Esperanto

This notice first appeared in the Esperanto language journal *La Ondo de Esperanto* (The Esperanto Wave) in July 1915 and can be viewed online here.

Shifu was an influential Chinese pioneer of Anarchism. He changed his name on several occasions and was known as Shifu at the end of his life, though in English he's remembered under the name Liu Shifu. He was also an active Esperantist and used the pen name Sifo for Esperanto writings. I translated a short biography of his life earlier, which may help explain some points.

Sifo

Shifu (Liu Shifu) the editor of the Esperanto and Chinese language weekly newspaper *The Voice of the People*, died in Shanghai from tuberculosis. We take some biographical details about Shifu from his publication's 23rd issue. Sifo was born in 1884 in Hongsang¹ in the province of Canton. He was an extraordinarily talented boy in his youth. At the age of fifteen, he became a "Sin-Can"² the highest student in the local examinations. He participated energetically within the Chinese political movement and provided a lot of assistance to the well known Doctor Sun Yat-Sen. Sifo edited a progressive newspaper in Hong Kong and opened a school for women.

He was gravely wounded by an explosion and had to have his left hand amputated. Furthermore, he was arrested and while in prison he wrote the text *On the reform of prison*. After reading this text, the city officials were so stunned by the talent demonstrated by the author that they ordered his release. In total Sifo spent three years in prison, while incarcerated he also wrote texts on linguistics, including a book on the Canton Dialect. In 1912 Shifu founded an Esperanto group and became a Vice delegate for the U.E.A (Universal Esperanto Association). In 1913 Shifu published *The Voice of the People*, an Esperanto and Chinese language newspaper. It wasn't long before the new newspaper was suppressed and Shifu had to flee to Macau (the Portuguese Colony³) but the Portuguese authorities also disrupted the publication of *Voice*.

Shifu published *Voice*, until the money ran out. He was an editor, administrator and printer at the same time. That is why he grew weaker with the publication of each issue, the work finally consumed him totally. When he fell ill, his poverty prevented him from seeing a doctor for treatment. Friends begged him to sell his printing press (Shifu's press was operated by hand, or in his case one-handed) but Shifu refused.

Shifu adored Lev Tolstoy and founded *Conscience*, a group whose principles were as follows:

1. Against Meat eating,
2. Against alcohol
3. Against smoking
4. Against slavery

¹ I have not been able to figure out what the modern name of the city is, the English language biographies just refer to him being born in the Canton area.

² I don't know what that means, I believe this is an academic achievement, the second obituary by the British Esperantist goes into a bit more detail about this period of Shifu's life and I found a little more information in some brief biographies written in English.

³ Returned to the control of the People's Republic in 1999.

5. Against using human vehicles (I.e. Rickshaws and pedicabs)
6. Against marriage
7. Against families
8. Against deputation
9. Against political parties
10. Against state officials
11. Against war
12. Against religion

During his sickness, his friends begged him to eat meat, but he kept his principles until his death.

We acknowledge the highly civilized principles of Shifu, but express extreme regret over his death. China has lost one of the most fervent and sincere pioneers of the international language.

Obituary from the British Esperantist

Obituary from the British Esperantist, published in 1915, the original article can be found online here. And continues onto the following page.

Mr Shifu

Here is a biography of a remarkable man, excerpted from *The Voice of the People*, a weekly Chinese and Esperanto language newspaper. We present it here without changes.

Biography of Mr Shifu

Mr Shifu was born in 1884 in the city of Hongsang in Canton province. He was an extraordinarily talented boy in his youth. At the age of fifteen, he became a “Sin-Can” the highest student in the local examinations. However, he did not want to submit to the institution which demanded he behave like a slave. Instead, he taught himself about many practical sciences and read every kind of book he could find. Although he learnt without a guide, he came to understand many subjects at a profound level. In 1901 an 18-year-old Shifu appalled by the suffering of the people and disgusted with the rot and corruption of the government organised a public speech in his home city to inspire a political revolution, it made a good impression. He later travelled to Japan. While in Japan, he met Sun Yat-sen who was staying in Japan to recruit supporters for his organisation “Tongmenghui” after the failure of his revolt in Huizhou (1900). Shifu assisted Sun Yat-sen for a time. Shortly after, Shifu returned to China and started publishing a progressive newspaper in Hong Kong and founded a school for women. In 1907 the revolutionaries attempted to resume their activities. At that time, the official Lee Tseng ruled over Canton and opposed the revolutionary movement. Shifu believed that the first step had to be the removal of this devil. Shifu lay in wait one morning with a suitcase for Lee Tseng to pass-by on the road, unfortunately the suitcase

exploded before Lee Tseng had appeared. Shifu was wounded in the arms, head and chest. The police sent him unconscious to a hospital, after a month in hospital and a surgical amputation of his left arm he recovered from his wounds. Of course, he was tried in a courthouse.

Shifu defended himself on several pretexts, but due to suspicion was sentenced to prison. While in prison, a living hell, he wrote the text *On the reform of prison*. After reading this text, the city officials were so stunned by the talent demonstrated by the author that they ordered his release. In three years of prison, instead of giving in to depression, he worked on the book "*Cantonese Dialect*", a work so brilliant that even famous linguists admired it. After leaving prison, he met with some sympathisers and founded a group for assassinations. In 1911 a member of this group Lin Kaun-Si threw a bomb at Lee Tseng while Shifu wished to go to Beijing to kill the Qing Prince Regent Zaifeng. Shifu was in Shanghai when the Qing Emperor abdicated, seeing a good opportunity to promote his ideas, he returned to Canton and founded the Fui Min (The Cock crows in Darkness) school.

As you know, Chinese students of Anarchism in Paris had already begun publishing a Chinese language newspaper, *The New Times*. In its pages, many translations of different Anarchist ideas appeared, including Bakunin and Kropotkin. However, importing these ideas into China proved very difficult. Fui Min collected *The New Times* and published them as small pamphlets that were easy to circulate, effectively becoming the soil seed of Anarchism planted within China.

In 1912 Shifu founded an Esperanto group and soon became a Vice delegate for the U.E.A. In the summer of 1913 when civil war broke out within China he witnessed with his own eyes the crimes of the warlords and fervently attacked militarism in articles that were published in both Esperanto and Chinese in the newspaper *The Voice of the People* Issues 1 and 2. As a consequence *The Voice* was suppressed and Shifu had to escape persecution to Macau which is ruled by the Portuguese. But the Portuguese authorities agreed with their Chinese counterparts to prevent the publication of Shifu's work. That is why *The Voice* has only reappeared now after two years of great hardship. In July of last year, Shifu founded the "Anarchist-Communist Group" in Shanghai, which is influencing the founding of regional groups to spread Anarchist ideas throughout China.

Shifu was brave, tolerant, decisive and hard-working. He published *The Voice*, with no funds and very few assistants. He was also its editor and administrator, but none of this frightened him. It is true that he was also quite sickly, as such he would fall ill after every issue of *The Voice* appeared and would rest for a short time before working just as hard as before once he started to recover. Understandably, this consumed his young life. When he fell ill, his poverty prevented him from hiring a doctor. We begged him to sell his press (his printing press was operated by hand) but he refused, explaining that the press was the sole source of life for our ideas in the East. It would be futile to save one person by selling it.

Later with the help of some friends we were able to send Shifu to hospital, but alas! It was too late. The disease is incurable and so, at 10 o'clock in the morning of the 27th of March 1915 Shifu passed away aged 31.

Shifu adored Lev Tolstoy not just for his wisdom, but also for his morality. Together with some friends, he founded *Conscience*, a group whose principles were as follows:

1. Against Meat eating,
2. Against alcohol

3. Against smoking
4. Against slavery
5. Against using human vehicles (I.e. Rickshaws and pedicabs)
6. Against marriage
7. Against families
8. Against deputation
9. Against political parties
10. Against state officials
11. Against war
12. Against religion

During his sickness, his Doctor advised him to eat meat to keep his body strong, but he kept his principles until his death.

K. Ch. San

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1915

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