

Review of
Carl Rogers: The China Diary
Edited by Jeffrey H. D. Cornelius-White

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I wish I knew why I am always so lucky. It seems as if I were always on the inside, by some hook or crook or accident, whenever there is anything of real interest going on. I am having opportunities that competent men would give a years [sic] pay to have. Yet they just fall into my hands. It means a big responsibility. (p. 135)

While in college at the University of Wisconsin, Carl Rogers was selected to be one of ten YMCA delegates to the World Christian Federation Conference in Peking (Beijing), China. The young man carried his typewriter onto trains and ships from Oak Park, Illinois, through the American West, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, and China. Ninety years after he pecked "My Trip to China" into a tome, it has been thoughtfully edited and documented by Jeffrey Cornelius-White and published by PCCS Books. This compilation seems to have been a work of sincere dedication by its editor and also its publisher as the book includes prefatory writings by Natalie Rogers, Brian Thorne, and Cornelius-White, including biographical introductions to the cast of fellow-travelers and dignitaries with whom Rogers had long conversations, 13 photographs, a listing of themes at the end, and a concordance-like appendix of topics and themes discussed in each entry.

Who is likely to want to read the travel diary of a 20-year-old in 1922? My list includes students of early 20th-century Japan or China, people interested in giftedness, people interested in the art of the diary and in emerging young adulthood, and most of all those of us who love reading Rogers, and are interested in the history of client-centered therapy and the person-centered approach. *The China Diary* provides a window for watching young Rogers come of age as he practices leadership and dialog, writes about his perceptions of the world stage, his thoughts about Christianity, politics, economics, and war, and his best hopes for the future. As he writes, he takes in new sights and cultures, spends hours and days with the speakers and teachers in his entourage and conference meetings, and gives the reader flecks of language and philosophy that point towards the person-centered approach.

We already knew from his biographer Howard Kirschenbaum (2007) that Rogers read extensively and was a prolific letter-writer. Also, those of us who love to read mature Rogers are already aware of

the beauty of his prose. Even at the age of twenty his writing is rather astounding. There are many enduring passages in this travel journal; the prose on every page communicates some of the lively acuity, personality and humor of its writer.

A particularly lovely example of Rogers' attentive and evocative prose appears near the very end of the journal where he describes his pilgrimage to the summit of Mount Fuji (pp. 170-174). That passage contains examples of Rogers' scientific attention to detail, his spirit of adventure and embracing of challenge, his willingness to solo pioneer, and his capacity for joy in the experiencing of a shared communal moment.

As Rogers travels, observes and engages with others, his empathic observations gradually surface more and more often, interspersed with comments like the following:

It [the Daibutsu Buddha] is simply huge. With the placid, almost scornful look of the typical Buddha, it looks down on us as merely the fleeting creatures of the moment, while it belongs to the ages. In spite of its impressiveness, tho, it is very evident from the people that come, that as an object of worship it appeals only to the ignorant and uneducated classes. Buddhism as a religion for educated classes is dead. (p. 69)

Yet only a few days earlier he had written:

As to the bugaboo of Japanese militarism, my attitude has certainly changed during the last 10 days. A problem like that looks so differently when viewed from the inside! A days [sic] trip through the farming country where every available inch of land is seized upon and cultivated, has been a mighty fine object lesson in the scarcity of land and the lack of room to expand. It is the most natural thing in the world that a party should grow up whose policy is aggression and the acquisition of land. I dont [sic] want to excuse the militaristic policy, but I simply want to point out that there are some mighty strong economic reasons for such a policy. (p. 66)

Like the above, many of his remarks seem nascent to the Client/Person-Centered Approach to therapy and interpersonal relationships and imbued with a wish to be justly fair as well as to be clear headed as to what one is about.

Rogers went out of his way on many tangential expeditions to view and discuss social as well as historical sites and institutions of interest. He took day outings to observe factory and labor conditions, taking in the sad panorama of poverty, oppression, conflicts and poverty, at every opportunity discussing, questioning, meeting students, faculty, owners, managers, and diplomats. He wrote of "...the fact that we are each of us responsible to a certain extent for the unchristian conditions that we find around us" (p. 168).

After visiting the Hong Kong Hospital for the Insane he typed:

The customary Chinese way of caring for a violently insane person is to chain him up, and simply feed and clothe him. They have one patient who was kept tied by a chain around his neck, for sixteen years. No wonder he was crazy, eh wot? (p. 137)

Visiting a factory mill that incorporated various cruel policies including twelve year olds in twelve hour shifts, days and nights, girls with feet bound, and thirteen work days before a day off, Rogers noted that the Chinese in this mill were ahead of the American steel mills, which required 24 hour shifts the day a worker rotated over between day and night shifts. He granted that the managers had good intentions, but what is needed, he wrote, "are managers who see so many thousand human personalities, every one of them with great possibilities" (p. 114).

Rogers' descriptions of the international Christian congresses that he attended left me with the impression that they somewhat resembled large person-centered groups. After one of these, he wrote, "The meetings have most certainly helped us all to attain a truly international mind" (p. 98). After another, he said:

What I have written off so quickly took several days to actually occur, since a conference of a thousand people, where they attempt to have discussion from the floor, moves very slowly, especially when every word has to be translated into another language. (p. 124-125)

Religious stance, organizational development, working conditions and war and peace are all major threads that run through the diary. Rogers discussed questions pertaining to these with fellow travelers, his hosts, managers and dignitaries; in his diary entries he would then synthesize the discussions, ponder and articulate his own thoughts. He affirms the thoughtful good will of the people he meets while grappling with the hypocrisy and self-interest of political, business and religious institutions.

It is a privilege to be able to read this young man's contemplative journey. To my mind, *The China Diary* is the earliest writing that we have for documenting the development and blooming of the person-centered revolution.

References

Kirschenbaum, H. (2007). *The Life and Work of Carl Rogers*. Ross-on-Wye, UK: PCCS Books.