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RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY UNDER MAO TSE TUNG

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The great, gray mists of time since I took Freshman English have blotted out all but one shining lesson: the deadliest of the Seven Sins is plagiarism. Therefore, I give a low and grateful bow to Barbara Tuchman, whose articles providentially appeared last month in the HOME NEWS and THE N.Y. TIMES and gave me the basis for this paper.

Thirty years ago, Mao Tse Tung prescribed that the main goal of the then new Chinese leaders was to continue the Revolutionary struggle between the "irrefutable revolutionary truth" of Marxism and the one and only "correct/line" called Mao Tse Tung Thought. This struggle, of course, was between the said irrefutable truth and the said correct line and revisionism, meaning the effort to revert to the capitalist road. This struggle is perpetual and never won, an essential of the system for by holding it always as a distant but attainable goal, the system is able to keep it alive and in the forefront of Chinese thought by exhortation and reassurance, answering all questions, removing all doubts.

To accomplish this, Mao enunciated six main principles: (1) Serve the People, the whole purpose of society. According to his definition, "the People" are all who support the Revolution, said to be 90-95% of the population. The remainder who are the "class enemies", "bad elements" and counter-revolutionaries are merely citizens. Workers, peasants and soldiers are automatically people, as is anyone of poor and lower-middle peasant or other working class family. Those who come from landlord, rich peasant, merchant-capitalist or bourgeois origin are automatically out, or at least not full members of society until they have proved by word and deed that they have repudiated their class values and whole-heartedly adopted Chairman Mao's "correct revolutionary line" of service to the people. What this requires in outward conformity for those with inner reservations can only be conjectured. The masses - and for China the word is appropriate in a descriptive, not necessarily Marxist, sense - appear quite at ease. The economic security of food, paid work and old-age pensions is a great relaxer of tension and this appears in faces and manners. There is no sense of pressure.

(2) Increase Production. Former consumer communities must become producers and self-supporters. This is what China's revolution is all about. It refutes all the firm statements of economists and agronomists in the past that China's arable land could not be

augmented, nor the yield per land unit be raised enough to feed the expanding population. Both have been done, not by magic but because people have been mobilized and motivated to do it by expropriation and redistribution of land, permitting communal farming in large tracts instead of fractional plots and by knowing that everything they do to make improvements will benefit themselves, not the landlord.

(3) Self Reliance, everybody down to the smallest local level must promote their innovations and energies for greater production. In human terms this process has produced a new person - the worker from the ranks who can become manager of an enterprise. True, such people do not bear sole responsibility but function in a committee. Even so, their straightforward greeting, their poise and self-respect are impressive, and the fact that the communes and factories are managed in part by their workers is one of the greatest bootstrap operations in history.

(4) Continuation of Renewal of Revolutionary Consciousness and appreciation of the close relationship between manual labor and the masses.

(5) Non-Agression and Non-Interference in affairs of other states, based on the idea that China can never be aggressive because this is incompatible with socialism.

(6) All States are Equal in Status and China is a friend of all. But there is a firm distinction between the "good" peoples of these states and their "bad" governments. If it is suggested to the Chinese that democratic governments tend in the long run to reflect their electorates, they remain blandly unconvinced. When told America has no working class identity as such, they are simply unable to understand.

The means of communication of these six principles remain as persistent as they are lacking in variety. The basic form is study groups of Marxist-Leninist and Mao thought in the schools, neighborhood, offices, communes and factories. Incredibly, at a steel smelting plant employing 50,000 workers, study groups meet after work for $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours four times a week with one session devoted to technical subjects and three to political thought and current affairs, only occasionally varied by recreation and sport.

There are no newstands in streets and stores. The two newspapers are distributed by mail only. Their content is more lecture than news and the latter is fairly stale. Two glossy magazines are published in many languages mainly intended for foreigners, though eagerly read by the Chinese. There are a few wall newspapers mounted behind glass but newsprint is sparse and most of the space is given over to pictures of achievements in harvesting, ship building and examples of "over-fulfilling the quota."

TV has 1-2 hours of programming a day but never outside the hotels for foreigners. Radios, however, are prized and young men walk in the streets carrying transistors. The bookstores display pile upon pile of little booklets of Marxist classics or Maoist thought or illustrated story books displaying heroic collective triumph over landlords, Japanese or counter-revolutionaries. Apparently, it has finally penetrated that people are not really interested in all this and some classic Chinese novels have been introduced, as well as works of bourgeois Western economists. When they go on sale, the bookstores are mobbed. Copies are hard to find. They are always sold out.

As might be imagined, the result of this completely controlled communication is that the bulk of young Chinese, particularly, are singularly uninformed. They know nothing about life except their immediate jobs, they ask no questions for they have no curiosity and they do not speculate. Chinese communism appears solely as the work of Mao and the 8th Army with an assist from Stalin. No Chinaman other than Mao is ever pictured in public propaganda.

Triumph is the dominant note in all permanent outdoor posters, "showing the raised fist, outthrust chest and heroic gaze on the far horizon", triumph in the class struggle. Exhortation is the theme in songs, dance programs and ballet. Art also serves the same purpose, showing the emancipation of the poor and lower middle class peasants from the wicked landlords.

A department of historic relics has been functioning since 1949 and under its supervision palaces, pagodas, temples and gardens are in better shape than at any time since their original occupants departed. The repairing, restoring and opening of these monuments to the public, of course, is with the stated purpose of showing how the proper-tied class exploited the labor of the people for its private luxury. At the same time, by

a clever twist of reasoning, the object is to show how China's wonderful heritage of the arts is owed to the "wisdom of the masses since theirs was the labor that built the Ming tomb or fired the glaze on the porcelain or embroidered the emperor's silk coat. The inspiration of the original artist, architect or designer is not mentioned, leaving the unquestioning public to suppose that the conception sprang full blown from the brow of the masses."

Religion has suffered the shutdown common under Communist regimes and many Buddhist and Taoist temples listed in guidebooks are closed. A few of the most famous have been opened for public visiting without any anti-religious propaganda attached. Contrarily, it is heavy at the Ming Tombs, now publicly exhibited for the first time. Graphic charts claim to show that 30,000 men a day worked for six years or 65 million man-days to build a useless tomb while every peasant household in the area had to contribute an average of over six workers to the task. The object everywhere is to remind the viewer of the cruelty and oppression of the past as compared with the liberation of 1949.

The deadly dullness and the over-simplification of the content of all this propaganda is so intense that it is a mystery that the Chinese can bear it. The answer is that the important people in China today (the masses, naturally) as Mao condescendingly explains are "blank". He adds: "On blank pages the most beautiful words can be written". So can almost anything be written, for people who are blank will absorb whatever is given, particularly when they have no criteria to judge by and have not yet the capacity to be bored. Beside this, the tradition for Chinese is to live within a prescribed pattern of behavior. Confucianism was precisely this. Remember the pearls of wisdom in those great little "Confucius say" admonitions?

Unappealing as it may be to the Western mind, the content of this propaganda in terms of the people and the dynamics of the Communist program make a good deal of sense and are meant to be and are taken seriously. They are put into action. At a railroad crossing a soldier on guard actually stepped down into the road to help a peasant get his heavily loaded cart moving again after a train had passed. He was "serving the people", a thing unthinkable in the old days when the soldier was both scum and the people's nightmare. China watchers who hear the words and published statements will never understand the real-

ity because to them the words are too irritating. Only when one sees it acted out in peoples' lives can understanding of today's China be possible.

"Nevertheless," says Mrs. Tuchman, "the assumption of infallibility, the twisting of the record and the suppression of fact, are creating an uninformed and misinformed - although a motivated public. One would like to believe that knowledge must break through, that truth conquers and that no people can be kept in obedient consensus for long but I am not sure of these propositions regarding China. Nine-tenths of the mainland population may be so thoroughly and contentedly indoctrinated that it will be long before they are open to new ideas."

For the immediate future, China's outlook seems cloudy, indeed. The mysterious death of Marshal Lin Biao and Moscow's possible complicity gives evidence that the struggle at top levels of Chinese leadership is not over. The tug of war over the succession to Mao who at 78 is treated as a semideity, is probably adjourned temporarily at best. Premier Chou En-lai, now clearly Number 2 in the hierarchy runs the country from day to day, though he consults the Chairman on important matters and takes major decisions in his name. But it is not certain how long he could hold the country together after Mao's death. In any event, he is 73 and so is the country's third ranking leader, acting head of the armed services. Of the sixty Cabinet members, Politburo members and top leaders of the armed forces, only some thirty odd are active or even visible at all.

The present policies of the victors tend to practical solutions to internal problems and moderate foreign policies. At home, there is a more realistic approach to education, wage incentives in industry and private vegetable plots in agriculture with economic development taking priority over arms production.

Abroad there is a willingness to be patient about Taiwan, to seek accommodation with the United States and Japan and to practice a more open diplomacy elsewhere while remaining on guard toward a hostile Soviet Union. But until the succession to Mao is settled, the stability of the present government and its policies will remain a question mark.