A Personal View of China's Cultural Revolution

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In September I attended a scientific meeting in Moscow and then, following an invitation of the Scientific and Technological Association of China, I went to Peking. When my Russian wife and I arrived at the station, I was taking my wife, they were abstaining. According to their information China was in the same way that we can see in the picture of any foreigner. They did their best to dissuade us from our fruitlessly planned. These gleaming forebodings contradicted strangely with the gorgeous bouquets of flowers that awaited us at Peking Airport.

However, as we drove into the city we soon noticed that it was unusually a little. Huge crowds of young people with red arm-bands were milling about in the streets in an atmosphere of general excitement. All available wall space which was not taken up with slogans or portraits of Mao Tse-tung was pasted over with messages and sheets of paper clamped over with writing. They turned out to be suggestions-prepared by individuals, or groups, or organizations—calling for changes. We saw practically all subjects from the renaming of the streets to the reduction of a certain number of old buildings. We learned that this was not confined to Peking. Siam in the west, Shanghai in the east, and Canton in the south, all presented the same aspect; and the suggestions were not only in the streets but also in every factory and every agricultural commune. The comments of the newspapers, the arguments, the interest, and whatever their outcome may be ultimately, they certainly testify to a new high level of literacy.

Young people, in large and small groups, visited the foreign guests, offered to answer any questions on the cultural revolution which we would like to ask. We soon learned that the destruction of old ideas, old culture, and old institutions was not a replacement by the new concepts of the proletariat, it was a radical and decisive, but when we went over the finer points the discussion became entirely realistic.

Asked what should happen to a country lover a poor peasant, a friend of the teachers and students, was read Mao Tse-tung's works and said that they were right.

The usage was that a country lover could be of no interest to the proletariat. So I varied the problem by asking a beautiful daughter of the people. The student who had been born near the country lady was now so certain, but was still inclined to think that the country lover had a right to help to the proletariat. But he was immediately overruled by another one who pointed to chapter thirty-two in the book, which states that the country lover had the right to help to the proletariat. But Kuo, too, had to be considered, and his conclusion was a very valuable one. He stated that his argument originated from the same chapter to which I pointed, but the effect that distinguishes the two is: Kuo, never be settled in a consumptional frame. The whole meaning and every idea may have been to the intellectual exercise, remarkably free from highbrow nonsense.

We felt after about two hours, again with clapping of hands and cheering, now rendered by many warm handshakes.

Whatever we saw of the cultural revolution gave the impression of a carefully planned and efficiently organized event. In such a vast occasion there may have been some slightly exaggerated instances where probably were some minor excesses of zeal. None the less, it is amusing to see the manner in which we saw the remainder of paper strips with slogans con- demning "old culture" which some younger people had pasted on the walls, the hotel windows, and various other places.

Now, however, all the museums were closed, except to foreign visitors, and to the young people of a large pagoda in Chekiang we found a notice saying that this was not a "bourgeois" relic; but a national treasure being protected by the proletariat. We saw no real damage, and, curiously, it may have been more likely to be insignificant in comparison with the vastness of China. The destruction of historical monuments carried out by the proletariat is, we think, still going on.

As we arrived at a hotel, we went looking for suggestions sheets were removed from the rooms; signs and still more pictures of Mao Tse-tung were pasted over the hotel window became larger than ever, starting with the Triple-Soverigns.

The great pagoda, too, was quite different from the one we had seen in the photographs. In the large central hall, there was a huge column of two and a half million Red Guard marching for hours past the grandstand of Tian An Men, waving their red flags at Mao Tse-tung, Lin Piao, and Chou En-lai. The only emblems carried were pictures of Mao. Before and during the holidays there were long queues outside all book shops which sold nothing else but the works and pictures of Mao Tse-tung.

All these manifestations of the cultural revolution completely focused on one main trend to be incomprehensible and therefore interesting. The best way of understanding the change is a cause for surprise to the Chinese. It seems to me that the Chinese still read passages in the papers, and all young people in the streets, are full of goods and We no longer hear except for Mao Tse-tung's books or pictures. We returned through the department stores and markets appraising the goods and making their choice in any way we choose. Self living is in hand, and bereft seems to lose one of the main reasons for the cultural revolution.

When I visited China four years ago, luxury goods like high-heeled shoes and elegant brocade dresses were making their way. The easy life for a new privileged class seemed to be in sight. And it is here where I think the cultural revolution has started. It tells the story how one thing may lead the other. When the people ofangle them their sense of a new experience, it is by the help of which they are able to come to terms with the changes that are to come. They show them their own choices of way. They show them the changes that are to come.

I am fully conscious of having used the word "presumably" because it is the only way in which I can describe the truly miraculous economic advance which China has made in the last few years under the influence of agriculture and, above all, in industry which has responded to the call. West can produce Chinese and cannot, from beginning to end, believe the achievements in electron microscopes, and from highgrade metal alloys to synthetic fibres. These changes, incidentally, are a case where they have outpaced us. To the Chinese the essence of this miracle is the leadership of Mao Tse-tung. To them the thought of Mao Tse-tung means the hero who served them all—mobilizing a grand total of 700 million pairs of skilled hands, backed by the enemy who occupies Taiwan and is fighting in Vietnam will bring back the hard old days. They are asked to study and follow the thought of Mao Tse-tung, which simply means to continue with all their energy the hard work of the previous generation in bringing about revolutionary changes.

The main theme appears simple and straightforward, but of course it has a number of aspects. By heritage the Chinese are a good and obedient civilization who would follow anyone who easily the orders of some new privileged class, who are therefore warned to watch on for, and guard against, its emergence. The revolution is also a result of the change of life which came to China with the western contact. During the years of the first Programme, the idea of show initiative, to make suggestions for improvements, and not to be afraid of criticizing someone/whose family background used to enjoy a high position. The China of tomorrow will need not fear a few leaders but many people who must be able to think for themselves and who have learned to take decisions in all walks of life. The Red Guards are the activists of the young generation, trained in the activities of the Chinese Communist Party. They must be an agent of change, and not a tool of preservation. The telescope is on, or rather the brush, and not the rifle.

The ultimate aim is to create a new form of socialist society in which each must grow according to his ability and where each must be free to be himself. With the young are told, China will lead the world and usher in a new era of mankind.

This facet of the cultural revolution is a development which, one feels, had to come sooner or later. The spirit of the emergent China was not going to be satisfied by becoming merely a super-Japan, a western-type technologically organised Asiatic industrial and manpower. From this pattern China had to break away by making her own, specifically Chinese, contribution. As Mao grows old, he may want to make sure that China is set on her own way, and so the break with the past has come now.

The Chinese are realistic, and they candidly discuss the fact that Mao will not live for ever. With this in mind now is it to ensure that his inspiration of the new China should remain alive. Two things are clearly necessary: the right choice of a successor, and to make certain that this choice will be followed. For the party, the party has fallen back on that core three, with, more than any other, brought victory to their seventeen years ago, the liberation army. The core of this force were the patriotic young students, who, at the time of the Japanese invasion, made their way to Yenan in northwest China to be trained under Mao Tse-tung's leadership. They were not trained as soldiers but as responsible revolutionaries whose duty it should be to make friends with the people wherever they went. It was, above all, this spirit which brought them together in a country where soldiers had only too often believed like hooligans. Lin Piao is the leader of this army, and it is the army which has prepared the little red book.

The raising of one man to a level when no ordinary human being can attain may be alien to us, but it is not new to the eastern mind. From this position which Mao Tse-tung has achieved he can look back on a long line of Chinese society. His choice of a successor cannot and does not seem to be a question of personal rivalry.

I am not a politician, but I want to point out the opportunity of the witness of the most remarkable happenings of our age. All I have done is to analyse my own impressions. My personal view, some day or may not be the correct one.