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Reporter

THE INFLUENCE
OF THE
THOUGHT OF
MAO TSE-TUNG

BY REWI ALLEY

ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE
THOUGHT OF MAO TSE-TUNG

Publisher's Introduction

The philosopher Plato dreamed of a day "when philosophers would be kings, and kings would be philosophers". In essence this was a plea for the rulers in a slave society to be philosophically minded.

To some it may seem that in China today Plato's vision is coming to pass; but actually the differences are fundamental. The people of the world's most populous nation in their hundreds of millions - and not an exploiting minority as in Plato's time - are becoming philosophers.

Furthermore, in socialist China, kings, emperors, and their parasites of every sort are no more. The people now rule, and their philosophy, dialectical materialism, sharply parts company with that of a class society - slave, feudalist or capitalist. The people's unprecedented mass philosophic movement is a giant step forward which, joined together with political-economic and organizational measures, is eradicating to the very roots the material and ideological conditions of the old China, and creating in their place a people's socialist China.

Powerfully assisting and guiding the people in effecting this profound change in their basic mode of thought are the philosophical and other writings of their outstanding leader, Mao Tse-tung.

Western commentators, and especially those of the United States, are endeavoring to befuddle others into

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ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE
THOUGHT OF MAO TSE-TUNG

By Rewi Alley

"I thought I was alright. Liberation was a good thing. The Government is the best we ever had. I was getting quite good pay. There were no family troubles that could not be met. Not naturally very energetic, I just lazied along on the whole quite pleased with myself. Then some one in our political study group quoted Chairman Mao so often; each time the quotation fitted so well, that I decided to read his works a bit, at first simply with the idea that I could make a good, chippy little statement myself during a meeting. But then as I went on studying all that down to earth material, I began to feel not quite so satisfield with myself".

This is a common enough statement among this quarter of the world's people these days. I can hear the Western cynic answer, "Pure revivalist stuff! Un-analytical minds of the common people are always looking for a personal savior! The illusion of being born again is necessary for many. Got to hang on to something, some God or other, poor beggars!" And so and on he would go, pleased with his incredible sagacity and insight into the thought processes of "lesser breeds without the law" not blessed by his particular variety of college education. But then, he is not one of the two thirds of the human race off which the one third has lived just too long. He has not known the full bitterness the old order can bring. He has not even read what Mao Tse-tung has written, and he has never tried to understand what has gone into the vast change that is sweeping over this one quarter of mankind today. why the reading of the clearly put down statements On Practice, On Contradiction, on The International Spirit, on what it takes to be a real revolutionary and all the rest, should have so great an impact on the people he

looks down on. Actually Chairman Mao has not written a great deal for publication, but in his essays and speeches that have been collected and widely published there is enough to give a clear insight into his thinking and how it dovetails with the needs of every one who wants to be a good citizen of this new order - the citizen who needs to be armed for the struggle he must engage in, with a clear understanding of where he is going and why.

Wang Hsiu-ying has a live, pleasant face, especially warm and engaging when she smiles and shows her beautiful white teeth. Though she does not look it, she is already a woman of forty, with a family of her own. For the past fourteen years she has worked as a saleswoman behind the counter of one of the State Department Stores in Wusih, Kiangsu Province. Her father was a cook, and she grew up in a home that passed through many a tough period with very little to eat. Sometimes just one meal a day, sometimes hardly even that. She was glad then in the early days of the new order, to get work to be able to earn money and bring security to her home folk. As time went on and with the help of the study group of her organization, she began to catch up with the revolution, learning that even the simplest work could be truly revolutionary. That her own work, with all the contacts she had with folk all day long, was one of great responsibility. She was in a position to make folk happy, or to go agrily away. If she abruptly said "wait a minute" instead of giving a smile and saying, "I'll be with you soon; please look at what we have" the prospective customer would probably move off. Often at home Wang Hsiu-ying would practice counter work, putting all kinds of objects out on the table, and then having the family come and pretend to be customers, all making a game of the thing - but Hsiu-ying learning something from it. She learnt as she went on how to apply some of her lessons in theory. Contradictions come all the time. The store was near a river boat station, and also near the railway station. Many folk would rush in to buy something before leaving; seeing people in a hurry, she would tell those she was waiting on to please give her a moment to serve the anxious one and not leave him fuming impatiently. Studying the essay on a proletarian world outlook made

her pay attention to a farmer who had come in and asked for No 39 shoes. She knew that numbers had recently been changed and that probably he was thinking of the old ones. When she told him this he said, "No, never mind, I will not try any on; thank you; 39 is my number." As he was going off she looked over the counter and saw that he was barefooted and his feet were muddy. So she entreated him to stay awhile, slipped around the back, and brought in her own basin with warm water, for him to wash his feet and try on shoes. He found a pair that fitted, and with a cheerful smile departed with the new shoes tucked under his arm.

Talking to us Hsiu-ying said, "Chairman Mao says one must do a thing thoroughly, sincerely; serving the people is not just a slogan; the people must be studied; we must analyze." Then she gave an illustration. Sometimes a couple would come in, the man quite evidently being the boss of the situation; or perhaps it would be the wife who was boss; the man would pick up a cigarette holder and toy with it. "You lost the last one you bought" the wife would say with some acidity, preparing to leave. Then Hsiu-ying could come in with some healing remarks such as, "It is really a useful thing; the cigarette butts can be saved and rolled again; it does not take so long to cover the cost." Softened up, the wife would say, "Well, you better buy this one." Once a man with a tough-looking beard came in; being offered a locally made razor blade, he wondered if it would cut his stubble, and asked how long it would last. Hsiu-ying had to confess that she did not know. But that evening she went to the factory that made the blades, loaded up with information about blades, determined not to be caught again!

Reading in "Practice" about the necessity of taking an objective view of the laws of development, she studies the way people come up to her counter. Those who step up directly, knowing what they want, just need swift service. Those who walk in undecidedly, not sure whether to buy or not, these need a word or two of encouragement. And then there are those who just aimlessly wander around with no intention of buying at all. So she learns how to estimate people. The quite old are always glad to stand aside while the quite young are served first. She knows some

are likely to respond when the saleswoman wonders whether they have a grandchild who would like this, or a mother who would like that. She has learned how to arrange the stock so that she can lay her hands quickly on whatever is needed in rush times; there are techniques for busy hours and for the quieter times. Learning to understand something of her customers, and doing everything she can for them, has brought much satisfaction to her life. She feels it is much fuller than it has ever been, and comes to her daily task each day with the pleasant feeling that she is starting out on a revolutionary venture with all kinds of interesting possibilities in it. And, she takes time to read over some of her favorite passages of Chairman Mao and think over the ways they can best be implemented as she goes along.

Yu Hung-hsien is a cheerful looking Chekiang lass of twenty one, whose father was a textile worker in Wusih. The father was retired from his job; and she was a graduate of Upper Primary school; she had looked forward to becoming a worker in heavy industry - maybe even having her picture in some illustrated paper standing by a huge machine. But instead, she was allocated to the textile industry, and was very unhappy and became more than disgusted when she was sent to the mill's barber shop, to start as barber's assistant, sweeping up and passing out hot towels. Her whole dream castle collapsed around her feet.

Despite the fact that China has been liberated for seventeen years and that it is over half a century since the downfall of the Manchu Empire, yet old ideas take some eradicating, and one of these was that to be a barber was a mean and low calling, not worthy of really nice people. To put it mildly, Hung-hsien felt she had been treated badly and that she was in a task with no future in it. When her old teacher came to see others working in the mill, she did not dare go to see her, so ashamed was she of her job. Over and over she pondered on how to get out of it, so that quite naturally her work was bad, and she made several quite serious mistakes. Then she had a talk with the Party secretary who seemed to understand her thinking very well. He told her

that now, in the new society, all honest work was revolutionary, no matter what the task was. What mattered was the attitude toward it.

Hung-hsien had read about Dr Bethune and others, but had said, "They are not people like I am; they were different." Then she studied Lei Feng (a labor hero...ed) a young person like herself, and she took the lesson to heart. Then another talk with the Party secretary, and the realization that she had been going along the wrong road in her thinking. She listened to discussion, and made a more down to earth study of Chairman Mao's words, finding out that his ideas really did go right down into the base of things, and that they could be a lot of help to her in trying to understand her position. She began to understand how important was the idea that a revolutionary is not scared of tough going, he passes on the easy things to others and takes on the heavy ones himself; he finds the best ways to help people. So she began to forget her silly pride, realizing that what she had been aiming at was something that would raise her above the common folk, not something that would serve the people. She found that if she looked around there were plenty of opportunities for doing things for others. There were plenty of mill workers whose families were in the country, workers who were not used to looking after themselves; she could find them, wash and mend for them, and carry food when they were sick.

Chairman Mao had said that when you get work, then you must study it in every aspect, master it completely. Hung-hsien decided to learn how to cut hair; when she asked the leading barber about this he just looked at her and said, "It's not easy"; but he let her try on him and even though after three whole hours of trying it still was not done properly, he was patient with her; and she practiced on her father and brothers, and any one else she could get to submit. She said, "I found that in shaving, one had to use the wrist, not the elbow; so I cultivated the flexible wrist each time I ate with chopsticks. I was scared to tackle people with heavy stubble or funny shaped heads, and sometimes wondered if I would ever really be able to be a barber. Though I had no hair, I practiced shaving my own face, and cut it

so badly, people thought I must be mad. This took me five months in all, from November 1964, to get through this stage. Then the shop sent me to Shanghai to learn how to do women's hair. There I was taught technique, and technique only. I had thought when first coming to the barber's shop, how much better off a shoe shiner was than a barber. At least he could sit facing his customer, not stand behind his back. But then those silly ideas vanished, and I found myself getting up at four in the morning practicing before going to work, how to do with one hand what the average person would use two to do. But following my Shanghai training and my return to the mill shop I began to realize technique was not the only thing. No longer would customers avoid coming to my chair as they had before. No longer was I looked on as being a clumsy apprentice sweating with anxiety."

And Hung-hsien went on - "Despite all that, I felt that something was missing now, something that previously had activated me into determination to do my best in the task given me. I went on with my reading of Chairman Mao's works; it was a deeper understanding of theory that made me think again, and gave me the urge to do more with what I had. A sick man was brought to the shop from the mill hospital; when I took him back I found that there were many in the wards around him who needed sprucing up; so I did that job on Sundays, and the income from this went into the Barber Shop Cooperative for all to share so that all would be correct organizationally. I found a paralysed patient and was able to get him to take more interest in life by attending to his needs. Then an eighty year old pensioner came to our shop; it was far for him to walk, so I made arrangement that I would call and attend him in his home twice a month; when he thanked me I told him it was Chairman Mao he had to thank." So the tale went on.

Continued study led from one thing to another. She began to wonder about the class struggle. Were there evidences of it in the group of thirteen who made up the Barber Shop Cooperative? A girl factory worker came in

to have her plaits cut off and her hair bobbed. A barber who was once the owner of a barber shop in the city cut higher than he needed to, but only gave the girl the plaits. Her mother sent her back to get the rest. Hung-hsien had not put it away, so the barber concerned could not say it was not there. But when the girl had gone, the same barber scolded Hung-hsien saying that he thought it was quite allright for barbers to sell a little human hair on the market. Hung-hsien replied that such an idea was purely a capitalist one. He angrily asked what right had she, a chit of a school girl, to criticise him? So the matter was taken to a meeting and Hung-hsien upheld. Then she grew still more suspicious of this barber; he always seemed tired; and grabbed sleep whenever he could during working hours. Hung-hsien went to his home once after work and found that he was operating a barber shop in it, with people coming in at all hours. Again the matter was brought up to the whole group, and became a practical lesson for all: do we want to return to the old order with every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost? or do we sincerely throw all our strength into our work group? Do we want to build up a new exploiting class, or do we not? Is the one who sleeps in the time he gets paid for by the work of others, and then works just for himself in the time he ought to be resting really a man of our class?

For these two girls, Wang Hsiu-ying and Yu Hung-hsien, and a growing mass like them, pie in the sky is no lure to work. They are not scared of being fired, or of the boss. The driving force in their lives is the thinking of Mao Tse-tung. To many in the West such a statement will be like a red rag to a bull. Yet, for the once denied and oppressed, Mao's thinking is a fact that cannot be laughed away, or lightly passed over; it is a deep and abiding fact in their lives that gathers strength as it enters into their lives. It is the new light of Asia.

In Yangchow, North Kiangsu, I went along the working benches of a handicraft factory. There were many teen-age lads and lasses learning from old-timers how to turn out

pieces of beauty in jade, amethyst, agate or other stones. Almost every worker had selected some passage from the works of Mao Tse-tung which held meaning for him at the moment, and had it painted on a card or board in front of his or her eyes. I saw the same thing in a pottery in another part of Yangchow, where workers were testing bowls and packing them: beside kiln doors, alongside the jiggs that cut out shapes from moulds "Why do we work?" "Where does our path forward lie?" "What makes a real person?" and so on.

Out on the streets of Yangchow I saw a group of lads come out from one of the factories; they had little boards hung from the front of their bicycles, with passages they particularly liked painted on them. They would read each other's, and passers-by would read them too. The thought of Mao Tse-tung is surely going to inspire the youth of this land in all its vast entirety for a long time to come. This is a youth that is not fanatical in its beliefs, but feels it needs to know the way forward, and that for all its problems there is an answer, if one searches for it in the right way.

We went through some of the lanes of old Yangchow. They were scrupulously clean. I have never seen such immaculate lanes in any old Chinese city. I wondered. Then we came to an old residence from which rose a sound of singing. Going in, we found it was a political study group operated by the local people of these lanes for the young folk - young folk, who for one reason or another had not yet been allocated work; some were boys who had not passed exams, or who had left school through sickness, family troubles, or what not, girls who were growing up, young housewives who wanted to learn more, and even an occasional middle aged one. These people of the lanes had divided up into many groups, like this one of thirteen which we visited, with a mass meeting each Monday. On the other mornings they studied or cleaned the town. At times they went to the country-side to help the communes in mass work; out of this project seventy seven had gone out to permanent work since 1964, forty six of them to villages to help in the many activities that needed them there.

Some have gone on to research institutes, state farms, and so on. One of the boys seeing a cart-puller with a sore leg, left his own family task and pulled the man's cart for ten kilometers out to the village with the hurt farmer on the top of it. Then he came back to the city and completed his own work. Learning the thought of Mao, all say, means that you must apply it. Girls help sick neighbors, look after children, sew and wash for others. The thinking of Mao Tse-tung runs through all those old lanes of Yangchow in no uncertain way.

When folk talk about the "thinking of Mao Tse-tung" they do not have anything mystical in mind, nothing comparable to religious thought. They have in their thoughts the down to earth things that affect them, ways of meeting which they see painted up on walls around them, simple extracts in simple words that have such honesty and clearness in them that immediately they understand. Revolution is struggle. A person's work is his way of expressing himself in a revolutionary way. Revolutionaries are not afraid of bitterness or death. For them the welfare of the people is the first concern. They are for working class internationalism, supporting all struggles of the people for freedom. In language that every one can understand, the thinking of Mao Tse-tung makes its impact.

Recently a foreign visitor said to me, "One thing I cannot take is this cult of the personality I see every where in China - this worship of Mao Tse-tung". Then he asked for explanation; this was not easy to give because he had been so well brainwashed in the West by television and other news media that he thought and spoke like an official commentator. There is no personality cult in China. Chairman Mao personally is one of the most humble of men, with a sure common touch that makes him loved. His birthday is not celebrated nor are streets or cities named after him. What the Chinese people do follow, however, is the living philosophy called the "Thinking of Chairman Mao"; this is the essence of the collective thought that brought the revolutionary forces through to sure victory, and which will stand them in good stead in the future. In the terse, down-to-earth language of Mao Tse-tung it sounds even better in Chinese than it does in foreign translation; translators often prefer literary

words to the more simple ones.

This thinking of Mao Tse-tung is a down-to-earth guide to action. At times a seemingly unsurmountable problem arises. Then all get together and study the bit about the "Foolish Old Man Who Moved Mountains" and they so increase their determination and strengthen their collective action that the way ahead becomes clear. In the old society there were many admirable texts, but they were adroitly by-passed in the grab system, where the right of the individual to exploit remains supreme. There is perhaps no one in the world so close to the quarter of humanity that makes up China as is Mao Tse-tung. He is the very embodiment of the man who stands patiently and sturdily in the paddy field despite the cold water around his legs in early spring, and who feels the hot sun on his bare back in summer, thoughtfully, tenderly producing the grain that will feed him and his people.

Mao's thinking is alive with the spirit of collective work; it breathes a true internationalism that is the hope of working peoples everywhere. It is the thing that inspires workers in factories as well as farmers in the most distant communes, bringing them together and giving them clear-cut common aims. It inspires the fighter who stands on China's borders, ready to repel aggression. It is with the student in his studies, the housewife in her street meetings. It is the living spirit of the Chinese revolution that means so much to peoples everywhere. Whether Mao Tse-tung is able to live along with and still more assist the Chinese people over the next few decades or not, it will remain a strength and a guiding light to them in their down-to-earth struggle for advance.

The question rises quite naturally, why should there be so much effort spent on getting the simple thinking that is so undoubtedly correct firm in people's minds. Who would be against it? Again there is something to be learned from negative example. Many of China's old intellectuals are at heart conservative, preferring values laid down in the past to those emerging from the people's struggles over the past forty years.

In the old China relatively few people were trained to examine problems manysidedly. And amongst ordinary people too there grew up myths surrounding this or that popular historical personage, with the tendency to lift him out of his historical context and use him as a justification for what is in essence a reactionary position: just as a Johnson would take a statue of Lincoln to Mexico City and use it to gloss over United States loot of Mexican resources.

There are still those who in their heart of hearts believe that only the chief enemy, the US and his revisionaist allies, have any real strength - some among families of former landlords and capitalists, some among once rich peasants, some who feel they are a cut above the common man, some greedy for personal power and wealth, some who look down on village life and think that only the "superior" city dweller is entitled to the fruits of the revolution, some who are scared of dying, scared of facing up to realities. There still exist those who have no confidence in their own people, who are against change, who are narrow bureaucratic nationalists rather than proletarian internationalists. These elements are in reality one with the forces opposing both the Chinese people and the long exploited, long denied peoples of other countries.

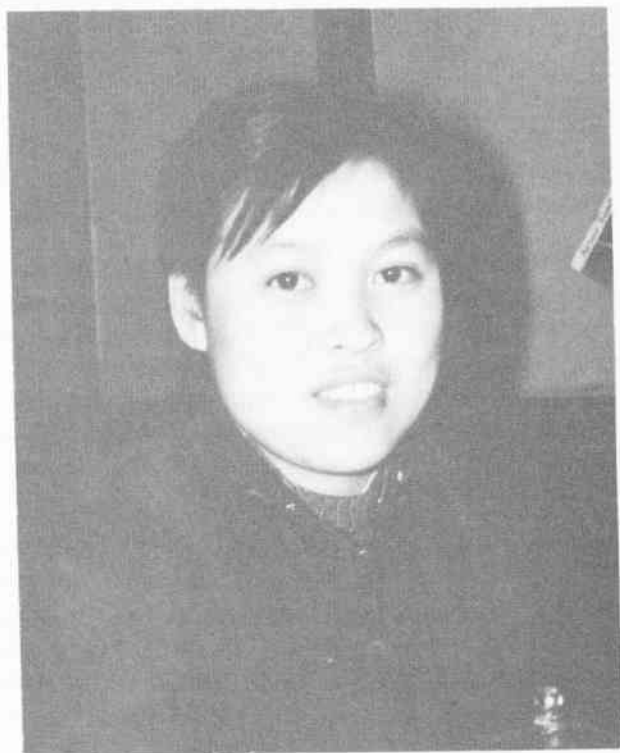
With the knowledge that these kinds of persons still do exist, and will exist for a considerable time to come, the struggle to implant the kind of thinking that will be able to counteract it and hold China to the revolutionary road is rightly considered all important. The thinking of Mao Tse-tung places squarely on the masses of the people the responsibility for economic self-sufficiency and for removing all mountains that stand in the way

There is no "Great Leader" complex here. It is the Thinking of Mao Tse-tung that remains one of the greatest factors in holding this great revolution to its course. In the end it will sweep forward, brushing aside all opposition, a force for peace and stability in the new world to come.

The Saleswoman



The Barber Girl



believing that this nation-wide study movement of Mao's is an exaltation, a cult of the individual. The truth is the exact opposite.

The cult of the individual, as for example the way it developed in the Soviet Union (as their present leaders state) dramatized the limited development of philosophic cadres. This reached so extreme a point that theory became almost centered in one individual, Stalin.

In China, instead of one leader being raised up in lonely eminence as the fount of all theory, the vast masses are all becoming theoretically-oriented leaders. In the Soviet Union over a period of years the gulf between its prime leader and the philosophic theoretical capacities of the people became quite wide; while in China this once-wide chasm is being steadily bridged.

American sophisticates, divorced from the aspirations and abilities of plain people, may in their ignorance and animus, deride what may seem to them the people's "naive, artificial and simplistic" reaching upward toward scientific philosophic generality.

Rewi Alley, poet, writer and long-time resident of China in "On the Influence of the Thought of Mao Tse-tung" graphically and at first hand depicts this awakening and upsurge of the people's latent theoretical powers - a province which for thousands of years was that of a privileged elite.

China, a nation which traditionally has honored the sage is proceeding firmly on its way to becoming a nation of sages, an heir of the best of mankind's culture, a culture to which they are creatively adding a new and significant portion.

Wisdom is being infused with action,
the head with the hand, "to subdue nature
and transform society".