

Reflections from China

PART TWO

by Doug Bond

This one example of many of Chinese efficiency explains why these people commonly cut open their toothpaste tubes when we would declare them empty. They find at least several more days of brushing by doing so and then the empty tube is recycled for its precious aluminum. Rice paddies harvested in the morning are flooded and replanted with seedlings during the afternoon of the same day. Chemical fertilizers augment the organic sources frugally collected from all sources to ensure crop production. Communal farms are being mechanized slowly with tractors, threshers and grinders. Rural electrification is amazingly extensive. But the Chinese alternative to the universal problem of displacement of agricultural people into the suburbs and slums of the world's exploding cities is to attempt to disperse industries such as brick-making, pre-cast concrete, cotton works and so on to the communal towns to absorb the displaced labour. A highly controlled ideological system assists in implementing this policy and strategic decentralization is a result of unknown priority. But evidence of enormous tunnels and shelters beneath Peking and other cities attests to the priority of strategic concerns.

Yet their rice breeds are not as productive as the dwarf rice strains developed outside the Bamboo Curtain. Our accepted technology of hybrid corn is not equalled though maize fields extend to the horizon in the north where these seemingly endless rows are cultivated a row at a time by mule power. Dairy cattle average less than half the productivity of our local herds and their few beefers rank similarly, though beef and dairy products have a low priority in the Chinese diet. Amongst their very labour and land intensive farm system, only their pork production demanded our respect. Yet everyone seen from near and far seemed adequately, if very equally fed and clothed. The increased physical stature of teenagers supports this general impression of an improved food supply and distribution.

Industrialization is well-advanced. Basic iron and steel production is established and secondary consumer manufacturing is beginning with accelerating demand. Millions of Shanghai brand electric fans mark the windows of six and eight storey office buildings and small but adequate two and three room apartments. The new housing facilities are adequate in design but far behind the demand in numbers. Radios are ubiquitous and serve to spread the Party line. It must be noted that many of the radios seen in stores and homes were fitted for short wave and Radio Canada came through loud and clear on at least a couple hotel radios. Televisions are becoming available and are usual furniture of farm and factory work teams' community rooms. But the radios and televisions are tube receivers and the transistor generation of hand calculators and home computers is a technology they covet

for practical and strategic reasons. The standard bicycle in standard black costs about 2 months' salary to the standard worker. And it is a bicycle world in Peking or Shanghai at rush hour. A treadle sewing machine costs 3 months' salary. Rent takes about 4 to 10% of private incomes but food demands 30 to 40% of a worker's "share of profits". We are ignorant in our bliss in Canada where we pay 15 to 20% of earning for food of unbelievable kinds and forms to the Chinese contrast.

Chinese culture is unique in the world as it has persisted for several millenia instead of experiencing the violent flows and ebbs of Western civilization from Babylon to Britain. But within this tranquil overview of Chinese time by Westerners is masked the repeated cycles of revolution that have occurred within the China entity. Repeatedly, old and corrupt dynasties and systems have been overthrown and new dynasties established in glory and hope attuning ideology with environment for the time. And in time the Ming and the Ching and others rose and fell through phases of maintaining the status quo, then stagnation and then corruption that spawned new revolution. It is with this simplified theme in mind that one wonders if, indeed, the Mao gospel is just another cycle of Chinese history. Certainly, the Chairman's devout, card-carrying adherents are unlike the nobility of old. The thirty million or so members of the Communist party of China do not flout their wealth and grandeur as the nobility of pre-Revolutionary China. But they do enjoy privilege and power. Will their sons and daughters see fit to attend the Peoples Congress in the universal clothes of worker workers? One new theme and hope is the slow trend toward universal education and communication. Though at present these serve to implement the centralist ideology, the ability to read, write, and communicate held by the common people may in time lead to an enlightened and questioning people.

Yet the masses are encouraged to and amazingly claim to succeed in banking some of their monthly income averaging an equivalent \$50.

So it is remarkable that in spite of a century of organizational collapse and three decades of political upheaval that the Chinese way of life is at least materially as advanced as it is, namely about three decades behind us in the West and about two decades behind their Asian neighbour to the north and west. This realization is the impetus that is forcing them to look to Canada and Australia, Germany and even Japan for technical exchange and assistance. The computer world of technology is sufficient goal to cause gradual Romanizing of their ancient, complex and elitist script. English, by accident of history the language of technology is now the Chinese objective as their second language; in the footsteps of the Japanese.

The Chinese fear and suspect their technically superior Soviet neighbors who, in turn, fear and suspect the Chinese hordes. The Chinese fear and suspect our American neighbours only slightly less. Having achieved a measure of equality in the physical essentials of human life and dignity and a measure of security after the painful rebirth of their centralized ideology, the Chinese can now look outward cautiously. Yet they have been a people of intense introspection since times prior to Marco Polo. It is to be hoped that the sudden opening of visions to the tinsel of Western technology during the recent past will not bring immediate popular expectations of colour televisions to individual liberties at a rate in excess of their practical and ideological capacity to evolve. Though we might wish them these objectives, the results of such demands might be frustration, reaction and repression.

But social evolution takes time and our rushing world creates and demands change at rates even we in the hub of North America find dizzying. Can we afford to wait for the Chinese? One in four of us is Chinese. The human race will have to be patient.

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