

*W. A. C. H. Dobson*

## CHINA, PAST AND PRESENT

DURING THE FIRST HALF of the twentieth century the main focus in the grand strategy of world politics shifted from its epicentre — Western Europe, the seat of the Imperial Powers — to its periphery — the United States and the U.S.S.R. When the century began, a small group of Western European powers dominated the world stage, sharing, between them, most of the rest of the non-European world. But these Imperial Powers in two “world wars” involved the non-European world despite itself. One result was that Africa and Asia, dormant in the nineteenth century, took the occasion to press claims, hitherto hardly articulated, to assert their independence. The Imperial Powers lost their Empires. Another result was that, largely as a result of involvement in these wars, a sort of centrifugal movement set in, and the focus of world power passed from the centre to the periphery, to the United States in the west and to the Soviet Union in the east. The old national power politics now gave way to new power alignments of an ideological kind. The result of this was the cold war, the confrontation of democracy and Communism. Once again, not only were the leading contenders in the West—the Soviet Union and its satellites and the United States and its allies—involved, but, under the pressure of the economic forces at the disposal of these two giants, so too was the rest of the world, Africa and Asia.

In 1950 most observers thought that the stage was set for the rest of the twentieth century—a global confrontation, ideological in kind, between the two giants of the Western world, the Soviet Union and the United States—and that the problem for decades to come, short of war, would be the reaching of some accommodation or “co-existence” between the two worlds of Communism and democracy.

But in such calculations insufficient consideration had been given to the erstwhile pawns of Western power politics: the new republics of Africa, the ancient civilizations of Islam, the Hindu world, the Far East and above all

---

This article has been adapted from two public lectures given by the author at Dalhousie University on March 21 and 22, 1966.

China. In 1950 it was difficult to imagine that this oversight was significant. India with all its problems had just attained independence and had an appalling internecine war on its hands. Japan appeared acquiescent under American tutelage. The new republics of Africa were still only a promise. The Middle East was hopelessly faction-ridden. China, to most people's surprise and puzzlement, had just turned Communist. Many doubted that Communism would survive there.

The factor hardly considered then, but eloquently expounded by Jawarharlal Nehru and echoed in various keys by the rest of the Asian and African world, was the view that the Cold War was a Western problem, the confrontation of Communism and Capitalism—a European neurosis—and that they, the non-Western world, would opt for non-alignment. They wanted nothing to do with the Western confrontation. Underlying this resolve, though little understood in the Western world, was the unpalatable fact that alignment in any form was a reversion to the state of the pre-1950's, tacit recognition of the dominance of the West one way or the other in world affairs.

In 1950 the West, in its pre-occupation with itself, took insufficient cognizance of the newly-awakened pride of Asia and Africa and so conceived of the world as divided into two camps, both Western-dominated, and set out to fight the battle with competing offers of aid. The shape of things to come for the rest of the century seemed still to be a long-drawn-out battle of enticement by the two Western world powers for the loyalty of Asia and Africa, for alignment one way or the other, in the ideological battle that was taking shape. To one aware of what was going on in Asia, however, a different possibility suggested itself. This was another shift of power alignment. The focus would shift to Asia. The ambitious young diplomat of the 1900s had his eyes on the embassies of London, Paris, Rome, Madrid, and Berlin. A similarly ambitious young man in the 1950s had his eyes on Moscow and Washington. Before the century ended, would he not be looking to Peking, to New Delhi, or to Tokyo? In 1950, one fact that seemed to argue against this was that China had just become Communist. No one at that time thought that this meant anything more than a victory for Moscow and for Communism and a tactical set-back in the prosecution of the Cold War. The United States, sixteen years later, is only just recovering from the fatal error of imagining that the Chinese are the pawns of Moscow, or satellites of the Russians, in their ideological battle with the West.

Even in 1950 the indications militated against this idea. Nehru was warning the West that India would not become Western democracy's satellite

in Asia. The Chinese thought it hardly worth saying that they were not Russia's pawn. But because of Western pre-occupation with its own problems and struggles much policy at the time was, and still to some extent is, fashioned and inspired by such Cold War terms. To those who knew something of the depths, profundities, and non-Western orientation of Eastern civilizations, it seemed more probable that the century would see increasingly in the non-Western world a closing of the gap between these ancient civilizations and modern technology. Their immediate problem, seen very early by the Japanese and belatedly by the Chinese, was that backwardness in science and technology had led to the thralldom of Asia to Europe and that it was in science and technology, in becoming "modern" but not "Western", that their liberation lay. Once the technological gap had closed, national pride, deeply rooted in long memories and ancient history, would reassert itself. Asia has no problem of its "identity". Its problem is that of contriving the conditions in which its identity can assert itself.

This shift of focus we are beginning to witness already, while the new half of the century is only sixteen years old. China has developed not as a loyal satellite of the Comintern in Moscow but as a major world power, distinguished not so much by its hostility to the democratic world, which is formidable enough, but by its hostility and irreconcilability with the European Communist world. The Chinese are already accusing the Russians of alliance with the Americans. It is not difficult to see why they imagine this. Recent diplomatic manoeuvres in Outer Mongolia, in Hanoi, and in Tashkent by the Russians, and the presence of the United States in Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam appear to the Chinese to be part of a concerted whole to contain them.

It is beginning to come clear that in the long term the major area of concern is not imperial rivalry, not ideological divisions, but the widening gap between Western economic wealth and non-Western poverty; once that gap is reduced, however, the main challenge to the West will be to its intellectual and philosophical world-leadership. In all this, China is pioneering the non-Western world's new path. Perhaps the shape of things to come in the developing world, in the long term, is exemplified for us in the present history of China, not as a matter of the fate of the struggle between Communism and democracy (these two ideologies are themselves changing and moving towards reconciliation, as we see in Europe today); not as a matter of the outcome of the struggle between riches and poverty (China is showing the world that a poor country can, virtually unaided, raise itself by its own economic bootstraps); but as a challenge to the dominance in the world of Western civiliza-

tion as we know it, because, once strong and assured, the civilizations of Asia will insist on their place in the sun.

The centrality of China both today and in the future on the world scene is hardly now in dispute. It is often said, though the fact is hard to assimilate, that China has one-fifth of the world's population. Its policies are at the moment the principal concern of the U.S.S.R. and of the United States. Despite this, it is the country that we in the West know least about.

Modern China comes most clearly into focus in the light of China's past. This may surprise some readers, but one of the consequences of our ignorance about China is that beliefs based on superficial observation are hardening into dogma. One such, firmly rooted in current thinking, is that the Chinese in 1949 went through some colossal repudiation of their past, ceased, in short, to be Chinese, and became rootless Communists overnight. And it is upon such dogmas that policy is being based. The thinking runs something like this: Marxists have no use for the past; the Chinese are Marxists; the Chinese have no use for the past. At almost any level this argument is faulty. All peoples, Marxist or otherwise, are consciously or unconsciously the creatures of their past, and no peoples are so homogeneous, so bound by cultural ties, so united by a sense of their own essential uniqueness, as the Chinese. And this is no less true today than it was in the Classical Age two thousand years ago. Further, it is demonstrably untrue that modern China has even attempted to repudiate its past. Historical studies of all kinds have not flourished so much in any time of Chinese history as they do today in China. Chinese literature and culture are more assiduously cultivated today than in any other period of history. To imagine this not to be so is to discount the energies and the dynamism of Chinese nationalism that is propelling the Chinese to great feats of physical endurance in building the new China. Marxist theorists distinguish between Chinese Communism and the Communism of the U.S.S.R. The accent, it is becoming increasingly clear, is heavily upon the *Chinese* rather than the *Communist*.

A great many of the contemporary realities in Peking are as puzzling to an expert on Marxism, who argues from theoretical Marxist thought, as would be an explanation of current realities in Canada by a Tibetan who argues from a theoretical knowledge of Christian theology. Indeed it is a commonplace that Communist newsmen from Poland and Hungary in Peking seek out their democratic European counterparts for the comfort of common

Western assumptions when confronted with some of the more puzzling manifestations of the Chinese mind.

This is not to deny that the present regime in China is Communist and Marxist. The Chinese leaders would be the first to insist that this is so. But a political and economic dogma such as Marxism, evolved in and based upon certain facts of Western sociological and economic behaviour, when grafted on to a society as different as that of the Chinese and expressed in a language as remote as is Chinese from Western languages, can produce some strange hybrids.

In speaking of ignorance of China, one has not so much in mind the paucity of information that we have on Communist China, since the world's press and eager visitors to China tell us a surprising amount. Far more significant is the almost total failure of our universities in the Western world to engage in those academic studies in depth that are a prelude to understanding, and which bring the information we have on China into focus. Many of the facts are not in dispute. It is in the interpretation of these facts, in the perspective in which we view them, that dangerous misapprehensions arise.

To a student of China's history, events since 1949 do not appear as a startling innovation, or as a complete *volte-face*; neither do they strike him as surprising or necessarily uncharacteristic. Change certainly took place, but no student of Chinese thought could fail to see in Maoism certain recurring and familiar themes in Chinese philosophy. (It is one of the more peculiar follies of scholars in China to find echoes or justifications for Marxism in Chinese classical philosophers, a sort of xenophobic rejection of Russian claims to priorities of invention.)

One of the most dangerous illusions in all this is to imagine that we in the West, with our notions of individuality, of the supreme value of the human soul, of justice, of the virtue of law, are somehow a universal projection of the hopes and aspirations of all mankind, and that men everywhere, if political conditions were propitious, would choose to embrace our ideals and values. This is folly, arrogant folly. But it is also dangerous. Marxism strikes at so many of our own highest aspirations that it has been repudiated by most of the civilized West and, in its cruder forms, modified within the European Communist world. But Marxism, as interpreted by Mao Tse-tung, does not necessarily offend Chinese traditional values and, as was seen in 1949 and since, has not aroused hostility; indeed it is almost the unanimous view of observers on the spot that Maoism has almost total acceptance in China. In

short, the Chinese response to Marxism was not necessarily the same as the European response, and this for an important reason.

When one speaks of the West as a sort of homogeneous whole, those conscious of the differences among Europeans and Americans and Frenchmen and Russians may wonder in what sense one can think of the West in this way. The answer lies profoundly and deeply in history. If we may speak of the West in any unified sense, if we have a consciousness of being Western, it is because, despite our differences, we have a common heritage and share, in the innermost recesses of our consciousness, certain values, modes of thought, and ultimately language itself, with the Greeks and Romans. We are the children, in a profound sense, of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, the instinctive continuers of Roman ideas of law and justice, of Greek ideals of truth and beauty. We think and are persuaded in Greek modes of thought. Our seminal roots lie in the antique world of the Mediterranean. Seeds thus sown have grown and been grafted and modified and enlarged, but the end process of this cultural conditioning is what makes us Westerners and gives Americans and Frenchmen, Russians and Britons, certain common values. For most people these things are intuitive, not self-conscious. But our common bonds are recognizable when we are confronted with peoples from outside of the Western orbit.

Perhaps the first thing that the student of China discovers is that in learning the Chinese language, the *sine qua non* of serious studies, he must cross a frontier not only of a strange syntax, a peculiar script, and an exotic vocabulary, but of ways of thought and of conceptualization for which his own knowledge of Western languages has no parallels. Here is the root of one of the problems of communication that exists between China and the rest of the world.

In the first place this language belongs to a group, including Tibeto-Burman, Vietnamese, and Tai, with hardly any features in common with any other language group. Its peculiarities—and they are remarkable—are not in themselves barriers to inter-communication. But one peculiarity—the nature of the Chinese script—has political consequences of a very profound kind.

The Chinese writing system is not a way of symbolizing sound, as are our own alphabetical systems, but of symbolizing notions. In the language of modern linguistic theory it is a system that is morpheme based, not phoneme based. This means in essence that written Chinese can be read by all Chinese, whatever the dialect of the speaker and at whatever period it was written, since the script takes no account of either historical or regional sound

change. Thus the Han Empire, in its heyday coterminous in time with the Roman Empire and of as great physical extent, needed no *lingua franca* for communication. The peculiar nature of the script provided one. This curious linguistic fact has been, and still is, an important element in unifying the vast Chinese race and facilitating large-scale administration. One of the great feats of Chinese civilization is to have kept a huge Empire in being and its culture intact for two thousand years. This very viability is due in some measure to the language and its script. The language, then, not only isolates China from foreign influences, but acts as a unifying force and as an administrative convenience through its peculiar script, a Chinese invention of some 3500 years ago.

But the language has a further bearing on the shaping of the Chinese ethos: its peculiar script makes the history and philosophy of two thousand years ago easily readable today. The vocabulary of modern Chinese is impregnated with its past. Almost every word in modern use has a history as well as literary associations with antiquity. The language and particularly its script enshrines so much that is culturally conditioned by the past that even the vocabulary of Marxism takes on an irresistibly Chinese flavour. Here lies an important key to understanding modern China. If we are the children of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, the Chinese are the children of Confucius, of Chuang Tzu, and of Mo Tzu. Their writings have been the basis of all Chinese education until within living memory. The genesis of Chinese thought lies in its classical period from the sixth to the third centuries B.C., China's Periclean Age. And, while few Chinese today know much about their classical thinkers, the vocabulary of modern philosophical and political thought comes straight out of classical precedent. Just as our basic premises lie deep in our own history, so do those of the Chinese lie in theirs, and the two classical and seminal periods are as different as chalk and cheese.

We are confronted simultaneously in China and in ancient Greece by a sudden and seemingly unaccountable efflorescence of the human mind. Between the sixth and third centuries B.C., for a reason we can only speculate about, there arose in the history of the human race a series of master thinkers who, each in his way, formed the matrices of thought of great civilizations. We are familiar with the names of our own thinkers, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. But we are not so familiar, perhaps, with the names of Mencius, Micius, and Chuang Tzu, the formative thinkers of Chinese civilization. Yet each of these authors is required reading for any understanding of Chinese ways and thoughts. The Chinese philosophers did not raise the same set of

problems that the Greeks raised, and there is no historical evidence for supposing that there was any communication of any kind between the Mediterranean world and the city states of the North China plains. With the astonishing versatility of the human mind, the Greeks set off in one direction and the Chinese in quite another. If our history is, as Croce thinks, the history of the evolution of individual liberty, it is because the Greeks set us off on that quest. A society so conditioned in the virtues of human liberty has one response to Marxism-Leninism. The history of the Chinese, on the other hand, is the history of the search for the perfectly ordered society, and Maoism is, in one sense, a perfectly logical outcome of that pursuit. That is why Maoism has such a large measure of acceptability among the Chinese people.

But thought grows in environment. The environment in which Chinese philosophy was born was in some ways not unlike that of ancient Greece.

China's first kings were captive priests, deputies on earth of Heaven, and as early as the tenth century B.C. were called Sons of Heaven. Heaven, so the early Chinese thought, bestowed its mandate to govern the world upon a man designated as its Son. This mandate he delegated to feudatories, who in their turn re-delegated to sub-feudatories, and so established a feudal chain from the King down to the local garrison governor. The Feudal Lords owed to their overlord, in feudal duty, the raising of troops, the supplying of war chariots in time of war, and the sending of token tribute in times of peace. The King supported himself from his own domain, and the Feudal Lords had absolute powers in theirs. The feudal class constituted an aristocracy. The common people (the Chinese language at the time has two words for people, one, *ren*, used exclusively for aristocrats, and the other, *min*, used for the serfs), tilled the Lord's field in common and enjoyed as their reward the usufruct of fields designated for them. This feudal pyramid broke down in the eighth century B.C., the erstwhile feudatories proclaimed their independence, and the garrison towns became autonomous city-states. In the seventh century B.C., profound changes took place. Iron came into general use. Coinage began to circulate. The aristocracy, hitherto engaged only in warlike and priestly duties, began to engage in trade and in teaching the arts of city-state life. In these profound social and economic changes the polity of the city-state raised great problems. There were states ruled by princes, by oligarchs, and by dictators of common origin. There were attempts to form coalitions of the city-states—a sort of league of nations—and once, in the seventh century, an attempt was made by the sovereign city-states to bind them-



selves by covenant to abolish warfare and to disarm. This was the first recorded account in history of a Disarmament Conference.

The city-states thus became great forums of debate, and places of political experiment. It was in this welter of speculation that Chinese philosophy was born. Its central problem was the problem of social and political order, its key question "how can we govern well the State?" The central problems of Chinese classical philosophy are order and unity. Some of the city-state princes set up Academies, in which they invited the travelling philosophers to expound their theories and invite preferment. These Academies are the direct forebears of the modern Chinese University. Mencius describes "gentlemen with dozens of carriages in their train, and hundreds of followers going from court to court." The historians of the period, around the time of Christ, speak of this period as the Age of the Hundred Schools of Philosophy—a fact to which Mao Tse-tung referred in 1957 when he said "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools contend", in the now famous "Hundred Flowers" movement.

It would be impossible in an article of this kind to give any adequate account of this flowering of political speculation. Suffice it to say that in 1949, faced with the disintegration following the Sino-Japanese war and the prior weakness of China under the onslaughts of the Imperial Powers in the nineteenth century, a weak and divided China faced the problems of unity and order with a long history of political speculation and thought upon its problems. They were certainly not new to the idea of political theory and political solution.

After the period of the Hundred Philosophers, China was united under the Han Empire (second century B.C.-second century A.D.); and one philosophy, Confucianism, which in the philosophical age had been but one of many, became dominant, orthodox, and all-powerful, but in the process—such is the eclecticism of Chinese thought—embraced features of many other philosophies.

In the fourth century B.C. three rival philosophies competed for the ears of the rulers of the city-states. The first was Confucianism, represented by Mencius, the second Utilitarianism represented by Micius, and the third Transcendentalism represented by Chuang Tzu.

Each of these three very different schools addressed themselves to the one question, "How is the state to be well governed, how is society to become orderly?" They differ both in their approach and in their solutions. To the question "How do we know?" Mencius replied that all knowledge, all truth,

was contained in the classics of antiquity. His epistemology was scriptural. There existed in the fourth century B.C. an anthology of poetry, dynastic hymns and songs of the people, written from the tenth century to the eighth century B.C., known as the *Songs*, and a collection of state documents compiled about the eleventh and tenth centuries B.C. and known simply as the *Books*. These documents, the Confucians argued, present a picture of the Utopia of antiquity, the times of Kings Wen and Wu. By interpreting the language of these classics in ways familiar to some students of our own Old Testament, they drew, with supposedly scriptural authority, a picture of the State in which the Ideal King ruled by the influence of his virtue alone over the natural world—and thus kept in accord the seasons and the orderly round of the times of sowing and ploughing, of birth and death and renewal—and over the entire human family. In the original texts “virtue” was a word which anthropologists know as “mana”, the magical force which priests and shamans manipulate to bring hostile powers under control. But in the Confucian vocabulary “mana” was elevated to “virtue”, from which was evolved an ethical system of ideal gentlemanly behaviour. This code of ethics, the code of the humane man, became the ideal of the Confucian administrator for all subsequent history. The order envisaged was worked out in a series of duties and obligations, beginning with the joint family, in which each member had an ascending order of importance as he converged upon old age and a rigid set of obligations and duties. Family harmony, the faithful carrying out of the five relationships, the duties of son to father—all these became the commonplaces of Confucian teaching and are a feature of Chinese family life to this day. From the family these interlocking relationships were extended to the State, so that the duty of son to father became precisely the duty of minister to prince, and the entire state was conceived as one huge harmonious family under a virtuous ruler, the “father and mother of his people.” The modern word for “nation or state” is *Kuo-jia*, “city-state and family.” Built into this ideal was a sanction against abuse, the right of the people to remove a ruler who had lost virtue, since Heaven withdraws its mandate to govern from the unworthy. The corruption of the Kuo-min-tang and the reputed behaviour of Chiang kai-shek and his family were widely interpreted in China as a loss of the mandate to govern. This theory of the Mandate of Heaven became very important in later Chinese history. It is the one justification for a change of regime, and in the Communist take-over the main burden of propaganda against the former regime was the tale of its corruption. This was a message that the simplest peasant could understand and interpret.

The second of the fourth-century thinkers is Micius. Micius argued that the past has no relevance for the present and that the answer to the problem of order in society and order in the State was to start again in the pure light of reason. He argued that the sum total of human experience attests the existence of a Deity. The Deity has a purpose, a will. That will and purpose is conceived in love and compassion. We must inquire into the cause of disorder, for then only can we cure its evils. Since all men have the ear of Heaven, it follows that all men are equal in the eyes of Heaven. Heaven rains upon the just and upon the unjust. Heaven manifests its love upon all regardless of person. It therefore follows that all men should love each other without discrimination and with equal intensity.

The notion of universal love in a class-ridden and family-centred society was thought, by his hearers, to be subversive of human life itself. "It outrages all human feelings", protested Mencius. The Confucians had precisely codified canons concerning the duties and affections that should govern the respective members of the joint family and of the orders of society. Nevertheless universal love, argued Micius, is the common consensus of the common good. This leads Micius into his two political axioms: the criterion of the common weal (the greatest benefit to the greatest number), and the accepting of the common accord (the theory that the policy producing the greatest benefit to all must be acceded to by all). It seemed to follow from this, argued Micius, that only the most competent, irrespective of class or family, were fit servants of the commonwealth. And to them should go its greatest rewards.

The philosophy of Micius failed in the final solution in the Han Empire and has attracted little notice since, until recently. In 1882 a German scholar described Micius as "an advocate of socialism and communism", nationalist writers in the 1930s tried to revive Micianism as "universal love", a sort of indigenous Christianity; but under Communism, Micius has been enjoying a new status as the earliest Marxist, who of course, unlike Marx, was a Chinese.

The third of the fourth-century thinkers, Chuang Tzu, taught that the only access to knowledge was in the mystical experience. True knowledge is available only to the adept in trance. In trance one sees the entire universe, the creation as One, the natural unity and natural order, which the adept, by "cruising with the Infinite", can induce in the real world by refusing to interfere and by yielding to "so-of-itselfness"—that is, to Tao. This philosophy in certain of its aspects has had a vogue in Beatnik Zen. More importantly, because Taoist adepts in their search for the drug of immortality were the first alchemists and were largely responsible for the compilation of the Chinese

Pharmacopoeia in the eighth century A.D., their successors have a popularity in China today as the first of the people's technologists and the authors of its science.

The foregoing, in an impressionistic way, shows how deeply rooted is political thought and speculation in China, how wide-ranging has been its interests, and how influential a part it has played in the formation of the Chinese ethos. Theoretical Marxism has obvious points in common with the Chinese tradition: the monolithic state; the criterion of virtue and incorruptibility; obedience to severe ethical and moral standards; the raising to the supreme point of ideals of order and accord; and the prior claims of society and the state over those of the individual. Individualism—the notion of the supreme value of the individual soul—has no place in Chinese thought or social organisation. Rather, the individual finds his protection and security not in asserting his individuality but in subordinating it to the common weal. Dissent, that essential element in the democratic process, is, in the Chinese tradition, the opposite of order; it is in fact the frightening *luan*, "disorder", and therefore reprehensible. One thing Confucianism and Micianism share is the notion that the competent should govern in the interests of the whole. Throughout Chinese imperial history the Confucian elite, recruited by competitive examination, have governed China. The notion of a devoted and ethical elite, whether of the Confucian scholarly orders or of the Communist party cadres, is not a hostile one to the indigenous tradition. Finally, part of the common folklore of the countryside, the result of centuries of conditioning in traditional thought, has firmly embedded in the Chinese mind the notion that the fate of the common people—the common weal—is the ultimate criterion of good government and that once the people suffer unduly, Heaven ordains that its mandate shall be removed from the cause of that suffering.

It was recently mentioned before Senator Fulbright's Senate Foreign Relations Committee that there is in Chinese no word for "freedom" in the democratic sense. There is a word, but it has nothing of the connotation evoked by President Kennedy when he used the word. It means "acting as for oneself", acting independently of the group, and thus acting contrary to the common weal.

China, whether Communist or otherwise, is a cultural world apart—apart, that is, from the West. Some of that apartness is enshrined in the very language and in the very thought of the Chinese. It is absolutely central to understanding modern China to understand the nature of this apartness.

The "apartness" of the Chinese people is an "apartness" not merely of geography but of language and of the modes of thought itself. The historical origins of Chinese thought and the very long period of conditioning which the Chinese people have had in that thought are profound. The language enshrines and keeps alive that thought, and its peculiarities are a unifying influence. One explanation for the very viability of Chinese civilization lies in the nature of the script and of the language in which its essence is conserved. But the language poses problems of communication and of understanding with the rest of the world. The Chinese response to Marxism-Leninism is a very different one from that of the liberty-inspired and individualistic West. Marxist theory undergoes certain changes in the very process of being expressed in a language so alien to Western thought. The clue to the understanding of the present, in China, lies in the ever-present past.

One of the oddest notions abroad in the West is that the Chinese have repudiated their ancient culture, have, as it were, changed their Chinese clothes for the red dress of Communism and turned their backs on their past. This is, of course, not so. The Maoist view is that the literature, the history, and the arts of China are the heritage of all the people, to be made readily available to them, and not merely the preserve of a scholarly and elite class. China has for two thousand years been governed by a bureaucracy recruited from the intelligentsia. Dynasty by dynasty, Chinese have competed in the provincial and imperial examinations, have risen through the hierarchy by the attaining of higher and higher degrees to the posts of highest preferment in the government. It sounds like the ideals of Plato's Guardians, the rule by philosopher Kings, and so in a sense it has been. But this has segmented Chinese society and created a social order quite different from any we have had in the West. Following the deliberate break-up of hereditary aristocracy based on land tenure in the third century B.C., society has been divided into four traditional classes, those of the scholar, the farmer, the artisan, and the soldier, in that order. Within living memory, scholars wore different clothes, exhibited the degrees they had obtained in the examinations by distinctive tassels and knobs on their hats, and walked down the street with lesser folk stepping aside to allow them passage. The examination system as one follows it over the centuries has had periods of peaks and depressions. It was abused: at bad times degrees were sold and examination questions bought. At its best it produced a number of scholar-statesmen — administrators upon whom every conqueror of China has had to depend in facing the problem of large-scale administration. It is no surprise today to learn that the writ of Peking runs

throughout the land right down to the smallest village. This tradition of large-scale administration by scholar-statesmen has two thousand years of history, and in a recent study it was shown that the elite of the Communist Party all come from the mandarin class. At one time it was thought that access to books and the ease with which the rich and powerful could educate their sons meant that a ruling caste in fact existed. Certainly certain families recur and recur in Chinese history. But more recent studies have shown what a remarkable degree of social mobility this examination system permitted. At all events, the highest orders of society have always been the most highly educated, and the deference and respect paid to scholars has in fact created an elite class which took refuge increasingly in conserving its mysteries—a knowledge of the Classics—so that the written language became more and more lapidary, farther and farther removed from the common speech. It was in the Revolution of 1911 that the revolutionaries made the first bid to democratize the written language, to get away from classical forms and to approximate more closely to the spoken tongue. But even so literacy and classical education drew deep lines of division between the literate and the illiterate, so that Chinese culture was the pleasure of a leisured and literate class and denied to the illiterate and overworked peasants. The Communist view is that Chinese culture is the heritage of all men, and enormous energies have been expended since 1949 in eliminating illiteracy and in making available to all the common cultural heritage of the race. Far, therefore, from repudiating the heritage of the past, the leaders in Peking are determined to make it available to all. This, of course, does not derive particularly from Marxist dogma but rather from Chinese nationalism and self-esteem. The Chinese have always throughout their history been highly xenophobic, contemptuous of barbarians, by which they mean non-Chinese. What they think of as the over-running of China by foreigners from the middle of the nineteenth century has stimulated, if anything, a pride in China's past achievements. It provides the core of a sense of nationality and identity, and occasions much of the energies and sacrifices that the Chinese people are prepared to go through to rebuild and modernize their nation.

The Chinese word for civilization is *wen-hua*, which means roughly the process of change that literature brings about. The centrality of scholarly and literary endeavour, the prestige of its scholars and writers, and the almost morbid passion for learning are part of the Chinese heritage, and rarely in recent times has that feature of the Chinese ethos been more in evidence. Westerners have often remarked upon the astonishing avidity for learning, the intenseness and seriousness of purpose of Chinese students. This derives from

a centuries-old conditioning that all Chinese have had in the respect for learning and the rewards that come to the good scholar.

To a Sinologist, one of the consequences of the coming of the Communist regime is that books, many of them once scarce and expensive and difficult to obtain, have suddenly become available in cheap editions, excellently edited, properly paged and indexed. An edition of, say, a twelfth-century classical novel is put out today in an initial press-run of six million copies. The publishing output of Peking has been so great that at periods there has been a paper shortage. Another consequence has been an enormous increase in the number of scholarly journals published. In one field alone, linguistics, three new journals have appeared since 1949. In Chinese art, the effects have been quite the reverse. Chinese porcelain and painting of quality were not difficult to buy before 1949, but since then the most rigorous controls have been placed on the export of "national treasures", so that outside of China the prices of quality pieces have risen well beyond the means of modest collectors. In China itself, every province now has its provincial museum, and the museums in Peking are said to be a byword for excellence, not only for the quality of the material but for the techniques of display and exposition they have evolved. Another consequence of the rise of the Mao regime has been the extraordinary high priority that archaeology has been given under the regime. It has always been known that rich sites awaited excavation, but in an appalling period of neglect in the 1920s the most accessible sites were looted and exploited by entrepreneurs, and the best of Western museum collections come from this period of predation. The Kuomintang, under the Academia Sinica, tried to exert some control, but it was feckless and the scale of excavation never large. Since 1949 there have been some fifty major archaeological teams at work on sites, and the study of prehistoric China has made enormous strides. The material, of course, goes to the provincial and national museums, and much of it has not yet been seen outside of China by Western scholars. There has, however, been not only a very considerable raising of the standards of scientific excavation and documentation, but very good reporting and publishing, so that Western scholars can keep abreast of development. China under Communist rule, far from repudiating its past, is, in short, reliving it as it has never done before.

One of China's greatest cultural treasures is to be found in its Dynastic Histories. For twenty-five dynasties it has been the Chinese custom to write the history of the previous dynasty, and these, the *Twenty-Five Dynastic Histories*, have survived to the present. They constitute a detailed accounting

of the last two thousand years. A microtype edition, in the possession of the author, printed on India paper, and readable only with a magnifying glass, occupies twice the shelf space of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Chinese historical writing began with the annals of the city states. We possess one such annal from 721 to 479 B.C., recording in brief entries a catalogue of the treaties entered into, ominous happenings, and the goings and comings of the court. All states kept such annals. One we possess in its entirety, and others exist in fragments and citations. We also possess two narrative histories of around the third century B.C., rich sources for the social history of that period. But it was in the first century B.C. that an official at the Imperial Court and his son began the writing of the Official Dynastic Histories, which, dynasty by dynasty, has been carried on as an essential part of state government up to 1927. The first historian, Szu Ma-ch'ien (c. 145-90 B.C.) deserves more than passing mention. He must, in any pantheon of the world's great scholars, be accorded an honourable place. His view of history was that social stability and ethical ideals could only be maintained if daily events were meticulously documented and the unedited record be held up as a mirror for princes. His structuring of history too was interesting. And this structuring set the pattern for all the dynastic histories that followed. The history was written in five parts. The first part he called the "main thread", a figure taken from weaving from the warp in a piece of tapestry. This was the story of Imperial succession, of the transmission of the Mandate of Heaven from sovereign to sovereign. Here are the lives and activities of kings and queens and of the conduct of the court. A second part, subsequently abandoned, records the history of the "hereditary houses"—a polite way of recording the histories of the city-states which acted independently of the Sons of Heaven. The third part consists of genealogical tables and charts and is a chronology in tabulated form. The fourth part consists of monologues on a wide range of subjects: the monetary system, astronomical observations made during the dynasty, commercial and mercantile regulations, the regulations for court and civic dress, in short a sort of economic and social history treated topically. The fifth part, a recognition that history is the sum total of biography, consists of biographies of some one or two hundred of the most prominent men of the dynasty and constitutes a sort of cumulative dictionary of national biography. This enormous work, begun by a father and completed in filial duty by his son, was the first and last history written, as it were, under semi-private auspices. With succeeding dynasties the work was compiled from daily records kept by officials, and written as a document of state.



It is difficult to describe what richness of material is contained in these histories, not one of which has yet been translated in its entirety into any other language. But, and particularly since the twelfth century A.D., other and different histories have been written and have been preserved. There are, for example, some five thousand local histories, histories compiled of cities, of districts, sometimes of temples, sometimes of families. To know nothing of these histories—and very few scholars outside of China do—is not to understand one of the most interesting and revealing intellectual battles going on in Peking at present. As one reads the historical journals, it becomes clear that the dilemma of the orthodox Marxist historian confronted with such detailed documentation is to find the familiar Marxist periodizations, to justify the Marxian stages of history, even to decide when such stages occurred—if they should be useful to determine. This is the stuff that divides scrupulous historians in China today. The traditional view of these histories, on the other hand,—the Confucian moralistic interpretation—has been challenged since the early 1920s by Chinese historians who have come under Western influence. One interesting consequence of all this controversy is that this rich historical material is being explored anew with new perspectives in mind. One such is the history of science. As readers of Needham's introductory volumes will know, as the history of science and technology unfolds itself in China and as evidence is accumulated from the rich sources that have survived, it is becoming clear that China has an impressive back-history of technological invention, a sort of historical base upon which the new scientists of China are building. Two members of the Academy of Medicine in Peking who recently visited Canada were telling of the existence, side by side, of traditional and Western medicine in the medical schools of China. It was in the Chinese pharmacopoeia of the eighth century that the therapeutic properties of ephedrin were first described, and much may yet be found among the results of Chinese empirical discovery that will prove useful. At all events, no peoples have ever been such assiduous recorders of their history, no peoples quite so conscious of their history, and, as far as the present generation of scholars is concerned, seldom has interest in Chinese history been so lively and productive as it is today.

Visitors to Communist China bring away with them a sense of the newness of everything, an impression that propagandists are quick to underline and try to document. In some senses there are novelties, but the Communist Party has a very real interest in giving the impression that everything is new and attributable to the virtues of Communism. But to anyone familiar with the history of China, there is much also that seems familiar.

Of the highlights of Chinese history which help to bring modern China into clearer perspective, the first, already touched upon, is the long history of bureaucratic skills that the Chinese have acquired and developed. The dynastic histories were written by civil servants and have always served as a guide to administrators, for government in China has historically always been by bureaucrats. "Politics", the struggles for power, have not been between class and class, between one economic interest and another, but between rival cliques of bureaucrats manoeuvring for the spoils of office. These intuitive bureaucratic skills are in themselves, apart from party dogma, a resource of the first importance in ruling a country as large and as populous as China. And since the historical tradition has been that the bureaucrats subscribe to orthodoxy, whether of Confucian training and its code of ethics, as in the past, or of Party discipline, as in the present, it is unhistorical to suppose, as it is often said, that China is unified and well governed for the first time in its history. This is patently not so. In comparison with the declining years of the Manchus and the struggling years of the Kuomintang, of course, Communist rule is by sharp contrast honest government, and government whose writ runs throughout the land. But this is a recurring theme in Chinese history. There have been not one but at least three periods of draconian regimes, periods of frightening totalitarianism under a strong father-figure following periods of decline and dissolution. The first, in the third century B.C., was that of the Ch'in Shih Huang-ti, the first unifier of China. Once execrated by orthodox historians, and cited by Western historians as a horrendous example of totalitarianism, Ch'in Shih Huang-ti has recently come in for re-evaluation by Communist historians as one of the architects of China's greatness. It was Ch'in Shih Huang-ti who was credited with the notorious burning of the books and with the immolation of two hundred scholars so that the memory of past history might be blotted out, and for this Confucians have damned him ever since. But Ch'in also built an enormous network of highways across China, standardized weights and measures, nationalized the currency, and built the Great Wall. For these prodigious works, done at terrible cost to human life, he is being given credit by the present regime. When one hears of the great public works, the building of dams and reservoirs, by thousands and thousands of workers today, this is not something new; it happened in the reign of the First Emperor. It also happened again under the Sui Dynasty (590-618 A.D.)—another period of hideous repression, of totalitarian methods, but also of getting things needed done, for the Sui built the great canal system that shifted the movement of grain across the Empire more expeditiously and greatly increased the mobility of the Imperial forces.

No one would suggest, as a number of twelfth-century Chinese historians tried to discover, that there is a recurrent and cyclical pattern in Chinese history. But large-scale public works and draconian measures are no novelty in China, and are certainly not an innovation of Marxist inspiration. In the past such regimes have lasted some twenty-five years.

One other recurring theme of Chinese history, and an essential part of the folklore of its thinking, is the mechanism by which a failing regime can be removed and changed. It has been said that in modern Africa one of the problems of new regimes is that no political mechanism exists short of a *coup d'état* for changing a regime that has got out of touch with reality. This mechanism has always existed in Chinese history and is wrapped up in the theory of the virtue of the leader and the withdrawal of the Mandate of Heaven. When the leader loses "virtue", so the theory goes, the "great accord" gets out of joint, the people suffer, and popular disaffection is the signal of Heaven's displeasure and a justification for removing the mandate and changing the regime. One of the new emphases of interpretation of Chinese history that engages the attention of historians in Peking today is the study of the process by which popular disaffection comes about, how peasant rebellions occur, and how regimes are changed. There is already an enormous literature on this subject. This theory does not suppose, or even consider, that the common people have any choice in the selection of their rulers. It supposes that the condition of the people is an index of the virtue or effectiveness of the ruler, which is quite a different thing. Popular satisfaction with a regime does not derive from the knowledge that it is self-elected. It derives from the state of the peoples' well-being. It is easy to see how Chiang Kai-shek and his party had, in the traditional terminology, "lost its mandate". It is also easy to see that amelioration of the lot of the peasants is in itself (in these terms) justification and in fact a vote of confidence for the regime that brings it about.

Another recurring theme of Chinese history, and one which is of very great moment in the present, has to do with Chinese notions about Empire. The First Empire, that of the Han, was really a consolidation of the territorial gains made by the Chin Emperor in the third century B.C. It was based upon certain Chinese ideas of the world and of their place in it. In Chinese thought the "world" is *T'ien hsia*, "all under Heaven", and sovereignty is the right of the Son of Heaven to govern "all under Heaven". In the earlier cosmogonies, the world was thought to be square with the "four seas" on its four edges. The world then became "all within the four seas" and "all under Heaven" in the two commonest clichés in the classics. The city states were the "centre

States" and, after the unification of China under the Ch'in, China (the name derives from Ch'in) became the Central State, the centre of the Universe, and the site of Heaven's viceroy upon earth. The Son of Heaven stood precisely in the middle. This egocentrism of the Chinese has powerfully influenced Chinese views of the world, both in antiquity and today. A history of the Ch'in and Han Dynasties, published some fifteen years ago, enjoyed the unusual distinction of being published both in Peking and Taiwan. The author began by describing the territorial state of China in the first century B.C.—an Empire then extending well into Tibet and Central Asia, the Gobi, and Mongolia, Manchuria, and Korea, and down into what is now Vietnam. This, in the Chinese view, is the world, that of the Central Kingdom and the kingdoms of the four barbarians. The historian then went on to declare that all loyal Chinese (meaning both Peking and Formosa) have a sacred duty to keep the confines of the erstwhile Empire intact, as being historically and irrevocably Chinese. In the Han Dynasty there were interminable debates as to what to do about the "western regions" and the periphery states—whether to rule them directly or to maintain a loose sort of suzerainty over them to be symbolized by the barbarians bringing token tribute to the Court. These two schools of thought have clashed in history again and again. The forward policy of occupation was advocated by military groupings, and the "rule by virtue" advocated by the Confucians. By the eighteenth century the dispute had been settled in favour of ruling by virtue, and all of these countries—Tibet, Korea, and Vietnam—had quasi-Chinese courts, customs, rituals, and procedures, but were rarely directly occupied or administered. In the history of the Chinese Empire, it has always been one of the measures of the virtue of the regime that the barbarians of the four quarters acknowledge Chinese suzerainty and bring tribute, attesting the superior culture of China and acknowledging their indebtedness to it. Now all this is very different in form and conception from Western imperial practices. But it is very Chinese. Any regime in China, whether Kuomintang or Communist, would have to ensure that its periphery states, at least in token, acknowledged China's suzerainty, though this would not mean the use of Chinese administrators or the occupation by military forces. It is a conception of the world, seen from the Chinese view, that promises security. This sort of thinking obtains in Peking today. China has never been a mercantile or naval power, has never embarked on overseas adventures, and has not any ambitions to set out on world conquest, or even to break down the States of South East Asia by successive occupation. She is, however, vitally concerned that the periphery states should be pro-Chinese. Foreign presences in

any of these areas touch Chinese sensibilities, and a presence that appears to constitute a threat to Chinese territory itself, would, in the belief of this writer, immediately provoke a defensive war by China. In the present dilemma in Vietnam, as in Korea and Taiwan, it is important to understand how the Chinese feel about these areas, and to know that any regime, Communist or otherwise, would feel the same way. This explains perhaps the reluctance of China to send combat troops into North Vietnam, but it also explains its vital concern in the survival of North Vietnam. Personally, the writer is in sympathy with the advice that American Sinologists have recently been giving the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: that containment of Chinese expansion may be quite proper, but that a failure to recognize the very emotional claims that China feels it has to special status in these sensitive areas is highly dangerous, and is likely to begin the thing that everyone wants to avoid, a war between China and the United States.

In summary, therefore, the very centrality of China in the world's problems, both today and in the future, seems certain. China's apartness, however, presents formidable problems in communication and understanding. Communist China is not, as a Western-oriented political theorist might be tempted to believe, working from theoretical Marxist premises alone. The clue to understanding Communist China, and therefore to wise policy-making, lies in a very much more profound understanding of China, its peoples past and present, than prevails in the West today.

The problem of China for the West, as of that of the rest of the non-Western, but newly emerging states of Africa and Asia, lies in better knowledge and more intelligent understanding. It is pre-eminently the duty of the universities to engage in those detached and serious academic studies of the unfamiliar worlds of Islam, of Hindu South Asia, of China and Japan, upon which wise policies can be based. The stars of these countries are now in the ascendant. They will be of increasing concern to us in the future. A Chinese classical strategist of the third century B.C., much quoted by Mao Tse-tung, has said "Know yourself and know your adversary, and though you engage him a hundred times, you will invariably be victorious."