

CHINA'S WAY TO PROGRESS

Giuseppe Santini

For twenty-two years China lay forgotten and was even confused with a small island – one of its provinces – and the flexible Chinese bamboo curtain was countered by a Western curtain of rigid disregard. Then suddenly that one-fourth of mankind enclosed in the world's third largest country was brought out of the memory attic, with a loud bang. The Chinese may have introduced the smile policy, but the Occidentals certainly launched the warm hug. The crowd of official visitors to Peking, performing a devoted quasi-pilgrimage, is now more numerous than the battalions of traders who go twice yearly to the traditional Canton Fair. Seventy-three year old Chou En-Lai will end up dislocating his right hand if he goes on shaking it at the present rate with delegations running into hundreds of people at a time, his eyes blinded by the constant flashing of the official souvenir photographers. The queue of countries on the waiting list to recognize the People's Republic of China is growing longer with the mounting awareness of the absurdity of the past oblivion or a political guilt complex for having kept China out of the U.N. for a long time.

China is now the fashion around the world, and in no uncertain terms. Everywhere politicians of the most conservative and bourgeois kind are attempting to rebuild for themselves a compromised career by singing the praises of Mao Tse-Tung.

An Exemplary Social Experiment. When confronting the enigma of the Chinese planet, too many Westerners have forgotten the Asiatic background and painful colonial history. But when the Communists came to power in 1949 the vast majority of the country carried on as it had been doing for the past 2,000 years, in an early Iron Age economy. And on countless occasions during our visits to the agricultural communes we were proudly told: "Here we didn't even have the life of the oxen and horses!" Compared to China in 1949 Russia in 1917 did not have the grim inheritance of a century of a shattering multi-colonial experience. Russia never suffered China's fate of such a sharp and pervasive Western impact that it was forced – together with many other Asiatic civilizations – into a kind of national schizophrenia not just in terms of a split economy, but above all in terms of a split culture and a split personality.

In China the individual has been rescued from the aftermath of this unfortunate heritage by the newfound companionship, common purpose and discipline of mass-organization. Just as the Vietnamese have withstood American technology so the ascetic militant Chinese have gone straight to the roots of the problems that have plagued Asian countries for thousands of years – the lack of food and low levels of nutrition, gross inequalities of income and consumption, unemployment and a sense of social uselessness, and the blind expansion of the cities.

Decentralised Economy. The gigantic Chinese social experiment does not only concern Asia however, but the West too, which has always claimed to have found the final answer to the problem of man and civilization. For years the Chinese have been striving to make the world realize, through their official interpreter and personal friend of Mao, Edgar Snow, that there are other important things in life besides an increase in GNP.

The Chinese model cannot be analysed according to its differences from the Western system. It involves an utterly different approach. It is the creation of a new world and a new man. The cities show an absence of automobiles (which is "neither backwardness nor delay, but a rejection," to quote Robert Guillaín), advertising, neon signs, and the three fevers of money, alcohol and sex. Political control over the masses not only stops the exodus from the countryside, but even manages partly to reduce the populations of cities.

In the year 2000 China will still be a powerfully agricultural and peasant country, for its modernization will have occurred without a flight from the fields, which is the price paid by the West. In China too the average size of farming concerns is growing through the system of communes, with subdivisions into production brigades and teams, but the greater part of the peasant masses stay put and carry on their traditional, intensive labour. Agricultural mechanization is being introduced with considerable caution so as to avoid upsetting the balance. But the essential point of the matter is that the agricultural labourer, though possibly deprived of farming machinery, must not and does not want to be urbanized, but is instead kept on the spot and incorporated in local small industries. He does not flee to the cities because the industrial road passes through a technically-oriented agriculture and a decentralized industry. Economic decentralization, which is perhaps the most important step in Chinese domestic policy since the Great Proletarian cultural Revolution, has freed China from a traditionally cumbersome bureaucracy and developed local enterprise to the greatest possible degree of independence. The 26 Chinese provinces, which are as much as even 4,400 kilometres apart, could for that matter, subsist on their own in the event of war, while anybody invading the country would be literally drowned in a sea of people.

This brings us to the human side of this Chinese experiment in creation of a new world. It is simply a matter of providing that Thomas Hobbes was wrong when he wrote in his "Leviathan" that "man's condition is a condition of war with everyone against everyone." What is taking place today in the world's most populous country is therefore the education and re-education of man. The heart of the matter is the need to root out selfishness and bring into existence selfless, dedicated men whose happiness consists of serving their fellow-men in the fullest sense of the human community. In a humanism at the service of collective welfare, China is striving to conceive modernization as part of a process of embellishment of the land-scape, development of the people's cultural life for the benefit of all instead of for the benefit of the placing the needs of man before those of the machine.

Here is what the Peking "People's Daily" has to say commenting on Mao's famous maxim: "Rely on your own forces. National machines and equipment are not entirely

indigenous since they possess a number of foreign features. They may replace foreign machines because they are superior to foreign equipment, they don't require money or at any rate very little, and are capable of doing great things. It takes much less time to use indigenous equipment which, when not available, can be promptly prepared. Indigenous equipment can produce bigger, faster, better and cheaper results. Finally, it can stimulate the revolutionary spirit of the masses and with this revolutionary spirit all difficulties can be overcome."

Day in the Life of a 16-year old. How do the students live and what do they think individually? Despite having to use an interpreter I was able to find out. Here is the result of my interview with Je Wen-Siu, a sixteen-years old girl who lives in the workers' district of Peng Pu at Shanghai. She is a pupil in class 3 at the junior school. She will shortly be taking her diploma. "How do you spend your day?" "I get up at 6 o'clock in the morning, do a few chores in the house, have breakfast and go to school at 8. I finish at 11 o'clock. I go home and have lunch. At one thirty I'm back at school again until 3 o'clock. Then I go back home and work." "How much time do you spend on homework at home?" "Well actually I do my homework at school. At home I go through the lessons for about an hour. From 4 o'clock on I relax, reading the papers and listening to the radio." "What news are you most interested in?" "All political news which illustrate the national and international situation." "What do you do when you meet with your girl friends?" "I often go out with girls and boys of my age. We do some sports and often play ping-pong."

Chinese Women. From a Western angle there is a lack of femininity in the Chinese woman. No beauty products, no mention of sex, either in films or literature. In the land of opium, drugs are nonexistent. Mao says that women hold up half the sky and women, for their part, are determined to keep their half raised at the same height as that held up by men. When the Chinese woman lists the social benefits she enjoys – 8 hour working day, free hospitalization and medical care, nursery and infant schools, 56 paid days before child birth also without charge – she always concludes by affirming that in the West women have not yet succeeded in obtaining all this. "However, we Chinese are working so that the women of the world can be equally happy and enjoy the advantages we have." This radical change in women's conditions in China has given women a sense of confidence hitherto unknown to them, a dignity and an undoubted awareness of carrying out an important role.

Social Security Benefits. The monthly cost of living is officially calculated for every region of the country. In Peking for example, it was recently quoted at 12 – 14 yuan a month (4.80 – 5.60 dollars) of which 10 go towards board and 3 – 4 for rent in State apartments. Many workers are also housed within the factories. In the agricultural communes housing is completely free. Certain small expenses such as cinema, theatre, haircuts and work overalls are also sometimes non-existent.

All medical and hospital treatment is entirely free for every Chinese worker or peasant, while members of their family only pay 50 per cent. A sick worker receives his total

pay cheque for the first six months, after which he receives only 60 per cent. If, however, the patient has money problems, then his company steps in with direct assistance. Each plant, factory or agricultural commune has a health centre and a first-aid station. Only in more serious cases are the sick sent to hospital. Workers retire at the age of 60, female workers at 50, or 55 if they do clerical work. The factory can sometimes agree to keep a worker on after he has passed retirement age. Pensions are related to work seniority and vary from 50 to 70 per cent of the worker's last wage. Each factory has a cafeteria where the workers can eat three meals a day for 10 – 12 Yuan (4 – 4.80 dollars) a month. The cafeteria timetable is tied up with company and shift working hours. Nearly all plants boast nurseries and kindergartens where children are looked after and fed under the control of a dietician for a very modest sum (about one dollar a month). Female workers are entitled to 56 days' rest on full salary before giving birth to children. When a low-wage category worker finds he has to maintain a large family, his expenses may exceed his income.

The Chinese regime has set up an assistance system guaranteeing a minimum subsistence level. The company where the worker is employed then intervenes and raises his salary to equal the cost of living. The commune deals with those peasants having wages that are too low or who are unable to maintain their family owing to physical handicaps. It uses money from a specially constituted fund comprising 2 per cent of the community's annual wage. These assistance schemes in reality are rarely resorted to, because a family nearly always has more than one source of income.

Industrial working hours are 8 hours a day, six-day a week, leaving one day's holiday a week (not necessarily Sunday). Normally there is one week's annual vacation, two weeks if the worker lives far from his family, as well as two national holidays (May 1 and October 1).

There are two opposite worlds just as the two ways of considering China's future are opposite. One is the rigid world of figures and prospects based on economic facts as seen by the West. The other is the world of faith, of the development of Mao thought throughout China, with the little Red Book. As for Western economic laws, the endless mass of 800 million people, who can be convinced, governed and directed along the paths decided by the powers that be, might well overthrow the whole problem from all sides. Reasoning with the dry yardstick of figures, the contribution of a dollar from each Chinese would make roughly 800 million dollars and the contribution of a day's work from each person would mean two million extra labourers for one year without cost to the State. True, to increase by just one metre per head the availability of cloth for even as few as 700 million Chinese, you would need enough cloth to go round the world eighteen times while the purchase of a million and a half tons of grain is only sufficient to feed the Chinese population for 5 days. The fact remains that when the number is not simply a juxtaposition of persons, but a compact whole, then it tends to become "Power". When Mao says that it is the people, and not things, that are decisive, he is trying in fact to demonstrate that this concept apparently destroyed by modern technology is still a meaningful one.

NOTES

The article on China gives us some insight as to how China has made phenomenal progress since Independence in 1949.

The People's Republic of China is one of Pakistan's closest friends. She has provided both military and economic aid to our country. She has resolutely stood by us in every crisis as in 1965 and 1971 during our wars with India. China had also firmly supported us in the United Nations during our struggle for national integrity and independence.

Words Explained:

occidentals :	European; Western
smile :	here it means, welcome
mounting :	increasing
oblivion :	forgetting
schizophrenia :	a mental disease
bourgeois :	middle class
GNP :	Gross National Product; total production of a country in a year
model :	here it means, economic system
exodus :	emigration
embellishment :	beautifying, adorning, decorating
great proletarian cultural revolution :	a movement launched in 1966 to denounce revisionist activities
Thomas Hobbes :	(1588 – 1679); an English philosopher and one of the greatest political thinkers of his nation
Leviathan :	a masterpiece of Thomas Hobbes
juxtaposition :	placing of facts, things side by side

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

1. Why has the world changed its attitude towards China?
2. Discuss Chinese agriculture system.
3. How does China rely on its own resources?
4. Describe a day in the life of a Chinese student.
5. Write a note on the Chinese women.
6. What are the social security benefits provided to the Chinese workers?
7. "It is the people and not the things that are decisive." Discuss.
8. "The heart of the matter is the need to root out selfishness." Discuss.