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Mao Tse-tung cites the prime importance of "people power" in any international power equation and chides the United States for its overemphasis on materialism. Historical characteristics that dominate the Chinese concept of "people power" are group orientation, hierarchical patterns in interpersonal relations, the supreme role of ideology, and perceptions of superiority. These attitudes grafted upon Mao's perceptions of Marxism are creating a new Chinese mind.

THE CHINESE MIND: A PROBING AND EXPLORATION

A lecture

by

Professor Clyde B. Sargent

INTRODUCTION

Mao Tse-tung says: "... in war ... people ... are decisive. The contest of strength is ... a contest of human power and morale."¹ "The outcome of a war is decided by the people, not by one or two new types of weapons."²

The fatal error of the United States is that it invariably overrates its own strength and underates [the power of the] people. It sees only the power of material things and does not see the power of man. ... It ignores man's role in war and the revolutionary people's courage and determination. From this [error] stems all of its miscalculations.³

Mao stresses the supremacy of *people power*, and he devaluates modern warfare's devices of horror as meaningful only when activated by people power. Without the human factor, all economic

and military power falls into the "paper tiger" category.⁴ Mao obviously is pre-eminently concerned with developing his people power—the minds, the morale, and the spirit of the 800 million Chinese people.

If people power is thought of by Peking as the foundation of economic and military growth, then the study of Chinese national power potential must include the most discerning possible insights into Chinese thinking on this subject. Understanding of people power results from an acute awareness of what motivates people to act as they do and what their behavior will be under given circumstances. The source of behavior is the congregational and individual minds of a people. Our total understanding of their power as a people, as a nation,

Note: This article is a sequel to "Chinese National Culture," *Naval War College Review*, May 1971, p. 41-51.

must include the best possible understanding of Chinese behavior.

As the United States warily maneuvers toward developing new relations with the People's Republic of China in the 1970's, it needs insights from many perspectives. The Chinese mind will determine Chinese behavior; our awareness of the forces behind behavior will permit us to influence that behavior, possibly in the interests of everyone. Hopefully the Chinese may similarly seek to understand the American mind.

Before probing for insights of the Chinese mind, we must acknowledge that the subject is somewhat nebulous. Pronouncement by me and uncritical acceptance by the reader of generalizations are hazardous. There is no room for the arrogance of certainty. Above all, data on the Chinese mind cannot be computerized and statistically evaluated. Our findings must be subjective and sometimes ephemeral.

In spite of this American penchant for statistically supported estimates, for "black and white" perceptions, for conclusiveness, and in spite of our tendency to disregard what we cannot computerize, we must engage in the sometimes frustrating study of how the Chinese view things in light of their heritage. For perceptions determine behavior, and that behavior must be regarded as rational in relation to perceptions by the congregational mind. Therefore, to understand the rationality of Chinese behavior, we must understand the mind that provides its motivation. This is an imperative concern that must underlie any realistic American strategic planning in regard to China in the seventies.

As I lead you into this haze-saturated forest from which we may not emerge this morning, *I confess humility*; a humility manifested in the subtitle of this lecture—"a probing and exploration." Probing and exploring are all that can be expected from an effort such as this. I dare proceed on this preliminary

endeavor because I believe that our national interest dictates acquisition of any and all perceptions capable of enhancing our wisdom in Sino-American relations.

In this exploration it is not my task to praise or condemn; my intent is to discover. I seek only to expose some simple perceptions that I hope will help in understanding Chinese behavior.

I shall consider, first, the gradual formation of key elements in Chinese thinking and their resultant institutions and attitudes, including the process of thought and decisionmaking. Secondly, we shall investigate the effect of these on the perceptions of the leadership of the People's Republic of China.

THE CHINESE MIND

Definition. For the purposes of this essay the *Chinese Mind* means (1) the nature of the thought process, and (2) the perceptions and values derived from thought. It includes the decisionmaking process and concern for cultural values that affect perceptions. Any description of the Chinese mind, however, may become partially obsolete as experiences and continuing Chinese campaigns to change the Chinese mind take effect. Not only values, but even thought processes will change.

The Chinese mind as it is discussed here relates very generally to the majority of the Chinese people, with a focus primarily on the population of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the PRC a Chinese mind distinct from the Chinese mind that has evolved normally elsewhere is being systematically shaped by those in power.

Origins and Sources of the Chinese Mind. The Chinese mind has been generally influenced by three basic forces: cultural tradition, environment, and historical experiences. It has been molded by systems of belief, made manifest in the forms of philosophy and religion.

These systems of belief have formulated styles of perception and ways of life. Most influential of these systems of belief have been Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, and Buddhism. These systems of philosophy and religion identified and established, for popular use, galaxies of values, attitudes, and social institutions.

As a result of these values and institutions, the Chinese mind has acquired a distinctive set of criteria and values that influences thought. This, in turn, has led to the development of a Chinese approach to analysis, problem solving, and decisionmaking that differs vastly from these processes in the West. Understanding the Chinese mind requires appreciation for these forces of history and interpretation.

It is useful to remember that, while all people are born with essentially comparable potential for thought, patterns of thought and the intellectual process of problem solving and decisionmaking differ vastly from one culture to another because of the "brainwashing" performed by every culture.

Westerners sometimes regard the Chinese mind as devious, evasive, indecisive, circumlocutory, even unconcerned. To accept this mistaken notion is to misinterpret the outward manifestations of a thought process that tends to be comprehensive and inclusive as opposed to the more selective, systematic, analytical, and logical process that characterizes Western thinking. Indecision and other cited attributes do not end the thought process; and they are signs that creative thought is in progress. These bewildering attributes reflect the Chinese refusal to make premature decisions, preferring to defer decisions of finality until all facts have been considered.

Chinese decisionmaking may involve many more considerations than Western decisionmaking. Thus, it is a larger and more demanding process. For strategic thinking it may become highly effective.

Therefore, it is pertinent that we consider some significant attitudes, perceptions, and the thought process that have developed out of the Chinese experience.

Selected Significant Institutions and Attitudes. Significant attitudes that characterize and dominate the Chinese mind include concepts of:

- Group orientation
- Hierarchy and patterns of interpersonal relations
- Supreme role of ideology
- Perception of historic greatness and concept of superiority

These attitudes reflect the total social structure and the principal perceptions of the Chinese mind. They were formulated in traditional China. They influence the "life style" of all Chinese populations even today as they experience either the revolutionary change of mainland China or evolutionary changes that are occurring elsewhere.

Group Orientation. The Chinese tends to be emotionally group oriented. He tends not to be an individual free to manipulate his destiny; nor is he accustomed to either the responsibilities or the privileges of an independent individual. His individualism is submerged within a group. He is comfortable with groups. Resulting from the conditioning of his training, he requires emotional comfort and security of the group. As a sort of individual non-entity, he submits himself to both the training and the discipline of the group. This attitude may be a great social asset, as it fosters a sense of "community." The Chinese created this feeling for the group from concepts and values described by Confucius and his followers. Through 2,100 years of imperial history (221 B.C.-A.D. 1911), the Chinese reinforced the concept and used it as a tool of governance. Even today this concept of group orientation is fundamental to the concepts of

political education and governance as practiced in the People's Republic of China.

In traditional society the domestic social grouping was the family. The family was the group to which the individual gave his prominent allegiance—even before allegiance to emperor. In current Chinese Communist society the group is the nation; the individual is trained to submit to the state, placing the goals of the nation above personal desires. The PRC has preserved the deep emotion of group orientation, but has altered the target for loyalty and submission from the family to the nation. The Chinese Communists preserved the emotional content of group orientation, while depriving the traditional group (the family) of its role in maintaining the social order and creating another group (the nation) to which the emotions of group orientation are to be directed. The Chinese Communists took what was essentially a liability in terms of their concept of nation and reshaped it into an asset. From a perspective of Communist goals for nation-building, these were *essential* social, political, and psychological changes.

Today the nation ostensibly fulfills the individuals emotional need for success, training, and discipline by a group. As a part of Mao's efforts to build a new China, the nation now is to fill the role of family, including the role of father, teacher, example of rectitude, and dispenser of rewards and discipline. Individualism is condemned in contemporary society as in traditional society.

Under this group orientation the individual needed to learn how to maneuver among the great variety of individuals in his group. This perspective has had profound effect upon Chinese values and thought processes. Resulting from these demands for socializing, the Chinese developed great sensitivity for the dynamics of human situations and interpersonal relations. Moreover,

continuing concern for human dynamics disciplined every Chinese to think of decisionmaking in terms of the role people play even as Mao emphasizes the power of the people. This emphasis introduced demands that affect thought patterns.

Hierarchy. Hierarchy is a traditional and current characteristic of Chinese society. Hierarchy is essentially a system of ranks, roles, and protocol. Each person has an understood role with privileges, responsibilities, and clear codes of protocol (or etiquette) for interpersonal relations. He possesses an acknowledged social position either above or subordinate to his fellows. He has the social and emotional security of knowing who he is and what is expected of him.

The pattern for hierarchy was established and practiced in the family—which included an authoritarian father and obedient and respectful sons expressing their obligation in the social demands for filial piety. While authoritarian, the father was seen in a prescribed role of benevolence and rectitude for the proper training of sons. The relationship of father and son was considered the most important of the five traditionally recognized basic human relationships. Inherent in the system of human relationships were concepts of dependence and inequality. Within the five human relationships recognized by the Chinese as basic, inequality is an element in at least four:

- Father and son
- Sovereign and minister
- Husband and wife
- Elder brother and younger brother
- Friend and friend

These concepts of paternal leadership and benevolence and of inequality had bearing on Chinese perspectives of international relations, pertaining particularly to the alien concept of "equality of nations."

The pattern of hierarchy in the

family provided the pattern of hierarchy in society. The ideal ruler was the father of his people, authoritarian but benevolent, moral and wise, conditioned and restrained by consciousness of his ethical role.

This pattern tends to prevail today. Mao is viewed as the emperor-father, possessed of all wisdom, ethical rectitude, and benevolence. This reverence is reflected in thousands of testimonials, as

The great leader is like a father
Mao Tse-tung educates us.

In his loving care for the people
he surpasses that of their own
parents.⁵

These distinctions of role are apparent today in the roles of the elite leadership, the cadre, and the people.

Supreme Role of Ideology. Ideology has been of supreme concern to the Chinese. Ideology has fulfilled the function that has been performed in Christian and Islamic societies by religion. It has provided guidance and inspiration and a reference for value judgments made in relation to the ideology. As an aid for value judgments, ideology provides the basic criteria for evaluating one's own behavior as well as that of others. Adherence to an ideology is a Chinese imperative. Consistency in behavior and thought with the ideology has always been expected; discrepancies between behavior and thought on the one hand and ideology on the other are judged as unacceptable. This was true in traditional China as it is today.

Adherence may not be eternal, and if a current ideology appears to become obsolete, the Chinese may adopt a new ideology and employ it with fervor and dedication. This capacity for shift represents not fickleness but ability to adapt and adjust.

In traditional society, Confucianism was the prevailing ideology. In the

People's Republic of China, communism is the prevailing ideology. It is significant that communism as we know of it outside of China is being significantly modified and naturalized by the Chinese to make it suitable in the Chinese cultural environment—the most conspicuous innovation being Mao's glaring focus on rural areas and the peasantry and his predominant emphasis on the power of people.

Ideology and authoritarianism have provided intellectual and emotional security. Dynamic faith in ideology provides the security, confidence, dedication, and compulsion that are powerful forces for nation-building.

Perception of Historic Greatness and Concept of Superiority. Confidence in China's historic grandeur, of capacity for governance many times demonstrated, and of superiority in culture are unquestioned perceptions held by the Chinese people. These perceptions strengthen the Chinese sense of identity. The Chinese do not suffer uncertainty of identity. The Chinese (even on the mainland) do not reject their past; their past is the basis of identity. And Mao has said: "Today's China is an outgrowth of historic China. . . . We must not mutilate history. From Confucius to Sun Yat-sen we must sum it up critically, and we must constitute ourselves the heirs of all that is precious in the past."⁶

Much of China's history provides a basis for perceptions of superiority over all other peoples of the world known to China. Only in the material instruments of power must the Chinese admit inferiority; and this gap they are determined to fill.

As they may close this gap, a matter of concern for us may be their proficiency in molding people—in manipulating the mind and spirit of China. With great sensitivity for the dynamics in the relationships between human beings essential in group orientation, with

conviction about the desirable characteristics of a good Chinese, with belief that man is inherently good and that waywardness is correctable by education and indoctrination, and with a highly effective and integrated method for developing the new mind of China, the Chinese feel they can develop people power as an instrument of power that Mao sees as surpassing all other tools of power.

With confidence in the essence of superiority, the Chinese are dynamically motivated to recreate China's position of superiority. Many indications reveal pursuit of this goal with fervor and confidence.

Chinese Thought Patterns, Problem Solving, and Decisionmaking. The Chinese style of thought involves attributes of what I feel may be called true "strategic thinking." The style differs significantly from conventional Western thought patterns. It tends to be more comprehensive in consideration of issues. The process is complicated by significant concern for the dynamics of human relations and human behavior. It is tedious, slow, and intellectually demanding. It seeks total integration of all aspects—core and marginal—of an issue. It demands inclusiveness, rather than selectivity and exclusiveness. It rejects premature determinations—decisions—and even hypotheses that may channelize the pattern of thought, thereby closing out intrusion of elements relevant to an issue which may arise later.

To grasp a feel for the Chinese thought process, I think of the Chinese thought process as *circle thinking* and—to coin a term—*radarscopic thinking*. Circle thinking represents, in a sense, drawing a circle to encompass and identify everything related to the issue of concern—even considerations only remotely related. The radarscopic thinking process involves scanning the entire compass of elements to identify everything and then casting an intellectual

spotlight on the whole to observe or consider all relationships and the interaction among all of the elements—core and peripheral.

Mao, for example, says something to the effect that one cannot understand the whole (that is, the whole of an issue, a problem, a situation) by first examining its parts. First, the whole must be observed, and then the parts may be understood. In a sense this is initially facing an issue the way we view a sunset—normally we see the total manifestation before we note portions of the sunset. Many Asian thinkers would agree that true understanding dictates understanding the whole before examining the parts.

In contrast, a Western thinker endeavors first to grasp what he identifies and selects as the essential elements—the core, the "gut issues." He proceeds from there on this selective basis to analyze, interpret, and estimate. Sometimes when things go awry, he will say, "We overlooked something," or "We forgot something," or "Unexpected peripheral factors invalidated the analysis." Or, most cowardly of all, "People did not act rationally."

The Asian thinker might correctly feel that the Western thinker has neglected to observe and consider essential elements of the total reality. Moreover, the Western thinker may have exercised individual prejudice by selecting what he believed to be important as a basis for analysis. Someone else might have made a different selection; for every judgment of what is important is tainted by individual bias.

In a limited way, I think Western thinkers have tended recently to consider a broader basis for problem solving and decisionmaking through an interdisciplinary treatment of problems. This is only a tiny approach to the Asian way of thinking, however, which is determined by cultural values, social attitudes, and philosophical concepts.

These patterns of thought and

procedures for problem solving and decisionmaking are important aspects of the Chinese mind.

THE CHINESE MIND TODAY IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The Chinese mind today in the People's Republic of China reflects most of the characteristics I have described. This is to be expected. As individuals we are cultural artifacts of our ancestors, and every nation at any given time is the creature of its cultural heritage. No one can obliterate the influences of centuries of cultural conditioning and introduce an entirely new and culturally untainted way of life. The leaders of the PRC started with a people deeply conditioned by traditional Chinese culture—and the leaders themselves were perhaps even more thoroughly conditioned. These influences of the cultural heritage are inevitable. For example, the fact that the Communists may denounce Confucianism, reject Buddhism, and scorn Taoism has very little relevance; for, in fact, by both their attitudes and language, they reflect some or all of these influences.

But the Chinese mind in the PRC is significantly changing. It is being reconditioned by the most colossal, ambitious program the world has ever seen, a program reflecting a sophisticated understanding of people and an awareness of the great assets inherent in traditional Chinese cultural conditioning.

This top priority endeavor to mold and reshape the Chinese mind highlights Mao's emphasis on the power of people. Mao believes that when the people have been desirably conditioned, both intellectually and emotionally, they will unwaveringly pursue development of China's preeminent greatness with unrestrained dedication. They will not need to be cajoled, enticed. Visions of national accomplishment and personal satisfaction derived from adherence to

ideology will provide the necessary incentives. This, then, is the creation of people power. Until the people have been suitably conditioned, pursuit of national goals can be only arduous, faltering, and inconclusive. Relying thus on people power (not just numbers, but the will and spirit and dedication of people), Mao believes that the character of the Chinese mind surpasses in importance all other tools for national development. This perception may explain in part why politics (indoctrination) is given priority over other aspects of national development, including economic.

Chinese emphasis on *people development* before economic development makes sense when we consider the Chinese "concept of time." This concept allows the government to program and establish priorities without restraints and the compulsions of a fixed time frame—for the Chinese is capable of projecting in terms of decades as we do in years.⁷ In the same context, these aspects of the Cultural Revolution that are bewildering to us (such as closing the schools for nearly 3 years) make sense. The dominant element herein is creation of people power through development of the Chinese mind.

Taking advantage of the Chinese heritage and viewing the future, the Chinese are creating a potentially potent human force—a force that may compensate in part for deficiencies in material assets of power and a force that will pursue, with dedication, creation of all envisioned essential elements of great power.

The new Chinese mind has great assets and potential liabilities for China. A few characteristics that I think I see existing or being developed include:

Continuation of the significant attitudes discussed earlier:

- *Group orientation*—now involving in the larger sense the nation as a group to which the individual owes submissive allegiance and, in a smaller sense, local groups (geographic, social,

occupational, et cetera, such as women's groups and trade unions) with which most Chinese are associated, giving them a sense of "belonging" and participation, and providing the government with an instrument for governance, indoctrination, control, and discipline.

- *Hierarchy*—consisting of leadership, cadres, and the masses.

- *Dedication to ideology*—evident in the prevalence of discussion of ideology and in value judgments (of individuals and of nations) on a basis of ideology.

- *Perception of historic greatness and of inherent superiority*—so that there is no uncertainty of identity with greatness and there is dynamic confidence in China's capacity to regain China's perceived position of superiority and supremacy. (These are powerful attitudes.)

I see also encouragement for downgrading importance of the individual as a corollary to subordination to the group. Mao asserts: "The individual is subordinate to the organization. . . . At no time and in no circumstances should a Communist place his personal interests first; he should subordinate these to the interests of the nation and of the masses. . . . We must all learn the spirit of absolute selflessness."⁸ And even citing Buddhism and Taoism, Communist writers stress the need "to shed the earthly form of individualism and acquire a spiritual form of collectivism."⁹

I further perceive new patterns of priorities in nation-building that emphasize preparation for "takeoff" by total conditioning of the people for fanatical dedication. This is a pattern of priorities that makes enormous sense in the light of the Chinese extended "concept of time," belief in the inherent goodness of man and in the correctability and moldability of character, and, above all, conviction of the superiority of people power as the one indispensable and preeminent asset for nation-building.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I wish to select from this consideration of the Chinese mind several ideas that I think we should remember.

- The Chinese Communists, assisted by the Chinese "concept of time," can and do afford a different sequence of priorities from the sequence that we would establish. "Putting first things first" in this context produces a sequence of priorities that sees people rather than factories, railroads, and other material elements of power as the foundation for nation-building.

- In the Chinese hierarchy of priorities for nation-building, people power is

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Professor Clyde B. Sargent completed his undergraduate work at Denison University in political science in 1930 and a master's degree in English at Trinity College in 1932. He then took a master's degree in Chinese language and civilization from the College of Chinese Studies in Peking and taught for 6 years as Chairman of the Foreign Languages Department of Cheloo University in Tsinan, China. During the war years, Professor Sargent served as a special assistant to the American Ambassador in Chungking and as a major in the OSS. In 1946 he returned to the United States and completed a doctorate at Columbia in Far Eastern studies. Since that time Professor Sargent has served in a variety of positions, including Political Advisor to the U.S. Delegation to the United States-U.S.S.R. Joint Commission on Korea (1947-1948), Director of Foreign Area and Language Training with the U.S. Government (1948-1965), and Professor of History with the East Asian Institute, Oakland University (1966-1967). Professor Sargent occupied the Chair of Comparative Cultures at the Naval War College during the 1970-1971 academic year and is presently serving as lecturer for The George Washington University graduate program there.

preeminent. People power is developed through cultivation of the Chinese mind. The Communists are vigorously, and seemingly effectively, creating the new Chinese mind.

• The Chinese thought processes, problem solving, and decisionmaking reflect, in general, Asian processes created and conditioned by Asian values; they possess sophisticated potential for all students of strategic thought.

The foregoing has been but a preliminary probing and exploration. I hope those perceptions may make it easier to understand the proverbial "Chinese puzzle." I have only touched on only a few elements that seem significant. Many other aspects of the Chinese mind need attention. With stimulus from this beginning, I shall continue this exploration in other, but related, areas.

FOOTNOTES

1. Mao Tse-tung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966), p. 139.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
3. *Peking Review*, 4 March 1966.
4. Mao Tse-tung, p. 140.
5. Cited from Chang-tu Hu, "Some Aspects of Contemporary Chinese Society," HRAF reprint, 1960, p. 43, from *China, Its People, Its Society, Its Culture* (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1960).
6. Mao Tse-tung, "Communist Party in National War," *Selected Writings*, v. II, p. 496.
7. See Clyde B. Sargent, "Chinese National Culture," *Naval War College Review*, May 1971, p. 42, *et seq.*
8. Mao Tse-tung, *Quotations*, p. 255, 269, 171.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

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Revolution is not a dinner party, nor an essay, nor a painting, nor a piece of embroidery; it cannot be advanced softly, gradually, carefully, considerately, respectfully, politely, plainly and modestly.

Mao Tse-tung, "Time," 18 December 1950