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## Child of a Revolution

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*The Thought Revolution.* By Tung Chi-Ping and Humphrey Evans. New York: Coward-McCann, 1966. \$5.

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IN MAY 1964, the story that a Communist Chinese diplomat had fled from the Red Chinese embassy in Burundi and had asked for asylum in the United States was front-page news. The defector was only 24 years old, and only a child of nine when the forces of Mao Tse-tung took over Shanghai. He was not one of the irreconcilables from the old regime, but had been educated by the communists almost from the beginning of his school career. If the communists were as effective in molding the minds of the young as we had been led to believe, how did it happen that this young man seized the first opportunity he had to defect? And why did he choose to flee to a country that had been portrayed to him daily as the most evil land in the world?

The young defector, Tung Chi-Ping, with the able assistance of Humphrey Evans, has provided us with the answers to these questions and to a good many more in his book, *The Thought Revolution*. Tung's story is both fascinating and moving. It gives us for the first time a detailed, eye-witness account of how the communists in China went about trying to mold the new communist man from the youthful clay that fell into their hands when they seized control from the demoralized Nationalist regime. Moreover, it casts considerable light on China's newest scourge, the Red Guard.

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Tung Chi-Ping's story offers some reason to believe that we have tended to overestimate greatly the effectiveness of the "educational" efforts of the totalitarians. It is not just that the communist techniques failed to make a devoted communist of Tung; what is most interesting and encouraging is why they failed to work.

Tung obviously considers himself to be reasonably representative of the young people that he left behind in Communist China, and the reader of his book comes away agreeing with him. The reason is that Tung shows that nearly all the Chinese, even the dullest-witted peasants, sense that they have been tricked and deceived by the Communists. Nothing stirs greater resentment than those who victimize, and one cannot read Tung's account of the victimization of the Chinese people without a feeling of deep revulsion toward those responsible.

Tung concedes that he and his people were at first impressed by the communists, believing that they were well disciplined, tolerant and just. At first their behavior appeared to confirm this, but before long people began to realize the communists' hypocrisy. Those who did not realize this soon got into trouble.

ONE OF the most important lessons that had to be learned in the "new China" was that truth was subjective, not objective. To discover the "truth" one had to be clever about divining the thoughts of the Party leaders, and this was complicated by the fact that the words they spoke did not always represent their actual thoughts.

For example, Tung tells of the great tragedy that befell one of his classmates, Sun, who was the only person he knew who actually believed the Party propaganda. Sun took seriously the claim that the Party leadership was responsive to the will of the masses. Knowing that Ssi-li, the chairman of the class branch of the Youth League, was a vicious intriguer who was universally disliked by the other students, he thought it his duty to ex-

pose this fact and have her unseated. He gathered testimony from all the students and had a meeting convened to hear the charges. Unfortunately he failed to take into account the fact that Ssi-li had just been admitted to membership in the Communist Party, and when the chips were down, the students who had poured out their complaints to Sun were afraid to admit that they had ever said anything against her. The tables were turned, and it was Sun who was put on trial for having brought false charges against a Party member. The students found themselves forced to "struggle against" Sun, which meant heaping abuse and denunciation upon him in a marathon meeting. Tung writes of Sun's bewildered reaction as follows,

*He had participated frequently in these hate orgies, but he had always believed that the victims deserved what they got. This was the first time he had endured the torment, and he knew that it was unjust. He refused to accept the criticism; he pleaded with us to stop lying and to tell the truth of what originally had been told to him concerning Ssi-li. Finally, we were encouraged to hit him with our fists and to spit on him. When we left him, he was sprawled on the floor, face down, sobbing.*

The experience literally drove Sun mad. Sun knew that he was right, and he had good reason to believe that the Party officials knew it also. He could not reconcile this knowledge with his naive faith in the Party propaganda. His mind snapped under the strain. The other students had no difficulty understanding why the Party protected Ssi-li, Tung explains,

*They (the Party leaders) would have been suspicious of her if she had been genuinely liked; this would have indicated that she sided with the masses against the communists.*

Tung himself had learned early that it was dangerous to tell the Communists the truth even when they asked for it. His favorite teacher in high school, an elderly lady named Miss Pan, had ventured to voice a criticism of teachers' salaries during the Hundred Flowers Campaign in the Spring of 1957. Criticisms were being invited, and Miss Pan had pointed out that previously teachers had received regular salary increases, but that

now such increases were rare. When the crackdown came on those who had ventured to criticize, Miss Pan was declared to be rightist. She was sent to work on the Amoy railroad as a coolie and she died within a few months.

Another of Tung's teachers quoted in class an early poem of Mao Tse-tung's in which Mao boasted that his accomplishments would be greater than those of China's best heremperors. A "progressive" student reported that the teacher had read this sarcastically, with the result that this teacher also was declared to be a rightist and was sentenced to manual labor on a cooperative farm.

But it was not enough just to refrain from criticism. One also had to be enthusiastic. One of Tung's teachers was subjected to the "struggle" process because he was guilty of doing his work competently but without enough feeling. He was subjected to hours of public criticism until he confessed his supposed errors, praised the Party and Chairman Mao for showing him his mistake, and swore to reform. Tung says it was like beating a man for not smiling, beating him until he did open his lips and show his teeth.

Another personal experience in high school taught Tung the grave danger of uttering an objective truth. His high school class had been assigned to work picking cotton in a commune. The students hated the work, and the peasants hated the students, but the night before they were to return to the city, a commune official announced that the students had unanimously demanded to be allowed to work another two weeks, and the authorities were bowing to their will. Both the students and the peasants protested this "unanimous" decision, with such vigor that the extra period was cut to one week. However, at the end of the week the students were compelled to hold a "struggle meeting" to criticize each other. They made the mistake of including in the criticism a classmate whose father was a general in the People's Liberation Army. He was very lazy and took full advantage of his father's position to avoid work and study, and all the criticisms made of him had the distinction of being true. But it was intolerable that the truth should be told. The Party showed its displeasure by ordering an intense struggle against the class leader.

*The cadres would accept nothing less than screaming frenzy from us. We also were encouraged to strike the ex-class chief with our fists and to spit on him. We were permitted to stop only when we were exhausted. Thereupon the cadres accepted the "will of the masses" and our classmate was sentenced to be expelled from the school and was sent to manual labor in clearing virgin land on the northwest frontier. Everyone in the class was sick with revulsion.*

Tung later received another valuable lesson from one of his classmates in how to succeed in the topsy-turvy world in which he found himself. The students were working in another commune, and one of their jobs was to interview the peasants to find out what they were thinking. Tung worked with a student who was a very experienced informer. They found that the bitterness and animosity of the peasants seemed limitless. Everywhere they were told that the Communists had broken their promises, had robbed them, cheated them and lied to them. Tung was amazed that they dared be so critical, but they apparently spoke out because they felt that things could not possibly be made any worse; they had nothing to lose but their chains. Tung's more experienced colleague wrote their report. It read,

*Having talked to our quota of families, we can say without any hesitation that the Party's rural policies are warmly welcomed by the peasants. In every household, enthusiasm of unmistakable sincerity was expressed for the commune system.*

The Party considered this a "brilliant" report. The fact that Tung was co-signer was interpreted as evidence of his progress in heightening his political consciousness.

This is reminiscent of an incident that occurred in the Soviet Embassy in Rangoon, Burma, recounted by Aleksandr Kaznacheev in his book, *Inside a Soviet Embassy*. An embassy officer wrote an accurate report on the visit to Rangoon of Poland's President Cyrankiewicz, saying that the Poles had ignored the Soviet Embassy, had failed to mention the Soviet Union in their speeches and in general demonstrated black ingratitude to the Soviets. This report almost ruined the officer's career. A more experienced officer was ordered to revise the report, and it came out praising the visit as a great success and ended with this statement, "All attempts on the part

of native reactionary elements to spoil the close relations established between the visiting Polish delegation and the Soviet Embassy have ended in complete failure.<sup>1</sup>

THE CHINESE and Russian Communists may not see eye to eye on many things, but they share a preference for twisting the facts to fit their conception of what reality ought to be. Tung discovered that this was the key to survival, and though it necessitated doing many things that went against the grain, he preferred survival to martyrdom. He was aided by the communist doctrine that the children of the lower classes were inherently superior to those of the upper classes.

Tung was from a proletarian family, but he received valuable guidance from a brilliant classmate, Hu. Hu was given rough treatment and low grades by the teachers, which he explained saying, "I have a loathsome, incurable, hereditary disease. My father is—was—a rich industrialist." Hu found that he could survive only by pretending that the communist environment was changing his nature and was gradually making him into the perfect communist man. This pleased the Communists immensely since it appeared to prove that environment determined human nature, one of their articles of faith. Hu had no hope of escape, because of his background. He could never be trusted to leave the country. But Tung was able to get an assignment to the Chinese Embassy in Burundi, where he spent one night before making his break for freedom.

There was no doubt in Tung's mind where he should go to seek freedom. It was to the embassy of that country that had been most fiercely reviled in all the propaganda of the communists that he had been subjected to since 1949. The enemies of his enemy, the communists, had to be his friends.

What kind of freedom was he seeking?

WESTERN intellectuals are all too often inclined to think of freedom only in terms of electoral machinery and the right to express dissenting political views. This is why they frequently argue that it is meaningless to talk about the communists depriving the people of their freedom because most people

1. Aleksandr Kaznacheev, *Inside a Soviet Embassy* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1962), p. 45.



Mao's Red Guards

in Asia have never known freedom. For example, two books on China, whose authors had been much impressed by the evidence they saw that the people of China were enthusiastic, dedicated supporters of the communist regime, inspired a *New York Times* reviewer to make this comment,

*The sacrifice of a freedom the Chinese never had in any effective sense—the freedom of individual dissent—and of an economic system based on profit (which benefited very few Chinese), does not in China seem a high price to pay for the sense of unity, dedication and identification which, both writers testify, runs through every governmental official.<sup>2</sup>*

What the reviewer and the authors of these superficial observations on the Chinese scene clearly do not realize is the tremendous importance of freedom from being compelled to engage in offensive, nonsensical, and hypo-

critical activities, not to mention the freedom from compulsion to say that black is white. A regime can be authoritarian and still permit most people to retain their integrity and self-respect. It can permit those who find that they cannot stand the restraints imposed on them the freedom of exit. The communist regime is the first in China that has had both the will and the means to eliminate these most essential freedoms—the freedom from forced irrationality, the freedom to be silent and the freedom to leave.

Being compelled to do what is shameful or ridiculous, such as inventing false charges to hurl against associates to prove one's devotion to the Party, or working oneself to the point of exhaustion to feed a backyard steel furnace that produces only worthless metal, is tolerable only to one who has neither sense nor character.

Tung is confident that the Chinese people still have both sense and character. In commenting on an American columnist's remark

2. *New York Times*, May 18, 1966.

that the Chinese people are possessed by revolutionary fervor, he wrote,

*The Chinese people are possessed by revolutionary fervor about as much as the prisoners in one of your penitentiaries. Their keepers can put them through the motions, but if they could throw their keepers out, there would be dancing in the streets, just as there was in Ghana when they got rid of Nkrumah.*

What are the possibilities that this may happen? Tung gives a very good description of the conflict between the "leftists" and the "rightists" that has been going on within the Chinese Communist Party for the past decade. He writes,

*The group of top leaders could be viewed as divided into two groups, the "reds" and the "experts." The reds were the old revolutionaries. Few of them were well educated, but they were fanatic about Marxist theories. The members of the other group, while politically pure enough, were essentially specialists in such fields as agriculture, say, or administration, foreign affairs, and industry. In the process whereby national policy was decided, the reds were rigidly doctrinaire; they followed a literal interpretation of Marxist-Leninist dogma, and they therefore were generally more "leftist." The "experts" however, tended to look at a situation more realistically (instead of seeing it as Marx or Lenin had said it ought to be) and to react to it in a more logical way; because they tended to adapt theory to the situation instead of interpreting the situation on the basis of theory, they were comparatively "rightists."*

WHAT we are seeing today is an intense struggle between these two factions. The "leftists" are endeavoring to crush the more pragmatic wing of the Party. The Red Guards are being used in much the same way that Tung and his classmates were used in the "Two Anti Campaign" of 1958, when they were herded out of the classrooms to demonstrate and shout frenzied slogans.

*We would not know what it was about until the next day. We would learn that we had risen "spontaneously" to protest some imperialist affront or some comment by an imperialist leader.*

Today it is the leaders of the "rightist" faction of the Party who are the target of the denunciatory slogans.

The surfacing of this conflict in the dramatic form it has taken the past several

months stands as confirmation of the accuracy of Tung's observations about the tensions that have long been concealed within the fabric of the Chinese communist regime. These developments have clearly shown how foolish and naive those visitors to China were who saw nothing in the eyes of the people but "the sense of unity, dedication and identification which . . . runs through every strata of Chinese society." These writers were inclined to caution us not to think that the Chinese people share our value system, that we should not think that what was reprehensible to us was necessarily distasteful to them.

What Tung tells us has the truer ring. For one thing, nothing he has written has been made to look foolish by the events that have transpired since his words appeared in print. To be sure, the Chinese value system differs from that of the Western countries in many important respects, but the Chinese people share with people everywhere a deep-seated need to harmonize their ideas and actions with reality as they see it. Even the leaders have this need, as is evidenced by their preference for false reports telling them that reality conforms to what their ideas say it should be.

At the moment, those who are farthest detached from reality appear to have the upper hand, and the leaders of the more pragmatic wing of the Party are confessing their past sins. The schools, which devoted little enough time to academic pursuits in Tung's day, have now been closed completely for a year, with the dubious aim of making the students "redder."

There is no reason to think that the young people are happy about this situation any more than Tung's classmates were happy about the cruel and senseless way in which they were treated. The Red Guards in Peking are reported to be "cold, hungry and visibly bored . . . they sleep in unfinished buildings and spend their days wandering aimlessly through the city, gathering at intervals to recite Maoist aphorisms."<sup>3</sup>

Badly needed is someone who can lead the people out of the Maoist wilderness and into a world where objective truth is honored and at least a minimal degree of freedom is restored. No such leader is now in sight, but certainly if he emerges, he will not lack for followers.

3. *Washington Post*, January 1, 1967, p. 1.