

**HEAVEN SEES AS THE PEOPLE SEE,
HEAVEN HEARS AS THE PEOPLE HEAR***

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“Heaven sees as the people see, Heaven hears as the people hear.”

This is a quotation from Mencius which illustrates the Confucian view of the people's primacy in the universal order of things. The people is the instrument by which Heaven withdraws its mandate from one dynasty and gives it to another: it rouses them up in rebellious rage to overthrow a corrupt ruler and set up a nobler one. The people is a sea on which the ship of state floats — and the sea can sink the ship. Confucian China always held that in the final analysis the will of the people was irresistible. When Commissioner Lin Tse-hsu on the eve of the first Opium War in 1839 wanted to invoke his ultimate threat against the recalcitrant British, he warned them that he would stir up a peasant militia that would swarm all over them and drive them from China's shores forever. Three years later the Canton authorities sought to drive the point home by opening a recruiting station just opposite the British *bodegas* where local roughnecks qualified for enlistment by lifting a 50-kilo weight. And when, in 1870 after 25 years of humiliating unequal treaties, an undisciplined mob broke into a French convent in Tientsin and killed a dozen nuns, a grateful intelligentsia concluded

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that at last the people was roused up and would accomplish what an ineffectual military and corrupt bureaucracy had been unable to do.

The Chinese government itself maintained a healthy respect for this popular power, and this was especially true during the last dynasty before the Revolution which brought the empire to an end. When local governments would group ten families together for mutual responsibility, and then ten groups of ten, and then ten groups of hundreds, it was the rule that their overall leader must not be a member of the *ilustrado* gentry. The government knew it had to keep the intellectuals and the peasants apart if it was going to control either, for it was the educated elite that could unleash the revolutionary power of the masses. This was a truth still recognized by a non-Confucian elite in the 20th century. Professor Li Ta-chao of the University of Peking, China's first Marxist, compared the power of an aroused peasantry to a roaring ocean wave, and one of his library assistants, Mao Tse-tung, in his famous 1927 "Report on the peasant movement in Hunan Province," likened the same power to the irresistible force of a typhoon.

I cite these examples as a few of the thoughts I would like to put forward the general question: how did the world's most conservative culture produce the world's most radical revolution? I am not going to suggest that Confucianism produced Marxism. Anybody who has been reading the foreign press lately knows that Confucian elitism is anathema to the government of the People's Republic of China — as well it might be — and that the name of that Mencius whom I quoted earlier has been vilified for another of his quotations, one that runs, "Those who work with their minds, govern, those who work with their hands are governed." But I am going to suggest that Confucian China had no institutions or power blocks — what we would call vested interests — capable of resisting the imposition of radical changes from above, and that Confucian China would not find the idea of a highly centralized, authoritarian, thought-controlling regime so strange or oppressive as we might.

I suppose I am safe in referring to pre-Communist China as the world's most conservative culture for no other reason than that it was conservative longer than any other culture. For two thousand years, China consciously resisted change in government and society, and the significant changes that did take place were those that were too subtle or gradual to attract outright attack by a powerful scholar bureaucracy. Indeed, it might be better to say "preservative" than "conservative," for

Chinese leaders were not merely conservative by temperament but preservative by design. Confucius himself considered that all the problems of his day stemmed from aberrant departure from the customs of a happier day of ancient sages and sage-kings, and the curriculum prescribed for the Chinese civil service was nothing more than a canonized collection of historic documents believed to preserve the glitter of that Golden Age. Or perhaps even "preservative" is too pale a term, and I should say "restorative" instead. For, during 2500 years of the recorded history of revolutions which overthrew dynasties with an average frequency of once every three centuries, the first thing each new regime tried to do was to recreate the image of the old regime as faithfully as possible.

Nor do I probably have to belabor the point of how radical the present Chinese revolution is. Confucius said, "There has never been seen a tree with its branches in the ground and its roots in the air," but that is just the kind of change envisioned in the People's Republic, and the vision is rapidly being realized. Marxist revolutionary theory starts not with economics or politics, but with man alienated from himself, and its goal is not an improved economic base but a sociological superstructure resting on that base in which the New Man will enjoy his true nature. I have called the Chinese Revolution the world's most radical revolution because I believe that China has moved farther along the path toward that goal than any other revolutionary society. Before the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966, Mao Tse-Tung told his comrades, "Unless a man is completely born again, he cannot enter the door of Communism," and all of China's agricultural and industrial miracles have been worked under the rhetoric of selflessness and service. The green seeds of Marxism dropped into China's ancient soil seem to have produced a sturdier plant with more fragrant blossoms and lusher fruit than in any other socialist land. The question is, what made the soil so fertile?

In the first place, China has always had a strong central government exercising control over a culture area larger than any other nation until modern times. If we superimpose the map of China on a map of Europe, we will see that the distance from Canton in the South to Mukden in the North is the same as the distance from Sicily to Leningrad, and from east to west, Shanghai is as far from Chungking as Istanbul is from Paris. At no time in history has a government in Paris been able to collect taxes in Istanbul, or an emperor in Leningrad to issue orders to a governor in Sicily in a language common to both

of them. Yet this has been the situation in China during more of its long history than not, and it is the situation today. This control has traditionally been exercised through an efficient body of civil servants rendering more loyal fealty to one common culture than to any provincial feudal lord, and willing to be assigned to the outermost reaches of the realm at the government's pleasure or emperor's whim.

I have been referring to the territory under this control as a "culture area" to make the further point that the Chinese government has always been, in the words of one western sinologist, "coterminous" with Chinese culture. The government was the arbiter and propagator of social norms, and the head of state was the embodiment and chief exemplar of the ideal national character. When I was first learning to write Chinese calligraphy, one of the models I copied was the handwriting of a Sung dynasty emperor, and engraved in stone in the mortuary shrine of a national hero who had died defending the town in which I lived was an enlarged copy of his last letter to his wife in his own hand. So, too, not far from that spot today there stands in the Yu Hua Tai memorial to 120,000 activists executed during the Kuomintang regime, a stone marker displaying an edifying comment on the blood of martyrs done in the brushwork of the present Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Tse-tung.

Of course, with our modern communication systems, even a comparatively decentralized government nowadays looks more centralized than the government of Confucian past. But the power of the Confucian past. But the power of the Confucian government was reinforced by the absence of competing power blocs or institutions which westerners and western students of history take for granted — vested interests, that is, capable of influencing, obstructing or even overthrowing central authority. By way of illustration, I will single out four which appeared in Europe and the New World from the time of the Roman Empire to the present — the military, the Church, the business world, and the intelligentsia.

In the West, from the time of the barracks emperors through centuries of countermarching nationalist armies to the dictatorships of the present century, governments have had to confront an often independent military profession. And not only in the West: in South America and the Far East today more nations are under the control of martial law or military regimes than are not. China never had such a military profession nor even a standing army, as we know it. Internal dis-

turbances that called for coercive action by the state — and there were plenty of them — were expected to be put down by peasant militia organized on the spot by the local gentry. North and northwest of the Great Wall, of course, were those enemy barbarians whose hankering to invade China's more comfortable civilization had to be controlled by military means. But the unlucky troops who manned these frontier garrisons provided the subject matter for two millenia of poems bewailing their impressment, hardships, and broken romances. And their commanders were most likely civil officials out of favor with the state. When actual invasions or revolutions required real generals in the field, scholar bureaucrats were expected to exchange the pen for the sword and take to the field, returning to their more genteel calling once the emergency had passed. The soldiers themselves were either conscripts or men who could find no other way to make a living. Even as late as my own day in China, one of the first popular sayings a newcomer learned was, "*Hao tieh pu ta ting, hao jen pu ta ping* — You don't use good iron to make a nail, you don't use good men to make a soldier."

China never had a church. Neither her Taoists nor her Buddhists created organizations with popes or caliphs sanguinary enough to attack one another or powerful enough to influence or subvert the designs and interests of the state. Buddhism did have a profound effect on Chinese culture, but not in the political sphere. It never produced those contentious Japanese monks who brawled in the streets of Nara and Kyoto, much less Christian abbots who rallied belly-slashing Crusaders on to victory with the cry, "*Deus vult* — God wills it!" The state religion, Confucianism, aimed at social order in this world rather than reward in the next, and taught the faithful to respect ancestors and render unto Caesar. Individual emperors occasionally patronized Buddhism or embraced Taoism, but scholar officials always castigated such faiths as abject superstitions fit only for ignorant peasants. There is a classic memorial studied as a model essay by all students of Chinese literature entitled, "The bone of the Buddha." It inveighs against the official reception of this Indian relic at court. Religion has always rested lightly on Chinese shoulders, especially scholar shoulders, whether in the 1940's or the 940's. Any Christian missionary working in a Chinese university on the eve of the Liberation will recall that few students would have found it necessary to be liberated from what the present government calls the opiate of the masses.

Big business was never a political factor in Chinese history, as surprising as this may seem to Filipinos who consider their Chinese

compatriots businessmen *par excellence*. China, of course, never had an industrial revolution, nor even a mercantilist overseas empire, and so did not produce such spectacles as an English East Indies Company colonizing a whole subcontinent or a Central Intelligence Agency overthrowing the government of a modern state at the behest of an American multinational corporation. Overseas trade China always had, but in view of her literal self sufficiency, this trade was seen by the government either as tribute typified by such exotica as Sulu pearls or Bornean bird's-nests, or as Chinese benevolence toward benighted lands languishing for want of tea and silk. But the merchants themselves always occupied the bottom rung of the Chinese class structure.

At the top of the social ladder were the scholar gentry who supposedly dedicated themselves to the service of the state at altruistic self-sacrifice, and below them came the peasantry which supported the land by the honesty of its sweaty labor and was the proper object of both the government's and Heaven's concern. Still lower came the craftsmen: they, too, worked with their hands, but their labor was less arduous and their products more efete. And at the very bottom came the merchants — parasites who neither dedicated themselves to public service nor labored to feed their fellow men, but rather, producing nothing, lived by their wits to reap dubious profits for their personal gain. When British merchants in their early 19th-century ghetto outside the gates of Canton attempted to attract official attention to the dishonesty they felt they were suffering at the hands of their Chinese counterparts, the Emperor was unmoved by any sympathy for their plight. After all, if they chose to make their living by such unprincipled means as trade, how could they expect to deal with more principled men, and if they were out-shylocked by their Chinese competitors, what grounds did they have for complaint?

Not only were merchants scorned and their commerce deprecated, but the real economy of the land was considered a direct concern of the government. No decrees were supposed to be promulgated which would interfere with the people's livelihood; quite the opposite, their hunger or suffering was ultimately the responsibility of that imperial father figure who was answerable to Heaven for their welfare. The failure of an incompetent emperor or corrupt court to maintain public works could lead to floods which would create famine which would produce brigands who would gather together in outlaw bands to become rebels. And the Chinese assessment of the real blame in such cases is indicated by their expression, "driven to the hills," for the English,

“take to the hills.” In our own Old Society, newspapers used to speak of Filipino youth “taking to the hills” in the Sierra Madres, but in the *Shui Hu Chuan*, a picaresque novel which is one of Mao Tse-tung’s favorite sources of quotations, the outlaw bands that gathered around a mountain called Liang are spoken of as “*pi hsiang Liang Shan* — driven to Mount Liang.” The fact that failure to control the Yellow River did actually lead to such sequences of floods, famines, brigandage and revolt has suggested to some that the reason an area the size of Europe remained a united nation for most of two millenia was that its dependence on irrigation and flood control made a strong central authority absolutely necessary. This is an unacceptable oversimplification, of course, but it does suggest a line of reasoning which persuades many economists today that China’s millions can never be adequately fed without a pooling and redistribution of their total resources by some central government powerful enough to do so.

Chinese scholarship boasts a long and brilliant history, and an outsider might expect it to have sparked the sort of dissent characteristic of intellectual communities in the West. Yet the Confucianist community never mounted any Renaissance or Reformation to undermine a Thomistic worldview or any French Enlightenment to unleash the forces of revolution, nor even provided any campus seedbeds to nurture protest or revolt. The reason is probably quite simple: the intelligentsia *was* the government. Chinese bureaucracy was nothing more nor less than the body of those who passed the government examinations — that is, what we would call degree-holders. There were no professional degrees like engineering or medicine. All majors were in the field of Confucian philosophy and statecraft, and led straight to employment in the civil service. The holder of, say, a BA degree was guaranteed a job in the government; an MA could be expected to lead to something like a governorship; and a PhD promised nothing less than such eminence as advisor to the Emperor himself. No nation ever had so profound or comprehensive a system of scholar rule. True, it was a system that produced not a few suicides among those who flunked and a virtuosity in cheating that survived into the 20th century to become a target for some of Chairman Mao’s sharpest sarcasm. But it didn’t threaten the state.

I must admit that the four aspects of Chinese culture which I have just singled out as being significant to the history of the Chinese Revolution escaped me when I began to study Chinese history and culture thirty years ago. I think the reason for this failing on my part — and,

I console myself, on the part of my mentors, both Chinese and foreign — was that during the first half of this century, China was trying hard to project the image of a western nation. National holidays celebrated the promulgation of a non-Confucian constitution being held in abeyance during a period of non-Confucian political tutelage to prepare the masses for participation in non-Confucian popular elections. Nowhere did the new look more completely disguised the past than in the intellectual community. China had never known that western ideal of the university campus a *san arena* for the exchange of ideas where posters advocating *ibagsak* something-or-other could appear alongside others crying *mabuhay* the same thing. Yet from the time of the first World War until well beyond the Second, Chinese campuses might have served as models of the sort of academic freedom which begins in the classroom and ends in the streets.

This was utterly heterodox, of course, for the Chinese academic tradition was based not on the pitting of thesis against antithesis to discover a true synthesis, but upon the mastery of a canonized body of orthodox doctrine. Indeed, Chinese education began with the literal memorization of that authorized canon, a technique which continued into my own day. When I was teaching in China, I was the only person in the classroom with a textbook — my students all memorized it and reproduced it, word for word and comma by comma, on their exam papers. I hasten to point out, however, that it is not true that people who memorize can't think. It is simply that when they do, instead of running to the library to look up reference data, they just consult the same data in their heads where it has been committed to memory.

It would be hard to overestimate the role this un-Chinese sort of student activism played in the Chinese Revolution. Looking back at it now with the advantage of hindsight, I interpret this deviation from Confucian norms as part of a kind of western-inspired interregnum between the final decay of traditional Chinese society around 1900 and a new Chinese-designed society around 1950. As far as the educational scene is concerned, I might even date the end of that interregnum with the year 1958 when the government brought the Hundred Flowers period to an end by uprooting all those "poisonous weeds" that had appeared among the more acceptable blossoms. The invitation to let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend had itself been reminiscent of that Confucian world in which the intelligentsia was expected to offer serious criticism of the government. In the Con-

Confucian bureaucracy, the highest ideal was the courageous scholar official who risked his neck — and often paid the full price — by criticizing the behaviour of the imperial court and even the Emperor himself. But it was never intended that such criticisms should recommend changing the institutions of the state itself, or that suggestions should stray beyond the confines of the official state doctrine. But that is precisely what happened in 1958 and it was no more welcome then than it would have been under the Emperor. Since that date, I assume, the older Chinese concept of higher education has been restored to all campuses in the People's Republic — that is, they have become exercise grounds for mastering an orthodox canon, not arenas for testing the validity of that canon.

To illustrate my thesis that since this half-century interregnum the Chinese people have reverted to certain concepts more congenial to them than western alternatives, I will mention simply their attitude toward legality and morality. Confucius spoke not of civil rights but of human relationships, and his concept of justice was really one of harmony. The western bogeyman of a totalitarian regime running roughshod over individual human rights probably never greatly disturbed the Chinese imaginations. Confucian China had no notion of human dignity as dependent on public law as is so dear to the heart of western democratic tradition, and neither does Communist China. True, the People's Republic does have a constitution and law codes — Marxism, after all, is a product of Western bourgeois intellectualizing and so carries such traditional paraphernalia with it. But I doubt that the weight of constitutional law rests any heavier on Chinese shoulders in the new society than religion did in the old. Crimes are committed not against the law but against mankind, and guilt is a moral matter not a legal decision. This is probably reflected in the terminology of "thought reform" and "education through labor" which modern China attaches to penal procedures and which outsiders often dismiss as a deceitful jargon. That is, true correction requires a sense of guilt, and guilt arises from moral rather than physical pressure.

Confucian China never framed any law codes, nor did it have any legal profession. Such laws as existed were intended for criminals and evil-doers, not responsible citizens. One did not appeal to the law, but fell into its clutches; one did not take a case to court, he was dragged before a judge. Only men unable or unwilling to settle their grievances like gentlemen even attracted the attention of law, and once they did, it was the magistrate's duty to ascertain the circumstances under which

they had committed the crime of which they were already guilty, and assign a fit penalty. Dignified citizens would ordinarily engage one of their peers to render an equitable decision between them. Such a private arbiter, a certain Mr. Chi, still used to set sipping tea alone in a teahouse I frequented, available to clients who would wine and dine him for such services. At the less dignified peasant level, cases were settled by elders of an extended family in a local clan temple, and the social stigma attached to crimes that sullied the family name is reflected in some of the draconian decisions handed down. One of the accomplishments of the peasant movement in Hunan listed by Mao Tse-tung in 1927 was their eradication of such penalties as drowning and burying alive.

But one legal principle Confucian society did insist on, and that was that no crime should go unpunished. The guilty would be punished if he were available, but otherwise his son or brother or neighbor or the next most responsible person. There were thus cases of unsolved crimes but no unpunished crimes, a state of affairs the Chinese considered satisfactory on both practical and metaphysical grounds — it discouraged further crime, and it maintained the cosmic harmony of the universe. Such group responsibility may not be so unfair as it might appear to a western jurist. In a closed society, it is unlikely that the theft of a sewing machine in a barrio, let us say, could be accomplished in complete secrecy, and those who shared the secret might well divulge it before accepting punishment in the thief's stead — or might even prevent him from doing it in the first place.

So, too, in the People's Republic, the principle of group responsibility is an accepted norm. Not only is no man an island, he is never even alone. State proclamations constantly refer to the group, unit, team or organization to which the individual citizen is responsible. A 1957 law, for example, established corrective reform through manual labor for vagrants and idlers. These are categories that would be difficult to establish by due process, but they are probably easy to establish among comrades. It is also noteworthy that this law specifically states that no criminal liability is incurred in its application — that is, the penalties are applied to persons who have been convicted of no crime.

Both Confucianism and Communism speak more in terms of ethics and morality than of law and civil rights. Those of us who are neither Marxists nor revolutionaries are inclined to listen with smug bemusement as Communist converts describe their position as a strict science untouched by any emotion or sentiment. For, although they cherish

the concept of that pure economic determinism that has won them the sobriquet of "godless materialists," in actual fact, Marxists must rank among the most idealistic people in the world. They writhe with the agony of other men, and they speak of laying down their lives for a cause that will not benefit them personally. From Founding Father Marx himself to his humblest disciple at a barrio teach-in, their voices tremble as they anathematize the man-distorting greed and brutalizing oppressiveness of their opponents. Just so, the sort of criticisms and self-criticisms which were welcome alike to Censors of the old Imperial Court and planners of the Hundred Flowers experiment in the People's Republic were precisely those which identified moral shortcomings like greed or arrogance which might pervert social order or circumvent national goals.

And more than moralistic, Communists and Confucianists are downright puritanical. Hot-hearted revolutionaries are constantly decrying the decadence, depravity and lewdness of the society they seek to replace, while the Chinese themselves have long had a reputation for primness and a reluctance to display the human body naked. They have their share of green jokes, of course, and have produced passable pornography — but the former have always been considered fit for the lips of rickshaw-pullers, boatmen and village toughs, while the latter has been the favorite explanation by dynastic chroniclers for the downfall of the preceding dynasty. I have been told that the budding cordiality between the People's Republic and Castro's Cuba was nipped off soon after Cuban representatives appeared in the streets of Peking unshaved and ruffled, and pinching the behinds of their female Chinese comrades. And just last week I heard that during the recent Philippine trade mission to China, a Filipino delegate asked an interpreter one evening about the possibility of procuring some chicks, inspiring a confused conversation about the bureau in charge of poultry.

In both ancient and modern China, then, the proper ordering of society was based not on rights and duties before the law, but on social responsibility and human relationships. Of course, the relationships themselves were very different then from now. Confucian China had a neat listing of five — those between man and wife, between parent and child, between elder and younger, between governor and governed and between friend and friend. In socialist China, on the other hand, the relationships are such as those between comrade and comrades, man and his neighbor, or a person and the people. But there is also one relationship — or "contradiction," as Mao Tse-tung calls it

in a famous essay on the subject — which has an especially Confucian ring — that between leader and led. For the Communist leader at every level of Chinese society today is expected to set the example for his followers by his own conduct. As any student of Confucius knows, the Master said that man is by nature good and that he needs only a good example to be led into right conduct, and to be corrected when he is wrong, not punished. That 1957 law about reform through manual labor is intended for application to those who obstinately and repeatedly turn a deaf ear to the good advice offered them. And they include not only vagrants, idlers and the lazy, but those who are uncooperative or unproductive of the total goals of society, or who refuse to go where they can best contribute to the construction not only of a new society but of a new environment.

I think Confucius would have liked that law. For Confucius held that human morality affected not only man's immediate environment but the entire cosmos of which he was but a small part.

When I first started studying the Chinese Classics, I was rather swept off my feet by Confucian philosophy. But that concept of universal harmony as being locked in with human behaviour was always a stumbling block to me. Even the two elementary essays, the *Ta Hsueh* and the *Chung Yung* — the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean — presuppose a chain of cause and effect that runs to such sequences as

- If a man cultivates himself, his household will be well ordered;
- If households are well ordered, proper human relationships will be observed;
- If proper human relationships are observed, the state will be well governed;
- If the state is well governed, the nation will be at peace;
- If the nation is at peace, universal harmony will be established;
- If universal harmony is established, Heaven will be pleased.

Now, Heaven's way of showing its displeasure is by sending down plagues of locusts, famines or floods. It therefore follows that if Heaven is pleased, there will be no plagues of locusts, famines or floods. Yet even the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company knows that earthquake, fire and flood are all acts of God, not the results of human immorality. Or at least so I thought 25 years ago. But now I am not so sure. Plagues of locusts are evidently no longer acts of God: they are now caused by birdless summers brought on by man's dumping too much DDT into his eco-environment in the hope of gain. Accidents don't

happen any more, they are caused — especially if they involve fire insurance — and even earthquakes are nowadays set off by profit-motivated men pumping out natural reservoirs of oil.

And who does not remember that series of disastrous floods right here in the Philippines three years ago, and the impassioned speculation on the causes? Some thought they were caused by a greedy person who stole an image from a church, others, that they were caused by a greedy corporation that cut all the trees off the Gran Cordillera Central, and still others that they were caused by a greedy nation seeding clouds in order to oppress the people of Vietnam. So it seems that nothing but the eruption of volcanos is left to the will of God alone. Or can we expect to wake up tomorrow morning and read that volcanologists have just discovered that Lake Taal is heating up again because of human greed?

In short, was Confucius right after all in thinking that human immorality is one of the cosmic forces of the universe? Or, to put it another way, is it possible that we live in a godless universe controlled by man's insatiable appetites which are progressively untuning all harmony out of the natural world around us?