

***A sound analysis of, and
educated guesses about,
the governing of China***

By JEROME ALAN COHEN

Will we ever understand China? In the century after the Opium War of 1839 increasing numbers of foreign diplomats, businessmen, missionaries, educators, students and soldiers lived there. Even so, the task was difficult. Since coming to power in 1949, however, the Chinese Communists have sharply reduced opportunities for foreigners to reside in China. They have carefully limited the travel of short-term visitors. And they have imposed such rigid control on information and contact that foreign observers in Peking have for months remained ignorant of dramatic major events that occurred almost under their noses.

No matter what the outcome of Nixon's pilgrimage to Peking, the recently-unlocked door to China may open a trifle wider. Essentially, however, China will remain inscrutable to those who seek the details of its day-to-day government. This continuing lack of access to many of the basic facts of China's domestic politics makes it all the more imperative that we appreciate the significance of those facts that do emerge. Here lies the contribution of scholarship: Ever-clearer interpretations of the past help us to understand the present.

The University of Michigan's Richard Solomon, currently on the staff of the National Security Council, is one of many young social scientists who, with the support of the Ford Foundation and the United States Government, became specialists in Chinese affairs during the past decade. This book amply vindicates the wisdom of that support.

Its subject is as old as Chinese history: How can China be governed? The challenge has absorbed the best Chinese minds from Confucius to Mao Tse-tung. But the task of the small class of literati who sought to maintain control over traditional

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A Peking department store.

Mao's Revolution and The Chinese Political Culture

By Richard H. Solomon.

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peasant society could not compare in difficulty with that of the revolutionaries who strive to transform that society into an industrializing nation-state capable of reasserting China's eminence.

The author's premise is that "China's difficulties in responding to the changing world of the past century have been largely cultural and psychological in quality rather than institutional or economic." Although his study is not explicitly comparative, he acknowledges that China is

not unique in this respect. Like the leaders of other developing states, the Chinese Communists have recognized that "modernization" requires expanding popular participation in politics. Yet the political behavior of these new participants inevitably reflects the social attitudes, emotional concerns and moral norms of the prerevolutionary era.

Revolutionary leaders themselves, although bent upon changing many aspects of this traditional "political culture," do not escape its impact.

They also find it convenient to manipulate certain traditional elements in order to motivate the masses. Nevertheless, the old political culture must be replaced—for it is the gravest barrier to the rapid social change required for modernization. Because political culture is inculcated through society's socialization practices ("the manner in which parents educate their children and teachers instruct their students to deal with the world they will know as adults"), the long-run success of the revolution depends to a great extent on the transformation of education and outlook. But questions of method, timing and scope are critical and controversial. In China, the controversy eventually burst forth in the cultural revolution, Mao's ultimate effort to smash the old values and practices that seemed to be re-emerging in the behavior of his own new élite.

"Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture" offers absorbing detail that demonstrates the distinctive social configurations of both old and new China. Synthesizing a multitude of published sources and extensive interviews with émigrés of various backgrounds, he explores the psychological dimensions of China's millennial emphasis upon social interdependence and personal dependence—and the accompanying anxiety about, deference to and passivity before authority. He points out how Confucianism, which preached the virtues of maintaining harmony, avoiding social conflict, suppressing hostility and aggression, and submerging individual interests in those of the group, admirably served the needs of the rulers of an agrarian society. Solomon contrasts this traditional authoritarianism with the Maoist theory and practice of "liberating" the masses from the oppressive ruling class by stimulating them to give vent to their long-suppressed resentments through active participation in a continuing revolution.

The long final portion of the book, dealing with post-1949 developments, discusses Mao's determination to "institutionalize the revolution" in accordance with his faith in social con- (Continued on Page 41)

Mao

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flict as the process of progress. His efforts met stubborn resistance from party and Government cadres, including many major figures. This in turn led to his desperate resort first to the Red Guard and later to the People's Liberation Army in order to "seize power" from the organization men.

What was at stake in this struggle, according to Solomon, was Mao's insistence that if the masses are to be educated for political participation, those in power must accept the public criticism of the masses. Mao,



often viewed as the complete totalitarian, thus appears as an innovator who "has tried to pass on to the Chinese people a system of political participation in which subordinate opinion becomes a powerful element in checking abuses of authority." Moreover, Solomon suggests, by doing away with the traditional socialization process that fostered submissiveness to authority, Mao may have set in motion forces that could eventually get out of hand and erode the totalitarian system itself.

Solomon does not purport to offer more than "educated guesses" about the future. Indeed, events since completion of the manuscript, which several times speaks of "the very loyal Lin Biao," illustrate the hazards of prediction. Yet the analysis is generally sound and often illuminating—and, because the book is both comprehensive and readable, the newcomer as well as the specialist will find it a rewarding experience. ■