

STONE GRACE

Chance, Providence, and Destiny

Introduction

It was random chance that I was born in China to two of Mao's close followers (1951). And it was providence that I became one of the first 300 or so "Original Red Guards" of the Great Cultural Revolution (1966). But it was destiny that brought me to the United States of America, as one of the first handfuls of Mainland Chinese students with an unrestricted passport (1979).

Against this backdrop, I was cast into the role of an unwitting spokesman of China, sometimes as a guest speaker on formal occasions, other times as a sounding board at large. In the case of the latter, many well meaning, yet ill-informed Americans would confront me and bombard:

"What do you think of China's tyranny government now that you live in America? Do you still believe in Communism since you have tasted freedom and democracy?" . . .

Encounters like these prompted me to investigate their source. I began devouring numerous western publications on the Red China Experience, each vividly describing what it meant to live behind the "Iron Curtain."

Among them was a book titled *The Horse Man*, about the life of a Beijing ex-Red Guard in Inner Mongolia. I stumbled on it one day while browsing at Harvard library. Unexpectedly, it unlocked deeply buried, long forgotten memories. I was suddenly overwhelmed with emotion.

People around me, unaccustomed to the sight and sound of a weeping Chinaman, stared uncomfortably, exchanging glances, then shrugs. One by one, they stood up and quietly walked away.

But I was mostly oblivious, having lost myself completely in a long-ago and faraway place, where horrendous crimes against the humanity unfolded, committed in the name of the "common good," the people's dictatorship, the thought-reform, and the Great Cultural Revolution.

Though surrounded by some of America's best, brightest, even nicest, I was not yet ready to share such uttermost inner-feelings with a people whose life experiences differed so greatly from my own. Nor could I expect them to understand the complexity of the issues at hand.

Despite my reputation as a straight shooter, I discovered in me an awkward defender who wrestled between speaking the truth and wanting to hide the family's dirty laundry. Why did they not ask me instead: "Do you still love your parents, now that you are grown?"

No, I was not an ingrate; and I understood perfectly why it was, and still is, so difficult for western readers in general not to feel a sense of vengeance toward the Communist China. Many of them would jump on the wagon at the first opportunity, and join the chorus: "Sanction! Sanction! Sanction! . . ."

That put me in a bind: On the one hand, my heart went out to those countrymen suffering injustice. On the other hand, I knew from personal experience just how selfish, unfeeling, even cruel many of the very same “victims” could be, should the deck of fate suddenly deal them a better hand.

Yes, you have heard it right: the Communist system is not entirely to blame for all the tragedies in China. Nor can the lack of freedom and democracy in its absolute sense fully explain them. Rather, it boils down to a culture, a way of doing things, and a vicious cycle, still yet to drown in its own blood!

In this respect only do I have grave misgivings about many of today’s available books about “Red China.” While they consist of genuinely heartbreaking, personal, eyewitness accounts, *few of them tell the whole story.*

The following are points that have consistently been overlooked:

(1) The Chinese Communism was not a brainchild of an international conspiracy, but was born of extreme poverty and unbearable hardship of the 1920s, caused by western imperialistic expansionism on one hand, and the ruthless exploitation by the Chinese old ruling class on the other;

(2) This “Red Tyranny” is a marriage of feudal clanship and modern ideal, which has brought both the most beautiful and most ugly aspects out of the Chinese people, if not their culture;

(3) Its governing body is deeply divided between the moderate-capitalists and hard-line-reformers. The formers are the elite intellectuals; the latter are people who carved a hard existence out of rocks;

(4) The roles for “victims” and their “tormentors” are frequently interchangeable;

(5) Against all odds, life went on. The ordinary Chinese demonstrated such resilience that they pursued happiness in the least likely of places, even during the Cultural Revolution. Many not only found it, but also enjoyed lives so carefree, so surreal, and so contrary to what had been portrayed that the truth will strike most westerners as *utterly inconceivable!*

How could such oversights be even remotely possible? We are not just talking about minor omissions here and there, by one individual writer or another, but rather, key and fundamental aspects, totally ignored, by so many otherwise intelligent people. I believe the answer is very simple and logical: *most of the books on Red China today are the works of one group alone—the “victims.”*

Everything has two sides; the myth of Red China and the so-called “Communism” is no exception. The absence of “the devil’s advocates,” however, instills in the readers a *fear* based on incomplete facts and leads them to oversimplified conclusions, thus counter-productive beliefs.

As a result, the United States does not have an objective policy toward China. We Americans are “consistently” torn between fighting “evil” and making alliance; preserving liberty and expanding market (pursuing profit).

It is such a familiar scenario: we sweep the “dirt” under the rug for as long as possible, until the situation snowballs out of control, at which point we brace for an “avalanche.” Then casting all reason to the wind, we willingly surrender the

stewardship to the “*whims of individual dissidents*” who literally end up leading both Beijing and Washington by their noses.

Priorities change and progress gets reversed, resulting in immense loss and suffering for the millions of innocents caught in the middle. Instead of reaping peace dividends (as one might expect of *the* only remaining super power), we scramble from one international crisis to another, with no end in sight.

A wise man once stated: “The saddest lesson of history is that people do not learn from history.” After 29 years of silence, I have finally come to feel detached, from my “first life,” enough to tell my side of the story. Though late in coming, I hope my perspective may offer some insights to the often-rocky Sino-US relationships. And I hope hindsight is 20-20.

A Special Note

This book is a true story, with real people, actual places, and their authentic names; the exceptions are Pretty River, Grace, “Biao jie,” Little Red, and Ava, whose names I altered in order to ensure their privacy. The dates of all-important events and quotations of various people in the book are either based on my recollection or confirmed by concerned individual(s) involved.

I also, (boldly, I think) decided to translate (from Chinese to English) the majority of the names according to their meanings in Chinese, instead of by sounds. Not to do so would have been a great injustice to both the characters in the book and to the non-Chinese readers. After all, the Chinese people take great pain, thus great pride, in selecting names that reflect their personalities, values, and ideals.

However, I left intact names like Mao Zedong and Jiang Kai-shek in respect of history. They have become synonymous with immortal personalities like Dao, Confucius, and Genghis Khan.

As for the title of this book, its meaning and origin, that is for you, the readers, to find out.

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DEDICATION

In memory of: Henry, Black Mule, and Fifth