Foreword

Seldom in human history, and never in as unmechanized a society as China's, has so much agitation reached as many people as during Mao's experiment at remolding man by mass persuasion.

For social scientists contemporary China offers something like a laboratory test of the limits of what propaganda can do. The question of the limits of persuasion has appeared in many guises. An early form—at least as early as the myth of the wolf children—was the issue of nature versus nurture: to what extent is man at birth frozen into a mold of what he will become, and to what extent does he take form according to what he is taught and told. A normative form of the same question is, how to teach; what can pedagogy do to develop a student's knowledge or skills?

In the West, since World War I, the same question appears regarding propaganda or advertising. In that war, leaflets by the millions, capitalizing on Wilsonian idealism, were dropped over German lines. When Germany lost, her nationalists claimed that she had not failed in battle, but had been "schwindeled" out of victory by propaganda promises. In support of this myth, there evolved in interwar Germany a large body of literature extolling the power of propaganda.

In the United States at the same period, a parallel literature emerged on behalf of advertising. Advertisers advertised their ability to influence a public that was said to have a mean intelligence no higher than that of a twelve-year-old.

But side by side with this myth of "The Hidden Persuaders," there emerged in American social criticism an opposite set of clichés expressing the frustrations of those who tried to educate

for good causes. Effort after effort to inform the public failed despite the heroic efforts of true believers to dent the indifference of the masses. A classic study of a public information campaign in Cincinnati, combined with a survey of public knowledge about the United Nations before and after, revealed essentially no learning, no change, despite massive propaganda inputs.¹

Can it be that the much feared hidden persuaders are really paper tigers? Do they attract billions of dollars from hard-headed advertisers and persuade no one? Clearly not. Persuasion sometimes works, but when and under what circumstances?

Experimental psychologists have produced a substantial literature on the conditions of effective persuasion as they appear in the laboratory. Experiments deal with the effects of repetition, of one-sided versus two-sided presentations, of explicitness or implicitness, of source credibility. But as Carl Hovland, the creator of much of this experimental knowledge, has pointed out, what is found in the laboratory is not often found in the field.² In an address which compared his own work with that of the sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld, Hovland noted that in virtually every laboratory experiment, a persuasive stimulus has an effect, while in sociological studies in the field, the usual finding is no effect. In Paul Lazarsfeld's studies of American presidential campaigns on which tens of millions of dollars are spent, the main conclusion was that few voters are converted and most votes are predictable in June.³ There are plausible explanations offered by Hovland for this conflict in findings. In the field, the free citizen chooses to expose himself mainly to propaganda with which he already agrees. Selective attention makes the audience in real life less amenable to persuasion.

Thus in various ways social scientists in the West have concerned themselves with the problem of the limits of mass persuasion.

Dr. Liu shows us that in a different guise that issue appears as central in Chinese Communist politics and ideology too. Hidden behind the party curtains, there has apparently raged a bitter debate about it between bureaucratic elements and the Maoist left-wing. The bureaucrats, as Dr. Liu tells us, had limited faith in mass persuasion. They believed that the political

consciousness of the masses could not be precipitated by agitation. "These leaders," we read in this book, "believed that a long period of education was needed to cultivate a degree of intellectual sophistication in the people." Mao and his disciples, on the other hand, believed that "sheer political agitation can bring forth a new world outlook in the constricted mind of the peasantry." Maoists seem to believe that the mass media coupled with grass roots oral participation could transform one-fourth of the human race. They act on the assumption that incessant meetings, discussion groups, little red books, and blaring loud-speakers can change men and society in fundamental ways.

The view of the bureaucratic wing was in agreement with that of the Russian Communists, whose past experience in propaganda and mass communication provided them with their model. The Maoists were the innovators, or in communist jargon, deviationists. In goals, the Chinese Communists of either wing differed but little from their Bolshevik mentors. In both Russia and China, the Marxist doctrine which said the workers have no fatherland, had been transformed into a vehicle of nationalism. Dr. Liu, in this volume, demonstrates how the Party and its agencies helped China achieve a measure of national integration. In both Russia and China, the goal was to modernize a peasant population for the sake of nation building. In both countries, the Communists believed that to achieve this goal they had to change the state of consciousness of hundreds of millions of traditional peasants.

Beyond that shared goal, differences emerge. Lenin had no use for the "idiocy" of rural life. While the Soviets like the Chinese tried to keep people down on the farm when they had no room for them in the cities, for the Soviets that was an expedient. But Mao's peasant orientation was more than that. The moving of millions of Chinese from the city to rural communes expresses a populist, rural, anti-intellectual, anti-urban doctrine. In the Bolshevik view the peasants can be more than passive followers of a revolution made in the cities. In Maoist doctrine they are the instrument of the revolution.

To a Bolshevik the Maoist conviction that backward peasants, by believing the right thoughts (those of Mao), could change a nation irrespective of the development of its productive forces

and social structure is the heresy of voluntarism, one of the various deviations in the Bolshevik canon. As Dr. Liu tells us, voluntarism was rejected by the Chinese Communist bureaucrats too. But the left wing, the Maoists, can be fairly described as voluntarists.

Dr. Liu traces for us the sequence of shifting postures as the political pendulum in China has swung between left and right. The years from 1948 to 1953 were years of revolution and of leftist attacks on what remained of the past society. From 1953 to 1957, on the other hand, were the years of consolidation and the growth of a new communist bureaucratic structure.

Mao's first major experiment in voluntarism was the Great Leap Forward in 1958, which sought to reverse China's course toward conventional bureaucratic methods of development. Backyard furnaces were to produce what factories produce elsewhere. Communes were to replace for the peasants the millennia-old links of family and village. With the failure of the Leap, Mao's opponents temporarily forced acceptance of a policy of economic reconstruction and bureaucratic regularization. But Chairman Mao did not take defeat for long. By 1963 his counter-attack had begun, and in 1966 he launched the Cultural Revolution, a second attempt to transform China by exhortation and to replace the routines of the bureaucracy by enthusiasm.

How can we understand the Maoist hysteria? As with any complex social phenomenon, explanations are numerous. Mao's repeated attempts to storm against reality and to deny the limits of politics can be explained at many levels, and validly so. Lucian Pye and Richard Solomon have examined the structure of the Chinese family and personality, and have noted both the wish-fear of disorder, and the prevalence of hatred in the culture, as well as the rebellion of sons against fathers that accompanies traditional notions of filial piety.⁴ Maoist storming is the institutionalization of hatred and rebellion. Dr. Liu notes, at one point, that in contrast to the elite Confucian tradition, Chinese popular culture (which Mao extolled) has always emphasized conflict. Another interpretation presented by Paul Hiniker uses dissonance theory and views the Cultural Revolution as an attempt to prove by proselytizing the rightness of the first failed attempt, the Great Leap Forward. Proselytizing

he argues, was necessary to prove that the first failure did not evidence foolishness. Dr. Liu in this volume finds in both Mao's personality and in ideology parts of the explanation, but he also sees in the Maoist reliance on propaganda a partly successful attempt to cope with a real problem under circumstances where other resources were lacking.

The real problem was the national integration of a backward country almost totally lacking the prerequisite conditions for the creation of a nation: a common language, adequate roads and railroads to tie the land surface together, literate people capable of communicating over distance, an effectively organized bureaucracy to govern the nation, and radios, newspapers, telephones, and telegraph to provide normal modern communication.

To an extraordinary extent, Chinese efforts surmounted these obstacles by creating a novel and innovative mass communication system at fantastically low capital costs, though very high labor costs. During mass campaigns, discussion meetings attended weekly or more often by hundreds of millions of people substituted for scarce newspapers, magazines, and books. A highly economical wired loudspeaker system that reached almost all Chinese villages substituted for radios that even in battery-transistor form would have been too expensive. The wired radio network also provided secure communication for military mobilization for much of the country, and did double duty as a telephone system for official business. Movies are shown in fantastic number by mobile projection teams who may move the equipment by bicycle. Newspapers are rented by the hour at the post office to people too poor to buy them. Confidential information bulletins brought by delivery boy and picked up again after being read tell the cadres what is going on in the world. During campaigns the walls are covered by *tatzpao*—posters with short, handwritten, large-character slogans—which everyone is asked to write.

In most respects both the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution were failures. Dr. Liu leaves the reader with little doubt that the future, after Mao, lies with the bureaucratic wing whose propaganda strategy was far more conventional—a large structure of professionalized newspapers; a press service; the New

China News Agency; a Ministry of Culture; a Propaganda Department of the Central Committee with various sections; and a national radio structure based on Radio Peking. Yet transitory and unsuccessful as Mao's efforts to replace these structures with *ad hoc* mass campaigns may have been, the fact remains that they did reach virtually the entire Chinese population, and not once, but dinned repeatedly into their ears. To the extent that mass persuasion can work, it had the opportunity to do so. Despite the poverty of China the nation was successfully organized to listen. To Mao's disappointment, the power of repeated chanting of his thoughts proved insufficient. But it would be foolish to think it had no effect. We cannot as yet observe the consequences very well. The time has not yet come to draw final conclusions. But certainly whatever power mass persuasion has, it has been tested to its limits. To some degree at least, Dr. Liu tells us, it has served to create national consciousness.

Maoism represents an extreme form of a shared Communist propensity to try to shape man by agitation. What distinguishes the left from the right, the Chinese from the Soviets, the Maoist from the bureaucrats, is a matter of degree. Clearly, Mao got his thoughts from Lenin, and then embellished them.

Leninism rests on the conviction that human consciousness is politically manipulable. Certainly that is the point at which Lenin made his sharpest departure from Marx. Marx's doctrine was that the intellectual superstructure in any society is but a reflection of the state of development of the productive forces and class alignment. Persuasion plays but a minimal role in orthodox Marxism, and indeed, in the *Manifesto*, Marx relegates the Communist Party to the role of intelligent interpreter of a process that it can influence but little:

The Communists . . . do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through,

they always and everywhere represent the interest of the movement as a whole.

The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle.⁵

Lenin in *What Is to Be Done* and in *State and Revolution* turned Marx on his head. While denying any deviation from orthodoxy, Lenin argued for the crucial role of the Party in bringing the workers to socialist consciousness; all that their life experience would bring them to, Lenin believed, was trade union consciousness. It was the Party that had to lead them to the Communist revelation.

In the Soviet Union, as later on in China, agitation and propaganda have been utilized to a degree unparalleled in the non-totalitarian world. (The fascists, of course, did copy their Bolshevik mentors in this respect.) The Bolsheviks invented virtually every device that Mao has used, and intensified. The Soviets used wall newspapers, developed a wired radio system, made almost everyone attend agitation meetings at which, among other things, public newspaper reading took place. The Bolsheviks trained a large corps of oral agitators; they invented worker correspondents. They set up the apparatus of censorship, party fractions, central news agency, subscription promotion through post office, all of which the Chinese followed. However, orthodox mimicking of the Bolsheviks was represented by what the Chinese Communists did during their more bureaucratic periods of consolidation and internal construction. The crescendo of agitation that China has reached in the periods of mass campaigns was something that the Soviets never attained. It represents a step well beyond Lenin in belief in the power of mass persuasion to mold men.

Dr. Liu's book examines the organization and conduct of this agitation and propaganda, both in its normal bureaucratic manifestations and as it worked during the mass campaigns, at least up to the initiation of the Cultural Revolution.

Because in the West the mass media tend to be diverse and pluralistic, the literature on mass media growth in the non-

communist world has tended to be rather non-political. The audience, its preferences and tastes, has been the favorite subject of research. The structure of media organizations and the content of media messages have been other subjects of research. Dr. Liu has done us a favor in looking at media growth in another perspective. In this book we are presented with a description of alternative patterns of media use and media organization as reflections of fundamental political strategy. By considering Mao's basic conception of human nature and his attempts at mass persuasion, Dr. Liu helps us to understand his extraordinary system of mass persuasion.

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