

A self-portrait of China's Maoism: murder of the mind

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The Communist Party of China and Marxism 1921-1985, A Self-Portrait

by Laszlo Ladany

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The greatest crime of Maoism is the mass murder of the human mind. It would seem impossible, even in this most murderous of centuries, to account for the history of the Communist Party of China. Its murder of so many million human lives is only eclipsed by its mass murder of far more minds. This is the only book I have ever read that is not only relentless in its examination of what the Communist Party of China has done; it also looks at why this happened.

The answer lies in Mao Zedong's fundamental principle that there is no universal human nature. Mao took the tenets of Marxism, a foreign, western system rooted in the philosophy of Kant and Hegel, and combined them with the legacy of the most brutal periods of China's thousands of years of history, to come up with a system that not only justified, but demanded the elimination of whole "classes" of people whom he put beyond the pale of humanity, including anyone who opposed him. This was the method of the Cultural Revolution, of the genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, headed by the Maoist Pol Pot, and is the method of the Maoist Shining Path narco-terrorists of Peru today.

Father Laszlo Ladany, who died soon after this book was finished, admits how much about China he does not know—after spending his adult life there. A Jesuit missionary who was expelled from northern China by the Communists in 1949, he spent the next 30 years trying to fathom, from his home in Hong Kong, what was really going on inside the

biggest closed society in the world. As a Hungarian born in 1914, Father Ladany had a profound knowledge of the history of communism in Europe and Asia. But the key quality he applies is simply the courage to tell the truth.

Ladany published *China News Analysis* newsletter for 30 years. By looking at the reality of Mao Zedong's thinking and methods, he was able to publish the truth of what was going on in China *as it happened*. His was the first, and only, voice for many years to report the terrible famine at the time of the Great Leap Forward (1959-60).

This very detailed history of *The Communist Party of China and Marxism* is called a "self-portrait," because the book is based solely on the party's own records and material published in the Chinese press. It is a remarkable feat, because the Chinese Communist Party, more than any other, is a secret society. Every article, every picture published is carefully scrutinized by the party leadership, for adherence to the prevailing political "line" of the ruling faction. Photographs were altered from one month to the next, to eradicate any record of the physical existence of those out of power. A word, a sentence, one or more faces there or not there in a photograph, are the shadows on the wall that an observer must read to understand what is going on in China, even the most massive social upheavals affecting hundreds of millions of persons.

Ladany, over years, watched these shadows and learnt what they meant. Any citation in the book which does not refer to a Communist Party document, refers to the *China News Analysis* of the time. There are writers who acknowledge, for example, the famine of the Great Leap Forward, which affected 100 million people, in their current books; look at their earlier books, and you will not find it mentioned. Yet the only writer on China I have ever read willing to acknowledge his enormous debt to Ladany is the Belgian-

Australian author Simon Leys.

Although this book goes through the entire history of the Communist Party, I will only discuss two themes: its unique description of how Maoism developed, and how the Communist Party took over China.

The cult of brainwashing and violence

Maoism, Ladany proves in this book, is not really Marxism, nor is any "rural movement"; it is a mass cult of brainwashing and violence. Any "China-watcher" who misses this fundamental point (and that is just about all of them) cannot understand how the Communist Party has ruled for 40 years. The Chinese Communist Party was founded by Marxist scholars, but was made into a cult of violence when Mao Zedong took over. How was this done?

Mao's Chinese heroes were Qin Shi Huang, the "First Emperor" who buried scholars alive and burned all their books; bandit warriors; and the outlaws of the ancient book *All Are Brothers*. Traditional Chinese culture was "abominable" to him.

The Communists are only the latest, and worst, of China's destroyers of her own culture. As a result of violent upheavals in the past, few historical monuments survive in the country. Some ancient buildings still exist in remote villages; but while China's civilization is thousands of years old, Beijing's "old city" is only 500 years old. Writing of his experience there even before 1949, Ladany wrote that "in Chinese cities, one finds no buildings comparable to the early churches of Europe," buildings a thousand years old or more that are still the heart of most European cities or towns.

Ladany emphasizes the crucial, though now obscure, turning points in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. These key points were when Mao turned on both the Marxist scholars who founded the Communist Party, and the civilization of China, to enthrone evil. The records are so scanty that little can be proven, but Ladany puts his finger on the key issues. If more historical records are opened up in the former Soviet Union, much more might be learned.

Oxford-trained China writer John Gittings acknowledged in an article in the London *Guardian* earlier this year that foreign China specialists are now thrashing about in self-doubt, because they were so wrong for so many years. It is particularly "galling," he wrote, that the "professional anti-communists" got it right about the mass torture inflicted during the "land reform," the starvation in the Great Leap Forward of 1959-60, and the bloodshed of the late-1960s Cultural Revolution, incidents now confirmed by the accounts which Chinese who lived through these times are now able to publish in the West. Yet it was their foolishness, not their "foreign-ness," that led the China-watchers to make all the mistakes.

There is a great question now among China-watchers about what will happen in China, in the wake of the suppression of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, the revolu-

tions in eastern Europe, the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union, and the return of Deng Xiaoping. With all his emphasis on detail of the internal history of the party, Ladany also makes clear the influences of external upheavals on China. The 1956 revolt in Hungary and the "de-Stalinization" campaign in the Soviet Union were Mao's nemesis; his response was to launch the "One Hundred Flowers Campaign" to destroy China's intellectual elite.

It is most likely today that the outcome of the current policy struggle in the European region of the great Eurasian land mass, over whether Russia, Ukraine, and eastern Europe will be destroyed by the International Monetary Fund "shock therapy" being imposed by the Anglo-Americans, will be the determining factor in the future of China.

'Kill! Kill! Kill!'

The Communist Party of China ultimately was not Marxist, although many members did try to study Marxism. From the earliest period, Mao Zedong was of a faction that injected violence and terrorism into the methods of the party, in a way that attacked head-on the traditional structure of Chinese life. The Aug. 7, 1927 ("Eight-Seven") party meeting was the first crucial turning point in the history of the party. The demand for violence introduced at this meeting was for an "enthroned, doctrinal violence" which was "unknown before in Chinese history," Ladany writes. It is not known now which party leaders were at this party congress, but it led to violent uprisings in Hunan, Hubei, Guangdong, and Jiangxi. On Sept. 9, 1927, Mao, then just one of the Communist Party's leaders, led peasants of Hunan in violent uprisings, whose goal was to take all land in violent revolutions. More revolts followed in the "Autumn Uprising." The policy became to break the Communist Party entirely from the nationalist Kuomintang party founded by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, leader of China's 1911 Revolution. Despite the utter failure of these uprisings, violence and terrorism became entrenched party doctrine.

These Communist Party meetings in autumn 1927 were led by a Georgian Communist, Besso Lominadze, a radical ultra-leftist who ultimately committed suicide. Mao's methods were the same then as 40 years later; they included forcing workers to strike, and aimless terror. It was often very young people, secondary and even primary school students, who led the violence. The Red Guards were foreshadowed in a directive from the party central organization to Hunan, which said: "Kill! Kill! Kill the counterrevolutionary gentry! Burn! Burn! Burn down their nests!"

It was not just the landlords who died. In many areas, peasants who were ordered to burn down the houses of landlords, refused, and killed the revolutionaries instead. In the violent operations in the late 1920s, some 4,000-5,000 Communists perished—but not, of course, Mao himself, who always stayed safely in the hills.

Mao liked certain things: He liked "struggle," and he

liked an ancient book, called *All Are Brothers*, about men fleeing the wrath of the emperor to become “noble bandits.” In the 1927 Autumn Harvest Revolt, Mao took up with bandit leaders in Hunan, but then set them off against each other, and both ended up dead. Despite the myth, Mao was not yet advocating the “theory” of the peasant-countryside revolution. In those days, like any revolutionary, Mao wanted to capture China’s cities. However, he left others with this most dangerous task.

Mao also loved purges. His first violent purge was run in 1930, and 4,000 party members were ousted. Then, as later, his methods led to disaster. It was the party purges at the Fujian base during 1931 that forced the much-touted Long March; 4,000-5,000 people were purged and killed, so weakening the Communist Party’s forces that they had to flee the Kuomintang into China’s interior. The Shanghai Communist Party underground leadership fled to Ruijin in 1933, where a base was set up by Mao and Zhu De. They then undertook the Long March, leaving behind other guerrilla fighters in Fujian who fought for three years. Intra-party violence continued, and thousands were killed. This, however, was kept secret for years.

After the break with the Kuomintang in 1927, the Communists degenerated into brutal savagery, otherwise known as the “land reform.” Later, during the civil war, the Communists carried out “radical land reform” when they took over north China: One could walk around on the north Chinese plains and see hands sticking out of the ground, the hands of people buried alive. So great was the brutality that Mao had to stop it in February 1948 in the Communist-controlled areas, in order to ensure food production.

In 1931, someone in the very heart of the party leadership sent a large number of its intellectual elite to their deaths. These were the 23 “Longhua martyrs” of Shanghai, who were betrayed to the Kuomintang police. In January 1931, there was a party meeting in Shanghai where “returned students” from Moscow asserted their authority. Four of the 23 martyrs were returned students. In 1980, an article in the *People’s Daily* said the 23 were betrayed by their comrades, at a time when only the highest leadership of the party knew who everyone was. The *People’s Daily* said it was Mao’s nemesis, Wang Ming; but Wang Ming had just been elected to the Politburo, he was not head of the party. Only a few others, including Zhou Enlai, knew about the party’s structure. What really happened is now impossible to tell.

In the first decade of the Communists’ existence, they were nothing but an irritant. When the remnants of the guerrilla armies arrived in the small interior city of Yan’an in 1937 after the “Long Marches” (contrary to generally accepted Maoist myth, several guerrilla groups, not just Mao’s, fled into China’s interior to escape the Nationalist government), the leadership was torn by dissension. The Communists tried to enlarge their base to the east and west, but that failed; all they had was the remote support of the Comintern,

their underground in the Nationalist-ruled cities, and the sympathy of “restive intellectuals and some American journalists” for the “new China.”

From 1938 to 1945, the Chinese Communist Party had no official leader. Faction fights raged between Mao and his great enemies, the “returned students” from the Soviet Union. It was the Seventh Party Congress in 1945 which finally made Mao the chairman, a new supreme office. This congress was preceded by the Seventh Plenum, which lasted all year, from May 1944 to April 20, 1945, and ended the Yan’an Rectification Movement, in which Mao had molded the party in his own image. There were reasons he was able to do this: The U.S.S.R. was fighting for its survival in World War II, and the Comintern was dissolved in 1943, undermining Mao’s “returned student” rivals.

It was in the Yan’an “Academy” that Maoism took root. The academy was actually the Rectification Campaign, or purge, which lasted from 1942 to 1944, and made Mao the supreme ruler of the party. Kang Sheng, for years the head of the Chinese Communist secret service, perfected his methods as deputy head of the Rectification Campaign. Young recruits to the party, many of them students fleeing the brutal Japanese rule in China’s cities, were the subjects of Mao’s great experiment in controlling the human mind. The students were sent out to do heavy manual labor, and at the same time subjected to the Stalinist methods of “exposing own thoughts and criticizing others.” The methods were so brutal that some revolted and put up posters calling for freedom and democracy. The leader of this revolt, Wang Shiwei, is known in history as the man who dared revolt against Mao. Mao’s reaction was violent: Months of brainwashing followed.

The role of the Yan’an Academy was to destroy all serious study of history, science—and even Marxism. The recruits in the Rectification Campaign studied writings by Stalin and by the Bulgarian head of the Comintern, Georgi Dimitrov, who was Mao’s patron in Moscow. Dimitrov, in a speech at Comintern Seventh Congress in 1935, proclaimed Mao the leader of Chinese Communist Party—long before the party itself had. But the main item for study was Mao’s speeches: “Rectifying the Party’s Style of Work,” “Oppose Stereotype Writing,” and “Concerning Methods of Leadership,” all endorsements of Stalinism.

Mao certainly understood how to exploit the young. He took young people, whose country, weakened by years of warlordism, was now being destroyed by invasion, who had nothing to believe in, and gave them a cause. The Rectification Campaign taught them “total submission to the party for the good of the cause.” One young Communist, who had been through the “evangelical revival meetings” of Mao’s Rectification Campaign, wrote at the time: This “taught me to reject old thoughts totally, smash the old thoughts within me. . . . My bosom opened up to a wide vision.”

Mao had a great talent for handling his enemies: He did not always kill them, as Stalin did; he leashed them and

manipulated them.

The party purge of 1942-44 made an “almost indelible stamp” on China. All serious studies were abolished, further weakening young people’s minds. The Rectification Campaign culminated 20 years later in the Cultural Revolution. But the same methods have persisted in all party purges: Targets are forced to study prescribed documents to acquire new convictions; they are exposed to extreme humiliation through criticism and self-criticism; those who still resist are eliminated. Purges of the 1980s followed the same pattern.

A supplementary method of Mao was to continually re-write history. One daring article, published in the *People’s Daily* during a political thaw in 1980, pleaded to “Keep the Original Form of Historical Documents.” Maoist history “gives the impression that the thoughts of a great personality show no development with experience, as if they were beyond time and space,” the article stated. In 1981, military leader Xiao Ke finally wrote that it was not true that Mao invented the peasant movement or land reform. These policies were initiated at the Fifth Party Congress in 1927, when Mao was a relatively minor figure in the party. But in a country where official photographs are constantly being altered, to eliminate or reinstate the images of leaders as they fall from power or regain it, such historic truth has little meaning. Recorded history can be completely changed within a few months’ time in China, and Deng Xiaoping is no less guilty of these outrages than Mao was.

‘No such thing as human nature’

Perhaps the most important document of Maoism is Mao’s speech on “Literature and Art,” delivered in Yan’an in May 1942 during the Rectification Campaign. In it, Mao cast whole “classes” of people outside of humanity. Lenin said that literature and art are subordinate to politics, but Mao went much further. He based his doctrine on the Marxist notion of class, but radicalized the notion of class to determine human nature itself. Speaking to “writers and artists who come from the ranks of the intellectuals” and “who believe that the fundamental point of literature is the artist’s love of humanity,” Mao proclaimed that there is no such thing as the love of humanity. “There has been no such love since humanity was divided into classes. . . . It is impossible in class society. . . . Classes have split society into many antagonistic groupings; there will be love of all humanity when classes are eliminated, but not now. We cannot love our enemies, we cannot love social evils; our aim is to destroy them. This is common sense, can it be that some of our writers and artists still do not understand this? *There is no human nature above classes.*”

These words, which were to justify the mass brainwashing, torture, and murder of millions of Chinese, reverberated throughout the People’s Republic and internationally. These words did a degree of harm not experienced anywhere in the communist societies in Europe, Ladany writes. The doctrine

that only the proletariat, the supporters of the Communist Party, have fully human nature, is unparalleled in the Communist Parties of the world. Even under Stalin, the doctrine of human nature was not defined as Mao did in Yan’an. Life in Siberian concentration camps was physically more terrifying than in many camps in China; but the mental terror, the brainwashing, is more severe in China. Lenin called for the discipline of the party, Ladany writes, whereas “Mao learnt the total subjection of minds.” He did not succeed, as the demonstrations of Spring 1989 proved; but he did incalculable harm.

I am reminded of Lyndon LaRouche’s description in an interview, of the student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square (*EIR*, April 24, 1992, “Statecraft for the Development of a Modern China”): “You see the television pictures of the students in Tiananmen Square. . . . You see a people, or the young people, looking for the soul of itself. It’s like they’re saying, ‘Somebody stole our soul, we want our soul back.’ But they didn’t know what the soul was; they knew what they wanted, but they didn’t know where it was.”

With the aid of Kang Sheng, who brutally persecuted party members operating underground in the cities controlled by the Kuomintang when they came to Yan’an, “Mao imposed his will on the party, and at the Seventh Party Congress in 1945, when it was all over, all acclaimed Mao as the supreme leader.”

Although, after his death, Mao was criticized for the “errors” of the Cultural Revolution, his early reputation remained intact. The Rectification Campaign was blamed on Kang Sheng, who was, as everyone knew, a Soviet-trained secret police agent. But the fundamental issue of Mao’s definition of human nature has not been repudiated. The issue was not even discussed in Marxist circles in China until years after Mao’s death. In 1981, Zhou Yang, who had been party boss of literature before the Cultural Revolution, gave a speech to the Chinese Writers’ Association, calling for study of Mao’s “Yan’an Talk on Literature and Art.” In May 1992, on the 50th anniversary of Mao’s speech, the official *People’s Daily* said in an editorial: “Mao’s thoughts on literature and art should be developed along with the development of the times. Deng Xiaoping’s speech at the fourth national conference of literature and art workers, which was held in the early 1980s, and Deng’s other remarks, are a glorious example for developing Mao’s thoughts on literature and art.”

Yan’an had long-term effects on the factional fights within the Communist Party. One of reasons for the purge and killing of China’s head of state and deputy leader of the Communist Party, Liu Shaoqi, during the Cultural Revolution, was that Liu in 1940 had ordered that the party stop torturing members into confessing crimes and killing them. Liu corrected “deviations” that occurred after the “Decision on the Thorough Fight Against Traitors” was published by the party leadership in Yan’an in September 1939. Many of

the other party members purged and condemned during the Cultural Revolution, were those who had worked underground in the Kuomintang-controlled cities. This pattern was set when Communist Party master spy Pan Hannain, who had been an underground leader and spy among the Nationalists, was purged in 1955. It was not the Communist Party urban underground, but "the Yan'an brigade," that won in the Chinese Communist Party.

It was the American "Chinese Communist lobby" which built the international myth about Yan'an. The importance of Yan'an was built out of all proportion, Ladany writes, as if it were for Washington to decide what China should become. A group of U.S. nonentities, including Edgar Snow, Freda Utley, Guenther Stein, and Walter Judd, made careers of this. David D. Barrett, a member of the U.S. military Dixie Mission, sent to visit the Communists, wrote 25 years later how impressed he was with Yan'an, especially that there were no police. It was only later that he learned that there was no need for police as such; he was only a few hundred meters away from a concentration camp.

The Chinese Communist Party is now the biggest secret society in the world. Like all such societies, it is dominated by groups and cliques. But it is unique to China that these groups survive over 40-50 years. Their domination of political life is a "peculiar feature of the Communist Party of China. . . . The crucial factor in China is not the often-asked question, whether the Chinese leadership is primarily Communist or nationalist, but rather which group of men is on top. It was the power groups who guided the fate of the nation."

This is how the Army has played so crucial a role in the Communist Party. Groups of military leaders formed the basis of factions of later years. Those who ruled the country under Lin Biao had been with Lin for 30 years during the anti-Japan war in the Northeast, and ultimately in the Fourth Field Army organized in 1948. In the same way, many of those who came to power under Deng Xiaoping after Mao's death had been together since the war, and had been members of the Second Field Army. Party and Army have been identical for many years, and this, more than Marxism, determined the character of Chinese communism.

How the Communist Party took power

How did this faction-ridden cult take power? "What really saved the Cause, was the Japanese war," which began in September 1937, just months after Mao moved his base of operations to Yan'an, Ladany writes. The Japanese invasion, the real starting point of World War II, was the outcome of the Versailles Treaty that ended World War I. This treaty ignored all of China's requests, although the Chinese had supported the Allies, and it made enormous concessions to Japan, including all German possessions in China and the rest of Asia. In addition, the Japanese were concerned that the collaboration between the new Republic of China and

Germany, particularly on the development of China's military, would make the republic too powerful, and determined to strike when they could.

The Nationalist government collapsed due to the economic and financial destruction of China. The civil war which followed World War II made economic reconstruction impossible, and did even more damage to the country than eight years of war with the Japanese invaders. Japan had maintained China's railways and industries for its own war operations; but during the civil war, the Russians stripped the Manchurian factories and the Communists mined the railways, making it impossible to feed the cities. In 1948, China's Nationalist government spent 64% of its budget on the civil war.

The Communist Party benefited immensely from the war with Japan and emerged from it in control of a large area of territory and with a vastly increased membership. The Communists were fishing in troubled waters. Their main aim was to expand their operations; the resistance to the Japanese invaders was carried on by the Nationalists. Without the Japanese war, the Communist Party could never have taken power. Although Sun Yat-sen's national revolution began in 1911, the Nationalist government was only set up in 1928 in Nanjing, China's "Southern Capital"; by 1931, Japan had already invaded Manchuria. The Nationalists struggled for years to unite a country ruled by battling warlords, with the Northern Capital, Beijing, in the hands of warlords and rebels. The Nationalist government did not succeed in uniting China until 1936; it made great achievements for so limited a period, building a modern army with German advisers, developing infrastructure, and encouraging the flourishing of cultural life.

In 11 years of war, the Nationalists lost 2.5-3.5 million soldiers and 100,000 officers, and there was immense destruction of industry, railways, and roads. The Communists were guerrilla fighters; they had no railways or industries to maintain. This determined their actions immediately after their victory.

When the Communists took over China, they were incapable of running the nation and its economy; they had to import the Soviet system of administration. The cities were a new world to the Communist troops. "In China, the distance between city and village cannot be counted in miles: The distance is more like 2,000 years," Ladany writes. This situation persists today. The Communist soldiers had never seen toilets, cars, schools, asphalt roads, electricity, or running water. The Nationalists had adopted western models; the Communists did also, but what they adopted was western communism, in its Russian form. Always before in Chinese history, invaders and conquerors, from the Mongols to the Manchus, were within a brief time themselves transformed by Chinese culture, but with the Communists this did not happen. The Yan'an barbarians knew too little of Chinese culture, and their policy was to destroy it.