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The Cultural Revolution's Impact on Chinese Education

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THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION'S IMPACT ON CHINESE EDUCATION

Many of the seemingly strange and excessive programs instituted by Mao Tse-tung over the years have been the overt signs of his consuming passion with creating a "New China" in his own image and likeness. Essential to his dream is a newly educated youth, formed according to his self-designed ideological mold. This new youth must be not only Communist, but Maoist. Side by side with this obsession is that of making China a major world power, and thus demonstrating the superiority of the thought of Mao over that of both the "imperialists" and the Soviet "revisionists."

These passions of Mao's led him to loose the winds of the Cultural Revolution, his most intensive and comprehensive effort to date to remold the Chinese people. A particularly vital part of the Cultural Revolution in Mao's eyes was the role of the youth. In large part, the Cultural Revolution was an education process of the highest order in the Maoist creative plan. It was significant that the Red Guards, drawn from the student body, were first sent into action against China's educational system.

The short-term effects were immediate and catastrophic as far as the former educational system was concerned. In typical revolutionary fashion, Mao's Red Guards had virtually destroyed the pattern of formal education by 1966. Over the last three years, Mao has been trying to put together a new school system based on a close link between work and study. Major curriculum categories for lower and middle schools are Mao's thought, fundamentals for industry and agriculture, revolutionary literature and art, military training, and physical education. Particularly in the lower schools, localities are being given closer control over education and relating it more directly to life in the communes.

Mao's educational formula may help provide the manual and skilled laborers needed by China's economy but, along with the three-year hiatus in university education, may seriously undermine China's ability to produce the modern technology necessary for industrialization. Nevertheless, Mao will probably insist on emphasizing revolutionary theory in all education.

BACKGROUND

In 1949 when the Chinese Communists took control of the mainland, Mao Tse-tung was suddenly faced with the monumental problem of managing the world's largest population, nearly 80 percent of which was illiterate. He needed bridges repaired and new ones built, irrigation systems restored, dams constructed, factories

rebuilt, and whole new industries. He needed engineers, surveyors, physicists, doctors, and electricians—in short, all the technical and professional people without which a modern nation cannot exist, and such people were in short supply. Another major problem was that the few technically trained people available to Mao were, by and large, politically unreliable. They had been

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educated in foreign countries or in China by foreigners, they were almost entirely from the bourgeois or upper classes, and many had even supported Chiang Kai-shek.

Adding further to Mao's problem was the fact that China's entire educational system was in the hands of politically unreliable people. Teachers and intellectuals were repeatedly called upon to deny their bourgeois past and pledge public loyalty to Mao and the party. From the first days of the Communist take-over the extent to which it was necessary to stress the "red" or political side of study along with the "expert" or professional side was a continuing source of friction between Mao and the school authorities.

The fragile quality of political loyalty was revealed in the "hundred flowers" period in 1957 when intellectuals, both old and young spoke out at Mao's invitation with unexpected sharpness against the lack of freedom in the new China. That experiment served to solidify Mao's view that "intellectuals" were an untrustworthy lot.

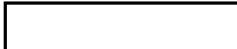
Mao's educational and technical planning was also heavily dependent upon the Soviet Union. Chinese students went to the Soviet Union for training; Chinese schools were modeled after Soviet ones; Russian textbooks were translated in great numbers, and learning Russian was a must for higher education. Soviet technicians tutored Chinese apprentices on how to build, run, and maintain the Soviet equipment installed at all major industrial sites. Thus, in addition to Mao's other problems with China's educational system, there was a potentially serious threat to political loyalty flowing from the emergence of young technicians schooled in Soviet "revisionism" at management levels in the new China.

During the "great leap forward" in 1958 and 1959, Mao introduced a number of radical re-

forms designed to mesh the schools more closely with production needs and to break down what he viewed as the intellectual arrogance of the school system he had inherited. His changes called for the massive development of primitive rural schools to be financed by people's communes, instead of by the national government; a system divided equally between work and study; a pre-college curriculum shortened to ten years; and for college teachers and students to be remolded through productive labor on farms and in factories. Generally Mao's efforts to reduce the arrogance of the intellectuals were probably more successful in lowering their morale and talents than they were in appreciably raising the educational standards of the rural masses.

Analysis of propaganda relating to educational reforms during the Cultural Revolution suggests that Mao's innovative approach to education met with considerable opposition from those within the party and the bureaucracy who favored a more selective approach to education. Liu Shao-chi is now charged with being the prime mover behind the opposition to Mao's program. Taking advantage of the economic difficulties which grew out of the leap forward excesses, Liu and his bureaucrats closed down many of the jerry-built schools founded in 1958. Thus, some 22,600 middle schools that had been opened to absorb 2.3 million students were pared back so that only 260,000 students remained by 1962. In the same period, attendance at primary schools dropped from 80 to 56 percent. Claiming to correct leap forward "deviations," Liu's group drew up a comprehensive plan of their own to restore educational levels to the pre-1958 period. Stiff entrance requirements and difficult exams were reinstated in an effort to raise the caliber of the students; in the process, of course, many of the workers and the peasants, who in Mao's view were the repositories of revolutionary virtue, were excluded.

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In essence, Mao's opponents placed primary emphasis on the training of a technically qualified elite so desperately needed to run the nation. Mao, on the other hand, while acknowledging the need for better trained youth, did not want the educational process to hinder the inculcation of revolutionary spirit. This difference in emphasis was clearly illustrated in the Mao and Liu views on students' spending part of their time in school and part working. The opposition, so the Maoists have charged, tended to use the general run of students as crude labor units, with little or no effort to integrate their school training with specific work tasks, as Mao insisted. The better students were trained for the day when they would take command over the masses. Consequently, graduates were imbued with the notion that they should go straight to government ministries, with no hardship posts, no tempering on the farms. Mao, of course, wanted the students to identify with the masses. In his view, the work assignments of the students were most valuable from the standpoint of imbuing them with the true revolutionary spirit of the people. Mao believes strongly that since the students will one day be running China, they must be steeped in the ostensible revolutionary elan of the masses.

Mao apparently moved in 1964 to put China's educational system back on the track. To that end he issued a number of important education directives in February and March of that year. Mao's defenders have claimed that his directives were nullified as a result of manipulation by Liu Shao-chi's bureaucracy in the Ministry of Education and in the organizational chain of command down to the local level. In the fall of 1964, Mao reportedly told foreign visitors that he wanted changes in education but that his ministers were blocking his way.

There is some evidence to suggest that the controversy in 1964 and 1965, on the eve of the

Cultural Revolution, focused primarily on the pace at which Mao's reforms were to take place, with Mao asking for quick delivery and his ministers buying delay with long-term experimentation. Premier Chou En-lai suggested as much at the December 1964 session of the National People's Congress when he announced that "in accord with Chairman Liu's instructions" educational reforms were to come over a "number of years." He noted that full-time schools and "experimental" part work and part study (vocational) schools would "gradually" produce new socialist men. Clearly Liu believed radical educational reforms were something for the future.

As much as one year later, in December 1965, Peking newspapers reported an education conference "under the direct guidance of the party central committee and Chairman Liu Shao-chi," where it had been decided that half work, half study schools for the cities would be experimental for five years and would be expanded only after ten years.

The forces of gradualism seemed firmly entrenched, a fact that possibly prompted Mao to feel that his new socialist man—throttled by red tape—would not appear in his lifetime. The following spring, on 7 May, Mao issued his famous directive, which sounded the clarion for rapid educational reform and the death knell for Liu and the gradualists.

...the student's...main task is to study...they should not only learn book knowledge, they should also learn industrial production, agricultural production, and military affairs...The length of schooling should be shortened, education should be revolutionized, and the domination of our schools and colleges by bourgeois intellectuals should not be tolerated any longer.

Mao Tse-tung, 7 May 1966

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THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE SCHOOLS

Mao's directive of 7 May 1966 was followed up in June with a number of pronouncements aimed at the "thorough transformation" of the educational structure. Schools were suspended to free the students, who served as the core of the Cultural Revolution Mao was unleashing; universities, middle, and even primary schools were closed by the Red Guards. Almost from the outset of the Cultural Revolution the seats of higher learning served as battlegrounds for the long, drawn-out wars in the provinces between factions of the Red Guards. Campuses served as staging areas for assaults on local authorities both in the schools and the government. The universities reverberated with the clamor of power seizure and counterseizure, mass rallies and counterrallies.

In one university after another leading officials and faculty members were dragged out, denounced, and humiliated for having resisted Mao's directives on higher education. Local resistance to Red Guard activities left a trail of violence, bloodshed, and property damage. Mao's initial aim of destroying the old order was successfully carried out in the earliest stage of the Cultural Revolution.

The focus of Red Guard attacks clearly reflected Mao's antipathy toward the former curriculum for higher education. Criticism of university medical training, for example, charged that students were educated beyond the diseases commonly incurred by the masses and that books, drugs, and instruments the students were taught to use were unavailable in the great majority of Chinese hospitals. The Maoist prescription for that malady was a call for the rapid training of rural medics—"barefoot doctors"—in the rudiments of public health, and to dispatch urban doctors, as well as whole hospitals and even

schools to the rural areas. Such measures have served to bring at least rudimentary medical help to millions of Chinese. The low level of competence of many of these barefoot doctors, however, tends to diminish the confidence of the peasants in the regime's medical program. Over the long term, suspension of advanced training for China's doctors would severely limit the quality of medical competence at all levels and restrict the availability of highly trained doctors to serve as teachers for future generations of medical students. Mao undoubtedly is well aware of this danger but he apparently believes that the political benefits of his re-education program far outweigh any long-term problems that may accrue.

By March 1967 chaos in the educational system had reached the point at which the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was directed to move into the schools of Communist China to restore order and to reopen them. It is not clear whether this step was the result of Mao's belief that the Red Guards had succeeded in destroying the old system and that it was time to implement his own plans or whether he simply had to bow to his opponents' demands for an end to disorders on the campus. Middle and primary schools were reopened, but for the most part the universities remained closed. Apparently, difficulties were encountered in restructuring the curriculum, revising texts, and even assembling faculties and a student body because of the widespread purge of teachers and the practice of dispatching teachers and students alike to the countryside.

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Many problems seem to be still plaguing the regime, however, and it is possible that the leadership in Peking has been unable to reach agreement on just how the universities are to be run.

In March 1969, the People's Daily opened a reader discussion column on "how socialist

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The army should give political and military training in the universities, middle schools, and the higher classes of primary schools, stage by stage and group by group. It should help in reopening school classes, strengthening organization, setting up the leading bodies...

Mao Tse-tung, March 1967

universities should be run." The point of departure was Mao's instruction of 22 July 1968 on the Shanghai Machine Tools Plant, in which he stated that university schooling had to be shortened and that students should be drawn from among the workers and returned to the job "after a few years' study." Articles from a number of students subsequently appeared in the paper enumerating the advantages of linking colleges with factories and farms and of reducing their curriculum and school terms. The newspaper discussion highlighted the Maoist concept of integrating theory with practical application. A typical example illustrating Mao's views is the story of the biology professor who could categorize flies for half a day but did not know how to kill one.

MAO'S PROGRAM AT THE MIDDLE AND PRIMARY LEVEL

In rural areas a propaganda drive for radical reform was touched off last summer, keyed to Mao's directive that rural schools should be managed by poor and lower middle-level peasants. Follow-up articles charged that state-managed schools had become a special preserve for the well-to-do and the talented, and they had ruthlessly excluded the children of the poor, while divorcing themselves from politics and production. Rural education has long been a troublesome stumbling block for Peking, in part because of its sheer magnitude, in part because of the intensive demands for labor in production, but most of all, perhaps, because the regime has been

unwilling to make the necessary capital investment.

At the heart of educational reforms introduced during the leap forward in 1958 was the Maoist theme that schools operated at the collective or rural commune level should be financed by the peasants themselves as a way of better serving local needs, but more importantly, to reduce the burden of state investment. In the period after the great leap forward, it became apparent that rural areas could not generally sustain the bootstrap operation envisioned by Mao, and thousands of such schools collapsed. In the fall of 1968, the Maoists once again insisted that the peasants could raise funds for their own schools and ease the burden of state investment. In the early stages of last fall's campaign, the press featured pace-setter units that set up schools without "one cent of state funds," themselves absorbing the cost of tuition, fees, books, heat, and buildings. Typically, desks and benches were improvised from stones and boxes, the sheep pen was a classroom in summer, the caves in winter and there were burnt sticks for chalk. The cost of supporting a teacher was to be defrayed by the teacher's part time labor.

...In the countryside, the schools should be managed by the poor and lower middle peasants—the most reliable ally of the working class.

Mao Tse-tung, August 1968

Mao's thesis did not go unchallenged, however, and by the end of 1968 some reservations were raised by rural brigades. These people felt that communes could not everywhere absorb the thousands of yuan previously invested by the state, and that unless the state supplemented the cost of supporting the teachers, funding their local schools would definitely reduce peasant

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income. An accommodation of costs was reached between the Mao thesis of complete local support of the schools and the former practice of state support. The compromise was acknowledged when Kirin Province's model for rural school reform was published in May 1969, with the proviso that the state was to supplement the income of teachers assigned to rural schools. Organizationally, it is now argued that commune-managed schools will break down the centralized and perpendicular hold formerly exercised over rural education by state bureaus and offices. It is claimed that smaller schools, closer to work and living areas, will make education accessible to greater numbers of peasants.

Discipline and attendance, under this formula, are to be ensured by forming classes into squads, platoons, and companies in the manner of the PLA. And the primacy of politics, Mao's thought, and the principle of education serving production will be guaranteed because the class character of teachers and textbooks will come under the continuing scrutiny of the poorer peasants. The teacher now is to live and work in the commune where he teaches and be fed and basically paid by the commune; as a result, he will more closely identify with local needs, problems, and production schedules. Student vacations as such are to be done away with, and time off from school is to be granted only during the busy farm seasons. Teachers are expected to do part-time or full-time farm work on a rotational basis. All this, it is projected, will break down walls between the intellectuals and the peasants, reduce distinctions between mental and manual labor, and inspire students not to hanker after higher education only to get away from the farm.

One of the major changes sought by Mao has been a reduction of the number of years spent in school. Currently, propaganda speaks of nine rather than twelve years of precollege school,

with five years for primary and four years for middle school. This change, together with the emphasis on productive labor and political study, has given rise to a radical reduction of the old school subject matter, with a weeding out of all that does not relate to politics or production. The heavy workload of the old-style schools had only ruined the health and eyesight of students, according to the Maoists. The new schools are to pare the 17 or more courses into four or five basic categories: Mao's thought, fundamentals for industry and agriculture, revolutionary literature and art, military training, and physical education.

New textbooks are being compiled by the peasants themselves, and best sellers tend to run heavily to Mao-Lin quotations, recollections of blood and tears from the old society and how to raise pigs for the new. The Chinese version of "Dick and Jane" is to be scratched in favor of math books featuring the greed of landlords and courses in commune accounting. Geography is to highlight such pertinent lessons as Sino-Soviet border clashes, and history is to instill revolutionary vigilance by recalling Japanese atrocities.



RECALLING EXPLOITER LANDLORDS

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JUNIOR - MIDDLE STUDENTS
IN AN EAST CHINA
COMMUNE STUDY MAO

Considerable emphasis is placed upon integrating theory with practice where production is concerned. Students are sent to both factory and field to experience on-the-job training. The farms have set up their own factories to facilitate the learning process. The old ways—drawing pictures of rice on the blackboard, students moving from book to book—is repudiated. Critics of the mass schools are reminded that such schools meet mass needs, and that even if the peasants do not know many Chinese characters, they get a good grasp on farm production.

In recent months there has also been a newspaper discussion on the relevance of foreign language study for rural schools. Some contend that foreign languages are needed to promote science and production and to convey China's revolutionary experience abroad. Others gruffly deny the relevance of foreign language study in rural areas, maintaining it is useless for the vast majority of peasants and that translation and the conveying

of foreign experience is better left to the specialists.

URBAN SCHOOLS PLACED UNDER FACTORY CONTROL

Press and radio discussion of urban school reforms has followed a similar pattern, calling for nine-year schools, a simplified curriculum, and emphasis on politics and production-oriented training. To this end, worker propaganda teams from nearby factories, with the support of PLA units, have moved in to take control over city schools since last summer. Maoist propaganda claims that in this way the working class is shattering the ascendancy of intellectuals in the school system and making the schools more responsive to the needs of the party, industry, and agriculture.

Reforms are aimed at greatly reducing administrative personnel. Under the new system, the chairmen of factory revolutionary committees

In carrying out the proletarian revolution in education, it is essential to have working class leadership; it is essential for the masses of workers to take part and, in cooperation with Liberation Army fighters, bring about a revolutionary three-in-one combination, together with the activists among the students, teachers, and workers in the schools who are determined to carry the proletarian revolution in education through to the end. The worker propaganda teams should stay permanently in the schools and take part in fulfilling all the tasks in the schools of struggle-criticism-transformation, and they will always lead the schools....

Mao Tse-tung, August 1968

serve concurrently as chairmen of school committees, and, in some areas at least, revolutionary committees for schools have been dissolved. Under the old system, intellectuals were too "concentrated"; new reforms call for more schools on a dispersed basis.

Factories also assume the funding responsibility of the new schools under their jurisdiction. Because teachers and students are to be integrated into the controlling factory's production schedule, schools will shed their former "consumer" status and become producers. Not only is labor input of teachers and students slated to defray school costs, it is also expected to build surplus capital for the state. A few newspaper articles even question the need of the old structural apparatus, such as the bureaus and offices of the former Ministry of Education.

Urban schools are to establish close organizational ties not only with factories but also with nearby farms and military units, so that a student may foster the all around productive and disciplinary traits of the new socialist man. Teacher shortages that result from the increased number

of schools and the frequent rotation of job assignments are to be met by calling on local peasants or soldiers for help, or by calling out retired workers.

Initially, urban students were doing three days of manual labor and attending school three days a week, but the system apparently was modified in some areas to a four to two ratio in favor of schoolwork. This is another reflection, perhaps, of continued pulling and hauling within the leadership over Mao's new programs. A typical breakdown of a 24-hour school week gives 12 hours to Mao study, 4 hours to industry-agriculture, 4 hours to revolutionary literature and art, 2 hours to military training, and 2 hours to miscellaneous studies. Again, curriculum reform demands that subject matter be keyed to local production needs, whether it be tea farm or foundry. Physics and chemistry are to be taught primarily as they relate to chemical fertilizer, water conservation, or the steel mill—not in an abstract or theoretical way. Textbook reform will teach students how to lay and repair electrical lines, rather than the theory of its operation. Courses in middle school physics—such as the history of the neutron—may be dropped as pedantic or irrelevant.



ON - THE JOB TRAINING

Evidence that considerable debate over the new Mao program is still going on appears even in the Chinese press. A few participants in the press debate have expressed concern that the burden of administering and funding schools might hinder rather than promote factory production. One answer to this problem has been to effect a division of labor, with factories assuming responsibility for middle schools and neighborhood associations administering the primary schools. Some see the activities of neighborhood associations to administer school districts as a step toward developing "urban communes"—the collective living experiment that fizzled quickly in 1960. Other critics view the neighborhood associations as not representative of "working class" leadership; this view is in turn criticized as impugning the class character of party organs in the association. Moreover, some urban residents object to efforts by the neighborhood associations to use after-school hours to indoctrinate their children, complaining that these activities diminish the children's contribution to family income. Proponents of after-hours indoctrination claim that the associations guard children against class enemies, who are particularly active after normal school hours.

PROBLEMS IN IMPLEMENTING REFORMS

Once having broken the former discipline of the old order, many students are now resisting efforts to reimpose some sort of authority and regimen in the schools. During the cultural revolution Maoists gave students license to denounce and ridicule their teachers boldly. More recently, seeking to rehabilitate and reaffirm the role of the teacher, the Maoists have been confronted with an authority crisis of their own making. Newly rehabilitated teachers are clearly reluctant to impose discipline, assign necessary homework, or give exams for fear of renewed criticism from their students or for fear of being charged with "restoring the old." Teachers of this stripe have been discovered teaching only political tracts,

even supplanting legitimate academic study with "Mao-study" to curry favor. Other teachers assume the attitude that their profession is not worthwhile, that there is more money in pushing a cart; they hide themselves on farm or in factory, disowning the fact they are teachers.

There are students, too, who have become disillusioned with the need to study when they know they are destined for simple farm or factory work, and some refuse to return to school. Other students equate the call to resume classwork with a return to reaction; they feel they should remain free to bombard their teachers at any time. Still others study only political subjects and dismiss mathematics and troublesome subjects as reactionary. They come and go as they please, ignore revolutionary discipline, and practice anarchy. One senses that the gulf between such students and the "liberated" teachers is quite broad.

The worker propaganda teams sent into the schools have experienced problems, too. Workers find the rehabilitation of schools a long and thankless task. With a factory job, one sees results in eight hours, but to remold a stubborn cadre might take more than three months. Provincial newspapers upbraid those teams and revolutionary committees who tend to postpone educational work as bothersome or of low priority, or who wait and see what higher authorities recommend or what neighboring units initiate. Then there are schools that have viewed the teams' arrival with hostility, spreading rumors to the effect that the teams can only be temporary because they are too simple-minded to sustain control. Others say that the teams represent a "loss of freedom" for the school, that the teams have come to seize power from the school's revolutionary committee.

OUTLOOK

There appears to be little doubt that, for the near term, China's schools will be run ostensibly

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the way Mao says they should, with primary emphasis on a pragmatic melding of formal schooling and practical labor. Mao's goal of producing a generation of both "red" and "expert" youths, however, faces formidable obstacles. Over the short run, Mao's formula for training the youth may pay dividends for an economy that has a great need for manual and skilled laborers. It will also accomplish Mao's intention of thoroughly intimidating China's professional teachers and thus make them more submissive to his directives. The loss already of three years of higher education, however, is bound to have been a setback to the training of the scientific and technical personnel needed to sustain economic and military hardware development.

Mao obviously felt that the school system as it existed prior to the Cultural Revolution did not

meet the needs of the state he envisioned. Initially the schools, like the economy, were heavily dependent on Soviet aid and experience. When Mao embarked on a policy of national self-reliance in the economic realm after the leap forward, he suspected that the schools had not followed suit; they were graduating more Soviet-oriented scientists and technicians than the newly "independent" economy could usefully absorb. In this sense Mao's educational reforms were aimed at striking a balance between China's immediate economic needs and its more sophisticated, long-range aspirations. Ultimately, though, if Peking is to modernize a relatively primitive economy, it must look to outside experience in science and technology. For the future, the schools are likely to win Mao's favor in direct proportion to their success in Sinifying foreign technology.

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