Articles by Michael Brown

Michael Brown

First published in Food for the Flock (Food for the Flock, Inc., Ontario, Canada).

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

China (Part 1) (June-July 1968)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 14 No. 6, June-July 1968.

Communist Crusade And Christian Challenge

“Welcome”! The voices were those of three tall soldiers of the Chinese Peoples’ Liberation Army who, with red-star fronted caps and wearing brass-embossed Mao badges on their olive-green tunics, smilingly examined our passports. They greeted us with their total English vocabulary as we passed over the wooden planks of the Lo Wu bridge to stand literally in the shadow of China’s blood-red banner flying above us.

Fulfiling a long-standing (and we believe God-given) desire to enter China, we applied, as Christians, for an entry visa, and just after Christmas were permitted to enter the Peoples’ Republic of China.

Our immediate attentions were caught by the glut of brilliant coloured propaganda posters and slogans appearing on all available wall spaces, and the almost clinical cleanliness apparent everywhere. Spotlessly clean waiting rooms, dining halls, city and village streets, and market places even, contrasted sharply with the proliferation of dirt, garbage, flies, and human expectoration we were accustomed to in Hong Kong.

Dominating the station dining room where we ate prior to entraining for Canton, was a larger-than-life photo of Mao Tse-Tung, China’s national leader, surrounded by people from many countries smiling up at him. The caption below, written in bold Chinese calligraphy, said, “Mao TseTung’s thoughts are the light of the world.”

The staff of the station restaurant paraded in front of us bearing two red banners and a hammer and sickle. They sang revolutionary songs and shouted slogans reminiscent of text-shouting Christians at an open-air meeting: “Struggle is happiness,” “Serve the People,” “Long live Chairman Mao,” and “All reactionaries are paper-tigers.” We were witnessing with our own eves China’s political convulsions sparked off by Mao Tse-Tung’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution which has violently de-culturized a whole nation and shocked a watching world.

With a huge picture of Mao fastened in front and a slogan painted on the boiler reading, “We must truly master Mao Tse-Tung’s thoughts,” our steam train flashed across the Kwongtung countryside. We passed by neatly laid out villages with clean white-washed walls on which were slogans in large red characters. On board, groups of young revolutionaries went from carriage to carriage leading community singing in praise of Mao’s “thoughts,” and preaching Marxist doctrine to the mainly peasant travellers.

They offered us tea and presented us with red lapel tabs on which were written ngoi haak (foreign guest). Several fine girls with radiant faces sang, “We love Mao Tse-Tung more than we love our father and mother. All who do not agree with Mao TseTung are our aggressors.” One girl then danced along the carriage while another girl held a picture of Mao before her, turning the dance into a ritualistic adoration of this Scion of Socialism.

On our arrival in Canton we found the city in a chaos of celebration over China’s 5th nuclear explosion, the news

of which had reached the city that morning. Processions of adults and children paraded through the streets carrying pictures of Mao, red flags, and square placards with slogans and the news of the latest “triumph.”

Street processions are a regular feature of Chinese city life. These bring traffic to a halt as they parade through the main roads singing and waving banners covered with Mao thoughts. Most processions are accompanied by drum-beating red guards. These create a background pulse-throb of noise as the city reverberates to the rhythmic thud of “Long-live-Chairman-Mao.”

A carnival atmosphere is generated by the constant cacophany of sound and vivid colourings of China’s revolution-wracked cities. Mao-thought strikes the eyes from every building, fence, lorry, and post, and bombards the ears from a million loudspeakers. From postage stamps to slogan-carrying bicycles, the “thoughts” of Chairman Mao are constantly before the people’s eyes.

Crimson banners line the main streets turning the city literally “red,” while a picture of Mao adorns every doorway in the main thoroughfares. There are no public advertisements in Red China. No sex symbols cunningly sell “bourgeois” commodities, no Coco-Cola signs, no ads for liquor, cigarette, car, or luxury goods appear anywhere. Nothing is permitted to compete with Mao’s sayings in the present crusade to intensify “revolutionary thinking” among the masses.

The last traces of ancestral worship were eliminated during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution when Red Guards supervised the public burning of ancestral tablets. A portrait of Mao now hangs in homes where

once joss sticks burned in honour of the ancestral spirits, emphasizing the bid for immortality made by the peasant-philosopher from Hunan. In a city once marked by a plethora of shops and stalls peddling all the trappings of idolatry, it is impossible now to purchase a single stick of incense.

This is the climate created by the new world-famous Red Guards. With evangelistic fervour these militant teenagers carry their “gospel according to Mao” to the 700 million citizens of this Red Republic seeking mass conversion to the man they call “Our great leader, teacher, supreme commander, and helmsman.”

While the more sensational side of Mao’s Cultural Revolution has been well publicized, little is known outside China of the deep fervour blazing in these young peoples’ hearts, which gives impetus to the present movement.

In Canton’s Peasants’ Institute, founded by Sun Yat-Sen and where Mao Tse-Tung himself once taught, Red Guards thronged us. They proudly showed their copies of Mao’s quotations which were freshly stamped with a much-loved saying of Mao to commemorate their visit to the Institute. “A single spark can start a prairie fire.”

That a major conflagration has been started in their hearts is evident from the fiery zeal of these youthful revolutionaries. One articulate boy, about 18 years old, said his only ambition was to “serve the masses.” “Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts,” an enthusiastic girl Red Guard cried; “We love our great Party and great leader Chairman Mao.” An estimated 30 million Red Guards carry this “party purism” to the masses.

Asked if they knew who Jesus was, someone shouted back, “There are no Jews here!” The Name of Jesus merely had a religious connotation for most of them; they knew nothing of His mission or saving work. “There is no God, we do not believe in Him; we are Marxist - Leninist atheists,” one scornful young Guard said.

My wife asked what they will do when Mao Tse-Tung dies. Several replied that if he died his “thoughts” would live on in their hearts, but the majority, dissatisfied with this reply, ran up to us as we were boarding our bus and said, “Chairman Mao will not die — he will live for ever”!!

The faith of “Youth for Mao” revolutionaries in their National Chairman is impressive. There is no doubt they adore this Marxist messiah. Knowing no other freedom than that of a proletarian dictatorship, and no other god than the party leaders, they have “given their hearts” to Mao and are convinced he will lead them into the “promised land” of ultimate world communism.

Not content with merely superficial conformity, Party publications exhort young people, saying “Make revolution in your souls.” This highlights the “religious” overtones of Chinese Communist dogma. In fact, the paranoic adulation afforded Mao by these young “apostles of atheism” can be understood only in religious terms.

Their bible is a red covered book the size of a pocket Testament called “Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung.” Daily they gather in groups all over the country to read, memorize, and preach from this Marxist “bible.” They underline passages and mark it exactly the same way a Christian does his Bible.

Room boys in our hotels gathered on the landing every morning at 6.30 a.m. to conduct “morning devotions,” chanting together from this book of Mao’s Quotations.

Mao is god, the Party is the church and the “crusade” evangelists are these youthful Red Guards. “Quotations” stands as their inspired writings, and the glory of world-revolution and world-communism, “heaven.” Unbelievers are “revisionists” and “class enemies” normally termed “monsters and ghosts.”

Propaganda methods closely resemble Christian “campaigns” with street meetings, cottage services, tract distribution, testimonies, and even tonic-so-fa chorus sheets!

A whole generation yields the worship and adoration of its heart to one man. Told there is no God, they still must satisfy the heart’s inner longing to worship and embrace a greater than itself, so they pour out to a creature the devotion and dedication that should be given to the Creator.

China (Part 2) (Aug-Sept 1968)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 14 No. 7, Aug-Sept 1968.

In the light of what we saw in China our conclusions are, nothing in current luxury-loving evangelical Christianity, known to us in the homelands, even begins to approximate the fearsome zeal and spirit of sacrifice shown by China's politically-inspired youth. Unless we Christians therefore can show at least a similar dedication and conviction for the gospel we profess, our message would make little impression on a generation so passionately committed to its flaming destiny.

Certainly Christianity, as represented by modern missions, foreign-supported, fragmented, weakened by institutionally-geared policies, and retaining strategy-concepts at least two decades out of date, have little spiritual dynamic to challenge the anti-God power of militant Communism.

Carrying bedding rolls and personal belongings on bamboo poles "coolie" style, with red banners held high and wearing scarlet hung wai bing (Red Guard) armbands, groups of Red Guards from Kwongtung rural areas were crowding into Canton to exchange "revolutionary experiences" and see the taai tsz bo (bit character posters). Guards who come from distant provinces carry knapsacks.

Moving through the streets in military file they sing latest revolutionary "hit" songs, "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman," and "The East is Red." Sample verses from this north Shensi folk-song:

From the red east rises the sun,

In China appears Mao Tse-Tung,

He works for the people's welfare,

He is the people's great saviour.

The Communist Party is like the sun,

Wherever it shines there is light,

Where the Communist Party goes,

There the people are liberated.

Eager to demonstrate their loyalty to Mao and practise his teachings, they embark on Long March feats and perform menial tasks as examples to the masses. They carry reeking night-soil out to the fields and help wash city streets three times daily.

These militant "mini-Maos," formidably indoctrinated in the works of their Leninist-leader, are not expected to resume normal studies until September this year. All middle-schools and universities are closed allowing students to participate in the Cultural Revolution.

Primary and infant schools are open half days only, their curriculum based exclusively on the study of Mao Tse-Tung's "thoughts." Children learn to read using Mao's Quotations as their primer.

One heart-rending experience took place while visiting a commune nursery school. Little children sang an "action" song called "Down with the American paper-tigers." Their dimpled fists struck out, and their little feet stamped as they cried, "Kill, kill, kill the American aggressors"!

From green-shoot years the children of China are being taught to hate, and indoctrinated in the soul-numbing, anti-god teaching of atheistic communism.

“Cultural Parks” holding 30 - 40 thousand people provide entertainment for the masses. Basketball courts, roller-skating rinks, and free open-air theatres producing quality Chinese - style opera and plays, perform to capacity audiences. All scenes have political significance.

One eye-catching number contained the currently popular song, “Chairman Mao’s words radiate with golden rays.” Nothing is too grand, no description too extravant for this modern mediator of Marxism.

Attending one of the free state cinemas we saw a recently released film showing Chairman Mao reviewing over 1 ½ million Red Guards in Peking’s Tin On Men Square. Every time the aging Mao appeared on the screen the audience loudly clapped. Before the film commenced the audience stood and sang “The East is Red,” the words being flashed on the screen, and when the film ended everyone stood again and sang “Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman.”

While out walking alone, a group of friendly Red Guards stopped to chat. As we talked, an older man approached and suddenly dug me hard in the ribs asking roughly, “What country are you from?” Reeking of liquor the man was obviously drunk, so to humour him I smiled and said, “England.” “You have a king,” he snarled, “and used to exploit us Chinese — you foreign devils even kicked us!” A crowd began to gather drawn by the drunk’s loud voice. Highly embarrassed for me, the Red

Guards quickly hustled the man down the street taking his name and address.

The only other incident occurred when talking with Red Guards in the midst of a milling crowd several thousands strong. This was Canton's favourite gathering place for Guards who come to exchange experiences and "swop" the Mao-badges they wear over their hearts, a different design badge for every revolutionary centre in the country. I wanted to take a snap of several badges one Red Guard had collected and pinned on a cloth; as I lifted my camera several young toughs jostled me and thrust their book of Mao's Quotations in front of the lense, shouting in my face, "Long live Chairman Mao." They were obviously out to stir up trouble and kept yelling and haranguing the crowd around me. So deeming prudence the better part of valour I executed a dignified withdrawal through the crowd.

Our official guide stedfastly refused to talk about, or take me to, a church building to see the Red Guard posters plastered on walls and doors. When I persisted he said, "I do not know of any churches." When challenged about the R.C. cathedral, a Canton landmark, he said, "I have not been that way for a long time."

Canton, traditionally a seat of rebellion and noted for its fiery extremism, appears to have thoroughly purged all known churches in the current Cultural Revolution. This is not true of all southern cities however, only last week I learned in a roundabout way that one well-known centre in Kiangsi Province where Assembly missionaries once worked, still has an assembly guided by four elders meeting in the same place they have always used.

In Canton's dimly lit but swarming evening streets, among political rallies I spoke with scores of Red Guards from places as far apart as Shanghai and Hainan, Kwongsi and Peking.

"Churches were finally destroyed last summer and covered with the sayings of Mao Tse-Tung," I was told by teenagers who have never been to church in their lives.

Asked who they thought created the universe and gave man his being some replied, "Chairman Mao and the "thoughts" of Chairman Mao!" By which they meant his teachings were the distillation of that material force responsible, in their view, for the evolution of nature and human society.

Asked why no girls in China wear pretty clothes, only sombre uniforms, they replied, "We are not interested in pretty clothes, we are revolutionaries. If we used cosmetics it would mean we were parasites."

Boy and girl-friend relationships just do not appear to exist, "We are pledged to Chairman Mao," a pretty 17 year old girl Red Guard said.

The knoll which augers the final great "anti-religion" is already sounding in this oriental "Orwellian" state.

Leaving China via the fertile Shum Chun valley, the parting slogan, carved into the hillside, impudently mocks the "revisionists" and challenges the "religionists" — "Long live the great and invincible thoughts of Chairman Mao."

What the "religionists" can never do, true, blood-redeemed saints of God must do. We ask seriously once more, is it not possible for God to open a way into China again, and that in our generation? Are we to write-off

China, over 700 million people as an impossible gospel objective? God forbid — and God forbid that we should cease to pray for this vast land and limit the God whose glory it is to do impossible things.

China, and the Chinese generally, viewed as souls for whom Christ died, presents the greatest spiritual challenge of this present age; the potential is tremendous. May God lay a praying-burden on many hearts that troubled China will soon know the healing balm of Christ’s gospel proclaimed freely among its vast multitudes.