Book Reviews

Eyewitnessing in Communist China

Many works of scholarship and popular writing on China have been written by gifted men who never ventured to China or at most paid it only the briefest of visits. Max Weber, for example, wrote the essays on Chinese philosophy for his monumental comparative study on the sociology of religion from secondary sources. The pioneer translator of Chinese literature into English was the late Arthur Waley, who could boast that he had not set foot in the Middle Kingdom. Franz Kafka wrote his tale of the Great Wall of China as an exercise in the symbolism that so marked his art and came hauntingly close in his portrayal of the "high command" to the psychology of the Chinese Communist bureaucracy during the more active stages of "mass construction projects" in 1957–58. His work even strikes a note of truth when juxtaposed to the current documents on the "Red Guards" and the ongoing "great cultural revolution."

Others went to China engaged in scholarly pursuits and did their homework in advance. One need only recall R. H. Tawney's *Land and Labour in China* and W. W. Willoughby's *Constitutional Government in China* to see how some were able to reflect in their writings the essence of a society and culture previously quite unknown to them. The fiction of such novelists as André Malraux may not be regarded as objective, but *Man's Fate* captures with unusual accuracy the spirit of the times.

Moreover, in spite of the fact that mainland China remains closed to Americans, the students of Chinese affairs in the United States have made original contributions to our knowledge of China in such disciplines as history, art, music, and the social sciences. As A. T. Steele notes in his recent book, *The American People and China*, "the United States has probably made greater progress in the field of higher Chinese studies than other non-Communist countries, with the possible exception of Japan."

What then are we to make of the two works at hand? The author of **Red China Today** (Quadrangle, Chicago, 1966. 383 pp., illus. $6.95) is Hugo Portisch, a widely known Austrian reporter and the editor-in-chief of the Vienna *Kurier*. The second book, **Love and Hate in China** (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1966. 156 pp. $3.95) —substantial parts of which appeared originally in the *New Yorker*—is written by Dutch-born author Hans Koningsberger, whose novels have won him a not inconsiderable following. The first author went to mainland China in mid-1964, the other in late 1965. As eyewitnesses to Mao's China, both Portisch and Koningsberger reveal open but suspicious minds in their travels along the well-beaten tourist path which China Travel Service arranges for them. They ask the usual questions, adding sensible comment to the now routine answers, and try to comprehend this fascinating land. Koningsberger in my opinion displays far more sensitivity to the events he witnesses and certainly a far greater humility, appropriate for a complete novice. Starting from scratch, Portisch, I think unwisely, tries to encompass the entirety of Chinese history and politics in the middle chapters of his book. The result is out of focus as history and often marred by substantial error in fact.

Two aspects of their journeys complicated the task of both authors. One was their apparent lack of preparation in the Chinese language and of reading background. Their questions are inevitably the same ones, naive and imprecise. More can be learned in far greater detail from any one of a half dozen good books on the substantive questions raised by the authors in their travels. They have chosen to tell us what we have long known and with a less than accurate knowledge of the historical or physical setting in which certain facts have meaning or relevance. Where theirs could have been original though modest contributions, they simply knew too little to ask significant questions and too frequently relied on intuition, as Portisch puts it, to recognize "an honest answer" from their hosts. Failing this, both authors have improvised, suggesting that somehow they were able to penetrate the inner thoughts of the Chinese people. One example from Koningsberger will suffice: ". . . it seems to me that the vast new bureaucracy is tolerated only because of the honesty and incorruptibility of the new officials in it. About that honesty there is no doubt among the peasants. . . ." Even if the dubious assumption in his first sentence is ignored, one wonders how the author, who spoke only to a few peasants through a translator, could possibly perceive the peasants' doubts, or lack of them.

Innocents Abroad

The other difficulty stems from the Chinese communist system. Perhaps even had the authors asked more exacting questions, the answers would have been the same, devoid of real content and standardized without qualification for the entire country. The foreigner in China, Koningsberger writes, "may find that his well-meaning neutrality (which most present-day visitors come with) crumbles under the endless frustrations of dealing with a Kafka-esque officialdom." As Portisch points out very well, the system produces an odd effect on all the visitors who go with such high hopes of delving behind the headlines and seeing the new Cathay at first hand. He says: "The same peculiar atmosphere prevailed among the foreigners here that I was to encounter everywhere in China: they avoided the people at neighboring tables, shunned introductions, and seemed not to want to know about the others so as not to admit what they were there for." In such an atmosphere it is no wonder that those who tell us they were eyewitnesses saw surprisingly little below the surface and had to use their imaginations even though they were looking directly at the Chinese state.

Perhaps the eyewitness in China real-

ly doesn't want to be an eyewitness in the usual sense at all. He wants to discover an inner truth that cannot be revealed by visual impressions and quick snapshots of the society. It is because of this, I think, that Portisch gives undue credence in his reporting to rumors or gossip as a way of explaining what does not at first glance seem justifiable in his scheme of things. Further, as has long been known, people in unusual circumstances see only the things they really want to see; their minds recall only those things that fit into thought patterns formed long ago. It may seem a trifle, but Portisch tells us that he never saw a poster with the face of a pretty girl, while Koningsberger saw posters in many places with "pretty girls with glossy black hair" and adds that "they have learned from the West to use sex in selling a message." This points up the fact, which could be made with far more subtle data, that the untutored eyewitness to events in China, as elsewhere, is only a moderately reliable recorder.

Mood and Code

But even so, there is a message communicated in both books which makes them worth reading and justifies their publication as firsthand accounts. While both authors tend to accept doubtful stereotypes, they also were able to grasp the mood of the country in a way that helps explain much of what we are seeing now in China, particularly in the upheaval of the "Red Guards." Everywhere they went they saw complacency. Koningsberger describes a factory in North China in which the workers were sitting "doing sweet nothing, picking up a tool or an oil can when they catch sight of the workshop manager." Portisch was given a trial spin in China's deluxe Red Flag passenger car and told that its designers' principal hope is to make the car as quiet as the Rolls-Royce. Both were able to report in revealing detail signs of what Mao Tse-tung now calls "revisionism." Here one can see quite clearly the growth of popular interest in the simple matters of career, prestige, glamor, and leisure. Mao could have read these books as confirming once more his belief that the Chinese society is moving in directions he regards with abhorrence.

The other aspect of Chinese life which emerges from these two books is how the contrasts of old China have been neutralized. A process of producing a tone of gray in the society has removed much of the cruelty that so typified human relations there in the past. The strain of idealism in the communist movement in China has helped erase the more unfortunate manifestations of traditional Chinese life, particularly as they pertained to the lack of food and shelter for the poor and the exploitation of young women. The now dominant tone is one of puritanism. The Chinese communists have instilled a highly developed code of personal morality and national pride, and a fanatical sense of cleanliness (which has virtually rid the country of flies). As in other puritanical societies, the effect of this is to eliminate much of the "joy of life" for the few who could once afford it. From the Western point of view it all seems too correct and orderly to be tolerable, but then, as both books bring out, the Western point of view is not so much in fashion these days in China.

JOHN W. LEWIS
Department of Government,
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

Identifying Races: Geography and Genetics

The effects of the controversies engendered by Carleton Coon's *Origin of Races* [reviewed by E. Mayr, *Science* **138,** 420 (1962)] were both salutary and unfortunate. They awakened physical anthropologists to the need for more systematic and intelligent focus on the semantic and taxonomic problems inherent in the taxon race, but they also tended to play into the hands of neoracists. **The Living Races of Man** (Knopf, New York, 1965. 352 pp. $10), written in collaboration with Edward E. Hunt, Jr., will probably add more fuel to professional fires but it contains less explosive matter for racist exploiters. As Coon points out, this new book can stand alone without the evolutionary background outlined in his earlier volume, but his frequent reference to the latter makes joint reading at times a necessity.

In the opening chapters the author bridges the two volumes with a summarization of his concept of race and a description of his five races or subspecies (geographical races)—Caucasoids, Mongoloids, Australoids, Congoids, and Capoids—to which he adds "Dwarfed Australoids" (Negritos) and "Dwarfed Congoids" (Pygmies). By referring to the latter two as races, he automatically elevates them to subspecies classification, a questionable procedure in view of his admission that their reduction in size is the only major factor that distinguishes them from their "full-sized" counterparts. Having determined his seven races and listed the descriptive criteria by which they were determined, he then outlines the selective pressure significance of geography and climate as mechanisms in race formation and the role of culture which so patently contributes toward complicating man's genetic composition.

Chapters 3 through 7 are devoted to the five major geographical or racial "realms" with which his seven geographical races are associated, and the next two chapters cover such topics as racial clines, skin and eye color, adipose tissues, the vascular system, and variable traits of uncertain significance such as earwax, eyeball size, facial muscles, dermatoglyphs, color blindness, ability to taste, and the geno-functional effects of diseases and disorders. Finally he reviews the wholesale migrations that have taken place since 1492 and concludes with a super-Aldous-Huxleyan glimpse into the realm of man's hypothetical capacity to transform himself biologically along imaginative but highly improbable lines.

To understand Coon is to interpret him in the light of his basic perspective and premises. He takes the position that races are not mere abstractions but extant entities whose movements can be traced and understood only in the light of history. He employs a regional, biocultural, and synoptic approach that he considers imperative in untangling the threads of man's racial past. To this end he has assembled an impressive mass of detailed information concerning migrations of peoples and the spread of languages and tool-making techniques, and has also collated into readable form data relating to the past and continuing impact of natural and artificial environments. His book is a helpful compendium, but whether or not it has satisfactorily delimited living races remains a question.

To argue the importance of languages and tools or evidences of contact and diffusion would be pointless