

The Birth of Communist China. By C. P. Fitzgerald. 1964. (Praeger, New York) 288 pages

A Short History of Communist China. By Frank Houn. 1967. (Prentice Hall, New Jersey) 245 pages

The entire discipline of historical investigation hangs precariously upon the personal attitudes and prejudices of individual historians. This is clearly illustrated in a comparative analysis of C. P. Fitzgerald's *The Birth of Communist China* and Franklin W. Houn's *A Short History of Chinese Communism*. Essentially, both volumes deal with the rise of Communism in China, but the impact of the writings differs considerably.

Franklin W. Houn's *A Short History of Chinese Communism* includes a cursory view of early Chinese history, the emergence of the Chinese Communist movement, the phases of the Revolutionary struggle, the Communists' ascent to power, and a lengthy discussion of the ideology and machinations of the present day Chinese Communist Party. This book is indeed aptly titled, for such a wide range of topics can hardly be adequately treated in a volume of less than two hundred and fifty pages. Unfortunately, the result is that both in style and format the work becomes boring and pedestrian. The writing fails at being truly gripping, although Houn's presentation of China's modern-day internal politics is an intriguing segment. Mr. Houn is a Chinese scholar of some reputation, and he has generously larded his writing with sources from both Western writers and official Chinese publications. It is regrettable that despite these credentials, he never really captures a sense of China in his work. Indeed, he very much conveys the impression of a Westerner "talking about" China.

Perhaps the most glaring fault in this selection is that Franklin Houn fails to define adequately the Communist Revolution within the framework of the Confucian-based, Mandate of Heaven, dynastic structure of Chinese history. He dismisses Chinese conservatism as "a strain in Chinese thinking and habit," and explains the lack of a Chinese Industrial Revolution in a mere page and a half.

Equipped with this sort of superficial approach, Westerners tend to view the rise of Chinese Communism as the over-run of a pack of conniving tricksters. Indeed, this tone is quite apparent in Houn's book, not so much in what he says, but rather in how he says it. Throughout the entire text, one finds such statements as, "The Communists . . . foment class struggle"; the Communists "spread like a raging flood . . ."; the Communists through "blending of allurements . . . and terror extended their control"; all of which convey to the reader a subtly negative view of Chinese Communism.

Houn is at his best when he discusses the structure and current history of the Chinese Communist Party. Not only does he give an interesting account of the Party organization, but his discussion of foreign and domestic policies is amazingly objective and, in part, even favorable. The main thrust of this book, however, is slanted by innuendo, and a four page conclusion, stunning for its total reversal in approach, is not sufficient to offset the preceding two hundred and forty pages. Mr. Houn's book leaves the distinct impression that

although he is a friend to Chinese studies, he is a foe to the Communist ideology. In the Preface to *A Short History of Chinese Communism*, Houn states that he wishes to be neither a critic nor an apologist, but simply a dispassionate analyst. Regrettably, he has failed to attain that goal.

In striking contrast to Franklin Houn's book is the offering by C. P. Fitzgerald, *The Birth of Communist China*. C. P. Fitzgerald is one of those rare historians who writes with both historical depth and literary style. He skillfully blends these ingredients, never permitting style to be encumbered by ponderous academia, nor scholarly integrity to be sacrificed for biased sensationalism. The result is a highly readable and absorbing study which contains a wealth of information. Houn and Fitzgerald treat essentially the same historical material, but Fitzgerald, unlike Houn, does not concern himself with the detailed structure of the Chinese Communist Party. He does, however, discuss the implementation of Communist policy in China, as well as the impact of the Chinese Revolution on both the Western and Far Eastern worlds. The approach of Fitzgerald differs vastly from that of Franklin Houn.

Primarily, Fitzgerald appears to have written his book from the Chinese viewpoint and has succeeded in imbuing it with the aura of Chinese thought. He creates this impression by stressing at the outset the three bases of Chinese civilization: the Universal Empire, agriculture, and the orthodox doctrine of Confucian ethical and political teachings. These three threads are woven together throughout the text, illustrating the integral factors which must be recognized if the Chinese Revolution is to be understood. On this basis, the acceptance of the Revolution is seen to be consistent with centuries of Chinese thinking. Repeatedly, Fitzgerald stresses that the key to a successful Revolution in China was the union of peasant and scholar bound together by these three concepts of Chinese civilization.

An important point raised by Fitzgerald is that Westerners tend to forget not only that there was no tradition of democracy in China, but that there did not exist even the rudimentary requirement for a republic, a sense of individualism. On the contrary, the Chinese were accustomed to a carefully structured, well-defined hierarchy of roles. Following a transition period of chaos after the collapse of the Manchu Dynasty and the highly distressing reign of Chiang Kai-Shek, a return to an orthodox society was welcome to the Chinese mind. The Chinese could easily view the Communist regime not as an oppressor denying freedoms, but rather as a restoration government with a modern twist.

Antithetical viewpoints mark the critical difference between the works of Franklin Houn and C. P. Fitzgerald. Houn creates an impression that the chicanery and determination of a few Communist radicals bullied the Party into power in China. Fitzgerald, on the other hand, sees the Communist Revolution as a modern dynastic change, reasonably comfortable and acceptable to the traditional Chinese mind.

Granted it is a concept that is difficult for the Western mind to appreciate, for in the West revolution has a quite different meaning. The patterns of the Chinese Revolution were uniquely dissimilar from those of the revolutions in the United States and in Russia. Accustomed to their own histories, Fitz-

gerald maintains, both of these nations misunderstood the subtleties of events in China. Their errors in equating the Chinese Revolution with their own national experiences have cost them dearly in the area of international intercourse. The Western Powers rashly lumped all Communism into the same bag, while the Soviet Union blithely offered China advice which had no relevance to her internal situation.

Certainly, two prominent figures in this scenario are those of Mao Tse-Tung and Chiang Kai-Shek. The world outside China has adopted a variety of positions and attitudes regarding these two men. Houn and Fitzgerald hold different views, and their individual treatment of these political adversaries further highlights the diversity in the two books being discussed.

Franklin Houn's appraisal of Mao Tse-Tung appears to be two-pronged. He regards him as being a crafty leader during the days of the Revolution, a skillful architect of his own political power and that of the Party, and an iron-handed controller and consolidator of that power. However, Houn reveals a note of admiration for Mao Tse-Tung's administrative skills. Specifically, Houn points to the fact that Mao did Sinify the foreign doctrines of Marx and Lenin, which provided for their acceptance by the Chinese people. This is a vital factor in the adoption by the Chinese of any foreign philosophy. Mao's adaptation of Marxism is but a repetition of the Sinification of the Buddhist philosophy centuries before. Houn recognizes Mao's psychological importance to the Chinese people as a strong leader figure to whom they can turn with respect and adulation — strong satisfactions to a Chinese mind steeped in the values of hierarchial reverence.

C. P. Fitzgerald regards Mao Tse-Tung as a successful leader of the Chinese people because he has translated universal Communism into a "Chinese religion," wherein, like the Emperor of old, the Communist Party is the instrument of control. The concept here of "religion" is not in the Western sense of an individual salvation, but rather a collective improvement for the sovereign Chinese people. In his leadership Mao has combined the Chinese desire for modernization with their need for the security of an authoritarian, orthodox rule. Fitzgerald regards Mao as a leader of indisputable ability and astuteness, but he questions the possible future of Mao's New Democracy when the mantle of power is passed to his successors.

Fitzgerald and Houn are more in contrast when they write about Chiang Kai-shek.

Franklin W. Houn's book is noteworthy for what it does not say about Chiang Kai-shek. There is never a time when Houn critically analyzes the government under Chiang Kai-shek with anything more than a mild rebuke. Indeed, his recitation of Chiang's capture in 1935 by two generals is almost ludicrous. It is difficult to believe that Chiang insisted that his captors kill him, or that the news of his kidnapping produced shock and concern throughout the strife-torn nation. As has been customary in the West, Houn avoids recognizing the tyrannical nature of Chiang Kai-shek's government, and instead paints him as a self-sacrificing, conscientious leader, surrounded by unscrupulous domestic adversaries who capitalize on foreign problems for their own gain. It should be noted that Franklin Houn's biography states that he

served in the Chinese Government from 1946 to 1948. Although such a post allows one inside observations, it also might reduce one's objectivity. In retrospect, such politicians and diplomats are obliged to defend a policy which they helped to construct, a weakness which is reflected in Houn's treatment of Chiang Kai-shek. He cannot bring himself to be realistically critical of the man, so he simply sidesteps the issue.

C. P. Fitzgerald also held a government post in China, but he represented Great Britain and his country was not the main prop behind Chiang Kai-shek. For this or whatever other reason, Fitzgerald was vastly critical of Chiang, and he has a different story on the 1935 capture. In Fitzgerald's version, the Generalissimo, rather than demanding to be killed, recognized that his captors intended doing just that, and he consented to negotiations. On a wider scale, Fitzgerald believes that Chiang's policy was misguided and ineffective. He chose the impossible task of suppression of Communist guerrillas ahead of resistance to Japanese aggressions. He depleted government forces on this project for ten years, and eventually had to capitulate to the Communists in a desperate attempt to drive back the Japanese. Not only did Chiang prove himself to be a leader deficient in judgment, but the entire policy of his administration was one of tyranny and repression. The country was inefficiently run, the economy near collapse, and the secret police flourished. Through indifference to their plight, Chiang lost the peasants; through repression, he lost the scholars, and thus opened the way for the union of these two groups under the Red Flag of the Communist Party. Fitzgerald labels the government of Chiang Kai-shek as "fascist," a reality the United States has long sought to ignore. One of the outstanding contributions of Fitzgerald's book is that he decisively explodes the myth of Chiang Kai-shek so long perpetrated by the press and the government of the United States.

It is, of course, a time-weary cliché that one cannot judge a book by its cover. True as this may be, the jacket designs of these two books do indeed give a clue to the contents. Houn's *A Short History of Chinese Communism* pictures a menacing, aggressive Red Army, guns and banners uplifted, sweeping across the book cover, an illustration of the author's interpretation of the Chinese Communist Revolution. The jacket on C. P. Fitzgerald's *The Birth of Communist China* gives a different visual impression. Behind the figure of an ancient, traditionally-gowned Chinese gentleman stands an orderly group of modern Chinese soldiers. This is the thrust of Fitzgerald's essay: the development of a Sinified philosophy which aims to bridge the gap between an ancient culture and the forces of a modern world.

ANNE M. PORTERFIELD
Student
Towson State College