

He also fears young people, which perhaps is his greatest fear. He is worried by the young people. Long before he launched his great cultural revolution, he was talking to foreign visitors, expressing himself very graphically, and saying that the young have never been blooded in battle; they have never fought a war, they have never fought a revolution; they have never seen foreign troops on their soil who had to be expelled; they do not realize how bad the Kuo Min Tang, the Chinese nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek, were. This is Mao talking and I am paraphrasing him. Therefore, said Mao, because they are ignorant of the past, they do not realize the need for continued self-sacrifice, hard work and so on. They lack revolutionary fervour and they, when they rise to power as they must inevitably do, will also, and primarily, betray the revolution unless great steps are taken to temper them, to discipline them, to get them thinking right.

To the foreign visitor to China, Mao's fears at first seem wildly misplaced and exaggerated, certainly up until the launching of the great cultural revolution. I think any foreign visitor to China, regardless of his political tendencies, has been impressed by the way China appeared to be united, dedicated, disciplined and egalitarian, with a spartan and puritanical ethic that many foreign visitors—myself in some ways at times—found sometimes offensive, sometimes rather humorous, but certainly unmistakable and inescapable. There seemed to be no basis for the sort of fears that Mao has been expressing, both privately and publicly, in recent months.

But if you stay there for a while, as I was privileged to do, become a resident and see a bit beneath the surface—and I stress it is only a bit—you do realize eventually that there are things at work in Chinese society: things like privilege, and even to some extent corruption. There is, what the British would call, an old boy net very much in operation in China—the old guard of party veterans, the men who were on the long march, the men who fought both the Japanese and the Chinese Nationalists. This aging elite has clung very tenaciously to their positions, and they do receive certain privileges which, in our western society, would seem very innocuous. They have better salaries; they have better homes, although nothing wildly extravagant; their children are sometimes favoured when it comes to getting places in schools regardless of their scholastic ability; they can have cars, which are a rarity in China to travel around; they can take holidays—there are places for senior officials to have holidays. These things are, to us, very trivial, but to Mao this is the rot setting in. And I think to many of the young people in China too—teenagers who have formed the Red Guards, and also junior party and government officials in their twenties, thirties and forties, are to some extent frustrated. They see what to them is an injustice; they see these anomalies, these discrepancies between their own aspirations and what the elite is offered. This has been, I think, a source of genuine fervor on the part of many Red Guards; and to Mao it is the rot setting in. I think he sees it in two terms. He sees it first in terms of Chinese history, where every previous dynasty, many of which were established through peasant revolutions somewhat like Mao's, has eventually been betrayed and has fallen because of the internal corruption, both financial and psychological, of its ruling elite. Mao also sees it—I know, because this part of it is public—in terms of what has befallen communism in the Soviet Union, which we in the west regard as a very hopeful development, and I think rightly so; we see the modification of communism, the moderation of Soviet policies, both domestic and foreign. Mao sees this as a gross