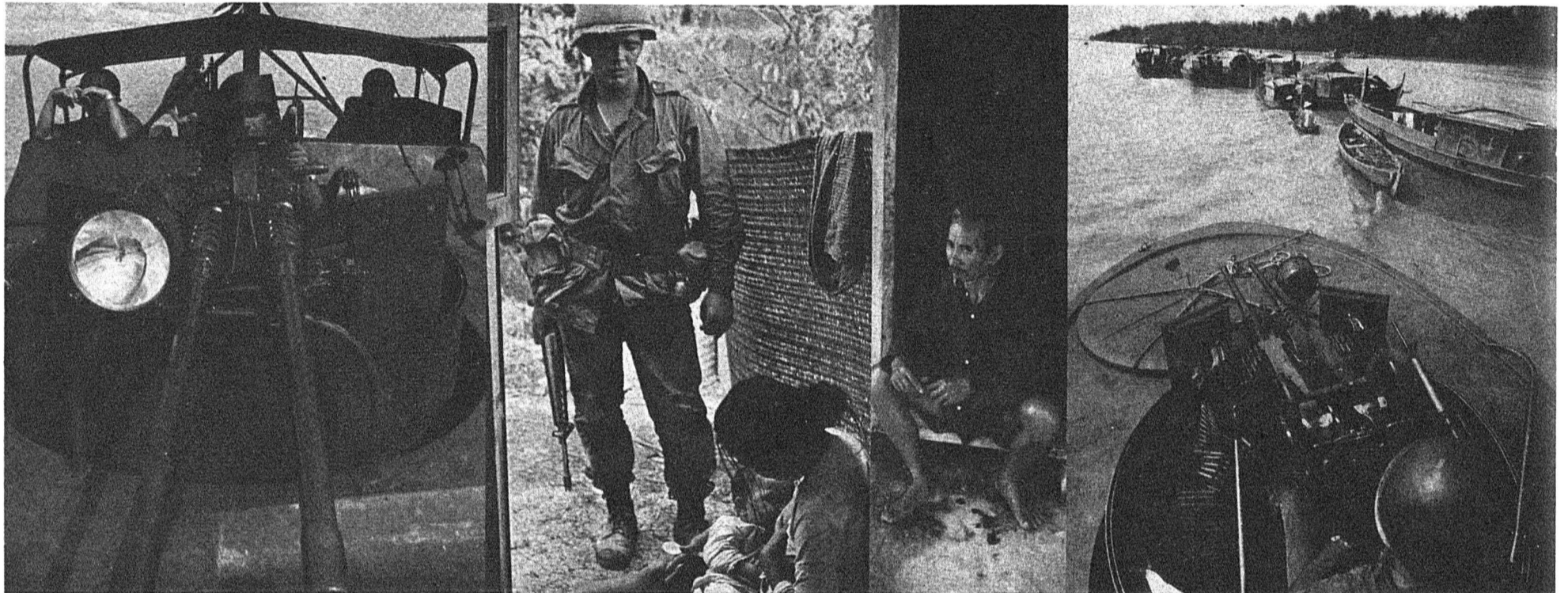


Vietnam paradox...



...a student's view

By **HOWARD MOFFETT**
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SAIGON (CUPI)—It is one of the major ironies of contemporary history that Marxism, rooted in a thoroughly materialistic concept of man, has in the hands of Mao Tse-tung, Lin Piao, Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap become the most powerful spiritual force in Asia—while the United States, which claims a Judaeo-Christian spiritual heritage, has sought to counter that force with increasing amounts of military and material aid.

In country after country of the third world, Mao has sounded the battle cry for a threadbare struggle to the death against U.S. imperialism and its lackeys; and time after time America has called for peace with honor and co-operation among nations, and has poured in more weapons and dollars to check the spiritual tide.

The paradox is rooted in the American view of the world.

THE DECLINE

American intellectuals often speak of the present as a post-ideological age. One reason, certainly, is the decline in influence of our Judaeo-Christian heritage. Another is that American and European societies are now comparatively free of the internal class conflicts which ideologies are invoked to explain. Historically, our own political and social institutions draw largely on

the traditions of Locke, Jefferson and Tocqueville, each of whom stressed ideas of equality and minimized class divisions.

More fundamentally, we have come to view other peoples' ideologies as obstacles to problem-solving, which we have unconsciously raised to the status of a new ideology. Perhaps, for lack of a dialectical content to our own new ideology, American society is increasingly preoccupied with a subtle variation of the "might makes right" theme: to wit, that technology, emotional detachment and hard work will solve any problem if applied in large enough doses.

The emphasis throughout our culture on problem-solving techniques, procedures, machinery and cost-efficiency is only the most general example. More specifically, the Vietnam war is a major problem for us—and we are employing all the technology, emotional detachment, and hard work at our command in order to solve it.

TECHNOLOGICAL POWER

The Asian view of the world—and the war—is often quite different. Much of Asia still has deeply-rooted class conflicts. The gulf between rich and poor—in Hong Kong, Saigon, Calcutta—is so stark that most people do not like to talk about it. At the same time, American technology and our emphasis on the Three E's—effort, efficiency and effectiveness—produce conflicting reactions.

On the one hand over-eager American advisors are indulged like children who come running in to tell their parents they have the answer to an insoluble problem. On the other, Asians are impressed by power and prosperity—especially power. They trace past defeats and loss of face to the superiority of Western technology, and they see technology as the key to winning back that lost power and dignity.

Most Asian societies are poor, colored, predominantly agricultural, and anxious to vindicate their national pride. They are watching China very carefully. It is natural that the emotional appeal of Marx and Mao would weigh heavily here, especially to those convinced of the historical inevitability of the victory of People's War.

The fact that Americans themselves are generally more impressed with their technology and wealth than with their democratic social institutions merely proves to these Asians the bankruptcy of American ideals and the rightness of their own cause.

THE OTHER HALF

There are other Asians who seem genuinely to value Western democratic ideals, and who are searching for the Asian idiom in which to express them. Hitherto it has been elusive—objective conditions in Asia are much more favorable to the Marxian interpretation of social history than to the Lockean.

Another sizable group of Asians understands full well why Americans are more impressed with their technology than with their democratic social traditions. Practical people, they recognize and seek the prerequisites of power. Many of them feel that though Chinese ideology is more fitted to today's Asia, and therefore carries greater emotional appeal, tomorrow's Asia must embrace Western technology, and by implication Western aid, if it is to arrive in the modern world.

Much of the explosive nature of the conflict between the U.S. and China derives from this last fact. Mao and Ho see the handwriting on the wall, and are desperate to chalk up some advances of their own. They must either match American weapons with Chinese, or push the Viet Cong to a People's War victory using political rather than conventional military force. One way or another, they need to win.

THE ATTEMPT

Thus the frantic Great Leap Forward in 1957, designed to broaden the economic base for Chinese technological and industrial development. Thus Ho's eagerness to employ Soviet technicians at surface-to-air missile sites around Hanoi. Thus China's haste to deliver a nuclear warhead, which she now has done. In one of his more didactic moments in 1953, Mao said, "Political power comes from the barrel of a gun."