

EXCALIBUR INTERVIEW

With Jerome Ch'en

Jerome Ch'en is a professor of history in the East Asian Department at York, and is presently taking a year's sabbatical. His writings about Mao and China have earned him international fame.

Ch'en spent the first part of his life in China until he received his Masters Degree, at which point he moved to England. There he received his Ph D., worked, married and had a daughter. The most recent part of Ch'en's life has been spent teaching, researching and writing in political history, and later in social economics.

Jerome Ch'en first began to write about Mao around 1960, in reaction to what he believed to be dangerous and misleading books already being written on Mao. His books have been in demand ever since, and he is considered by many to be one of the best biographers on Mao today.

Excalibur reporter Susan Grant spoke with York professor Jerome Ch'en on Monday about the death Mao Tse-Tung and recent developments in China.

EXCALIBUR: Professor Ch'en, what form do you think the political leadership will take in China, now that Mao is dead?

CH'EN: For many years the Chinese Communist leadership has been a collective leadership. We know for sure that Mao has not been taking care of day to day matters for some years, although he was in firm control of the general direction of the development of the country and the society.

COLLECTIVE GOVERNMENT

Succession to Mao's demise is a problem grossly exaggerated by the western press. Long before Mao's death, the affairs of state and army had been under the control of a number of leaders. Before Chou En-lai's death this was clear for he was in charge of large areas of the affairs of the country. After Chou's death a number of people came to replace him. After Mao's death, what responsibilities and tasks he left behind will be taken care of by others. There will be a collective government, as it has always been for these many years.

As to the removal of this great, overwhelming person of Mao, he cannot be replaced. China cannot have another Long March, another Revolutionary War, without these great historic events it is unthinkable that anyone of Mao's stature will emerge in the near future. It is usually from great crisis that great leadership will emerge; in that sense, Mao is irreplaceable. So what we really are concerned with is whether Chinese leadership will be united without this great personality there to dominate the entire scene.

EXCALIBUR: Do you foresee any factionalism in the Chinese leadership?

CH'EN: If there is going to be any factionalism, I think it will be between what the western press usually calls the radicals and the "right-wingers". But when we use factional analysis of Chinese politics, we are very well advised to remember that Mao may be dead but Mao's thoughts aren't dead. Mao's thoughts are still a very powerful ideology, influencing almost every aspect of Chinese life.

This is particularly significant after so many political and ideological campaigns in China. We shall remember that three great battles for succession have been fought and are over now; the battles of Liu Shao-Chi, Lin Biao and more recently Teng Hsiao-Ping. These battles were not just power struggles, nor were they purely a battle of policies, they were concerned with the future course of development of the country and society.

With these campaigns now over, the Chinese general political consciousness is much higher than before. I attach much importance to the campaign of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. During that campaign, which was almost nation-wide, the people studied Marxist and Leninist classical writings on the future of proletariat dictatorship and the future of socialism for China.

HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS

With the people's political consciousness

and the level of political education now so much higher than before, with the major opponents to Mao's line of social development removed and with Mao's thoughts, still very strong in control of China's development, I don't think we should think in terms of a country becoming disunited, with factions fighting one another. It is certainly not likely to be like the struggle after Lenin's death, and it is not likely for civil war to break out in China, in need of the army to take control and form something like a military junta. That development, to me, is



Question of Succession grossly exaggerated by western press

quite unlikely. It shows our over anxiety for the fate of China, either because we sympathize with China, or because we wish that China will become disunited, or from whatever point of view. I think this question of succession is grossly exaggerated. It also shows an inconsistency of western thinking, we (the west) would wish to see a China united and strong to counter balance Russia. On the other side, the west also fears a united and powerful China that would threaten the security of the west.

EXCALIBUR: Who would you say are the people in the leadership to watch?

CH'EN: From the official ranking of leaders, the Prime Minister, Hua Kuo'feng, also the first vice chairman of the Communist Party, is the most important man. We don't know very much about Hua himself, except through the campaign to "Study the Brigades", in which he played a major role. This campaign was called about this time last year, and Hua's participation secured his position of being the most important man after Mao and Chou. I would regard this campaign as important as the Land Reform Campaign in the early 1950's.

URBAN RECONSTRUCTION

Wang Hung-Wen also held an important position in this campaign. This young man's position in Urban reconstruction, in the party organization, and so on also makes him a key figure.

Besides these two people, I would say that Chang Chun-Chiao, from Shanghai, is a man of experience and also theoretical training

and ability. He is also a man to be watched closely. Chang Chun-Chiao is also said to be a man of very close contact with the party, and with considerable influence in the army.

So if we divide the leadership, into administration, the party and the army, this Hua, Wang and Chang would be very important leaders.

PROPAGANDA

If we add again the importance of propaganda and ideology into the leadership, then Chiang Ching would be a person of considerable importance, as her influence in propaganda, education and cultural activities is very great.

So I would use the functional approach to understand Chinese leadership, and would say that these four persons would be likely to play key roles in the political events of the near future.

EXCALIBUR: Do you think there will be any significant changes in Sino-Soviet relations in the near future?

CH'EN: According to the recent events from Peking, the Sino-Soviet relations will not change in the near future. China, like any other country, will not be used by any other political forces in the world to fight others' battles.

CHINA WON'T CHAMPION WAR

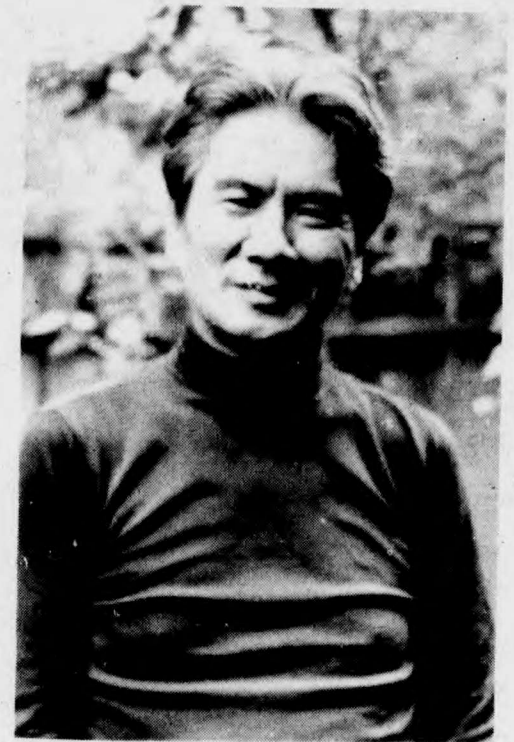
China does have a very long common front with Russia. With these limitations, China will not be forced to change her socialist principles to come to terms with Russian socialist principles. China will not champion any kind of war, or fight Russia, for the benefit of other people.

EXCALIBUR: What do you think about the issue of Taiwan?

CH'EN: Taiwan now has nuclear capabilities, and this makes the Taiwan question more difficult. Taiwan now has the ability to defend itself from attack, if it so chooses, when before it would have been impossible. Taiwan is controlled, politically, almost completely by Washington. For China, Taiwan is a question of territorial integrity. It is a part of China that is occupied by a rebellious government, supported by the United States. The country of Taiwan is completely isolated, except for the support of the USA, as most countries, like Canada have chosen to recognize Mainland China instead.

Taiwan is a key factor in improving Sino-US relations. Without the United States

recognizing Mainland China as the official government of the Chinese people, then future relations between the two countries must remain awkward and strained.

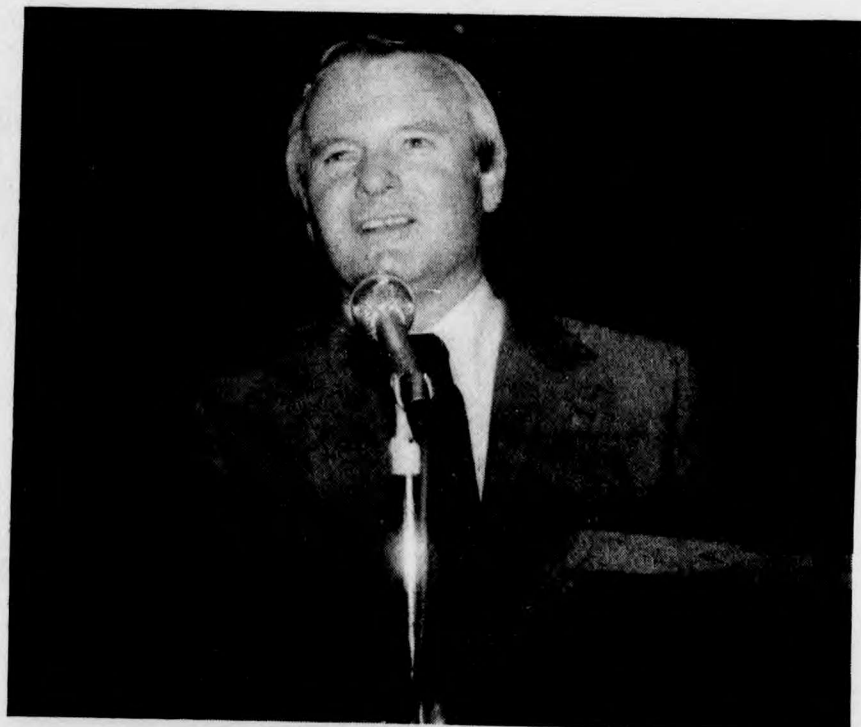


Taiwan is controlled politically by Washington

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY

If the US insists on having the KMT government on Taiwan, then the Sino-American diplomatic relations will have to wait. I believe this will be detrimental to both countries. China must have Taiwan for her territorial integrity, and the US has much more to gain with Mainland China as a friendly country than anything Taiwan can offer. I don't feel however, that the death of Mao will make any significant changes in the relations between Russia, or Taiwan, and China.

NEXT WEEK:



BILL DAVIS