

## Secret societies resurge in the People's Republic

The innermost secret of the Communist Party of China, and the reason why they must maintain Mao Tse-tung Thought, is contained in the fact that there never was a communist revolution in China, nor is there a Communist Party there in the sense that most Westerners understand the word "communist." Rather, the word "communist" is simply the latest name given by the millennia-old Chinese "secret societies" to their activities, just as the 19th-century Taiping Rebellion, regarded by Mao as his heritage, called itself Christian, and other Chinese used imagery from Islamic and Persian cults along with ancient Chinese indigenous ideologies.

Understanding this makes it much easier to grasp why Communist Party cadre are leading an organized wave of criminal activity in China.

With such famous names as White Lotus, Elder Brothers, Triads, Green Gang—and in overseas communities, Tongs—these societies stem as far back as the second or third century B.C., and span the rise and fall of the relatively ephemeral dynasties. The first emperor of the 14th-century Ming dynasty was a White Lotus adherent who took the name Ming from the King of Light prophesied in the Lotus's mixture of Persian Manichaeism with Buddhism and Taoism. The societies were customarily the instrumentality used by the Chinese Mandarin oligarchy in the dynastic cycle of peasant rebellions that brought down one dynasty and created another.

Millions died in these rebellions, 30 million alone in the Taiping rebellion now being celebrated in China's press. A large part of the mass ideology for such secret-society rebellions was provided by ancient Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu, who wrote (XIX, Book One):

Exterminate the sage, discard the wise,  
And the people will benefit a hundredfold;  
Exterminate benevolence, discard rectitude,  
And the people will again be filial;

Exterminate ingenuity, discard profit,  
And there will be no more thieves and bandits.  
These three, being false adornments, are not  
enough  
And the people must have something to which  
they can attach themselves:  
Exhibit the unadorned and embrace the uncarved  
block,  
Have little thought of self and as few desires as  
possible.

If this sounds like Mao's Cultural Revolution, it should: for Mao himself certainly was greatly influenced by, and probably was a member of, the Elder Brothers Society. Other famous Chinese Communist leaders still praised today, such as Generals Chu Deh and Ho Lung were definitely members. So were the majority of recruits into Mao's peasant "Red Armies" in 1926-30.

These societies also included the Big Sword Society in Anhui or elsewhere, and the Society of Morality in Zhili.

The fact that these societies were the fertile ground for Mao's recruitment efforts is seen in the 1936 declaration of famed Communist Gen. Peng Dehuai. "We must deepen our work in the Elder Brother and other secret societies and make them active, not merely passive, allies on the anti-Japanese front."

Mao's notorious personality cult was, in the Chinese context, no stranger than the deification of previous emperors; Mao was simply the latest of those who promised the millennium of agrarian egalitarianism.

Maoists were not the only ones who used or stemmed from the secret societies. Chiang Kai-shek used the Green Gang to suppress the Communists in the famed 1927 Shanghai massacre. And, while Alexander Haig may believe Deng Xiaoping to be an anti-Maoist modernized pragmatist, during the trial of the Gang of Four, Hsinhua news agency releases of Dec. 4 revealed that Gang of Four member Zhang Chunqiao was gathering evidence that Deng, Liu Shaoqi, and Peng Zhen were trying to revive the "old people's secret association," a probable reference to the Elder Brothers, as well as other names like "eastern association," and "old men's tie association." Deng protested, but it is interesting that Peng Dehuai, who opposed Mao long before Deng did, was one of those recruiting Elder Brothers. The current fight in China is not between the secret societies and the pragmatists, but within the secret societies, as has occurred many times.

### The societies' agrarian socialism

The ideology of the secret societies, including Mao's Communists, is the key to Chinese politics today. For more than two millennia there has been no basic

change in China's social structure. It has remained an agrarian society dependent upon a huge bureaucracy to organize sprawling irrigation and flood-control projects by means of mass corvée labor. In the past the bureaucracy was called Confucian; now it is called communist.

From approximately 200 B.C. to the beginning of the Ming dynasty in the 14th century, China's population never rose above 65 million; it simply expanded and contracted in cataclysmic dynastic cycles. Agricultural output and population increased at the beginning of the dynastic cycle as the new dynasty made reforms, invested in water control, and so forth. As diminishing returns set in due to the lack of sustained technological advance, the Mandarins reduced investments in water-control projects, as Deng has done.

The ensuing economic and social breakdown was marked by flood and famine, inflation, female infanticide, organized crime and brigandage, and mass recruitment by the secret societies—all patterns present today.

Repeatedly, Confucian literati and others led secret society rebellions promising agrarian egalitarianism, which established a new dynasty after massive depopulation, and the pattern was repeated once more. Population rose sharply in the early Ming and Ching dynasties because of major technological advances, but failure to continue the advances restored the cycle.

The major attempt to break out of this "old China" pattern was a Westernization effort in the 1898 Hundred Days Reform and in Sun Yat-sen's Republican movement. Both were aided by Japan's Meiji era Mitsubishi faction with the slogan of the Hundred Days Reform being "Know the Shame of Not Being Like Japan." They wanted to industrialize and urbanize China.

Mao's movement, however, bore the stamp of the "old agrarian China," trying to set up a Mao dynasty, emperor cult and all. Lately, as part of the anti-Western attacks on Deng, one commentator in *Guangming Ribao* on May 25 recalled Maoism's roots:

Some theorists did not recognize the great historical role of the leaders of the peasant wars but said . . . [they] disrupted the development of the productive forces. . . . Some even used the statistics of how many people were killed to prove the "negative role" of peasant wars . . . [but] at the critical moment they had been able to lead the masses in smashing the old dynasty. . . . In the end they were either put down . . . or degenerated into tools of the landlord class for making dynastic changes. However, we absolutely cannot use this to negate the great historical role played by peasant wars.

The party cadre handing out machine guns and explosives to criminal and terrorist gangs well know their origins.

Contrary to China Card theorists, Deng and his faction are not opposed to the "old China" ways of the secret societies but uphold "old China" ideology on the most fundamental question: Deng is resolved that China shall forever be an 80 percent peasant society. In fact, the Chinese press reported that one of his reasons for wanting to break up the communes was to disrupt former Chairman Hua's attempts at rapid mechanization. Deng agrees with Mao that China's communism is anti-industry "agrarian communism." While many kinds of political statements are permitted in China today, the Dengists banned a document by an urbanization-oriented reformer criticizing Mao's agrarian socialist philosophy. The predominant kind of industry permitted by Deng is that necessary for the military (and even that is limited), and for Hong Kong-style colonies on the coast of China.

Deng's chief disagreement with the hard-core Maoists, aside from seeking a respite from constant upheavals, is that he is more willing to manipulate such barbarians as Alexander Haig into helping China regain its Asian empire and to strive to become a world power. Many Southeast Asian nations fear Haig has already acquiesced to China's domination of that area. On the world financial scene, Deng's strategy is personified by the simultaneous membership of Sir Y. K. Pao—a Shanghai resident who moved to Hong Kong in 1949—on the boards of Chase Manhattan Bank, British-owned, long-time opium-smuggling Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, and the Peking government's Bank of China. In addition, the BOC and its subsidiaries now control 30 percent of the bank deposits in Hong Kong, a major financial center for all of Asia. In this Deng is following the pattern of the Green Gang's alliance with Hongkong and Shanghai Bank in the drug market.

In addition, the *People's Daily* of July 8 reports on intensified efforts of the Deng regime to use overseas Chinese, some of whom are organized into the Tongks, to secure a "broadening of the patriotic united front" and promote China's influence in other countries. Overseas Chinese own a majority of businesses in such countries as Indonesia and Malaysia, whose governments oppose the China Card policy.

Haig is reported to have remarked that, due to Deng, "China won't be communist forever." Understanding what the word communist really means in China, Deng can only marvel at the naïveté of some barbarians. The question remains, however, whether Deng can manipulate the growing turmoil in China as easily as he does Al Haig.

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*These two articles were prepared with the participation of two other long-time China experts who prefer to remain anonymous.*