

far
east

Reporter

CHINA NEWS

"FAMINE"?

"BRAIN WASHING"?

"SINISTER ARRESTS"?

"SLAVE LABOR"?

HOW SUCH "NEWS" IS MADE

EXCERPTS FROM:


ASSIGNMENT CHINA

By Julian Schuman

As China correspondent for the American Broadcasting Company and writer for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and *Denver Post* he lived in both old and new China. As an associate editor of the American-owned and edited *China Monthly Review*, Julian Schuman stayed on four-and-a-half years to watch and evaluate the history-making events that unfolded before him. Covering 5,000 miles through Red China, he made the first-hand observations and experienced the events vividly described in this book.

Techniques of distortion, invention, and the half-truth-disguised-as-fact have been employed to fasten upon the public consciousness such notions as the "Red purge," "brainwashing," "slave labor," "Chinese aggression."

Not since Walter Lippmann's classic dissection of American reportage on Russia following the 1917 revolution has there been such a thoroughgoing examination of what lies behind the headlines found in one's daily newspaper. The chapters headed "Drums of Demonology," "News from Nowhere" and "The Logic of Death" alone make this book worthwhile.

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FRUITS OF DEMONOLOGY

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During the early summer of 1949, a certain amount of unbiased news continued to flow from China to the United States and to get printed in the American press. The correspondents were not particularly sympathetic; as neutral reporters there is no reason why they should have been. But their reports were not yet garnished with the invention and distortion which later began to feature them.

Then the situation changed. There had been some hope among foreign businessmen in China that the new government might extend to them some of the generous privileges they had enjoyed under the Kuomintang, or might even invite them in to help it run its affairs. Among American diplomats, especially the wishful thinkers who hoped to see rivalry for power between the Russians and the Chinese, there had been an assumption that the leaders of the Chinese revolution would "betray Moscow" and join with the West in the cold war. This proved a bad guess. Before long it became clear that the Chinese (quite sensibly as it turned out) reciprocated the friendship and support they received from the Soviet Union.

It was then that the China reporting in the America press showed a marked change. The verbal onslaught was well under way by August, 1949. This was a couple of months before the Chinese government was to withdraw accreditation from foreign correspondents until such time as diplomatic relations should exist, with Chinese newsmen permitted to work in a country which desired permission for its correspondents to operate in China.

On the fifth and sixth of August, American newspapers featured an Associated Press dispatch datelined Shanghai. "Chu Liang, 'Little Jolly Fellow,'" read the dispatch, "has been arrested for anti-communist propaganda. Chu, a vaudeville actor who first came into disfavor for a skit containing the line, 'people like to eat,' was criticized violently by the pro-red press for subversive activity. The *Liberation Daily* says the arrested man now is being questioned."

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It sounded pretty sinister—unless you happened to know what the AP dispatch had omitted. The truth, as almost everyone in Shanghai knew, was that Chu Liang had been arrested not for “anti-communist propaganda” but because a number of radio actresses had lodged personal complaints against him for having acted as a procurer for Nationalist army “brass” before the changeover and having forced them to *wei lao* (“comfort”) some of Chiang’s generals.

The truth was, further, that the new government had no political charges against Chu but that he had, in fact, come into “disfavor” with the old Nationalist government a year earlier. It was then that he had performed his skit containing the phrase “people like to eat,” coupling it with a reference to the city’s rice merchants as “rice worms.” For this he had been denounced by the rice dealers to Shanghai’s economic czar, Chiang Kai-shek’s son, and he had extended his procuring services as a means of “clearing” himself.

Thus easily can a few facts be altered and distorted to mislead the outside world. The falsification of routine local crime stories picked up from Chinese papers to make them look like instances of political persecution—reports of the arrest of persons guilty of anything from petty theft to crimes of passion—soon became a common practice.

Before long some China correspondents were giving their imaginations free rein in the reporting of what went on inside the country. I recall sitting in a wine shop in Shanghai surrounded by Chinese and foreigners engaged in normal imbibing late at night, and puzzling over the papers from home with their United Press and Reuters dispatches which informed the world that the town had been blanketed by an early-to-bed curfew. Similarly, it was not unusual to spend an hour listening to a Voice of America broadcast, and then to pick up a newspaper and read a press association dispatch announcing that the Voice of America had been banned by the new Chinese “totalitarians.”

The practice of doctoring news stories about procedures against criminals to make them sound like political arrests or convictions has since become a ritual pattern through frequent references to the “terror” and “purge of businessmen,”—phrases with which Western journalists and scholars still characterize the *San Fan-Wu Fan* anti-corruption drives of late 1951 and early 1952. I have already related how *Time* magazine served up a horror story in which Mr. Chang, a Shanghai herb dealer, poisoned himself, his entire family, and his seven

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employes and their entire families; and how Bill Powell and I, several weeks after this fable appeared in print, were startled to find Mr. Chang and his employes alive and at their accustomed places in the herb shop. This blithe little fiction by no means exhausted the ingenuity of *Time*.

In May, 1952, a fourteen-member Indian cultural mission visited China, headed by Mme. Viyayalakshmi Pandit, former Ambassador to Washington and later to serve for a term as President of the United Nations Assembly. On their return to New Delhi Mme. Pandit told the Indian Parliament that China's new government was bound to endure because it commanded "the respect and loyalty of the people." This, she added, was because the government was responsive to the people's needs and had released tremendous energy which was being utilized in rebuilding the country. Wherever the members of the delegation went, Mme. Pandit said, whether to one of the new industrial plants, to the Huai River flood-control project, or elsewhere, they noted a feeling of cooperation with the new government among Chinese people of all degrees. Mme. Pandit's report was released officially by the Indian government.

Hard on the heels of Mme. Pandit's report came press "interviews" with other members of the delegation, all of whom averred that conditions in China were simply dreadful and all of whom, for some unexplained reason, chose to remain anonymous.

It remained for *Time*, however, to attempt the coup de grace. "For public consumption," that magazine announced, "Mme. Pandit said a few kind words: 'We were greatly impressed by the fine creative efforts of the new China.'" (She had said a great many more kind words than that, but *Time* often is crowded for space.) Then, relying for support on its own anonymous member of the visiting delegation who happened to be conveniently on tap, *Time* went on to say: "Red China has made substantial material progress but only by using armies of slave laborers. One huge dam visited by Mme. Pandit was being built by 2,000,000 peasant conscripts."

Ordinarily such controversies end at that point, with the publication in possession of the last word and the majority of its readers, in the absence of any rebuttal, satisfied that that word is gospel truth. But Mme. Pandit was not disposed to let the matter rest there, and on June 26 she issued another statement characterizing the press reports of her mission's visit as "incorrect and misleading." She called attention

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to the anonymity of the sources of these reports, plainly casting doubt on their genuineness.

“One such anonymous statement,” she declared, “refers to ‘strict control of members of the mission from the time they reached China to the time they departed.’ This is completely misleading. A number of interpreters were assigned to the mission . . . since none of us knew Chinese.

“Reference has also been made to conscription of ‘forced labor’ for the purpose of building the Huai River dam. . . . It is a well-known fact that the Huai River dam was built through the willing cooperation of about 2,000,000 peasants who were paid.” (This was corroborated by my own observation of labor conditions at the Huai River flood control project in North Kiangsu Province, made during a visit a few months later. I spoke with men and women workers there, and learned that much of the work was being done by peasants from the areas which had time and again suffered from Huai River floods; and that many of these men and women had volunteered to participate in this effort because it would mean an end to floods and misery; that they often worked on the project during the slack season on their farms; that in addition to pay they received free housing, medical services, transportation, and the opportunity to shop at low-price cooperative stores; and that any necessary work on their farms during their absence was done free of charge by their village mutual-aid team.)

But the nailing of one press fabrication about China meant little, for another usually came close behind. Almost at the same time that Mme. Pandit was laying to rest the whimsies of *Time* magazine—on June 23, 1952 to be exact—readers of the English-language press arriving in Shanghai were fascinated to learn from a United Press story datelined Taipei, Formosa, that “Shanghai is a city of hungry millions. . . . There is no rice for the vast bulk of the population,” and “. . . the average Chinese is afraid to buy meat.”

What was the source of this peculiar fear? Well, it appeared that anyone “who has enough money to buy meat is immediately visited by the neighborhood Communist ‘tax commissar’ who accuses the family of having a hoard of cash and orders them to hand it over as a ‘special tax from the wealthy classes.’”

No rice in China, that is, but plenty of corn from Taipei. . . . Having ridden a bus past the Tihua Road marketplace on my way downtown just a couple of hours before, and seen housewives and

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amahs milling about the scores of open-air stalls buying pork, beef, rice, vegetables, eggs and other foods on ample display, at prices that would have cheered an American shopper, I thought this story rather curious.

Just to check my eyesight, I suggested to Pang Chen, an office colleague, that we drop over to one of the restaurants serving Western food for lunch, the Chocolate Shop on Nanking Road. On the way we passed a dozen restaurants large and small and a score or so of cheaper sidewalk eateries, all of which displayed their usual stacks of pork chops, sausages, roast duck and other meats to which Shanghailanders are partial. A large bowl of noodle soup could be had for the American equivalent of about five cents; *ke fan*, the counterpart of the blue-plate special, sold for from ten cents to a quarter.

At the Chocolate Shop the customary crowd of Chinese interspersed with Westerners were launched on American-style meals beginning with soup, proceeding to meat with vegetables and salad, and ending with dessert and coffee. Nobody seemed worried about where his next cut of meat or bowl of rice was coming from, and nobody seemed "afraid" to eat it when it came. As for the neighborhood "tax commissar," he bothered no one because he never existed.

I found myself wishing that the gifted author of the United Press dispatch could have been there as our guest, for the Chocolate Shop is only a hoot and a holler from the old UP office on Yen'an Road. But the UP scribe was now doing his hooting and hollering from Formosa.

It is from such apocryphal beginnings, nevertheless, that popular myths take root and flourish. The United Press fantasy about hunger in China, having achieved the dignity of print in numerous places, entered the general fund of misinformation about China and was used unquestioningly in newspaper and radio-television comment, and even in learned tomes written by scholars.

The effect of such outpourings upon an American living in China, and regularly perusing the newspapers and magazines from home, was of an eeriness not readily to be described. Among the publications we were then receiving at the Review office through subscription or exchange were *Time*, *U. S. News & World Report*, *The New Yorker*, *Harpers*, *The Nation* and *The New Republic*. In addition I read the daily Associated Press, United Press, Reuter and Agence France Presse dispatches which were carried by the *Hongkong Standard*, a Chinese-

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owned English daily, opposed to the new government, which arrived every day. I also read clippings sent from the States relating to China which appeared in the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald-Tribune*, the *Washington Post* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. From these one might conclude that there were, in fact, two places called China—the place where one lived and the place they were writing about, to which it bore no faint resemblance.



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It was from Hongkong that by far the greatest bulk of such press material issued either at first, second or third hand. For it was to Hongkong that most of the China correspondents and press bureaus betook themselves when they decided, in late 1949 and early 1950, that the atmosphere in China was going to be uncongenial to their thinking. There, in the British crown colony on the border of China, they set up their “window,” or at least peephole, into the awesome land they had forsaken.

And they found plenty of company there. For Hongkong had already begun swarming with “China experts” in the form of American and British diplomats, consular officials, intelligence officers, press agents, political theoreticians and economists, as well as Chinese refugees or fugitives. The Chinese refugee “experts” prospered; they found an insatiable market for their rumors and “inside information,” their compilations and analyses, their “fact sheets” and “authentic reports” mysteriously gathered about a place to which they had no access.

Since the changeover, the consular offices of Western countries in Hongkong have transacted little consular business; but anti-Chinese propaganda assignments have given them plenty to do. At times the personnel of the United States Consulate in Hongkong has been the largest of any in the world. The special agents, publicity experts and “idea men” in some cases have been indistinguishable from the “working newspapermen” in Hongkong for one very good reason; they

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have given signs, in some cases, of being the same person thriftily holding down two jobs.

The Hongkong sources on which American correspondents and press bureaus rely almost exclusively consist of:

(1) *Western Governments*. Official statements or unofficial gossip from employes of the American, British, or other foreign consulates whose job it has been, since the changeover, to prosecute the cold war as energetically as possible against the present government of China.

(2) *Anti-Peking Chinese*. Chinese emigrés who have lived in Hongkong since long before 1949 and have thoroughly absorbed the comprador mentality toward China. Most of them are British, American or Formosan subjects whose sole or principal source of income is from propaganda against the Chinese People's Republic. Among these are the compilers and publishers of "fact sheets" and "reports" which form the bases for many scholarly "surveys" of conditions in China published in the United States.

(3) *Refugees, Fugitives and Released Prisoners*. Many of these are Chinese whose enmity toward the revolution caused them to leave the country voluntarily (and without hindrance). Others are persons either of Chinese or foreign nationality wanted by Chinese authorities on charges of violating laws, or deported on similar charges. Still others are military personnel of foreign governments released after conviction and imprisonment as spies or agents of Chiang Kai-shek, who has not been reticent about boasting of his "forces on the mainland." In such cases an individual's account of life in China is not precisely unbiased.

(4) *The China Press*. Newspapers, periodicals and official government statements published in China and received in Hongkong. These, on the surface, furnish the most effective ammunition in the arsenal. They are combed minutely, day by day, for any sign of an internal problem of any sort. Since "criticism and self-criticism," or public discussion of social failings, is basic to the Chinese creed today, an abundance of such material is to be found in almost any issue of almost any Chinese publication. Whether this indicates any fundamental or serious failing in present-day Chinese society is another question.

If, for example, a regional grain harvest falls short of the predicted yield, or one item out of twenty in an industrial plan fails to achieve the stated goal, this is announced in the Chinese press and much discussion centers around it. Such "admissions" are seized upon in Hong-

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kong, and minor or partial failures are transformed into national catastrophes. The favorable news of which such items are a small qualifying part is omitted. This has been the regular method of reporting exercised by the American press all the way from the slapdash, casually irresponsible tabloids to the *New York Times* and *Christian Science Monitor*.

The *modus operandi* of this species of journalism was already familiar to Western newspapermen in Shanghai shortly after the change-over, when the foreign press corps was still doing its China reporting from China. Since few of the correspondents or bureau heads could read Chinese, translators were employed. The translator's job was to scan the Shanghai papers along with the official *Peking People's Daily*, translate the principal headlines, and list them on a sheet of paper.

This topical list might—and during the early months of the new regime probably would—include headlines reporting progress in stemming the currency inflation, agricultural gains in areas which had undergone land reform, the reopening of factories and re-employment of their workers, and so on. The Western correspondent or editor would run his eye down the list, disregard items that reflected credit on the new government, and mark one that had to do with, say, the arrest on murder charges of a landlord's strongarm overseer.

"Okay, translate that story in full, Wang," would come the command. And presently the cable would be speeding another "Chinese Terror" story to America with the Chinese press itself cited as the authority.

When the foreign press corps moved across the Hongkong border this specialized type of reporting was raised to a high art—and a considerably formalized one—through the ready availability of a whole regiment of pro-Nationalist Chinese who could render expert assistance in the "interpretation" of these selected tidbits from the Chinese press.

An illuminating example of how this process worked—and still works—was afforded by an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* of August 15, 1955. Dated Cambridge, Massachusetts, the article deals with the sojourn at Harvard of Mr. William Hsu, identified as "chief editor of the Union Press and Union News Agency in Hongkong—a growing publishing house that has become one of the most important sources of information about what's going on in China under the Communists."

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Mr. Hsu, according to the author of the *Monitor* story, Mary Handy, had been a member of "an anti-Communist underground cell" at the University of Peking. But two of his comrades in the counter-revolutionary group had repented their course, and suggested to the others that they do likewise. Then what happened?

"Mr. Hsu and his friends," the article relates, "quickly saw that things had gotten too hot—that they would have to leave. They bought railroad tickets to Hongkong." What did they do with their railroad tickets? "'We confessed we had been members of a reactionary organization,' Mr. Hsu is quoted as saying, 'and said we regretted this. Then, before anyone suspected what was going on, we boarded the train and left China.'"

Without pausing to wonder just how oppressive a "bamboo curtain" can be in a land where a confessed counter-revolutionist can buy a railroad ticket, hop a train and leave the country, let us proceed to Mr. Hsu's quoted account of what happened next:

"When we got to Hongkong we were nearly broke. But we joined friends and worked as writers and editors at odd jobs. We saved our money, started subscribing to publications from the mainland, and set up the Union Research Institute." Apparently all that is needed to set up a "research institute" on Chinese affairs is to start "subscribing to publications from the mainland." It is instructive to note, too, that Mr. Hsu and his associates, who started out nearly broke and subsisted on odd jobs, accumulated enough money to enter business in hardly any time at all.

"Today," the article continues, "the Union Publishing House is a thriving business with a staff of 150 and offices in several Southeast Asian cities." And, we are informed, it issues a variety of publications among which are "scholarly articles," as well as "*The China Weekly* that features a weekly report on what is happening on the other side of the 'bamboo curtain.'"

Just who are the customers for this avalanche of printed matter the reader is not told. But it is evident from the healthy state of Mr. Hsu's business that his clientele must be widespread. The *Monitor* describes his publishing concern as "one of the most important sources of information" about China. In short, the outpourings of an escaped counter-revolutionary who proclaims his enmity toward the present government of China is, to our press, "one of the most important sources of information" about China.

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How trustworthy is his "information," and what this means in terms of China news reporting generally, we are able to gauge from a sample quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor* story. "In March, 1954 the *People's Daily* [of Peking] reported that 200 million people—or a third of the population—lacked food," Mr. Hsu told his interviewer. This is the repetition of a myth that has become a classic in the library of anti-Chinese demonology. It was promulgated in the news columns of the *New York Times*, and through the medium of a Reuters news agency dispatch in the *Monitor*, at the time mentioned by Mr. Hsu. And this is how it was arrived at:

In November, 1953 (a few weeks before I left China) the Chinese People's Government, because of the increased demand for grain resulting from an overall rise in national purchasing power, moved to prevent speculation and profiteering in food and took over its distribution on a national scale. Much publicity was given this move in the Chinese press, including the problems and difficulties involved. The government undertook to buy from grain growers, at fixed prices, the major portion of their grain not needed for their own use and to market it to non-food growers and to farmers growing food crops other than grain.

Now, China's 100,000,000 peasant families grow various crops. Millions of them grow rice, corn, millet, wheat, and other edible grain, and others raise soyabeans or peanuts or vegetables or fruits or other foods. Still others concentrate on industrial crops like cotton or hemp or tobacco. However, despite old superstitions entertained abroad, the Chinese eat a variety of foods and, as in most other countries, few of them raise all the kinds of food they eat. Hence the need for food distribution. Grain and tea are transported to peasant families which grow vegetables and fruit, and vice versa. And to those which grow no food at all, including both the growers of industrial crops and the urban dwellers, all their food must be transported.

Food distribution on a national scale in a country as vast and as heavily populated as China is obviously a huge undertaking. "Distribution" of food means, here as anywhere, purchasing it from the grower and delivering it to the consumer. In discussing this matter the *People's Daily* in Peking stated on February 10, 1954, that, "It is undoubtedly an extremely onerous task to guarantee food at a reasonable price to an urban and rural population of 200,000,000."

How did the outstanding organs of American journalism report this

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story? Seizing upon the word "distribution" to make it appear like "relief," and seizing upon the word "onerous" for its vague implications of difficulty, the *New York Times* ran a story on March 9, 1954, headed, "1/5 OF RURAL CHINA IS SHORT OF FOOD." It attributed to the *People's Daily* the statement that "About ten percent of China's rural population is living in 'famine areas.'" Also that "the state now actually had to supply food to nearly 100,000,000 persons in the countryside"—the plain inference being that they were destitute.

In the next sentence the admission was made that "this total was said to include residents of county seats, small towns and industrial crop areas as well as other food-deficient peasants." If a farmer who raises other crops than foodstuffs is thereby a "food-deficient peasant," then millions in the United States are in a state of perpetual starvation.

This hoax was repeated two days later in the news columns of the *Christian Science Monitor*, through a Hongkong dispatch attributed to Reuters under the sensational headline, "FAMINE STALKS RED CHINA."

"Communist China has conceded officially," said the opening sentence, "that almost half the country's 450,000,000 people are receiving government food relief for famine. A copy of the *Peking People's Daily* reaching here disclosed that 200,000,000 people are being supplied now with food." The author of the story did not state whether he himself had dug his breakfast out of his own land that morning, or also was being "supplied with food" and thus "receiving food relief for famine."

To this bit of deception the *Monitor* story added another, based on "unofficial reports" and "other reports reaching Hongkong." These otherwise unidentified reports brought the allegation that "the Communist government has imposed a complete ban on the sale and production of polished rice in the country," and that only unpolished rice was available. As everyone knows, with the possible exception of Hongkong dispatch-writers, the polishing of rice removes most of its nutritive value, and doctors and dietitians in the United States have been loudly beseeching every one for decades to eat unpolished rice (or whole wheat bread instead of white bread) for the sake of their health. In old China the short life span and the small stature of many of the people, particularly the rice-eaters of the south, have been attributed at least partly to polished rice as a staple diet item. China's "Communist government," singularly enough, was the only government in the

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world sufficiently concerned about its people's welfare to discourage an ancient dietary habit injurious to their health.

Since I was still living in China when the "complete ban on the sale and production of polished rice" supposedly went into effect, I can report from personal experience that, while most Chinese appeared to feel that the eating of unpolished rice was to their personal benefit as well as a means of increasing the total amount of rice available, there was no such thing as a "complete ban."

The entire business of food distribution at fixed prices, be it noted, is a matter of taste as to who shall do the distributing and who shall make how much profit. In the United States the wholesale price of milk is fixed by either the state or federal government and the retail price by agreement among the dairy companies. For milk that is priced for the farmer at from eight to twelve cents a quart when it issues from the cow, the housewife pays twenty-four or twenty-five cents. Grain worth a fraction of a cent a pound when harvested brings from twenty to twenty-five cents at retail under free enterprise.

It was to eliminate the middle-handling, the manipulating, the speculating and profiteering on food that the Chinese government took over its distribution. Under this system the "two hundred million people now being supplied with food" pay for what they get, just as scores of millions supplied with food by business interests here pay for it. But you would never know it from reading our newspapers.*

The "food shortage" myth was repeated a year later by the *New York Times*, and possibly will become an annual feature as regularly to be looked for as that paper's spring editorial lauding the integrity of the free press. In its 1955 version the story appeared on April 24, in the form of a Hongkong dispatch by Mr. Tad Szulc. The factual nub of this story, as cabled by Mr. Szulc, was that the Chinese government had been "announcing recently a series of measures to improve production"; that the goal was an increase of ten million tons of grain

*On September 8, 1955 the *People's Daily* in Peking, commenting on the purchase and distribution of grain, noted that a good summer harvest had been reaped in many areas and a good autumn harvest was in sight. "This year's grain production in China," the paper stated, "is estimated at 180,400,000 tons. The estimated figure for 1957 is 192,800,000 tons, or 12,400,000 tons more than this year. State purchases will remain unchanged for three years, even though the output of grain is expected to increase. Every peasant in China will, it is estimated, have 25 more kilograms of grain in 1957 than in 1955, or every household approximately 100 kilograms more. If the production plan is overfulfilled, the peasants will keep still more grain for themselves."

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over 1954; that the newly formed Agricultural Bank of China would make loans to individual peasants as well as to farming cooperatives and state enterprises; and that peasants were being urged to use high-quality seeds in their planting.

To this report the *Times* gave the headline: "RED CHINA IN GRIP OF SPRING FAMINE." And this is the paragraph with which the story was introduced: "Signs of a spring famine in Communist China are filtering from the mainland. At the same time the Peiping Government is showing a growing concern over the long-range agricultural picture."

These alarming conclusions, and a few others like them, were based on the following sources in the dispatch: (a) "persons [unnamed] who have crossed the border to this colony"; (b) "A Canadian missionary [unnamed] recently arrived from Shanghai"; (c) "experts here" [anonymous]; (d) statements culled from Chinese publications in which government officials reiterated their basic national policy that the socialization of agriculture must proceed gradually and voluntarily.

On the basis of such statements, and of the unidentified voices whispering into his ear, the correspondent drew a picture of "food shortages" and "famine." Government officials were encouraging the peasants to produce more grain. Therefore there must be "shortages." Measures such as agricultural loans and the distribution of more productive seed were being employed—ergo, there must be a famine.

The *Times* returned to the subject three months later—on July 30, 1955—in what was essentially a rewrite of the previous year's story ("1/5 of Rural China is Short of Food"). This time the "news peg" was a report to the National People's Congress by Deputy Premier Chen Yun. What he reported, as a scrutiny of the *Times* dispatch itself would reveal, was that China had produced 1,300,000 more tons of grain in 1954 than in the preceding year despite almost unprecedented floods; that the country had "sufficient grain to eat and dispose of"; that China was able to export grain as it had been doing since 1950; and that domestic use and export of the crop did not leave, in Chen Yun's own words, "much of a surplus."

All these facts were included in the *Times* dispatch itself, but so effectively minimized, buried, or larded over with "interpretation" that they were discernible only to the trained eye of a professional journalist or a propaganda analyst. Upon this report of progress in China's agricultural program the *Times* bestowed the headline: "Many in China

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in Need of Grain." And the correspondent, borrowing liberally from the *Times'* "famine" story of a year earlier, began his dispatch thus: "Almost one-fifth of China's peasant population must buy grain from the state because of natural calamities or individual shortages, according to Deputy Premier Chen Yun." Individual shortages? Well, millions of Chinese didn't raise any grain—so they were "short!" And to prove that they were in desperate circumstances, they had to buy it from the "state"—the only distributor of grain since November, 1953, as we have seen!

A few weeks before the appearance of this example of responsible journalism—on May 30, 1955, that is—the *Times* printed an editorial lamenting what it termed the "spring famine" and "rural starvation" in China, ending on this lofty note: "It is clear, however, that the Chinese Communists are learning that promises of future industrial greatness cannot substitute for present food, and that hunger cannot be assuaged by government edict."

Quite so. Neither can it be created by verbal legerdemain.

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The foundations upon which these tales are based seldom vary: the well-coached "refugee"; the escaped counter-revolutionary selling anti-Chinese propaganda for a living; the faceless "expert" whose identity or whose very existence cannot for some mysterious reason be established; the doctored-up version of reports in Chinese newspapers or official documents. To such tainted testimony the press has thrown open its columns in a solemn-faced pretense that it is purveying "news" from China.

A massive headline in the *New York Post* of February 23, 1955, screamed: "MAO KILLED 15 MILLION CHINESE, EXPERT SAYS." The "expert" is Mr. Walter Robertson, whose main assignment as Mr. Dulles' Assistant Secretary of State at that time was to labor at resuscitating Chiang Kai-shek's collapsing fortunes. The sources for his story were unspecified "reports"; the occasion was an appearance at a Congressional hearing designed to drum up public sentiment for increased military appropriations, during which annual process traditionally anything goes. The editors responsible for this hysterical

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headline must have known the nature of Mr. Robertson's qualifications as a China "expert" and the probable degree of truth or nonsense in his performance. In the normal practice of responsible journalism such a statement would have been shrugged off or ridiculed. But "MAO KILLED 15 MILLION," in extra bold Gothic, makes a feverish headline. And feverish headlines not only sell newspapers, but in such matters carry a vague impression of fiery patriotism.

In its more staid manner, *The Christian Science Monitor* joined in with a series of articles by another Robertson. Basing his figures on the Chinese press, Mr. Frank Robertson added together all reports of Chinese arrested for crimes ranging from petty graft to kidnapping and murder, threw in the regiments of Kuomintang troops mopped up by the People's Liberation Army after the departure of Chiang, used the stock mistranslation of the Chinese term for destroying the military effectiveness of a body of troops—that is, killed, captured and dispersed—and emerged triumphantly with the allegation that millions of innocent Chinese had been "purged."

Along with this myth, tirelessly promoted by the newspapers and doubtless accepted by millions in Western lands, goes another: the "slave labor" legend. Like the "purge," it is useful to those interested in maintaining the impression that China is ruled by men so inhuman that there could be no possibility of living peacefully in the same world with her. This, if true, would certainly be of the utmost seriousness in a world where, as President Eisenhower has said, there can be "no alternative to peace."

For a demonstration of the technique whereby the "Chinese slave labor" story is purveyed to the American public in the guise of news and commentary, let us follow Mr. Egon Kaskaline, author of an article in *The Christian Science Monitor* of November 2, 1954, headlined:

Soviet Pattern

SLAVES PRODUCE FOR MAO

This headline, calculated to put the reader in an exorcistic frame of mind by linking the detestable idea of slavery with the Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung and then with the onerous "Soviet Pattern," need not be attributed to Mr. Kaskaline. Newspaper writers generally are not responsible for their headlines. Nevertheless it reflects accurately the tone and purpose of the piece.

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That tone and purpose were set forth by Kaskaline in his leading paragraph, furnishing an admirable example of journalistic objectivity: "Communist China has adopted one of the ugliest features of Communist dictatorship by establishing a slave labor organization."

Having succeeded in crowding into one sentence of less than twenty words the time-tested fright symbols of "slave labor," "dictatorship," and "Communist" (twice), with the epithet "ugliest" added for the benefit of the dull-witted, the author proceeded to announce in his next paragraph that:

"Official documents, published by the Communist government, report that numerous forced labor camps have been set up all over Communist China. Slave laborers, counting probably millions of men and women, already are making important contributions. . . ."

In his third paragraph Mr. Kaskaline assured his readers that "Mass internment of 'enemies of the people' began immediately after the Communists took over. Yet it is apparently only now that political prisoners are being used as slave laborers on a large scale."

It was in his fourth paragraph, however, that his startling exposé mounted to its climax. Here he divulged the source of his confidential information about "slave labor" in China. "Regulations Governing Labor Service for Reform, published September 7," he wrote, "and other documents which have come into the hands of western experts show how thoroughly the Chinese Communists are imitating the Soviet model."

It was upon China's own documents, then, that he based his allegations and the atmosphere of guilt by association with the Russians—"the Chinese Communists are imitating the Soviet model." The fact that "Regulations Governing Labor Service for Reform" was printed literally by the hundreds of thousands and circulated both in and outside China seems hardly worth mentioning, since copies of it doubtless did come, as Mr. Kaskaline darkly phrased it, "into the hands of western experts," whether they got them by writing to Peking or by picking them up at the American or the British consulate in Hongkong.

But what did these Chinese documents, once in the hands of "western experts," reveal to justify Mr. Kaskaline's accusations? What secrets did they lay bare that enabled him to write about "millions of slave laborers" in China? Here is his answer: "The number of inmates of the Chinese labor camps is not disclosed."

The lack of tangible facts in paragraph five of his story did not

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disconcert him, however, for he had on call another sure source for this kind of journalism. "Unofficial estimates," his story continued, "place the figure at several millions, citing as their authority such statements as the following from the September 7 *People's Daily* in Peking."

He then proceeded to quote what he alleged to be passages from the newspaper mentioned:

"A nationwide campaign has resulted in the arrest of large numbers of bandits, despots, special-service agents, backbone elements of reactionary parties and corps, and leaders of reactionary societies and religious organizations. These elements have been sentenced to prison terms, deprived of their political rights, and eventually organized in labor corps where they carry out their reform through forced labor."

And so, with hardly any effort at all, the *Christian Science Monitor's* writer had taken a Chinese press discussion of the arrest of assorted criminals in "large numbers," and had blown this up into "several millions" with the aid of "western experts" and their "unofficial estimates."

What had really happened?

For years since the *San Fan-Wu Fan* drives of 1951 and 1952 and even before, the new government had been rounding up racketeers, gangsters, armed insurrectionists, business bribe-givers and bribe-takers, and intelligence agents sent in by Chiang Kai-shek and some of his friends. These had been put on trial, and those convicted had been sent to prison. The mysterious "document" produced by Mr. Kaskaline, supposedly revealing a portentous new development in what he called the "organization of a slave-labor system," was in fact a routine report by Lo Jui-ching, Minister of Public Security, on the handling of these convicts. Kaskaline's quotation from the *Peking People's Daily* (a copy of which is before me as I write, and the excerpt turns out to be not from a news report about the "Regulations on Reform Through Labor," but from an editorial) is badly translated, or perhaps successfully mistranslated, to give it imputations which it did not carry.

As a matter of fact, when one compares his quotations with the original text in the *People's Daily*, one can begin to see how the omission of a few sentences, plus a few mistranslations of Chinese characters, produces meanings quite different from what the original statements contained.

In short, just as *The New York Times'* Mr. Szulc had taken a government report reflecting marked progress in agriculture, operated

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on it with scissors and paste, disguised it with the grease paint of "interpretation," and presented it as a confession of failure and distress, *The Monitor's* Mr. Kaskaline had performed similar surgery on Lo's report and sought to transform it into an admission of wholesale atrocity upon innocents. What such press stories represent is an application of the technique of "Great-heavens-look-what-they're-doing-now!" What they are doing now may well be what is properly, beneficially and universally done. But pointing an indignant finger at it while uttering exclamations of pious horror couched in "Red Peril" cliches can convince many readers that it constitutes a dreadful crime.

As regards "forced labor" in China, there is certainly a system of compulsory work for convicted criminals, as there is in other nations throughout the world, including the United States, Britain, Canada, France, the Soviet Union, Belgium, Sweden, and so on. Modern penology emphasizes the therapeutic value of work for prison inmates. The laws of the United States, like those of almost every nation in the world, prescribe imprisonment "at hard labor" for most categories of convicted criminals. One difference between such "forced labor" in America and "forced labor" in China is that American prison inmates receive next to nothing for their work while those in China are paid prevailing wages and in many cases support dependents at home on their earnings.

These facts about prison labor in China are easily accessible to any Western journalist who might be interested in them.* But no doubt it is more advantageous to conform to the official mythology. Thus in "good" countries the universal institution of compulsory labor by criminals is a natural and wholesome thing; in "Communist" countries it is a crime against humanity.

*A *New York Times* dispatch published August 13, 1956, from Lanchow, China, strikingly answered the "forced labor" charge. The author was identified by the *Times* as "David Chipp, a British correspondent of Reuters, who has just completed a 5,000-mile round trip from Peiping to the northwest of China." Describing a huge development project in the northwest, Mr. Chipp wrote:

"If there is forced labor, then it is nowhere apparent either in attitude of the workers or in the pace at which they work." He also quoted Chinese officials as saying that in such undertakings "unwilling labor would be a drawback rather than an asset."

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WHO "BRAINWASHES" WHOM?

One of the most heavily exploited myths of the cold war was blown up with a shattering bang in February, 1956, in the pages of the conservative weekly, *U. S. News & World Report*.

Its issue of February 24 carried a long interview with Major William E. Mayer, an Army psychiatrist who had spent four years in Korea and at home studying "brainwashing." "His conclusions," the editors of the magazine noted, "are based on detailed questioning of nearly 1,000 U. S. soldiers who were captured in Korea and underwent brainwashing at the hands of Chinese Communists."

Major Mayer was quoted in the interview as saying that American prisoners of war in the hands of the Chinese "were not subjected to physical torture, according to their own statements."

The verbatim interview, presented in the form of a series of questions and answers, continued:

"Q. So you don't count torture as an essential part of brainwashing?"

"A. Definitely not."

In answering the question, "Then what is brainwashing?", the psychiatrist replied: "It is not the third degree. It is not an inhuman system of unnamed tortures and magic designed to 'destroy the mind' and will."

A little farther on he is quoted as follows:

"As long as we understand precisely that by brainwashing we are

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simply using a coined word to apply to an indoctrination and education process, I can say that every prisoner-holding power in every major war has engaged in this kind of activity. This is permitted under the Geneva Convention. The Communists simply went about it more intensively, more systematically."

Toward the end of the session the interviewer asked: "Did they [the Chinese] try to make prisoners into Communists?" The answer:

"Never. One of the largest areas of public misunderstanding has related to just this problem. It seems clear, from the things the prisoners said, that not only was no attempt made to convert them to Communism, but, in fact, any prisoner who even suggested joining them physically was very promptly and emphatically dissuaded. They made quite a show about this."

The article ended with a "disclaimer" stating that the opinions expressed by Major Mayer "do not necessarily represent the view of the U. S. Army." His statements can nevertheless be regarded as definitive. Not only were they made by a fully qualified authority, but it is inconceivable that they could have appeared in print without the cognizance of the Pentagon.

This official repudiation of the "brainwashing" myth, one of the harshest accusations flung at the Chinese, came after five years of its constant employment. Time and again, when conditions had begun to look favorable for some meaningful move toward settling differences and bringing order and stability into American-Chinese relations, the legend had been trotted out as an excuse for prolonging enmity. The Chinese "tortured" American prisoners; how could they be admitted into the company of civilized nations?

The accusers somehow failed to notice that many American prisoners, returning home, denied stories of mistreatment when speaking of their own free will, although not when speaking under the eye of public-relations officers. Some had no opportunity to speak at all, but were kept incommunicado on reaching American soil and hustled to military hospitals for mental "reconditioning."

Meanwhile in the mass-circulation periodical *This Week* for July 17, 1955, A. E. Hotchner, an outstanding freelance writer, quoted with evident Pentagon approval the findings of Army Intelligence that "no American military prisoner was 'brainwashed' during the Korean War."

Still another article debunking the "brainwash-torture" myth, and based on official U. S. Army findings, appeared in *Look* magazine for June 26, 1956. Written by Dr. Julius Segal, a psychologist, on the basis of an investigation conducted for the Department of the Army, the article states that, "The Communist captors in Korean prison camps used no hypnotic powers to influence our men; nor did they in some mysterious fashion 'wash their brains' clean of Americanism to replace it with the Communist faith."



So much for the “brainwash-torture” myth as applied by the press to American military personnel. In the case of American civilians imprisoned in China, similar techniques have been employed.

Most American civilians, on arriving in Hongkong after their release, have been received into the waiting arms of State Department representatives and given some intensive coaching, after which they issued statements about their “suffering” and “mistreatment.” When any declined these ministrations—and some did—their refusal to speak the desired piece was quickly attributed to “brainwashing.”

Such a case was that of Mrs. Adele Austin Rickett, who arrived in Hongkong late in February, 1955 after three and a half years’ imprisonment for espionage under the guise, as she related, of a Fulbright scholar.



But it is in the broader use of the “brainwashing” slogan—that is, as implying hypnotic or compulsory control of the thinking of an entire people—that the American press has done its most thorough job. The concept, as used for this purpose, is as vague as chlorophyll and as all-embracing as the benefits of the right deodorant. Anything under the sun can be explained by it or linked with it.

Thus, if the Chinese people rally around the leaders who led them to freedom from the Kuomintang, it is because they have been “brainwashed.” If they follow their lead in turning away from medieval farming methods to join agricultural cooperatives and treble their income, the explanation is easy: “brainwashed.” And so too with the thousands of scholars, writers and intellectuals who, having compared the despoliation of their country under Chiang Kai-shek with her new health and dignity under the government led by Mao Tse-tung, have decided to embrace the latter. “Brainwashed!”

In the pages of the widely respected weekly, *The Nation*, there appeared in the spring of 1955 an article epitomizing an intellectualized version of the “brainwashing” myth. This article was written by Mr. Kingsley Martin, editor of the *London New Statesman and Nation*. His conclusions in some respects parallel those of the staff press agents of the American State Department and the China Lobby, but he possessed the advantage of having made his observations inside new China. His general report was far from being all, or even prepon

derantly, negative. He found no evidence to support what he identified as "the Honkong-American view of divisions, discontents, and instability in China." He discounted heavily the stories of "mass liquidations," pointing out that "liquidated" meaning killed, was a mistranslation of a speech by a Chinese general who boasted that two million enemies had been "rendered harmless," and noting the inclusion of numbers of criminals and "ex-Kuomintang soldiers in southern China who had refused to surrender their arms."

Even in the area of his main theme, that of "brainwashing," Mr. Martin discredited much of what is purveyed in the popular press on this subject. Yet he clung to his own version of the "brainwashing" slur, and did so on two specific grounds. One was the tales of dissident or partially converted intellectuals, admittedly holdovers from the Kuomintang regime, whose testimony he seems mainly to have sought on the subject. He accepted their stories of physical and mental torture though unsupported by any observed evidence. In my four active years as a journalist in China during the present regime I never encountered such evidence; and since no disinterested person has ever claimed to have witnessed any, the hearsay stories which Mr. Martin relies upon must remain highly questionable.*

But his chief reason for the accusation of "brainwashing" arose from broader considerations. Mr. Martin complained that political and propaganda pressures were exerted on the Chinese people in order to make them believe certain things. This is undoubtedly true—just as it has been true in every major country of the world, including England and the United States, since the beginning of the cold war. One man's "brainwashing" is another's "loyalty-security program." The American thought-control apparatus that has invaded schools, churches, the press, trade unions and the home, scandalized our allies, and excited bitter protest from courageous scholars and jurists, clergymen and plain people at home, can scarcely have escaped his notice.

*Lo Jui-ching, Minister of Public Security, in an address to the National People's Congress in June, 1956, acknowledged that some unjustified arrests had been made on the ground of counter-revolutionary offenses, and that some of those wrongly arrested had been convicted and jailed. "We arrested some against whom warrants might well have been withheld rather than issued, and in a few cases we even arrested some persons who should not have been arrested." Criticizing these injustices, he stated that "some have already been rectified and others are in process of being corrected." Security Minister Lo added that physical mistreatment of prisoners is forbidden by state policy.

Tung Pi-wu, President of the Supreme People's Court, described to the Congress a current policy of "greater leniency" on the part of the courts in view of substantial success achieved in combating counter-revolutionary activity.

The only question then, if we are to accept Mr. Martin's terms, is, who is to "brainwash" whom, and to what purpose? He noted in his Nation article that what he referred to as "brainwashing" was called "re-education" by the Chinese. And that, from my own extensive observation, is exactly what it is: education away from old ideas that made their country a land of misery toward new ideas that offer hope and realized achievement. This departure from the old toward the new is the path the Chinese have chosen for themselves. It is not the path prescribed for them by the Western intellectual liberal. And this is the one thing that the Western intellectual liberal, in all his self-righteousness, cannot endure.

The trouble is, of course, that the leaders of China's revolution do not happen to share Mr. Martin's opinion as to the moral superiority or even the common sense of what he identifies as the "liberal tradition." Being men and women of intellect too, they are not unacquainted with this tradition. They happen to regard it, with its abdication of active moral choice, its compulsion toward safe respectability, its well-bred suspicion of the submerged man and anxious concern for the rights of his most brutal oppressors, as a destructive and self-defeating ethic. They have noticed no deterrent effect exerted by the "liberal tradition" on the Western cycle of militarism, wars, depressions and moral decay over a period of two hundred years. Above all they have seen it ineffectual in retarding the procession of foreign gunboats to the Whangpoo River. They have chosen to believe that there must be a better way.

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