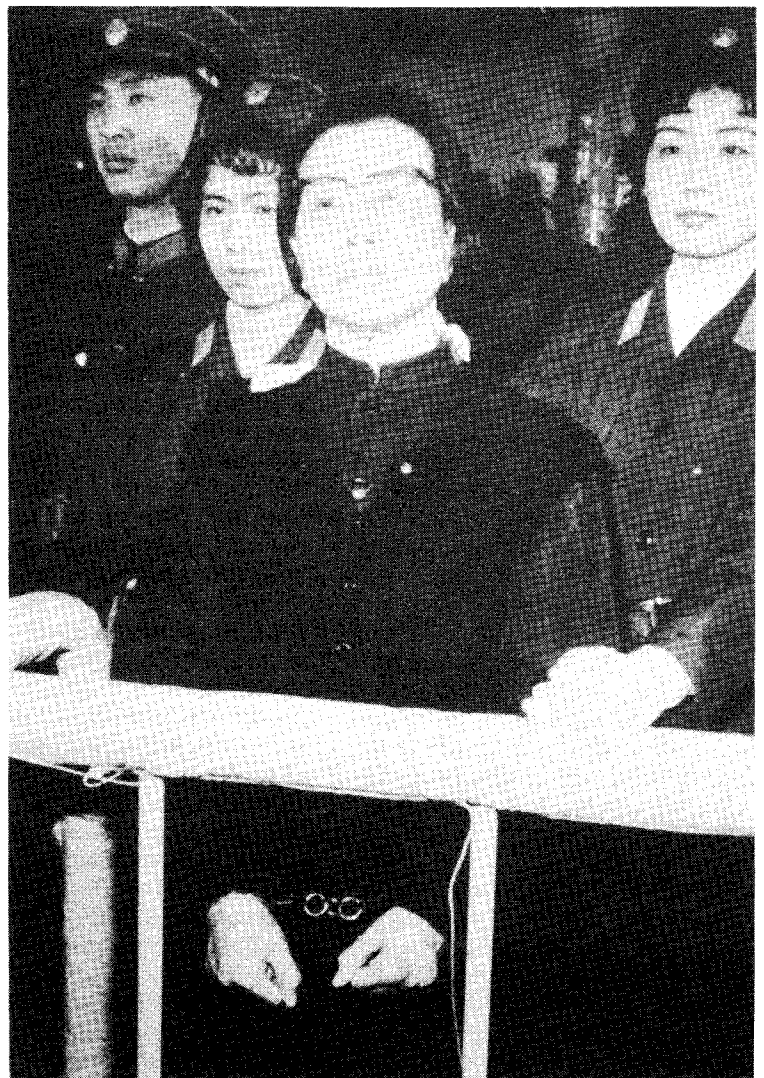




Chiang Ching at her trial: "If I have to admit to anything I can only say I lost in this round of struggle for political power... It is not I, but your small gang which is on trial in the court of history."



# THE WEAPON OF CRITICISM

## “To Get Rich Is Glorious” Recent Books on Capitalist China

by Y. B.

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### **To Get Rich Is Glorious**

by Orville Schell (New American Library, 1986)

### **Chen Village: The Recent History of a Peasant Village in Mao's China**

by Anita Chan, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Ungar (University of California Press, 1984)

### **La société chinoise après Mao: Entre autorité et modernité**

C. Aubert, et al. (Fayard, 1986)

Of the books reviewed here, it is Orville Schell's readable account which certainly delivers the meatiest offering; his slices of life in contemporary China and frequent contrasts of this with Mao's epoch will be food for thought especially for those who are still trying to sort out events which have followed the death of Mao and the subsequent rise to power of Deng Xiaoping. Schell's book does not pretend to be an overall summation of the post-Mao period, however, nor does it attempt to mount any sort of thoroughgoing challenge to the current regime. Indeed, Schell himself is quite obviously torn by the direction of events in China since Mao's death and does not appear to have any kind of systematically worked-out summation of what has happened and why. What he does have is an evident sympathy with the Chinese masses, a profound conviction that with the revolution in 1949 "the Chinese people stood up," as Mao put it, and a creeping feeling that they are now in increasing danger of being shoved back down.

Schell's book is formed around his observations during a few recent trips to the People's Republic of China which took him through a number of the main cities, combined with accounts of the countryside gathered from a number of long-standing "friends of China" such as William Hinton, author of the classic account of revolution in a Chinese village, *Fanshen*. The book is anecdotal; it mingles statistics on agricultural production with quotes from major speeches of the current leadership and conversations with Chinese people who Schell sought out on his trips. Though particularly the conversations are weighted — the Chinese quoted here cannot be said to be representative of a cross-section of Chinese society, as they are mostly in the areas and jobs most accessible to a foreign journalist — even so what Schell manages to draw from this material is a picture that will give rise to sadness, and rage, in the heart of anyone who was ever truly inspired by the Chinese masses' tortuous battle to throw the weight of imperialism off their backs and build a new China.

It is a story, above all, of restoration: of the dismantling of "socialist new things" and the return of the ugly sores that so disfigured the old China, things which many, including Schell himself, thought had disappeared from the Chinese landscape forever. His book opens with an account of his first sighting ever of a pedicab in the PRC: "These small, rickshaw-like conveyances, which are powered by a man on a bicycle rather than on foot, had long been banned in China. The image of one human being straining on a bicycle to haul another human being around was one that came too close

*Reactionary subjects like this Buddha and other demons, ghosts and mummies are once again the vogue among artists in China.*



to suggesting the old exploitative society the Communists had set out to transform with their revolution. But sensitivity to such socialist niceties is evidently on the wane, for as I watched, a potato-shaped woman, carrying several net bags bulging with food and packages, rudely tapped the driver on the chest with her fan and woke him up. After haggling over the price, she heaved her bulk into the pedicab and barked an order, and a moment later they were off, the calf muscles of the driver flexing as he strained to get his vehicle moving."

These "tails of capitalism" as they were called in socialist China appear throughout Schell's book. He notes, for example, the explosion in demand for notary publics; in 1982 there were more than 400 million new economic contracts signed in China along with a plethora of wills as people seek to ensure the inheritance of their newly gained private property. A few years earlier there had been very few of such things.

Schell devotes ample discussion to an element at the core of the new economic programme of the Chinese government: the *zeren zhi*, or "responsibility system." Ma Hong, president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, explained: "In the past, we overemphasised collective leadership and slighted individual responsibility; the result was that everyone was nominally responsible but no one actually assumed responsibility. This has now begun to change." Schell recounts that, "when I asked an elderly peasant guarding a heap of watermelons he had brought in from the countryside to sell at a market in

Peking what was meant by the responsibility system, he furrowed his brow at first, and then a pleased smile creased his face. 'It means we can do what we want,' he replied.'

Indeed, so far as the new system is concerned, each person is "responsible" principally for himself — as in any system where commodity production prevails. For workers in industry, as *La société chinoise après Mao* notes, this has meant efforts to return to the piece-rates abolished at the end of the 1950s, individual labour contracts and now, following the most recent Central Committee meeting in September 1986, even large-scale layoffs. After all, each factory must be "responsible" for itself and, above all, for its profits! In agriculture, this same logic has led to perhaps the most dramatic transformation of all: the decollectivisation of the land.

It is above all in agriculture that the Chinese leadership has touted the success of their reforms, as they boast of rich peasants springing up throughout the countryside, buying colour televisions, building new homes, going on vacations to Tokyo, and so forth. Schell believes, along with the authors of the other books here, that there has been a definite and marked increase in agricultural production, at least in a number of areas. To no small extent this may be due to the unusually good weather that has prevailed in China for the past few years. As for the reforms, their overall impact is, however, far from clear. It is possible, even very likely, that they have in fact stimulated growth of a certain kind, but as Schell reveals, there is an ominous side to this. For example, while Deng and Co. present themselves as the champions of modernisation (especially in opposition to Mao and the "Gang of Four" whom they accuse of wanting to keep China backwards), decollectivisation of the land spells certain doom for mechanisation and hence of modernisation in agriculture, the foundation of the Chinese economy. Schell quotes Hinton on mechanisation: "Actually, most of these big machines are white elephants anyway. Since fields have been divided up again into small plots,

there is no way the peasants can use elaborate farm machinery. In fact, it's hard for most farmers to justify any kind of mechanised equipment. Except for small grain-grinding machines and transport vehicles, there is now virtually no agricultural mechanisation. It may have been the first of China's Four Modernisations but, as far as I can see, it is dead in the water."

The authors of *Chen Village* report that, "The peasantry of a prosperous village in Jiangsu province feared that dividing the large collective fields would play havoc with the irrigation networks they had built up and would be poorly suited to the mechanisation they had installed," and so resisted the decollectivisation order. (Schell relates that the Chinese themselves "have facetiously concocted their own version of the Four Modernisations: the elite-isation of the cadres; the freedom-isation of the peasants; the bonus-isation of the workers; and the diploma-isation of the intellectuals.")

So even insofar as production itself is concerned, the revisionists' modernisation programme, by redividing the land and relying on unleashing the "enterprising" or rich peasant in the countryside, has

in fact created insuperable barriers, in the context of China, to any long-term growth in production. Such growth depends on the socialist consciousness and organisation of the masses of peasantry, including even in order to realise mechanisation. As Mao pointed out, "In agriculture, with things as they are in our country, cooperation must precede the use of big mechanisation." ("On the Cooperative Transformation of Agriculture") This was actually at the heart of one of the first all-out battles that Mao had to wage against the capitalist-roaders in the 1950s. It also reveals the accuracy of Mao's analysis of the capitalist-roaders in China when he pointed out that one of their characteristics was having opposed the cooperative transformation of agriculture — though at the time certainly some people abroad doubted that there were those in the Chinese party who would seriously attempt to undo collectivisation itself.

Decollectivisation also goes hand-in-hand with an end to relying on the masses to consciously plan production. Today instead the peasant plants according to the logic of the marketplace. One result of this discussed by Schell is that land is being rapidly pulled out of production

*American-born hotel owner has opened China's first deluxe hotel. "I'm making a revolution," he says, "and I'll show them what service is all about."*





*Capitulation and idolizing of the West stretches from high Party leaders to Peking's clinics: cosmetic surgery to give women "double eyelids" common to Western features has skyrocketed in recent years. Only one eye is done at a time.*

of grain, and converted to the production of more lucrative cash crops like cotton, tobacco, fruits and vegetables, etc. While increased production of higher-priced goods contributes to an apparent rise in overall agricultural production, it disguises a potential long-term disaster for the Chinese economy. For the practice long established under Mao had been to take grain as the key link in agricultural production, and this was founded on a solid basis. After all, feeding people in a planned and expanding way is a key task. The undoing of socialist policies regarding grain cannot be compensated for by simply relying on the market mechanism to encourage productivity by raising prices — and even if it could, rising grain prices would lead to further disaster. The poorer workers — and polarisation is certainly increasing in the cities too — would be left unable to afford the grain, and inflation, rampant in pre-revolutionary China, would be pushed ahead. But if the current regime doesn't let grain prices rise, then land will continue to be taken out of grain production, giving rise to shortages and hunger.

Secondly, grain surpluses were a key to protecting the masses of peasants against natural disasters — which in pre-revolutionary China

frequently resulted in the poorer peasants, who had no reserves, going into debt and then being locked in a cycle of debt/repayment with the landlords. Similarly, grain surpluses were a key link in the Chinese revolutionaries' defense strategy against potential imperialist invasion, which was signalled by the slogan of "dig tunnels deep, store grain everywhere, and never seek hegemony." Grain storage was to facilitate people's war, enabling the masses to hold out in the countryside and wage guerrilla war under conditions of imperialist attack. These agricultural policies undermining the only means the Chinese could hope to resist imperialism — like the revisionists' substitution of a strategy of relying on importing advanced technology to gear up its military machine so as to fight "a war of steel" — only made it inevitable that the new Chinese rulers see themselves unable to do anything but capitulate.

Schell illustrates vividly how decollectivisation has unleashed the furies of private interest throughout the countryside. The collective system had, besides being an important basis for forming a revolutionary world-view, also enabled the peasants to overcome many of the wasteful practices associated with

the feudal family-oriented production. Schell recounts how, for instance, crops are protected now that the collectives are dismantled; in the words of a Western observer who went to Long Bow, the village discussed in *Fanshen*: "All over the countryside, you see little guard shacks in the fields, where peasants now have to spend the night watching their crops. Not only do they have to work all day farming but they have to stay up all night as well. And by the time harvest season approaches, you can feel the tension in the air. As soon as one family starts gathering its crops, everyone else in the area is forced to begin also. It's like a wind that sweeps across the land. No peasant wants to be the only one with crops still out in the field, because he knows he is just setting himself up to be robbed." Besides the waste of labour, this is also wasteful because peasants are tending to harvest crops before they have fully ripened.

A fever of property-grabbing spread in the wake of decollectivisation, with extremely harmful results. "In the rural areas," William Hinton told Schell, "people are ripping apart and dividing up everything they can get their hands on. They figure that if things are being parcellled out, they better get in there and get their share before someone else does." A social scientist told Schell how in Long Bow, the peasants had gone so far as to strip apart the motors for the irrigation system built by collective labour, and sold parts such as the copper wire from the generators on the "free market." The governing logic was that if they didn't someone else would, and besides, part of *their* labour had gone into building it in the first place.

How much resistance there is to all this is unclear. But there is resistance. In *Chen Village*, one peasant recounts how decollectivisation was greeted in another nearby village in Guangdong: "The peasants were literally forced to do it. In fact, one peasant (in my team) was so angry he refused to go draw lots for the parcels of land he was entitled to.... Before people weren't as worried as they are now; ... they felt sure of having something to eat in the end.

But now (1982), with the land all distributed, they feel financially insecure.... Everyone I know in Xinhui County dislikes the new policies. People practically go around saying, 'Down with Deng Xiaoping.'" Similarly, in the cities, a study for the World Bank (cited in *La société chinoise après Mao*) reports that in response to the Deng regime's assault on "egalitarianism" and its attempts to promote material incentives such as piece rates, etc., "the egalitarianist pressures basically come from the workers themselves. Too big a difference among the workers is poorly accepted. This is why an attempt in 1981 to restore piece-rates was met by failure." They also note that "to be a cadre in industry these days 'is like sitting on a volcano.'"

Resistance is also appearing to another institution from the old society which Schell notes is making a remarkable comeback: the tax code. Having unleashed commodity production everywhere the revisionists are working feverishly to put in place a vast tax-collecting bureaucracy. Even Western experts are, however, pessimistic about compliance, especially in the countryside. The head of the tax office has complained of several hundred incidents of physical assaults on his tax collectors, including where they have been paraded before jeering crowds through village streets.

Schell provides numerous examples of how what Western social scientists call the "social safety net" is disappearing from beneath the Chinese masses. The number covered by organised cooperative medical systems has dropped from 80-90% in 1979 to only 40-45% today. *Chen Village* reports how its own medical facility was sold during decollectivisation to a doctor who promptly doubled the prices for a basic vaccination. Hinton, looking over these developments and especially the situation of the poorer peasants, the old, etc., observes that, "What I am more concerned about is who is going to take care of people if there are floods, droughts, or famines, or if the rural economy suddenly goes sour. If any of these things happen — which is not impossible — there are going to be a lot

of people back out on the roads begging, with no place to go and nothing to eat.' He paused, and then remarked, somewhat fatalistically, 'If you ask me, a situation like that would put China back pretty close to the way it was before 1949.'"

In the last half of his book, Schell goes particularly into the relations of China with foreign countries and the way Chinese people now look at these. He tells of talking with a host at one of the fancier Chinese hotels, who turned out to be a Party member and a former People's Liberation Army soldier. The host, named Chen, informed Schell that "his boss" came from Hong Kong. Schell: "Do any members of your Chinese staff resent having to work under foreign managers?" I asked, still trying to adjust to Chen's use of the word 'boss,' a term I had never heard in China except to refer to such unacceptable categories of people as 'capitalist bosses' or 'Soviet bosses.'

"No. Why should they?" replied Chen, with a surprised look on his face. 'They are good managers... Besides, if we had a Chinese hotel manager, we would have more trouble restricting local people from coming in and wandering around as they pleased.'

"It was amazing to hear a Chinese speak of 'restricting local people,' not because it was an unusual practice, but because few official Chinese ever discuss the subject with foreigners so unselfconsciously. Chen, however, acknowledged it without any suggestion of hesitation or circumspection, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for a Chinese hotelier — who was working in a country that was at least theoretically 'under the dictatorship of the proletariat' — to want to keep his countrymen out of his hotel lest they scuff up the rugs and wear out the furniture. The fact that Chen felt no evident uneasiness with this whole concept suggested the degree to which local employees in these new hothouse areas of foreign comfort and convenience may have internalised the values of their clients."

In the domain of China's relations with the rest of the world restoration has meant exactly this kind of

restoration of kowtowing to imperialism, complete with the old "No Chinese Allowed" admonitions. Chinese repeatedly told Schell how things Chinese were inferior to those from the West; the head of one Chinese hotel responded to a criticism that his hotel had "no Chinese flavour" by saying, "What is Chinese flavour anyway these days? It's cockroaches and ugly, Russian-designed buildings. That's not much to build on."

Perhaps the most poignant single instance Schell gives of this new worship of Western things is the new fashion among women. He recounts how Pierre Cardin and the like are now the rage among urban better-off women, and how in response to a new-found concern among women for their bustline, *China Sports News* suggests nutrition and even hormones and plastic surgery. Dr. Song, head of a hospital at the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, remarked that with the rise in the standard of living one could expect more and more demand for cosmetic surgery involving reconstruction of eyelids, noses and breasts. Schell notes, "The most common kind of cosmetic surgery performed in China today is surgery on the epicanthus of the eyelid, which gives the eye a rounder and more Western look by adding a second fold. 'The love of beauty is human nature,' Dr. Song recently told a reporter from the *China Daily*. 'Now that the people's living standard has improved, and they have begun to want more from life, some girls think that single-fold eyelids are not beautiful enough.'"

This ugly movement to model the Chinese woman along the lines of the latest Western pin-up girl is paralleled by an all-round effort to restore women to their ancient place as decidedly subordinate to men. In the countryside the breakdown of collectivisation and the subsequent return to family-oriented production, with its consequent emphasis on sheer muscle-power, together with the ideological assault on women, has created a situation where infanticide is on the rise. Schell writes that travellers to some parts of China report that up to eighty percent of the surviving in-

fants are male! Mothers who have produced only female babies have become objects of general abuse, and many have turned to the ancient religious rites in their desperate search to somehow produce a male offspring.

Despite Schell's illustration of the direction of Chinese society, he never once labels this "capitalist." He seems to share instead the kind of view that Hinton espouses, that the problem is that "The Party seems to be making no distinction between what is worth keeping from the old system and what is not." There has been a tendency among some "friends of China" who criticised the "Gang of Four" as "ultra-left" and more or less went along with the 1976 coup d'état to become increasingly disturbed at what they see in the current regime's program. Yet many of them are unable, or unwilling, at least so far, to draw the lessons taught by Mao about the class struggle under socialism. For it is not the Chinese revisionists who "make no distinction between what is worth keeping from the old system and what is not" — they are in fact overthrowing socialism in every sphere. Rather, the problem is that many of these forces, including Schell here, tend not to make a distinction between the capitalist road and the socialist road in China.

The coup d'état in 1976 was not simply a turn to the right, it was an overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its revolutionary headquarters — and the overthrow of socialist social relations and restoration of capitalist relations followed as night follows day. Despite this, Schell's thoughtful observations about the contradictions growing rapidly in Chinese society validate Mao's incisive summation of the key importance of the line of the Party for determining the nature of the social system: "Our country at present practices a commodity system, the wage system is unequal too, as in the eight-grade wage scale, and so forth. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat such things can only be restricted. Therefore, if people like Lin Piao come to power, it will be quite easy for them to rig up the capitalist

system."

Towards the end of his book, Schell describes a visit to Pierre Cardin's recently opened Peking branch of Maxim's Restaurant. As he and his companion finish their \$160 meal with a *mousse glacée aux framboises* and pay with an American Express card, Schell watches one of the young waiters get ready to leave, garbed once again in his bulky Chinese street clothes and carrying a large thermos bottle in which he was taking home some hot water, a luxury few Chinese have in their homes. He muses on what Mao Tsetung, lying only a short distance away in the mausoleum, would have had to say about Maxim's of Peking:

"Had he decided to make an inspection tour, would he simply have handed his familiar cap and coat to the French hatcheck girl as other Chinese officials had done more recently when invited by foreigners to dine at Maxim's? And how would he have responded when he ascended the staircase to the bar and heard the strains of Mozart and Strauss being played by two of his minions dressed up like a nineteenth-century French *comte* and *comtesse*, and then seen twelve young Chinese in European formal dinner wear pouring imported wine into crystal glasses for wealthy foreigners? Might he not have retreated behind the vermilion walls of his quarters at Zhongnanhai and launched another cultural revolution? Might not his followers, now hidden in the woodwork, someday have the power to do the same, once again disappointing the hopes and dreams of the West and those Chinese who are drawn by its powerful magnetism? Might not the dreams embodied in Maxim's and other possibly more practical Western projects prove, in the long term, a terribly fragile structure on the tumultuous Chinese body politic?"

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*Chen Village* is by a group of American social scientists who interviewed several dozen refugees from a single village in Guangdong Province, not far from Canton. Through meticulous piecing together of these interviews the authors draw a picture of what they

describe as a more or less ordinary Chinese village going through the 1960s and early 1970s, with an epilogue covering the 1980s. Their account does give a picture of the complexity of events in a peasant village, how muddled the struggle was at times — for example, the youth who brought the Cultural Revolution and Red Guards to Chen Village were middle-class sent-down students who had been excluded from the Communist Youth League and who, in the middle of the Cultural Revolution, seem to have abandoned political activity and the village as well. The book also gives a picture of economic development in the village that is hardly congruent with the desire of the current regime to paint things as all bleak during the Cultural Revolution, and flourishing today. Yet the authors' method of focusing on the style and form of political struggle, and neglecting its content or taking this as simply bureaucratic in-fighting, obscures the actual development of village life.

This goes hand-in-hand with a tendency to de-emphasise change in the village, a tendency which is taken to the level of dogma by the authors of *La société chinoise après Mao*. One of the French scholars who authored this book goes to the extent of arguing that collectivisation was actually a conservative measure reinforcing the family structure because it tied the peasants more firmly than ever to the land. Decollectivisation is, from the pseudo-leftist perspective of this particular author, hailed as "liberating" the peasant from the land and giving him mobility, as peasants now take their produce to marketplaces, etc. Such "freedom" will be familiar to any reader who is familiar with the "freedom to travel" etc. of peasants in any oppressed country who are forced into the massive slums of Mexico City, Calcutta, and on and on. The value of this reactionary work, whose sophisticated authors repeat almost every available hackneyed slander against Mao's China (that, for instance, 15 million were killed during the Great Leap Forward, etc.), lies exclusively in the data, not insubstantial, that can be gleaned from its pages. □

***Forward Along the Path  
Charted by  
Mao Tsetung***

