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CONFUCIANS AND COMMUNISTS:

Hoang Van Chi on The Relation of Marxist to Confucian Concepts,
and Cultural Susceptibility to Communism

Working Notes on Vietnam No. 5

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PREFACE

These comments are drawn from my rough notes, slightly edited, from a seminar on the title subject given by Hoang Van Chi at RAND, 8 August 1968. (Among others present were C. Wolf, G. Pauker, and C. Gouré). The note in brackets at the end is my own, written at the time.

Rough and incomplete as they are, these remarks may stimulate interest in what I suspect is a very important -- and certainly neglected -- area of inquiry: cultural resistances, or susceptibility, to communist organization and ideology. This general question was scarcely raised in the 1950-54 or 1961-68 periods of speculation and concern about the future of "Wars of liberation" and the possible impact of communist success in Vietnam. Worries about dominos in Southeast Asia, or "ragweed" propagation of communist-style insurgencies in Latin America and Africa (as predicted by some at the recent ARPA-sponsored conference on pacification, RM-5923 ARPA), focussed on rational incentives to imitate communist techniques or accept communist guidance and leadership, and the possible effectiveness of such imitations or communist influence.

Hoang raises here a whole new set of questions on the social/cultural/attitudinal factors conditioning the differential impact of communist efforts in different nations. Their pertinence to many issues of predictions and of U.S. intervention policy is attested by the variegated pattern of communist success and failures over the last two decades, whether or not countered locally by U.S. supported programs.

Hoang's emphasis here on a single factor -- religion, and specifically, the influence of Chinese/Confucian/Buddhist religious concepts -- (and associated cultural institutions) may seem simplistic, but should not be dismissed too hastily for that. A quick look at the gross contours of communist expansion and influence -- in fact, even a longer look, at the details -- suggests strongly that this religious/ethnic hypothesis may have great realism and power. It could hardly have stronger implications for prediction and policy. If it is, doubtless, only a starting point for investigation and analysis, it seems one that deserves rapidly to be exploited.

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and Cultural Susceptibility to Communism

The conflict is, in part, ideological. We kill Viet Cong; but a Viet Cong has been bitten by a carrier, seized with a germ -- an idea. We must attack the germs. One can consider communism in the role of a disease -- but one must also consider the susceptibility of the environment. Note the extreme correlation of local religions and success of communism.

Most Confucian population has been taken over by communists: China, North Vietnam (though not Taiwan -- which is, however, run by the similar Kuomintang. Japan might also be considered an exception, though a different strain of Confucianism is found there; and Marxism is strong). Why, among underdeveloped areas, are Confucian countries so susceptible; why is the environment so propitious for communists, while Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, and Moslem environments are not? Why did Ho, Dong, Giap -- all sons of Confucian scholars -- turn to Marxism?

There is a parallel to alternative geometries: through a point, one can draw with respect to a given line: >1 parallels (Lobachevsky), 1 parallel (Euclid), 0 parallels (Riemann). All of these lead to coherent geometries.

Similarly, religions accept: >1 Gods (Hindus, Greeks), 1 God (Christians, Muslims, Jews), 0 Gods (Marxists, Confucians).

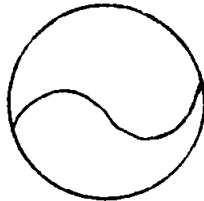
So long as Marxists are free to discuss, criticize, select, in Marxism, it is a "philosophy"; otherwise, a dogma, religion. Likewise, Maoism. Marxist ritual is like a religion: pictures, songs, awe. "Adepts" must accept axioms without argumentation. Like a religion, Marxian/Maoism presents a view of the universe; an explanation of the origins of man; a metaphysics.

Compare the metaphysics of Confucianism and Marxism. The first is found in the I Ching: the Confucian canonical books (they existed

long before Confucius; Confucius commented, revised, drew philosophy from them: ethics, politics, though not economics). Everything in the world is composed of different combinations of Yin and Yang. Laws of the I Ching:

1. Permanent change (everything constantly changing).
2. Duality of Yin and Yang.
3. Harmony of Yin and Yang. (Where Yin is strong, Yang is weak.)

Confucian symbol
(e.g., in Korean flag):



Like a sine curve: change, inter-penetration of areas; day/night.

After Confucius, scholars added elements and made it into a rigid dogma, lasting 2,000 years.

Why couldn't China get rid of dogma? Why the early cultural superiority of Asia, then stagnancy?

The philosophers all lived (Kung, Lao-tzu, Mo-di) during a warring period, (5th-3rd century B.C.) before Shih-huang-ti: small principalities; wandering scholars; freedom of speech. Later, there was control of thought. The advantage of Europe: it was never unified! Marx had to go to England to write Das Kapital; if he couldn't have left Germany... Voltaire lived on the Swiss-French border; Lenin, in Switzerland. Greek philosophers thrived during the city-state period; their rulers couldn't be too despotic, because they couldn't afford efficient police.

Europe had the advantage of being defeated in the Crusades, which destroyed the authority of the Pope; hence, scientific thought, industrialization were possible. But China was too unified, too despotic: had control of thought. This was okay for building a Great Wall, for handicrafts, but not for art, philosophy, science.

When Orientals realized, with the Opium War, that Westerners were not barbarians, they became interested in Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau.

They were enthusiastic about democracy -- but not for Asia. Then they found Marxism.

Marxist Laws:

1. Permanent change -- same as Confucius.
2. Duality: Thesis - antithesis (= Yin - Yang)
leading to synthesis (like sexual reproduction).
Emphasis on internal conflict as engine of change.
3. But where Confucicians see Harmony, Marxists see Conflict, the inevitability and need for violence, for change. (Like the praying mantis: the female eats the head of the male while mating.)

A Confucian who accepts violence can accept all of Marxism. A Hindu or Moslem or Catholic or Protestant who accepts violence must still, also, reject his God or Gods, to accept Marxism. Confucians see themselves as "supra-theist" -- they don't "need" gods: like the Marxists. And both see duality of principles in everything. So, if one is a "revolutionist," with a belief in violence, ...

Yet Asians may, after years, reject non-temporary violence (i.e., violence that is not only in war or revolution); this "unending terror/war" leads to a dissonance for Asians.

Compared to Russians, Chicomcs are more sophisticated: they use "mental terror" rather than "physical." But communists must accept the availability and possible necessity for violence; and "thought reform" is seen by them as violence. (Experiencing it, as "landlord," affected Hoang's memory, made it impossible for him to play chess.)

Communist "political education" aims to:

- (a) reeducate, save man from sin (cadres);
- (b) punish, make example (landlords);
- (c) combine persuasion and threat (French prisoners).

[Gouré: The type of religion also goes with the type of social organization, the role of priesthood, modes of social control: all of which also affect vulnerability to Marxism.] All Asians -- even Diem -- are

affected by Confucianism. (But Confucian scholars resisted Marxism.) [They could not accept the principle of violence?] Communists have much bigger problems in Protestant and Hindu countries. [Does the Hoa Hao religion show Hindu influence? It comes from the area of the Delta bordering on Cambodia and, according to some, has Cambodian roots. Likewise, Theravada Buddhism. The Southern Delta, as a whole, has much weaker Confucian influence than the Center or North: further from China, settled later, little role of Mandarins, conquered first by French rather than by Imperial Mandarins, more Cambodian influence. Does this mean weaker susceptibility to communist mobilization, even apart from Hoa Hao, Cao Dai influence? Do the latter reflect, themselves, southern cultural tendencies that show up, as well, in other southerners as resistance to communism - as - religion?

Another, stronger implication is that Cambodia and Thailand, with far more Hindu than Confucian cultural orientation, should be more resistant to communist "religion" and penetration. This was true for the Malayan, as opposed to Chinese, elements in Malaya. How about Burma? Indonesia? India?

What are the related sociological/anthropological/familial/cultural factors that go along with religious differences, and that may bear upon the susceptibility of a particular population to communist dogma and influence?]