Anagha Uppal

Dr. Robinson

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Reflection #5

*“Secondly, a revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous.”*

The first thing that I’d like to talk about is the conversation we had the week before last questioning the need for violence during a revolution. Melanie’s comment that violence paves the way for such methods and continues and ends in violence seems worth repeating here. A movement that began in violence is connected to a present where regulations are maintained and dissidents silenced with force in China, and where each individual is scored on the basis of some chosen parameters, a score that affects one’s position in society and dissuades opposition.

Because the current regime seems a natural continuation of that led by Tse-tung, I imagine that he wouldn’t take issue with it, but I wonder if Tse-tung would discourage that human tendency to evade violence if it were clearer that the same proletariat for whose rights he fought are the ones affected by the policies. Or would he continue to view these actions as removing the counter-revolutionary elements? This is the conflict, between an internal distaste for violence, and a faith in its effectiveness to carry out a purpose (considering long-term impact). Mao condemns the innate sense as a bourgeois reaction that aims to prevent a revolution in favor of the peasants. Is non-violence a bourgeois element?

I also found interesting the fourteen great achievements on the part of the peasant associations. Some listed actions are quite culturally conservative in nature. The peasants ban the killing of oxen. Conservative Hindus in India and the conservative Bharatiya Janta Party in India also bans the killing of the sacred cow. Eliminating waste including feasts, gambling, opium, sugar-making and certain performances is very puritanical. And where is this view placed in today’s context, where opulence is considered the rewarded outcome of a democratizing automated society? In “On Contradiction,” Mao emphasizes learning all sides and all perspectives for a full understanding of something. However, politics and revolution inherently demand a certain one-sidedness. Banning excesses and punishing landlords can hardly be considered a multi-sided perspective.

While reading this, I had a similar reaction to Oscar, who wondered if the violent peasant cause and guerrilla warfare was possible today with the domination of global policing and surveillance. Sam speculated that technology serves as a medium for modern guerrilla warfare. Anonymous, Wikileaks and others hack into or release information that is valuable to the state and its organs. But these groups cannot take the punishment of the highest bourgeoisie class into their own hands. All they can do is hope that the public will, or the state will. They can only ruffle feathers, calling (thus depending on the state) SWAT to raid homes of offending people to at most endanger a few lives. By themselves, these groups are still quite weak.

Overall, I find Mao to be much more engaging of a writer than Ho Chi Minh – HCM, at least in the material we read – has been inspired to become a socialist revolutionary. Mao writes in terms of his experience converting inspiration into full-bodied action. He uses that experience to give name to the experience of the middle class, a gap that Oscar questioned in the first week. His classification classification is so clear and so specific that I wonder if anyone has done a modern revision of the same classification and placed the various American communities along this bourgeois-proletariat gradient in the last five years.