REVIEWS

The Making of a Terrorist

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The Revenge of Heaven: Journal of a Young Chinese, by Ken Ling, English text prepared by Miriam London and Ta-ling Lee, *New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972. 413 pp. $8.95.*

I

THIS EXTRAORDINARY book was put together by the editors from the written and oral recollections of a Chinese schoolboy who at the age of sixteen became a leader in that strange eruption of moral and political anarchy, fanaticism and fury called the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. His story begins on June 1, 1966. On that date the signal for the revolution was given in the author's native city, the one-time treaty port of Amoy, by a local rebroadcasting of speeches made earlier in Peking by Chiang Ching, the wife of Mao Tse-tung, by Chen Po-ta his secretary, and by Premier Chou En-lai who announced a suspension of classes in all universities and intermediate and technical schools. The narrative ends on July 19, 1968. In the late afternoon of that day the boy and an elder brother, clad only in their swimming trunks, waded into the water at Amoy beach and struck out for one of the Nationalist-held islands beyond the Taiwan Strait. In the two years intervening Ken Ling had lived more than enough for a lifetime.

Ken Ling, however, is not his real name, for the editors have seen fit to disguise the identities of all persons in the narrative except public and party officials. At the beginning of the cultural revolution he was enrolled in an upper form of the Eighth Middle School of Amoy, where he was by his own account a docile and diligent student. His main thought at the time was to accumulate the honors and high marks that would enable him to enter a university. His chances of doing so seemed bright enough, despite his handicap of a bourgeois origin. "Our teachers," he confesses, "had been very good to me; I had been happy and favored at school." The fact, however, that the teachers had been designated to be the first victims of the cultural revolution threw young Ling for a time into a quandary of conscience. If he joined in tormenting them, it would of course prove him the worst kind of ingrate; if he attempted to defend them, he would, besides putting himself in some danger, forfeit all hope of a university education. So at first, though he took no active part in the persecutions, he did add his signature, though as obscurely as possible and as illegibly as he dared, to the lists of accusations and denunciations that were constantly being drawn up in huge characters and posted on the walls.

There are occasions when Ken Ling's narrative is strangely suggestive of William Golding's novel *The Lord of the Flies* and others when it recalls Richard Hughes'

High Wind in Jamaica. The tortures inflicted on the teachers of the Eighth Middle School, as Ling describes them, were of an extreme and senseless barbarity of which perhaps only children and adolescents are capable. The teachers, until so recently feared and respected, were now forced to contribute to their own degradation by wearing dunce caps and placards inscribed with their alleged crimes and to cry out as they were paraded around and around an athletic field that they were black-hearted reactionaries, imperialists' running dogs, and so on, and to beg forgiveness on their knees. This, however, was only the mildest of their punishments, for they were also it seems subjected to incessant beatings, made to kneel on broken glass, to eat insects, spiders and even night soil. They were confined at night in narrow unlighted chambers in one of the school buildings, soon made foul by their involuntary excretions. Several attempted suicide and one succeeded. Ling tells us how another died at the hands of his torturers:

> Chen Ku-teh . . . had been imprisoned in school in a room under a stairway. . . . Over sixty years old and suffering from high blood pressure, [he] was dragged out at eleven-thirty, exposed to the summer sun for more than two hours, then paraded about with the others carrying a placard and hitting a gong. Then he was dragged to the second floor of a classroom building and down again, beaten with fists and broomsticks all the way. . . . He passed out several times but was brought back to consciousness with cold water splashed onto his face. He could hardly move his body; his feet were cut by glass and thorns. But his spirit was unbroken. He shouted, "Why don't you kill me? Kill me!" This continued for six hours until he lost control of his excrement. They tried to force a stick into his rectum. He collapsed for the last time. They poured water on him again—it was too late. . .

Similar episodes no doubt were taking place at the time in all the other Chinese provinces.

II

KEN LING lost much of his squeamishness about torture when he was chosen leader of the student organization which took over from the provincial party the punishment of the pedagogues. He found that the sight of the blood-stained body of a teacher no longer unnerved him and that the agonized screams of a victim presently ceased to find echoes in his dreams. As he began to feel the intoxications of power he abandoned his scruples and inhibitions one by one to the enjoyment of it. For the most part he left the actual dirty work to eager and obedient followers. "The few of us at the top," he explains, "did not have to beat others personally, but we did order subordinates to do the job." When he led his schoolmates on raids to the homes of disgraced teachers he abstained from the looting, except sometimes in the case of books or some irresistible prize like a pair of binoculars; but he found it impolitic to restrain the greed of his followers, and what he was too proud to steal he was willing enough to destroy.

> I wanted to destroy things so that I could say, "I have done all that." But I also did this to satisfy something in my heart—something I had in common with other youth during the Cultural Revolution. We felt this was the one chance in our lives to enjoy anything, whatever other people had and more. If we could not enjoy something, then we would destroy it so that everyone would be equal.

Ling soon acquired an elaborate vocabulary of Communist invective which he learned to employ against adversaries. He also stuffed his memory with the famous aphorisms of Chairman Mao Tse-tung because he found them an infallible means

of silencing criticisms or protests. The most effective quotation was Mao's assertion that: "the thousand components of Marxism can be summed up in the sentence: *Rebellion is justified.*" This sentence, as young Ling discovered, could give sanction to almost any outrage or excess. He had, however, no ideological convictions beyond belief in the importance of power for its own sake.[1] He felt no real loyalty to the Chairman whose sayings he mouthed and at whose name he cheered. This, he says, was also true of many of his comrades.

> . . . We were loyal only to our own organization, but to enable that organization to grow we had to size up the situation, to watch the "facial expression" of the central authorities before making a move. We had become adept at turning the Communist Party to personal use; mutual exploitation had become the real basis of the relationship between the central authorities and us. When we shouted, "Long live Chairman Mao!" we no longer knew the meaning of the words. Why weren't we allowed to shout, "Long live the Red Guards"? Our basic premise was that we were the future masters of the country. Only after this basic premise was destroyed by Mao Tse-tung were we to realize too late that Mao had used us more than we did him.
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> During the ensuing two years I was never to hear my colleagues discuss how to defend Mao Tse-tung thought or rule of the proletariat. All I heard was how to strengthen our own organization and weaken the opposing one.

After the boys and girls of the Amoy Eighth Middle School had been inducted into the Red Guards and given uniforms and armbands they threw themselves with full zeal and fury into the officially-inspired campaign to eradicate "the four olds"—meaning old ideas, old habits, old customs, old culture. This effort, never quite successful, to obliterate tradition is apparently a phase of all great revolutions. In Amoy in 1966, according to Ling, it became a licensed carnival of vandalism and rapine. The names of streets were changed; signs were torn down from the merchants' shops, architectural ornaments mutilated or destroyed, temples, churches and missions plundered, homes invaded in the search for idols to smash, paintings, calligraphic scrolls and other items of pre-revolutionary art collected and, like the "vanities" of Savonarola's Florence, publicly burned in huge bonfires. Out of regard for his Christian mother, Ling did not join his comrades when they desecrated a cemetery or when they ransacked the church at which she worshiped and drove the clergyman and his family from their house. When it came to Buddhist shrines and temples, however, Ling had no inhibitions, but his special savagery seems to have been reserved for the old women who dealt in clairvoyance, fortune-telling, and communication with the dead. He tells us how, when he and his friends broke into the domicile of one such victim,

> I kicked over the little table with her equipment—her fortune-telling fan, tiny bell, her "eight diagrams" for divination —while the others smashed the image over her altar table. Then as one of us started to hit a wash basin to attract spectators, we pushed the altar table outside the front door, so that I could stand on it to make a speech. I wanted to find out whether this kind of person feared torture. . . . I grabbed her by the hair, pulled her onto the altar table . . . bent her fingers backward. Down she went on her knees with a cry of pain—"*Ai ya!*" . . . I wanted her to confess that her fortune-telling was all a big fraud without foundation and that she had never been visited by any gods or ghosts. Pushing a bullhorn to her mouth, I ordered her to repeat what I said. When she refused one of us started to pull her hair upward till her scalp oozed blood. Another pressed a rounded

wooden stick down on her calves as she knelt and rolled it back and forth. All this work in the hot sun made us lose our tempers; we were hungry and thirsty and took it out on her. In a little while she broke down. . . .

By this time the Red Guards had become the only real power in Amoy, hated and dreaded by the populace, able to defy and even to insult the local Communist committee, and later daring enough to attack the local police in their stronghold and to vanquish them.

III

MEANWHILE, the Red Guard leaders had slowly grown aware that the prime purpose of the cultural revolution was not the persecution of schoolmasters or the eradication of old usages. These exercises in terror, as Ling and the others now perceived, had been only "a tempering and trial of Red Guard courage" to determine their fitness for the parts they were expected to play in the grim contest for power that was developing in the very highest quarters of the Red régime. They did not at first recognize that Mao's chief adversary in this conflict was no other than his anointed successor, Liu Shao-chi; they understood very well, however, what was meant by "the power faction within the party that follows the capitalist road," denounced again and again in communications from Peking. It meant certain old-time Communists, some of them veterans of the Long March and Yenan, who had entrenched themselves in the party bureaucracy. These were now marked for destruction at the hands of a generation which at the time of the Communist victory in the civil war had not even been born.

The effect on the Amoy Red Guards was to inflate their sense of importance and to inflame their ambition. They chose as their first political victim a female bureaucrat, Wang Yu-keng, head of the education department of Fukien province. She had joined the party in Yenan and her husband was the powerful Yeh Fei, the provincial party secretary. On August 24, 1966, the Red Guards and their auxiliaries began a march on Foochow, the provincial capital, where they were reenforced by contingents from various other schools. But the Foochow populace was apprenhensive and hostile, and Yeh Fei, as it turned out, had a great many Red Guards of his own, so that in the first confrontation on August 29 Ling and his allies were badly mauled. They remained in Foochow, however, and gradually gained the upper hand, especially after it became known that their actions had the approval of the Maoist faction in Peking and that the commander of the local military garrison had refused Yeh's plea for the protection of his wife. She fled secretly to Amoy but her hiding place there was betrayed and she was carried back to Foochow in triumph to be insulted and disgraced before a vast crowd gathered in the municipal sports stadium. She was

> . . . guarded by four Red Guards from Amoy Eighth Middle who kept her arms twisted behind her back. Every time she was called upon to confess her crimes, they forced her head down; as she listened to criticism with her head bent low, they would frequently pull her head back sharply by the hair.

Their victim was well along into middle years and seems to have been suffering from some cardiac disorder. Presently she fainted, so that the plan to parade her through the streets had to be abandoned. Later she begged Ling not to send her to Amoy for the repetition of the ordeal that her captors intended. He was haughty and scornful.

> I told her the story of the fisherman and the snake. After being saved by the fisherman, the snake bit his rescuer, killing him. . . . She assured me that she would never bite me and that she would remain forever grateful. . . . She was almost on her knees before me. . . . I re-

minded her of her boast [on August 29] "You can never strike me down. . ." Anger overwhelmed me. I thought again of Wang's cruel smile that day, of the shouted abuses of the Foochow Red Guards and the bruises all over my body. Losing self-control, I pushed Wang in the chest so that she fell over backward. "Are you struck down now?" Wang Yu-keng was again in tears. Knowing now that the situation was hopeless, she cried, "I want to kill myself, want to kill myself!"

"Go ahead and kill yourself," I said. "But you should know that suicide is a crime against the people."

I ordered the others to drag her away. A jeep was already waiting for her outside. . . .

After this proof of how powerless Yeh Fei had become even to protect his wife from indignity his own disgrace and downfall were inevitable and followed swiftly. Young Ling led a raiding party into the secretary's home where they discovered exactly what they were hoping to find—evidences of bourgeois decadence (French perfumes on Wang's dressing table, high-heeled shoes in her wardrobe, a bathtub large enough for Wang and Yeh to occupy together); evidences of graft and corruption (foreign-made furnishings, English teas and whiskies, expensive cigarettes, a collection of scrolls, paintings and other items of pre-revolutionary art). Most damaging of all was the layer of dust over *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung!* It also appeared that Yeh Fei had been indiscreet enough to keep a diary into which he had inserted some animadversions against Chou En-lai and lamentations that men and women whose party credentials went back thirty years and more were being delivered as sacrificial victims into the hands of riotous young ruffians.

This time both Yeh and Wang and some of their chief supporters were paraded in their ignominy through all the streets of Foochow. No one, it seems, dared to give them so much as a glance of pity. Afterwards in Peking our narrator and some of his companions were to witness a reenactment of the Foochow scenario. The personage marked for destruction in this case was a very high one, Liu Shao-chi, who was being denounced on the wall posters as "the Chinese Khrushchev." By a series of deceptions some Red Guards from Tsinghua University contrived to capture Wang Kuang-mei, Liu's handsome and cultivated wife, and to subject her to a kind of *auto da fé* before a mob of a hundred thousand Red Guards from all parts of China. She was vulnerable on several counts besides her beauty which is said to have excited the jealousy of Madame Mao (Chiang Ching). She had been born into a wealthy family and had had a pre-revolutionary education; she had been acquainted with some of the Kuomintang leaders and there were those who professed to believe her to be a Nationalist spy. She had charmed some of the foreign diplomats; she preferred the traditional close-fitting, side-slashed garment to the drab and austere proletarian dress; she had posed, thus attired, with Sukarno and a group of Indonesian dancing girls. As in the case of Wang Yu-keng she became the helpless and unwilling instrument of her husband's ruin. Liu Shao-chi was succeeded as heir apparent by the then ascendant Lin Piao, already in control of the armed forces, but destined nevertheless to go the way of his predecessor.[2]

IV

As A RED GUARD delegate and later as a fugitive Ken Ling did a good bit of traveling through the mainland provinces. His accounts of conditions as he found them during the chaos and anarchy of the cultural revolution are in interesting contrast to the recent reports of granaries filled to bursting, booming industries, well-supplied markets and well-stocked shops.[3] In Amoy there seems to have been food enough, though when Ling and his brother caught

and cooked a stray cat they considered it a rare feast; but in the mountains of western Fukien Ling found the peasants subsisting on little besides a soup made from bamboo shoots or a paste of sweet potatoes from which the nutrients had been previously extracted and sold. In Anhwei province where famine is an old, old story,[4] he found evidences of general starvation. In Hopei, the provincial capital,

> . . . we saw clusters of children crying and stirring about. Most of them looked no more than three to five years old. Their limbs were thin and their bellies swollen, reminding me of the propaganda photographs I had seen of African children. Babies too young to walk were howling spasmodically without tears. Some were dead . . . . We looked at their cotton padded clothes, torn and filthy, with so many pieces missing that their bodies were hardly covered at all. Fleas and lice were visible through the exposed cotton padding.

Ling noticed that some of these children had lost fingers or were otherwise mutilated; he asked one boy how this had happened.

> "Papa and mama cut them off," he replied without hesitation. . . . "Papa says this way people will feel sorry for them." . . . [The child] begged us for more money and food. He said that every time his parents returned they checked to see how much money he had got and if he had spent any. If there wasn't enough money he was beaten. . . .

In these parts there were even rumors of cannibalism, seemingly verified when one of the meat pasties bought by Ling's boy and girl companions at a railway food stand in Shantung province was found to contain a human fingernail!

Filth of one sort and another, but mostly in the form of bodily excretions, is much mentioned in the narrative, for example in Ling's account of a journey to Shanghai in the fetid atmosphere of an overcrowded railway car, and in his description of the mass rally at an airfield in Peking, where a million Red Guards (so he calculated) from every part of China were packed together so closely as to be virtually unable to move, waiting there almost a whole day for a fleeting glimpse of Chairman Mao, Lin Piao and a few other notables. Many were knocked down and trampled (apparently to death) in the stampede that followed.

Ling found that the Red Guards from all the northern provinces were infested with lice. On his first night in Peking, after he and his companions were assigned to quarters in Tsinghua University, Ling found himself unable to sleep.

> . . . I was disturbed by the others all around me, snoring or crying out in dreams. Moreover, the quilted cover issued to me stank. The northerners did not take a bath for months on end and went to sleep by slipping their naked, odorous bodies into the bedding. I tried to cover the edge of the bedcover with my own clothes, but the stench was still penetrating. . . . I got up and roamed about. It was very cold in the corridors, but these northern Red Guards, with nothing but a cotton-padded jacket slung over their shoulders, bare bellies protruding, shuffled along half out of their shoes, urinating as they walked. . . . This was a brand-new building, not yet formally opened for use, according to the platoon leader, but it was already filthy beyond description. Everywhere there were sputum and the yellowish stains of urine. . . .

It is not strange that the febrile excitements of the cultural revolution should have included a good deal of promiscuous sexuality among the schoolboys and schoolgirls who constituted the vanguard. In the bloody warfare between rival organizations of Fukien Red Guards, rape was the probable fate of any girl unlucky enough to be captured by the enemy. From such practices, however, the fastidious young Ling

stood aloof and disapproving; his own innocent and tender relationship with the pretty young schoolmate who shared his adventures provides an odd countertheme to the savageries and squalors of his story. She was slain by gunfire in one of the battles and his grief at her death completed his growing disenchantment with the game of revolution.

V

AT THE TIME of his return from Peking, however, Ling was in the full flower of his ambition. The 8-29 Group as his associates and allies now called themselves—after the date of their first challenge to Wang Yukeng and Yeh Fei—was now the supreme power in both Amoy and Foochow and it began to assume some of the functions of government. In Amoy it had set up a municipal commune, under which Ken Ling, not yet seventeen and totally ignorant of economics, was placed in charge of factory production. A kind of high sanction for the appointment, however, existed in an exhortation to the "rebellion-making" elements by Chairman Mao "to grasp the revolution and promote production," which was then everywhere declining. The curious thing is that in their very naïveté Ling and his staff were able to effect a plan of reorganization and a system of workers' incentives which did indeed increase production but also brought down on them the wrath of Peking. They had not, it seems, understood the nature of a socialist state or the meaning of a planned economy.

> To avoid being dragged down by unprofitable factories, mainly those in heavy industry, we closed a few of them and transferred the workers to factories with higher profit margins, where they could help step up production. Our move greatly angered the central authorities because it disrupted nationwide production planning. . . . In addition, certain factories, particularly the canning and food processing plants, could now market their products directly. For example, a can of fruit that would ordinarily sell for twenty cents on the foreign market and seventy cents on the domestic market, would now be sold directly to the workers in the plant for forty cents. We would turn twenty cents into the national treasury and still make twenty cents. When the Ministry of Foreign Trade personnel learned about this they were so angry they jumped thirty feet in the air. . . .

Not long after this the rule of the 8-29 and its commune in Amoy came to an abrupt end. An order from Peking commanded all Red Guards to return to their classrooms and there devote themselves to the study of the wisdom of Mao Tse-tung. The order could not be resisted or evaded because it was being enforced by the People's Liberation Army, which had hitherto remained quiescent in the conflicts and disorders of the cultural revolution. A few days later Ling was warned that the army had been instructed to arrest him. He and a half dozen other proscribed leaders of the 8-29 managed to flee the city rather ignominously in a night-soil truck, just before the military sealed up all escape routes. At Changchow to avoid attention the fugitives separated, Ling setting off in the direction of Canton. He slept by day in haymows or covered under leaves in the fields and traveled afoot by night until a friendly truck-driver picked him up and drove him to Chao-an near the southern tip of Fukien. There he saw his name, picture and description on a police poster offering a reward for his capture. Once across the provincial border he considered himself safe and his next few weeks were spent in rather pleasurable wandering through Kwantung and Kwangsi provinces, hitch-hiking or stealing bicycles as opportunity offered, behaving when he needed to with revolutionary guile or ruthlessness. Then one day in Canton he learned that the army had been ordered to make no more arrests, that the suppression of the "little generals" had

been pronounced an unhappy mistake, that the fugitive leaders were urged to return to their posts and were guaranteed protection. A new struggle for supremacy, it seemed, had developed among the party hierarchs, and once again both Maoists and their adversaries had need of the Red Guards.

This apparently was the stage at which the cultural revolution, after the familiar historical pattern, began to devour its offspring, or rather when the offspring began to devour one another. The situation, as Ling found it after his return from exile, was almost indescribably complex. The ranks of the Red Guards had been vastly swollen by workers and peasants, also in some cases by ruffians and criminal gangsters, though the students still held on to the posts of command. In Foochow the 8-29, now engaged in desperate conflict with a new organization of rebellion makers called the Ke Tsao Hui, had the overt support of the district military commander. In Amoy matters were exactly the reverse. There had been a schism in the 8-29 of Amoy, and former schoolmates and comrades had become the bitterest of foes; but it was the secessionist group (Ke Lien) that had the aid and encouragement of the army in the contest that followed.

In the fighting at Foochow, where the leaders of the 8-29 had been driven from their burning headquarters, the weapons were mostly thrown missiles of one kind and another—rocks, stones, pieces of furniture, firebombs, vials of vitriol. The casualties amounted to about two dozen dead and some hundreds injured, including Ling himself who was caught and badly beaten after jumping from a window. In the new fighting in and around Amoy both sides presently managed to provide themselves with forbidden firearms, including automatic rifles. They also turned to the manufacture of bombs and grenades and the struggle settled into that pattern of urban guerrilla warfare with ambushes and continual sniping of which our century has had so many examples in so many places. While it lasted terror was pandemic in Amoy.

VI

The Revenge of Heaven—evidently the title is meant to suggest that the death of Ling's sweetheart was a punishment for his sin of *hubris*—is in many ways an important and valuable book. It is the first account we have had by a direct witness to a strange and hitherto mysterious chapter of recent Chinese history. It is also, despite the gruesomeness of much of its detail and the frequent coarseness of the language, a fascinating book to read. No doubt it owes much of its interest to the collaborators who helped to organize the story, but the characterization of the boy terrorist—his arrogance and ignorance, his guile and naïveté, his ineffable vanity and affection for family—is surely Ling's own unconscious contribution. And one can perceive in this self-portrait more than a few similarities to some of the characters on some of our own college campuses and high school playgrounds.

[1]The French Sinologist, Pierre Do-Dinh, believes that Marxism, because of its basis in abstractions and logic, will always be alien to the positive and pragmatic Chinese mind. "It cannot even be imagined that it will evolve a specifically Chinese Marxism, as it created *zen* Buddhism, because Marxism does not deal with a reality that can be attained through non-conceptual channels." (*Confucius and Chinese Humanism*, Funk & Wagnalls, 1969.)

[2]In September, 1971, a Chinese jet plane, presumably on a flight to Soviet Irkutsk, crashed and burned in Outer Mongolia. Several months later the Russians announced that one of the nine charred bodies found in the wreckage had been positively identified as that of Lin Piao.

[3]Cf. "Whose Boom in the Commune" by John Gittings, *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, January 29, 1972.

[4]The editors in a footnote remind the reader that the chronic hunger in Anhwei is the theme of the well-known "Flower Drum Song":

"Of every ten years famine claims nine
Tung Tung Tung Chiang!"