

## No computer science without striptease

By David Ramsay Steele

**M**ake no mistake, the present turn in China is not a mere Orwellian ploy, a fleeting tactic of the ruling class, like the Hundred Flowers episode. What is occurring is the admission of a fifth of the world's population to the Great Society of division of labour, moneymaking, personal freedom and intellectual innovation. Welcome!

This is not to deny that the present Chinese regime is still horribly arbitrary and repressive. Brutal Western dictatorships like those of Argentina or Brazil are pleasant havens by comparison. Libertarians must never cease to denounce the bloodthirsty techniques employed by the Chinese ruling class, and we must give our full support (though it does not amount to very much) to the 'democratic' dissidents who have, all of a sudden, popped out into the sun-light, and whom the Chinese government is scheming, by the hour, to suppress. But none of this should cause us to underestimate the vastness of the transformation which has begun, and which will soon gain such momentum as to be practically irreversible by the passing whims of the state.

One small straw in the wind is the contents of *Beijing Review* (formerly *Peking Review*) which used to be crammed full of the most imbecilic claptrap, occasionally enlivened by particularly entertaining yarns, like the time when the Divine Chairman, to demonstrate his continuing strength and virility, swam the Yangtse river at a speed which (*Peking Review* did not point out) was greater than the Olympic record.

The weekly *Beijing Review* is now improving visibly almost with every Issue. It has a long way to go before it can compare with *Time* or *Newsweek* (on which it is clearly striving to model itself), but at around 10p a time, it's well worth the occasional look.

The issue of 19th January asks: 'Is Money

Synonymous With Capitalism?' The treatment of this question clearly illustrates a realisation on the part of Chinese ruling circles that "modernisation" is impossible without the development of trade and profit-making. *Beijing Review* recalls that under the arrogant sway of the Gang of Four, "anyone who wanted to develop a diversified rural economy and accumulate funds (that is, to make money)" was accused of "putting money in command", and branded as a worshipper of "the filthy capitalist system".

*Beijing Review* praises the entrepreneurial skill of one particular 'production brigade' (translate as business enterprise) which 'got rich' in 1964 by a diversified but complementary output of bricks, noodles, pigs and shipping. For its pains the production brigade was harassed by the ubiquitous hirelings of the Gang of Four. But *Beijing Review* now declares that this money was made "through hard work, not speculation" or "cut-throat competition with other brigades." Money is by no means synonymous with capitalism and that is "in conformity with Marxism-Leninism-Maozedong thought to the letter".

A scrupulous intellectual like myself might point out that Marx, although not holding money to be synonymous with capitalism, did argue that money reached its fullest development in capitalism and would disappear in socialism. Lenin and his party attempted to abolish money in Russia, between 1918 and 1921, an attempt which had to be ignominiously abandoned owing to the resulting collapse of industry. Stalin maintained that money would disappear from the Soviet Union within a few decades. The Mao faction of the Chinese ruling class were perfectly orthodox Marxist-Leninist in their campaigns against 'material incentives' and their excoriation of the Soviet Union for permitting the growth of commerce.

Under cover of attacking the Gang of Four, the present Chinese rulers are rejecting the last remnants of Marxism. History is not made entirely by scrupulous intellectuals, and the fact that the Chinese have abandoned all pursuit of the chimera, socialism, is of more significance than the fact that they have

done so dishonestly. There are a few more points which will save the Chinese a lot of trouble if they can be grasped now. All money-making is speculative, and speculation is always a public benefit which aids the market's co-ordination process, and thus serves the people. All competition is cut-throat, in the sense that profits come from seizing opportunities glimpsed only by the seizers, and this will upset the plans of those who have not been so acutely perceptive, causing some of them to lose money. Nonetheless, the losers will still be much better off than they would in a social order which did not permit cut-throat competition.

Although the toleration of profit-making at the enterprise level (production brigades, communes, etc.) will rapidly realise great benefits for the Chinese people, they will still be held back needlessly until it is recognised that futures, capital and money markets are vital to modern production. Without these, the Chinese will be able to industrialise after a fashion, like the Soviet Union, by relying upon the West, but they will be unable to innovate autonomously, they will be ever more dependent upon the West, as the Soviet Union is, and they will never come near the industrial progress of Brazil, Japan, South Korea or Taiwan. It is imperative that a Great Proletarian Stock Exchange be opened as soon as possible. (Perhaps China will side step this ideological embarrassment, and still reap some of the gains of a rational economy, by a new arrangement with Hong Kong or Taiwan.)

The next edition of *Beijing Review* carried impressions by Chinese journalists of their recent visit to the United States. These latter-day Marco Polos gazed in wonderment at the magnificent fruits of the market system, but were not so bedazzled that they failed to put their fingers right onto some crucial points.

"Gluttony and selfish pleasure-seeking is inseparable from the capitalist mode of life, but this is only one side of the picture." Promising; they should have learned that much from Marx, if anyone in China still reads him. "The Americans like to call their society a consumer society, but without production consumption is out of the "In that highly competitive capitalist society,

whoever does not get ahead in his work is liable to be ousted", remark the journalists wistfully.

What lends a tragic poignancy to these impressions is that neither the Chinese visitors nor their American hosts have suspected the truth: the achievements of modern American civilisation, without peer in the history of the world, are due to the comparative freedom of the spontaneous market order. But they are only a glimpse of the unimaginable splendours which will emerge from a system of total *laissez-faire*. And they are being choked off at their source by the tightening tentacles of the American State.

"There really are many cars there", reports Li Yanning, deeply impressed. "The average is two cars per three persons, but not every family has a car. There are many car-less families, and the better-off families may own more than two. Moreover, the cars vary greatly in quality ..."

We cannot blame a Chinese journalist for failing to perceive that the average of two cars for every three persons (babes-in-arms not excepted) has come about *just because* no one has been empowered to ensure that every family has a car, *just because* no one has been able to insist that all cars are of the same quality, in short, just because there has been no equalising, homogenising, bureaucratising or bolshevizing of automobile production in the U.S. We cannot condemn the Chinese for overlooking the fact that once the government steps in to redistribute cars, the cars will begin to disappear. (Magic? No. Economics.) We can hardly upbraid them for ignoring what is clearly perceived by only a tiny minority in the West, with its much greater experience of the market systems that 'redistribution' means destruction.

"We should do better than the Japanese. They have learnt from the United States not only computer science but also strip-tease. For us it is a matter of acquiring the best of the developed capitalist countries while rejecting their philosophy.... Many American well-wishers hoped that in the course of bringing about our four modernisations, we would avoid the United States' negative

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aspects, such as wasting energy resources and polluting the environment .... "

In other words the very people who, through ignorance, are doing their best to destroy civilisation in the West and return us all (or rather, the tiny handful which could still subsist) to the Stone Age, are busy advising the Chinese on how to conduct their emergence into the modern world.

Visitors from less-developed countries have the habit of making out a mental shopping list of social institutions. They will buy from the advanced world those things they like, and leave on the shelf those things they dislike. They imagine that they can have paved roads and air conditioning, and maintain the social structure of the tribal village! Or, less naively, but still hopelessly, they believe they can get the technological results of a market order out of a cloud-cuckoo-land of social organisation called 'socialism'.

However social institutions are not toy balloons. There can be no advanced industry without a market for factors of production. There can be no TV sets or appendectomies without production for profit. Scientific and technological innovation cannot long flourish without the sardonic, rational-critical, whats-it-really-worth way of thinking spilling over into every department of life. Social co-operation on a big scale requires that we work for people we do not know, nor deeply care about. The co-ordination of the productive efforts of billions of people, essential for modern living standards, can only be achieved by the unplanned catallactic process known as the market. This process is inconsistent with political regimentation of society into one lifestyle or way of thinking. A free society has no party line, though uncomprehending Russian exiles from Ayn Rand to Alexander Solzhenitzyn have found this too vertiginous to accept.

China does not have the option of acquiring American "science" without its "philosophy" (by which presumably is meant, not *The Roots of Reference*, but prevalent mores and political values). There is no science without the values that sustain science.

Though these values are *not* specifically the values of Moonies, Scientologists, Yuri Geller, or psycho-babble, they are the values which permit all these to proselytise unmolested.

To the majority of today's intellectuals it is as baffling as the Earth's motion through space to an ancient Hindu, but there it is. You play the game of catallaxy, or you do not play it. If you do not play it, you remain wretched. But if you play it, *you must play it*. You want computer science? Then you have to put up with striptease.