

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

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A Chinese Way to Freedom

Hongkong, like Britain, is an off-shore island. Across a narrow strip of sea lies the Chinese mainland. Since Mao Tse Tung has ruled China, Hongkong's population has multiplied twice over, many have swum across the straits to escape from Communism. Bodies of those who have failed in the attempt are still washed ashore each week on Hongkong island.

Last week we had a distinguished visitor in our home from the island. She is Miss F.C., Woo. M.B.E., J.P., D.P.Ed. Now 82, she founded St. Paul's College for girls and built it from its original fifty pupils into the largest school in Hongkong, with an enrolment of 2,500. Miss Woo has worked under British colonial rule, under the

Japanese occupation, and under the shadow of Chinese Communism. Now, she watches President Nixon preparing for his talks with Chairman Mao. I asked her what she sees for the future of her people and of China.

'I used to be afraid of Communism' she replied. She had good reason to be; for on the mainland, the Chinese Communists have liquidated people like her, the intellectual elite of the society they sought to destroy. 'I was afraid of losing my life, my possessions, my school, all I had built up'.

Miss Woo's eyes smile cheerfully as she describes how she spent her formidable energies to raise the status of women in China. When she was a child, women were little better than slaves. Today Miss Woo's pupils play their part freely in every walk of life.

For years she was the only Chinese among the principals of top grade schools in Hongkong. 'And I was determined to show that anything the British could do, I could do', she said. Hers was the only school built by the Chinese, with money raised by the Chinese themselves. With pride she told how she won concessions from the British Colonial Secretary, before whom lesser mortals trembled. In 1931, she became the first Chinese woman to be decorated by a British Sovereign, King George V. Then she was made the island's first woman Justice of the Peace. The University of Southern California gave her a doctorate. In those days, she owned three acres of land in down-town Hongkong, property which today would be worth millions.

With all this achievement, Dr. Woo found herself in 1952 at the end of the road. Crippled with arthritis, she had to resign her work, and went for treatment to the Mayo Clinic in America. She pinned her hopes on cortizone, which had then just been developed.

But cortizone could not cure her. After a course of ray therapy, the doctors could only tell her, 'Be patient'. Each morning she woke with her two hands clenched and aching.

Then, in New York, she met an old friend, Dr. Frank Buchman the American who initiated the work of Moral Re-Armament. She had known him in China years before; and she remembered, his emphasis on the change in human nature which comes from listening to the voice of God and from accepting absolute moral standards. His message helped her with her school work. Now she went eagerly to meet him again.

Once more he was able to help her fundamentally. 'Instead of telling the Almighty how right you have always been', he suggested, 'why not let him tell you what He thinks of you?'

She pondered this. As she did so, before her mind's eye one by one marched the people who had wronged her: those who had gossiped about her, the man who had asked her when she left her school to move away so that her influence would not affect her successors. She realised that the feelings inside her were those of a bitter, hate-filled woman. Those people might be wrong; but she needed their forgiveness. She sat down and, with pen clutched in her twisted hand, she wrote letters of apology to each one.

'The next day God gave me back my hands', said Dr. Woo. As she spoke, she showed me how they had been bound by her illness and were now set free.

'And your fear of Communism?' I asked her. 'That left me too', she replied. Dr. Buchman introduced me to Communists whose lives had been changed in the same way as mine had. As I had been set free from my arthritis and bitterness, they had shed their class hatred. They were now harnessing their revolutionary passion to fight for God's world instead of against it, and to deal with the moral as well as the social roots of injustice'.

'I decided to use my remaining years to give to the world the answer I had found', she said. Since that time she has worked tirelessly in Hongkong, and travelled four times round the world. She has met the leaders and people of many lands, and told them how she found cure and freedom of body and mind. She challenges those who meet her to match her commitment.

As President Nixon's visit to China draws near, the headlines and the hopes of millions may mount. But I shall be thinking of Dr. Woo and what she represents. The Chinese, after all, are mastered by an ideology. They are out to win the world. If Nixon is possessed by any lesser aim - say, to win an election, there is no doubt who will win the ping pong match. But is it too much to hope that he might offer to his Chinese hosts the gift his fellow-American gave to Dr. Woo - a more liberating faith than Marxism?