

China, through rose-colored glasses

During China's Cultural Revolution, a departing western visitor would arrive at the airport. Suddenly, out of the crowd would rush a breathless employee from the hotel where the visitor had been staying.

"Sir! Sir!" the Chinese hotel employee would cry, "You left your razor blade."

Sure enough, the westerner would get back his discarded razor blade, cleaned and neatly wrapped. On returning home, he would tell this story a hundred times, a glowing testimony to the new honesty and efficiency the communists had brought to once rotten China. The enraptured westerner would not, of course, know that this touching event was repeated almost daily — as a means of gulling credulous foreigners into believing Maoist propaganda. Western visitors to Mao's China were shown only what the communists wanted them to see: Gaudy stage scenery and smiling masks that hid the grim truth from the eyes of foreign barbarians.

This anecdote is one of many recounted by the Belgian writer Simon Leys in his brilliant little book published in 1974 on Mao's China, *Chinese Shadows*. Leys shows damningly how western liberals kowtowed at the feet of Chairman Mao, who they styled the world's greatest "progressive reformer." This, while Mao and his men were busy starving to death or shooting at least 27 million Chinese. In the front ranks of this pack of clapping seals were many of our own media stars and Ottawa mandarins.

Leys' words ring as true today as they did 15 years ago. After Mao's crimes became widely known, liberals convinced themselves that China had once again changed. This time, under Deng Xiaoping, China was truly on the progressive path. But politically and in



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basic human rights, China had not really changed at all. It was still run by Stalinist bureaucrats who had almost as much contempt for human life as Mao.

Only our perceptions of China changed — spurred on, once again, by disinformation spoon fed to visiting westerners by the crafty Chinese. Now, for a second time in a generation, liberals have been humiliated and shamed by the bitter realities of China. Heaps of dead students in Tiananmen Square showed that "progressive socialism" in China was nothing more than the old totalitarianism with a thin coating of sticky sweet and sour sauce. So our media and political liberals have erupted with the same fury and white-hot indignation as would a faithful woman betrayed — twice betrayed, in fact.

Some Toronto *Sun* columnists — call them the Gang of Six — have been irritating the liberal media by constantly raising the issue of China's totalitarian system.

George Jonas, one of Canada's best minds and a Gang of Six member, neatly skewered our liberal uniform-think media in a stiletto-sharp article this past week on China. Liberal sneers for the *Sun* heretics should now turn to red faces, covered with sackcloth and ashes.

Still, I doubt that self-criticism will last for long. Doddering Stalinists will be blamed and China-infatuation

will resume. After a decent interval, western businessmen, reporters and politicians will flock back to China for Peking Duck banquets and tours of Xian.

Simon Leys, speaking of the current regime, put it nicely in a recent article. "Whenever their utter vulnerability is exposed to us in all its nakedness, we modestly avert our eyes to spare them any embarrassment."

Irk the Chinese, as I did recently with some blunt talk, and you get dropped off the list of "approved, esteemed foreign friends."

Of course, the liberal media will still snarl at China for a while: You're not hip if you're not wearing a "Freedom for China" T-shirt and getting weepy over the 400-600 students and workers killed at the square.

But where were all these liberal fears when the Chinese were busy killing one million Tibetans? Clicking little glasses of mao tai with their smiling Chinese hosts.

Where were they when the Soviets were slaughtering a million Afghans? And why, cynics might ask, are Chinese student protesters so much purer and holier and more worthy of our heartache than Palestinian or Iranian students shot down protesting against an occupation army or a tyrannical shah?

Well, perhaps because Dan Rather and the big guns of TV weren't there. As they say in California, if it didn't happen on TV, it didn't happen.

Back to Leys for a last aphorism. History shows that for revolutions to succeed, rebels don't have to be intelligent. What is necessary is for governments to be sufficiently stupid. The Deng regime has certainly acted stupidly. But so have its pre-Tiananmen western admirers. One now wonders with alarm if our Soviet "experts" might be as wrong as our red-faced China watchers.