

## **"Competitive Comrades - Career Incentives and Student Strategies in China", book by Susan Shirk**

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More than 30 years after Mao Zedong's rise to power in China, his crusade to transform social consciousness has left people more, rather than less, alienated from one another and from the state, according to a recently completed study by Dr. Susan Shirk.

Shirk, an associate professor of political science at the University of California, San Diego, has analyzed the failure of the Maoist vision by looking at the city high school as a microcosm of Chinese society. The results of her study have just been published in a book titled, "Competitive Comrades - Career Incentives and Student Strategies in China" by the University of California Press.

In her study, Shirk, an authority on Chinese education, looked at the social and political life in the high schools. She found that instead of cooperation, there is intense individual competition, both academic and political. In other words, a failure of Mao's attempt to transform human behavior and diminish individual competition in China.

"I try to explain this failure by looking at the strategy that Mao used to transform behavior," Shirk said. "He tried to change people by rewarding individuals who exemplified the moral virtues of the system. I call this kind of system 'virtuocracy,' a term I coined to describe societies which reward people who are judged to be politically virtuous with job opportunities or entrance to the university. People are not promoted for their professional or intellectual ability, as they are in meritocracies, but for being good Reds.

"I found that many students very quickly became opportunistic, while others became overcautious," she said. "The regime attempts to encourage the collectivist spirit by singling out and promoting those individuals who display it most zealously. This is a contradiction that is not lost upon the young," she said, "and they take a dim view of political activism.

"For example, many Chinese are very careful of what they say because someone else may pick it up and create political suspicion."

Much of Shirk's research is based on material gathered before the Cultural Revolution which, she says, is an extreme example of political virtuocracy. But since the party today is trying to reinstate tough political control, the study still applies to the current situation.

"You will always get these problems as long as you are going to give rewards for political virtue," Shirk said. "The book is really a study of the falseness and competitiveness in everyday life which are consequences of virtuocracy," she said.

„ These consequences are not intended," she said. "But, they are the result of a fundamental contradiction between moral transformation and the tactics devised to accomplish this change. It is a contradiction that continues to plague China," she said.

For more information contact: Paul W. West, 452-3120

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