

# CHILDREN OF MAO ...

## Film-makers do Battle with Chinese Censors

moral absolutes were gone, the characters were more complex, and the films relied on striking imagery rather than words to evoke their stories.

Chen Kaige is the most internationally renowned fifth

views on the film-makers' political responsibilities.

By the 1960s, all the arts were unquestionably subordinated to the needs of politics. The primary role of cinema was seen as that of moral guidance. Scripts were kept to a rigid socialist format, emphasising positive heroes and exemplary ways of life, usually with a clash of two opposing forces, where good finally triumphs over evil. Ultimately, the battles of the Cultural Revolution led to closure of the Beijing Film Academy in 1966. It re-opened in 1978.

The Academy takes in a block of students every five years. The 1978 generation, its fifth, came to represent a distinctive, more provocative kind of film, a break from the wooden clichés of the past, more visual, more stylish, and dealing with issues previously considered taboo.

The work soon became known as fifth generation films, winning critical acclaim abroad while generating controversy at home.

Many turned a critical eye to aspects of the recent political past formerly considered off limits. *The Blue Kite* describes, through the eyes of a young boy, the uncertainties and betrayals experienced by the family of a political exile between 1949 and 1967.

The first film by director Tian Zhuangzhuang, *Horse Thief*, filmed in Tibet, was described as immoral by some Chinese critics because of its apparent sympathy with the thief who steals horses through lack of any economic alternative.

The new uncertainties were



THE NEW FACE OF CHINA  
A scene from "Farewell to My Concubine,"

often portrayed in the lives of their screen characters and in the kinds of issues the films addressed. The black and white generation director and his *Farewell to My Concubine* spans 50 years, focusing on two stars of the Peking Opera and

the way political events intruded into the world of theatre and their personal relationships, with tragic consequences.

Says Kaige: "The film is about the choices of how and why we live and die, about the relationships between love and sexuality and between real life and the theatre."

Reference to the Cultural Revolution is still a sensitive matter, and Kaige's film showed little difference between the excesses of the invading Japanese, the corrupt Kuomintang, or the Communist Party cadres, implying that they were equally bad.

*Beijing Bastard* is a blend of fantasy and reality with an appearance by Cui Jian, one of China's best known rock stars. It opens with a young couple who try to commit suicide, but are saved. When the young woman disappears, she leads her friends through a Beijing underworld of musicians artists, each in their own way trying to interpret, in the words of director Zhang Yuan, "the confusion and conflicts between politics and reality, love and sex, money and traditional values."

Zhang Yuan is a sixth generation film-maker and it is the courage of these young artists in creating enduring images of the extraordinary times they are living through that is winning them the recognition they deserve. - GEMINI NEWS

GERRY ELLIS is a British freelance journalist who specialises in films.

## Wild Swans Author Turns to the Great Helmsman

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Jung Chang charts the course of her family history through the different regimes of China: the warlords, the Japanese, the Kuomintang and finally the oppression under Mao Zedong—the Great Helmsman, as he was once called.

It is a destiny that took the family to the precipice of death innumerable times, only to drag them back to the horrors of continuing life.

"The incidents have not changed me," Jung Chang said in an interview. "It has not made me or my mother bitter. I am sure that if other people had a chance to display the courageous side of their character, they would emerge better human beings."

She puts her positive attitude down to the fact that through all the gloom she saw the beauty of the world around her. The book contains many descriptive passages eulogizing the mountains, the flowers, the quiet of a village or the pleasure of art and poetry. All this offered her comfort during her ordeal.

Jung Chang's grandmother, Yu-fang, became a concubine to a warlord at the age of 15. She was beautiful, and one of the last of her generation to have her feet crushed and bound to stop them growing. Her master abandoned her for year at a time with the threat that infidelity would result in torture and death. He granted her freedom on his deathbed.

Her daughter, Xia De-hong, grew up to be a formidable communist activist who put her life at risk several times. When the communists came to power, her troubles had only begun.

As high-ranking officials, she and her indomitable husband faced physical and mental

torture under the regime. Xia De-hong's husband was driven to insanity and inevitable death. Her mother died tragically. She and her children survive, bruised but not broken.

Despite the unimaginable plight of the Chinese, the author shows no hint of recrimination. The book does not try to vent anger over the atrocities that robbed Jung Chang's family of a harmonious life. By laying bare the facts, she evokes the reader's disgust and awe at Chinese society, especially under Mao.

Jung Chang witnessed the excesses of the Mao cult, the destruction of intellectuals and creativity and the display of king-sized pictures and praise of himself.

Fed with a constant diet of Maoist propaganda, Jung Chang, like others, could not find it within her to question the cult, until her last days in China. Not once did she or her family defy the rules.

Jung Chang left for the West ten years ago when she won a scholarship to study in Britain. She now lives in London and says would not consider returning to China, even though China is "in her blood."

She points to the economic headway China is making. This, and China's increased communication with the outside world, she sees as a sure guarantee of the country's future. She chooses not to dwell on the negative characteristics of the governments that have given China an unpopular international image.

When students revolted in Tiananmen Square, says Jung Chang, "they were still reacting in a prescribed way." She explained: "They had not quite

shaken off the conditioning they were subject to over the years.

"The power of brainwashing cannot be underestimated. The students are communists. It takes a long time for people to think for themselves and to think differently. You need the control of fearlessness."

Her parents, she admits, were not totally fearless. Once, during the Long March in the 1930s, her father stifled his wife's cries in case it provoked criticism. Her mother had a miscarriage as a result of the terrible march.

Jung Chang says: "Under Mao the control was a straight jacket. Today, it is like a net." It is to the times of the straight jacket Jung Chang now again turns her attention.

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## A Charming Chinatown Survives in Calcutta

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plans: "For the rich, it doesn't matter much; they can choose their way. But for the middle-class, it's like hoping against hope."

As a British passport holder, he has lived all his life in Calcutta, but plans to send his two schoolgoing children to his brother in Australia. At this moment, neither the sociologists nor the Chinese themselves make any predictions about their continued presence in the city — GEMINI NEWS

RANJITA BISWAS is on the staff of the 'Financial Express', Calcutta.

## Maoism Survives in Peruvian Highlands

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Professor at a provincial university in the Peruvian Andes. Since 1980, the guerilla war, primarily waged with terror tactics and indiscriminate killings, has cost more than 27,000 lives and an estimated \$20 billion in economic losses.

More than 60 per cent of all Peruvians were unconvinced that Guzman's request for peace talks, transmitted via published letters and videotapes and later seconded by many of the movement's other jailed leaders, was genuine, according to polling surveys.

"If the Peruvian people didn't believe the letters, why would the Shining Path members themselves?" asked Tapia. *El Diario International*, the

Shining Path newspaper published in Belgium, has called the letters and videos "a hoax and a blatant lie."

Communiques from Shining Path activists in Lima deemed the letters "counter-revolutionary" — a surprising attack against the once-mythic Guzman — and then denied the hostilities would halt.

By most accounts, a bearded, middle-aged former bank clerk named Oscar Ramirez Durand now heads Shining Path.

Although few think Durand, who is called Feliciano by his followers, capable of replacing Guzman ideologically, many seem convinced that his child of a Peruvian general is more than capable of continuing the war.

A retired general once close to Ramirez's family and a high-ranking member of the intelligence services, said: "When you think about what he has to look forward to if he's caught, namely life in prison, it's obvious that he'll fight to the end."

"When he was a teenager, Oscar wanted to be a cadet at the National Military College. He seemed to want to lead armies then, so why not now?"

The government has repeatedly speculated on a power struggle between two camps in Ramirez's new central committee: a hard line faction favouring more military action versus a group calling for political activity aimed at winning peasant support.

Former senator Enrique Bernales, an expert on terrorist violence who heads the left-leaning Institute of Constitution and Society, says there is no evidence of such a split.

He believes there are no indications that Shining Path's central committee, rebuilt in late 1992, has accepted the ideas put forward by Guzman. He adds: "The government's reaction at this point is irresponsible."

An interview with a Shining Path activist backs up Bernales' contention. He said: "The government assumed that Abimael Guzman equals the Peruvian Communist Party, but if Guzman falls, it is only one man. From the organisational point of view, Guzman doesn't decide anything these days. It's the new central committee who decides."

One apparent decision of the central committee is to follow up on Guzman's previously aired request that the movement celebrate the 100-year anniversary of Mao Zedong's birth on December 26.

Preoccupation over the possibility of terrorist attacks on this date has led to a heightened state of awareness among the armed forces. Military documents show much of Shining Path's future military actions are likely to focus on Peru's Upper Hualagala Valley, the heart of the world's cocaine producing region.

Shining Path influence is rising in the Upper Hualagala mainly because of government successes against a rival guerilla group, said the military documents.

The near-final collapse of the Revolutionary Movement of Tupac Amaru (MRTA) has allowed Shining Path to push into new areas, gaining access to drug money that could fund future military operations, the documents said.

One military commander with experience in the region said: "The MRTA was the containing wall preventing Sendero from advancing in the valley. Now that this wall no longer exists, Sendero is rapidly extending its influence to areas once controlled by MRTA."

The military report suggests pacification of the Hualagala is unlikely by 1995, despite promises by Fujimori to end Peru's war by the time his mandate expires.

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# The British Council Language Matters

### The Intro

Today's column continues our spelling versus pronunciation exercises. Remember the tips given last week about using your dictionary. There is also a next installment of the discussion of examinations, as well as a Word Processor.

We have received a request for an explanation of the jokes in the Word Processor, and in the near future there will be a short article on some of the issues involved in understanding the play on words which they depend on. But, as you certainly all know, a joke is no longer funny when it has to be explained!

### Spelling vs Pronunciation

eg bear -> care -> where -> here -> dear

Note that words that have similar pronunciation do not necessarily have similar spellings, and that words with similar spelling are not necessarily pronounced in the same way.

Consider the pronunciation of the words in the box and group them according to vowel sounds (ie: which words rhyme).

fun	stone	none	groan	town
own	bone	gone	on	known
done	moan	brown	John	won
phone	one	down	grown	son

Think carefully about the vowel sounds - the five columns do not necessarily mean there are five groups of sounds.....

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3?	Group 4?	Group 5?
eg fun none	stone			

### Examinations : Tests of Knowledge or Memory? Part 2

In Part 1 we started to look at the examinations used in Bangladesh to test a student's ability in the English language at the SSC level. First we analysed the essay type questions used in that examination and concluded that 'they test memory, but neither understanding of nor skill in the English language'. This week we look at the objective, multiple-choice type questions to see if they are any better.

We start with this typical question:

Which is the correct word in the gap of the following sentence?  
Reza wants to go to.....to learn English?

a London  
b America  
c Germany  
d Dhaka

You may be puzzled by the word 'correct'. Does it mean 'appropriate'? Since both London and America are equally appropriate places to study English, as, in certain circumstances, Dhaka could also be, how are we to answer this question? Without further information about Reza and his circumstances it is really not possible to understand, let alone answer, this question. The information is, of course, to be found in 'English For Today' Book 7, for, as with the essay type questions, the multiple choice questions do not test English at all, but only memory of the contents of prescribed textbooks (or notebooks). In fact they demand an even more precise total recall than the essay type questions, for 'correct' refers precisely to what is to be found in such books.

In Part 1 we have already drawn conclusions about examination questions that test memory, as opposed to understanding of or skill in a language. The multiple choice question above, however, not only demands more detailed memorisation, but less language production. In fact none at all, for all that is required is a 'tick mark'!

We may also pause to note that not only has the ability to use skills been replaced by the ability to memorise and repeat, but statements expressing, or suggesting, an opinion (i.e. is it better to go to America, London, Germany or Dhaka to study English?) are treated as statements of fact. Opinions are not up for discussion, for they are either 'correct' or 'incorrect'. The long-term effect of this must be to encourage a dogmatic approach to options - hardly appropriate in a democratic society!

Does this imply criticism of multiple choice questions? Like other types of objective questioning, they do have their uses. For example, they can test knowledge in a precise way, like this:

Which of the following articles can you put to complete the sentence?  
We must fight for the liberty of..... press.

a a  
b to  
c the  
d (no article)


Good multiple choice questions are not, however, easy to set and there are a number of faults with both of those above (quoted from actual SSC papers) - quite apart from the fact that they test memory rather than language skills. For example, in both cases the choices are inconsistent. In the first one we have a confusion of cities and countries. In the second, only the grammatical item specified in the question should be given, but 'to' is not an article. In both cases the questions are also prime examples of inappropriate, ungrammatical English, ironically reflecting, however, a limited, grammatically rule-bound (rather than a communicative) view of language. In both cases it is clear that choices are provided only to bring the number up to four, whereas three would be perfectly adequate and, especially in the second one, more logical.

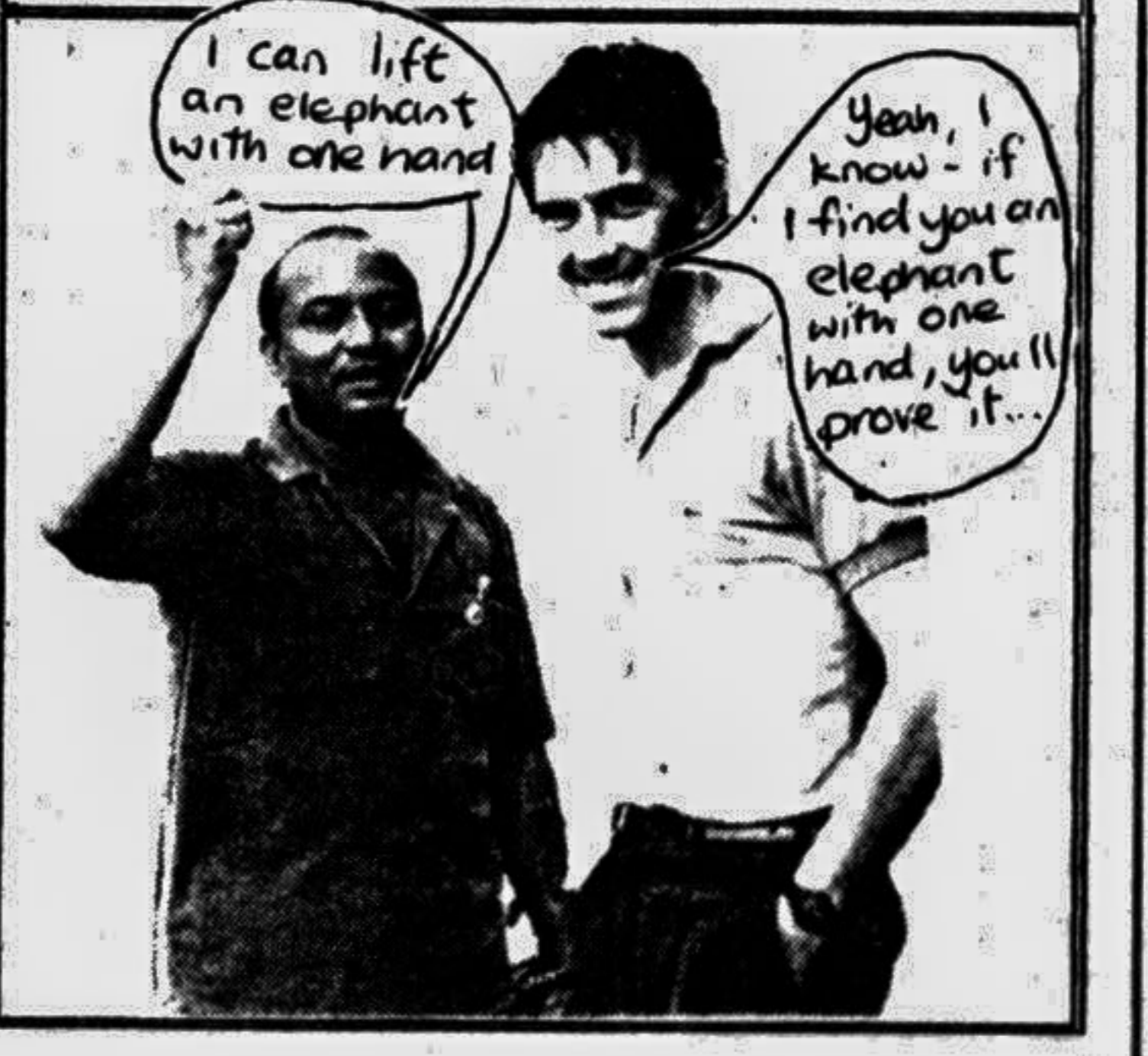
You may be wondering if the questions quoted are typical of all the SSC objective type questions? Sadly, they are. In fact some are worse. What, for example, could possibly be the 'correct' answer to this question, when all the choices seem inappropriate/incorrect?

Which is the correct phrase or idiom in the gap of the sentence?  
The headmaster is..... in the school.

a all in all  
b all and sundry  
c all the same  
d all at once

Once more we have a poorly written question testing the wrong thing - memory not language skills. Whilst an examination with such questions cannot provide any indication of actual proficiency in English, it can, unfortunately, counteract most efforts to achieve it. For not only does such an examination not test English language skills, but, by limiting learners to a diet of memorising and repetition, it prevents them from acquiring the communicative competence that they so desperately need.

### The Word Processor.....



sun	phone	moan	known	bone	own	grown	stone	fun
Group 1	Group 2	Group 3?	Group 4?	Group 5?				