

Ch'en controlled by
his religion of
terrorism and



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ch'en Ta Erh: The Time Bomb In Man's Fate, Andre Malraux examines the compelling forces that lead individuals to join a greater cause. Forced into a life of contempt, Ch'en portrays the man of action in the early phases of the Chinese Revolution.

He dedicates himself to the communist cause. It is something greater than himself, a phenomenal concept that he has fused into. It is something for which he will give his life. How did this devotion come about? A combination of his personality, his interior life, as well as society's influence, molded him into a terrorist. Ch'en is self-destructive; he is controlled by his religion of terrorism and his fascination with death. He is representative of the dedicated soldier who begins as a "sacrificial priest" (4) and ends as a martyr. After all, the ideologies of communism and terrorism were practically a religion to those involved in the revolution.

An examination of Ch'en's past gives us an idea of how he formed his beliefs, and fell into a state of isolation. At an early age, his parents were murdered in the pillage of Kalagan. In addition, at age twenty-four, his uncle was taken hostage and killed because he couldn't afford the ransom, and with no wife or children he was severed from any attachment to a family. He was practically brought up by pastor Smithson, representative of the thousands of Christians that were present in Shanghai, who gave him his Christian education. However, "as he was devoid of charity, a religious calling could lead him only to contemplation or the inner life; but he hated contemplation and would only have dreamt of an apostleship, for which precisely his absence of charity disqualified him" (64).

Thus, he was unable to be a devout Christian, and in addition to this Old Gisors makes a comment about Ch'en's basis for a belief: "No sooner had he observed Ch'en than he had understood that! this adolescent was incapable of living by an ideology which did not immediately become transformed into action...."(64).

Although he is Chinese ethnically, he felt estranged and unconnected to his heritage. His separation from his ethnicity can be demonstrated through his physical appearance which relates more to a Mongolian than a Chinese national. His attachment to a class rather than a nation is reflected in Suan, who states " I don't want to create China... I want to create my people, with or without her.

The poor. It's for them that I'm willing to die, to kill. For them only.

..." (189).

It is clear that Ch'en and Suan do not feel as though they are part of China, and the quote also indicates that one of the chief reasons for feeling this way is their economic condition. For it was a time when many were starving in China, and agrarian land reform was most desperately needed. Colonialism causes an indeterminate quality of identity, and it creates a need for a radical change to link people such as Ch'en to a culture.

They have been tainted by foreign culture, and no one feels like an insider. Ch'en has been shaped by this society and wants to diminish the suffering that it has brought about. It is the historical situation that Ch'en is in that helps him make the choices that he does. At 24 years of age, Ch'en had no

money, but only worthless diplomas. He was a truck driver, then an assistant chemist:" everything had pushed him into political activity: the hope of a different world, the possibility of eating, though wretchedly (he was naturally austere, perhaps through pride), the gratification of his hatreds, his mind, his character.

This activity gave a meaning to his solitude"(65). It leads him to fight to unite everyone under a big community, where they escape from isolation and live more equal lives. Ch'en can not live in his present situation, however " The world they were preparing condemned him - Ch'en - as much as it did that of their enemies"(103). What would he do in a factory? He is not taken as a working class member, as seen by the scene in which the antiquarian believes him to be of the higher class. The store clerk is somewhat justified for Ch'en lies between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, with his University of Peking education. However, Ch'en is not rich either.

Thus, it is apparent that once the revolution came to an end he would not fit into the new order. There is no place for him in the old wor...

.. Id or the new; he is an instrument of destruction. Ch'en lives by the ideology of action - terrorism.

Even his physical appearance is suggestive of his line of work. He has hawk-like physical features, indicating a bird of prey. Ch'en clearly states his intentions:" I'm not looking for peace. I'm looking for.

.. the opposite. (173). In addition, Ch'en devotion to his cause is phenomenal. To him, terrorism is even greater than a religion. This is seen through the dialogue between Gisors and Ch'en.

Gisors asks " You want to make a kind of religion of terrorism?" (192), and Chen responds, " Not a religion. The meaning of life. The..

. the complete possession of oneself. Total. Absolute. To know.

Not to be looking, looking, always, for ideas, for duties"(192). It becomes clear as to how it is possible to commit one's life to the cause. The cause, which is a means to an end, becomes the end in itself. However, it is not so easy to take the life of another. He is hesitant about killing someone else, but to a large degree he has no choice.

This is perhaps the most important conflict between human impulse and his ideology. This dichotomy is further exemplified through the transition from Ch'en's state of mind to the outside, and the inability to recognize one's own recorded voice. These are representative of the switch between the individual mind and the bigger causes to which he serves, as well as the existential dilemma that each individual is cut off from himself. In the end it is the ideology that takes power over him. For it is much more important to serve the higher objective, and he serves it as a sacrificial priest. Ch'en makes his connection with others through death. This can be demonstrated through Hemmelrich's experience:" It came to him suddenly that life was not the only mode of contact between human beings, that it was not even the best; that he could know them, love them, possess them more completely in vengeance than in life.

... 'One can kill with love'" (267). This is supported by Ch'en's actions. For before Ch'en kills he always inflicts upon himself some sort of physical harm.

In doing so he feels what his victim will feel, and Ch'en identifies with him in this way. Ch'en, like many followers of the revolution, were completely dedicated to the cause. However, it is ironic that it is still the Chinese who do the "dirty work." It is he who kills the first victim of the insurrection to get the document necessary to gain access to the guns, and it is he who takes the most physically active role and eventually gives his life for the cause. It is those who are not ethnically Chinese who are giving the orders, and assuming the highest positions. So dedicated is Chen that the fear of death does not ward him off, it actually calls him to battle, and he decides to continue as planned to kill Chiang Kai-Shek.

Despite the fact that people who fail in an attempted suicide rarely try again, Ch'en goes out for a second assault. He wants the action of the revolution, yet he realizes that if Chiang Kai-Shek were killed and Ch'en lived then he would be obsolete as a terrorist. His ultimate fulfillment is brought about by dying for his cause. For he knows how much weight an idea acquires through the blood that is shed in its name. Ch'en's thought before he kills himself indicates that he achieves a peace through suicide: "And suddenly everything seemed extraordinarily easy to Ch'en.

Things, even actions, did not exist; they were dreams, nothing but dreams which take possession of us because we give them force, but which we can just as easily deny" (180). This is further reinforced by Ch'en's idea that "In the last hour I have felt nothing of what used to weigh on me" (192). Ch'en is

the terrorist for the insurrection. His faith had isolated himself from the world instead of submitting to it. We have a personal need for connection, Ch'en is isolated until the end, when all differences are subsumed. Communism gives a sense of escaping isolation.

For under this ideology there is a personal connection and an feeling of equality. It is the ultimate fulfillment to live his idea, and more importantly to die for his cause - a cause that is much greater than the individual. In the end Ch'en becomes the bomb. Bibliography Malraux, Andre. Man's Fate: La Condition Humaine. New York: Vintage Books. 1990