

lessons of strength. Strength is like a god to him; he abhors weakness and sees Khrushchev's "coexistence" as weakness. Mao's obsession with brute strength goes back to his childhood.

When he was 13 years old, there was a famine in his native Hunan province. Starving peasants, who were refused help by a callous governor, broke into the provincial granary and carried off rice to feed their families. Several were executed and their heads displayed on poles as a warning. Furiously indignant, young Mao demanded of his father, "They had a right to do as they did. Why were they punished?"

Said his father, grimly, "My son, they were punished for being too weak to defend their rights."

Mao has never forgotten that lesson; even today he occasionally says, "China never again will be punished for being weak, as she used to be."

Mao has chosen as his personal residence the traditional power-center of the Chinese nation—the Forbidden City, the inner quarter of the ancient imperial capital, Peking. He lives a curiously withdrawn life, often shutting himself up for weeks or months, reading, studying, and contemplating. He still travels in the countryside, however, and makes a point of mingling with the people and asking personal questions, though there is an increasing air of aloof superiority about him.

BUT MORE AND MORE, the man is becoming mixed with the legends that have grown up about him. Of the great political leaders of today, Mao Tse-Tung is certainly the one about whom hard facts are most difficult to establish.

He disdains ostentation. His "uniform" is a gray jacket, buttoned to the throat, and a plain cap such as a London taxi driver might wear. When at home, he lives with his family—his wife and two teen-age daughters who are learning ballet dancing—in a lovely little one-story marble palace with a roof of traditional imperial-yellow tile, built on a terrace facing one of the three lakes which lie in the gardens behind the New China Gate.

This palace has a romantic name out of the past—it is known as the Palace of the Fragrant Concubine. The Emperor Ch'ien Lung built it two centuries ago to house the Princess Hsiang Fei, a Turki lady of extraordinary beauty whom the Emperor brought to Peking as part of the spoils of war from his conquest of Turkistan.

Mao, who, as I already remarked, has given China its first strong centralized government since Ch'ien Lung's day, apparently also shares that Emperor's taste for vivacious, intelligent women. He has been married three times, discounting the

legend of a child-bride forced upon him by his father at the age of 14.

His present wife, Lan Ping, is a movie actress from Shanghai whom Mao married in Yenen in 1939. The two daughters are her children. Mao also has a grown son by his first wife, Yang Kaihui, daughter of his philosophy professor at Peking University, whom he courted in his student days. She was killed in 1928 during a Kuomintang purge of Communists and their relatives.

Three other children—presumably born of his second wife, Ho Tzu-chun, a former schoolteacher, from whom Mao was divorced in 1937—had to be left with friendly peasants during the hardships of the famous Long March; such were the internal disorders of that time that no trace of them could be found afterward. Mao Tse-Tung knows personal bereavement.

In person, Mao is somewhat above the average Chinese height, slightly stooped, deeply sun-tanned with thick hair but a receding hairline (the name Mao means "hair," so baldness would be unbecoming!). He is heavier than he used to be, but his physical strength is considerable. It was only a few years ago that he insisted—to the horror of his staff—on swimming the 1,400-yard-wide Yangtze River to prove that it could be done despite the treacherous currents.

THERE IS indeed an uneasy feeling spreading throughout much of free Asia that Mao Tse-Tung's belief in his ability to do the impossible has wider horizons than anyone has yet understood. It might help if Mao's own horizons of factual knowledge—especially of the United States—were a good deal broader than they are. Mao has occasionally told visitors that he would like to tour the United States some day. There is something to be said for such a visit if it ever comes within the realm of practical politics.

Mao Tse-Tung, with China's enormous manpower, is dangerous enough today. Tomorrow—say in three to five years—he may have acquired at least a few nuclear weapons and become even more dangerous. His ignorance of the power realities of the world as a whole, and of the United States (which he considers a "paper tiger") in particular, remains a very serious threat to the peace of Asia and the world. For Mao Tse-Tung and the American people to get to know each other better could be a benefit to both.

But it isn't likely to happen as things are. Probably Mao Tse-Tung will indeed learn more than he knows now about the power of the United States in the course of time; but most likely he will have to learn the hard way.

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