

15 October 1972

Dear Harold:

This is by way of an amicus curiae offering to supplement your valiant efforts to disabuse Ms. Gonzalez of her notions about the Chinese and Opium and its derivatives. I not only agree with everything you told her, which is all true and can't be said too often, but can add a few supporting details.

The story that Red China produces and spreads opiates is a classic example of the big lie as perfected by the late Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, the exact opposite of the truth, and is viable only because of the profound ignorance of most Americans about the history of the last 200 years. This climate of ignorance is so all-pervading and persistent that it is quite easy to trot out the same nonsense year after year and get away with it. The denials also appear, but everyone knows that they never entirely erase the damage done by the lies, especially in a climate where the vast majority of people have no idea of what has been going on for two centuries and refuse to learn.

The truth is that one of the major social accomplishments of the Chinese Communists is the elimination of drug addictions, which was very widespread and deliberately cultivated by the Japanese during their occupation of China, just as the French had deliberately spread the use of opium during their tenure in Indochina (only more French officials fell victim to the habit themselves than did Japanese in China). In China the Communists, whether one agrees with their politics or not, unquestionably have eradicated drug addiction along with prostitution and venereal disease. Entirely eliminated it, according to EVERYONE who has been there.

This of course does not mean they could not at the same time use drugs as an instrument of policy outside their own country, as the currently renewed canard has it, but there is a special reason why they never would do this: having been the historic victims of such policies in the past from imperialist countries, this is one weapon they would not be caught dead using. They fought an entire war with the British over allowing opium into China, which ended in the humiliating Treaty of Nanking in 1844 which marked the beginning of national dismemberment for China, so they are extremely sensitive on the question of addictive drugs, quite apart from their natural puritanical streak which makes it a matter of pride with them never to stoop to such unspeakable methods.

The Treaty of Nanking initiated the phenomenon of extra-territoriality, which meant that foreigners in China were not accountable to Chinese law, but to their own. This meant that until after the end of World War II nearly all foreigners in China could do pretty much as they pleased, including import, process, distribute and sell opium and its derivatives, and the Chinese could do absolutely nothing about it. During their occupation of ~~Chinese~~ China the Japanese abused this privilege perhaps more blatantly than the British, Americans, French, Germans, and other foreign nationals had before them. The Japanese, who also had had a taste of extraterritoriality themselves, turned the drug trade over to Koreans, who were technically Japanese nationals and therefore immune to Chinese law enforcement. The Koreans descended on China in a wave of carpetbagging activities, including the drug traffic, and the longer the Japanese and Koreans stayed the worse it got, far worse than ever before. Because in the old days we and the other foreigners brought in opium, which is smoked in a pipe, costs a lot and tended to be the undoing of rich officials more than anyone else. After modern chemistry learned how to refine opium into cocaine and later heroin, the situation grew much worse.

While not cheap, heroin is far more addictive, more drastic in its effect, and more easily consumed than opium with its somewhat cumbersome paraphernalia. By the end of World War II uncounted thousands of quite ordinary Chinese had been drawn into heroin use through methods remarkably similar to those used by pushers now in this country. The newly addicted must become a pusher himself in order to support his habit. Anyone who imagines the Chinese, ~~men~~ after all their experience, would have anything to do with such business these days, simply knows nothing of the facts or has refused to think about them.

Recently there was a multi-million heroin bust carried out in San Francisco and New York which ~~was being carried~~ ^{been} netted half a dozen Chinese who had ^{been} bringing the stuff into the country from Southeast Asia. All were from Singapore. I asked a customs agent where the stuff came from, and his reply was delivered simply and in a routine way. Like about 90 per cent of the ~~heroin~~ heroin brought into this country, he said, this came from the Southeast Asia triangle, which means Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. Anyone who knows anything about the drug traffic will tell you the same thing. It never varies, except this ridiculous propaganda that it comes from Red China. Hell, the Red Chinese have been trying for 25 years to clean out a small army of former Kuomintang troops who fled from Yunnan and Szechuan provinces into the hill-tribes areas of Laos and ~~that~~ Thailand and Burma ~~and~~ when the Reds took over in China. There they set up business growing opium and are still at it. Burma hasn't been able to get rid of them because of her own internal weaknesses, Thailand apparently doesn't care and probably is making too much money out of the trade, and the Cambodians and Vietnamese can't help themselves. As everyone knows, Mme. Ngo Dinh Nhu was much mixed up in this traffic before her husband was assassinated in 1963. The stuff was flown out of Laos, to list one example, by commercial airlines like Air America and Civil Air Transport (CAT, the former Chennault line based on Taiwan) and one version I've heard has asserted some of these planes have brought the stuff as far as Mexico.

In any case the profits from the drug trade have financed much of the CIA's operations in Laos, according to a statement I've seen many, many times and never seen denied. Air America is the CIA's own.

Certainly Chinese are mixed up in the present drug traffic, but the one thing you can be sure of is that they are not Red Chinese. For the others, its old stuff, profitable and familiar to many of them.

Now about Mr. Striso. The name is entirely new and unfamiliar to me, but if he worked for UNRRA in China after World War II and before the Communists took over, there is an outside chance he may have met Mao, Chou and Lin Piao as he apparently claims. But you can be sure he did no more than meet them. These particular men always have been extremely choosy about the foreigners they get mixed up with. In those days, because of extraterritoriality, China was a natural gathering place for all sorts of weird and shady types, remittance men whose families were glad to get rid of them, various characters on the lam for one reason or another, and all sorts of adventurers and misfits, soldiers of fortune, and just plain crooks. Like any other bureaucracy newly created, UNRRA picked up its share of these characters, some of whom I've known personally. This is one very good reason that the term Old China Hand has fallen into well-deserved disrepute. You never know about them, including this one. It happens that I've never had a chance to meet ~~the~~ Mao or Chou, but it wasn't because I wouldn't have been interested. In any case, when Mr. Striso comes on and says they are old buddies, I cannot but wonder. He ~~sounds~~ sounds like the kind of operator who flourished in China in times now happily gone, one whom I would avoid as the plague and would trust no further than I could throw the Great Wall.