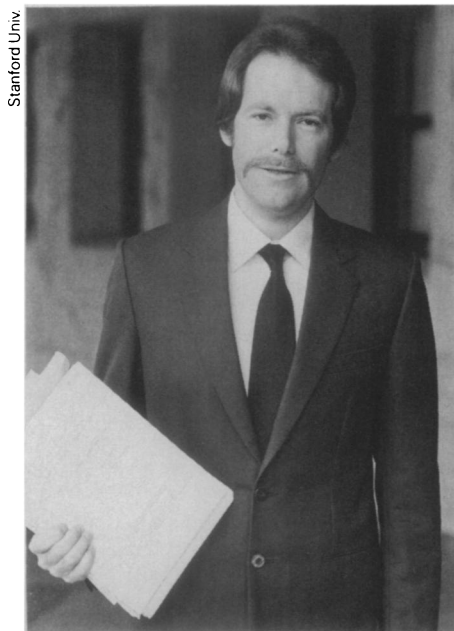


The Man Who Would Be Anthropologist

One student's ouster has sparked debate about ethical dilemmas in cultural anthropology



Steven Westley Mosher

By WRAY HERBERT

A popular newsweekly once described Steven Westley Mosher as the Indiana Jones of anthropology, although Mosher prefers to compare himself with the late Margaret Mead. Either comparison may be apt, for it is Mosher's freewheeling style that has rankled fellow anthropologists over the past few years and that, in late February, led finally to his expulsion from the Ph.D. anthropology program at Stanford University. The incident has served to underscore problems with the foundering scholarly exchange with China and — more important — to highlight the kind of ethical conundrums inherent in much anthropological field work.

Both Stanford and the would-be anthropologist are now trading charges of unethical behavior, but both parties have decided not to reveal crucial facts behind

their allegations. Nevertheless the basic story can now be pieced together from interviews and from the two fragmentary accounts — Mosher's and the Stanford anthropologists' — that were distributed by the university in early March. Mosher was one of the first social scientists to be admitted to China as part of the liberalized exchange program initiated in the late 1970s. He was given unusual license as a researcher and, as Mosher himself concedes, he took full advantage of it. In probably one of the most exhaustive studies of Chinese village life since the cultural revolution, he spent nine months observing life in a rural commune in China's Guangdong Province.

One aspect of Chinese society shocked Mosher. He observed an official birth control program involving forced abortions — as many as 400 a month in a commune of 80,000, according to Mosher — and, in a few cases, infanticide. The abortions, Mosher claimed, were often performed on women seven, eight and nine months pregnant; other women, Mosher said, were fleeing the commune to deliver their babies in the hills. Mosher made these claims after leaving China for Taiwan in June 1980. He published his findings under the name Steven Westley in Taiwan's popular magazine the *SUNDAY TIMES CHINA WEEKLY*; the magazine also published Mosher's photographs of women in the final trimester of pregnancy undergoing abortion.

According to Mosher, it was this step that caused his problems with the Stanford anthropology department. The Chinese government, he says, put pressure on the university to make an example of Mosher; according to Mosher's account, Chinese officials indicated that the exchange program would be made to suffer if Mosher were not punished. As evidence of this pressure, Mosher cites a letter to Stanford University from Kenneth Prewitt, head of the Social Science Research Council (one of the major sponsors of U.S.-China exchange), in which Prewitt attrib-

utes such a threat to Zhao Fusan, a Chinese official connected with the scholarly exchange program. Prewitt told *SCIENCE NEWS* that Fusan did indeed make such a threat, but he says that he (Prewitt) made it clear to Fusan that Mosher would not be punished to satisfy the Chinese government. Prewitt adds that he also made that very clear in his letter to Stanford officials, which Mosher, he says, has been quoting out of context.

Mosher concedes that he should have used his real name in the popular article (he did use his real name when he published essentially the same findings in *ASIAN SURVEY*, a refereed journal, two years later). And he has also said that his article probably has had no effect on Chinese social policy. But he maintains that he did nothing more than tell the truth and that, because he was still a graduate student, he was an easy scapegoat. "It is a measure of the success of my research that the Chinese Communists are so anxious to discredit it," Mosher said following his expulsion.

According to Clifford Barnett, chairman of the Stanford anthropology department, the investigation leading to Mosher's expulsion began in August 1981 when two members of Mosher's dissertation committee reported Chinese officials' claims that Mosher had acted unethically and illegally. The anthropology faculty named a three-person committee to explore the charges, and a year later that committee completed a 47-page report calling for Mosher's dismissal. In late February, the full faculty voted unanimously for Mosher's dismissal.

At first, the department refused to discuss publicly any of the report's contents, claiming that confidential information could be "injurious to third parties." Mosher, too, refused to make the report public, saying that revelation of the contents could undermine future litigation; but he emphasized in public statements that it was the publication of his abortion findings that led to his ouster. In early

March, the faculty released another statement, stating that the abortion issue had nothing to do with Mosher's expulsion. Prior to the publication of those findings, it indicated, Mosher had "abused his status as an anthropologist to engage in illegal and seriously unethical conduct" in China. The faculty said that Mosher had endangered the lives of his research subjects early on, ending speculation that the published photographs of the pregnant women had, by violating their privacy, constituted the unethical behavior at issue. Again, however, the faculty refused to explain what Mosher did in fact do that was illegal or unethical.

Mosher has declined to comment further. But in an earlier statement he denied various charges apparently made in the report. Chinese officials accused Mosher of illegally importing a van and then using that van to bribe local officials; they said he had traveled illegally into restricted regions of southern China; and that he had tried to abscond with Chinese artifacts. According to Mosher's own report, Chinese officials had also accused him of obtaining state secrets of value to U.S. intelligence agencies. Mosher labeled Peking's allegations "false and fatuous."

It remains unclear which if any of these alleged activities were cause for Mosher's dismissal, or if it was (as Mosher claims) the publication of his abortion findings. The Chinese government has linked the Mosher case to recent restrictions on

foreign scholars, but according to Prewitt, such restrictions were inevitable. Peking officials never realized what it meant to give social scientists access to Chinese society, and they were uncomfortable with such scholarly scrutiny from the beginning.

Stanford has defended Mosher's right to publish his research findings where he wants, adding, however, that it was "unwise" to publish in a popular Taiwanese magazine. Many anthropologists share that view. For example, according to Clifford Geertz of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J., Mosher had a responsibility as one of the first social scientists allowed into China to act cautiously; by behaving recklessly, Geertz says, Mosher has jeopardized the work of other sinologists. And to the extent that his actions have caused a restriction of the exchange program, he says, Mosher's publications have not served the truth.

The real question that the Mosher case raises for cultural anthropologists is this: are ethical conflicts inevitable in field work? Is the Mosher case an isolated and peculiar one, or is it representative of what happens in anthropology every day? Geertz says that Stanford is to be congratulated for "reacting with courage to a case of malpractice." Scientists, like any other professional group, find it difficult to police their own, he says. Mosher says that Stanford would not have been so courageous had he been a tenured professor

rather than a graduate student.

University of Arizona anthropologist Cheryl Ritenbaugh, currently the chair of the American Anthropological Association's ethics committee, says that the ethical issues raised by the Mosher case typify the kind of dilemma that confronts anthropologists routinely. The AAA code of ethics states clearly that anthropologists must protect their research subjects and protect the integrity of the discipline by behaving legally and honestly, Ritenbaugh says, but the AAA newsletter is replete with reports of ethical dilemmas: anthropologists working in the inner city, she notes for example, often become aware of illegal acts and must choose to protect their subjects or to honestly report their findings. Similarly, she notes, archaeologists must often choose between purchasing stolen artifacts on the black market or allowing them to disappear.

Whether or not Mosher confronted a typical anthropological dilemma in China is difficult to know as long as the Stanford report remains confidential, and social scientists are not the only ones interested in the facts of the case. Mosher and Stanford officials were called to testify in closed session before the Senate foreign relations committee in early March; according to a committee staff member, several committees are interested in sorting out the facts of this case in order to judge the propriety of both Mosher's and Stanford's actions. □

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Annual Review of Neuroscience, Vol. 6 — W. Maxwell Cowan et al., Eds. The introductory article in this volume covers Nobel laureates in neuroscience from 1904 to 1981. Annual Reviews, 1983, 563 p., illus., \$27.

Daytime Star: The Story of Our Sun — Simon Mitton. Outlines our present understanding of the sun — a fascinating story involving physics, astrophysics, history, space research and energy research. Originally published in hardback in 1981. Scribner, 1983, 191 p., illus., paper, \$6.95.

The Enchanted Loom: Mind in the Universe — Robert Jastrow. Recaps the astronomical setting for human existence and the early history of life and then focuses on intelligence and the brain. Tells how the brain evolved, the way it works, how it balances instinct and reason and "what it is evolving into." Originally published in hardback in 1981. S&S, 1983, 183 p., illus., paper, \$6.95.

The Encyclopedia of Monsters — Daniel Cohen. "The subject of monsters lies somewhere in a misty realm between zoology and folklore." Much of the book concerns what has been called "cryptozoology" — the study of animals that may or may not exist. Dodd, 1983, 287 p., illus., \$14.95.

McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Chemistry — Sybil P. Parker, Editor-in-Chief. A comprehensive reference work that provides up-to-date information on each of the major divisions of theoretical chemistry — inorganic, organic, physical and analytical. Includes relevant topics in physics that are essential for the understanding of modern chemistry. Each article begins with a definition and presents a concise explanation of the subject in language as simple as the topic permits without omitting important technical information. The articles were selected from the *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology*, 5th ed., 1982. McGraw, 1983, 1195 p., illus., \$49.50.

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The Prisoners of Insecurity: Nuclear Deterrence, the Arms Race, and Arms Control — Bruce Russett. Shows that most of the fundamental questions about national security and arms control are political rather than technological. W H Freeman, 1983, 204 p., illus., \$15.95, paper, \$7.95.

Science and the Paranormal: Probing the Existence of the Supernatural — George O. Abell and Barry Singer, Eds. The term paranormal is applied to anomalous data that supposedly transcend the limits of existing science and are due to unknown and hidden causes. The contributors, scientists and science writers, have tried to explain the mainstream scientific viewpoint on each paranormal topic thoroughly and simply. They look at each topic through the "lens of science" and invite the reader to share that "microscope" with them, to follow the details of their reasoning. Originally published in hardback in 1981. Scribner, 1983, 414 p., illus., paper, \$9.95.

The Self-Sufficient Suburban Garden — Jeff Ball. Presents a five-year plan for designing, planting and maintaining an efficient garden that will yield the maximum amount of food for the least amount of space, time, money and effort. Rodale Pr, 1983, 236 p., illus., \$14.95.

Women Who Marry Houses: Panic and Protest in Agoraphobia — Robert Seidenberg and Karen DeCrow. The authors see agoraphobia "as a paradigm for the historical intimidation and oppression of women. The self-hate, self-limitation, self-abnegation, and self-punishment of agoraphobia is a caricature of centuries of childhood instruction to women." Famous agoraphobics, including Emily Dickinson and Queen Victoria, are analyzed. The authors are critical of alleged "cures" for agoraphobics, and they feel that when society encourages women to do fully accepted and compensated work outside the home, women will no longer need to be agoraphobic. McGraw, 1983, 224 p., \$15.95, paper, \$7.95.