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***CHINESE COMMUNISM AND THE
RISE OF MAO***

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chinese communism

AND THE RISE OF

mao

BENJAMIN I. SCHWARTZ

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TO MY BELOVED WIFE, BUNNY

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PREFACE

TO THE 1979 EDITION

The period which has elapsed since the publication of this book seems so immense that it is almost impossible to recapture the atmosphere which prevailed at the time of its writing.

A considerable literature has since appeared on the subject, often drawing on rich new sources of documentation. Some of it has been supportive of the main lines of argument in this volume. Some has been critical. In my 1958 preface a brief attempt was made to consider some of the revisions suggested by new evidence. At this point, however, instead of dealing with substantive points of historic interpretation, I would like to make a brief defense of at least one of the book's underlying preoccupations. In recent years — particularly since the open rupture between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic — the author has often been reproached for having belabored the obvious. Was there a need to argue that the Chinese Communist movement had made its own revolution? Is it not obvious that the Chinese revolution was a product of Chinese history and not a creation of the master-minds in the Kremlin? Did one have to prove that the Chinese Communist leadership was not completely under the sway of the dread authority of Joseph Stalin?

The brief answer is that in 1949 none of this was obvious and that not all those who argued the opposite were mindless fools. Even in its Maoist phase, the Chinese Communist movement was still deeply involved with the claims of Soviet ideology. Even the Mao Tse-tung of the Yen-an period did not lightly attempt to undermine the authority of what he still regarded as a world-historic movement centered in Moscow of which the Chinese Communist movement was a part. The same Maoist leadership which had displayed such initiative and resourcefulness in developing its own strategy of revolution — the same leadership which had every reason to doubt the infallible wisdom of Stalin as a guide to Chinese affairs — still seems to have remained committed to a view of the world at large based on Soviet ideological premises. The same Mao Tse-tung who dared to assume the mantle of theoretical leadership of the Chinese Communist Party during the Yen-an period seems to have accepted without criticism the image of "socialism" pro-

jected in Stalin's *Short Course on the History of the CPSU*. He may no longer have looked to Moscow for guidance in making the Chinese revolution but this did not necessarily lead him at the time to doubt that the Soviet model, in its main features, provided the image of China's future. To be sure, the bases for the ultimate rejection of Soviet spiritual authority were laid during this period, but anyone who closely examines the contemporary Chinese Communist sources becomes acutely aware that there was no eagerness to cut ties with what was still regarded as an ecumenical world-historic movement which presumably represented the wave of the future. To dismiss this entire dimension of Chinese Communist history is to distort the complexities of that history.

Was it so incredible that Chinese should have looked outside of the Chinese culture sphere for a higher source of wisdom? After all, it would not be the first time that this had happened. In a period stretching from the third century of our era until the beginning of our millennium some of the most profound minds of China had regarded Buddhist India as the source of higher truths. The Chinese Communist disengagement from Moscow as a source of higher truths was a slow and agonizing, not a facile process.

In the United States there has recently been a revival of the notion of a "lost opportunity" in China. We are told that if the United States had severed its ties with the corrupt and ineffective Nationalist government and extended a hand of genuine friendship to the Communists in Yenan, we might have detached them from their one-sided commitment to the Soviet bloc. While totally agreeing with the view that we could not (and should not) have "saved" the Nationalist government, and while granting that our involvement in the civil war had undoubtedly created deeply anti-American feelings in many circles of Chinese society, I must remain skeptical of the notion that the United States could have easily detached the Chinese leaders from their Soviet-oriented image of the world. There was, after all, no incompatibility between their wartime policy of relative friendship toward the United States and Chou En-lai's cultivation of friendship with many individual Americans (whom he may have genuinely liked), and the overall "united front" posture of the Communist bloc as a whole. If the Cold War polarization had not taken place (the question of the causes of the Cold War can hardly be treated here), it is probable that a somewhat more open relationship between the two societies might have continued. Given the Cold War and certain persistent assumptions,

it becomes highly questionable whether we could have modified in any radical way the Chinese leaders' image of the world. It is after all conceivable that it was neither in our power to save the Nationalists nor to win the friendship of the Communists. If it was their own experience which had led them to fashion their own strategy of revolution, it would in the end be their own experience which would lead them to raise doubts about the role of the Soviet Union as a model for China and as an actor in the arena of international affairs.

Whatever may be the truth of the matter, the fact remains that in 1949 Chairman Mao decisively proclaimed China's policy of leaning to the Soviet side. What may be even more significant is that he also proclaimed China's determination to look to the Soviet Union as a "teacher." Indeed, to most observers of China during the period before 1955 it seemed more and more apparent that the People's Republic was drifting toward the internalization of Soviet models in every sphere of social and political life.

The whole effect of China's vehement reiteration in 1949 of its Soviet orientation was to add enormous weight to the general perception that the Soviet leaders did indeed have in their possession a kind of infallible social science and that their doctrine, whether regarded as redemptive or diabolic, gave them access to the inner laws of global history. I would submit that in the atmosphere of the times it was by no means obvious that the Chinese Communists had made their own revolution in the past or would shape their own society in the future.

May 1979

BENJAMIN I. SCHWARTZ

Author's Note: I wrote this book as an associate of the Russian Research Center. For this new Harvard paperback printing, I am pleased that the East Asian Research Center wishes to sponsor it also.

PREFACE

TO THE 1958 PRINTING

Some eight years have elapsed since this book was written. During that time, the Chinese Communist Party has firmly established its power on the mainland of China, and world-wide interest in all aspects of Chinese Communism has grown immensely. Much work has been done on the history and origins of the movement and many new facts have been brought to light. The Chinese Communist Party has itself elaborated a new orthodox account of its own history, which differs in some marked respects from previous orthodox accounts (as illustrated in the writings of Hu Hua, Hu Ch'iao-mu, and others) and has brought to light new documentation.

In view of these developments, a re-examination of some of the interpretations brought forth in the book is perhaps warranted. While there are many issues which are certainly open to further discussion, I shall concern myself in this brief preface only with questions which seem fundamental.

As indicated in the introduction, my main concerns in writing this book were first with the history of the internal political relations of the Chinese Communist movement and the history of the relations of the movement as a whole to the Kremlin and second with the closely related question of the evolution of Marxist-Leninist ideology within the Chinese environment—the question of the evolving relations between ideology and actuality. Behind this concern there lay an even larger question—What role if any has ideology played in the history of Communism? In dealing with the latter question, I was not exclusively concerned with Chinese affairs as such. I was also fascinated by the enormous claims made for Marxist-Leninist doctrine as a master science providing its chosen initiates not only with the key to the past but with an infallible science for navigating in the treacherous waters of current social and political events. The self-image of the ideal Communist leader (at least until recently) was of the man whose environment provided him with few perplexities or surprises. He was the intellectual master of all he surveyed. At any given point of time he could make an infallibly correct socio-historic analysis of the current situation and his policy decisions were squarely based on these analyses. The fact that the doctrine was often called

a "method" rather than a "dogma" changed nothing in this image. One of the purposes of the book was to examine these enormous claims within the context of the Chinese experience.

If we turn our attention to the first of these concerns — the concern with the inner political history of the movement — accumulating evidence has now made it clear that the statement on page 185 that "the complete victory of the Mao-Chu leadership within the Chinese movement can be said to have been achieved during the 1932–33 period when the Central Committee moved its headquarters from Shanghai to Juichin" stands subject to correction. It is now clear that Mao did not achieve full ascendancy within the movement until the Tsunyi Conference of 1935. It is also clear that certain members of the Central Committee group such as Po Ku (not, however, Wang Ming) managed to wield considerable power within the Soviet areas after 1933 and that there may have even been a temporary decline of Mao's power during the period 1933–1935. The whole story of the complicated factional disputes of the 1933–1935 period remains to be unraveled. It is possible to conceive of many reasons why the members of the "28 Bolshevik" group were able to maintain positions of power within the Soviet areas. They still enjoyed the high prestige of their party positions and presumably the full backing of Moscow and of local Kremlin agents such as the mysterious General Li Teh. They may also have been able to link up quite effectively with elements within the Soviet areas and Red Army high command who were by no means fully reconciled to Mao's ascendancy.

But while this revision of the factual record must be made, I would, nevertheless, maintain the essential correctness of the analysis of the basic factors involved. Indeed the new evidence, it seems to me, in some ways lends added support to this analysis. The assertion that there was a deep conflict between the Central Committee group and the Mao leadership has now received further support from many sources. The assumption that in the end the Central Committee group lost out because it had no firm base of power within the Soviet areas has by no means been weakened. The contention "that the gravitation of power into the hands of Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh was the result of circumstances and power relations existing within the Chinese Communist movement rather than of any decision made in Moscow" has, it seems to me, been strengthened rather than weakened by the new evidence which has since become available. Finally, the Chinese Communists themselves now insist that one of the basic issues of ideology (to the extent that ideology was involved) be-

tween the Central Committee group and the Mao leadership was the question of whether the strength of the Red Army was to be used to preserve the rural bases or as an instrument to recapture the movement's urban bases.

On the question of the evolution of ideology, I would not be inclined to modify any of the basic propositions set forth in the book. Since this book was published, many have insisted that Lenin himself opened the door to the possibility of a complete divorce of a Communist Party from its supposed class basis, the industrial proletariat. But while Lenin may have opened the door, it was Mao who was forced by Chinese circumstances to march through it.

Nothing that has happened since the thirties would lead me to modify the view that Communist doctrine has undergone a steady process of decomposition rather than a process of "extension and enrichment." As these lines are being written, much of the ideology is in flux not only in China but also in other parts of the Communist world. This does not mean that nothing remains. The concept of a Leninist party, the Stalinist model of economic development, the underlying Hegelian faith that "History is on our side" probably still exercise a deep and tenacious hold on those in power. But the overweening claims of Marxism-Leninism as a master science infallibly guiding its initiates from the present into the future enjoys less empirical support than ever. Instead, it seems quite clear that this socio-political philosophy is as much buffeted, twisted, and shaped by unforeseen contingencies and unexpected possibilities as political philosophies which make far less sweeping claims.

May 10, 1958

BENJAMIN I. SCHWARTZ

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INTRODUCTION

It is the purpose of this study to investigate the history of the Chinese Communist movement, within a limited period, in terms of its doctrinal frame of reference and of its internal political relations. It is thus *not* its primary purpose to consider the movement in terms of the "objective" social and political conditions which have encouraged its growth, or in terms of its effect on the masses. Nor does it deal in any detail with those elements of China's traditional culture which may have facilitated the movement's growth. It need hardly be added that none of these aspects can be considered in isolation from the other. One cannot, of course, understand the tensions which have developed in China between Marxist-Leninist dogma and reality, or the political relations among various groups within the party and between the party and Moscow without reference to China's objective conditions or its cultural heritage. While bearing this fact in mind, however, we feel that we are justified in focusing our attention on an area which has been particularly neglected hitherto.

We are aware that there are those who might be inclined to doubt the value of such an investigation. To those who dwell on the presumably Olympian heights of sociological, economic, geopolitical, and historic abstraction, everything which has happened in China may seem to have flowed inexorably from the "objective situation." To such people the ideological presuppositions of the leaders of the Communist movement may seem to be so much froth on the surface of reality, while the details of their political relations may seem to be so much small talk not worthy of the scholar.

It would, of course, be sheer folly to deny the transcendent importance of objective conditions. All political action must be carried on with reference to the tasks imposed by the objective situation. I do, however, emphatically reject that type of animism which maintains that "situations" automatically create their own results. *The manner in which the tasks are met or not met* is determined quite as

much by the ideas, intentions, and ambitions of those who finally assume the responsibility for meeting them, as by any other factor. The fact that in China the Communists, with their own peculiar pre-suppositions, have inherited the responsibility for meeting these tasks will, I think, be a factor of paramount importance in determining the shape of future objective situations.

Furthermore, it is not our purpose to consider doctrine *in vacuo*, but to treat doctrine as molded and twisted by living men, operating in concrete situations and animated by a variety of motives. What emerges in China will certainly not be the simple result of the present doctrines and intentions of the Communist leaders. It is more likely to be the result of the tension between such doctrines and intentions and the situation in which these leaders are involved. To ignore the doctrines of the leaders, however, is to ignore one of the determining factors in this tension.

Paradoxically, one of the prices often paid by those who have a supercilious disdain for ideological matters, who refuse to consider any but the "objective" factors, is a peculiar naïveté with regard to ideological claims. Precisely because of their refusal to consider matters of doctrine they are often inclined to accept at face value ideological pronouncements which are simply empty ritual phrases. It is only by a study of the tension between doctrine and behavior that one can learn to distinguish between what has become dead letter and what is still living faith.

It may further be objected, however, that in concentrating on the thoughts and intentions of a handful of leaders we are ignoring the fact that what we are witnessing in China is a sweeping popular movement, an elemental upsurge of the masses, and that the leaders are merely the agents of the needs and aspirations of these masses. Now, while we are firmly convinced that the Communist movement in China has risen to power on the crest of a popular movement, this does not mean that the Communist leadership is, as it were, the mystic embodiment of the popular will, or that all its acts are the expression of the aspirations of the people. Within the Communist dispensation, in particular, there is every reason to suppose that basic historic decisions will be made by the political leaders and not by the surging masses.

There are two oversimplified views to be avoided, I think, in con-

sidering the relations of the small groups of the intellectually and politically articulate to the masses in such lands as China. There is, on the one hand, the inclination to think that because these groups have come to think in a foreign idiom, they are therefore entirely cut off from the masses and have no relation to them. To those who hold such views it must be pointed out that these men cannot completely escape from the environment from which they have sprung or the situation in which they are involved, even when they look abroad for solutions.

On the other hand, there is also the inclination to think that the voice of the westernized intellectual-politician in Asia is simply the voice of the masses made articulate. This view ignores the extent to which the thought of these intellectuals has been colored by their commitment to foreign philosophies as well as by their own ambitions. We would therefore suggest that, in general, the relations of these groups to the masses are not simple but paradoxical. They are involved in a common situation with the masses and yet, to a considerable extent, alienated from them.

Applying this generalization to the Chinese Communist movement, there can be little doubt that the present Communist leaders in China have risen to power by addressing themselves to the immediate felt needs of China's peasant millions. To leap, however, from this fact to the conclusion that they are the embodiment of the aspirations of the Chinese people and that they will automatically continue to express the needs and aspirations of the masses is to construct a myth designed to sanction in advance all their future activities. The needs of the masses have a time dimension. Lenin may have been in complete harmony with the felt needs of the masses when he proclaimed the motto of land and peace. Was he then in harmony with their felt needs at the time of the Kronstadt uprising?

As for the aspirations of the masses beyond their physical and economic needs, how can they be known unless we go into the Chinese village and live with its inhabitants? It may of course be that beyond their desire to escape from their present wretchedness the masses are simply confused about the type of life which they wish to live. Whatever may be the case, it behooves us to approach this whole question in a spirit of humble agnosticism. If by the phrase "the aspirations of the masses" we simply mean that their political

leaders know what is best for them, that the leaders will succeed in making their own aspirations those of the masses, then let us say so and not indulge in sentimental rhetoric. We know that the masses wish to escape from their present wretchedness. In the absence of knowledge, however, we have no right to say that the masses of China wish to reproduce the pattern of either Detroit or Magnitogorsk in China. We are, however, in a somewhat better position to study the ambitions and aspirations of their leaders.

I would therefore suggest that in China we have witnessed not only an elemental upsurge of the masses, but also the rise of a vigorous new ruling group to power. These are two related but separate facts.

To some it may appear that this study concerns itself overmuch with the hairsplitting details of the Marxist-Leninist *scolastique*. In the first place, it should be observed that this doctrinaire hairsplitting is the atmosphere in which the Chinese Communist leaders live and the air which they breathe. Unless we form some acquaintance with it, we cut ourselves off from an understanding of their mental world.

More important, however, it is only by grappling with the details of doctrine that we can attempt to judge what elements of doctrine are still the mainsprings of action and what elements have already become dead verbiage designed to conceal the decay of doctrine.

In general, it is our view that in spite of its seeming "successes," Marxism has in its movement eastward — into situations for which its original premises made little provision — undergone a slow but steady process of decomposition. This process had already gone some distance with Lenin, himself, and might have gone still further if he had lived longer. Elements which are organically inseparable in the original doctrine had already been torn asunder and isolated from each other with Lenin. With Stalin, of course, this process has gone still further, and it has been one of the aims of this study to show how the process has been carried forward yet another step by the experience of the Chinese Communist Party.

At every step, to be sure, the process has been inhibited and counterbalanced by a tremendous "will to orthodoxy" (closely related to the power interests of the groups involved). Whenever circumstances have finally led to a course of action not provided for by previous

doctrine, every attempt is made to prove that such action was actually contemplated in advance and new rationalizations are then devised to fit new experiences into an elaborate façade designed to prove an unerring consistency and unflinching foresight. On the other hand, so long as political action seems to be in harmony with orthodox tenets, such tenets are considered inviolate and not open to question.

It is the conclusion of this study that the political strategy of Mao Tse-tung was not planned in advance in Moscow, and even ran counter to tenets of orthodoxy which were still considered sacrosanct and inviolate in Moscow at the time when this strategy was first crystallized; that it was only the force of circumstance which finally led Moscow to provide a façade of rationalization for this new experience.

If this conclusion is true, what bearing does it have on the immensely complex question of the relations of the Kremlin to the Chinese Communist Party? If the Maoist strategy was not planned in advance in Moscow, if the Mao leadership was not directly chosen by Moscow, these are historic factors which must bear some weight in the consideration of this question. However, it must be emphasized that relations between Moscow and the Chinese Communist Party are quite as likely to be determined by a whole range of factors operating in the present and in the future as by factors inherited from the past.

On the other hand, this conclusion does bear much more directly on the enormous claims made for Marxism-Leninism as a sort of magical science enabling its self-chosen high priests in the Kremlin to plan their grandiose global strategy well in advance, allowing no room for unexpected contingency. An immense effort is currently being made by orthodox Stalinist historiography to present the Chinese Communist success as the result of Stalin's own prescience and masterly planning. It is strange to note that this myth has been accepted and even insisted upon by many who regard themselves as the Kremlin's bitterest foes. It is our own conviction, however, that Communist success no less than Communist failure is often unplanned in advance.

To underestimate the cleverness of the Soviet leaders or their single-minded pursuit of their objectives, would be sheer folly. On

the other hand, to accept their own image of themselves as super-human "social engineers" operating on the basis of an infallible historic science is equally dangerous. We should not underestimate the attractiveness of such an image to large segments of modern humanity desperately looking for straws to cling to, and we must remember that such an image has a paralytic effect on those opposing the Kremlin and discourages belief in the possibility of maneuvering against it in a world still full of incalculable contingencies.