

April 12. 1961
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Dear Raya, thanks for yrs and the pice on Marx's debt to Hegel, wch I will defer discussion on until I am more competent.

Before I forget, the man you asked about re the piece on Russian intellectuals is James Stiver, 1178 Yale Station, New Haven.

Now to China. I enclose an essay I wrote this morning. This is a carbon, my first present to you. Where does it get us? Clearly it is opposed to my ideas on Yen-an's "humanism" that I gave you last month. But is it necessarily completely inconsistent? As you see I make a harsh final judgement. The period of the Kiangsi Soviet is not well documented, though I have come across an anonymous report, The present condition of China, an anonymous work translated into English by a Japanese observer, which regarded the Soviets favourably, which I will try to get around to summarising for you. Mao in the period 1927-37 was deeply concerned with his own struggle for leadership, much more deeply I think than he ever suggests in his own interviews or writings. After all, one does not dwell on such things unnecessarily. But by Yen-an he could afford to relax a bit. Also in the United Front period, say 1937-43, he made considerable concessions to the KMT. This amounted, among other things, to leaving the peasants alone to some extent, and being tolerant to the rich peasants.

Was this humanism? Necessity? Whim? Conviction? Was it the real Mao? Was he waiting for the peasantry to show some renewed revolutionary spirit?

All these questions are loaded, for Mao's control was by now undisputed, his cadres were organized, there was none after Chang Kuo-t'ao to challenge him. So any revolutionary fervour that manifested itself was fervour tolerated by Mao. So what spontaneity of peasants is possible in such circumstances, or what can arise among workers when the cadres are there as the factories are built? I don't know, but would say little. Yet there was hope and excitement in the air, this I think is clear. There is hope and excitement in the air now in Cuba. Can Mao here be called the haughty vassal, is he possessed of the tragic consciousness? Does he in some Rousseau sense see himself as the personification of the general will? Or is he just out for power? I think not simply the latter, but I think his goal is to forge, himself, a unified "socialist" state, on lines that find more support in Stalin than in Marx, in which he is to decide, not in the last resort the people themselves. I will start now looking at Yen-an. Any comments of yours welcome. This essay I send as a background. If it is useless, scrap it. But there may be some point that interests you, if so we can dig away at it together. Let me know. My apologies if this is not at all what you want, but I can always try again. Background has its uses.

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It was good to see you again. No Don't think so

For Raza Inayatullah from Jonathan

Mao Tse-tung's rise to power: 1927-1937.

Jonathan Spence

In late November of 1927 Mao Tse-tung's political future appeared bleak. The central committee of the Chinese communist party had just dismissed him from his three main positions, as an alternate member of the politburo, secretary of the Hunan provincial committee and secretary of the party front committee. The Party itself was weak and with wavering leadership; Ch'en Tu-hsiu was discredited, Ch'ü Chiu-p'ai was just about to be after the Canton Uprising. But by 1937 Mao was finally in undisputed control of the communist party in China. How he got there is a highly controversial question; in an attempt to answer it I will trace his career chronologically down to 1937, concentrating on a few key moments, and follow three interpretations of that career: first, the careful but slightly haphazard accounts to be found in the books of North, Schwarz and Brandt; second, Mao's own account as he saw fit to retail it to Edgar Snow in 1937; third, the present orthodox communist account as it can be found in An outline history of China, published by the Foreign Languages Press of Peking in 1958.

By 1929 Mao was securely ensconced in the ~~Hubei~~ Kiangsi area, the earliest soviets had been formed, and the Red Army had already developed sufficiently to give Trotsky ~~a profound shock~~ a profound shock in November. (1) The theoretical descriptions of the Soviets were not issued till 1931, and as Snow points out no western observer visited the area, so exact details are not ascertainable. The crucial question is whether or not Mao was at this time acting independently of the leadership in his own party. It seems to be fairly clear that Mao was pursuing the revolution from a countryside base with a peasant army while the official leadership of the two labour leaders Li Li-san and Hsiang Chung-fa continued to speak and act as if the revolution could only advance

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through the urban proletariat and that all efforts should be concentrated on developing the workers' consciousness. Mao has consistently denied such a split. He told Snow in 1937 that he had agreed completely with the results of the Sixth Congress of the communist party held in Moscow in late 1928:

"With the new line adopted at that Congress, Chu Teh and I were in complete agreement. From that time on, the differences between the leaders of the Party and the leaders of the Soviet movement in the agrarian districts disappeared. Party harmony was reestablished". (2)

Wittfogel, in an answer to a question, said this harmony was complete in China, since Li Li-san was a mouthpiece for Stalin, Mao agreed with Li Li-san, therefore Mao and Stalin were at one. (3) In his essay On the rectification of incorrect ideas in the party written in 1929 Mao went even further (or at least now wants us to think that he went even further, since this is from the edition of 1953) writing that the Red Army had to be drawn back to proletarian political consciousness, that roots of "extreme democratization" had to be eradicated, and that they were guilty of petty-bourgeois individualism - presumably a clear statement that the workers alone had the final revolutionary consciousness, not the peasants. In the same essay Mao mentioned that many people were seeking to leave the revolutionary army, a fact he attributed to "incorrect leadership". Since that leadership could not of course be his or Chu Teh's, such a statement implies a purge in the offing; vague references in his conversations with Snow with reference to the West Fukien conference of December 1929 support this. Army officers of "a Trotskyite faction" "were eliminated from responsible positions and after the Fukien Conference lost their influence". Also "the question of land policy was argued at great length, and the struggle against 'opportunism', led by those opposed to redistribution was overcome. It was resolved to carry out land redistribution and quicken the formation of Soviets". (4) No such difficulties are mentioned

Handwritten notes in the left margin: "Mao", "Snow", "1929", "1953", "incorrect", "Chu Teh's", "Army officers", "Trotskyite faction", "opportunism", "redistribution", "quicken the formation of Soviets".

in the Peking History. Mao had won the first round.

The connection between these events and the appearance of Mao's obituary in Inprecor in March 1930 may be close, but there is no proof whatsoever. In June Li Li-san finally admitted that the Red Army might indeed be used to spur urban insurrection, and in July came the famous attack on Changsha, the city being held for a few days. Initially hailed as a triumph, this was later described as a monstrous error and semi-Trotskyism. (5) Mao was cautious to Snow: "the attacks on Changsha were not necessary and had an element of adventure in them". (6) The Peking History is noncommittal saying only "the flames of revolution flared up not only in the bases, but in all places traversed by the Red Army". (7) The end of the year saw Chiang Kai-shek's first extermination campaign against the Kiangsi Soviets and two events crucial to Mao, the fall of Li Li-san and a second purge of the army. A letter of November from the ECCI accused Li Li-san of semi-Trotskyism, petty-bourgeois chauvinism and Putschism; he was replaced by Wang Ming and the 28 Bolsheviks, known as "the returned students, whose guide and counsel was Pavel Mif of the Comintern." North is emphatic that "the returned student leadership came to power as creatures of the Russians". (8) More crucial perhaps was the Fut'ien purge of December 1930. North quotes from Li Ang's testimony to the effect that in this and following months Mao executed hundreds of communists opposed to him. Brandt describes the men as loyal Li Li-sanists who still wanted to take cities. (9) Mao told Snow that communist rebels under Liu Ti-tsoo "attacked us politically on the basis of the Li Li-san line" and added that "Liu Ti-tsoo was arrested, and other rebels disarmed and liquidated". (10) Mao had won the second round.

* 1931 saw the Mukden incident, and the next two extermination campaigns by Chiang, both failures. It saw also, in November, the First all China Congress of Soviets, to which Mao was elected chairman and Chang Kuo-t'ao one of the vice-chairmen. The Peking History only mentions this Congress

as taking a strong and courageous stand against the Japanese in contrast to the fawning of Chiang. To Snow, Mao gives the date of the Congress and his election to the Chairmanship. Nothing else. Thus two major formulations of the Congress are not treated, the Constitution of the Soviet Republic which pledged shorter hours, equality before the law for all racial and religious groups, freedom of speech, press and the rights of assembly, the emancipation of women and the freedom of national minorities to self-determination, while declaring "the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants", (the editors of the Documentary History insist that there was no pretence of anything but a one party dictatorship and there were no workers) (second, the land law of the Soviet Republic which declared the confiscation of all the lands of big landlords and militarists without compensation, the giving of a plot of land to each man in the Red Army to be tilled in his absence, and with equal distribution of land among the peasants as a voluntary process and an ideal. There was to be no enforced collectivisation. North believes this to be a crucial time in CCp leadership, in which performance in China became more important than relations with the Comintern. (11)

The main event of 1934 was the bringing of the Central committee and the secretariat of the CCp from Shanghai to Kiangsi, and the sending of Wang Ming to Moscow. It is suggested by North that the Kiangsi Soviet may have threatened to cut funds to Shanghai and thus forced a showdown, but he admits facts are lacking. Anyway the leadership was still divided, with Mao as chairman of the CEC but still in a weak position, Chang Kuo-t'ao as strong vice chairman, Chu Teh as an influential field commander, Po Ku in charge of party affairs and Chou En-lai as military supervisor (12) The Peking History emphasises constructive achievements in the Soviets and also the gallant role played by the communist party in the defence of Shanghai. It is hard to see what communist strength there

could have been in Shanghai in 1932. Mao does not discuss any party politics with Snow for 1932.

In 1933 Chiang launched the fourth extermination campaign which was yet another failure, but in October started the fifth with its complex blockade of the whole Kiangsi area which was to prove successful. He also suppressed the Fukien rising with surprising ease and efficiency, so that an observer like George Shepherd who had thought at the beginning of the year that all "South China will go Red" received new faith in the KMT and foresaw the destruction of communism in China. (13)

Mao admitted to Snow that the failure to support this rebellion was wrong: "In this period we made two important errors. The first was the failure to unite with Ts'ai T'ing-k'ai's army in 1933 during the Fukien Rebellion". (14) The Peking History makes it appear that the leaders of the Fukien rebellion worked constructively with the communists in opposing the KMT and the Japanese. (15)

The Second all-China Congress of Soviets took place in ^{January} ~~July~~ 1934, Juichin already being in danger from the KMT forces. The theoretical formulations here are not important, but what was of great importance is the struggle for leadership that took place and Mao's role in it and description of it. It is central to the controversy between Schwarz and Wittfogel as to the orthodoxy of Mao's leadership. Mao reported the following to Snow:

At the second congress "I gave a long report, and here the Central Soviet Government, as its personnel exists today, was elected. Preparations soon afterwards were made for the Long March... By January, 1935, the main forces of the Red Army reached Tsun-yi, in Kweichow. For the next four months the army was almost constantly moving and the most energetic combat and fighting took place". (16)

According to North however, at the Congress in 1934, though Po Yu was replaced as secretary general to the party, it was not by anyone sympathetic to Mao but by Chang Wen-t'ien, another returned student, and

thus subject to Comintern discipline. North believes that Mao got the leadership of the party at Tsunyi in January 1935, when he had been out of touch with Moscow for three months (the Long March began in October 1934) and when Chang Kuo-t'ao was absent, that Mao's power was thus in spite of, not because of, Stalin. (17) The Peking History corroborates this version in complete contradiction to Mao's own statement to Snow. The Peking History says:

"In January 1935, in Tsunyi, the Chinese Communist Party held an enlarged meeting of the political bureau of its central committee. The Tsunyi conference put an end to the erroneous leadership of the central committee and established the correct central leadership with Mao Tse-tung at the head. This new party leadership was the guarantee for the victory of the Chinese revolution". (18)

One of the rare illustrations in the history is of a large, ornate building, the "Site of the Tsunyi Conference". In answer to a question Wittfogel stated that Mao came to leadership at Tsunyi in 1935. If that is so, and it seems undeniable, then why did Mao back date the whole event by a year and make it take place at the official Congress of the Party? Clearly because he was himself uneasy about the unorthodox way in which he had actually obtained the leadership, with no reference to the Comintern whatsoever. Similarly the Peking History makes a partial concession to the facts of Tsunyi by claiming Mao was elected at "enlarged meeting" in order to give him a semblance of orthodoxy. In fact the meeting was a crucially contracted one. Mao had won the third round.

In 1936 the communists consolidated their hold in Shensi, first at Pao An, then, after the Sian incident, in Yen-an. But Mao still had one battle to fight that was neither against the Japanese nor the KMT. Chang Kuo-t'ao had been powerful in the party for ten years, he had consistently opposed Mao's policy of peasant's soviets claiming that they were inapplicable to China (19), and in answer to Mao's "defeat for all" slogan in Yen-an which stated that the communists should only participate in

those campaigns against the Japanese that would aid them in their own campaign against the nationalists, Chang offered his own slogan of "victory for all", aiming at a sincere and concentrated United Front, with the goal of liberalizing the KMT. The two proposals were debated at a conference in Loehuen in October 1937, but according to Chang, Mao closed the meeting when opinion turned against him. Early in 1938 Chang was expelled from the party and many of his followers were killed. (20) Mao had won the fourth and final round and was now undisputed leader of the CCP.

What can be said of these ten years? The story still remains largely a collection of hypotheses strung along a line of ascertainable fact. ~~It must be confessed that~~ The major source of much of North's information is from interviews with Chang Kuo-t'ao or from Li Ang's book Red Stage, both highly biased sources as he himself admits. Other main sources are either Chinese Communist works subject to constant revision and alteration or to Mao's own biography in Snow which contains some definite lies and naturally untold distortions. The account in the Peking History is a simple glorification of Mao, who appears as the leader almost from 1927, and where both Russian influence and confusing factors are simply ignored. For this period there is no mention of the Comintern, of Wang Ming, Li Li-san, Chang Kuo-t'ao or Po Ku, the story is simple and coherent, and completely false. Mao's own autobiography has passages of great frankness but seems in general to show Mao's own desire to appear orthodox. As for Snow's enthusiasm for the communism and the personalities he found in Yenan, one can only say that natural antipathy for the KMT made him over generous. The history of these years, the organization of the soviets and indeed the manufacture from above of soviets that Trotsky had warned against in Problems of the Chinese Revolution, as well as the incidental purges, lead one to see the revolution during this period as imposed from above by a very small elite, rather than as the expression of a genuine revolutionary spirit by the peasants and workers of China.

Notes.

1. Leon Trotsky. Problems of the Chinese Revolution. What is happening in China? Nov 9, 1929.
2. Edgar Snow. Red star over China. (Modern Library ed) p.171
3. Lecture by Karl Wittfogel, the theoretical basis of Marxism. April 11, 1961.
4. Snow ibid pp.174-5
5. Benjamin Schwarz. Chinese communism and the rise of Mao. p.145 ✓
6. Snow ibid p.180
7. An outline history of China. Peking 1958. p.352
8. Robert North. Moscow and Chinese communists. p.146
9. North ibid p.173. Conrad Brandt, Stalin's failure in China. p.170
10. Snow ibid p.182
11. Robert North, Kuomintang and Chinese communist elites. p.44
12. North, Moscow... p.157-8
13. James Thomson. Thesis pp.146 & 154
14. Snow ibid p.186
15. Peking history p.360 ✓
16. Snow ibid p.187
17. North ibid p.167
18. Peking history p.366-7 ✓
19. North ibid p.166
20. " " p.180