

## The Road Is Tortuous: The Chinese Revolution and the End of the Global Sixties

### El camino es tortuoso: la Revolución China y el fin de los años sesenta globales

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**Abstract:** This article argues that the rightward turn of Chinese politics in the 1970s was a key contributing factor in ending the revolutionary era of the long and global 1960s and ushering in the neoliberal age of reaction which followed. This process of counter-revolution in China began with the Sino-American rapprochement, which Mao initiated in response to the hostile encirclement of China by Soviet, American and Indian forces in the late 1960s, and ended with the arrest the Gang of Four soon after Mao's death in 1976.

**Keywords:** China, Maoism, Global Sixties, International Communism, Revolution

**Resumen:** Este artículo argumenta que el giro hacia la derecha de la política china en la década de 1970 fue un factor clave que contribuyó a poner fin a la era revolucionaria de la larga y global década de 1960, marcando el comienzo de la reacción del neoliberalismo que siguió. Este proceso de contrarrevolución en China comenzó con el acercamiento chino-estadounidense, que Mao inició en respuesta al hostil cerco de China por fuerzas soviéticas, estadounidenses e indias, a finales de la década de 1960, y terminó con el arresto de la Banda de los Cuatro, poco después de la muerte de Mao, en 1976.

**Palabras clave:** China, Maoismo, sesenta globales, Comunismo internacional, Revolución

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When one thinks of Chinese global influence, one tends to think of economics more than politics. China has had several 'global' moments, but only one was characterized by political or ideological Chinese influence. The rest, it seems, were economic in nature. Janet Abu-Lughod has described a 13<sup>th</sup> century world system comprised of interlocking regional subsystems, among which China, as the largest and most dynamic economy, played the determining role.<sup>1</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, polemicizing on behalf of "real world history" against "Eurocentric social theory," built on the work of Abu-Lughod, Kenneth Pomeranz, R. Bin Wong and others to argue that "if any economy had a 'central' position and role in the world economy" before 1800, "it was China."<sup>2</sup> And then there is our current day, when China has been playing an major global economic role for many years now. While these economic moments of global Chinese influence are well-known, even if their precise parameters are subject to a certain degree of academic dispute, there is another moment of global Chinese influence which flared briefly, and which historians have only recently begun to give its due.

I am writing of a moment at the height of what historians are calling the long and global 1960s (roughly 1955-1973), centered on 1968 (a year of widespread global revolt) when China, "specifically because of its revolutionary situation, came to constitute a foundation for transnational discourse of intellectual and political change."<sup>3</sup> At this time, Mao Zedong and China became a point of reference for a variety of different political and cultural movements. And although there was no one central inspiration for the vast array of expressions of rebellion which happened around the world during the long 1960s, if one had to point to a single mainspring from which the spirit of rebellion flowed, it would have been Mao Zedong, the world leader who told the youth of his own country that "it is right to rebel (Mao 310)."<sup>4</sup> Yet, by the mid-1970s, much of this influence had dissipated, and by the mid-1980s it was all but forgotten except among diehard followers of Mao's teachings. The brief life of this revolutionary global influence caused its existence to

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Fabio Lanza, *The End of Concern: Maoist China, Activism, and Asian Studies*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2017, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Mao Zedong, "Speech at a Meeting of All Circles in Yan'an to Commemorate Stalin's Sixtieth Birthday," (December 21, 1939) in Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949*, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2005, 7:310. This quote is also often translated as "to rebel is justified." Although the original statement by Mao is from 1939, the quote was deployed broadly in the context of the Cultural Revolution as a call for people, especially youth, to rebel. In the Chinese context, this meant to rebel against forces representing capitalist relations within socialist society which were emerging within the Communist Party itself (which, however, were defined vaguely during the first years of the Cultural Revolution). Globally, the call took on a more general sense of rebellion being an inherently good thing.

largely be passed over for a time. Fortunately, the development of the global 1960s as a historical field of study is rectifying this situation.

As the burgeoning scholarship of the global 1960s field continues to sustain and reinforce our understanding of the importance of Maoist China as an inspiration and partial cause for the revolutionary energies of the long and global 1960s, it is worth considering also what role the decline of China's revolutionary energies had on the global movements which it had inspired. As the factional battles inside China's Communist Party were won by forces which prioritized national security and domestic order, resulting first in the Sino-American rapprochement of the early 1970s and then the end of radical domestic policies after Mao's death in 1976, China stopped serving as a generative force for global revolution. Indeed, as Maoist dialecticians like to say, "it turned into its opposite." That is, it went from being a generator of global revolutionary energy to a demoralizing example of revolutionary defeat and capitulation.

### A Survey of Global Chinese Influence During the Long 1960s

Across western Europe, the Cultural Revolution "galvanized Dadaist student protest, nurtured feminist and gay rights activism, and legitimized urban guerrilla terrorism."<sup>5</sup> A fashion for Mao-collared suits swept Paris, a radical chic which inspired the films of Jean-Luc Godard.<sup>6</sup> Mao's writings had a particular influence on German student leader Rudi Dutschke.<sup>7</sup> Aside from the broad and diffuse influence in the youth culture and student movement, militant organizations with divergent interpretations of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought sprang up. Two of the groups with the most staying power represented opposite poles of thought. On one end of the spectrum was the Norwegian Socialist Youth Union, which, with its orientation toward the working class and economic struggles, melded Maoist militancy with traditional Western European communist workerism.<sup>8</sup> At the other end of the spectrum were Italy's Red Brigades, who claimed Maoist inspiration for their urban guerrilla warfare campaign which shook Italy during the 1970s and 1980s. The Red Brigades' terrorist violence was too detached from mass action for most other Maoist forces however, and they were ejected from the meetings held in France in the early 1980s which were aimed at regrouping Maoist forces into an

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<sup>5</sup> Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*, London: Bodley Head, 2019, 269.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, 114-116.

<sup>7</sup> Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 179-180.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Petter Sjøli, *Mao, min Mao*, Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2005. Interview with Tron Øgrim in Oslo on December 22, 2004.

international organization and which ultimately resulted in the formation of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement.<sup>9</sup>

In Latin America, Chinese influence during the Mao years went through two distinct conceptual moments which overlap somewhat chronologically. Aside from a broad influence in student and youth milieus like those found in Europe, the Chinese Revolution exercised a strong influence on both revolutionary nationalists and on communists who pursued, or at least advocated, armed struggle (in opposition to the path of peaceful coexistence and competition championed by the Soviet Union).

For revolutionary nationalists, China provided an example of a potential path to independent economic development and modernization in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial context. This appeal was particularly apparent in the struggle which the left-wing of the Bolivian Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) waged to take China as a development model, rather than pursuing the path of dependency on the United States which the MNR ultimately opted for. But this appeal was also readily apparent in accounts of China's socialist construction written by left-wing nationalist figures who visited China during the 1950s, such as Lázaro Cárdenas and Jorge Amado.<sup>10</sup>

Chinese influence was even more pronounced on communist revolutionaries who attempted armed struggle. Across the continent, the Cuban Revolution served to clarify the terms of one of the main issues in the Sino-Soviet split, that is, whether or not socialism could be reached via the path of peaceful coexistence and competition (as advocated by Moscow) or whether armed struggle was the road to socialism (as advocated by Mao). The concurrent events of the Sino-Soviet split and the Cuban example fueled the emergence of guerrilla struggles and splits in communist parties across Latin America. Everyone in this camp was reading Mao, even those groups (which formed the majority) which were basically focoist and which hewed more closely to the writings of Che Guevara (or, in some cases, of Abraham Guillén and Carlos Marighella). But substantial factions emerged in the communist movement across the continent which followed the Chinese line and which sought to emulate the Chinese Revolution in their home countries. The outstanding example here is of course Peru's Shining Path, although substantial also-rans emerged in several other countries.<sup>11</sup>

Chinese influence in Africa was more geopolitical than ideological, but was widespread all the same. Insurgents from Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, both Congos, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria and South Africa all

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Jorge Palacios in Las Cascadas on May 27, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> This is a major theme of my book, *Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America*, New York: Routledge, 2013. On Cárdenas and Amado specifically, see Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras: I-Apuntes, 1957-1966*, Mexico City: UNAM, 1973, 3:101; and Siwei Wang, "Transcontinental Revolutionary Imagination: Literary Translation between China and Brazil (1952-1964)," *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 6, no. 1 (2019): 70-98.

<sup>11</sup> For the dynamics of this whole process, see Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries*.

received training from China.<sup>12</sup> However, Chinese ideological influence on these African revolutionaries was much more limited than in the case of Latin Americans who received Chinese training. As Eduardo Mondlane, the first president of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) explained

What are we supposed to do if, apart from the Africans, only the communists will train and arm us? It was apparently alright for the West to ally itself with the communists against the fascists, but when we are denied Western aid we are apparently expected to do without communist aid as well [...] As for the suggestion that we are teleguided by Moscow and Peking because we accept their aid, the answer is that those who know FRELIMO know that this is simply not true. Let the West offer to help us, and then they can test whether or not we are truly non-aligned.<sup>13</sup>

The situation with other insurgents was quite similar. Although China provided aid, which was very welcome, and some degree of ideological influence took place, no sizeable Maoist groups emerged in Africa.

In Southeast Asia, Chinese involvement in the affairs of local parties, mass movements and armed struggles was greater than anywhere else in the world, with the exception of Korea, where of course China fought a war against the United States in order to protect the socialist revolution in the North. China's proximity to the region and consequent heightened interest in events there engendered ongoing exchanges and cooperation to a degree not seen elsewhere in the world. In light of this fact, it is notable that no party emerged in Southeast Asia which took an uncritical lead from the politics articulated in Beijing, or which treated Mao's works as a secular holy book. Even the Communist Party of the Philippines, which remains identified with the international Maoist left, holds positions on the Cultural Revolution and on capitalist restoration in the USSR which are well to the right of what is usually found in that milieu.

In India, the Communist Party led several armed struggles in the 1940s and 1950s. Differing summations of these events among party members played a major role in the split off of a large pro-China faction during the Sino-Soviet split, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), in 1964. Tellingly, however, the CPI(M) upheld the earlier armed struggles as forms of peasant self-defense, rather than as struggles which could result in a full-scale communist revolution.<sup>14</sup> This important distinction, and the support of a dissident minority for a peasant war leading to overthrowing the state, soon led to another split

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<sup>12</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic*, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, 127.

<sup>13</sup> *Observer* (London), 29 January 1967, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Sumanta Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising*, London, Zed, 1984, 20-21.

when the Naxalbari peasant uprising broke out in 1967. These forces, which went on to found the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and several smaller groupings, were much more explicitly Maoist. The leading figure, Charu Majumdar, even declared that “China’s Chairman is Our Chairman.”<sup>15</sup> India, and even more so its neighbor Nepal, remains a hotbed of Maoist activity today.

In the United States, Maoist China’s most profound influence was on the African-American movement for armed self-defense. The pioneer of the armed self-defense movement, Robert Williams, projected that movement’s mindset onto the global stage after China reaffirmed its desire to develop an atomic arsenal in 1960 when he wrote that “with the bomb, China will be respected and will add a powerful voice to those who already plead for justice for black as well as white.”<sup>16</sup> Malcolm X directed the movement to study the Chinese experience with his 1963 “Message to the Grassroots” speech, in which he claimed that there were “no more Toms in China. And today it’s one of the toughest, roughest, most feared countries on this earth – by the white man... All you have to do is examine the historic method used all over the world by others who have problems similar to yours. And once you see how they got theirs straight, then you know how you can get yours straight.”<sup>17</sup>

The Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), an African-American student group with chapters in several cities, followed Williams and Malcolm X’s lead in situating the Black liberation struggle in the context of the liberation struggles of the Global South. The RAM served as a milieu in which a good number of intellectuals and activists debated and were trained in revolutionary theory, with many adopting Maoist ideas in some form or another to their post-RAM endeavors. Most important among these Black nationalist leaders who passed through RAM were Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, founders of the Black Panther Party. The Black Panthers both adapted many Maoist ideas in their own practice and exposed the broader radical milieu to Mao’s writings, while popularizing the idea that domestic armed struggle against the US government was possible.<sup>18</sup>

## The End of Revolution in China and the End of the Long and Global 1960s

<sup>15</sup> Charu Mazumdar, “China’s Chairman is Our Chairman: China’s Path is Our Path,” *Liberation* 3, no. 1 (November 1969): 6-13. The Bangla name মজুমদার is generally rendered as Majumdar but can also be spelt Mazumdar.

<sup>16</sup> *Crusader* 2, no. 21 (December 31, 1960).

<sup>17</sup> Malcolm X, “Message to the Grassroots” in George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks*, New York, Grove Weidenfeld, 1965.

<sup>18</sup> Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013; Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution” in Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, eds., *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political & Cultural Connections Between African Americans and Asian Americans*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2008.

Given how recent revolutionary China's global moment of intellectual and political influence was, one might expect there to be more of a visible impact from that time still apparent in the world today. And yet, apart from a few exceptions, there is almost no conspicuous remnant of that influence. Certainly, those of us who investigate the topic can find political organizations and intellectual trends which originated or were decisively shaped in that moment just about anywhere in the world. But in most places, there is no real remnant of global Maoism which forces itself on the consciousness of most people. It simply does not contend for mental space among politically or intellectually active people, unless they have a particular penchant for communist politics or tend towards Sinophilia. In most places in the world this has been the case since as early as the 1980s. So, what happened? How did the moment of broad influence collapse so quickly?

The question is, perhaps obviously, bound up tightly with the question of what happened to the global Sixties overall? What ended this revolutionary period and ushered in the period of reaction which followed? If, as Eric Zolov has argued (and I agree with him), the global Sixties were "constituted of multiple crosscurrents of geopolitical, ideological, cultural, and economic forces... [producing] a 'simultaneity' of 'like' responses across disparate geographical contexts, suggesting interlocking causes,"<sup>19</sup> then we might expect that, as the geopolitical, ideological, cultural and economic crosscurrents continued to shift, that the alignment which produced the global Sixties would disappear, and some new global moment would take the place of the global Sixties. As it happened, contrary to the hopes of many global Sixties protagonists, the new global moment which came into being was not 'world socialist revolution,' or 'The Age of Aquarius,' but the beginning of an extended period of global neoliberal reaction.

And just as any global moment is "constituted of multiple crosscurrents of geopolitical, ideological, cultural, and economic forces," this new reactionary moment did not take place as the result of the passive drift of those forces (as if these forces were constellations drifting into different positions of alignment), but rather as the result of the interpenetration of varied subjective and objective forces, with the subjective forces including the many decisions made in the context of the formerly existing global moment. This being the case, it should be no surprise that a number of different theories have been offered for the 'end of the Sixties.'

Explanations for the end of the Sixties are typically given on a country-by-country basis. In the United States, the most famous argument is Todd Gitlin's 'good left vs. bad left' thesis, in which the militant elements (i.e., those who most embodied the global spirit of the 1960s) ruined the aspirations of the liberal reformers.<sup>20</sup> In Mexico, Jaime Pensado ends the Sixties with the repression of the student movement, setting the 1971 Corpus

<sup>19</sup> Eric Zolov, "Introduction: Latin America in the Global Sixties," *The Americas* 70.3 (January 2014): 349-362.

<sup>20</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, New York, Bantam, 1987.

Christi massacre as an approximate endpoint.<sup>21</sup> The various national level explanations for the end of the 1960s usually involve one or more of the following factors: domestic repression; co-optation of rebellious elements in the context of the implementation of certain reforms; emergence of an organized reactionary opposition to the new Sixties forces; dispersal of radical forces in the face of the failure of their political efforts; and exhaustion of socially rebellious energies, resulting in a turning inward (e.g., narcissistic forms of counter-culture).

On a global scale, there are several factors that have been broadly recognized as contributing to creating an unfavorable environment for revolutionary forces. Probably chief among these is the economic crisis of 1973 and the subsequent overall slowdown in global economic growth. Another major global factor often cited is the increasingly aggressive contention between the United States and the Soviet Union. I would like to argue here for a major factor which is almost always overlooked, and which corresponds to a recognition of the global Sixties as a political and ideological global moment for China. Just as the revolutionary energy of China played a central role in the emergence of the global 1960s, the decline of that energy played a central role in the end of the global Sixties.

China's ability to play an inspirational role for the radicals of the rest of the world during the long Sixties relied on both the example it set in its domestic policies, and on the stance it took in foreign affairs. In domestic affairs, China's decision to take up the mantle (ever more explicitly abandoned by the Soviet Union) of radical egalitarian social reform and, more importantly, the transformation of human nature to correspond with communist values, provided an inspiring example to those who shared the desire to eliminate inequality and to change the value systems and mentalities underlying human existence. In its foreign relations, China's willingness to support liberation movements abroad, and its efforts to promote its own brand of Marxism internationally, likewise played an important role in its ability to serve as a radical example.

But Chinese domestic and foreign policies were contested arenas during the entire Maoist period (1949-1976). Not only were there sharp differences in priorities and values among leading Communist Party figures, but objectively there was a real contradiction between on the one hand building a new socialist economy in China (implying a need to keep China safe from foreign entanglements and to spend China's resources on domestic development priorities) and on the other hand promoting the spread of communist and national liberation struggles abroad (which involved spending scarce resources outside of China and on developing China's military capacity, while also risking or waging war).

The circumstances which would cause China's turn away from a revolutionary-mobilizing to a demobilizing foreign policy were already present in the situation that

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<sup>21</sup> Jaime Pensado, *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture During the Long Sixties*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2013, 239.

China faced in 1968-69. Surrounded by enemies, war seemed likely to erupt at any time. The escalation of the Vietnam War made it seem likely that China could be drawn into direct conflict with the United States as it had been in Korea. Tensions continued to simmer on the Indian border, where a war had been fought in 1962. And on the frontier with the Soviet Union a troop build-up on both sides resulted in two direct military clashes between Soviet and Chinese forces on Zhenbao Island, leading the Soviets to consider a preemptive nuclear strike on China. Judging the Soviet Union to be the greatest and most implacable threat to China, Mao Zedong set into motion a chain of events which would lead to rapprochement with the United States, culminating in Nixon's visit to China in early 1972.<sup>22</sup>

While the Chinese portion of the joint communiqué issued by China and the United States at the end of Nixon's visit continued to use the sort of revolutionary language which had characterized Chinese statements since the revolution's triumph in 1949, such as "nations want liberation and the people want revolution--this has become the irresistible trend of history,"<sup>23</sup> in practice Chinese foreign policy became more and more demoralizing for revolutionaries who had drawn inspiration from China. The visits of members of the Iranian royal family to China in 1971 and 1972, and the quick recognition of the government of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet following the coup against the Socialist Allende government, were emblematic of the sort of foreign policy decisions which accompanied rapprochement with the United States and which sapped China's power to serve as a generative center for a global revolutionary political moment.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the demoralizing turn in Chinese foreign policy, Chinese domestic events remained a source of radical inspiration until late 1976, when the Gang of Four were arrested within weeks of Mao's death. When great chaos erupted at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, with students taking to the streets and major party leaders being overthrown and subjected to mass criticism, it was as if China had proved to the world that it took the idea of continuous revolution seriously, that it would go to great pains to prevent the emergence of a gray non-revolutionary bureaucracy as had happened in the Soviet Union. Despite, and perhaps partially because of, the ill-defined and contradictory nature of many of the events of the first few years of the Cultural Revolution decade, the idea that something genuinely revolutionary and unprecedented was going on in China found resonance in and gave force to radical movements around the world.

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<sup>22</sup> Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001, 238-276.

<sup>23</sup> Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, February 28, 1972.

<sup>24</sup> On the Iranian rapprochement with China, see Ehsan Razani and Nor Azizan Idris, "The Shah's China Policy: From Hostility to Rapprochement (A Neoclassical Realist View)," *e-Bangi: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* (Malaysia) Special Issue 1 (2015): 8-22. This article argues that the Shah deliberately used rapprochement with China as a way of undermining the Iranian communist movement.

While the mass mobilization and widespread unrest which is popularly associated with the Cultural Revolution was basically over by 1969, efforts were made by part of the Chinese Communist Party to theorize a socialist political economy which would move China toward greater egalitarianism and gradually eliminate feudal and capitalist social relations and values, while simultaneously furthering the economic development of the country.<sup>25</sup> Where it held power, this faction attempted to implement its theories. This faction was led by Zhang Chunqiao, a leader who enjoyed a long-standing reputation for championing radical egalitarianism.<sup>26</sup> Zhang and his comrades viewed the progressive elimination of the “four alls” as the central task of socialist societies as they moved toward a communist future. If the “four alls” were not constantly fought against, the remaining capitalist economic and social relations would grow stronger and generate a new bourgeoisie within the Communist Party itself. As Zhang put it,

in *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*, Marx deals in more specific terms with this dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, and to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations.<sup>27</sup>

Zhang’s faction, and Mao himself, made sense of the earlier events of the Cultural Revolution by reference to this framework.

As part of combating the “four alls,” Zhang promoted workers with political acumen into jobs which were being performed by more traditionally trained intellectuals, including making efforts to train a new diplomatic corps and moving workers into government administration. He also tried, when possible, to replace conservative veteran cadres with youth who had proved themselves in the Cultural Revolution’s early days.<sup>28</sup> Inevitably, such efforts caused disruption to the smooth functioning of the state. While Mao Zedong sympathized with Zhang’s egalitarian agenda, he placed a higher priority on order during the 1970s than he had during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. As a

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<sup>25</sup> The most complete compilation of this Maoist political economy can be found in George C. Wang, ed., *Fundamentals of Political Economy*, White Plains, M. E. Sharpe, 1977.

<sup>26</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, Cambridge, Belknap, 2006, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Chang Chun-chiao [Zhang Chunqiao], *On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship Over the Bourgeoisie*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1975, 16.

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth J. Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution*, Boulder, Westview, 1997, 169-170.

result, Zhang's radical faction only sometimes benefited from Mao's patronage, and the more pragmatic faction of the Communist Party (associated with Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping) continued to hold most positions of power and had a much larger base of support within the party itself. As a result, when Mao died in 1976, it was only a matter of weeks before Zhang and the rest of the Gang of Four were arrested, and a purge was carried out against his radical faction.

Despite calls from the new Chinese leadership to obey the Central Committee, post-Mao China did not have the appeal for international radicals that it had while Mao lived.<sup>29</sup> While the arrest of the Gang of Four may have only been the final nail in the coffin of the global forces which had served as engines for the Global Sixties, it caused tremendous confusion and demoralization for those forces which were explicitly ideologically aligned with Maoist China. This was the case much more so than in the case of the earlier foreign policy reversals. In the case of foreign policy, global Maoist forces could rationalize Chinese rapprochement with the United States as a domestic necessity for China which did not necessarily affect their own orientation in their own countries. Even the Partido Comunista Revolucionario de Chile kept its criticisms of China's quick recognition of the Pinochet regime private until 1977, sharing them initially only in the context of confidential party-to-party communications.<sup>30</sup>

An initial period of confusion over what was happening in China was exacerbated by Enver Hoxha's sudden polemic against Maoism. Albania had been China's closest ideological ally during the Mao years, and Albania had worked with China to build the Maoist political trend internationally. Radio Tirana, like Radio Beijing, beamed shortwave propaganda around the world. And Tirana had been a common destination for international Maoist travelers.<sup>31</sup> Abimael Guzmán led a party delegation there in 1967.<sup>32</sup> In 1978 Albania published Hoxha's *Imperialism and the Revolution*, which polemicized against the entirety of Mao's body of theoretical work, while also accusing China's post-Mao leadership of aspiring to turn China into a new imperialist power. Hoxha proposed a return to the 'pure' Marxism-Leninism of Stalin's Soviet Union (Hoxha remained adamantly opposed to Brezhnev's USSR).

Hoxha's polemic revealed a latent split within Maoism which had hitherto been unrecognized. When Maoism emerged as the main political trend opposing Khrushchev's

<sup>29</sup> "Obey the Party Central Committee Headed by Chairman Hua in All Our Actions," *Peking Review* 49 (December 3, 1976): 8-10.

<sup>30</sup> Jorge Palacios, *Del Mapocho al Sena*, Santiago, LOM Ediciones, 2001, 33-36. "Carta abierta del Partido Comunista Revolucionario de Chile al Partido Comunista de China" (Nov. 1977).

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Jorge Palacios in Las Cascadas on May 27, 2013; Interview with Emilse Escobar in La Paz on March 2, 2007; Benjamin Kohl and Linda C. Farthing, with Félix Muruchi, *From the Mines to the Streets: A Bolivian Activist's Life*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2011, 146; Interview with Oscar Zamora Medinacelli in Sucre, March 20, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (CVR) interview with Abimael Guzmán and Elena Iparraguirre in Callao on May 28, 2002.

de-Stalinization in the wake of the 1956 Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, it became the standard bearer for Stalin Era orthodoxy. Even as China embarked on experiments in socialist construction which broke in major ways from the orthodoxy of the Stalin Era, it remained Stalin's standard-bearer. The central feature of Maoism during its final years was the claim that the conditions of socialist society called forth a new bourgeoisie within the Communist Party, and that the masses of people needed to be mobilized to overthrow the capitalist roaders within the Communist Party itself.<sup>33</sup> Despite a great deal of confusion about what this meant, resulting in the chaotic and often inarticulate convulsions which marked the Cultural Revolution in late 1960s, the fact that millions of people were acting on the idea of rebelling within socialist society in order to keep that society from becoming the sort of grey, oppressive society which the Soviet Union had become, accounted for much of China's power as a generative force for global rebellion during the 1960s. The idea of the emergence of new forms of capitalist relations under socialism was anathema to Stalin's concept of socialism, but central to Cultural Revolution Maoism. This resulted in a strange marriage under the Maoist banner globally between defenders of hidebound 1930s Soviet orthodoxy and advocates of an eternally rebellious spirit. Of course, hindsight makes the division between these trends within Maoism much clearer than it was for many participants at the time. Indeed, the tension within the ideology between upholding Stalin's legacy and the "Right to Rebel" spirit of the Cultural Revolution caused a certain amount of cognitive dissonance for many Maoist ideologues.

Given the apparent failure of the Cultural Revolution and the confusion over the direction that the new Chinese leadership was heading, a retreat into the theoretical purity of the primordial Stalin era proved appealing to many Maoists, particularly in Latin America. Saturnino Paredes, the original leader of Peru's Maoist faction, brought his Partido Comunista del Peru-Bandera Roja into Hoxha's orbit. Colombia's third largest guerrilla group, the People's Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación), led by the Partido Comunista de Colombia (Marxista-leninista), also went Hoxhaist. Taking things one step further, the Communist Party of the Philippines, a longtime Maoist organization whose New People's Army had been waging guerrilla warfare since 1969, sought a new relationship with the Soviet bloc itself.<sup>34</sup>

The combined blows of the capitalist restoration in China and Hoxhaite factional activity within the Maoist ranks greatly diminished the Maoist forces globally. By the end of the 1970s, it was hard to imagine the force which Maoist ideology had exercised on the global movement of just a decade earlier. In a few pockets, strong Maoist elements

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<sup>33</sup> For a succinct statement of this position, see *Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1966.

<sup>34</sup> José María Sison and Ninotchka Rosca, *Jose Maria Sison: At Home in the World. Portrait of a Revolutionary*, Greensboro, Open Hand Publishing, 2004, 152-153. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the CPP rediscovered its Maoist roots and conducted a rectification campaign.

remained part of the national political scene. This was most apparent in Peru, the Philippines and South Asia, where large scale armed struggles led by Maoist parties continued or would soon emerge. But without a socialist state to unite them, these Maoist forces remained fractious, uniting for a time to support the Shining Path and later the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), but ultimately dividing into squabbling grouplets. Outside of Nepal, even the strongest Maoist forces (such as those in India, Peru and the Philippines) are today almost entirely unable to affect the direction of national politics, and most Maoist remnants in other countries are unable even to make the general public aware of their existence. The weakness of the Maoist legacy makes it all the harder to imagine just how influential this political trend was at the height of the 1960s.

## Is the Chinese Revolution Finished as an Inspirational Force Outside China?

“As we have often said, while the road ahead is tortuous, the future is bright.”  
Mao Zedong, “On the Ten Major Relationships”

“Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up.  
And change is coming, whether you like it or not.”  
Greta Thunberg, Speech at United Nations, September 23, 2019

The question remains, then, whether the Chinese Revolution, and in particular the revolutionary upheavals that took place within socialist China during the Cultural Revolution, have spent their force as an influence on global events. While it is impossible to do more than to speculate, I expect there will be a resurgence in learning from the Chinese experience. The French Revolution, the European Revolutions of 1848, the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution have all had repercussions in times and places at considerable remove from the original events. As humanity faces an ever-escalating climate crisis and the neoliberal hegemony which has dominated the globe since the late 1980s continues to collapse, it seems only natural that some people will turn to the last major expression of global left-wing radicalism as part of charting a political path forward. That time was the 1960s, and China’s ideological hegemony in the movements of the 1960s was paramount.

Already, centralized planning and socialist economics have received fresh popular treatments and a resurgence in innovative thinking unlike anything seen for decades.<sup>35</sup> Should the trend continued, it would be highly surprising should no attention

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<sup>35</sup> Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*, Brooklyn, Verso, 2019; Leigh Phillips and Michal Rozworski, *The People’s Republic of Walmart: How the World’s Biggest Corporations are Laying the Foundation for*

be paid to the only sustained effort to prevent capitalist restoration in a socialist country. Recently, China itself has faced a resurgent grassroots left challenge drawing on the country's own traditions from the Mao era.<sup>36</sup> Even the United States has seen an upswing in interest in socialism unlike anything since the 1960s.<sup>37</sup> While in most of the world the remnants of the direct inheritors of the Maoist tradition are unlikely to be in a position to benefit organizationally from or directly influence the ways in which a new socialist generation interprets the Chinese experience and draws its own lessons, it does seem likely that a re-encounter with Mao will take place.

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<sup>36</sup> Javier C. Hernández, "Students Defiant as Chinese University Cracks Down on Young Communists," *New York Times*, December 28, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Although there may be resistance to looking to the 1960s for inspiration or ideas, if the repeated attacks of the popular socialist podcast *Chapo Trap House* on the Baby Boomer generation for being responsible for spoiling the planet are any indication.

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