

intellectuals, but also at the whole population, including hundreds of millions of peasants, CPC publicity promoting the Soviet Union had to be conducted through large-scale and wide-ranging mass activities organized by popular associations as well as through conventional mass media and organized meetings and study sessions. This makes it an important topic for research. However, important as the issue is, no monographic study has been produced so far. The present paper proposes to examine diverse activities of the Association as a "mass organization" to assess the way the CPC promoted the Soviet Union among the population and their response.

On 30 June 1949, Mao Zedong published his important article "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship" and formally announced China's policy of "leaning to one side" in favor of the Soviet Union. This policy was relevant not merely to foreign affairs but to ideology and the national economy as well, especially since China had to rely upon Soviet assistance in domestic construction. However, the CPC's establishment and proclamation of its pro-Soviet policy did not immediately call forth pro-Soviet feelings among the Chinese. Indeed, for some time after the War of Resistance Against Japan, the great majority of the lower strata in the Chinese population had little understanding of the Soviet Union. With the exception of a minority of left-wing intellectuals, most intellectuals and urban residents, especially in the Northeast, had an unfavorable impression of the country. The reasons for this lay not only in painful memories of Tsarist Russia's occupation of Chinese territories in the Northeast and its high-handed oppres-

sion of the Chinese population there, but also in Stalin's postwar China policy and the acts of Soviet troops in the Northeast.

The Soviet army failed to withdraw from the Northeast China within three months after the conclusion of WWII, as had been stipulated by the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. Rather, the prolonged period of occupation was devoted to transporting to the Soviet Union the greater part of those machines and installations that could be dismantled as well as other equipment and materials. On top of this was the publication after February 1946 of the secret Yalta Agreement reached by the US and USSR behind China's back, with the revelation that Chinese sovereignty and interests had been played off as bargaining chips between the two powers. This led to a series of large-scale anti-Soviet demonstrations, spreading from Jiaochangkou in Chongqing to all the major cities in China. In particular, the behavior of occupying Soviet troops in the Northeast — theft and rape were virtually an everyday occurrence — added fuel to the fire of popular resentment. "Now the Small Noses (Japanese) are gone," Northerners commented, "the Big Noses (Soviets) are coming." Not only did the ordinary people feel like this; even rank-and-file CPC members in the region found it puzzling and disappointing. The Soviet troops were Communists like themselves; why did they monitor, check and obstruct the Chinese Communists at every turn? On the one hand, the CPC was confronted by popular ignorance and even antagonism with regard to the Soviet Union; on the other it needed the Soviet Union as a concrete exemplar of the achievements of socialist construction in

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Learning from the Soviet Union: CPC Publicity and Its Effects

—A Study Centered on the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association

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中共建国前后，政策向苏联一边倒。绝大多数人民对苏联无认识或对苏联反感，中苏友好协会是中共在全国开展“宣传苏联、学习苏联”的关键组织。中共的宣传带有强制灌输单一思想的特色。中共需要全面倒向苏联时，人民仍对苏联一无所知或有反苏情绪；而当民间逐渐对苏联产生好感后，中共高层却开始考虑与苏联抗衡。因此，中共的宣传既不能须臾放松，也往往与民众有距离，造成了官方宣传与民间情绪的错位。

Soviet Union." Focusing on this publicity the present article aims to analyze how the CPC used the Association to conduct a rousing publicity campaign that translated the policy of friendship with the Soviet Union into popular will. The article will also try to evaluate the actual effects of the publicity.

General discussions of the CPC's publicity work appeared in the West early on,¹ followed in recent years by monographs on publicity during the Cold War period.² As to studies on the CPC approach to publicity on the Soviet Union, the Ph. D. thesis of Zhang Bogeng of Harvard University is probably the only research result available. In 1991, Dr. Zhang interviewed 250 Beijing residents (two-thirds of whom had been engaged in publicity work in the 1950s) using a questionnaire.³ Owing to the fact that it was directed not only at government cadres and

I

During its long struggle against the GMD, the CPC had accumulated a wealth of experience in mass publicity, mobilization and organization. Full play was given to such experience in running the country after the Party came to power. Reliance on its powerful ideological-political work to integrate society and lead the masses to follow the ruling party became the core of the CPC publicity. In the 1950s, when the CPC policies of friendship with the Soviet Union and of "leaning to one side" were in full swing, "learning from the Soviet Union" was at the heart of official publicity work, while the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association (SSFA) was the key institution in advancing the movement to "promote and learn from the

order to make the masses understand what the future of the socialist China would be like. Consequently, promoting the Soviet Union and urging the nation to learn from it became top priorities for the CPC after the establishment of the PRC.

II

On 5 October 1949, the SSFA headquarters was formally launched in Beijing, with Liu Shaoqi, Vice President of the country, as Chairman. A look at the list of the Association's sponsors and the process of its structuring and organization indicates clearly the significance attached to this piece of publicity project by the top echelons of the Party. The Association was defined as a united front organization whose primary mission was to devote every effort to developing its membership and set up branch organizations. Anyone willing to work for Sino-Soviet friendship and learn from the Soviet Union could join. By early November 1952, its membership topped those of the Youth League, the Trade Union and the Women's Federation, making it the largest "mass association" in the country.⁵

The CPC's methods of publicity came in a rich variety, ranging from the traditional — *dagu* (story in verse sung to the accompaniment of a small drum and other instruments), *yangpian* (magic lantern shows with a chanted explanation), variety shows, *yang ge* (a kind of popular rural dance), waist drum dance, and so forth — to the modern, such as slides shows or film. Regular activities sponsored by SSFA branches in different parts of the country included exhibitions, lectures; seminars, get-togethers, study

Revolution, the other the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance.

During the First Five-Year Plan, SSFA branches in different parts of the country produced large numbers of pamphlets enlarging the accomplishments of Soviet experts in China to promote the idea of learning from the Soviet Union. Their concrete contributions became the best testimony to Sino-Soviet friendship. However, though Soviet experts in China made many significant contributions, a number of problems did appear. Among these was the tendency among Chinese cadres and technicians to place too great a reliance on them. Another, more serious, problem was that some of their proposals or ways of doing things did not fit Chinese conditions.⁹ Then there was disagreement over the weighty issue of whether the Chinese army should also adopt the Soviet institution of one-man leadership.¹⁰ Owing to a series of conflicts of this sort, after the success of the First Five-Year Plan and the accumulation of experience in economic development, the CPC set about exploring a route better suited to China's development. A certain attitude of reserve began to set in with regard to all-out-learning from the Soviet Union.¹¹ Towards the end of February 1956, on the evening of the closing ceremony of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev presented his criticism on the errors of Stalin and the personality cult. This "secret report" shocked the world and exerted tremendous and far-reaching influence upon the future political development of the CPC and of China itself. At the same time, it sowed the seeds of the split between China

and the Soviet Union in the years to come. In so doing Khrushchev had, to quote Mao Zedong, "lifted the lid and made a big mess." Accordingly, from then on Mao Zedong began his repeated expositions of "On the Ten Major Relationships," formally proposing that China take the Soviet Union as an object lesson.¹²

By 1958, when the whole of China started on the frenzied road of "national construction" with the CPC's launch of the "Great Leap Forward," Soviet experience started to look conservative and backward. Khrushchev, who was highly dubious about both the "Great Leap Forward" and the People's Communes, dragged his feet over a response to China's request for new assistance.¹³ It so happened that it was at this very juncture the CPC bombarded the Jinnen Islands without notifying the Soviet Union in advance. Relations between the two parties became more and more strained. Then the 21st National Congress of the CPSU made implicit criticisms of the CPC political line on the People's Commune and the "Great Leap Forward." This was followed by Soviet neutrality during the Sino-Indian border conflict, when the Soviet Union went so far as to declare that it was hardly worth resorting to arms for those barren scraps of land on the border. The CPC was deeply angered. After the heated quarrel between the two parties at the Bucharest Conference in 1960, Khrushchev made the sudden decision in July to recall all Soviet experts in China, and the Sino-Soviet split was finally in the open. While top-level tension relaxed somewhat in 1962, at the Moscow Conference of the next year the relations between the two parties broke up once again, and general political

polemics became the order of the day, setting off the thirty-year Sino-Soviet confrontation.

From the time when the CPC's Central Committee formally proposed taking the Soviet Union as an object lesson to the split between two countries, relations grew ever more distant. The cooling of relations was accompanied by an annual decrease in the SSFA organization, personnel and funds. At the same time publicity on learning from the Soviet Union diminished in both range and scale, no longer conducted with the fanfare of the past. On 4 April 1966, the organization and its local branches were formally transferred by the CPC Central Committee to the jurisdiction of the foreign affairs system as a department of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries,¹⁴ i.e. simply a channel for minimal people-to-people contact. Once the "Great Cultural Revolution" started and publicity switched to "opposing and fending off the infiltration of revisionism," the SSFA simply disappeared without a trace.

In the early stages after 1949, SSFA publicity on the Soviet Union focused on the Soviet state system, social conditions, people's livelihood, and the impact of the October Revolution on the Chinese Revolution. During the First Five-Year Plan, the major point of publicity was on the advanced Soviet economic construction. As the high tide of Sino-Soviet relations began to ebb, the focus shifted to the relatively apolitical field of Soviet science and technology.

This development was also related to the stagnating progress made by the Soviet Union in terms of science from 1957 on. Another focal point was Lenin and, in particular, the

significance of the October Revolution; it was no longer possible for the CPC to continue eulogizing Stalin and his magnificent deeds. In the late 1950s, the rapid deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations at the highest level as well as Ultra-Leftist domination of the domestic scene led to the gradual decline of the SSFA's routine publicity activities in terms both of frequency and scale. The situation also made it hard for cadres responsible for that specific field of publicity to determine where they should keep going and where to stop. An example is the puzzlement on the part of local cadres during the period of the "Great Leap Forward" when China was setting up People's Communes and promoting small blast furnaces. The Soviet Union had never done anything of the sort, so how could publicity about learning from the Soviet Union be integrated with their current central work tasks?¹⁵ The Central Committee's response to their confusion was the instruction that publicity work "has to be done, but not overdone."¹⁶ Faced with such directives, local publicity workers' enthusiasm cooled into utter passivity; they became extraordinarily cautious, sidestepping all locally-based exchanges whenever possible.¹⁷ Only activists were allowed to take part in routine activities in the major cities,¹⁸ although they still bore the name "mass activities." Such activities decreasing each year until they disappeared completely with the launching of the "Great Cultural Revolution."

III

Whatever the object of publicity, the evaluation of its effects is always a difficult

and complex task. Data limitations make it impossible for the author to categorize popular responses in terms of class, occupation, sex, age, locality, education, etc. All that can be done is to indicate the general trends that can be gleaned from materials at hand.

In the first years after the establishment of the PRC, the CPC conducted intensive publicity through the SSFA. Through such activities, especially in the "Sino-Soviet Friendship Month" in November 1952, vast numbers of ordinary people gradually became interested in and learned about the Soviet Union, and learned that China would follow the same path. Generally speaking, good results could be expected when publicity about the Soviet Union went hand in hand with real-life practice: an example was effect produced by the timely aid provided by Soviet epidemic-control teams in rapidly eradicating a plague epidemic in the provinces of Jehol and Chahar.¹⁹

In general, intellectuals and urban residents, who were more concerned with current affairs and the nation's sovereignty and fate, tended to be suspicious of official publicity. They did not respond to the vague professions of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance about consolidating friendship between the two countries and protecting world peace; rather, they questioned why Chinese Changchun Railroad and Lushun would not be returned to China until 1952.²⁰ By autumn of 1952, when the Sino-Soviet Talks issued a bulletin announcing the return of Chinese Changchun Railroad to China and the extension of the Soviet lease on the Lushun Base, some people did respond positively towards Soviet goodwill, but others began to ques-

tion the essence of the two countries' co-administration of Lushun: was the Soviet Union "guarding the gate" for China because the Chinese navy was still weak, or was this invasion and occupation?²¹ Lushun residents had strong negative responses; they vented their anger on the Soviets living in their city, quarreled with Soviet soldiers, or pushed and jostled Soviet people on streetcars, sometimes even beating them up.²²

At the end of Sino-Soviet Friendship Month, friendship associations in various places and related government departments jointly reviewed the results of their publicity. Naturally much had been accomplished, but they had also recorded a fair amount of discontent. Analysis shows that the causes of popular dissatisfaction fall roughly into the following categories:

(1) Misunderstandings resulting from lack of clarity or inappropriately implementing Party decrees. For example, because some propagandists failed to clearly explain the meaning of "The salvos of the October Revolution brought us Marxism-Leninism," many inhabitants of Shanghai's tenements asked in bewilderment: "What good would it do for the Soviet Union to fire cannonballs into China?"²³ Another example was the dumping and subsequent forced purchase of large quantities of Soviet cotton prints in a number of places in 1951, arousing much discontent among ordinary people.²⁴

(2) Pro-American sentiments among many intellectuals and businessmen had not been thoroughly eliminated. In the first years of the PRC, their anti-Soviet and pro-American ideas often intertwined. Many who had lived in the US felt that America had warm-hearted people, advanced science, genuine

democracy and freedom, high quality education and teaching materials, abundant material wealth, and possessed of everything desirable from cars and "foreign-style houses" to the atomic bomb.²⁵ Even those who had never left the country but had read books, journals and newspapers, watched Hollywood films, or made their own interpretation of modern Chinese history, saw America as a "moral state"²⁶ that had never engaged in aggression. There were also those who worshipped the US because of its material civilization and, even more, those who felt closely bound up with the US because of their faith in Christianity.²⁷

(3) The psychology of suspicion of and opposition to the Soviet Union arising from historical grievances or nationalist sentiments. The Chinese people, especially Northeasterners, could not forget that of all the Chinese territories lost to the Powers in the last years of the Qing Dynasty, the Russians had taken the lion's share. "How comes it," they frequently asked, "that the Soviet Union refuses to return our Sixty-Four Villages East of the Heilongjiang River and our Lake Baikal, which they occupied by force?"²⁸ Some Beijing citizens were doubtful of the "selflessness" of the Soviet aid to China, holding it to have ulterior motives.²⁹

(4) Antagonism towards the policy of "leaning to one side" and praising everything about the Soviet Union. Many ordinary people disagreed strongly with the policy, especially with the practice of lauding to the skies the Soviets and every aspect of their social life. College teachers in Tianjin coined a popular saying: "Chairman Mao says we Chinese People have stood up. What a pity that no sooner had we stood up than we fell pro-

friendly relations between China and the Soviet Union, decreasing Soviet support to China and, ultimately, making it impossible for China to attain the realm of socialism.³⁶

However, what really worked to make intellectuals and urban residents give up their prejudices against the Soviet Union was the general policy of "learning from the USSR in an all round way" formulated by Mao Zedong and the CPC Central Committee during the period of February to September 1953. Responding to the call, the Chinese nation as a whole was swept up in a high tide of learning from this first socialist country in the world.³⁷ The U-turn was completed in the following year of 1954 by the Khrushchev's visit to China and the wealth of gifts he brought: long-term loans to China were increased, Soviet troops withdrawn from the military harbor of Lüshun, and Soviet shares in all joint Sino-Soviet firms transferred to China. Once this news was made public, there was widespread rejoicing and appreciation.³⁸ In addition, large numbers of Soviet experts began to arrive in China after 1954. Their technical knowledge and conscientious attitude convinced numbers of CPC cadres and intellectuals of Soviet sincerity, adding to Chinese goodwill towards the Soviet Union.³⁹ If in the early days of the PRC the Soviet Union was promoted out due to domestic political requirements, the second high tide of learning from that country was undoubtedly due entirely to the needs of economic construction — the First Five-Year Plan that was being launched had to have substantial Soviet assistance. As Mao Zedong put it later, at that time we did not know how to go about construction, and we had no choice but to learn from the USSR.

It was at this juncture that an event took place in the Soviet Union that damaged its image in China. This was the secret report made by Khrushchev at the 20th CPSU Congress in condemnation of Stalin. The report was widely circulated among Chinese cadres and intellectuals, the tremendous impact thus produced smashed the Soviet myths and almost eliminated in one stroke all that had been achieved in the past seven years by the CPC's pro-Soviet publicity. Since the Soviet model had problems, thought many intellectuals, China had to cut loose from it and search for an alternative course. Also, while pondering how to switch tracks away from the Stalin debacle, they began to examine critically the communist theory and the fundamental problems in its essence. Dai Huang, a reporter with Xinhua News Agency, recalls that when he and his colleagues heard the report they felt as though a soundless atomic bomb had exploded in their mental universe.⁴⁰ The doubts aroused by this report resurfaced as discontent with the Soviet Union during the brief "airing of views" in the spring of 1956.⁴¹ However, it was immediately countered by Mao Zedong's Anti-Rightist Movement, in which anyone who dared to challenge the Party's policies and authority was ruthlessly punished. One of the crimes of many of the intellectuals who were branded "Rightists" was their critical speeches on the Soviet Union. At the time, to be opposed to the USSR meant opposing the Party and opposing socialism — i.e., being counter-revolutionary.

Thus when the movement of "opening up one's heart to the Party" took place in 1958 and intellectuals were called upon to make their political stand explicit, even per-

sonages in democratic/science circles who had looked up to Europe and America's democratic systems and science and technology all had to attack their previous reverence for America and contempt for the Soviet Union, and announce that they would henceforth endeavor to study Marxism-Leninism and the advanced experiences and science and technology of the Soviet Union.⁴² The drastic changes in these people indicated that the most "stubbornly" pro-US and anti-USSR elements of Chinese society had been rounded up and brought under the pro-Soviet banner. The twin-pronged campaign of publicity and political movements aimed at learning from the Soviet Union and making the whole nation pro-Soviet that was introduced around 1949 can be said to have been crowned with success by 1958.

Ironically, just at the very moment when CPC publicity had achieved the much desired success in transforming China into a pro-Soviet nation, Party relationships at the top made an about-turn. However, Mao Zedong's thunderous outburst of wrath at Khrushchev when they met in the summer of 1958 was kept from the rank and file cadres and the man in the street for the time being. News of the heated quarrel between the two sides that took place in autumn 1959, on Khrushchev's third visit to China, was widely circulated among high-ranking CPC cadres, but remained unknown at the grassroots. This state of affairs prevailed until the summer of 1960 when the USSR decided all of a sudden to call back from China all its experts, finally making the Sino-Soviet split plain to cadres and ordinary people. The scenes of distress at railway stations between the departing Soviets and the Chinese seeing

them off demonstrated the depth of friendship between the two peoples, albeit rather inopportunistly.

IV

Immediately after the founding of the PRC, the CPC launched all out publicity to explain and promote its pro-Soviet policy of "leaning to one side." The fundamental mission of the newly set up Sino-Soviet Friendship Association was to mobilize and organize the masses to promote and learn from the Soviet Union. Through a range of colorful activities, ignorance or resentment of the Soviet Union was to be transformed into understanding and admiration. At the same time, it was to eulogize the superiority of the socialist system, drawing with bold strokes pictures of the happy future life for which the Soviet Union provided the model.

Obviously, the publicity was marked by indoctrination and coercion. This was because stabilizing and consolidating the regime required a uniformity of social opinion despite the huge gap between the Party policy and mass political consciousness. The evolution of Sino-Soviet relations and the orientation of CPC publicity provides a classic example of this process. In the early 1950s, when there was strong anti-Soviet sentiment among the majority of intellectuals and urban residents and the great masses of peasants knew little about the USSR, the CPC, because of its pro-Soviet policy of "leaning to the one side," had to promote that country and Sino-Soviet friendship. However, by the early 1960s, when favorable impressions of and friendship with the Soviet Union had gradually taken root among the Chinese, the

CPC, determined to take an alternative route, started to propagate the general policy of opposing and guarding against revisionism and of confrontation with the Soviet Union. There was an anecdote that vividly illuminated this dislocation between the CPC official publicity and popular feeling: during the "airing of views" coincident with the Sino-Soviet honeymoon of 1957, an engineer in Beijing said "actually, not all Soviet experts are necessarily good." For saying this, he was branded a Rightist, kicked out of the capital and exiled to work in the Northeast. Then in 1965 when Sino-Soviet relations had already deteriorated, this same engineer said, "actually, there are quite a few good guys among the Soviet experts." Because of this, he was branded "counterrevolutionary" when the "Cultural Revolution" took place the next year and exiled to Qinghai to be reformed through labor.⁴³ This classic example shows the effectiveness of CPC publicity throughout the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations and how it was quite capable of swaying popular feeling. However, there was al-

ways a time-lag between popular responses and policy changes from the top; tragedy became inevitable when warm relations at the top conflicted with chilly sentiments at the bottom, and vice versa.

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