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far  
east

*Reporter*

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA  
APPROACH TO HISTORY'S HERITAGE  
Of Territorial and Border Aggressions  
And To  
Current Revolutionary Movements

*By Neville Maxwell In*

*"Commonsense and Honesty About China"*



*Yenan*

China's Approach to History's Heritage  
Of Aggression and to  
Current Revolutionary Movements

FAR EAST REPORTER INTRODUCTION

The new China, established in 1949, was faced with the fruits of foreign aggression - "amputation of territory" and "sustained and conscious attempts to dismember her as a national entity." (Maxwell). What has been and is China's response to these left-over fruits of a predatory period in China's history?

With the establishment of the new China the Chinese people "stood up - never again to be an insulted people." They have moved steadily on the socialist path - their status today evidenced by the tide of nations moving to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China.

Is China now threatening to "settle accounts"? to go to war? to use her military and nuclear muscle to right historical wrongs? Mr Maxwell's answer is: "The statements and actions of the Communist Government of China shows that the new men who took power in Peking in 1949 were concerned with the future of China as history had left her, not with restoring the boundaries of her imperial past." China today is pursuing no irredentist policy toward her former aggressors.

Is this People's China threatening to export revolution, as Washington's propaganda depicts? Clearly the revolutionary experience, methods and results of the Chinese people's revolutionary struggle are an example and encouragement to revolutionary and liberation movements throughout the world. But: China is adamant that "every revolution in a country stems from the demands of its own people....revolution cannot be imported." (Lin Piao)

Mr Maxwell's sharply reasoned and concise analysis of what China has done, is doing and what she says she means to do concludes with the statement: "China is not expansionist, aggressive, reckless, and dangerous; China is peaceful, cautious, anxious to defend her borders, not to enlarge them - - - threatened not a threat."

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA  
APPROACH TO HISTORY'S HERITAGE  
**Of Territorial and Border Aggressions**  
And To  
**Current Revolutionary Movements**

**T**HE assumption, or axiom, that underlies western political and strategic thinking about the problems of Asia is that the designs of Communist China are basically militant and aggressive. Sometimes this is summed up in the unexamined and unthinking phrase 'the threat from China'—for example in a *Times* leading article on June 18 this year; sometimes it is elaborated, even embroidered, as in this passage from a 1964 article by George Kennan:

'[China] has fallen into the hands of a group of embittered fanatics; wedded to a dated and specious ideology but one which holds great attraction for masses of people throughout Asia; finding in this ideology a rationale for the most ruthless exertion of power over other people; associating this ideological prejudice with the most violent currents of traditional nationalism and xenophobia . . .; consumed with the ambition to extend to further areas of Asia the dictatorial authority they now wield over the Chinese people themselves; sponsoring for this reason every territorial claim of earlier Chinese governments for which history can show even the flimsiest evidence; and now absolutely permeated with hatred towards ourselves not only because their ideology pictures us all as villains, but also because we, more than any other people, have had the strength and the temerity to stand in their path and obstruct the expansion of their power.'

With more restraint, Paul Hasluck, when he was Australia's minister for external affairs, said that 'the fear of China is the dominant element in much that happens in Asia', and went on to declare that that 'fear is well founded'. This paper seeks to examine the latter proposition: to ask how well the fear of China is founded in the evidence of what the Chinese themselves have done, are doing, or say they mean to do.

No element of the policies of the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) has nourished international apprehension and distrust more than her approach to territorial and boundary questions. There is a widely held belief that the Communist Government of China carries on in fierce, almost rabid, form, the unforgetting and implacable irredentism that is taken to have been the characteristic of imperial China. India's charges that China's approach in the Sino-Indian boundary dispute was bellicose and expansionist carried far and weightily; Kennan's allegation that Peking sponsored 'every territorial claim of earlier Chinese governments . . .' has recently been echoed by the Russians, who accuse China

of 'laying claim to land that Chinese conquerors entered or planned to enter in the remote past'; a recent writer on China's borders concluded that under the Communists Peking has been 'far more ambitious to restore her greatness and regain any territory that she considers was once hers' than imperial China ever was. This belief in China's innate and continuing irredentist hankering for physical expansion provides a starting point for examination.

China's approach to territorial questions should be put in the context of the century that preceded the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. This had been China's time of troubles, in which, prostrate, she had been subjected first to amputations of territory, then to sustained and conscious attempts to dismember her as a national entity. The Russians, in their great imperial sweep across the northern reaches of the Eurasian land mass, had collided with the Manchu domains in the 16th and 17th centuries, but for two centuries after that the Manchus were able, by and large, to hold them back. In the middle of the 19th century, however, the Russians renewed their drive southward and annexed a vast swathe of territory between the Amur and Ussuri rivers and the Pacific seaboard. China accepted the loss of this territory in a series of treaties. She was thus cut off from all access to the sea north of Korea; and what had been internal rivers of China now became border features: before the treaties of Aigun (1858) and Peking (1860) Russian navigation on the Amur and Ussuri was illegal or by China's compliance; after—if the Soviet interpretation of the treaties is to be accepted—the whole breadth of the rivers became Russian, with the Chinese using them only on sufferance. The Tsar's domains cut into the Emperor's in the west, too, and again Peking acquiesced in the annexation of wide tracts of territory that the Manchus had regarded as their own.

China had also lost the island province of Taiwan to the Japanese, while the British had been nibbling at what the Chinese regarded as their territory on the borders of Burma and India. The dependent states of Korea and Indo-China had gone to the Japanese and French respectively.

So far as China's imperial neighbours were concerned, this was to have been only the beginning. One of the Tsar's ministers, Sergei Witte, expressed Russian expectations at the end of the 19th century in these words:

' . . . the more inert countries in Asia will fall prey to the powerful invaders and will be divided up between them. . . . The problem of each country concerned is to obtain as large a share as possible of the inheritance of the outlived Oriental states, especially of the Chinese colossus. Russia, both geographically, and historically, has the undisputed right to the lion's share of the expected prey . . . the absorption

by Russia of a considerable portion of the Chinese Empire is only a matter of time. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Other European imperial powers generally accepted that the lion's share should be the bear's, so to speak, and were not inclined to protest unless it appeared that Russia had designs on some particular part of China which they coveted for themselves. (For the British, this was Tibet. Curzon became convinced that Russia's 'passion for a pan-Asiatic dominion' was focused on Tibet, and he seems to have been right. 'Our sovereign has grandiose plans in his head', wrote the Russian War Minister of the Tsar in 1903, 'he wants to seize Manchuria and proceed toward the annexation of Korea; he also plans to take Tibet under his rule'.<sup>2</sup>) But as late as 1915 British strategists were philosophical about the prospective digestion of large parts of China by Russia; in his study of political frontiers Sir Thomas Holdich described the Amur-Ussuri boundary as 'a typical example of an elastic frontier which is destined to disappear with the advance of Russia'. The Russian impulse toward expansion at the cost of China was not changed by the revolution—the Karakhan declaration of 1920, in which the new Soviet government promised to return to China all territory taken by the Tsars, indicated a very short-lived change, if it was not entirely tactical. The U.S.S.R. succeeded where the Tsars had not, and detached Mongolia from China, turning it in due course into a satellite and military base; they brought Sinkiang within the Soviet sphere of political and economic control, and as late as 1949 Stalin attempted to persuade the war-lord there to declare independence, promising that the Soviet Army would support him against China. That the Soviet Union hoped to prolong, and perhaps perpetuate, its occupation of Manchuria after 1945 was concluded anyway by Dean Acheson, who when he was Secretary of State, in 1950, said the Russians were 'detaching the northern provinces of China and attaching them to the Soviet Union'.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

If Manchuria, Mongolia and Sinkiang were the prizes the Russians aimed at in the intention they flatly described as 'the dismemberment of China', the other imperial powers did not intend to be left out:

'The possible spheres of the four European powers in China—should China disintegrate—were tentatively indicated. The southern part of China, bordering on French Indo-China, would obviously fall to France. The great central region, the so-called Yangtse Valley, including Nanking and Shanghai, would fall to Britain. Farther to the north, an area up to the Yellow River would obviously be claimed by Germany. Finally the whole north of China from Sinkiang to Chili and Manchuria, including . . . Peking, would fall to Russia. The United

States would claim no part of China's territory. Japan would have to be content with Formosa. . . .

But China escaped partition at that time. The fact that she did was due neither to her military power nor to the strength of her national unity. Only the intense competition among the Great Powers, the anti-imperialist trend in American policy, and the unsatisfied ambitions of Japan saved her. Not opposition to imperialism and territorial conquests but, paradoxically, a profusion of imperialism on the largest possible scale achieved the miracle of China's continuance.<sup>4</sup>

Against that historical background, it should not be surprising that the Communists, when they took power in Peking in 1949 and China, in Mao Tse-tung's words, 'stood up', put consolidation of China's remaining territory at the top of their agenda. Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang, all were brought under exclusive Chinese control for the first time for many generations. And Tibet.

Speaking in 1964, an American scholar described China's actions in Tibet as 'the clearest case of overt aggression in the post-war period',<sup>5</sup> a fair example of the loose condemnations to which even generally moderate students of international affairs are drawn when discussing China. There is a considerable literature on the legal rights and wrongs of China's position in Tibet, too extensive to be even summarised here. But only seven years before the Chinese moved back into Tibet, the American Government, quashing a final British attempt to separate Tibet from China, was of this view:

'The Government of the United States has borne in mind that the Chinese Government has long claimed suzerainty over Tibet and that the Chinese constitution lists Tibet among areas constituting the territory of the Republic of China. This Government has at no time raised a question regarding either of those claims.'<sup>6</sup>

The Chinese, Nationalist as well as Communist, saw their action in Tibet as nothing more than the long-promised reassertion of a temporarily lapsed central authority. (The lapse may have been, in non-Chinese terms anyway, a long one, about forty years; but in that time no government had recognised or even regarded Tibet as a sovereign power, and indeed the Tibetans, until the very last, had never sought such recognition.) Had it been a Nationalist force rather than the People's Liberation Army which marched into Tibet in 1950 it is probable that there would have been very little protest in the outside world, and certainly no outcry.

<sup>4</sup> Dallin, *op. cit.*, p. 66. But at a cost. Sun Yat Sen wrote in 1924: 'China is the colony of every nation that has made treaties with her and the treaty-making nations are her masters. China is not the colony of one but of all, and we are not the slaves of one country, but of all.' Quoted in *China: Yellow Peril? Red Hope?* by C. R. Hensman (London: S.C.M. Press, 1969), p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> Morton Halperin, in *China and the Peace of Asia*, edited by Alastair Buchan (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), p. 105.

<sup>6</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943; China* (Washington, D.C., 1957), p. 630.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by D. J. Dallin, *The Rise of Russia in Asia* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1950), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 42

<sup>3</sup> Speech to National Press Club, Washington, January 12, 1950.

(A parallel to China's actions and problems in Tibet might be seen in Nagaland. There the Nagas, like the Tibetans, felt themselves in every way different from the power which now meant to include them; they argued that they had long enjoyed *de facto* independence; they tried to appeal to the United Nations; like the Tibetans they believed they had reached an agreement with the metropolitan authority that their autonomy would be recognised, even that they would ultimately be allowed to opt for independence. But in this case too the central government saw such aspirations as unacceptable moves towards secession, and used armed force to suppress an armed uprising. Only the Nagas have spoken of Indian 'aggression' in this context, others seeing New Delhi's actions as no more than any other government would have done in similar circumstances.)

After Tibet had been reclaimed as an autonomous region of the People's Republic, there remained only Taiwan among lost territories which Peking was declaredly determined to regain. This should not, however, be seen as an *irredentist* claim. Had the Kuomintang rump made its last stand in a redoubt on the mainland there would have been no surprise, certainly no criticism, if the Communist régime had held the revolution incomplete and the civil war unfinished until that redoubt had been reduced. That Chiang Kai-shek retreated instead to an island province, and that the United States Navy prevented the P.L.A. from following him there, makes no difference to the merits of the issue.

Thus the Chinese, after 1949, as quickly as possible and as ruthlessly as necessary reasserted central authority in all the territory left to China. *But there was no attempt to turn the clock back.*

\* \* \*

The Nationalists had nourished strong irredentist claims to lost territories. They had hopes of regaining from the U.S.S.R. all that great tract between the rivers and the Pacific—and they cherished the memory of the Karakhan declaration. They had never accepted the territorial claims Britain had made in Burma (or rather, as they saw it, on Yunnan); and they vigorously repudiated the British claim, developed only after 1937, to the slice of territory between the crest line of the Assam Himalayas and the Brahmaputra valley, which rested on Sir Henry McMahon's secret dealings with the Tibetans during the Simla conference of 1914. Other irredentist claims looked to tracts in the Pamirs which Russia and Britain had allotted to Afghanistan, over China's protests, and to the areas Russia had annexed from China's western marches. But the statements and actions of the Communist Government of China show that the new men who took power in Peking in 1949 were concerned with the future of China as history had left her, not with restoring the boundaries of her imperial past. They turned their

backs on the inherited irredentist claims—and on the intractable disputes which those must have entailed. China has repeatedly declared that she has no territorial claims on any of her neighbours.

But the decision to abjure all irredentist claims did not in itself solve the problem of China's boundaries. That remained.

In the contemporary western perception, boundaries are fixed, defused, almost domesticated. But, with Lord Curzon, 'I would invite you to pause and consider what Frontiers mean, and what part they play in the life of nations'. For Curzon, frontiers were 'the razor's edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace, of life or death to the nation'; and the Chinese, looking at the deadlocked negotiations over the Sino-Soviet boundaries, and the concentrations of Russian troops and missiles against them, would no doubt agree. It is probable that the Chinese, whose historical experience with frontiers goes back so very far, were aware from the inception of the People's Republic how prickly and potentially explosive the problem of their frontiers might be—and they have therefore handled the problem with care and moderation.

Chou En-lai stated his government's approach to border problems at the Bandung Conference in 1955:

'With some of our neighbouring countries we have not yet finally fixed our border line, and we are ready to do this. . . . But before doing so, we are willing to acknowledge that those parts of our border are parts which are undetermined. We are ready to restrain our Government and our people from crossing even one step across our border. . . . As to the determination of common borders which we are going to undertake with our neighbours, we shall use only peaceful means and we shall not permit any other kind of methods. . . .'

Although sinister under-meanings have been read into that statement—sinister under-meanings would be read into *Little Bo-Peep* if Chou En-lai recited it—in fact it openly explained a pragmatic policy. Chou stated what was obvious to those who considered the subject—that some sectors of China's long borders had not been submitted to the process of boundary confirmation which modern states require, while others had been only partially through that process; and that China was prepared to go through that process peacefully with all the neighbours concerned.

Briefly, the process of boundary settlement begins with *delimitation*: that is, the joint determination of a boundary line by agreement between the governments concerned, and its definition in a treaty in written terms. 'The delimitation of a mutual boundary is a very important operation in international law. It can make or break the neighbourly relationship between adjoining states. Consequently, its execution requires careful planning, and parties must carry out the necessary negotia-

tions with absolute good faith.' If that first step is the more difficult and pregnant with possibilities of conflict or misunderstanding, the second is not without its pitfalls either. This is *demarcation*: that is, the actual laying down of a boundary line on the ground, and its definition by pillars, cairns, or other markers. 'It is in this process', Sir Thomas Holdich wrote in his study of borders, 'that disputes usually arise, and weak elements in the treaties or agreements are apt to be discovered.'

Following the principles Chou stated at Bandung, China successfully—that is, to the satisfaction of both parties—negotiated boundary settlements with five of her neighbours: Burma, Nepal, Pakistan, the Mongolian People's Republic, and Afghanistan. With three other neighbours, Korea, Viet Nam, and Laos, the boundaries, although they were settled by treaties between China and the Japanese and French, are apparently already mutually satisfactory, and there has been no suggestion that any further negotiations are needed to confirm them. (Although it might be noted that the South Korean government maintains a substantial territorial claim against China.) Intractable disputes have arisen, however, with regard to China's boundaries with her two biggest neighbours, India first, then the U.S.S.R.

\* \* \*

These disputes are too complex and vexed to be analysed here, there is space only to state conclusions.<sup>8</sup>

The Sino-Indian dispute brought China to state and re-state her approach, in an effort, it seems, to assuage what the Chinese at first believed were genuine misapprehensions on the part of the Indians and others. Late in 1959 Peking gave this assurance to New Delhi:

'So far as the question of boundaries is concerned, China absolutely does not want one inch of another's territory. There are undelimited borders between China and many of its neighbouring countries, but China has never taken, and will never take, advantage of this situation to make any change in the actually existing state of affairs on the border by unilateral action. Whether or not the boundary has been delimited, China is always prepared to work in close cooperation with its neighbours . . . so that there will be no mutual misgivings or clashes over the border question.'

The record of China's dealings with her neighbours, including India, demonstrates a scrupulous adherence to that undertaking. So far as the Sino-Indian borders were concerned, there had been no delimitation at all between China and either Britain or any other power on the other

<sup>7</sup> A. O. Cukwurah, *The Settlement of Boundary Disputes in International Law* (Manchester: University Press, 1967), p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> See the writer's *India's China War* (London: Cape, 1970 and New York: Pantheon, 1971); and 'Russia and China: the Irrepressible Conflict', in *Pacific Community*, July 1970.

side of the Himalayas. The task of creating the linear boundaries that modern states require was left to the successor states, and to the P.R.C. Peking proposed settlement on the basis of the *status quo*—thus, much to the indignation of the Kuomintang on Taiwan, waiving the claim to the tract beneath the McMahon Line.<sup>9</sup> China proposed comprehensive boundary negotiations to delimit, then demarcate, mutually satisfactory boundaries on the basis of the *status quo*. India, however, had decided very soon after the British left that to negotiate a boundary settlement would not be in her national interest; she therefore declined negotiations, on the only possible grounds—the argument that the boundaries were already delimited by the natural processes of history and custom, and therefore required only demarcation. Thus, in effect India claimed the right to establish unilaterally the general alignment of the Sino-Indian boundaries, admitting China to the process only at the secondary stage of demarcation, where marginal adjustments to the alignments claimed by India might be made. When the Indian Government put a definitive northern boundary on their maps, in 1954, it claimed the Aksai Chin tract: this, linking Tibet with Sinkiang, was of high importance to China in spite of its desolation—and the Chinese had regarded it as part of China at least since 1896, when they informed the British that it was theirs. The result was deadlock, which India attempted to resolve by giving military expression to her historically dubious claim to Aksai Chin under a 'forward policy'. The Chinese attack in October and November 1962 was the response to that military challenge.

The problem of the Sino-Soviet boundaries was different in that most sectors had been delimited by treaty, and in some stretches demarcated as well. Although the Chinese describe the treaties which produced the boundaries as 'unequal'—and only the Kremlin's retained historians would argue with that—they have never described them as *illegal*—and have not repudiated them. On the contrary, the Chinese have all along proposed that the boundaries should be settled on the basis of the treaties. But, it will be asked, if the treaties are valid, what need is there to renegotiate the boundaries? The answer lies in the existence of disputes; not only divergences between Chinese and Soviet maps, which in 1960 Chou En-lai dismissed as a 'very small discrepancy which is very easy to settle'; but also over such important, indeed explosive, details as precisely where in the border rivers the boundary lies—on the *thalweg*, as the Chinese maintain, or on the Chinese shore, where the Russians would put it? The original treaties, in other words,

<sup>9</sup> The Kuomintang re-stated its unchanged view of the McMahon Line in the midst of the Sino-Indian border war in 1962: 'The so-called McMahon Line is a line unilaterally claimed by the British during their rule over India. The Government of the Republic of China has never accepted this line of demarcation, and is strongly opposed to the British claim.' *Current* (London), December 1962.

were inadequate. Vaguely phrased, based on rudimentary or primitive maps, they did not serve the modern state's requirement for a clear linear boundary, even in desolate areas. In this instance, again, the Chinese approach is clear and consistent: negotiate a comprehensive and detailed settlement on the basis of the treaties and, where they do not serve, on the basis of the *status quo*, compromising local disputes; pending such a settlement, agree to maintain present positions; and, where there have been clashes or there is evident danger of such occurring, reciprocally withdraw all military personnel from the area in dispute.

As does India, the U.S.S.R. declines to take that approach. Moscow will agree only to 'discuss the question of specifying the frontier line over individual stretches'—which begs the question of who is to decide which of the 'individual stretches' need 'specifying'. The context suggests that in Moscow's thinking such decisions belong to the Soviet Union—or at least that the Russians should exercise a veto over what sectors should *not* be discussed. To the Chinese, this approach means that it would be the unequal treaties over again, with Russian nuclear missiles being brandished instead of the gun-boats of the Tsar's Amur River flotilla.

So far as boundary questions are involved, China's record shows five cordial and mutually satisfactory settlements; two dangerous deadlocks. But the evidence of the two disputes does not uphold the conclusion that Peking did anything deliberately to create or even exacerbate them. Indeed, if this analysis is correct, the common charge that China follows a policy of chauvinism, irredentism and adventurism along her frontiers is disproved.

\* \* \*

Another charge is that China is a menace to the stability of her neighbours, and indeed of Asia and even the world, as a covert and overt exporter of revolution. Documentary evidence, indeed confession, of this Chinese approach is often traced in Lin Piao's long speech 'On People's War', which has been compared to *Mein Kampf* as an operations plan for world conquest. But when the text is read it provides no foundation for such interpretations; it is as if China-watchers in the West do not listen to what the Chinese are actually saying, but hear instead their own inner voices, saying what they expect to hear from the Chinese.

The whole context of Lin Piao's speech is that of the perceived danger of an American attack on, even invasion of, China. He is saying, in effect: if the imperialists attack us we shall suffer—but if we apply the lessons of our past, as Mao Tse-tung's teaching sums that up, we shall overcome. But he also speaks about revolution in other countries,

and declares that China's path is the only path for other people who now wish to achieve revolution:

'Of course, every revolution in a country stems from the demands of its own people. Only when the people in a country are awakened, mobilised, organised and armed can they overthrow the reactionary rule of imperialism and its lackeys through struggle; *their role cannot be replaced or taken over by any people from outside . . . revolution cannot be imported.*' (Italics added.)

That is a restatement of the central experience—and therefore the central belief—of the Chinese Communists: that revolution is and can only be a do-it-yourself process. That there is no short cut. Lin Piao goes on:

' . . . revolution cannot be imported. But this does not exclude mutual sympathy and support on the part of revolutionary peoples in their struggles. . . . Our support and aid to other revolutionary peoples serves precisely to help their self-reliant struggle.'

So there is the rub. What, in practice, does Chinese 'support and aid to other revolutionary peoples' consist of?

First, and undeniably this is of vast importance, the support that comes from 'the red sky in the east', the exemplar of China's own revolutionary triumph. And the aid that comes from Mao's teaching—above all, perhaps, from the invincible optimism with which he preaches that it *can* be done. Aside from this, while the Chinese hail every development in the world which looks to them as if it has revolutionary potential, the actual aid they have supplied to revolutionary movements—aid in the material sense, guns and money rather than example and exhortation—has been minimal.<sup>10</sup> China has, of course, been assisting North Vietnam; but her actions with regard to that war on her doorstep have indicated extreme restraint.

Another statement of China's approach to other revolutionary movements, more laconic but to the same point as Lin Piao's, was made in 1963 by Chen Yi:

'The question of world revolution is one for the countries concerned. If countries are not ripe for revolution, then China can't do anything about it. However, China will support revolutions against imperialism and oppression. This is not to say that we are behind all revolutions! Castro in 1959 had no relationship with us, so therefore you can't blame China for the success of the Cuban uprising. China is not the arch-criminal behind every uprising. China cannot pour revolutions on or off when she wants to. China can only manage her own affairs. Revolutions depend upon the people themselves—but China will support foreign revolutions both morally and politically. We are Marxists. We must support them! We don't care if we hurt the feelings of the United States, or even of Mr. Krushchev. We can't exchange this for our friendship with the oppressed people. But it

<sup>10</sup> See Arthur Huck, *The Security of China* (London: Chatto & Windus for the Institute for Strategic Studies, 1970), pp. 51 ff.

must be noted, *Chinese troops will not cross our borders to advance revolutions.*<sup>11</sup>

China's relations with her neighbours go to confirm that Chen Yi was expressing Peking's policy. These can be seen as strictly reciprocal: it is not what a neighbouring government is in its political complexion that modifies Peking's approach to it, but what that government does. A case in point is Pakistan. There is nothing in Pakistan's military régime that could appeal to the Chinese, but since the early 1960s—after a period of very cold relations in the fifties—Pakistan has approached China as a friend, and China has reciprocated. This is to simplify, of course; factors from India's quarrel with China, and from China's quarrel with the U.S.S.R., all bear strongly on the sub-continent. But the pattern of reciprocity may still be traced.

China's approach to her remaining imperial neighbours, Britain in Hongkong and Portugal in Macao, should also be looked at, and could perhaps fairly be put in the context of what happened to those other remnants of empire in Asia, Pondicherry, on the east coast of India, and Goa. The French, under sustained diplomatic pressure from New Delhi, were persuaded to relinquish Pondicherry—there has been no such pressure from Peking to oust the Portuguese, or the British. When diplomatic pressures failed to move the Portuguese, the Indians simply annexed Goa by military action—China has neither used nor threatened force against either of the foreign enclaves in her territory. The customary explanation for this is that Hongkong is so immensely valuable to China as an entrepôt and foreign exchange catchment. Undoubtedly Peking does value that—but Macao can hardly be put on the same plane of economic value to China. From the rejoinder the Chinese made to Khrushchev when he twitted them for failure to take action like the Indians' against these outposts of empire, it might be inferred that another factor is involved in Peking's calculations—recognition that to use force in international relations to try to undo history is extremely dangerous. 'With regard to outstanding issues, which are a legacy of the past [such as Hongkong and Macao],' the Chinese said, 'we have always held that, when conditions are ripe, they should be settled peacefully through negotiations and that, pending a settlement, the *status quo* should be maintained.' In an analysis such as this, challenging the general tendency to place the worst possible construction on Peking's actions, it is easy to lean too far the other way; but the most detailed recent study of China's observance of international agreements put its conclusion in the sub-title—'A Study of Compliance'.<sup>12</sup>

The same American scholar whose verdict on China's action in Tibet

<sup>11</sup> In an interview with John Dixon and Miss Roper, *q.v.* Huck, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Luke T. Lee, *China and International Agreements: A Study in Compliance* (Durham, N.C.: Rule of Law Press. 1968).

was quoted above also observed that 'the outlook of the Peking régime is that force is a legitimate instrument of policy both internally and externally', and this again is a general opinion. The evidence most readily given for this opinion—and characteristically, it is drawn from Chinese words rather than China's action—is Mao Tse-tung's famous maxim, 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun'. The context in which Mao was speaking is rarely considered. It was 1938, when the Chinese Communists were embattled, fighting both the Japanese and the Nationalist forces, and when some within the Communist Party were challenging Mao's political and strategic teaching that the way to revolution lay only through protracted war.

'In other countries [Mao said] there is no need for each of the bourgeois parties to have an armed force under its direct command. But things are different in China, where, because of the feudal division of the country, those landlord or bourgeois groupings or parties which have guns have power, and those which have more guns have more power.'

In such circumstances, Mao argued, it would be naive to fail to see that, for the Communists, too, military power was all-important: But

'it is very difficult for the labouring people, who have been deceived and intimidated by the reactionary ruling classes for thousands of years, to awaken to the importance of having guns in their own hands, . . . [Therefore] every Communist must grasp the truth, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun".'

Mao went on to state his other great principle in this regard, that 'the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party'; but the point here is that Mao was only pithily expressing what is surely a truism—that for revolutionaries to turn away from force, leaving that weapon to their opponents, is to concede defeat. *Mao was not applying his maxim to relationships between states*, and nothing in Peking's actions since the Communists won power there suggests that the Chinese believe it has such application. Like any other government, Peking is ready to use force within the state when it judges that circumstances require it; like any other government, Peking will—and has—used force when force is used or clearly threatened against it—and the Chinese constantly proclaim their determination to resist most forcefully any attack upon their country. But there is no evidence in China's action or in Chinese words to substantiate the view that Peking considers force, except as reaction to force, a legitimate instrument of policy in external affairs.

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The belief that China is ruthless in the use of armed force is coupled with the belief that she is callously reckless to the point of irrationality in disregarding the consequences of nuclear war. The story that Mao



once declared that China could lose 300 million people in a world war and still triumph is apocryphal; but the Chinese do maintain that China can survive a nuclear attack, and insist that they will not truckle under the threat of such. With the Soviet Union openly warning that if it comes to war it will use nuclear weapons; and with the Americans, too, calmly and publicly discussing how they could achieve the maximum destruction in China with the most economic outlay,<sup>13</sup> it is difficult to see what else, short of surrender, they could say. Before the U.S.S.R. developed its own nuclear weapons Stalin expressed very much the same attitude to the American bomb as did Mao, in another famous aphorism.

'The atom bomb is a paper tiger which the United States reactionaries use to scare people. It looks terrible, but in fact it isn't. Of course, the atom bomb is a weapon of mass slaughter, but the outcome of a war is decided by the people, not by one or two new types of weapons'—so Mao replied in August 1946, when the late Anna Louise Strong asked him about the possibility of the Americans using nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union. Here Mao was extending to nuclear weapons the fundamental precept of his revolutionary philosophy—that *no matter how strong its enemies may appear*, revolution once launched is invincible. Mao's emphasis and insistence on this point is understandable. If revolutionaries do not believe that 'all reactionaries are paper tigers', how can they ever hope to triumph? If political calculations were to be based primarily on assessments of the fire-power of both sides, there would never again be a revolution. The point was seen thirty years ago, in a study of the Spanish Civil War:

'Before [now] counter-revolution usually depended upon the support of reactionary powers which were technically and intellectually inferior to the forces of revolution. This has changed with the advent of fascism. Now, every revolution is likely to meet the attack of the most modern, most efficient, most ruthless machinery yet in existence.'<sup>14</sup>

But China's approach to nuclear weapons is in fact measured, realistic and cautious—certainly more so than Washington's, probably more so than Moscow's. The picture of China and especially Mao ignorantly and recklessly brandishing nuclear weapons may again partly reflect the effect of those inner voices which seem to influence some China-watchers; but it has also been deliberately spread, partly by the bomb and missile lobby in the United States, but most actively by the U.S.S.R. The

<sup>13</sup> For example Mr. McNamara, then U.S. Secretary of Defence, is reported to have made this statement in testimony before a Senate sub-committee in January 1966: 'A considerably smaller number of weapons [than would be needed for the U.S.S.R.] detonated over fifty Chinese urban centres would destroy half the urban population—more than 50 million people—and destroy more than half of the key governmental, technical and managerial personnel and a large proportion of the skilled workers'. Quoted by Hensman, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>14</sup> Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit*, quoted by Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 247.

Chinese approach to nuclear weapons was well summarised by Arthur Huck:

'[The Chinese] have argued their position on nuclear weapons with care and subtlety. They do not think a world war is inevitable or even very likely. They do not want a head-on clash with the imperialists. They are fully aware of the destructive power of nuclear weapons. They have tried to reassure the world about their intentions by reiterating after their nuclear tests that China will never be the first to use nuclear weapons. . . .'<sup>15</sup>

Professor Morton Halperin made the same point. Contrary to the completely false picture spread largely by the Russians, he said,

'If one in fact looks at what the Chinese say, if one looks at what the Chinese have done in various crisis situations, it becomes abundantly clear that the Chinese view is that nuclear war would . . . be a great disaster for the world and in particular for China. . . .'<sup>16</sup>

There is nothing menacing or foolhardy in China's attitude to nuclear weapons. Short of the palladium of national interest, the Chinese will do anything they can to avoid war—and especially nuclear war. They have as good reason as anyone to know what war means—it is doubtful if even living Russian or German experience of war could exceed China's in suffering and duration. Chen Yi put it personally: '. . . wars are terrible things. Wars kill people. I've been a soldier for most of my life and seen a lot of fighting. If there is another war, I can tell you now, that somebody else can do the fighting. I've seen enough.' And Lin Piao: 'We know that war brings destruction, sacrifice and suffering on the people. But the destruction, sacrifice and suffering will be much greater if no resistance is offered to imperialist armed aggression. . . .'

China's basic position is that war is to be avoided wherever possible—but not past the point of surrender of vital national interest. All discussion of war in China is in the explicit context of defensive war. The whole concept of 'people's war' is defensive in the strategic sense—of smothering an invader beneath the armed and militant mass of the Chinese people.

It is this writer's conclusion, then, that in respect of territorial and boundary questions, of support to revolution, and of nuclear weapons—the three main elements of the fear of China—China is not what she is presented to be. China is not expansionist, aggressive, reckless and dangerous: China is peaceable, cautious, anxious to defend her borders, not to enlarge them—and threatened, not a threat.

<sup>15</sup> Huck, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> In Buchan, editor, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

NOTE

This issue of FAR EAST REPORTER is a reprint of Neville Maxwell's "Commonsense and Honesty About China"--"an examination of the unexamined and unthinking phrase, 'the threat from China'."

Neville Maxwell is Senior Research Officer at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Oxford University.

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Mr Maxwell is the author of "India's China War"(1970) in which he stated, "In 1962 the Government and most Americans let their preconceptions lead them to accept India's charges of Communist China's 'aggression' in the outbreak of hostilities between the two countries --- a view which sound scholarship has now challenged."(NYT 4/14/71)

The picture on the cover  
is from  
A Chinese scissor cut-out