



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Lovell, Julia (2015) The uses of foreigners in Mao-era China: 'Techniques of Hospitality' and international image-building in the People's Republic, 1949-1976. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 , pp. 135-158. ISSN 0080-4401.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/13758/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively

**The Uses of Foreigners in Mao-era China: ‘Techniques of Hospitality’ and
International Image-building in the People’s Republic, 1949-1976**

READ 10 MAY 2014

In the contemporary UK, where politicians crave big-spending Chinese tourists and investors, and access to Chinese markets, we are familiar with the idea of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) exercising hard, economic power.¹ But China’s leaders also yearn for the country’s cultural influence, its soft power, to match its financial clout; and they are prepared to spend lavishly to achieve this aim. In 2009 alone, China spent \$6.6 billion on a media group that would give China a stronger international voice.² The year before, China spent \$44 billion hosting its international coming-out party: the 2008 Olympic Games.

The state’s latest soft-power campaign is the so-called ‘China Dream’, designed to market globally the idea of a strong, successful, happy China. China’s propaganda tsars are certainly serious about communicating their message. The posters have been splashed

¹ I would like to thank several people who commented on this paper and helped with materials: especially Thelma Lovell (for extensive and invaluable assistance with Italian and German-language sources, and for insights on the European engagement with Maoist politics and culture), Matthew Johnson, Li Jigao, Jiang Tao, Yao Shuyi, You Lan, Robert Macfarlane and Michael Schoenhals. I wish to thank also the audience of the Royal Historical Society for their constructive and stimulating comments when this lecture was delivered on 10 May 2014. I am especially grateful for a Philip Leverhulme Prize which enabled me to visit China and obtain materials for this paper which are unavailable in the UK.

² See, for example, Vivian Wu and Adam Chen, ‘Beijing in 45b Yuan Global Media Drive,’ South China Morning Post 13 January 2009, at <http://www.scmp.com/article/666847/beijing-45b-yuan-global-media-drive> (accessed 12 January 2014). For a discussion of China’s quest for soft power in the early twenty-first century, see Joshua Kurlantzick, Charm Offensive: How China’s Soft Power is Transforming the World (New Haven, 2007).

over China's major cities; international conferences are being held to debate and communicate the slogan's meaning; for weeks in the summer of 2013, a ballad entitled 'The Chinese Dream' performed by a song-and-dance combo from China's nuclear-missile corps topped the charts.³

China's aspirations for global cultural influence only started to make international headlines in the past decade or so, when the publicly divulged sums of money involved became eye-watering. But the impulse is much older, stretching all the way back through the twentieth century.⁴ And among some non-Chinese audiences between the 1950s and the 1970s, China enjoyed perhaps its greatest international soft power since the Enlightenment. The culture and politics of Maoist China permeated global radicalism during these decades. Mao and his ideas of continuous, peasant revolution appealed to leftwing rebels, and civil-rights and anti-racism campaigners in the US, Australia, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Italy, Norway and Sweden. Across the developing world (in Asia, South America and Africa) Maoist politics inspired post-colonial nations with idioms such as self-reliance, party rectification and revolutionary spontaneity.⁵ The list of those who found in favour of Maoist China is a bewilderingly various one: Quakers, sinologists, French philosophers, Venezuelan pirate revolutionaries, West German Dada

³ 'Chasing the Chinese Dream,' The Economist 4 May 2013, at <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21577063-chinas-new-leader-has-been-quick-consolidate-his-power-what-does-he-now-want-his> (accessed 12 January 2015).

⁴ For twentieth-century China's preoccupation with international 'face' as represented by sporting achievements, see Susan Brownell, Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic (Chicago, 1995); Xu Guoqi, Olympic Dreams: China and Sports, 1895-2008 (Cambridge, Mass., 2008). For an exploration of the literary dimensions of this search for global prestige, see Julia Lovell, The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature (Hawai'i, 2006).

⁵ For an informative introduction to this context, see Alexander Cook ed., Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History (Cambridge, 2014).

hippies, Congolese feminists, Algerian guerrillas⁶ – and Shirley Maclaine, who in 1975 wrote an adulatory account of a six-week visit to Mao-era China during which she found her way out of a mid-life crisis.⁷

Where did this global enthusiasm for Maoism come from? The dominant view of, say, Western Europe's engagement with Maoism is to see it largely as a home-grown phenomenon – as an eccentric youthful experiment in alternative politics, an intellectual and cultural outburst divorced from China itself. Consider this recollection by a former Italian Maoist sympathizer during the 1960s:

[Maoist] China was a challenge to the society in which we lived: to our authoritarian education, our oppressive factories, our conciliatory and bureaucratic communism. This spurred the young of the European New

⁶ A sampling of issues of Peking Review from the mid-1960s indicates the international flavor of the enthusiasm for Maoist China and the Cultural Revolution. For more balanced assessments, see for example: Andreas Kuhn, Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne: Die Lebenswelt der K-Gruppen in der Bundesrepublik der 70er Jahre (Stalin's heir, Mao's sons: the world of the K-Groups in 1970s West Germany) (Frankfurt, 2005); Sebastian Gehrig, '(Re-)Configuring Mao. Trajectories of a Culturo-Political Trend in West Germany,' Transcultural Studies 2 (2011), 189-231; Sebastian Gehrig, Barbara Mittler and Felix Wemheuer eds., Die Kulturrevolution als Vorbild: Maoismen im Deutschsprachigem Raum (The Cultural Revolution as a model: Maoism in the German-speaking world), (Frankfurt, 2008); Gerd Koenen, Das Rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere Kleine Deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967-1977 (The red decade: our little German Cultural Revolution 1967-1977) (Köln, 2001); Christophe Bourseiller, Les Maoïstes: La Folle Histoire des Gardes Rouges Français (The Maoists: the crazy history of the French Red Guards) (Paris, 1996); Richard Wolin, The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution and the Legacy of the 1960s (Princeton, 2010); Roberto Niccolai, Quando la Cina Era Vicina: La Rivoluzione Culturale e la Sinistra Extraparlamentare Italiana negli Anni '60 e '70 (When China was our neighbour: the Cultural Revolution and the Italian extra-parliamentary left in the 1960s and 1970s) (Pistoia, 1998).

⁷ Shirley Maclaine, You Can Get There From Here (New York, 1975).

Left movement to take the Cultural Revolution as a point of reference, without worrying too much about learning what kind of thing it really was...We had a vague, confused feeling of the anti-authoritarian and libertarian character of the initial phases of the Cultural Revolution, which chimed with the contemporary need for a modernization of European society.⁸

This quotation expresses the way in which Maoist China was conveniently remote and unknown to many of its young left-wing worshippers in Europe and the United States. In the utopian, politically polyglot phase of the late 1960s and early 1970s, many radical students in Germany, France, Italy and Norway picked up on the superficial aspects of Maoism that appealed, and overlooked the rest. Richard Wolin, in his acute and informative book on French Maoism, makes the following sharp comment about the creative, adaptive qualities of the French interpretation of Chinese communism in the 1960s and 1970s: ‘if the Cultural Revolution did not exist, the gauchistes [the French leftists] would have had to invent it.’⁹

⁸ Lisa Foa, ‘Perché fummo maoisti: la Cina è un giallo’ (Why we were Maoists: China is a mystery), *Limes* (1995), 237-238. Jon Rognlien, the scholar of Norwegian Maoism, confirms this view: interview by author, Skype (Cambridge-Copenhagen), 3 February 2014. For an almost exclusively light-hearted take on the engagement with Maoism by French youth of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which again emphasizes the playful, imagined nature of this enthusiasm, see Gerard Miller, *Minoritaire* (Minority) (Paris, 2001), 76-123. He writes, for example: ‘It’s impossible to understand the passionate interest in China that thousands of French teenagers of my generation felt if you imagine that we were in love with the idea of the iron fist. Quite the contrary: what dazzled us about Mao was his spirit of mischief, his insubordination...To me, Mao’s China at the end of the 1960s was much more “olé-olé” [than the doctrines of the Trotskyites]...[D]uring these years there was frankly nothing better to do in France than to be enraged; and nothing better for the enraged than to be Maoist’ (79, 80, 97).

⁹ Wolin, *The Wind from the East*, 3.

But this conclusion – that global Maoism was nothing to do with Chinese Maoism – underestimates the skill and hard work that the PRC put into disseminating its soft power globally between 1949 and 1976. This article aims to complicate the stereotype of a closed-off, isolated Maoist China, shunned by the international community, that has long persisted in popular impressions of the period.¹⁰ Using memoirs and Chinese archival documents, it will describe some of the ways in which Mao-era China reached out to the world beyond conventional diplomatic channels: the agencies that strove to spread Chinese cultural and political influence and how successful they were. For the limited opening of Chinese archives over the past decade and a half has enabled us to glimpse more of the inner workings of China’s so-called Foreign Affairs system (*waishi xitong*): the complex, comprehensive web of bureaucracy woven after 1949 to monitor and control Chinese contact with the outside world.

Mao-era China and Cold War cultural diplomacy: An overview of recent scholarship

This article does not make claims to be revisionist in arguing that the politics and culture of Mao-era China had international reach: any historian of (for example) 1960s France, Germany, Italy, Scandinavia, India, Southeast Asia, Peru and so on will be well aware of engagement with Maoist political theory and practice outside China.¹¹ Yet until relatively

¹⁰ Over the past two decades, a plethora of memoirs of Mao-era China published in English, often focused on the political and xenophobic extremism of the Cultural Revolution, has powerfully influenced non-specialist understandings of this period of history: the best known and most successful has probably been Jung Chang’s Wild Swans (London, 1991).

¹¹ Consider, for example, the rich secondary literature on the engagement with Maoist politics and culture within individual countries, particularly India, Nepal, Peru and France: Sumanta Banerjee, In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalites Movement (Calcutta, 1980) and India’s Simmering Revolution (New

recently, few scholars considered the international spread of ideas about Maoist China between the 1950s and 1970s in a bilateral or transnational way: the extent to which the enthusiasm for Maoism was driven by what non-Chinese imagined Maoism to be; the extent to which impressions of China were actively shaped by Maoist China. Paul Hollander's Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society undertook an acute, comparative analysis of Western 'fellow travellers' to Communist regimes including the USSR, the PRC, Vietnam and Cuba, but without accessing Chinese-language sources.¹² For decades, moreover, study of Cold War politics, diplomacy and culture in the West remained largely Eurocentric in focus, preoccupied with the U.S.S.R.-U.S. axis. Although many international histories of Communism and the Cold War have been written in European languages, for years they tended to treat Maoism as little more than a case-study within a Eurocentric whole.¹³ As a result, the

Delhi, 1984); Aditya Adhikari, The Bullet and the Balloox Box: The Story of Nepal's Maoist Revolution (London, 2014); David Scott Palmer ed., The Shining Path of Peru (London, 1992); Wolin, The Wind from the East and Belden Davis, 'French Maoism,' in The 60s Without Apology, eds. Sohnya Syres et al., 148-177 (Minneapolis, 1984).

¹² Paul Hollander, Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society (London, 1998).

As another example, consider Tom Buchanan's thorough but unilateral account of the links between China and British leftists, in East Wind: China and the British Left, 1925-1976 (Oxford, 2012), and a review by Qiang Zhai (a prominent archival historian of Chinese foreign relations during the Cold War) expressing reservations about the one-sided nature of Buchanan's treatment: 'Buchanan's treatment would have been fuller if it had incorporated some coverage of Chinese reception and manipulation of the British Left. Buchanan would have presented his readers with an international history if he had examined how the Chinese, both the Nationalists and Communists, used foreigners, including the British Left, to "sell" their images and win international endorsement abroad.' Available at: <http://www.history.net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=36957> (accessed on 12 January 2015).

¹³ See, for example, Archie Brown, The Rise and Fall of Communism (London, 2010); Robert Service, Comrades: Communism, a World History (London, 2008); David Priestland, The Red Flag: Communism

importance of Maoist China in this conflict as offering a genuine alternative to USSR communism, providing intellectual and practical support to rebels throughout the world, was until recently relatively neglected in mainstream scholarship on the Cold War.¹⁴

Scholarship on the Cold War of the past fifteen years has, however, steadily acknowledged more fully the Asian and specifically Chinese influence. Odd Arne Westad has crucially expanded previously Western-centric perspectives on the Cold War, bringing the study of the role played by the Third World into mainstream scholarship on the conflict.¹⁵ As part of this greater globalisation of Cold War history, manifested also in the journal Cold War History and in The Cambridge History of the Cold War, we have in recent years seen a welcome increase in the participation of mainland Chinese scholars in international and Anglophone debates about Maoism and the Cold War, in for example Chen Jian's Mao's China and the Cold War and Qiang Zhai's China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975.¹⁶

Since 2000, China historians and political scientists such as Zheng Yangwen, Anne-Marie Brady, Alexander Cook, Cagdas Ungor and Matthew Johnson have and the Making of the Modern World (London, 2010). Of these three general histories (all of which are sound and informative), Priestland's book is probably the most expansive in perspective.

¹⁴ See Yinghong Cheng, 'Beyond Moscow-Centric Interpretation: An Examination of the China Connection in Eastern Europe and North Vietnam during the Era of De-Stalinization,' Journal of World History 15.4 (December 2004), 487-518. For the early findings of an exciting forthcoming book on Soviet and Chinese competition for influence in the Third World, see Jeremy Friedman, 'Soviet Policy in the Developing World and the Chinese Challenge in the 1960s,' Cold War History 10.2 (2010), 247-272.

¹⁵ Odd Arne Westad, The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times (Cambridge, 2005).

¹⁶ Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad eds., The Cambridge History of the Cold War (Cambridge, 2010); Chen Jian, Mao's China and the Cold War (North Carolina, 2001); Qiang Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975 (North Carolina, 2000).

pioneered a more transnational approach to China's approach to cultural diplomacy in the Cold War.¹⁷ The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds (edited by Zheng Yangwen, Liu Hong and Michael Szonyi) argued for the importance of the Asian theatre in general, and of the impact of Mao-era China in particular, to Cold War culture and diplomacy.¹⁸ The Cold War in Asia was therefore particularly timely in offering wide-ranging and practical insights into the cultural and political channels along which Maoism played an international role, in countries including Burma, Indonesia, Mexico and Sweden. Alexander Cook's 2014 volume of essays, The Little Red Book: A Global History furthermore provided an illuminating selection of national case-studies describing the international reception of Mao's Little Red Book.

With her two monographs The Friend of China: The Myth of Rewi Alley and Making the Foreign Serve China, Anne-Marie Brady trail-blazed study of Chinese-language sources on the PRC's 'foreign affairs system'. Particularly in the latter volume, Brady provided a thorough history of this system and its Soviet antecedents, while making innovative use of internal foreign affairs publications and manuals, and analyzing the cases of specific individuals (such as Edgar Snow) courted by Beijing as useful 'international friends'. Matthew Johnson's recent research into the visits of black American writers to the PRC through the 1950s and 1960s (making use of both Chinese- and English-language sources) has illuminated Mao-era China's attempts to assert a leading role in the global revolutionary, anti-imperialist movement. Cagdas Ungor's doctoral dissertation on the PRC's 'external propaganda' (*duiwai xuanchuan*) machinery has cast important light on the network of foreign-language broadcast and print media,

¹⁷ Anne-Marie Brady, The Friend of China: The Myth of Rewi Alley (London, 2002); Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic (Lanham, 2003).

¹⁸ Zheng Yangwen et al. eds., The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds (Leiden, 2010).

such as Peking Radio and periodicals including Peking Review and China Reconstructs, through which Mao-era China attempted to win global influence.¹⁹

In sum, recent work on Mao-era China's foreign relations has used Chinese-language archival materials made newly accessible over the past two decades to suggest that during the 1950s and 1960s China poured large amounts of money and expertise into a painstaking and at times sophisticated soft-power programme. Not all this money and effort was wisely spent: Ungor's analysis of Maoist China's often clumsily designed external propaganda substantially undermined earlier, Cold War-era portrayals of China's foreign-language publications as highly effective ideological weapons. Nonetheless, both older and more recent research indicates that some of the PRC's efforts at cultural diplomacy garnered rich political dividends, in both hard- and soft-power terms. Greater understanding of Maoist China's cultural diplomacy could have an impact on our view of the exercise of both hard and soft power on both sides of the Cold War divide. If the international enthusiasm for Maoist China was substantially engineered by the Chinese government itself, what does this phenomenon tell us about the priorities of the Chinese state and leadership at the time? How important was China as a cultural and political actor in the Cold War?

Several aspects of Mao-era China's international soft and hard-power programmes would reward further investigation: the efficacy of public overtures such as external propaganda; the workings of shadowier organisations, especially the International Department (*Zhonglianbu*), which directed crucial relationships between the

¹⁹ Cagdas Ungor, 'Reaching the Distant Comrade: Chinese Communist Propaganda Abroad (1949-1976),' Ph.D. dissertation, Binghamton University, 2009.

Central Committee of the CCP and other national communist parties.²⁰ But for reasons of space, this article will consider just one of the channels along which the People's Republic between 1949 and 1976 tried to project international, soft-power messages: the inviting of so-called 'foreign guests' (*waibin*) on carefully planned tours around China, often with all or at least some expenses paid and with the bonus of one-on-one conversations with leaders such as Mao Zedong or Zhou Enlai, the country's charming, urbane foreign minister then premier between the 1950s and 1970s.

The government of Mao-era China hoped that, back in their own countries, these travellers would return the favour of hospitality through speeches, articles books and political briefings that would spread positive propaganda for the People's Republic. Until 1954, the People's Republic was officially recognised by only twenty-one other states. In this situation, courting non-diplomatic delegations was an essential part of China's campaign to improve its international image, at a time when its official avenues for exercising influence were narrow. How, then, was this hospitality planned and carried out? And what results did it produce?

Contemporary accounts evoke a veritable foreign delegation industry in Mao-era China. Travelling troupes – of both the famous and the obscure – flooded Beijing: rumour had it that fourteen hotels in the capital alone were dedicated to the delegation trade through the 1950s. This is what one witness wrote about such establishments in 1958:

²⁰ This department's archives have not been declassified, and the prospects for access at present seem non-existent. In 2013, an official history of the organization was published: Wang Jiarui ed., Zhongguo gongchandang duiwai jiaowang 90 nian (A history of the Chinese Communist Party's interactions with the outside world over the past ninety years) (Beijing, 2013).

These hotels have an atmosphere of their own, for nobody is ever seen to pay a bill...Japan had sent a Trade Union delegation, a Youth and Women's Delegation, a Scholars' Mission, a Writers' Mission and a Fertilizers' Delegation...There was a Burmese Women's delegation, a Norwegian Students' Delegation, a French Film Delegation, a Singapore Trade Mission, an Italian Socialist Party Agricultural Mission, a Hong Kong Industrial Delegation, a Finnish Trade Union Mission...²¹

To give a sense of the scale of the enterprise: perhaps as many as 100,000 such delegates visited in the first decade of the People's Republic alone.²²

Reports written from both sides of the encounter evoke a machine of perfect control, judged to play to the individual weaknesses of particular visitors, and rehearsed to ensure flawless performances by Chinese hosts. In his 1962 memoir Escape from Red China (written after fleeing China in 1957 via Hong Kong) Robert Loh, a Shanghai factory manager, gave a view from inside the system. His role was to play the part of a gently reformed capitalist to foreign visitors to Shanghai in the 1950s. He was to reassure foreigners that the Communists' humanity and moderation had won over even bourgeois industrialists to Chinese socialism. He wrote: "The process of deceiving the foreigners resembles theatrical production. Each little play is carefully staged and rehearsed."²³ By 1954, "the entertainment was staged with a high degree of efficiency...Before each entertainment program, the performers were briefed on the background of the guests and were told how to answer the questions they could expect to be asked. The performers and the entertainment officials together worked out the acts and arranged for

²¹ Michael Croft, Red Carpet to China (London, 1958), 7, 39.

²² Herbert Passim, China's Cultural Diplomacy (New York, 1962), 1.

²³ Robert Loh, Escape from Red China (New York, 1962), 153.

the props that would create the planned impression on the visitors': elegantly bourgeois ornaments, books and records, and luxuries such as imported food, cigarettes and alcohol.²⁴

Loh underlined the political sensitivity of the work: 'even a small slip...could have international repercussions...Thus, whenever I was chosen to entertain a group of foreigners, I would be informed at least a week in advance. I would then attend meetings in which I would receive "guidance".' Every aspect of every 'performance' was minuted by 'interpreters' (in reality, politically reliable cadres) who subsequently produced full reports of everything seen and discussed.²⁵

The Communists, Loh concluded, 'rarely blundered once they had perfected their means of deceiving foreigners.

They took infinite pains to see that the entertainment went smoothly. Emphasis was placed on making it seem casual and spontaneous. This was easier than it may sound, because almost all visitors wanted to see the same things; rarely did a foreigner ask to see something for which a showpiece had not been carefully prepared...Moreover, each visitor was studied with such care that generally his behaviour could be anticipated. He was shown only what would impress a person of his type the most. He also stayed in only the best hotels...at the end of his visit he usually was given expensive and carefully chosen gifts, so that he would leave with a warm feeling of regard for his hosts.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 155-156

²⁵ Ibid., 156.

²⁶ Ibid., 159.

In a depressingly effective appeal to vanity, hosts often reassured visiting authors of the canonical status of their books in China: for how could such a writer then accuse such a country of intellectual repression?²⁷

The scenarios were sometimes planned far in advance, especially if children were involved. Loh remembered how the authorities ordered that, weeks before the household received some African visitors, the daughter of one of his closest friends, also an industrialist, be given a doll painted black to accustom her to the idea of dark skin. When two African ladies eventually visited the family, the little girl had been trained to rush up to them both and give them a kiss. Loh wrote: ‘It was remarkably successful. The two ladies were so touched that they had tears in their eyes.’²⁸

Loh’s account is backed up by selected Western eye-witnesses, who affirmed that ‘nothing was left to chance’ in orchestrating foreign visits to Maoist China. Jacques Marcuse, a Belgian journalist in Beijing through the 1950s, observed that ‘the special correspondent is given the VIPP (Very Important Potential Propagandist) treatment...you do not allow visitors to see anything but that which you want them to see.’²⁹ The political scientist Paul Hollander, in his analysis of Western ‘political pilgrims’ to Communist countries, has described the ‘techniques of hospitality’ rolled out by Maoist China to make the very best impression on visitors: flowers, cars, banquets, elite healthcare, luxurious hotels. On her 1954 visit to the PRC, Simone de Beauvoir was apparently particularly taken by her Beijing hotel room’s two brass double beds and pink silk sheets.³⁰ Loh, Marcuse and Hollander, therefore, all coincide in painting a picture of

²⁷ Paul Hollander, Political Pilgrims, 361-362.

²⁸ Loh, Escape from Red China, 169.

²⁹ Jacques Marcuse, The Peking Papers (New York, 1967), 8, 19.

³⁰ Hollander, Political Pilgrims, 363. See also Passim, China’s Cultural Diplomacy, 12.

a remarkably effective state hospitality machine, dedicated to manicuring international views of China.

At this point, it would be reasonable to interject that there was little special about the great care with which the PRC received foreign guests. All governments research and brief on visitors, and strive to put their best foot forward. Consider the elaborate preparations for Irish president Michael Higgins' 2014 state visit to the UK, or the vast security apparatus built around the presidential travels of George W. Bush after 9/11. But I would like to argue that officially micromanaged foreign visits to Maoist China are a little different, because they represented one of a very few channels by which one could gain access to China during these years. Contemporary Irish visitors to the UK, by contrast, can draw their impressions from a much wider range of sources and contacts. To the Maoist government, these visitors offered a crucial opportunity to construct and control the country's international image. An early scholar of the PRC's cultural diplomacy, Herbert Passim, wrote:

Every foreign visitor is another feather in [China's] cap, a mark of recognition, another milestone on the road to acceptance and respectability, another blow to the American policy of non-recognition. The overwhelming majority are drawn from the most influential and articulate strata of their home countries, so that their impact value is incomparably greater than that of ordinary tourists.³¹

Non-political, non-diplomatic visitors were often indulged by Maoist China as state guests, not tourists: many were met at the airport by ministers, they enjoyed audiences

³¹ Passim, China's Cultural Diplomacy, 8.

with Mao and Zhou and their visits were publicized on the front pages of newspapers.³² And because contemporary visitors to, and information on, the People's Republic were scarce outside China, the eye-witness reports of such travellers enjoyed a greater prestige and influence back in their home countries. One sometimes encountered the strange spectacle of a non-specialist visitor to China regarding themselves or being regarded, on his or her return, as an expert on the country, merely by virtue of having been there.³³ Indeed, through the 1950s the Chinese government often showed an inclination to refuse visas to people with a background in Chinese studies or Chinese language skills, indicating a preference for visitors without prior or independent knowledge of China.³⁴

And now that provincial and Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives in China are partially open, we can read some of the plethora of reports written before and after so many foreign visits, cataloguing plans, successes and deficiencies. We can see a little into the internal workings of the system: its scope and capacity. Was it as seamlessly choreographed as our witnesses cited above describe? What were its stand-out public relations coups? And when did it fail?

~

There can be no doubt that, in the minds of leaders like Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi and Mao Zedong, hosting foreign visitors represented high-level, confidential political work. In 1950, while Communist armies were still quashing the last remnants of opposition in the south and while the country was hammered by hyper-inflation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs focused on taking control of all contact between Chinese institutions and foreign visitors: 'From now on, any institution that receives foreign guests must first contact the

³² Ibid., 9, 38.

³³ Ibid., 30.

³⁴ Ibid., for example 79, 80-84, 94-95, 107, 109-110.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This is mandatory.’³⁵ A report from 1954 declared that ‘receiving foreign guests is...an extremely significant political job, crucial for warming up the international situation...If rightists don’t come, they’ll always be saying bad things about us. If we do let them come, they’ll find that difficult.’³⁶ Documents from 1958 and 1964 reiterated: ‘To receive foreign guests well, politics must take command’³⁷ and such work must be supervised only by ‘politically reliable cadres with a high level of policy and professional competence’.³⁸ ‘Any mistake will result directly in political losses,’ emphasized a 1953 circular.³⁹

³⁵ Archive of Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ACMFA) 117-00110-02 (1950), “Zhou Zongli ‘Zai lingzhi ge jiguan zhaodai waiguo shijie ji waibin jun xu shixian yu waijiaobu lianxi’ ji bu gei Zongli de baogao” (Premier Zhou once more orders every organisation to contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before receiving foreign diplomats or guests, and a report made to the Premier).

³⁶ Shanghai Municipal Archive (SMA) A-42-1-20 (1954), “ZhongGong Shanghaishi zhonggongye weiyuanhui guanyu jiedai waibin gongzuo yijian” (Opinions on the reception of foreign guests, by the Heavy Industry Committee of the Shanghai Municipal Branch of the CCP).

³⁷ Beijing Municipal Archive (BMA) 100-001-00465 (1958), “Jiedai waibin de zongjie, jiedai sukeji gongzuo zhe daibiaotuan, qingnian daibiaotuan, qingzhu SuGong qingtuan jianguo 40 zhounian huodong, wei zai jing geguo liuxuesheng juban lianhuanhui de jihua, zongjie, jianghua deng (Summary of reception of foreign guests: plans, summaries and talks for receiving the Youth Delegation of Soviet Technology Workers, the Youth Delegation, for congratulating the CPSU Youth League on its 40th anniversary and for parties for foreign students in Beijing).

³⁸ BMA 088-001-00160 (4 September 1964), “Shishe youguan jiedai waibin gongzuo de wenjian” (Documents on the reception of foreign guests).

³⁹ SMA A-47-2-10-37 (1953), “ZhongGong Shanghaishi wei guanyu waibin fang Hua canguan jiedai gongzuo de tongzhi” (Notice from the Shanghai Municipal Branch of the CCP about the reception of foreign guests visiting China).

Documents outlining even mundane arrangements – numbers of guests, details of invitations, banqueting plans – were annotated by Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi, indicating the leadership’s micromanagement of such issues. All the way up to his death, Zhou personally received thousands of foreign visitors: not just high-level dignitaries, but also journalists, students, teachers, trade delegations, sports teams. At one point, Zhang Wentian – deputy foreign minister through the 1950s – ridiculed Zhou’s focus on such work, objecting that Zhou ought to spend his time on more important, strategic matters and that he was spending too much of the Ministry’s budget on drinking Maotai – a kind of hellish Chinese vodka – with foreign journalists. Zhou disagreed: he responded that he was willing to pay for the food and drink himself, but that he was determined to continue. In diplomacy, he once remarked, ‘there’s no such thing as a small detail’ (*waijiao wu xiaoshi*).

Logistical preparations for visits were strenuous. In the words of one report, ‘every link must be pulled tight’: from the drawing up of propaganda, to the preparation of accommodation and food.⁴⁰ There was a strong psychological logic underpinning the material care with which visits were managed. Paul Hollander places adroit emphasis on the importance of ‘hospitality’ as a technique for making individuals feel guiltily indebted to their Chinese hosts and inclined to reciprocate positively. In the archives, short-term foreigners in China are never described as ‘visitors’ or ‘travellers’: they are always ‘foreign guests’ (*waibin*), with all the implications of indebtedness that the word brings. Given the numbers of foreign visitors travelling to China even during the Mao era, not all had their costs covered by Chinese state organisations. Yet evidence in archival reports and eye-

⁴⁰ SMA A-47-1-154 (1) (1953), “Er ge yue lai Shanghai waibin zhaodai gongzuo de zongjie baogao: juemi” (Top secret: summary report on reception of foreign guests in Shanghai over the past two months).

witness accounts suggests a strong cossetting principle at work: visitors were to be showered with attention and goodies, leaving them as gratefully dependent on their hosts as possible. Even at the toughest of times, the appropriateness of such expenditure was not questioned. Queen Elisabeth of Belgium visited in 1961, near the apogee of the post-Great Leap Forward famine, a predominantly manmade disaster generated by radical collectivization after 1957. Nonetheless, all Queen Elisabeth's costs (including hairdressing and laundry) were covered by China, and thousands of *yuan* spent on presents. The cadres in charge reasoned: 'We must dispel their suspicions about our country, for example that we are having a famine and that the communes have collapsed and that Chinese people are warmongers.'⁴¹

Dossiers were compiled on the political background of every guest: to understand and exploit their vulnerabilities. Again in preparation for Queen Elisabeth's arrival, the Beijing government undertook research into the interpersonal complexities of the Belgian royal retinue of a thoroughness worthy of *Paris Match*. These files were then diligently studied by all cadres who had contact with particular foreigners: 'to imagine in advance all the kinds of questions that foreign guests might ask'.⁴² One directive acknowledged that 'This kind of work is very stressful, it's easy to get tired and irritated...the questions asked by foreign guests are sometimes limited but sometimes limitless. Sometimes you need an encyclopedia to satisfy them.'⁴³ Words of welcome, introductory remarks and question-and-answer sessions were to be scripted in advance

⁴¹ BMA 102-001-00190 (1961), "Zhongdian waibin zai jing canguan" (Visits of VIP foreign guests to the capital).

⁴² See *ibid.* and SMA A-42-1-20.

⁴³ SMA A-47-1-154 (1)

and censored first by the work unit's senior leadership, and then by at least two cadres in the Propaganda Department of the Committee for Receiving Foreign Guests. Once approved, all this material was turned into secret, internal pamphlets, again to be studied by hosting cadres.

There was a handy eight-syllable slogan to express the appropriate political approach: 'seem relaxed on the outside, but be tense inside, and don't give anything away' (*waisong neijin, bulu benji*).⁴⁴ The levels of vigilance demanded verged on the obsessive compulsive. As one report hectored: 'Planning, arrangement and checking: all three are essential. There can be no exceptionalism. Once you have checked everything, check it again.'⁴⁵

Reports written before and after visits evoke a system of military discipline, a discipline that applied equally regardless of the political affiliations of the visitors. In some cases, the ratio of minders to delegates was almost one-to-one. A miscellaneous group of 214 visitors to Shanghai in 1953 (from Western Europe, the United States and non-socialist Asia) was accompanied by 212 cadres dispatched by the Central Committee.⁴⁶ When Kim Il-Song visited Shanghai in 1958, the welcoming party was 6,900 strong, and every member had to be 'politically pure'. In advance of Kim's arrival, almost eighty 'suspicious elements' were arrested or put under intensified surveillance; twenty-three were sent off for labour reform. The ranks of those selected to be shown to

⁴⁴ SMA A-42-1-20.

⁴⁵ SMA A-47-1-154 (1)

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the Koreans were also checked and cleansed: for example, the children of landlords and rightists were purged, again ‘to guarantee political purity’.⁴⁷

Security was deemed essential: on a 1953 visit, the special operatives detailed to a foreign delegation disguised themselves variously as messengers, odd-jobbers, room attendants, receptionists and guides; they wiped baths, they piled bedding, they brought refreshments, but their true function, apparently, was never identified by the foreign guests.⁴⁸ Secrecy and organisation became all the more pressing at moments of political and social crisis. Despite the fact that much of China was starving in 1960, the government pressed ahead with its plans to invite more than two thousand foreign guests to attend National Day celebrations. But planning was beset by fundamental logistical problems. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs directive warned: ‘The task of providing their food will be very onerous. Recently, because of the tensions surrounding food supply, we have discovered that bad elements have broken into food supplies for foreign guests in food trucks... Reduce as far as possible the number of cities that the foreign guests visit.’⁴⁹

⁴⁷ SMA A-72-2-4 (9 September 1958), “Shanghai xian jiedai guobin zhihuibu guanyu yi Jin Richeng shouxiang wei shou de chaoxian zhengfu daibiaotuan fang Hu qijian jiedai gongzuo zongjie baogao” (Report by the Shanghai county headquarters for receiving state guests, on the work done to receive the government delegation from North Korea while visiting Shanghai).

⁴⁸ SMA A-47-1-154 (1).

⁴⁹ ACMFA 117-00742-01 (1960), “1960 nian Zhongguo guoqing, zhongyang guanyu jiedai de zhishi, zhuwai shiguan, youguan defang waishichu guanyu guoqing gongzuo de qingshi ji lai wang wendian” (Central Committee Directives and telegrams on instructions for the reception of foreign guests, embassies abroad and local foreign affairs departments for National Day 1960).

Still the show went on: a banquet, a reception on the Tiananmen rostrum, and a fireworks display hosted by Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi, to which all foreign guests, experts and journalists in Beijing were invited.⁵⁰ Indeed, through the famine years of 1959 to 1961, both foreign visitors and residents complained – with unwitting grotesquerie – of how hard it was to keep the pounds off in China. Rewi Alley, a long-term New Zealand resident in China, wrote to his nephew in 1961: ‘How does one get weight down? I am 200 and should be 170. Only one way I suppose. That strong push away from the table!’⁵¹

~

Internal Chinese reports claimed that all this work won major P.R. triumphs for the CCP. Chinese write-ups of visits are scattered with approbatory comments: Sri Lankan agronomists, Polish economists, Indian and Greek Communists who exclaimed that China was now their model. One Argentinian hugged his host cadre with delight after a visit to a commune.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Brady, Making the Foreign Serve China, 117.

⁵² See, for example, SMA A-72-1-24 (1959), ‘ZhongGong Shanghai shiwei nongcun gongzuo weiyuanhui, Shanghaishi renmin weiyuanhui nongcun gongcun weiyuanhui 1959 nian jiaoqu renmin gongshi jiben qingkuang ji renmin gongshe gaikuang he chuli dui Maqiao renmin gongshehua de fanying’ (The basic situation and general survey of People’s Communes in the suburbs, and a summary of responses to Maqiao People’s Commune, from 1959, by the rural work committee of the CCP Shanghai municipal committee and the rural work committee of the Shanghai municipal people’s committee; SMA A-72-2-3 (1959), ‘ZhongGong Shanghaishi nongchang gongzuo weiyuanhui, Shanghaishi renmin weiyuanhui nongcun gongzuo weiyuanhui guanyu waibin canguan qingkuang (The CCP Municipal Shanghai farm work committee and the rural work committee of the Shanghai municipal people’s committee report on the visits of foreign guests).

One of the remarkable aspects of this system is how willingly – according to both Chinese and non-Chinese accounts – many foreign visitors drew conclusions about the general superiority of the system from a carefully choreographed visit to a single model commune, school, farmer or temple. Even the handlers for a 1952 delegation that included Nehru’s sister, Mrs Pandit, seemed surprised by how easily convinced the visitors were after seeing just one temple in Shanghai that Chinese people enjoyed freedom of religious belief.⁵³

Yet the real proof of the system lay not in what guests politely said to their expectant minders, but in how they responded when they were far beyond China. A good example can be seen in the response of Edgar Snow, the American journalist upon whom the CCP first developed many of their foreigner-handling techniques.

In 1936, Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi, in consultation with one of the Communists’ most useful and influential Chinese fellow travellers Song Qingling, had carefully picked Snow as the ideal mouthpiece for taking their story to the international world. Song Qingling occupied an unusual and highly prestigious role in Chinese politics of the 1920s-40s. As the widow of the veteran revolutionary and first president of the republic, Sun Yat-sen (who died in 1925), she had impeccable revolutionary credentials. In 1927, the Chinese revolution split between left and right, when Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Nationalist Party, ended the Soviet-sponsored united front with the Communists with a bloody purge. Song Qingling sided with the left, briefly seeking refuge in Moscow and Europe before settling back in Shanghai in 1931 as a determined critic of Chiang’s Nationalist regime. She was protected from intense Nationalist persecution of Communists and the leftwing between 1927 and 1936 by her family

⁵³ SMA A47 1 154 (1). See also SMA A-72-2-3.

connections: not only by being Sun Yat-sen's widow but also, perhaps just as importantly, the beloved older sister of Chiang Kai-shek's wife, Song Meiling. After returning to China, Song Qingling helped the Communist underground operation (for example, by liaising with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Soviet Union and Comintern in Shanghai, hosting meetings for those with CCP connections, finding sympathetic foreigners to mediate contact between Shanghai and the CCP Central Committee deep in rural China, and even personally funding Mao's revolutionary base in the northwest of China).⁵⁴

Snow was one of several sympathetic, useful foreigners whom Song Qingling guided towards the CCP in the 1930s. He was a well-disposed but non-Communist American with excellent media connections. Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai invited him, through an underground network, to spend weeks visiting their beleaguered state in northwest China, which was under military threat from the Nationalists.⁵⁵ According to Jung Chang and Jon Halliday (who, in their biography of Mao, write scathingly of Snow's gullibility in the face of a CCP charm offensive) before Snow's arrival at Communist headquarters, Mao gave four instructions for the visit: 'Security, secrecy, warmth and red carpet.'⁵⁶ Mao and his confreres had chosen and primed their man well. The following year, Snow wrote up his impressions and interviews of the Communist base area in the northwest (heavily censored by Mao and Zhou) into the

⁵⁴ For more details, see Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), 96, 122, 135; Israel Epstein, *Woman in World History: Soong Ching Ling* (Beijing, 1993); Chen Guanren, *Song Qingling dazhuan* (Biography of Song Qingling) (Beijing, 2003).

⁵⁵ For more detail, see S. Bernard Thomas, *Season of High Adventure: Edgar Snow in China* (California, 1996), 131; John Maxwell Hamilton, *Edgar Snow: A Biography* (Indiana, 1988), 67-69.

⁵⁶ Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (London, 2005), 199.

global bestseller Red Star Over China. The book turned Mao into an international political personality, portraying him as a disarmingly laidback, affable patriot.⁵⁷

Red Star was an important public relations success when the CCP was on the point of annihilation by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government. Snow's 1961 book, The Other Side of the River: Red China Today, spoke out for Communist China at another crisis point: at the height of the post-Great Leap Forward famine, in which tens of millions died of starvation or the effects of malnutrition largely caused by state economic mismanagement.⁵⁸ Though not entirely without its criticisms of China, the book found in favour of the Communist regime under Mao. In his introduction, Snow insisted that he had been given perfect access during a six-month visit in 1960 (his first return to the country since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949): 'I cannot complain about lack of opportunity to see China. I was to travel, if anything, too extensively in the time I had available...I think I know more about all these people than I could possibly have understood had I never returned to China.'⁵⁹ Throughout, Snow described how, in his tour of the country, he caught up with old friends, both foreign and Chinese (and including Mao and Zhou), and was cheerily received by countless citizens of New China. There was nothing to imply reserve, control or manipulation in his write-ups of these genial, comradely encounters. Most crucially perhaps, from a PRC

⁵⁷ Edgar Snow, Red Star Over China (London, 1937). See Thomas, Season of High Adventure, 169-189, Hamilton, Edgar Snow, 84-96 and Robert M. Farnsworth, From Vagabond to Journalist: Edgar Snow in Asia, 1928-1941 (Missouri, 1996), 310-317 for details about the book's reception. Thomas, Season of High Adventure, 165 has details of CCP editing of the book.

⁵⁸ For two recent accounts of the famine based on extensive archival research, see Frank Dikötter, Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Greatest Catastrophe (London, 2010) and Yang Jisheng, Tombstone: The Untold Story of Mao's Great Famine trans. Guo Jian and Stacy Mosher (London, 2012).

⁵⁹ Edgar Snow, The Other Side of the River: Red China Today (London, 1963), 21-22.

propaganda perspective, the book denied famine and starvation several times: 'I diligently searched, without success, for starving people or beggars to photograph...I must assert that I saw no starving people in China, nothing that looked like old-time famine...that I do not believe there is famine in China at this writing...One of the few things I can say with certainty is that mass starvation such as China knew almost annually under former regimes no longer occurs.'⁶⁰

Files on preparations for Snow's visit in Beijing archives tell a different story. A top-secret planning document from 1960 dissected Snow's character and situation with clinical chilliness, with a view to exploiting his weaknesses for the PRC's benefit.

Snow's writing, the report observes, 'has [in the past] served a beneficial propaganda purpose for us. But he himself is not a progressive individual...we guess that he has some link with the State Department...In recent years he has suffered repeated professional frustrations and setbacks...big newspapers refuse his articles.' (By 1960, McCarthyism had driven Snow and his family into Swiss exile.) The report goes on:

We suppose that Snow has two aims in coming to China: first, to win fame and fortune by writing a book; second, to carry out strategic espionage...In hosting him, we should be superficially friendly...On the surface we should seem relaxed; inside, we must be tense, to increase our vigilance. We should intensify our control of his activities...As regards his interview and writing requests, we should satisfy them according to our needs: we will let him see some of the things that we allow him to see, to bring him to understand a few things that we have prepared for him to understand...We must propagandise to him the dazzling achievements of socialist construction in

⁶⁰ Ibid., 619. 172.

every area, and the great victory of the general line, the Great Leap Forward and the People's Communes...We will make him see the unanimous unity of every nationality, the correctness of the CCP leadership, the absolute unity inside the party, and that the unity between China and the USSR can never be destroyed.⁶¹

To his diary, Snow confided his suspicions that all was not as it seemed: 'I realised what it is that is strange about these meetings and interviews thus far. I am cordially received and given every co-operation technically correct. But no intimacy is established no spark of human warmth established. It is as if you knew that you were never going to see a person again and it cannot be the beginning of a friendship...I wanted to combine renewal of friendship with interviews and business but Rewi Alley said that's the last thing to ask for. They'll do everything to avoid that.'⁶² Indeed, Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives on Snow's visit contain informants' reports on private conversations provided by old, non-Chinese 'friends' (and loyal servants of the Communist government) whom Snow described so warmly in his book: Israel Epstein and George Hatem.⁶³

⁶¹ BMA 102-001-00118 (1960), 'Waijiaobu jiedai de Minzhu Deguo zhengfu daibiaotuan, Chaoxian zhengfu jingji daibiaotuan, Gangguo dangzheng daibiaotuan, Aerbaniaya Zhongguo youhao xiehui daibiaotuan, Yingguo Menggemali yuanshuai, Yingguo zuojia Sinuo zaijing canguan huodong (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reception of a delegation from the German Democratic Republic, of an economic delegation from the government of North Korea, of delegation from the Congolese party and government administration, of a delegation from the Albania-China Friendship Association, and on the activities of the English Field-Marshal Montgomery and the English [sic] writer Snow while visiting Beijing).

⁶² Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 121-122.

⁶³ See, for example, ACMFA 116-00189-06(1) (10 July 1960), 'Meiguo zuojia Sinuo qingkuang fanying' (Reports on the situation of the American writer Snow); ACFMA 116-00265-03(1) (2 September-24

Yet in writing up The Other Side of the River, Snow kept his misgivings to himself. Once more, Mao and Zhou had chosen their man well: Snow had financial reasons for siding with China. He owed too much of his journalistic reputation to his writing on China through the 1930s and 1940s; he had a wife and two young children to support. He needed access to write a successful book on China; and he needed to write favourably enough about China to maintain future access.

Bill Jenner, now a retired professor of Chinese history, has spoken of the book's impact on him as a young doctoral student in 1962, just before he decided to travel to Maoist China himself to work for two years as a translator in Beijing's Foreign Languages Press, the government organization that published China's so-called 'external propaganda' for foreign readers. He bought a copy of the book using prize money he had won at graduation. "There just wasn't much to read on contemporary China at the time, and the book's overwhelmingly positive image impressed me a lot...I think it's a far more pernicious book than Red Star because it was researched during the famine. He should have known better. However closely he was being watched by his minders, he should have seen through things. He ought to have known what he wasn't seeing. He'd been in China before."⁶⁴

Communist hospitality also scored successes with hard-power implications: in 1962, the Communist leadership selected Jan Myrdal, a failing Swedish leftwing novelist, to be invited on an all-expenses paid trip to China, including a month in a model village in the northwest. The paean to the Chinese rural revolution that resulted, Myrdal's 1963 book Report from a Chinese Village, became an international bestseller (thereby securing

November 1960), 'Guanyu Meiguo zuojia Sinuo de qingkuang' (Concerning the situation of the American writer Snow).

⁶⁴ Bill Jenner, interview by author, Cambridge, 29 November 2013.

Myrdal's livelihood) and a rallying text for the radical leftwing and student rebels in 1960s Sweden.⁶⁵ As the founding member of a Swedish Maoist grouping formed in the 1960s, Myrdal subsequently led protests against the Vietnam War; this spike in radicalism worried Sweden's ruling political party enough for it to take a neutral stance on American intervention in Indochina, thereby weakening international support for US policy.⁶⁶

Thanks in part to Zhou Enlai's careful hosting of Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia through the 1950s and 1960s, the prince took refuge in China after he was ousted by a military coup in 1970. There, across the ensuing five years, the Chinese brokered an alliance between Sihanouk and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, one that dramatically boosted the Cambodian Communists' international and national respectability, and furthered Maoist China's aim of spreading communism through southeast Asia.⁶⁷

Skilful Chinese hospitality may also have helped export the Maoist revolution to Indonesia, with appalling consequences. The Chairman of the Indonesian Communist Party, Aidit, a great admirer of Mao and his revolution, visited the same model commune twice, in 1959 and 1961, and was given the full propaganda treatment. Having emphasised that entry to the commune was entirely voluntary, his hosts in 1961 explained all the great transformations that had taken place in the preceding two years, and flatteringly presented him with a book that had reprinted an inscription that he had

⁶⁵ Jan Myrdal, Rapport fran Kinesisk By (Report from a Chinese Village) (Stockholm, 1963).

⁶⁶ See discussion in Perry Johansson, 'Mao and the Swedish United Front Against USA', in The Cold War in Asia, eds. Zheng Yangwen et al., 217-240.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the role played by the CCP in brokering the alliance between Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge, see for example Philip Short, Pol Pot: The History of a Nightmare (London, 2005). On the economic relations between mainland China and Democratic Kampuchea, see Andrew Mertha, Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979 (Ithaca, 2014) and Ben Kiernan, The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79 (New Haven, 2008).

left in 1959. Aidit's Chinese minders in 1959 and 1961 deftly concealed the true nature of the Commune system – terror, starvation, cannibalism – and reinforced Aidit's respect for the Maoist experiment. The report on his visit commented that 'Aidit was very satisfied. He said: 'You can see that the changes here [over the past two years] are huge...I am delighted...I wish you ever greater success in the future.' Four years later, in 1965, directly encouraged and (some historians argue) funded by Mao and his lieutenants, Aidit helped launch a coup against the Indonesian army, expecting triumph for his Communist Party. Instead, the armed forces under General Suharto reasserted control and launched a purge that killed some 500,000 suspected Communists, many of them ethnic Chinese.⁶⁸

~

Despite the fastidiousness of preparations, the archives also expose weaknesses in China's international hospitality machine. In 1953, at least, it seems clear that the smooth operation described by Robert Loh was not yet in place: foreign guests complained about getting earache from the constant comparisons of China's glorious todays with its dreadful past; that a trip to China was a 'journalist's punishment'; that minders accompanied guests through meals to spy on them; that the Chinese were trying to buy their guests through farewell gifts of clothes and cash.⁶⁹ In a serious gaffe, one foreign

⁶⁸ BMA 102-001-00190 (1961), 'Zhongdian waibin zaijing cangan' (The visits of VIP foreign guests to Beijing). For a discussion of the Indonesian coup of September 1965 and the anti-Communist, anti-Chinese purge that followed it, see John Roosa, Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'Etat in Indonesia (Wisconsin, 2006).

⁶⁹ ACMFA 113-00180-01 (8 December 1953), 'Guanyu 1950-1953 nian zibenzhuyi tixi guojia laihua waibin fanying de zonghe baogao ji qingkuang jibiao' (A summarizing report on the responses of foreign guests visiting China from capitalist countries between 1950 and 1953; see also ACMFA 117-00473-07 'Guanyu

affairs cadre revealed to one of the guests that every delegate had been extensively researched in advance.⁷⁰ A 1950 Ministry of Foreign Affairs directive about how to receive foreign guests gives a flavour of how much the Ministry felt its employees had to learn in terms of international polish. It contained plenty of useful, factual guidance about the difference between a sit-down dinner and a buffet; about how to behave in the face of a bread roll (namely, you should break off a piece and butter it). But there was also a substantial amount of hectoring about more basic issues: reminding diplomats, when leaving the toilet, to check that their flies were done up; not to yawn openly in front of interlocutors, not to pick nose or ears.⁷¹ Reports of visits by foreign guests well into the 1950s were studded with complaints that cadres were snapping at each other through stress and over-work⁷²; or that they were ill-prepared, or wooden; or drunk.⁷³

Sometimes, foreign guests seriously imperiled international camaraderie. Consider the following, slightly cryptic report: ‘Recently, some foreign guests have engaged upon discourteous behavior towards female attendants, which has gone beyond the bounds of friendly unity with international friends...From now on, only male attendants will service

waibin yingsong, yanhui, songli ji jiaotong gongju zaxing guiding’ (On provisional regulations for the reception and seeing off, banqueting and gifting of foreign guests, and for their means of transport).

⁷⁰ ACMFA 113-00180-01.

⁷¹ ACMFA 117.00110.07 (1) (2 January 1951), ‘Duiwai jiaoji huodong zhong fasheng de wenti ji “dui waibin jiaoji xuzhi”’ (Problems that have occurred in contact with foreigners and ‘Essential information for contact with foreign guests’).

⁷² ACMFA 117-00102-01 (19 September 1951), ‘Guoqingjie teyao waibin zhaodai weiyuanhui gongzuo zongjie’ (Summary of work for committee in charge of receiving specially invited foreign guests).

⁷³ BMA 088-001-00404 (2 July-26 December 1963), ‘Zongshe, shishe guanyu waibin cangan de qingkuang huibao deng’ (Reports by the main and municipal offices on visits by foreign guests).

the rooms of male guests.⁷⁴ The sheer numbers of foreign travellers to Maoist China would suggest, moreover, that it was not logistically possible for every visit to be perfectly monitored and choreographed.⁷⁵

The Chinese masses could prove unruly, also, and impervious to efforts to deploy them in the service of ‘international friendship’. The archives are scattered with embarrassed reports of rude receptions: of Chinese children and adults gathering around African visitors to a Beijing hutong, pointing and laughing that ‘their skin is like tree bark...their heads look like pigs’⁷⁶; of workers ignoring friendly Albanians, or gathering around the back of one Polish visitor, pointing at his neck (the work summary explained that it was very thick and red).⁷⁷ Despite the exhaustive, and exhausting, preparations for Kim Il-sung’s visit described above, the commanding cadres still found fault with the

⁷⁴ 117-00189-01 (20 May 1952), ‘Zhongyang guanyu Wuyijie waibin jiedai de zhishi ji gedi jihua he youguan qingkuang deng’ (Central directives on the reception of foreign guests during Labour Day and relevant matters concerning the plans for all localities).

⁷⁵ Matthew Rothwell, for example, describes how, in later memoirs and interviews, several Latin American visitors of the 1950s and 1960s felt that it was possible to escape their hosts and have unscripted encounters in Chinese cities. Personal communication and Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America (Abingdon, 2013).

⁷⁶ MFA 117-01299-01 (12 May 1961), ‘Guanyu xiang qunzhong jinxing zhengque dui hei Feizhou waibin de jiaoyu tongzhi’ (Notice about correctly educating the masses about receiving black African foreign guests).

⁷⁷ SMA B123-6-163 (1964), ‘1964 nian guowuyuan, Shanghaishi renwei wajingmaoban, shiwei waishi xiaozu ji Shanghaishi diyi shangyeju guanyu waishi gongzuo you guan wenjian’ (1964 documents relevant to foreign affairs work from the State Council, the Shanghai People’s Committee Foreign Trade Office, the Foreign Affairs sub-committee of the Municipal Party Committee and Number One Municipal Trade Bureau).

performance of the masses. The team of welcoming students at East China Chemistry Institute, they specified, were extremely ill-disciplined: they did not shout slogans or sing songs, they messed about throwing flowers and strips of paper at each other, 'creating a very bad influence'.⁷⁸

The thinness of the façade could be exposed with alarming ease. A report from a model commune near Shanghai, which from 10-14 October 1959 alone received at least two delegations of foreign visitors a day, suggests that the hosts at one point let slip the staged, Potemkin nature of what was on display.

The people hosting one delegation to the new village took it upon themselves to ask if the foreign guests would like to visit some peasants. The foreign guests agreed but when they got there, every single house was shut up; there wasn't a single peasant to be found. It was the same when the foreign guests visited the commune hospital and reading room...the officials...had gone out for lunch.⁷⁹

The experience suggests that even slightly spontaneous arrangements were fraught with risk.

Despite the research undertaken in advance by Chinese hosts, they could still misread their guests. After Mrs Pandit's minders in 1952 took her to call on Song Qingling, they observed that Mrs Pandit viewed Song as 'half-woman, half-goddess'.⁸⁰ Outside China, Mrs Pandit seemed less worshipful: in a debriefing conversation with the American ambassador in Delhi following her trip to China, she remarked that Song was

⁷⁸ SMA A-72-2-4.

⁷⁹ SMA A-72-2-3.

⁸⁰ SMA A47 1 154 (1).

‘closely confined’ in Shanghai. ‘She seemed bitter at world generally and had little to say.’ Mrs Pandit’s report to the Americans contradicted in other places the responses recorded by her Chinese minders. According to the Chinese report, the Indian delegations gasped with admiration at the socialist construction that they saw: on being shown a swimming pool, for example, they remarked that in India, building even a tap with running water would be a major event. To the US ambassador, Mrs Pandit said: ‘Chi[nese] health conditions remain serious even worse than in India.’ Mrs Pandit’s Chinese handlers were confident that they had been warmly welcoming, stressing the Chinese people’s love of peace. This is what she reported back to the Americans: ‘The effort being made [to] educate people and particularly children is frightening in its thoroughness and doctrinaire qualities. From kindergarten up, every stage of education ruthlessly controlled.’⁸¹

The writer Frank Tuohy, on a visit to Nanjing in 1966, asked to see a children’s drawing class, after visiting a classroom adorned only with pictures of Chairman Mao. The following day, his request was granted and he observed a primary school class copying ‘clippings of girl guerrillas shooting down planes with rifles; paper tigers being throttled by the Viet Cong; three Americans – a bishop, a professor and a doctor – standing arm-in-arm over a pile of corpses; GIs with the features of President Johnson being bayoneted up the rear...’ The guide, he noted, ‘seemed offended by our lack of enthusiasm.’⁸²

~

⁸¹ 793.00/7-752, ‘Telegram: The Ambassador in India (Bowles) to the Department of State,’ 7 July 1952, Document 36, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume XIV, Part 1, China and Japan*, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v14p1/d36> (accessed 12 January 2015).

⁸² Frank Tuohy, ‘From a China Diary,’ *Encounter* (December 1966), 8-9.

A long and intricate paper-trail remains to be traced out, before the true impact of China's hosting work can be fully understood: we need to explore the post-China writings and public engagements of those carefully courted, and to work out who read and who listened to them. To gain a preliminary sense of this, we could return to the example of Edgar Snow. In Chinese, German and Italian translations, his writing on Chinese communism was eagerly consumed by Chinese and Southeast Asian revolutionaries, and by European radicals between the 1940s and 1970s.⁸³ The careful suppression of the extent and causes of political cataclysms such as the famine of the 1960s – to which Snow contributed – made it possible for young sinologists of the late Maoist era to write influential academic articles and books that validated Mao and his revolution both before and after Mao's death in 1976.⁸⁴

⁸³ For indications of the international influence of Snow's writing, see the interview cited above with Bill Jenner and interview with Mark Selden, 29 May 2013; Niccolai, Quando la Cina Era Vicina; Kuhn, Stalins Enkel, Maos Sohne; S. Bernard Thomas, Season of High Adventure : Edgar Snow in China (California, 1996); C. C. Chin and Karl Hack eds., Dialogues with Chin Peng: New Light on the Malayan Communist Party (Singapore, 2005).

⁸⁴ Consider, for example, Mark Selden, The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); Jonathan Mirsky, 'China After Nixon,' in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 402 (July 1972), 83-96; Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, China! Inside the People's Republic (New York, 1972); Edward Friedman, 'The Innovator' in Dick Wilson ed., Mao Tse-tung in the Scales of History (Cambridge, 1977), 300-321. Friedman, Mirsky and Selden all later underwent significant, even dramatic, changes in their assessment of Mao-era China (in particular, of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution) when access to China increased somewhat after Mao's death. Examples of their later, far more critical judgments can be found in Jonathan Mirsky's post-Mao journalism for publications including The Times, The Spectator, The New York Review of Books, and in Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, Chinese Village, Socialist State (New Haven, 1991).

Maoist China's hosting programme, moreover, had a domestic as well as an international focus. Foreigners were the official target, but the government also used the spectacle to underscore at home the triumph of the revolution. A 1953 report observed that 'the masses at the sites visited by the foreign guests were all educated by the experience. One worker said that New China's international status must have improved...in the past, Chinese people went abroad. After the victory of the revolution, everyone comes to China...After multiple visits by foreign guests, workers at one nursery no longer felt that their work was trivial; they felt that they had done glorious, important international propaganda work.'⁸⁵ A Shanghai worker visited by a West German in 1957 drew similar, grateful conclusions: 'Before Liberation,' she told the cadres who had trained her for the visit, 'who would have visited a worker like me? But now that we have "turned over" [*fanshen*, the Chinese communist term for having undergone revolutionary transformation], we are the masters/hosts...and foreign guests visit us: this is an unprecedented honour for my family.' The worker's family 'diligently prepared for the visit, wanting to show the foreign guest how well workers lived after the revolution.'⁸⁶

To Communist officials, preparing ordinary people to put on a show for foreign guests was part of a much bigger political project: mobilising the enthusiasm and energy

⁸⁵ SMA A47 1 154 (1)

⁸⁶ BMA 101-001-00632 (13 November 1957), 'Benhui, benbu youguan jiedai chuxi gonghui 'Bada', 'Wuyi' waibin ji riben Chuanqishi yihui, Riben gonghui liang daibiaotuan deng guoji gongzuo de jihua, zongjie, huanyingci, hepian mingdan deng youguan wenjian' (Relevant documents, including plans, summaries, welcome speeches, name lists for greetings cards, for international work receiving foreign guests and Kawasaki municipal parliament and Japanese trade union delegations for the Eighth Congress and Labour Day). See also SMA A-72-2-4, describing mass mobilisation in advance of Kim Il-song's visit.

of the masses for Party political aims.⁸⁷ For this, and many other reasons, there is a certain melancholy to reading the archives on China's hosting machine: a sense of Maoist China being one vast stage-set – the Chinese playing to the foreigners, the foreigners playing back to the Chinese, and back and forth it goes.

⁸⁷ See Chen, Mao's China and the Cold War for a discussion of the ways in which Mao used foreign policy to achieve domestic objectives, especially mass mobilization.