

5. Seizing the Power of Ideological “Interpretation”

I. What Did Mao Learn from Stalin’s *History of the CPSU*?

Four years of concerted efforts from 1935 to 1938, with many complications and temporary setbacks along the way, finally brought Mao on a triumphant march toward realizing his political ideals. By the end of 1938, Mao had control of the Party and the Communist armed forces firmly within his grasp, but one matter continued to rankle him—he had yet to seize the power of ideological interpretation.

The power of interpretation—the power to define terminology—is one of the greatest powers available to human beings. Within the Communist Party the power of interpretation was especially important; whoever was empowered to interpret the classic texts of Marxism-Leninism controlled the Party’s consciousness. In other words, control over the military and the Party had to be sustained through the power of ideological interpretation. The importance of interpretation lay not only in the content and the meaning of words and expressions, but even more importantly in integrating these terms with reality, and in the role these terms and concepts played in social existence. Under the long-term management by the Soviet faction, Russified concepts had shrouded the Party in a special spiritual climate and a richly pro-Soviet atmosphere that seriously hindered innovation. In this environment, Wang Ming, Zhang Wentian, and the others in the Soviet faction not only rose to the top but also complacently presented themselves as the bearers of the Holy Grail and lorded themselves over others as the great masters and defenders of the faith, dismissing all innovative thinking as heterodoxy to be eliminated

at first instance. For quite a long time, Mao could do nothing but stew in his indignation while those who supported Moscow's orthodoxy treated his ideas as "parochial empiricism" that "departed from the classics and rebelled against orthodoxy," and they regarded Mao as a mere layman forever barred from the inner sanctum of Marxism-Leninism.

His self-respect battered, Mao resolved to express himself with an authoritativeness that would silence his political opponents. Back in 1910, while still a student at Dongshan Primary School in Xiangxiang County, Hunan Province, he expressed his resolve in a poem entitled "Chant of the Frog":

Squatting like a tiger in the pond,
Nurturing my spirit beneath the green poplar,
If I don't first greet the spring,
Which insect dares to chirp!¹

As soon as Mao embarked on his great enterprise, he found the apparatus of the Party's spiritual guidance even more intolerable. Aspiring to the role of a "guru" and gifted in management, Mao understood his own and his opponents' aptitudes well enough to know where his disadvantages lay—he had read less of the Marxist and Leninist classics than those who had studied abroad. But Mao was confident that his profound understanding and intuitive grasp of Chinese history and cultural traditions, combined with some key concepts of Marxism-Leninism, would be of far greater practical value than the armchair strategizing of pedants who had swallowed foreign teachings without truly digesting them. In Mao's view, those in the Soviet faction were "sourceless like an autumn flood and rootless like duckweed" with "minds full of emptiness," and they relied purely on their training in Moscow to gain control of Party ideology and consequently control of the Party and its armed forces. Mao was taking the opposite route: through willpower, intelligence, and ability he had gained control of the Party and the military, and ultimately he would capture the ideological battlefield as well.

In October 1938, after reading a number of books by Marx and Lenin as well as their Stalinist interpretations in Mark Mitin's and Arnold Aizenberg's textbooks on dialectical materialism and historical materialism,² Mao launched a Party-wide "Study Movement" from the rostrum of the Sixth Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee.

To study what? In a word, to study Marxism combined with China's reality—Mao's new concept as well as his attitude and work method. At the time, there was no formal concept of "Mao Zedong Thought," nor was it convenient, under Stalin's remote observation, to call attention to Mao's new contribution. Furthermore, it was difficult for Mao to reveal all of his actual thinking. He found that he was unable to speak his mind.

Yet, after everything he had already experienced, all of this was really nothing for him. At the end of 1938, a report from Ren Bishi, newly arrived from Moscow, gave Mao important revelations that helped him resolve this quandary. Ren reported to Yan'an that Moscow had just published Stalin's *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (CPSU), and he recommended that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee immediately have it translated.³ Upon reading the *History* several months later, Mao grasped it like a treasure and quickly issued an appeal to Yan'an cadres at all levels: Study the *History* and become students of Stalin!

Mao put an extremely high value on Stalin's *History*; Guo Huaruo, who was Mao's military affairs secretary at the time, recalls Mao stating at one cadre meeting: "The *History of the CPSU* is a great book; I have read it ten times already, and I advise all of you to read it numerous times as well."⁴

From 1930 until the end of the 1950s, on at least ten occasions Mao called on the entire Party to study Stalin's *History of the CPSU*. At a cadre conference in Yan'an on May 19, 1941, Mao gave his famous speech "Reform Our Study," in which he recommended "using the *History of the CPSU* as core material" to study Marxism-Leninism, with everything else being "supplementary material":

The *History of the CPSU* is the finest synthesis and summary of the worldwide Communist Movement during the past century. It is a classic combination of theory and practice, and it is the only comprehensive model existing in the world.⁵

In 1942 Mao referred to this book as "the encyclopedia of Marxism-Leninism," and he included it in *Rectification Literature* and then in *Essential Texts for Cadres*. From 1949 to 1956, the *History* was a required political text in all of China's tertiary institutions, and it was not until the early 1960s that its prestige was overtaken by the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*.

Was Mao's esteem for Stalin's *History* merely a tactic or was it sincere?

Mao deeply resented Stalin and he was extensively engaged in producing ammunition to use against Wang Ming, so why would he venerate a major work by Wang Ming's spiritual guru? At first glance, it seems inexplicable that these political opponents, Mao and Wang Ming, would be in agreement in their praise of Stalin's *History*. Mao was present at a Yan'an mobilization meeting held by the Central Committee's Department of Cadre Education on May 20, 1939, when Wang Ming delivered the main report, entitled "The Importance of Studying the *History of the CPSU*."⁶ Wang Ming's partiality for the *History* was understandable, but what about Mao's?

Mao's high evaluation of the *History* was definitely intended to pander to Stalin, but even more importantly, the *History* provided Mao with a great deal of experience and strategy that he desperately needed to launch a power struggle within the Party. All of this material served Mao's political objectives and provided him with ammunition to seize the power of ideological interpretation within the CCP.

The *History*, the full title of which is *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course*, was compiled under Stalin's orders for the purpose of thoroughly obliterating political dissent and consolidating his dictatorial status. Following Stalin's personal revision and examination, the book was officially published at the height of the great purge in 1938. Given his direct participation and meticulous organization of the drafting and publication of this book, Stalin agreed to have it published under his own name.⁷

Mao immediately discovered the enormous value of this book as a sample of Stalinism. Mao greatly admired Stalin's flexible approach to Marxism. Just as in the *History* Stalin demonstrated his talent for selectively applying Marxist principles to meet his political needs, Mao focused only on the Marxist theories of class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In their popularization of Marxism, both Mao and Stalin were masters of the first order. Stalin's strength was in breaking down Marxism into several concepts, whereas Mao's skill was in simplifying Marxism and, especially, inserting Chinese folk idioms and slang into Marxism. Stalin invented the slogan of "Cadres deciding everything," whereas Mao's celebrated dictums included "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" and "To rebel is justified!" Mao reaped considerable benefit from the *History*'s concise, sequential narrative. He soon used the summary remarks in the *History* as the basis for his report "The Twelve Points of Bolshevization," delivered at a high-level cadre conference for the Central Committee's Northwest Bureau.

The *History* arbitrarily edited history in order to preserve Stalin's image of infallibility, and this also suited Mao's political needs to rewrite the history of the CCP with himself at the center. The *History* depicts the history of the CPSU as a life-and-death struggle between the correct lines and the erroneous lines, and in particular it highlights Stalin's personal role. The book mentions Stalin's and Lenin's names more than 650 times, and quotations and citations from Stalin's and Lenin's works take up one-quarter of the text, totaling around 100 pages. All of this was especially interesting and inspiring to Mao, who regarded himself as the manifestation of the Party's correct line. Under Mao's personal direction from 1943 to 1945, Ren Bishi and Hu Qiaomu used the *History* as a blueprint, and the struggle between the two lines in the CCP as the guiding principle, to compose the first historical summary text produced by the CCP, a Chinese version of the *History of the CPSU* with Mao Zedong at its center—the "Resolution on Certain Issues in the History of Our Party." In this "Resolution," only Mao represented the CCP's correct line (Liu Shaoqi was added as a representative of the correct line in the August 1945 revision), whereas all other Party leaders were either Left or Right, and the Party's broader membership served as mere foils to highlight the greatness of the Party's top leader.

Using Stalin's personal volition as the sole criterion for judging right and wrong, the *History of the CPSU* did its utmost to vilify and belittle the rest of the CPSU leaders, and this was well-suited to Mao's self-aggrandizement and arbitrary temperament. The *History* categorically labeled all Party veterans whose views diverged from those of Stalin as "opportunists," "enemies of the people," "turncoats," "traitors," "spies," and "back-stabbers," and it created the theoretical basis for Stalin's mass murder of Old Bolsheviks and his implementation of social terrorism. During the War of Resistance against Japan, Mao was at the preliminary phase in his plan to achieve national dominance, and the success of the revolution depended on a concerted effort by the entire Party, so he could only selectively emulate Stalin's experience of repression within the Party. But Mao learned what he needed from Stalin's *History*, and it was not before long that he began using terms such as "opportunist," "empiricist," and "dogmatist" against other leaders within the Party. Under pressure from Mao, the vast majority of Party leaders accepted these accusations, either willingly or unwillingly, for the sake of Party unity; Mao had them gripped by their "pigtails" and he could dispose of them at will, whereas he remained in an unassailable position.

Mao found what he needed in the *History*: revolutionary strategies and tactics with the leader at the center, serving as an axis from which radiated specific channels for strengthening the Party's ideology and development, and principles and methods for launching inner-Party struggle. From this book, Mao gained a thorough understanding of the special qualities required to be a leader in the mold of Stalin: ruling the Party with an iron fist and using ideology in service to this rule. Mao was hardly a novice in this regard and now, with the *History* as a foundation, Mao had even greater confidence.

If it can be said that the *History* enriched Mao's revolutionary tactics and strategic thinking in terms of political utility, then Stalin's philosophical sharpshooters, Mark Mitin and Pavel Yudin, were instrumental in making Maoism into a philosophy.

Among the CCP leaders, Mao was the least fettered by Marxism-Leninism and the most free and flexible in his thinking. In his youth, Mao had been deeply influenced by traditional Chinese philosophy, attaching particular importance to the Theory of Mind developed by Neo-Confucians Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Shouren. It is because Mao maintained communications with traditional Chinese philosophy that he frequently came up with new thinking and concepts that diverged from Moscow's orthodoxy. But in the early 1930s, Mao's original viewpoints were met with a negative reception from the Party's Soviet faction. Ambitious and proud, Mao was not content to be a mere "practitioner"; he wanted to join the pantheon of Marxist-Leninist theorists. As a Party member, Mao could not establish a new holy writ and he was obligated to rely on Marxist texts in order to make his views more systematic and theoretical.

From 1937 to 1939 Mao in Yan'an thirstily scrutinized the Marxist philosophical courses on dialectical materialism that Bo Gu, Shen Zhiyuan, and others had translated from Russian. Yet almost everything Mao studied was part of an annotated catechism-style "hermeneutics" of Stalin's works provided by the CPSU's official philosophers at that time—Mitin, Yudin, Ivan Shirokov et al.⁸

This inevitably resulted in mutual contradictions. On the one hand, given Mao's active pandering, his vivid thinking became intangibly squeezed into the dogmatic framework of Mitin, Yudin et al., and Stalin's linear and arbitrary thought process had a huge influence on Mao. Mao's maxims, such as "Two sides to everything" and "Infinite divisibility," were adopted as universally applicable and fundamental truths. On the other hand, since Mao's study of Mitin, Yudin, and Shirokov resulted from

external pressures rather than from a personal inclination, and because Mao’s free will could not be completely restrained by Stalinist “scriptures,” Mao’s thinking frequently ventured “out of bounds,” leaping from Stalin’s incantations into the great beyond. It was at this stage that Mao wrote his most important philosophical treatises, “On Practice” and “On Contradiction.” In short, while holding fast to the purpose of “serving my interests,” Mao may have been inspired by these urtexts to expand upon them and to give a foreign inflection to a Chinese tune, or even to blatantly slight the urtexts and write his own new tune. Therefore, innovation and discovery coexisted with rigid conservatism, the two supplementing each other to become a distinguishing feature of Maoism. In the process, Maoism began to take on a Marxist exterior, with Mitin, Yudin, and Shirokov providing the scaffolding for the initial construction of Maoism as a philosophy.

The relationship between Maoism and Stalinism is complicated; regarding the two as either completely equivalent or completely separate is contrary to fact. Yet in terms of the “Study Movement” that Mao carried out in Yan’an from 1939 to 1941, irrefutable evidence connects Maoism and Stalinism by countless threads. In Stalin’s inner sanctum, Mao discovered not only a weapon for attacking Wang Ming and other opponents but also a coagulant to systematize his own theories. Through his painstaking manipulation, Mao was able to use Stalin to attack Wang Ming and also to perfect his own ideological system. Once Stalin became useful to Mao, his dogmatism also became palatable. In fact, Mao’s grafting skills reached a high degree of proficiency and fecundity. In this respect, as Stalin’s student Mao actually surpassed his teacher.

II. “Undermining the Foundation and Sanding the Soil”: The Advancement of Chen Boda, Hu Qiaomu et al.

After putting a great deal of effort into politics and theory, Mao won the status of the Party’s chief Marxist theoretician as a result of his 1940 essay “The Politics and Culture of New Democracy” (later renamed “On New Democracy”). Now was the time for Mao to carry out his plan that had been brewing for so long, which was to gradually weaken the control Wang Ming and others held over the Theoretical and Propaganda Departments of the CCP.

A brief review of the rise of Wang Ming and others within the CCP reveals that this group built their fame on ideological grounds. First of

all, by becoming well-versed in the works of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, they raised themselves in the estimation of the Comintern and distinguished themselves from the others studying in the Soviet Union. They then leveraged their support from Moscow to be groomed for leadership of the CCP, using ideology to forge and consolidate their status in the core leadership of the Party. Since ideology was the only sphere in which people such as Wang Ming, Bo Gu, and Zhang Wentian enjoyed a genuine advantage, and was the only position from which they could hold the fort, the long-term monopoly of the Party's Theoretical and Propaganda Departments by Wang Ming and the others in the Soviet faction was hardly surprising.

Although Wang Ming, Zhang Wentian, and the others suffered a political decline following the Sixth Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee, they did not lose power overnight; the Soviet faction and its close allies retained control of the CCP's main Ideological Departments right into the early 1940s:

- CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department: Director Zhang Wentian, deputy director Kai Feng;
- CCP Central Committee Cadre Education Department: Director Zhang Wentian;
- CCP Central Committee Party Newspaper Committee: Chairman Bo Gu;
- CCP Central Committee Party School Committee: Chairman Wang Ming;
- CCP Central Committee Party School: Director Deng Fa;
- Central Marxism-Leninism Institute: Director Zhang Wentian;
- Women's University of China: Director Wang Ming;
- CCP Central Committee official publication *Liberation Weekly*: Chief editor Zhang Wentian.⁹

All along Mao was quite tolerant of the control that Wang Ming, Zhang Wentian et al. maintained over the Party's Ideological Departments. As a master strategist, Mao knew how to differentiate the relative importance of real power versus that of spiritual direction. From 1935 to 1938, Mao let nature take its course, while he also made a conscious effort not to express any objection to Zhang Wentian's leadership of the Party's ideological work. Mao's most pressing task was to lure the Soviet faction out of the leadership core so that he could first consolidate his own power

over the military and then seize control of the Party. Mao knew that once he controlled the military and the Party, he was guaranteed success in seizing the power of ideological interpretation. The Sixth Plenum in 1938 finally fulfilled Mao's wish to become leader of the Party; Zhang Wentian was formally stripped of his official title as the person with overall responsibility for the Party and instead he was put in charge of the theoretical propaganda and education work of the Party. Not long thereafter, Mao summoned Wang Ming back to Yan'an. In order to put Wang under his personal supervision and keep him from enjoying any real power, Mao had Wang fill the largely ceremonial post of head of the Central Committee United Front Department and additionally he appointed him to a number of culture- and propaganda-related posts. On the surface, it appeared that the Soviet faction had gained greater influence in the Party's ideological domain following the Sixth Plenum.

Mao dealt with this complex situation through a well-thought-out strategy of pulling Zhang Wentian closer while alienating him from Wang Ming. At the same time, he "undermined the foundations and sanded the soil" in the departments that Zhang headed, promoting young theoreticians with shallow roots in the Party in preparation for eventually replacing Zhang Wentian and the other members of the Soviet faction.

With his influence in the Party's core leadership in obvious decline following the Sixth Plenum, Zhang Wentian devoted his full energies to the ideological sphere. This was just when Mao called for a Party-wide "Study Movement." Under Zhang Wentian's direction, Yan'an compiled, translated, and edited a ten-volume Marx-Engels series of books as well as twelve volumes of the *Selected Works of Lenin*. Yan'an's young intellectuals drank up these classics, and the study of Marxist-Leninist theory was suddenly all the rage. Ironically, the launch of this "Study Movement" gave a new lease on life to Wang Ming, who had been somewhat lost and constrained after the Sixth Plenum, passing his days in the caves of Yan'an's Women's University of China and the Central Committee United Front Department. Wang Ming seemed to feel that the opportunity had again arrived for him to display his acumen in Marxism-Leninism, and he went about giving talks that were heartily welcomed by the young intellectuals in Yan'an's various organs and schools.

It was hardly surprising that Wang Ming remained in the limelight. Following the Sixth Plenum, Wang Ming was still a member of the Secretariat and the Politburo. Even more importantly, Mao's political report to the Sixth Plenum, "On the New Phase," included many of

Wang's political views. In order to demonstrate loyalty to Stalin and expand CCP influence in domestic political life, Mao adapted to the circumstances and, even more than Wang Ming, he actively promoted strengthening the United Front with the KMT. The Sixth Plenum's political resolution had been drafted by Wang Ming for the Politburo. After the Sixth Plenum, Wang Ming felt a loss of political power but he did not feel any sense of being ideologically thwarted.

Mao had no choice but to let Wang Ming and the others enjoy the limelight for a time. From the CCP's standpoint, what would the "Study Movement" study if not Marxism-Leninism? Mao could only watch one volume after another of the Marxist-Leninist works being translated and published in Yan'an as his resentment of Zhang Wentian grew.

From Mao's standpoint, Zhang Wentian remained entrenched in his old errors while adding new ones as well, and he was an irremediable dogmatist. After the "Study Movement" was launched, Zhang failed to apply his specialist theoretical knowledge to play up Mao's new contribution, while he also failed to raise his dissatisfaction with Wang Ming to the level of theoretical criticism. Even worse, Zhang single-handedly brought about a surge in the study of Marxist-Leninist works in Yan'an, and the accompanying blather and armchair strategizing provided a platform for Wang Ming and the others. All this must have been aimed at sidetracking the "Study Movement" for the purpose of allowing Zhang Wentian, Wang Ming, and the other "Party bosses" and members of the "academic clique" to continue to monopolize the Party's cultural and propaganda positions.

The fact is that Mao had greatly expanded the space he occupied in Party ideology since 1938, and Zhang Wentian, while controlling the Party's theoretical and propaganda work, had taken the initiative to cede the most important power to Mao: Zhang's assistant at the time, Wu Liping (also known as Wu Liangping), recalls that after the Sixth Plenum, the Central Committee stipulated that any important articles published in Yan'an's *Liberation Weekly* or *The Communist* had to be first vetted by Mao,¹⁰ and all of Mao's speeches and essays appeared on the most prominent pages of these publications.

However, Mao expected more than this from the Ideological Departments; his ultimate aim was to change the atmosphere within the CCP. He wanted to take over the ideological sphere—not merely to control it, but to totally occupy it. Publishing Mao's essays as headline articles, or giving Mao the power to vet other articles, did not allow him to

immediately change the atmosphere of pandering to Russia that had long been a fixed feature of the Party. What Mao wanted was to break down the quarantine between himself and the atmosphere that Zhang and the others had built up. This quarantine allowed the creation of endless amounts of pedantic and long-winded Party-speak and allowed the Soviet faction to leisurely manipulate the Party's entire belief system. In the face of this enormous intellectual rampart, Mao's new concepts and new literary style could never become popular, much less replace what was currently in use.

Mao had a profound understanding of Zhang's personality and behavior. Although deep down, among the Moscow dogmatists Mao considered Zhang no different from Wang Ming, Zhang had parted ways with Wang some time earlier and had been acting on Mao's advice over the years. Suddenly striking out at Zhang would send inevitable shock waves throughout the highest echelons of the Party without benefiting Mao in any way. For that reason, Mao could only continue making use of Zhang while trying to think of a better plan to replace him in the future.

On March 22, 1939, at Mao's suggestion the CCP Central Committee decided to hive off the Publishing Section (Liberation Publishing House) from the Party Newspaper Committee and to set up a Central Publication and Distribution Department in charge of political vetting and management of Party publications in Yan'an and the other base areas. Li Fuchun, at that time deputy director of the Organization Department of the Central Committee, would simultaneously serve as head of this department. Li Fuchun was Mao's old friend, so appointing Li to this position represented an important step to erode Zhang Wentian's authority.

Li Fuchun had long been engaged in Party work, however, and Marxist-Leninist theory was not his strong point. The main function of the Central Publication and Distribution Department that Li led was to "intercept" pernicious thoughts. Li's political loyalties were entirely with Mao, but given his lack of familiarity with theory, he was not of immediate help in terms of promoting Mao's contributions.

Mao appears to have anticipated this "disconnect" from the outset, but he revealed no anxiety or worry. The young theoreticians he had pulled into his orbit, Chen Boda, Ai Siqi, Hu Qiaomu, He Sijing, and He Ganzhi, did not yet have the practical experience for immediate advancement to leadership positions in the Cultural and Propaganda Departments. Mao had the discernment to discover that the "scholars" (*xiucai*) who would eventually become the backbone of his theoretical team would be made up of two kinds of people: the first group, exemplified by Chen Boda,

had studied in the Soviet Union but had no historical relationship with Wang Ming, Bo Gu et al.; the second group consisted of activists from Shanghai's Left-wing cultural movement, such as Ai Siqu, Hu Qiaomu, and He Ganzhi. What the two groups had in common was a lack of battle experience in the soviet areas and little status within the Party.

Among these young scholars, Mao particularly appreciated and valued Chen Boda and Hu Qiaomu. Having proven most helpful to Mao, Chen and Hu had earned Mao's trust and had become part of his inner circle, with Chen appointed secretary of the Politburo in 1939 and Hu appointed Mao's personal political secretary in 1941, giving them each important roles on the political stage of the CCP.

Chen Boda's greatest value to Mao was his theoretical enrichment of Mao's "Sinification of Marxism," which contributed substantially to perfecting Mao's new theory.

What attracted Mao was the way Chen's writings gave a Chinese flavor to communism. During the 1930s, in major cities, for instance Beijing and Shanghai, Marxist philosophers, economists, and literary theorists, such as Li Da, Chen Hansheng, Wang Ya'nán, and Hu Feng, were actively engaged in translating and interpreting Marxist works and they attracted a large youth following. Unlike Li Da and the others, however, Chen Boda did not engage in standard translations and introductions; his writings had an obvious originality. A student of the great historian Wu Chengshi,* Chen early on had utilized Marxist theory to explain the basic concepts of Chinese philosophy, staking out his own course among the Leftist theoreticians.

In his 1933 pamphlet, "On Tan Sitong,"† Chen explained Tan Sitong's thinking in terms of the Marxist principle of dialectical materialism and he proposed that it "contains rudimentary materialism and traces of imperfect dialectics."‡¹¹ Chen even proposed that Chinese Marxists should become successors to China's great philosophies,¹² in effect drawing close to the notion of the Sinification of Marxism. This was undoubtedly a rare and surprising concept in the early 1930s.

* Translators' Note (cited hereafter as TN): Wu Chengshi (1884–1939) was a famous classicist, paleographer, and educator who took the perspective of historical materialism.

† TN: Tan Sitong (1865–1898) was a late Qing politician, thinker, and reformist who was executed after the failure of the Hundred Days of Reform.

‡ TN: This quote is translated from the Chinese.

The tendency toward a nationalized form of communism as expressed in Chen Boda's writings was further reflected in the "New Enlightenment Movement" that he helped to launch.* The "New Enlightenment Movement" was an ideological and cultural movement aimed at promoting Marxism, carried out from September 1936 to the summer of 1937 by Chen Boda, Ai Siqu, Zhou Yang, He Ganzhi, Hu Qiaomu, and other Leftists in Beiping, Shanghai, and other major cities to counter the KMT's promotion of the "National Revival Movement." Chen considered the "New Philosophy" (i.e., Marxist philosophy) highly significant to China, but he sharply criticized the serious inadequacies of China's Leftist cultural movement. He felt the Leftists should engage in self-criticism because they were "unable to use dialectics to explain China's actual life" nor could they engage in in-depth, systematic analysis and criticism of China's traditional thought.¹³ As a result, the KMT was still able to use China's traditional thought as a powerful tool to defend its rule, and even the Japanese imperialists were using traditional Chinese thinking to dupe the Chinese people. Chen emphasized that China's modern culture should draw on the positive aspects of traditional Chinese thought, while also drawing on the great cultural traditions and accomplishments of the outside world, integrating the dialectics of Chinese traditional philosophy with the advanced foreign cultures under a Marxist framework.¹⁴

Chen Boda's scholarship and self-cultivation in classical Chinese philosophy and his unique views on the nationalization of communism were eventually discovered by Mao. In terms of the nationalization of communism, Mao and Chen were in virtual agreement. As soon as he met Chen, Mao's only regret was that he had not known him earlier. For a while they exchanged letters on the thinking of Confucius, Mencius, and Mozi.¹⁵ At this time, Mao had an urgent desire for theoretical and systematic reinforcement of his concept of the Sinification of Marxism, but he lacked the necessary help. Chen's appearance filled this yawning vacancy. In spring 1939, a year and a half after Chen's arrival in Yan'an, Mao released him from his post at the Marxism-Leninism Institute and

* Chen Boda published "Philosophy's National Defense Mobilization: Self-criticism of the New Philosophers and their Suggestions for a New Enlightenment Movement" on September 10, 1936, in the Shanghai Left-wing publication *Reading Life*, vol. 4, no. 9. He published "On the New Enlightenment Movement" on October 1 in *New Century*, vol. 1, no. 2. These two essays by Chen formally launched discussion of the New Enlightenment Movement.

promoted him to deputy secretary general of the Chairman's Office of the Central Military Commission (CMC), which made him Mao's chief theoretical aide. Once Chen stepped into the power hub, his character was quickly poisoned by the power-hungry atmosphere.* In this "Sinicized" environment, Chen rapidly degenerated from a simple teacher to an ambition-blinded power-monger.¹⁶

Unlike Chen Boda, with whom Mao became familiar due to his theoretical scholarship, Hu Qiaomu was employed as Mao's political secretary based on his writing skills and succinct style. Hu had been a backbone in Shanghai's CCP-led Leftist cultural movement in the 1930s. Remaining behind the scenes for a long time, he was much less well known than Zhou Yang, Ai Siqi, and Chen Boda. After Hu arrived in Yan'an in autumn 1937, the Organization Department of the Central Committee largely ignored him and assigned him to a position far from Yan'an, as an assistant to Feng Wenbin at the Anwubao (Anwu Fortress) Young Cadre Training Course in Jingyang County, Shaanxi Province.† There he served as deputy director of the training course and as propaganda head of the Northwest Youth Resistance Alliance (which replaced the disbanded Communist Youth League as the CCP organization that led the youth movement).¹⁷

These two years in Anwubao were a political loss for Hu Qiaomu, giving him almost no opportunities for contact with Mao. Most of the cadres in the Young Cadre Training Course had experienced the Long March as Red Army soldiers, and they had little in common with Hu in terms of temperament or interests. In May 1938, the Central Committee decided to establish the Central Youth Committee to replace the Central Youth Department, and it appointed Chen Yun secretary and Feng Wenbin deputy secretary. Hu Qiaomu was then absorbed into the Central Youth

* In a 1940 Yan'an discussion on "national form," Chen Boda grossly exaggerated the errors of Wang Shiwei, an intellectual whose thinking differed from his, and he implied that Wang was a dissident. In conversations with friends, Chen said, "The most important thing is to follow someone, and to follow him to the letter."

† Ostensibly established by the Northwest Youth National Salvation Association but actually led by the CCP Central Committee Youth Department (the Central Youth Committee), the Young Cadre Training Course, originally set up in Yunyang Township, Jingyang County, Shaanxi Province, was moved to Anwubao, north of Yunyang, in January 1938, and came to be known as the Anwubao Youth Training Course.

Committee^{* 18} and he established a close working relationship with Chen Yun. After spinning his wheels in Anwubao for two years,¹⁹ in July 1939 Hu was finally sent back to Yan'an. By then, Chen Boda had become Mao's political secretary and Hu was still an unknown, but with Chen Yun's support, Hu gradually had an opportunity to distinguish himself. On April 16, 1939, *China Youth* resumed publication in Yan'an, and due to his involvement in editing the magazine, Hu gradually attracted Mao's attention. In May 1940, the "Zedong Young Cadre School" was formally established on the foundation of the Anwubao Young Cadre Training Course, with Chen Yun as director and Hu Qiaomu as the person actually in charge, giving him even more opportunities to have contacts with Mao.

In 1941 Hu Qiaomu was formally transferred to Yangjialing to serve as Mao's political secretary as well as a secretary of the Politburo. Mainly engaged in copy-editing Mao's speeches, Hu quickly became Mao's indispensable right-hand man. As a new arrival at the power center, he was extremely circumspect and he kept a low profile until the height of the Rectification Movement in 1942, when Mao sent him to the Central Propaganda Department to replace Kai Feng as acting head,²⁰ thus overnight turning Hu Qiaomu into one of Yan'an's notables.

Although they arrived in Yan'an along with Hu Qiaomu in 1937, Ai Siqi, He Ganzhi, and Wang Xuewen had many fewer political prospects than either Hu Qiaomu or Chen Boda. Qi, He, and Wang had established sterling reputations in Shanghai's Leftist cultural circles in the 1930s and they enjoyed Mao's warm hospitality during their first few years in Yan'an. They were given teaching jobs at Northern Shaanxi Public School, the Central Party School, and the Marxism-Leninism Institute, with monthly allowances of 20 yuan as well as personal bodyguards.²¹ Mao frequently went to them for advice on philosophical and theoretical issues. For a period, Mao particularly valued Ai Siqi, frequently corresponding with him and inviting him to his cave for late-night chats. Over time, however, Mao's interest in Ai and the others waned. Mao appreciated Ai's layman's version of Marxism, but it lacked depth and still employed Russian-style dogmatism as a conceptual tool, so that "popularization" was little more than "textbookization." He Ganzhi, valued by Mao as a prolific writer,

* The Central Committee Youth Committee was comprised of Chen Yun, Feng Wenbin, Li Chang, Liu Guang, Hu Qiaomu, Gao Langshan, Huang Hua, and Song Yiping.

was offered a position as Mao's personal theoretical secretary, but he was too bookish and he declined Mao's offer in favor of concentrating on his writing.²² In any case, He Ganzhi's writing was too slapdash, so Mao respected his wishes and did not insist on drawing him in. Wang Xuewen was the most qualified in terms of in-depth scholarship of revolutionary history and theory, but he was too pedantic as both a writer and as a person, and his pronounced dogmatic tone made him unsuited for Mao's retinue.²³

Although Mao was somewhat disappointed with Ai, He, and Wang, at the time he did not demand perfection from them, and he actively assimilated the most useful aspects of their writings. For example, in the November 1936 pamphlet *China's Past, Present, and Future* (later renamed *China in Transition*), He Ganzhi stated that China was a "half-colonial, half-feudal society," and that China's present stage of revolution was that of a "New Democratic Revolution." Although this had originated with the Comintern, the expression was succinct and clear, and it obviously inspired some aspects of Mao's subsequent "On New Democracy." Mao used the strong points and rejected the shortcomings of these theoreticians who had emerged from the garrets of Shanghai with no training in the Soviet Union, and beginning from 1938, each was appointed to leading positions in Yan'an's Cultural and Propaganda Departments. Ai was first appointed chairman of the Association of Border Area Cultural Circles, and after the Marxism-Leninism Institute was established, he became head of the institute's Philosophy Department. He became secretary general of the Propaganda Department's Cultural Work Committee in 1939, and was appointed chief editor of the newly established publication, *Chinese Culture*, in 1940. He Ganzhi was appointed to the Central Cultural Work Committee and Wang Xuewen was appointed deputy director and dean of studies of the Marxism-Leninism Institute in autumn 1938.

From 1939 to 1941, Mao used the strategy of "undermining the foundation and sanding the soil" to gradually consolidate his influence and infiltrate the Theoretical, Propaganda, and Education Departments controlled by the CCP Soviet faction. Having enlisted Chen Boda and Hu Qiaomu as his wingmen, Mao now wanted to push the "Study Movement" into deeper territory and to create ammunition for a direct challenge

²³ Liu Xuewei recalls that Wang Xuewen used Leontiev's *Political Economy* as a textbook at the Marxism-Leninism Institute, that he "spoke very cautiously, and his arguments and key points largely followed that book." Although Liu Xuewei found Wang Xuewen's classes "scintillating," some of his classmates "dozed off."

to Wang Ming and the others in the form of a discussion of the Party's historical problems.

III. "Lobbing a Stone": Mao Compiles a "Party Book"

By late 1940, Mao could no longer tolerate the twisted academic atmosphere that filled Yan'an's organizations and he decided to change the direction of the "Study Movement." Mao's strategy was to "Shoot a man by first shooting his horse, and to capture bandits by first catching their boss." Temporarily ignoring the Party's mid- and lower-level cadres, he first released the Party's senior cadres from pure book-study and drew them into discussions on the sensitive topic of the Party's history from 1927 to 1937, in that way fanning the wild fire toward Wang Ming and Zhang Wentian.

Mao was playing with fire. In 1938, a Comintern directive to the CCP had explicitly warned the leadership to be discreet in its discussions of the Party's past in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts that would affect Party unity. Although this Comintern directive was still fresh in his ears, Mao completely disregarded it. During the following three years, Mao had consolidated his power base and he wanted to venture further by testing the response of other leaders.

In December 1940 Mao formally stated a number of viewpoints that he had kept buried in his heart for years. At a Politburo meeting on December 4, for the first time Mao criticized the policies of the late soviet-area period as ultra-Leftist line errors, which implied that the "Zunyi Conference resolution required amendment." This immediately provoked arguments at the meeting, with Zhang Wentian and others disagreeing that any line errors had been committed during the late soviet-area period.²⁴ Facing opposition from Zhang and others, Mao adjusted his language. On December 25, in an internal Party directive later published as "On Policy," for the first time Mao declared that the CCP had committed errors of Left deviation opportunism during the later period of the soviet movement, citing eleven specific aspects of such errors. Mao was releasing a trial balloon, using the relatively general and ambiguous concept of the "later period of the soviet movement" without explicitly stating that this stage was the time between the 1931 Fourth Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee and the 1935 Zunyi Conference. Likewise, he used "Left deviation opportunistic errors" in place of a formal judgment of "Left deviation opportunistic line errors."

Mao's choice of this time to state his views was based on his accurate