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Stan A. Taylor
Robert S. Wood

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Image and Generation: A Social-Psychological Analysis of the Sino-Soviet Dispute

Stan A. Taylor and Robert S. Wood*

When the Chinese Communists accuse their Russian comrades of the heinous sin of collaboration with the West, obviously more is involved than political polemics. There are, in fact, social-psychological factors involved which, when subjected to brief analysis provide some interesting insights. Utilizing the two concepts of images and of political generations, it is possible to demonstrate that one of the serious, if not controlling, factors contributing to the deteriorating state of Sino-Soviet relations is the different image of the external world, particularly the manner of working within the interstate system, held by the decision-makers of both countries. What we attempt to demonstrate, in particular, is that, as a result of singular experiences with the inter-state system (that is, between China and the external world and between the Soviet Union and the external world) during the formative years of the present leadership of these nations, certain attitudes and habits of behavior relevant to the external world were determined. Further, that these "images," particularly of accommodation-non accommodation and collaboration-non collaboration have tended to become one of the primary sources of the Sino-Soviet dispute.

In general, we are saying that in order to understand any crucial problem in international relations, it is necessary to know "not only what exists but also to understand what men perceive to exist and the resulting attitudes they hold." In other words, fruitful study and understanding of any aspect of the international system must include some concern for not only the

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*Mr. Taylor is an associate professor in the Department of Government at Bentley College of Accounting and Finance. Mr. Wood is an assistant professor in the same department at the same college.

actual behavior of the individuals within the system but their perception and images of the system. Our concern here is to examine why the Chinese and the Soviet leaders perceive relations with the inter-state system differently and how this difference in perception has contributed to the Sino-Soviet dispute.

*The Role of Images.* The theory of images, as applied to international relations, suggests that a nation's foreign policy is to some degree a function of the image held about the situation or object toward which the policy is directed. The goals which nations set and the inter-state system in which these goals must be achieved are the result of a nation's perception of the ends and means available to it. These perceptions are a product of the nation's image or belief system. To say that a nation has an image is not to impute anthropomorphic qualities to a state, since it is obviously true that only individuals can possess an image. It merely recognizes that within any given decision-making body, there may exist enough shared aspects of a common image to speak of a modal image. It is not only possible, but also useful, to speak, by way of metaphor and analogy, of organizations, states, or societies as possessors of images. This sort of metaphor recognizes that any state (when speaking of that state's action in international relations) is merely the "sum total of those major decision-makers who are empowered to make policies which are binding on the government." Thus, when we speak of the Chinese leaders' image of the external world, for example, we are referring to the most frequent or characteristic aspects of the individual images held by the sum total of decision-makers who can make binding decisions for China.

Once this image is developed it governs the manner in which the external world is perceived. All perceptual data and cues must pass through the image before they are cognized. The image is thus the "total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavior unit, or its internal view of itself and

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the universe." There is a dual relationship between perception and the image which occurs in four stages: First, early perception in the life experience along with physiological factors determine the creation of the image. Second, the image prepares an individual (or a group of individuals acting as a decision-making unit) to "see" in a particular fashion. Third, the actual input of information from the environment is filtered or metered through the image. That is, the image becomes the window through which all perceptual data must pass. On entering, this data must pay the price demanded by the image. And fourth, the information is evaluated and verified according to the image.

Thus, the concept of images assumes that the key to the explanation of why a state behaves the way it does is to be found in the decision-makers' image of the situation. In international relations (as in interpersonal relations) reality is internal to the observer. "A change in frames of mind among those dealing with great affairs, even though a matter of imagination, rates as a change of reality, for attitudes are part of reality in foreign affairs." 

**Political Generations.** The concept of generations as a tool for political analysis is relatively new and somewhat unused. It has been widely used by historians, novelists, artists, and sociologists but only rarely by political scientists. A generation

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in politics is defined as those who have undergone essentially similar historical experiences during their period of "social adolescence" or formative years. The great events and influences of this period must be analyzed in order to better understand that generation's reaction to present problems.

This stage of social adolescence is critical to the political scientist for in the years from fifteen to twenty-five virtually all of the individual's social and intellectual concepts are formed. An individual's basic views and modes of thinking are shaped and colored by all which influences him during this ten year period and this influence remains part of his image for the rest of his life. This is particularly true in regard to images and modes of thinking about international relations since a relationship between international events and domestic affairs is usually not sensed until the age of social adolescence.

The concepts of images and political generations are admirably suited to the study of international relations since, when used jointly, they can assist in ordering data and in explaining the behavior of any particular behavior unit. While the concept of political generations has been used to explain the development of revolutionary movements within a state, this paper uses this concept, along with the concept of images, to explain partially why the Soviet Union and China violently disagree on the extent to which even tactical accommodation with the "enemy" is acceptable. All of this, in some respects, merely points to the indisputable and unexceptional fact that the difference in historical and cultural experience and the concomitant geopolitical position of Russia and China have yielded different leadership bodies with distinctive perspective and modes of reaction. Yet, as in so much analysis, concentration upon the "obvious" can often be more fruitful than a search for the esoteric.

The following quotations from an editorial in the Chinese ideological journal, Hung Chi, amply demonstrate that one of the foremost aggravants in the Sino-Soviet dispute is the manner in which China perceives Russia as collaborating with the West.

The leaders of the CPSU have completely reversed enemies and comrades. They have directed the edge of struggle, which should be against United States imperialism and its lackeys, against the Marxist-Leninist fraternal parties and countries.
The leaders of the CPSU are bent on seeking Soviet-United States cooperation for the domination of the world. They regard United States imperialism, the most ferocious enemy of the people of the world, as their most reliable friend, and they treat the fraternal partners and countries adhering to Marxism-Leninism as their enemy.

If the leaders of the CPSU genuinely want unity and are not just pretending, they should draw a sharp line of demarcation between enemies and comrades... in order to oppose U.S. imperialism.

It is absolutely impermissible for them to treat enemies as friends and friends as enemies and to ally themselves with the U.S. imperialists... in the vain pursuit of world domination through U.S.-Soviet collaboration.10

Such widely divergent perspectives regarding accommodation or non-accommodation with the West are more than just "revisionism" and "dogmatism." They owe their existence, in fact, to deep-seated images of the inter-state system which in part developed in the thinking of the current leaders during their period of social adolescence.

The Chinese Experience. In assessing the impact of events on the lives of the present Chinese leadership it is necessary to answer two questions. First, was this leadership born within a particular period? and second, was the social adolescence period of these leaders marked by certain events and situations which would tend to foster the development of a singular image of the external world?

In any generational analysis of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership, it is striking to observe that the great majority was born between 1895 and 1905. In fact, of the relatively small number of Chinese leaders who have interlocking responsibility in the State, the Party, or the Military, all but two were born between 1895 and 1905.11 By going beyond this "interlocking directorate" and by resorting to less than satisfactory statistical devices (i.e., "average year of birth") it becomes clear that not only the upper level of leadership falls within this generation but that the lower levels do

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11See Directory of Chinese Communist Leadership issued by the Biographical and Information Section of the Press and Publications Unit, American Consulate General, Hong Kong, November, 1960.
also. Analysis of the membership of the Central Committee of the CCP provides the following data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Average Year of Birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Full members elected in 1945.</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Alternate members as elected in 1945 but most made full members at 8th Party Congress in 1956.</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Made full members in 1956.</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Elected alternate members in 1956.</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Elected alternate members in 1956 at the 2nd Session.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The average age of the 18 full members of the "Political Bureau" of the CCP in 1963 was 64 and that of the six alternate was 60. This would place the average year of birth at 1899 and 1903 respectively.¹²

A remarkable aspect of Chinese Communist leadership is that not only the current leaders stem from the 1895-1905 generation, but that an analysis of the Politburo, or the ruling clique within the Politburo, from 1921 to 1945 reveals that at no Congress did the average year of birth range beyond a period bounded by 1892 (the 1st Congress in 1921) and 1903.¹³ Several conclusions can be drawn from the above data, but those relevant to this paper are that the leadership of Communist China has been relatively unchanged since 1921 (the two obvious exceptions were the condemnation of Kao Kang in 1955 and the dismissal of Marshall P'eng Te-huai in 1959) and that the great majority of these leaders were born between 1895 and 1905.

This 1895-1905 generation experienced their period of social adolescence between 1915 and 1925. This general period

in Chinese history and foreign relations is a singular and unique period which could not help producing extremely distinctive modes of thinking and images of the external world. From a Chinese point of view, this general period can be characterized as one of complete betrayal by all foreign powers and one of complete disillusionment with the inter-state system. The revolutionarily changed educational system of China into which this generation was born signaled the end of traditional Chinese society. \(^{14}\) Contrasted with the earlier generation of the founders of Chinese Communism, this generation received little of the classical Chinese education and was much more at home in the potentially nationalistic modes of thought of the West. \(^{15}\)

Within the early lifetime of most of this generation (although not necessarily within their period of social adolescence) nearly every major world power made inroads onto Chinese sovereignty. Following the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, for example, and through the various devices of loans from foreign powers, the granting of exclusive economic and mineral rights, the creation of "spheres of interest" protected by nonalienation agreements, and through out and out leases of territory, the Chinese melon was sliced. By the end of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) Manchuria was divided between Russia in the North and Japan in the South and Japan had acquired control over Korea, a control which was officially recognized by the U.S. through the Taft-Katsura notes. Great Britain, through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902, realized that a recognition of Japanese interests in China would be the best defense against Russia.

Within the actual period of social adolescence of the Chinese Communist leaders, the foreign intervention did not lessen and this was complicated by deteriorating domestic conditions. The successful overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty in 1911 did not lead to a stable reformist government but rather to 13 years of civil war. During this time Western encroachment through loans and the acquisition of railroad rights increased. From the Root-Takahira Agreements of 1908


(which gave implicit recognition of Japanese interest in Manchuria), through the Lansing-Ishii notes of 1917 (by which the U.S. recognized Japan’s special relations in China on the basis of territorial propinquity), and including an entire series of treaties in 1917 and 1918 (by which Britain, Italy, France, and Russia agreed to support Japan’s claims in China at a future conference in return for Japanese destroyers as protection against German submarines in the Mediterranean), China was “betrayed” by nearly every major foreign power. The central theme of U.S. foreign policy in Asia throughout this period was to maintain an “open door” in China, which the Chinese perceived as singularly detrimental to their national interests.

In the eyes of the 1895-1905 generation, the events of the twenties were as disastrous as the unequal treaties of the earlier decade. The May 4th Movement (1919-1920) was a critical period in the development of future Chinese Communist leaders and undoubtedly contributed significantly to their image of the external world. The Movement itself was partially sparked by the betrayal of Wilsonian idealism at Versailles and by pressure from the Japanese.16

This kind of imperialism was not a sole monopoly of the Western powers. In the developing relations between Communist Russia and the struggling Chinese Communist Party, a pattern of betrayal developed which was characterized by the selfish use of the revolutionary movement in China to further the interests of the Soviet Union. Although the successful revolution in Russia was probably one of the important formative events on the lives of the Chinese Communists, later Soviet policy in China seemed to be dictated solely by the need of extending the “breathing space” and of maintaining Soviet national security.

Even an overview of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1920’s reveals several policies and actions which were undoubtedly formative experiences on the 1895-1905 generation of Chinese Communists. Three observations about this period are illustrative: One is that at no time were any policies of the Soviet Government or of the Comintern, no matter how detrimental they may have been to the interests of Chinese Communism, “thrown away merely in the interest of the Chinese revolu-

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16See ibid.
Another observation is that Soviet policy toward China not only ignored the interests of the Chinese Communists, but was dictated solely by the demands of Soviet security. Stalin's aim "was to concentrate as large forces as possible against the European Powers and Japan, the enemies of the Soviet Union," regardless of the effect of these policies on the Chinese Communists.18

A final observation about Sino-Soviet relations in the twenties is that Mao Tse-Tung was not the Soviet choice as leader and that Mao himself was quite dubious of Soviet advice and assistance from at least 1921 on. In fact, the whole emphasis of Mao's thinking and of his activities not only was unsanctioned by Moscow but was carried on without the knowledge of Moscow.19

Thus, following the concepts of generations and of images, the period from 1910 to 1930 was a formative period for the current Chinese leaders, who for the most part, were born within the 1895-1905 generation. As a result of singular experiences during the social adolescence of these leaders, a unique image of world politics developed which views any type of accommodation or collaboration with the "enemy" as not only deviation from the ideology, but as a betrayal and as portentous of actions which may be threatening to China.

The Soviet Experience. In examining the context within which the Soviet leadership developed, three factors stand out. First, while within the last century and a half, imperial exploitation and the anti-colonial revolt have been two of the most basic facts of Chinese life, Russia, both Tsarist and Soviet, has clearly been a colonial power. However traumatic the allied intervention of 1918-1920 may have been to the Soviet regime, it was not part of a pattern of imperialist exploitation. Russia as an imperial power was never as infected by the extreme xenophobia with its overtones of racism felt by the former Asian and African objects of colonial activity.

Secondly, Lenin and the Bolshevik intelligentsia conceived the Russian Revolution as part of a European revolution. Par-
particularly throughout the period from April to October 1917 it was assumed that a Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the ending of the war with a "democratic" peace, and a proletariat revolution in Europe were all part of a single process. Indeed, until 1922 there was the optimistic hope that the revolutionary spark would ignite throughout Europe, particularly Germany—a hope which to a much lesser extent survived throughout the twenties. In his pre-revolutionary writings Lenin seemed to envisage a world rigidly polarized into two ideological camps—a polarization which would terminate in the victory of socialism and an abrupt end of the essentially amoral balance-of-power politics. In any case, Lenin at this time believed a socialist revolution "unthinkable in a single country" and that it required "the most active cooperation of at least a few progressive countries in which we cannot include Russia."\(^{20}\) Emotionally and intellectually Lenin was linked with the West.

Lastly, when the hopes for a European revolution diminished in 1921, it became increasingly difficult to unify into a single and consistent policy the two facets of Soviet foreign policy—the encouragement of world revolution and the maintenance of national security. Moreover, as early as 1918, Lenin became increasingly aware that the capitalist world did not represent a solid hostile phalanx. The realization that the capitalist world was divisible even in the face of a Soviet Russia and that the security of Russia was not to be found in external revolution led the Soviet regime to accommodate its ideological pretensions to the amoral system of world politics. Following the concept of political generations, the period from 1920 to 1940 represents the formative period of the majority of the present Soviet leadership who, for the most part, were born between 1905 and 1915. An imperial past and an uncertain intellectual attachment to the West formed the historical and cultural background of this period of political accommodation. It seems evident that the combination of these factors would put the ideological polarization of Bolshevik doctrine within a different perspective than another or radically different life experience.

George Kennan noted that by the end of the thirties, the Western democracies were forced to ally or accommodate

themselves to at least one of the totalitarian powers in order to defeat the others. In somewhat similar fashion, it can be said that from 1922 through 1945 the Soviet Union was impelled for security reasons to accommodate itself to one or more of the Western regimes. In so doing it demonstrated an ability of maneuver, despite certain ideological inhibitions, which indicated a rapid adoption of traditional power techniques and the extent to which the revolutionary fervor had died down.

The developing Soviet image of the nature of world politics can be perceived in its successive attempts to gain recognition and guarantee its security. Despite the continued, though lessened, emphasis on the creative uses of violence and the inevitability of war in the class struggle, the Soviet Union showed surprising ease in accommodating itself to equilibrist politics, with all its "amoral" and non-ideological overtones. It is true that the hostile intents of dogmatic ideology often determined the mode of their competition and at times distorted the Soviet leadership's view of the internal and external configurations of power in the West, particularly in the case of ascendent Nazism. But, through it all, commitment to ideological bipolarity was definitely in a low key and any tendency toward virulent xenophobia kept in check—with the possible exception of the first Five Year Plan and then the reasons involved to a large extent the inward orientation and rising pressures of forced industrialization.

In Europe the regime displayed an increasing willingness to sacrifice the various national parties and the prospects of a revolutionary sweep through Europe to a solution of the more immediate security dilemma. The one serious revolutionary prospect after the collapse of the post-war uprisings was the disturbances and turmoil in Germany during 1923 after the French occupied the Ruhr. The Politburo membership wavered as to their appraisal of the revolutionary potentialities of the situation; but, in the end, the rewards of maintaining the Rapallo arrangement with Germany as a counterweight to the power of England and France seemed greater than any possible benefits to be gained by too actively assisting the German party.

In the Middle East, the conflict between Russia's revolutionary interests and its balance-of-power interests was less pronounced, given the possibility of dovetailing both these
considerations with the local nationalist attempts to remove the influence of the Western Powers, particularly England. Even here, however, when the two policies diverged, as they did in Kemal’s suppression of Russian communist influence within his country, the Russians strove to maintain friendly relations with Turkey and bolster that country’s position vis-à-vis Great Britain.

In China also the interests of revolution and equilibrist politics momentarily coincided. Soon, however, as in the Middle East, these interests diverged. Although Stalin attempted to maintain the coalition with Chiang, he was finally forced toward an open revolutionary break which resulted in an utter debacle.

The fact is that during this period every revolutionary attempt ended in failure and at times forced the Soviet government into extremely uncomfortable postures. When these debacles are contrasted with the relative success of traditional techniques of balance-of-power politics, the Soviet prolongation of this period of “tactical” accommodation with the capitalist sphere is easily understandable. But, as is so often the case in Soviet history, the sacrifice of the ultimate to the immediate often results in giving the immediate an independent validity of its own. The whole Soviet position on disarmament and collective security is illustrative of this point.

Before the establishment of the Soviet state, Lenin opposed disarmament on the grounds that it would hinder the course of world revolution. By 1922, however, Lenin had dropped his blatant opposition to disarmament, while maintaining in theory the two basic objections to disarmament—that war in a capitalist world is inevitable and that force was a prime instrument in the overthrow of bourgeois government. These two themes were played in a minor key after the collapse of the central European revolutions and the Polish war, only to be revived in the period of the first Five Year Plan when internal stresses were combined with external (vocal, at least) belligerency. Even during this latter period, however, disarmament was a major theme of Soviet diplomacy right up until 1934. The maintenance of this theme even during this period of stress cannot be seen simply as a technique to demonstrate Russia’s peaceful intentions and to stigmatize the West—though it was undoubtedly that. But beyond this, the disarmament campaign was part of the Soviet
drive for recognition and normal relations. Most particularly, the whole campaign can be viewed as part of the Soviet search for security.

On the level of theory, disarmament was still presented as a tactical device and at no time during the period did the Soviet Union abandon the basic belief in the inevitability of war and the use of force in social transformation. At the same time, however, disarmament was beginning to be presented as having value in itself quite aside from any tactical consideration. And even when the theme of disarmament was dropped, the Soviet Union chose not to lessen its accommodation with the non-socialist world and adopt a revolutionary stance—but in fact attempted to increase those ties in pacts of mutual security. The advantages of such an approach over a revolutionary posture were even clearer to the Soviet leadership than during the twenties. By 1934 it had entered into normal diplomatic relations and was a member of the League of Nations. Given the growing menace of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union dropped the disarmament theme and attempted to turn the international organization into an effective instrument of collective security. Further, where the earlier period was noted by the conclusion of simple non-aggression pacts with most of its neighbors, the Soviet government now entered into pacts of mutual assistance with France and Czechoslovakia. When this failed in 1938, the Soviet Union turned increasingly to the possibility of a pact with Germany which might offer them positive territorial advantage through an intermediate zone between Germany and the USSR. Disarmament, collective security, and territorial expansion were all phases of Soviet Russia's search for security. The abortive uprising in Germany in 1934 and the debacle in China made it even clearer that world revolution and non-cooperation were not serious possibilities. Moreover, it cannot be said that, in general, accommodation and a degree of collaboration with the West had been unfruitful.

Leninist doctrine and Stalin's reiterations emphasized the tactical nature of these successive policies. War as the engine of revolution and the goal of a Pax Communa in which the system of power politics would come to an end were still enunciated. However, as necessary means often become ends, so tactics pursued over a prolonged period acquire an independent validity. Interestingly, The Fundamentals of Marxism-Lenin-
ism published in 1959 made this point quite explicit. The distinction between strategy and tactics was blurred and thus gave Soviet policy at any particular time the illusion of greater orthodox purity:

The word tactics is often used to denote the political line pursued for a relatively brief space of time, and determined by certain definite conditions, while the word strategy denotes the line for an entire phase of development. But such distinctions were not always made. In the early stages of the working class movement (before the October Revolution), the word tactics presupposed the entire policy of the party, irrespective of any particular period. It was in this sense that Lenin used it . . . he did not consider it necessary to distinguish strategy from tactics.²¹

Now, although throughout the entire period the Soviet mode of thinking was essentially "revolutionary" and often determined the limits and possibilities of any concrete situation, nonetheless, the Leninist intellectual predisposition toward the West, the fact that Russia was not the object of prolonged imperial exploitation but was in fact itself an imperialist power, the security dilemma, and the immediate rewards of limited collaboration with the West as contrasted with the dangers and possible losses of revolutionary "adventurism"—all of these successively contributed to an image of the structure of the international politics which was neither a logical derivative of Marxist-Leninist ideological pretensions nor of more traditional geopolitical factors. But, in any case, the "mix" was of Russian vintage and the present leadership, who were reaching maturity during this eventful period, were bound in some significant degree to share its political image.

Borrowing for a moment from communist jargon, in an examination even of this limited facet of the origins of the Sino-Soviet dispute, it appears that the rift is "objective" and not dependent upon the "subjective" difference in personalities—be they Khrushchev, Brezhnev or Kosygin. The life conditions of the Soviet leadership have impelled them to approach the structure of world politics with different images and perspectives than the leader of a nation, albeit communist, whose conditions have been so radically different. In itself this fact

hardly explains the concrete issues rending the communist world but it does give insight into the patterns of reaction of the two leaderships in the face of those issues.

Summary. Given the singular image of world politics developed during the periods of social adolescence of the leaders of the Soviet Union and Communist China, it is quite clear why Soviet "tactical" accommodation with the West is perceived as treason by the Chinese. While the period of social adolescence of the Soviet leaders was characterized by frequent, albeit "tactical," relations with the Western nations, the same period in the lives of the Chinese leadership was characterized by repeated disillusionment with the inter-state system. The extremely xenophobic Chinese image of the world is a natural byproduct of the experiences of the Chinese leaders during the 1920's and the 1930's. It is equally clear why the hostility and xenophobia of the Chinese is viewed by Soviet leaders as unnecessary dogmatism and as a threat to the unity of international Communism. The social-psychological tools of images and of political generations add some insight and understanding to this continuing dispute.