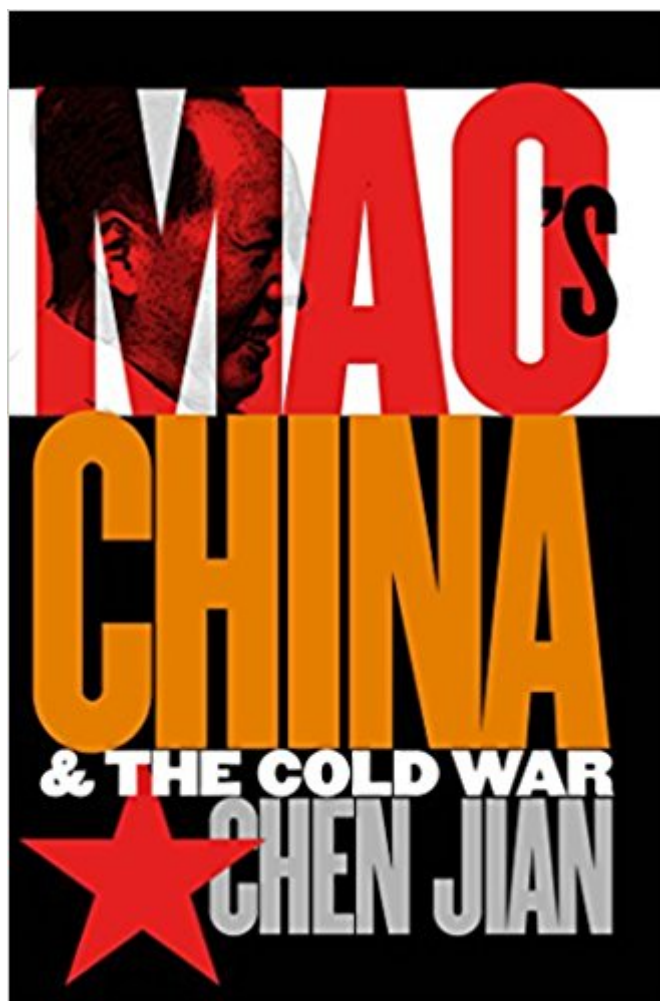


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Mao's China And The Cold War (The New Cold War History)



Synopsis

This comprehensive study of China's Cold War experience reveals the crucial role Beijing played in shaping the orientation of the global Cold War and the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. The success of China's Communist revolution in 1949 set the stage, Chen says. The Korean War, the Taiwan Strait crises, and the Vietnam War--all of which involved China as a central actor--represented the only major "hot" conflicts during the Cold War period, making East Asia the main battlefield of the Cold War, while creating conditions to prevent the two superpowers from engaging in a direct military showdown. Beijing's split with Moscow and rapprochement with Washington fundamentally transformed the international balance of power, argues Chen, eventually leading to the end of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the decline of international communism. Based on sources that include recently declassified Chinese documents, the book offers pathbreaking insights into the course and outcome of the Cold War.

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Customer Reviews

The author, formerly a student in Shanghai and at Southern Illinois University, uses primary sources from Chinese archival materials to provide new information on and analysis of Chinese leader Mao Zedong's behavior during the Cold War. Chen takes further the current literature on Chinese security interests (see Andrew J. Nathan and Robert S. Ross's *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress*, LJ 7/97; for Mao's life, see Philip Short's *Mao: A Life*, LJ 11/15/99, and Ross Terrill's *Mao Zedong: A Biography*, Stanford Univ., 2000) and presents two important points: First, he argues that

Mao made decisions primarily based on his ability to promote "continuous revolution" in China and bolster his own power. And, second, he asserts that Mao used the Chinese people's "victim mentality" (i.e., the feeling that foreign powers were poised to take unfair advantage of China's vulnerabilities) to rally public opinion. The author investigates several case studies, including the rise of the Cold War, America's "loss" of China, the Sino-Soviet alliance, the Korean War, the first and second Indochina War, the Polish-Hungarian crisis, and the Taiwan Strait crisis. We are fortunate to have this book because of the author's analysis and use of sources that are not generally available to non-Chinese. Highly recommended for all academic libraries and public libraries with international relations collections. Peggy Spitzer Christoff, Rockville, MD Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A major contribution to our understanding of Chinese Cold War history. Chen Jian's unrivaled control of the new and plentiful Chinese source materials is evident throughout, as an inspiration to other scholars in the field. (Odd Arne Westad, London School of Economics) Chen's extensive documentation will boldly challenge the revisionist view of a more pragmatic Mao. ("Foreign Affairs") We are fortunate to have this book because of the author's analysis and use of sources that are not generally available to non-Chinese. ("Library Journal")

Chen Jian's works on China's rise to international power are groundbreaking books exploiting Chinese (and Soviet too) source materials and interviews. This book follows along the same pattern established in his 1994 book, "China's Road to the Korean War," which argues that Mao's ideological commitment to the social and political revolution forecasted, even guaranteed, a shooting conflict with the United States. In *Mao's China and the Cold War*, Chen goes further in his analysis, demonstrating that it was Mao's worldview and determination to make China the central figure in the international Communist movement that was the driving force behind China's many foreign entanglements: Korea, First and Second Indo-China Wars, Taiwan Strait Crisis, the sundering of the brotherly alliance between Beijing and Hanoi, and the nearly fatal rift between Mao and Moscow. Chen deftly describes Mao's concern for "continuous revolution," and the fear that reactionary movements abroad would influence the Chinese population at home. Of equal concern to Mao was the effort to harness the people's enthusiasm for ultimately disastrous endeavors, such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Chen shows that Mao accomplished these "mobilizations" and maintained his grip on power by demonizing first the United States, then the Soviet Union. This form of politics served Mao well, allowing him to keep his supporters in check

(even if he ended up purging them in the end) and his opponents disoriented. It even allowed him the freedom to make the compromise most surprising of all -- normalization of relations with the United States in the early '70s. Chen points out that even with this act, Mao was pursuing his goal of radicalizing his own movement, particularly vis-a-vis the Soviets. Ironic, then, that in permanently casting away from the Soviet-led bloc (to which Mao had more than once pledged allegiance), Mao nearly guaranteed the former's disintegration and went a long way to undermining international Communism's appeal world-wide. A bibliographical essay addressing each chapter enhances the usefulness of this book for students and those getting acquainted with the Far East during the Cold War.

This is an interesting perspective of what Mao's perspective of the Cold War looked like and the thaw of Sino-American Relations.

Chen Jian has written an insightful history of the role China played in the Cold War from the time of Mao Zedong's rise to power and the Communist victory in 1949 to the resumption of cordial relations with the United States in 1969-72. Chen argues that Chinese foreign policy during the Maoist Era was driven by Mao's ideology of "continuous revolution," and that Mao cultivated, and then exploited, a "victim mentality" in the populace in order to mobilize his people whenever necessary. This continuous revolution included an ongoing push for an international proletarian movement and called for the eventual establishment of China's centrality to the movement. In addition, Mao believed that the eventual triumph of his Marxist revolution would garner China a place of prestige in the international community. By focusing on nine transnational events, Chen shows how China's foreign policy was informed by this Maoist doctrine and how Mao would redefine terms, when necessary, to keep his revolution relevant to the current state of world affairs. The nine events that Chen analyzes are the Chinese Civil War, the dissolution of U.S.-Sino diplomatic channels, the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet alliance, China's role in the Korean, the first Indochina, and the Vietnam War; the Polish and Hungarian crises, the Taiwan Strait crises, and the Sino-American rapprochement. Chen weaves the theme of Mao's continuous revolution throughout the book and supports his thesis with an impressive amount of source material. In fact, there are nearly one hundred pages of sources and citations, some of which are recently declassified Chinese documents as well as Soviet documents made available after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, newly released primary documents make up the smallest portion of Chen's source material, and much of the remaining documentation is information that was already readily

available. Chen evenhandedly examines China's involvement in Cold War events, seeking to prove his thesis rather than take sides or place blame regarding controversial events. However, as regards the scholarly debate among historians of "America's lost chance" in maintaining a non-confrontational relationship with Mao's China, Chen firmly places himself on the side of those who insist that such a lost chance is a myth. According to Chen, a Sino-American accommodation was impossible due to the inner dynamics of Mao's ideology. Since the opposition camp Chen refers to bases its position on what Washington could have done differently (which, according to Chen's thesis is irrelevant), Chen charges that the proponents of the lost chance theory are operating on an ethnocentric methodology. China's foreign policy, Chen maintains, was designed to ameliorate Mao's revolution and was not simply a reaction to U.S. policy towards China. Interestingly, Chen can also be accused of operating from an ethnocentric methodology. He presents his argument that a CCP-American accommodation was impossible due to Mao's ideology, but as William Appleman Williams has argued in *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, Americans were operating under an ideology of their own during that same period. The American ideology during this time frame, according to Williams, included the belief that American values were Divinely-ordained universal values and therefore any other worldview was not just wrong-headed, but evil. Williams cites several instances in American history where this "good versus evil" ideology informed American foreign policy. Hence, it can be argued that a Sino-American accommodation was impossible due to American, not Maoist, ideology. This view also challenges scholars that allege that Sino-American relations were made impossible due to tactical misjudgments and simple errors in policy-making by Washington. Throughout the book, as Chen examines the ideological motivations behind Mao's political decisions, he refrains from either idealizing or vilifying the Chairman. While this neutrality towards Mao's actions is commendable in many respects, it also leaves important questions unanswered. For example, a scant two sentences are devoted to the introduction and explanation of both the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the ensuing Anti-Rightist movement. These were brutal and tragic policies in the history of Mao's leadership, with extreme political ramifications, and as such, they deserved a measure of analysis in *Mao's China*. Another reason that the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Anti-Rightist movement should have received more coverage is because they have a direct bearing on Chen's thesis that Mao's political decisions were based on ideology. Many historians believe that Mao deliberately instituted the campaign to get political dissidents to identify themselves so they could subsequently be purged. It could be argued that because the violence directed at the so-called rightists followed the Polish and Hungarian crises and coincided with the de-Stalinization process in Russia, Mao was making

decisions based on threats to his personal power and dictatorial style of government, and not on his ideology. At the very least, Chen could have explained how the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Anti-Rightist movement fit into the overall scheme of Mao's ideology. The fact that Chen glosses over these major events and does not address the questions they raise makes him appear remiss in his scholarship; at worst, he can be accused of only presenting evidence that supports his thesis. A similar problem exists regarding the coverage of the Great Leap Forward. Though Chen makes it abundantly clear that Mao believed in the superiority of his ideology, he does not elaborate on how Mao could continue to believe this in light of millions of Chinese deaths as a result of his Great Leap Forward and other policies. How did Mao interpret the failures of his policies and the deaths of his people as he put his ideology into practice? How did he reconcile his utopian aims and the reality his policies created? Mao's China does not answer these significant questions. Chen's treatment of the evolution of the Chinese position leading up to the Sino-American rapprochement is one of the book's strengths. Traditional scholarship typically focuses on the deteriorating Sino-Soviet relationship and the advantageous strategic and geopolitical aspects that reconciliation with the United States would afford China. This approach explains why a Sino-U.S. reconciliation would have been valuable to China, but Chen explains how Mao made such a political about-face possible. According to Chen, Mao viewed the rapprochement with an eye to reinvigorating his declining internal political power. By redefining or inventing terms Mao was able to justify seeking friendly relations with the U.S.--the nation that, for two decades, he had declared to be his movement's primary enemy. For example, even though the Soviet Union was clearly communist, Mao announced that capitalism had been restored to the Soviet Union and redefined Soviet Russia as a "social-imperialist country." He then declared that this type of imperialism was more dangerous than the United States' variety. By reclassifying the Soviet Union, Mao could justify banding together with a less dangerous foe in a united front against China's new primary enemy, the Soviet Union. In this way, a Sino-American rapprochement was made compatible with Mao's ideology. In addition, by deleting the Soviet Union from the brotherhood of Marxist countries, China, in Mao's eyes, would become central to the cause. The status brought to China and the CCP by being recognized by the U.S., and soon after by the U.N., also helped to fulfill Mao's goal of a prestigious international position for China. For Mao, the Sino-American rapprochement produced positive forward momentum and progress for his Marxist revolution. Overall, Mao's China and the Cold War accomplishes its aims by illuminating the role that ideology played in Chinese foreign policy during the Cold War. Readers will find Chen's coverage of the evolution of the Chinese position leading up to the rapprochement enlightening, and other sections of book, such as the section on "ping pong

diplomacy," light-hearted and very entertaining. The book is well-written and very readable, making it ideal for a general audience or anyone desiring a general understanding and overview of Maoist China. Seasoned scholars may take issue with the fact that Chen oversimplifies at times, and at others he presents only one side. For example, Chen cites the Sino-American rapprochement as a major incident that led to the wholesale collapse of the Soviet Union. This is overly simplistic in light of the fact that Chen does not go into detail regarding the multi-casual factors that, in fact, resulted in the Soviet downfall. And as regards events leading up to the Sino-American rapprochement, Chen does an excellent job of revealing Mao's thinking and reasoning, but he does not develop the concurrent evolution of the U.S. side of the story. The book would have been enhanced by explaining the changes in the U.S. perspective. For example, a central issue for the Truman administration was the mutually exclusive American and communist worldview and their irreconcilable economic systems, but the Cold War as well as domestic issues shaped the Nixon administration into a security-focused government. Developing these contextual issues could shed light on the American contribution to paving the way for the reinstatement of diplomatic relations with China. Even still, *Mao's China and the Cold War* is an excellent contribution to the historiography of the Cold War.

Chen Jian's book for a number of years has been the standard "must read" text for any student of modern Chinese history. An excellent example of "new Cold War" scholarship, the book makes excellent use of newly available Chinese primary sources and secondary materials to explain policy making of the PRC leadership. The book's central argument is that Mao's endless pursuit of "continuous revolution" in China defined his priorities in foreign policy, so that essentially a confrontational foreign policy became a necessary backdrop to domestic political developments. The argument has its own critics; one may argue, for instance, that the domestic politics first approach is unduly Sino-centric, and ignores the dynamic of China's relationship with other powers, notably the US and the USSR. But for better or worse, Chen Jian's argument cannot be ignored. The book is nicely written, and I had my undergraduate students digest it with apparent ease. Highly recommended.

Mao's envy on the economic success of the now defunct USSR resulted to the classic exchange of thoughts through letters between the two great communist society leaders. this book contains all Mao's arguments on why USSR would not be considered as a socialist state.

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