

Book Review: *China and Africa, 1949-1970 The Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China*, by Bruce Larkin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971. Pp. 350. \$10.00.

In 1959, leading China scholars came together at Gould House in New York to formulate plans for organizing the academic study of the People's Republic of China. Born of the Cold War and the post-Sputnik era, professors such as John King Fairbank and A. Doak Barnett concluded that certain areas of Chinese society should be scrutinized. The direction of the field corresponded to the then-felt needs of the American empire and its policy planners: who was to succeed Mao, what competing interest groups would emerge victorious in any resulting "power struggle," and what characterized the nature of Chinese foreign policy initiatives around the world? Thus was born the systematic study of People's China, cast in the role of "enemy," dissected for possible weaknesses, analyzed in terms of adopting preventive countermeasures, and funded to the tune of \$70 million in the decade of the 1960's.\*

Originally submitted as a doctoral dissertation at Harvard in 1965, Bruce Larkin's *China and Africa, 1949-1970* falls within this genre of Cold War-inspired, "know-your-enemy" studies. Its most basic assumption postulates that Chinese foreign policy is fundamentally threatening, subversive, and in the final analysis, aggressive. For example, Larkin sees a stable, static world where an interloper--China--seeks "hegemony (p. 200)." His purpose is to describe Chinese activities in Africa as well as to reconcile seemingly contradictory aspects of Chinese foreign policy; i.e., Chinese support of national liberation struggles while simultaneously seeking and maintaining state-to-state relations with non-socialist governments (what Larkin calls "evolutionary" and "revolutionary" goals). Since China is cast in the role of outside agitator in the African community of nations, Larkin proposes to discuss the various mechanisms--attendance at Afro-Asian conferences, seeking diplomatic recognition, support of national liberation movements, granting economic aid, and offering an alternative ideological system and model for emulation--by which the People's Republic of China seeks influence and hegemony. In short, Africa is painted as the object of sinister and malevolent designs fostered by Peking, an Africa vulnerable to Peking's clutches since the demise of European colonialism has "created opportunities"

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(p. 3) for its foreign policy. Despite Larkin's conclusion that "short-term, pragmatic, evolutionary, and non-disruptive components of Chinese foreign policy have governed her African policy (p. 210)," Larkin nevertheless feels that Peking's "policy of preparation (p. 202)" advocates a stance of fishing in troubled African waters, looking for an opportunity to assert itself.

As long as the metropolitan countries--Great Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal--controlled Africa through a colonial system, the Chinese attempt to gain diplomatic recognition from various African states proved unproductive. However, in the late '50's and early '60's, as the tide of political decolonization became stronger and more African nations gained political independence, recognition became forthcoming, first from Egypt in 1956, then by a growing number of countries, until by 1970, she maintained relations with fifteen African states. Larkin even concedes that in those cases where African states suspended or broke relations--such as Dahomy, Ghana, and Tunisia--"incidents commonly cited to prove that China has suffered a general setback in Africa have been misread. The spectacular cases show that China has been the victim of bad luck, of untimely coups, and even of the uncontrollable aggressiveness of indigenous radicals (p. 146)." What Larkin fails to mention, however, is that Chinese initiatives took place in the context of overt hostility from an American government which, since the 1950 imposition of the blockade and embargo, had attempted to isolate China economically and politically, and to lessen its visibility as a successful national liberation movement.

The real specter haunting Larkin is not so much the granting of diplomatic recognition by various African states to China, but rather the support the Chinese have given to national liberation struggles, beginning with their backing of the FLN in Algeria, and continuing with their backing of Gizenga in the Congo in 1961 and Gbenye in 1964. Decisions as to which liberation struggle to back became complicated with the growing Sino-Soviet split of the early '60's, a schism which at times led to an opportunistic policy on the part of the Chinese. For example, one could argue that China supported Biafra mainly because the Soviet Union backed the Nigerian central government. Before the Cultural Revolution, China also backed UNITA in Angola, rather than the MPLA, since UNITA gave verbal support to the Chinese position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union and the MPLA did not; this has led to an embarrassing situation since UNITA forces have been reportedly fighting on the side of the Portuguese colonials recently. What is important to remember, however, is that the Chinese learned from such mistakes, corrected their

policy, and no longer grant support to any group which simply takes the Chinese stand in the Sino-Soviet polemics, but rather one which has real popular support. This is evident in a recent Chinese publication, the March 3, 1972, issue of *Peking Review*, that defines support for various African national liberation struggles, including MPLA.

What of Chinese economic aid? Larkin feels that the purposes of Chinese economic aid encompass several elements, such as gaining "expanded markets and economic advantage (p. 107)," an opportunity to learn about African societies, and generally to win friends and influence people. In short, Chinese aid policy is seen solely from the perspective of Chinese self-interest, never from the viewpoint that aid could be beneficial to the recipient. This one-sided stress on Chinese motives leads Larkin to some confusion when dealing with the Tan-Zam railway project, for which the Chinese reportedly put up a \$336 million loan when no other country came forth. Larkin sees the Tan-Zam partly as an effort to impress other national liberation movements of the scope of possible Chinese support, a "carrot" to entice political alignment along Chinese views. The Eight Principles of Economic Aid, first put forth by Chou En-lai during his tour of Africa in 1963-1964, is likewise dismissed as a camouflage for ulterior motives. The possibility that Chinese aid is given to establish economic independence rather than neo-colonial dependency never occurs to Larkin; in this respect, George Yu's recently published *China and Tanzania* (Berkeley, 1970) offers a more realistic, less hostile view of the co-operative nature of Chinese aid in the Tan-Zam project. Clearly, Larkin fails to understand the economic aspect of China's appeal to developing nations of the Third World, not only in terms of offering reasonable trade and aid arrangements that foster self-reliance, but also the specific forms of assistance--such as providing textile factories--which tend to develop labor-intensive industries in countries where unemployment and under-employment are a serious problem. In such ways, Chinese aid is more effective in the developing countries than Western aid.

Larkin devotes a couple of chapters to analyze the nature of the Chinese ideological threat; i.e., the propagation of the Chinese revolutionary model throughout Africa. First, he describes a number of elements in this strategy: 1) identifying the enemy--mainly U.S. imperialism; 2) waging a protracted struggle against this "principal contradiction"; 3) imbuing its adherents with a "doctrine of will" (p. 118). All these elements, like a successful public relations campaign, are designed to foster "(m)aintaining revolutionary momentum" (p. 124), the conviction that revolutionary action will

eventually prove successful. Organizationally, a communist party, an army, and a united front would be required for a successful liberation movement. But Larkin feels that proper prophylactic countermeasures can be taken to undercut the possibilities of successful revolution. He recommends co-optation for indigenous radicals--"If African countries continue economic development and achieve greater integration, the number of rewarding paths for socially conscious Africans to pursue should also increase (p. 207)"--and diplomatic recognition for China--"They (the African countries) could best accommodate China's interests and serve their own ends by conducting normal relations with China...(p. 212)." Since Larkin so obviously takes the perspective of the status quo--i.e., neo-colonialism in Africa and its chief supporter, U.S. imperialism--there is little appreciation in this book of the tremendous impact of China's revolution on other nations struggling to free themselves from colonial, semi-colonial, and neo-colonial rule. The fact that China's "new democratic revolution"--a united front led by a vanguard working-class party--did overthrow feudalism, colonialism, and imperialism--a strategy being successfully re-enacted in south Vietnam today--is merely seen as window-dressing, a cleverly concocted propaganda campaign designed to ensnare the gullible.

It is also interesting to see that Larkin does not put forth any Third World country as a model to be emulated by emerging African societies. Nowhere does he mention Nigeria, which figured so prominently as the requisite form of "democratic" and "responsible" decolonization in Africa, until, of course, the Biafra secession of 1967-1969 punctured this vision. Nothing is said of India, whose tradition of "non-violent" development under Gandhi and Nehru was often depicted in the early '50's as a reasonable alternative to the "violence" and "extremism" of the Chinese revolution in casting off colonial and imperial control. In short, nothing remains but the West European model of industrialization, and even Larkin has to concede that Africa will never catch up if it attempts to follow this formula.

Even as a social science, international relations book, Larkin's *China and Africa* comes off badly. A key assumption (necessary to maintain the fiction that China seeks hegemony) is that in Sino-African relations, all initiatives have been taken by Peking. What of African needs and interests when these have been congruent with China's? Larkin remains silent. Also, the book is sadly out of date already, neglecting to offer any insights into Chinese foreign policy during the Cultural Revolution. It may, of course, be argued that foreign policy remained in abeyance, at least until the post-Ninth

Party Congress (April, 1969); but Larkin fails to deal with (1) the repudiation of the Liu Shao-ch'i position in foreign policy, and (2) the equally important "May 16th Group" headed by Yao Teng-shan, whose "ultra-Left" tactics (having Chinese sailors distribute Mao badges to Italian workers, then confronting them when they refused to wear them) smacked of the crudest type of mechanical exportation of the Cultural Revolution.

Larkin's greatest shortcoming is his inability to grasp the *socialist* content of Chinese foreign policy, as a *logical extension* of its *socialist* society. He consistently imposes the technical standards of a bourgeois state's diplomatic apparatus. For example, success is defined in terms of "involvement of greater numbers of personnel," "access to regions," "commercial interdependence," "identity or communality of views," "capacity to conceive and consummate announced plans," "the entry of friends or clients to posts of authority (p. 126)," rather than the liberation of oppressed nations and peoples. As seen through Larkin's eyes, Chinese foreign policy becomes a series of propaganda pronouncements in the pages of *People's Daily*, *Red Flag*, and *Peking Review*, statements made in vacuum, designed to befuddle Western observers, incite rebels, or pull the wool over people's eyes. This propaganda, if I follow Larkin, conveniently serves to mask Peking's real objectives, i.e., "hegemony." This confusion over the *socialist* dimension of China's foreign policy is readily apparent in Larkin's attempt to resolve seemingly contradictory elements of Chinese foreign policy; i.e., supporting liberation movements while seeking diplomatic relations from highly repressive governments. Larkin resolves this by the formula of Peking's desire for "short-term" accommodation with existing states, and a long-term "policy of preparation" for revolution. Larkin's mental gymnastics are unnecessary: the Five Principles put forth at Bandung (which Larkin never mentions in his book) specified "peaceful co-existence" as a correct policy for relations between states of differing social systems. The Chinese position with respect to foreign policy was summed up in an important article published during the height of the Sino-Soviet polemics. Foreign policy is

*to develop relations of friendship, mutual assistance and cooperation among the countries of the socialist camp in accordance with the principle of proletarian internationalism, to strive for peaceful co-existence on the basis of the Five Principles with countries having different social systems and oppose the imperialist policies of aggression and war; and to support and assist the revolutionary*

*struggles of all the oppressed peoples and nations.\**

Taken from this perspective, China's state-to-state relations with Haile Selassie's Ethiopia in no way conflicts with her support of the Eritrean Liberation Front. As the Chinese have repeatedly pointed out, the question of a nation's destiny must be decided by the people of that country. Revolution cannot be "exported"; the Chinese have even chided Che Guevara for attempting to deny this maxim, and eventually failing in Bolivia because of the lack of understanding of this principle.

What of Larkin's contributions? Perhaps his greatest has been to lay out painstakingly and methodically the liberal academic viewpoint regarding Chinese attitudes to Africa. He incorporates the most prominent arguments of this position, such as the charge of opportunism (Chinese backing of UNITA since the Soviet Union backed MPLA), meddling (supplying weapons to Stanleyville), extremism (challenging Tunisia during the Cultural Revolution), ineffectiveness (suffering ruptured diplomatic relations with numerous African states), splittism (wrecking the Communist party in South Africa because of ideological disputes), and threats of revolution (the publication of Lin Piao's *Long Live the Victory of People's War*). By bringing together in one volume these arguments, and by providing a running commentary of Chinese public statements vis-a-vis Africa in the 1955-1965 period, Larkin provides an overview and synthesis not offered anywhere else. He also includes a good appendix on the organizational features of the Chinese foreign policy apparatus as it concerns Africa.

A strong argument could be made that recent events portend an even more important future role for the various African liberation movements. American, West European, and Japanese corporate capitalism, having Southeast Asia closed to their needs for perpetual "growth," will look to other sections of the Third World to recoup the losses sustained on the Indochinese peninsula. Recent articles in the *New York Times* indicate that a "low profile" effort on the part of American capitalism is quietly intensifying American government support for South Africa. In addition, the South African authorities--in collusion with Portugal--are currently planning the construction of the enormous Cabora Bassa hydroelectric power station in Mozambique and the subsequent settlement of one million white colonists to weaken FRELIMO and the neighboring African countries which give aid to the liberation struggle there. Thus, the contradictions between colonialism and neo-colonialism will intensify in Africa, and there will be an even greater need to know and to support these various liberation struggles; to relate the experiences 1) of the Tanzanian, Guinean, and Congolese (B) peoples in maintaining independence, 2) the various liberation fronts such as MPLA and FRELIMO in striving for liberation, and 3) the support that socialist countries like China offer to these peoples will attain even greater importance as a task for progressive writers to undertake in the future.

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\*"Peaceful Coexistence--Two Diametrically Opposed Policies" (Foreign Languages Press: Peking, 1963), p. 26.