

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

GCD-2

Chinese Studies Compared with Russian
Studies in the United States

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September 26, 1962

Dear Dick:

Since graduation from the Russian Institute of Columbia University in 1950, during my government service, and now in two months of visiting scholars and other specialists in Chinese affairs in Cambridge, New York, Washington, Los Angeles and San Francisco, I have had a chance to observe the relative efforts which have been made in Chinese studies and in Russian studies in the United States. This has not been a systematic survey, and, so far as I know, no one has made one. On the Russian side the Joint Committee on Slavic Studies, appointed jointly by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council, finished in 1959 a thorough assessment of Russian studies in the United States since their rapid expansion beginning in 1946.^{1/} I have found nothing comparable about the Chinese studies, and no comparison of the two.

I refer, of course, to the kinds of research, teaching and publication about the Soviet Union and Communist China which are absolutely necessary for the wise formulation of national policies toward these countries and the international movement which they head. Such studies focus on contemporary Russia and China, but they must also go back far enough into history and out far enough geographically and philosophically so as to place current developments in the Soviet Union and Communist China in perspective. The academic disciplines of political science, language, anthropology, law, international relations, history, economics, sociology, literature, geography, psychology, philosophy, education and fine arts must be brought together for an integrated examination of these whole foreign societies. I refer not to the steady work in all these disciplines which always goes on at universities, in private industry and in some government offices in the systematic pursuit of knowledge about everything, including Russia and China, but rather to the special institutes, research centers, programs and other efforts established

^{1/} Summarized in "An Appraisal of Russian Studies in the United States" by John M. Thompson and others in The American Slavic and East European Review, October, 1959.

with a sense of urgency out of a concern for a national need.

My impression is that Chinese studies have now reached the stage of development in the United States which Russian studies reached in 1950. We have a twelve-year gap measured in the books, scholars, monographs, teachers, language skills, libraries, government and private specialists, translations and popular media materials needed for adequate understanding and policy-making on China.

Russian studies accelerated later than they should have, but the knowledge and skills gap in that field has been reduced substantially. Chinese studies have begun to expand much too late, and about the only good thing which can be said about the situation is that many scholars, university administrators, foundation officials and a handful of men in the Government are aware of the urgency of catching up.

I am not able to evaluate the quality and measure the quantity of scholarly work in the two fields, but I respect the judgment of Professor A. Doak Barnett of the East Asian Institute of Columbia University who wrote in his 1959 book, Communist China and Asia:

Although a considerable number of studies on Communist China have been published, there is an urgent need for more scholarly research on every aspect of the Peking regime. If one compares what has been written on contemporary China over the past decade with the research done on the Soviet Union during the same period, it is clear that there has been a serious lag in work on China.

Perhaps the need for extraordinary effort in Russian studies should have been felt in 1917 when the Russian communist revolutionists were successful in their anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist cause. Additional efforts on China might have been prompted in 1927 when the Communist Party and the Kuomintang Party cooperated successfully in their revolution, shouting anti-western slogans. It is true that the 1937 Japanese invasion of China and Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union put the United States on the same side temporarily with China and Russia but that lasted only until 1945 in the case of Russia and until 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party gained control of China. The Russian-instigated North Korean aggression began in June 1950, but the Chinese had a million men fighting Americans in Korea in October 1950. So, by 1950 at the latest, measured by the potential threat to the security of the United States, research on both the Soviet Union and Communist China should have been going full steam ahead.

The Soviet Union was, however, both seen as a threat, and was an actual danger to the United States, by its support of the

Greek Communist guerrillas in 1946, well before the Communists seemed likely to win in China. Naturally, therefore, research on Soviet Russia got a head start. The Russian Research Center at Harvard was started in 1947, but the East Asian Research Center there was not organized until 1955. Time lags of this order are characteristic elsewhere, and they can be accounted for only by examining some other factors.

Some conditions now affecting Chinese studies also have applied to the Russian field, and were described by the Joint Committee on Slavic Studies as follows:

During the postwar decade certain conditions decisively influenced the pattern and rate of growth in Russian studies: the limited resources existing in 1946 in personnel, materials, and scholarly knowledge of Russia; the urgent need for trained specialists in the government and in academic life; the relatively limited interest in the Russian language and in general education about Russia among the public and in the colleges and secondary schools; and the inaccessibility of the Soviet Union.^{2/}

Insert "Communist China" for "Russia" and change the date to 1960 and one has a fair statement of analogous problems with respect to Chinese studies.

To account for the lag in the acceleration of research and teaching on China requires examination of several contrasts with Russian studies. It is easier for Americans to study about the Soviet Union than to study about Communist China. Russian is a hard language, but Chinese is far more difficult. The Soviet Union which matters (ignoring Siberia) is a European country and so the cultural gap between ourselves and Russia is smaller than with respect to China. The published literature on Russia in languages easy for Americans to read is greater.

Access to their own written material has not been facilitated by either the Soviet Union or Communist China, but the flow of books, magazines and newspapers from the Soviet Union has been larger, more varied and steadier. Since 1959 Communist China has tried to shut off the flow altogether, except for a few newspapers. This has made it very difficult for private scholars to see documentary source materials. The Department of State helps some; it distributes to 123 scholars and libraries the translations from the China Mainland Press Service, which are produced in an official unit in Hong Kong. The Department used to arrange through the Social Science Research Council for distribution to 60 research libraries of reports and

^{2/} Ibid., p. 425.

translations from the United States Joint Publications Research Service, which complement the Hong Kong materials; but since July 1, 1962 these are available only in hard-to-use microfilms and must be purchased through two authorized commercial channels.

Party due to self-imposed United States Government restrictions, but mostly due to the "bamboo curtain", American scholars have not traveled in Communist China, have seldom met mainland scholars and have not been able to arrange for reciprocal exchanges between libraries and publications media. Scholars need documents to work on. The lack of contemporary documentation in quantity from Communist China accounts for the temptation, even on the part of newcomers to the field, to work in the pre-1949 era for which documents are more plentiful.

During the years when the "iron curtain" in Europe was shut tight the United States tried to pry it open. Our policy toward China has been the reverse: to try to keep Communist China under quarantine. We have refrained, and have urged others to refrain, from having diplomatic relations or trade or aid or communications or any other contact with Communist China. In contrast with its stimulation of Russian studies, the United States Government until recently has not encouraged American universities to make any special effort in contemporary Chinese studies. These Government attitudes have inevitably had a dampening effect on interest in scholarship on China.

Republican politicians have not blamed Democratic politicians for the successful communist revolution in Russia, but such accusations with respect to the victory of communism in China, coupled with Congressional investigations of many persons thought to have had something to do with the disaster in China (including a number of scholars) have engendered a domestic political bitterness which has made the study of contemporary China a risky business. McCarthyism had a far more inhibiting effect on Chinese studies than on Russian studies. Certain experts on China would not talk to certain other experts during that period. A whole generation of "old China hands" in the Department of State was fired, shunted off into other work, or forced to resign. Senior academic experts in the Russian field saw what was happening and worked out an informal understanding that they would not be provoked into polemics and mutual denunciations. Scholars are naturally apt to draw conclusions and to comment on current United States foreign policy, but in the China policy area it has been thought wiser not to.

As I indicated earlier, I have not found any definitive quantitative measures of relative effort in Russian and Chinese studies. The most impressive evidence is the unanimity among experts in both fields in their opinion that an imbalance exists. I have collected a few other pieces of information which tend to illustrate the disparity and perhaps to give some idea of its order of magnitude.

Imbalance in government research is particularly difficult to measure because of the many independent intelligence and research organizations and due to the necessarily overlapping functions of policy formulation, operations and research. Information obtained is hard to talk about because of its security classification. I have reason to know, however, that the Department of State would agree that research on Communist China in the Department and in the government generally has not been given the attention it deserves. The Department is now trying to remedy this deficiency, but it has no authority to direct or guide research and analysis programs of other agencies. One fact of political life is that although the Department of State is best qualified to say what sort of research on Communist China is needed for the formulation of foreign policy, the Department of Defense is much more likely to obtain the necessary appropriations from Congress. Some of the foregoing points are suggested if one examines the research contracts let by the Department of State, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Office of International Security Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Air Force, the United States Information Agency and the National Science Foundation for studies on the Soviet Union and Communist China in the five years prior to April 1962. There were 201 contracts made with corporations and institutions outside the government. Five were made by the Department of State. 130 were concerned with the physical sciences, weapons technology, medicine and the like, and the remainder dealt with foreign policy and the social sciences. 152 had to do with the Soviet Union, 17 with both the Soviet Union and Communist China and 32 had to do with Communist China alone.

In the academic world the coordinating and stimulating activities of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council are important. The former administers the Joint Committee on Slavic Studies, which I mentioned at the beginning of this letter. The latter administers the Joint Committee on Contemporary China.

Since its establishment in 1948, the Joint Committee on Slavic Studies has had funds totaling about \$950,000, from private sources including foundations, at its disposal for the support of research, for travel and publication grants, for the procurement and reproduction of materials, and for the general development of the field of study. In addition, foundation grants in support of the Current Digest of the Soviet Press, published weekly, have totaled \$534,000.

The Joint Committee on Contemporary China was not set up until 1959. In 1960 a grant of \$250,000 was received for the support of its activities over a three-year period. Independently, the Social Science Research Council has received a grant of \$910,000 for support for five years of a program of research on the economy of contemporary China. A subcommittee on Research on Chinese

Society of the Joint Committee on Contemporary China has \$85,000 at its disposal.

The present financial situation of these coordinating bodies is not too bad. The two Joint Committees now each have to spend annually about \$85,000 for grants to individuals for research, support of conferences, promotion of the fields of study, etc. In addition, the American Council of Learned Societies has foundation funds in the amount of \$190,000 for expenses on the United States side for US-USSR exchanges for scholars in the humanities and social sciences.

On July 28, 1962 the Council on Foreign Relations of New York announced that it had received a grant of \$900,000 from the Ford Foundation for a three-year study of Communist China and a two-year study of policies and institutions of countries of the Atlantic area. The China study will be directed by Dr. Robert Blum, former president of the Asia Foundation, and will attempt to evaluate Communist China's international relationships and its internal political and economic problems.

The Universities of California (Berkeley), Columbia, Harvard and Washington were the pioneers in the remarkable post-World War II expansion of Russian studies. I have the impression that these schools, plus the University of Michigan, are also taking the lead in pushing work on contemporary China.

The Russian Research Center at Harvard was started in 1947 with a spur from United States Government money. Its 1948-49 budget was about \$150,000; it had a staff of 45 (counting secretaries); and it produced 5 books and 23 articles in that year. Over the years since 1948 it has grown to a staff of 71 in 1961-62 with a budget of about \$177,000 and has maintained its early rate of production of books and articles. The East Asian Research Center at Harvard was started in 1955 with a spur from private foundation money. It had a 1961-62 budget of about \$178,000, a somewhat smaller staff than the Russian Center, and a scholarly production rate about the same. In any large university like Harvard there are many departments and graduate schools which do some work on Russia and China and equip some students with knowledge in one or both fields, but I found agreement among the Harvard officials to whom I spoke that a fair measure of relative effort in the two areas can be obtained by neglecting these miscellaneous activities and comparing the progress of the Russian and East Asian Research Centers.

The Social Science Division of The Rand Corporation of Santa Monica, California, which has the Air Force as its largest research client, estimates that during the last ten years it put two or three times as much effort into Soviet research as it put into Chinese studies. The Division would like to increase its work on China, but is held back by the lack of qualified experts. As was true in

the Russian field during its early expansion, every newly-trained specialist on China will have many offers of employment during the next few years. Rand believes that expansion of Chinese studies will profit greatly from the experience gained in the Russian field but that learning of the Chinese languages will be the biggest obstacle.

Ten years ago at the University of California at Berkeley Russian studies were more advanced than Chinese studies. Increased effort and money has been put into both fields, but more on the China side, so that today the two areas are about even. Within the University's Institute of International Studies there is The Center for Chinese Studies as well as The Center for Slavic and East European Studies.

Looking ahead in Chinese studies, advantage can be taken of the evaluation made by the Joint Committee on Slavic Studies because there would appear to be analogies to every point listed in the Committee's forecast on the future of Russian studies in the United States:

This field of learning is facing a number of important challenges in the years ahead: 1) the continued expansion of the store of scholarly knowledge concerning Russia, and the formulation and testing of general theories concerning the development of Tsarist and Soviet society and culture; 2) the maintenance and improvement of programs of graduate education; 3) more considered attention to undergraduate and secondary education; 4) the training of teachers with a general knowledge of Russia; 5) the development and expansion of scholarly contacts and exchanges with the Soviet Union; 6) the establishment of arrangements for professional organization consonant with the increasing size and expanding functions of this field of study; and 7) transmission to the general public through a wide range of media of communication the knowledge of Russia that has been acquired by the scholar.^{3/}

The attempt of the Chinese Communists, by halting the export of books, newspapers and periodicals, and in other ways, to prevent outsiders from knowing the details of internal developments in China will continue to present special problems. The intelligence community of the United States Government is able to obtain some of this forbidden documentation. Some selected outside scholars with security clearances are allowed to look at it. This distri-

^{3/}Ibid., p. 427.

bution should be expanded and other ways should be found to exchange knowledge and opinion between government intelligence and research analysts and qualified specialists in the academic community.

The federal government should do a lot more to encourage Chinese studies. It should subsidize, both directly and through contracts for specific research, institutes and special research programs like those mentioned above. It should get materials which are collected, translated and produced by government agencies out into the academic community where they can be easily used. The mainland press translations ought to be made available to hundreds of students and graduate scholars through a subsidized subscription service. The penny-pinching decision to microfilm the Joint Publications Research Service should be reversed, and distribution of these publications should be expanded. The government's biographic reports on leading personalities in China should be reproduced and passed to scholars. Intelligence reports and analyses should be declassified or sanitized after an appropriate interval and made available to university libraries. This is only the beginning of a longer list of valuable things which the federal government should do. No item would be expensive in relation to typical national security projects in other fields. A million dollars per year would do wonders; ten million per year would revolutionize the pace and scope of research in American universities on contemporary China. No single agency would have to foot the bill; the Department of State should coordinate a planned program of assistance through external research contracts, and State, the military departments, and the Central Intelligence Agency should each contribute in an appropriate proportion.

The biggest question mark relating to the future of China studies must be placed beside official United States-China relations. If relations with Communist China are ever undertaken on a basis analogous to relations with Communist Russia the urgency of knowledge and understanding will, of course, quickly rise. There will be priority cables to answer, position papers to write, propaganda to plan, negotiations to prepare for, and estimates to make. An army of government officials like that now concerned with anticipating or responding to every utterance and action of the Soviet Union will be needed for Communist China. Some of the necessary expertise is available now, but it is inadequate even for the condition of no relations with Communist China. The reasons for increased effort in Chinese studies are sufficient, however, under existing China policy; they do not depend upon a change in China policy.

I hope that nothing I have written here can be construed as suggesting a reduction in effort on Russian studies to pay for an increase on the China side. That would be most unwise. The nation needs a continuation of the expanded training and scholarship to meet the Soviet threat as well as accelerated private and government programs to remedy the corresponding deficiencies in United States capability to understand and peacefully engage Communist China.

Cordially,