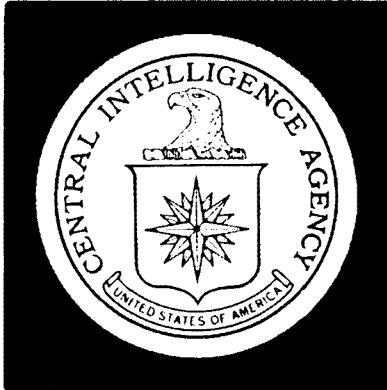


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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Report

*LEADERS OF COMMUNIST CHINA*

*III. CH'EN Po-ta*

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CR R 71-5.3  
August 1971

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## WARNING

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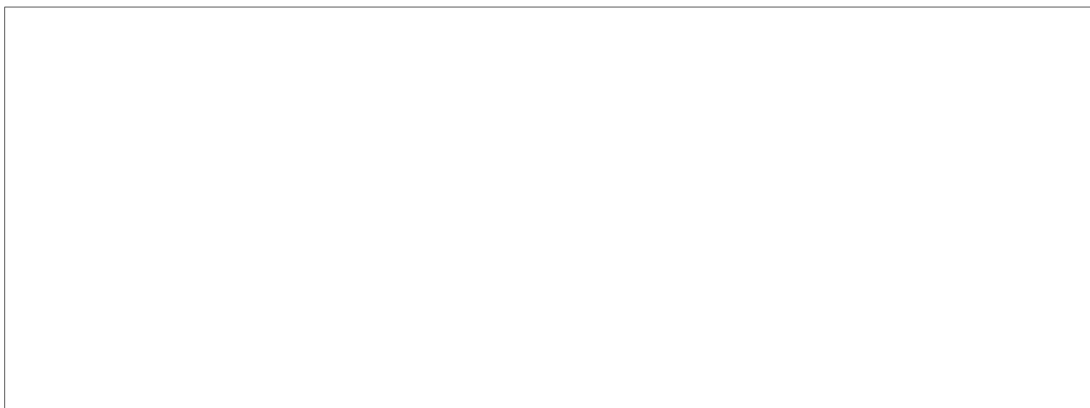
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## PREFACE

This report is the third in a series of in-depth biographic studies of Communist China's top leaders. The series will fill a gap in our biographic coverage of China's senior leadership and is launched in anticipation of future leadership changes.



The additional length of these reports over our conventional product is primarily attributable to the inclusion of more background information and speculative comment than is our usual custom.



Information in this report is current as of 15 July 1971.

*This report was prepared by the Central Reference Service and was coordinated within CIA as appropriate.*

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## BIOGRAPHIC BRIEF

Ch'en Po-ta's rise to fourth place in the Chinese Communist hierarchy resulted from his close personal relationship with Mao Tse-tung, whom he has served as personal secretary, ghost-writer and troubleshooter. Ch'en is a prolific writer, a Communist ideologist and a major figure in the propaganda apparatus. He has no individual authority or power base, however. From July 1966 through at least 1969 Ch'en was head of the Cultural Revolution Group of the Central Committee, with full responsibility for implementing Mao's directives on the Cultural Revolution.

Ch'en has not appeared in public since August 1970. His absence could be due to a heavy workload or illness, or he could be the object of official criticism for involvement with the extremist-oriented "May 16 Group." The Politburo supposedly censured Ch'en in 1970 for endorsing radical tactics during the Cultural Revolution, but he has not been criticized publicly in official Chinese news media, and he has not submitted a self-criticism to the Politburo.

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PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

CH'EN Po-ta  
(7115/0130/6671)

Member, Standing Committee,  
Politburo, Chinese Communist  
Party Central Committee

Ch'en Po-ta, longtime personal secretary and political agent of Mao Tse-tung, ranks fourth in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) hierarchy, although his status and political future are presently clouded. Ch'en has been a full member of the Politburo of the Central Committee (CCP-CC) since August 1966 and a member of the Politburo Standing Committee since October of that year.

A prolific writer, a Communist ideologist and a major figure in the propaganda apparatus, Ch'en is, next to Mao, the leading philosopher and theoretician of the CCP. He has devoted his career to bolstering and praising Mao, who has in turn called on Ch'en frequently during the past 30 years to help him develop his revolutionary society. In July 1966 Mao selected Ch'en to head the Cultural Revolution Group (CRG) of the CCP-CC, a position of great responsibility. As CRG head Ch'en was the chief administrative officer of the Cultural Revolution, Mao's attempt to eradicate all opposition to his will--both real and imagined--in the CCP and Chinese society.

Without Mao's support Ch'en would have little prominence. He has no individual authority or power base.

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Current Status

Ch'en has not appeared in public since August 1970. The New China News Agency (NCNA) press release on the 1 October 1970 National Day rally barely noted his absence. After the 1971 May Day rally in Peking, NCNA commented that there were members of the Politburo (unnamed) who were not in attendance because of "work or illness."

Some observers feel that Ch'en's absence may be due to his involvement in the selection of slates of candidates for the new provincial Party committees that have been formed since December 1970. Others believe he may be ill. Still others feel that he has declined politically because of a long-standing dispute within the Politburo over power and policy.

Recent reports state that Ch'en was involved with the "May 16 Group," an organization formed in 1966 by high-level, Peking-based dissident radicals. The group has been associated with political attacks on Chou En-lai, members of the State Council, and several military figures who are now on the Politburo. It was also accused of directing a destructive attack against the British Embassy in Peking in 1967. In late 1967 the group was denounced for espousing extreme, violent tactics.

A yearlong investigation of the "May 16 Group" by the Politburo appears to have been completed in the spring of 1971. Official Chinese news media then initiated a major political campaign on the anniversary of the group's founding by denouncing "sham Marxists" and the group's leaders who were originally criticized in 1967. Private study committees in China are now reviewing the report, which apparently includes criticism of Ch'en Po-ta. As yet, however, Ch'en has not been named publicly as the target of this campaign.

At several unpublicized Politburo meetings in late 1970, both Ch'en Po-ta and fellow Standing Committee Member K'ang Sheng were supposedly censured for espousing extremism during the Cultural

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Revolution. K'ang submitted a self-criticism to the Politburo, but to date Ch'en is not known to have offered an official explanation of his actions or a self-criticism.

### Early Life

Ch'en Po-ta was born about 1905 in Huian hsien, Fukien Province, to a poor peasant family and was originally named Ch'en Shang-yu (7115/1424/0671). He received some education at a village school near Amoy established by the overseas Chinese leader Tan Kah Kee (7115/0857/1649). Ch'en then joined the army of the local warlord Chang Chen (1728/6966), but he worked only as a clerk and secretary.

In 1927, shortly after joining the CCP, Ch'en enrolled in the Labor University in Wusung. He participated in Party work in nearby Shanghai, was arrested by police authorities, and was briefly imprisoned.

Released from prison in 1927, Ch'en went to Moscow, where for 3 years he studied Communist ideology and propaganda tactics at the Sun Yat-sen University. While there, Ch'en remained aloof from the "28 Bolsheviks," a group of Chinese students who later returned to China and followed Comintern policies. Because of his attitude, the group ostracized Ch'en, and in 1930 one of its members, Ch'in Pang-hsien (4440/6721/2009), officially criticized him for practicing "factionalism."

### Teacher and Writer

Returning to China in 1930, Ch'en, using the alias Ch'en Chih-mei (7115/1807/2734), became a history lecturer at Peking's China University. This school had the largest number of underground Communist Party members of any college or university in Peking. Ch'en actively supported the CCP during political demonstrations that occupied the student community in Peking during the mid-1930's. Also, along with a number of others, he carried on underground Party work in nearby Tientsin.

While teaching in Peking, Ch'en, under the name Po-ta, wrote a series of articles advocating

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a new enlightenment movement for China. When war with Japan appeared imminent he supported the Chinese Communist call for a united front with the Chinese Nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek. He urged Chinese intellectuals and students to resist all foreign aggression, and he vigorously rejected all attempts to revive Confucianism. Ch'en's articles were generally read by the young Chinese leftist intelligentsia and gained him his first claim to fame.

### The Propagandist

After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, Ch'en went to Yen-an, the remote Communist headquarters Mao had established in Shensi Province. He was assigned as an instructor in the CCP Party School and as director of the research section of the CCP Propaganda Department. He has not been identified in the latter post for a long time but is probably still the Politburo member who exercises the most influence over the research section's operation.

Ch'en's literary output during the 1930's was mainly confined to rewriting and interpreting party doctrine on a wide variety of topics. The subject matter of his articles included Chinese classical philosophy, 19th century Chinese history (an American scholar describes Ch'en as a competent historian of this period), and attacks on various Chinese warlords and nationalist leaders of the 20th century.

After his arrival in Yen-an, Ch'en wrote commentaries focused on Communist Party topics. These included articles on the Chinese Civil War of 1927-36; notes on Mao's Hunan peasant report; critiques of the land tax in China; and several works commenting on and praising Mao Tse-tung.

### Mao's "Brain Trust"

When Mao arrived in Yen-an in late 1936, he was not regarded as a serious Communist theorist. He

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was criticized by influential and powerful Moscow-trained Party members, who tended to demean him as a "local Communist" who did not really understand Marxism-Leninism. Mao therefore enlisted a number of intellectuals and writers to aid him in developing a reputation as a theoretician, to formulate doctrine, and to serve as his spokesmen on ideological subjects. These men were all trained propagandists.

Initially, Mao ignored Ch'en Po-ta because he was a poor public speaker and an introvert. Upon reading some of Ch'en's works, however, he became impressed by the latter's intellect, fervor and writing style and added him to his inner group of theoreticians. Ch'en soon became one of Mao's political secretaries.

Soon after the organization of his "brain trust" a prolific production of political articles by Mao began. The relative proportion of these works drafted by his team and by Mao himself is unknown, but all are indelibly stamped with Mao's imprimatur and are part of his theoretical arsenal. All members of the "brain trust" benefited personally from their close association with Mao, receiving various promotions and important Party assignments. (All but Ch'en have now either died or been purged.)

Ch'en remained in Yen-an until 1942, when he was sent to Chungking to become an editor of the local CCP journal, *Hsin-hua Jih-pao*, and to work at the Shenghuo Bookstore. While there, Ch'en was presumably under the direction of Chou En-lai, then the principal CCP representative in China's wartime capital. By 1943 Ch'en was back in Yen-an, where he resumed his duties with the CCP Propaganda Department.

#### Late 1940's--Early 1950's

After World War II Ch'en produced several polemical works attacking the political and economic leaders of the Chinese Nationalists. His 1948-49 critiques of Chiang Kai-shek's *China's Destiny* were bitter, effective and widely read.

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As a representative of the social sciences, Ch'en attended the united front Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which met in September 1949 to establish the People's Republic of China on 1 October. (He was also elected a delegate to the Second, Third and Fourth CPPCCs, in 1954, 1959 and 1964, respectively.)

Ch'en's activities in the early 1950's were focused primarily on propaganda. He shared responsibility for writing many of the important editorials in the Party's central daily newspaper, *Jen-min Jih-pao*. He also published several pro-Stalin and pro-Mao articles; one important article--"Mao Tse-tung's Theory of the Chinese Revolution is the Combination of Marxism-Leninism with the Chinese Revolution"--appeared on the 30th anniversary of the CCP, in 1951. Other articles criticized Chang Wen-t'ien, Ch'en Shao-yü and Li Li-san, all members of the CCP-CC and former leaders of the Party. The attack against Ch'en Shao-yü (Wang Ming) was the most extreme the CCP had published to that point.

In 1953 Ch'en Po-ta retired into an unexplained 2-year period of relative seclusion from public affairs.

Agricultural Spokesman--The Collective, the Commune and Hung Ch'i

In March 1955 Ch'en reemerged into public view as deputy director of the Rural Work Department of the CCP-CC. He was not entering an unfamiliar area, for in the past 20 years he had steeped himself in Mao's concepts of the Chinese peasant and land system. Ch'en was given the task of promoting agricultural collectivization, under Mao's direction. In October 1955, before the Sixth Plenum of the CCP-CC, he delivered an "Explanation on the Draft Resolution on the Question of Agricultural Cooperation." This speech was part of a bitter debate within the CC. Mao's forces eventually won, and collectivization was adopted as a Party policy.

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In 1958 Mao proposed the commune as a new organizational form for agriculture. Again, debate on his new idea within and outside the party was intense. In a move to insure that his views on the commune and other topics would be heard, Mao created a new Party journal, *Hung Ch'i*, and appointed Ch'en Po-ta as its editor. (The journal replaced *Hsüeh-hsi* as the major theoretical periodical of the CCP.)

Ch'en now had a vehicle through which he could express himself, and he wrote articles in the first several issues of the journal. Ch'en has kept himself directly involved in the publication of *Hung Ch'i* since 1958, but when he is working on other projects for Mao, his associates direct the journal's activities. He has not always had complete control of *Hung Ch'i*. For instance, during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, reports indicated that he was unable to persuade all the *Hung Ch'i* editors to support the goals of Mao's campaign. Only after the recalcitrant editors were reprimanded did the journal join in publicizing the Cultural Revolution.

### The Cultural Revolution

In 1965, as he had so often done before, Mao called on Ch'en Po-ta to aid him in waging political and ideological war. Ch'en was one of Mao's most trusted confidants from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. In the preplanning phases of the campaign and throughout the violent twistings and turnings of the revolution, Ch'en remained loyally committed to Mao.

By early 1966 Mao had decided that P'eng Chen (1756/4176), the first chief executive of the Cultural Revolution, was unfit and should be replaced. In July Mao named Ch'en head of the reorganized CRG. Ch'en's main associates in this body were K'ang Sheng, adviser; Chiang Ch'ing, Mao's wife and first deputy to Ch'en; Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Yao Wen-yüan, leaders from Shanghai who espoused radical solutions;

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and last, but probably most important, Chou En-lai, who, although not a member of the CRG, appeared with its leaders before large groups and was its most effective spokesman.

Some lower-ranking members of the CRG became identified with certain excesses of the campaign and were eventually criticized and dropped from CRG membership. These people endangered the reputation but not the overall authority of the CRG.

The CRG supposedly selected victims for purge and/or criticism, initially formed the Red Guards, and in stages approved slates of candidates for local, provincial and national office of practically every organization in China from mid-1966 through 1969.

Following the August 1966 Plenum of the CCP-CC, the Red Guards were given a free hand to purge anti-Party and antisocialist bourgeois national and provincial leaders who did not give wholehearted allegiance to the Cultural Revolution.



MAO, LIN, CHOU, T'AO CHU AND CHIEN APPLAUDING RED GUARDS AT A 1966 RALLY

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As the purge movement spread through the provinces, the CRG lost control. For a period during the summer of 1967, the nation was close to anarchy. The country's leaders were forced to move rapidly toward restoring order, and this task was largely carried out by regional military commanders, many of whom had been under fire from militant Red Guard factions responsive to the CRG. This brought about the purge within the lower echelons of the CRG, but its top leaders, such as Ch'en Po-ta, sought to disassociate themselves from events of the period.

The CRG itself has not been mentioned since late 1969, and with the winding down of the Cultural Revolution, its authority has undoubtedly been circumscribed.

#### Scientific and Economic Planning Positions

Ch'en Po-ta has represented Mao on several important planning committees. He was named to the ad hoc Scientific Planning Committee when it was organized in 1956 to formulate a long-range plan for the social and natural sciences.

In November 1962 Ch'en became one of seven new vice chairmen of the State Planning Commission (responsible for long-range economic planning) of the State Council. The organization soon began work in earnest on development of the Third Five Year Plan. Ch'en has not been identified with the commission since 1965, and it is not known whether he is still active in its affairs.

When the Chinese Academy of Sciences was restructured in October 1949 Ch'en was appointed a vice president. This was an honorary position, and he did not participate actively in internal administrative discussions within the academy. Chou En-lai, with Mao's approval, named Ch'en honorary head of a revolutionary committee of the Academy of Sciences in July 1967. Not much is known of the activities of this committee or of Ch'en's role in it.

Other scholarly positions that Ch'en has held since 1949 include those of vice president of the

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Marxism-Leninism Institute, member of the Association for Reforming the Chinese Written Language, and member of the academy's Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences.

#### Central Committee Membership

Ch'en was elected an alternate member of the CCP-CC in April 1945, at the Seventh Party Congress. He was elevated to full voting membership in 1946, after the deaths of several CCP-CC members. He was reelected a CC member at the Eighth and Ninth Party Congresses, in 1956 and 1969, respectively.



MAO, LIN, CHOU, CH'EN AND KIANG VOTING AT NINTH PARTY CONGRESS, 1969

Ch'en was first placed on the Politburo in September 1956 as an alternate member. He was promoted to full member in August 1966 and to member of the Politburo Standing Committee by October 1966.

#### Travel and Honorific Positions

Ch'en has traveled abroad only to the Soviet Union. In addition to his stay there in the 1920's, he accompanied Mao when the latter was negotiating the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance

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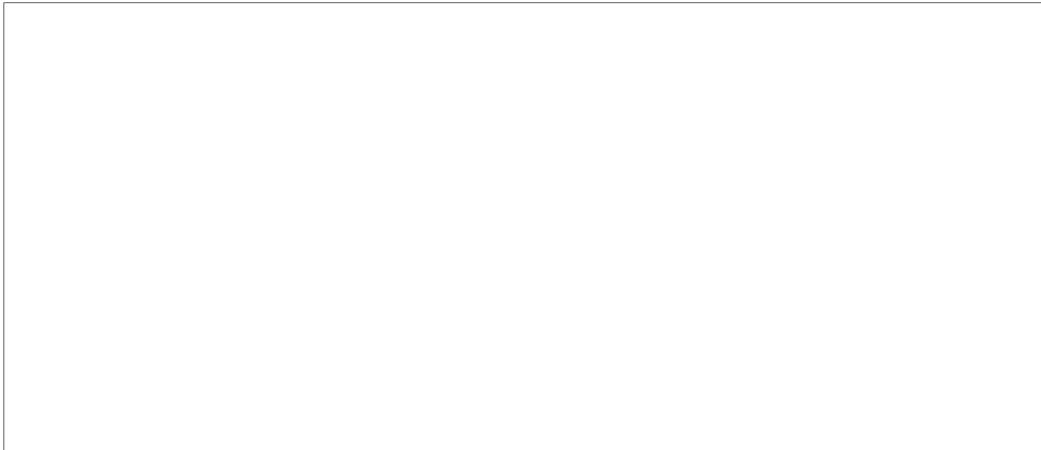
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during December 1949-February 1950 and when the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution took place in 1957.

Ch'en represented Shanghai at the Second National People's Congress (NPC) in 1958 and was elected a deputy to the Third NPC in 1964.

Personal Data



Ch'en is married. His wife was supposedly a classmate and friend of Nieh Yüan-tzu (5119/0337/2737), the radical firebrand of Peking University during the Cultural Revolution.

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