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978-1-107-01787-0 - Spying for the People: Mao's Secret Agents, 1949–1967

Michael Schoenhals

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## Spying for the People

Since the end of the cold war, the operations of secret police informers have come under the media spotlight, and it is now common knowledge that vast internal networks of spies in the Soviet Union and East Germany were directed by the Communist Party. By contrast, very little historical information has been available on the covert operations of the security services in Mao Zedong's China. However, as Michael Schoenhals reveals in this intriguing and sometimes sinister account, public security was a top priority for the founders of the People's Republic, and agents were recruited from all levels of society to provide intelligence and ferret out "counterrevolutionaries." On the basis of hitherto classified archival records, the book tells the story of a vast surveillance and control apparatus through a detailed examination of the cultivation and recruitment of agents, their training, and their operational activities across an eighteen-year period from 1949 to 1967. These revelations add an entirely new dimension to modern China's troubled social and political history. Although the story may be safely set in the past, the development of human sources to sustain an oppressive domestic order is nothing if not eerily relevant to students of the present.

Professor Michael Schoenhals has researched the politics and history of the People's Republic of China for more than twenty-five years. Now at Lund University, his publications on the subject include *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies* (1992) and, with Roderick MacFarquhar, *Mao's Last Revolution* (2006). In 2003, the Swedish Research Council awarded him the prestigious "researcher of excellence" title.

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## *Mao's Secret Agents, 1949–1967*

MICHAEL SCHOENHALS

*Lund University*



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I had not meant to write *this* book. When I first approached the Swedish Research Council for funding nearly a decade ago, I had a different book in mind – one that had been gestated on the basis of dossiers on members of the general public maintained by China's Communist Party in the 1950s and 1960s. My plan was to perform an archaeological salvage operation, to fashion accounts of lives on file in an evolving – as I had come to think of it – dossier dictatorship. Much as I already knew what was in the dossiers, however, it quickly dawned on me that my understanding of their context of creation was woefully inadequate. Somehow, before I could confidently tell my stories, I needed to develop a grasp of the Maoist surveillance state – the system that had generated so much of my raw data. Credit for allowing me to begin to develop just such a grasp must go to the anonymous flea marketeer who sold me a tattered copy of the 1957 *Lectures on the Subject of Agent Work*. From its title in Chinese I was, at the time, not able to tell what this nondescript Ministry of Public Security booklet was about, but it would play a seminal role in the conception of the research on which my findings would come to rest. For accepting my Christopher Columbus-inspired defense (“Admittedly, Your Majesties, I have failed to present you with a new route to India. However, I am able to offer you instead an entirely new continent”) of a line of inquiry resulting in a book very different from the one they had agreed to fund, I owe the board of directors of the Swedish Research Council a big debt of gratitude.

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Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CMPS	Central Ministry of Public Security
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSAD	Central Social Affairs Department
KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopastnosti</i> (Soviet security and intelligence service 1954–91)
NEMPS	Northeast Ministry of Public Security
NEPSC	Northeast Public Security Conference
NPSC	National Public Security Conference
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
PRC	People’s Republic of China