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Ceausescu's Journey to the East

Introduction: Romanian Specificity in Context

During Christmas 1989 television audiences around the world had their private and familial celebrations of love and thanks-giving interrupted by special reports from Romania. The six-month long fairy-tale of the peaceful end of Communism in country after country in eastern Europe brought to an end by images of tanks on the streets, civilian casualties, and haunting scenes of the Romanian Communist leader Ceausescu and wife Elena lying next to one another in a pool of blood.¹ In the span of a few short days it became obvious to the world that the events in Bucharest in 1989 contained the human will to dignity manifest in Berlin in November and its negation by force manifest in Beijing in June. Those who did not follow Romanian affairs over the course of the last 30 years had difficulty understanding why Romania fit into neither the pattern of peaceful democratization that marked the other east European changes of regime of 1989. Those who had followed Romanian affairs over the last few decades, faced the opposite difficulty, namely understanding why the regime did not succeed in suppressing the uprising as Deng did in China.

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¹ For an account of the events of 1989 in eastern Europe see Timothy Garton Ash, The Magic Lantern, New York, Random House, 1990 and Ralf Dahrendorf, Reflections on the Revolution in Europe, New York, Times Books, 1990

As the two groups of observers delved deeper into the specific and unique nature of the revolution, a consensus emerged that Ceausescu had by the 1980s consolidated hybrid regime form, some of whose characteristics were akin to those of the central European Communist states, some akin to Maoist China and Kim Il Sung's North Korea.

Romania of the late 1980s differed from its neighbors in eastern Europe in a number of respects.² Its economic model was closer to autarky than to the inter-dependent planned economies whose trade was managed through COMECON. Autarky led to impoverishment and by the mid 1980s Romania had the distinction of being the only Soviet Bloc country whose population as a whole was living at subsistence levels, with gasoline, heating, electricity and food rationed. Politically Romania was marked by a strange fusion of independent action in international politics, a mix of nationalism and Communism as sources of ideological legitimization, and a Leninist party system ravaged by corruption yet controlled by a personalistic dictator with a cult of personality.

The lynchpin of the system was the ideology of struggle promoted by the organs of propaganda and coercion, both of which grew to monstrous proportions as the economy declined and as winds of openness blew from Moscow. The state viewed society neither as the collective will of the people to be attended to (as pluralist systems would) nor as partners in achieving development (as reform Communist systems and most enlightened dictatorships would) but as a recalcitrant mass to be educated to understand, mobilized, led, and if need be coerced, along the path of multilateral development to the heaven of

pure national communism. Society in the last days of Communism consisted of cold and hungry masses fed by daily doses of two hours of propaganda involving the “Conducator” (leader) Nicolae Ceausescu, and two hours of national songs (Cantarea Romaniei.) All overt forms of dissent were ripped out by its roots, borders were sealed, radio was jammed, the secret police (Securitate) was active and believed to be omnipresent, art and culture was made to serve the ideology of struggle, and various churches were either co-opted or peripheralized and its leadership demonized.³ In all respects Romania in the late 1980s was more akin to North Korea than to Hungary.

How did it come to be this way? This paper argues that the Romanian regime (i.e. Ceausescu’s characteristic form of rule) emerged from his response to a three of critical events and experiences that marked his early years in power. First, consolidation of political power 1965-1968 taught Ceausescu that cadre policy and judicious use of denunciations, coupled with control of the secret services were means by which opposition could be eliminated. Second, his denunciation of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 allowed Ceausescu to discover the appeals of nationalist sentiment as an efficient mechanism of social control, personalization of power, and gave him the incentive to re-launch a campaign for industrialization along autarkic lines. Third, Ceausescu’s trip to China and North Korea in June 1971 opened the his eyes to the use of ideological mobilization to tie the elements of independence, autarkic

² This argument of historical legacies of the communist period is made most strikingly by Valerie Bunce, Subversive Institutions, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999 and Grzegorz Ekiert, The State Against Society, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996

³ For a review of Romania in the 1980s see Mark Almond, Decline Without Fall: Romania Under Ceausescu, London, Alliance Publishers, 1988; Dennis Deletant, Romania Under Communist Rule, Iasi, Center for Romanian Studies, 1999; Dennis Deletant, Ceausescu and the Securitate, London, Hurst and Company, 1995

industrialization, personal power, and moral Puritanism together by the use of ideological mobilization and a cult of personality.

Ceausescu's rise to power and techniques learned in eliminating all opposition is well documented in Dennis Deletant's Ceausescu and the Securitate. Analysts of Leninist party structures such as Merle Fainsod and Leonard Schapiro have described in detail the operation of techniques for the consolidation of personal power through control of the cadre policy and forces of coercion.⁴ Likewise Ceausescu's realization of the multiple uses of multiple political uses of nationalism is also well documented.⁵ It is the third element, namely the link between Ceausescu's visits to China and North Korea in 1971 and the emergence of ideological mobilization and a cult of personality to direct the people's energy toward his chosen goals that is hardly explored.

The Scholarship

Conventional academic wisdom sees the roots Ceausescuism as buried deep in the history of his visit to China and North Korea in June 1971. Dennis Deletant makes the case most explicitly, arguing "It is now clear that this visit aroused in him an admiration for the Cultural Revolution and for the grandiose spectacles dedicated to the cult of personality. The stage-managed adulation of Mao and Kim Il Sung, so meticulously choreographed, fired Ceausescu's imagination and he demanded the same upon his return to Romania."⁶

⁴ Deletant, 1995, pp. 68-102; Merle Fainsod, How the Soviet Union is Governed, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979; Leonard Schapiro, Totalitarianism, New York, Praeger Books, 1972

⁵ For a discussion of Romania see Deletant 1999, pp. 114-116; Katherine Verdery, National Idology Under Socialism, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991; For a discussion of central European regimes see Francois Fejto, A History of the People's Democracies, New York, Praeger, 1971; George Schopflin, Politics in Easter Europe, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993

⁶ Dennis Deletant, 1999, p. 119

While causally stated, Deletant's claim is limited. His essential argument is that Ceausescu's system of governance based on independence, rapid industrialization, personalized decision-making marked by a strict moral overtone, emerged from Ceausescu's responses to domestic and international factors such as the struggle for supreme control within the Communist Party of Romania, the rebuffing of Moscow and the his personal Puritanism.

Two other analysts of Communist Romania, Catherine Durandin and Ion Petcu concur with Deletant's view and locate the roots of Ceausescuism not in the Asian trip but in Ceausescu's will to protect his country from and reap the benefits of his policy of independence via a vis Moscow.⁷ Deletant's view implies that Ceausescuism borrowed little from Asian politics other than specific techniques of mass adulation. This interpretation suggests that for Ceausescu the cult of personality was a toy that he had consciously created in 1971. It also implies that the cult was not part of a larger political system but rather it was a stand alone form of political theater that was nurtured, perpetuated and extended to members of Ceausescu's family as part and parcel of a policy of political manipulation.

Another prominent scholar of the period offers a more expansive, though less causally verifiable explanation. Mary Ellen Fisher assumes causality, stating "The Asian trip evidently had a considerable impact on Ceausescu, who must have studied Chinese techniques of political and ideological mobilization as well as the extensive personality

⁷ Catherine Durandin, *La Roumanie de Ceausescu*, Paris, Editions Guy Epaud, 1988, pp. 206-209; Ion Petcu, *Ceausescu: Un Fanatic al Puterii*, Bucuresti, Editura Romanul, 1994, pp. 294-301

cult of Kim Il-son [sic.] already in operation.”⁸ Fisher develops this theme in her book-length study of Ceausescu’s form of political leadership arguing that Ceausescu’s cult of personality and ideological mobilization were techniques adopted as a means of augmenting the legitimacy he initially gained by standing up to the Soviet Union in 1968.⁹ The narrative logic provided by Fischer is that on his Asian trip Ceausescu realized that his popularity at home and abroad were based on the independent line taken vis a vis Moscow. Further realizing that it would be impossible for him to regularly do this given Romania’s dependence on Soviet technology and inputs, Ceausescu took a page from Kim Il Sung’s book and created the cult of personality as a means of disseminating the duplicitous myth that he is a maverick to a domestic and international audience while staying in the Soviet camp. The argument suggests that initially the cult was directed as much to an external as to a domestic audience. Later as economic failure discounted foreign policy victories in the eyes of the populace, the cult was mobilized to create “false legitimacy” through outright lies, overt deification, and a vitriolic barrage against domestic and international “saboteurs.”¹⁰ Fisher’s thesis, stated in a somewhat simplified manner is that Ceausescuism is Kim Il Sung’s cult of personality transplanted to Romanian soil that grew to monstrous size watered by the cesspool of failed economic policy which in turn was fed by the runoff of the autarkic economic policies chosen to complement the politics of independence.

⁸ Mary Ellen Fisher, Ceausescu: A Study in Political Leadership, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 1989, p. 180

⁹ This line of argumentation running through her Ceausescu: A Study in Political Leadership, was first introduced in Mary Ellen Fisher, “Idol or Leader? The Origins and Future of Ceausescu’s Cult,” in Daniel N. Nelson Ed., Romania in the 1980s, Boulder, Westview Press, 1981, pp. 71-116

¹⁰ Fischer, 1989, pp. 160-189

Katherine Verdery offers the most complex account of the influence of the Asian expedition on Romanian politics, stating that “in 1971, following a visit to North Korea, China and North Vietnam, Ceausescu’s ‘July theses’ inaugurated what has been called his ‘mini cultural revolution.’”¹¹ Verdery’s book investigates the relationship between intellectuals and media vis a vis state power in the Ceausescu era and concludes that “contests over the definition of cultural and scientific values occurred around ‘the Nation’ rather than something else.”¹² She sees the emergence of nationalism and its hybridized fusion with Communism as a product of the interaction of three factors: the persistence of the “Nation” in traditional Romanian culture, the socialist context that forced producers of culture to become sycophants to politicians—Ceausescu above all—through the process of bargaining for resources, and link made between re-commodification of culture by Communism. The implication of Verdery’s thesis is that Ceausescu’s Asian experiences had a profound effect on Romanian politics, but its effect was very indirect.

Extending Verdery’s thesis to consider the implications of the Asian visit would suggest the following line of argumentation. In China and North Korea Ceausescu witnessed the application of the ideology of struggle inciting the masses to perform Stakhanovite feats whose end goal was autarkic industrialization. Ceausescu was impressed by this mode of mobilization as it served two overriding goals: rapid industrialization and assertion of Romania’s independence vis a vis the Soviet Union. The means chosen by Ceausescu for achieving these three goals was a campaign for ideological mobilization in two distinct realms. Ideological mobilization in the party placed emphasis on an acceleration of

¹¹ Verdery, 1991, p. 107

¹² Ibid., p. 303

industrialization and fulfillment of the five-year plan ahead of schedule. Mobilization in the cultural sphere called for the purification of Romanian culture of foreign and cosmopolitan (read Soviet) influences. Ideological mobilization brought about investment in heavy industry, which in an autarkic context meant the creation of a rust-belt shortage economy. Mobilization in the cultural realm led to a similar perversion, whereby independence emerged in its gruesome forms of ethno chauvinism and protochronism. In this interpretation, Ceausescu's cult of personality arose not from a conscious will to transplant it from Korean to Romanian soil but rather as a byproduct of the process of ideological mobilization in the party and cultural spheres. This interpretation also implies that the Ceausescu did not have to actively nurture the cult of personality but rather it grew because the mobilization of the cultural system kept perpetuating it in the service of industrialization and independence.

The authorities in the field all unequivocally claim Ceausescu learned something of fundamental importance during his 1971 Asian trip. They do not, however, specify what exactly he saw, realized, or came to understand on his journey to the East. Nor do they explain how this accrued learning influenced his politics following his return to Romania in late June 1971. The three perspectives outlined above offer very different interpretations of the role played by the cult of personality in Ceausescu's regime. Each of the three interpretations is premised a different view of what Ceausescu experienced during the course of his trip. Deletant's "desire to reproduce the spectacles" interpretation depends on Ceausescu having witnessed and having been impressed by the techniques of mass adulation while touring the East and the conscious reproduction of mass spectacles

upon his return to Romania. Fischer's "cult as a means of legitimation" is based on Ceausescu's realization during his trip to China and North Korea that the cult of personality is based less on mass rallies than on the ability to control the media.

Verdery's complex thesis is at based predicated on the assumption that during his Asian trip Ceausescu was impressed by the near messianic power wielded by the individual who control the ideological mobilization in the party and culture.

Definitive confirmation of the role played by Ceausescu's trip to east Asia in the later political developments in Romania is practically impossible given the lack of candid of high level government officials who had access to the directives of the Conducator. Yet a careful review of the newspaper articles of in the Romanian, Chinese and North Korean press during and immediately following the June 1971 visits may yield evidence that serves to give credence to one or more of the interpretations suggested above.

The Evidence

Nicolae Ceusescu, his wife Elena and an entourage of half a dozen personnel including Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Manea Manescu, Dumitru Popa, Ion Iliescu, Gheorghe Macovescu and Aurel Duma left Baneasa airport Bucharest on the morning of May 31, 1971 bound for Beijing. The main event of the weeks prior to their departure was the launching of a campaign to accelerate the fulfillment of the five-year plan of 1971-1975. On Sunday May 30 the main party organ, Scintea, carried a full headline page call from the National Council of the United National Front to the citizens of Romania exhorting various groups (workers, engineers, agriculturalists, scientists, artists and producers of culture,

professors, teachers, soldiers, women, etc.) to fulfill the five year plan in less than the allotted time.¹³ The call was delivered in standard form and there is little in the text other than recurrent reference to the nation and patriotism that suggests a deviation from Communist orthodoxy.

After a week spent in Beijing, another in Pyongyang and a few days each in Hanoi and Ulan Bator, the Romanian delegation returns to Bucharest on June 25, 1971. Shortly thereafter, on July 6, 1971 Ceausescu presented to the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party a series of proposals to “improve the political-ideological activity of, the Marxist-Leninist education” of party members and all Romanians.¹⁴ Scintea published these “July Theses” the next day, which, taken together served as the basis for the “mini cultural revolution” whose aim was to transform Romania into a “new society inhabited by citizens who conform to [Ceausescu’s] expectations.”¹⁵ The July Theses essentially call for three major political innovations: 1. centralization of the control of culture, education and the mass media under the aegis of the Communist Party and its executive officials; 2. expansion of ideological and propagandistic efforts among the masses, using both re-education techniques and large scale cultural movements; 3. a synthesis of Marxism-Leninism and Romanian nationalism to provide content for the media and producers of culture. Taken as a whole, the July Theses represent a dramatic departure from earlier political ideas propounded by the Romanian Communist Party and represent a milestone in the development of Ceausescu’s ideological approach to politics in both form and content. Two policy pronouncements may be used as book-ends to

¹³ Scintea, May 31, 1971, p. 1

¹⁴ Scintea, July 7, 1971, pp. 1-5

chronicle the nature and extent of the change that took place in Ceausescu's—and by extension the Executive Committee's—thinking in the intervening 5 weeks, most of which were spent in Asia.

What did Ceausescu see, hear, experience in China and North Korea that affected his view of the role of ideology in politics? Let us Chronicle the events as viewed through the lens of the major party organs.

Scintea of Bucharest carried at least one major article chronicling the visit to the East every day of the trip, often in front-page and multi-page articles with photographs. The Chinese party daily Renmin Ribao of Beijing, and the North Korean Worker's Party Daily, the Nodong Sinmun of Pyongyang did likewise. Three types of articles appeared: 1. Articles recounting preparations and actual details of the events; 2. Speeches by Ceausescu and his hosts; 3. Communiques. Approximately 80% of the articles fell into the first category, 15% in the second, 5% in the third although it must be noted that narrative pieces sometimes included relatively lengthy quotes from Ceausescu, his hosts, their wives, high level government officials, and ordinary people.

The articles addressed considerable attention to four different subject areas: 1. Mass Spectacles (rallies, masses cheering at arrival and departure, banners, flowers, flags, paintings, massive street pageants); 2. Exhortations of Overt or Hidden Nationalism (praise of an independent line in foreign relations, calls for strengthening the anti-fascist and anti-colonial battle, calls for non interference in the politics of fraternal Communist

¹⁵ Fischer, 1989, p. 180

parties, exhortations for the construction of different forms of Socialism in accordance with national tradition); 3. Ideological Mobilization in Industrialization (oratory by ideological cadres in factories, on the spot guidance by top level officials); 4. Ideological Mobilization in Culture and Education (presentation of new educational models that involve both ideological and practical work, presentation of stage performances of nationally inspired songs and dances.) What is curiously missing is any mention of the mass mobilization of the Cultural Revolution in China whose greatest excesses were ended two years prior to Ceausescu's visit but which nevertheless continued until the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976.

Almost every report article in each of the three dailies contained a description of the large-scale spectacles that impressed the reporters by their scale, care, intensity, and care taken in their preparation. Similarly many articles contain quotes from Ceausescu expressing his admiration of the Chinese and North Korean people at large and particularly those who have come to greet his entourage with such affection. Photographs carried by the newspapers illustrate the nature of the mass spectacles in vivid black and white. A review of a set of typical articles should offer us insight into what Ceausescu witnessed in terms of mass spectacles and what his immediate, if somewhat scripted, impressions were.

On June 1, 1971 Renmin Ribao carried a front-page article under the headline "Ceausescu-led Party and Government Arrived in Beijing Today," that described the various manifestations of the celebration in which "countless Beijing citizens

enthusiastically welcome Ceausescu-led Party and Government delegation of Socialist Republic of Romania.” The article mentions that a festive mood reigned in the city as people from all walks of life waited on the street between the airport and the city center for a glimpse of the Romanian delegation. A front page article in the Scintea edition the following morning entitled “Party and State Delegation of the Romanian Socialist Republic Arrives in the People’s Republic of China” carries a similar set of observations citing that “many thousands of people in new clothes waited on the streets...with banners in Romanian and Chinese exhorting ‘Long live the Friendship between the Chinese and Romanian People,’ ‘Warm Welcome to the Romanian Party and State Delegation...underneath the flags of the two nations.’”¹⁶ The reporters allow themselves a little leeway in expressing their own subjective point of view in the middle of the article. They write, “A veritable wave of people, as Peking is witness to only for events of the greatest importance, is everywhere present. It seems that nearly all citizens of the capital came for this true treasure of Chinese-Romanian friendship. Everything is dominated by endless lines and acclamations of the populace.”¹⁷

Most of the first few pages of Renmin Ribao of June 2 also document the arrival of the Romanian delegation. The lead article entitled, “Ceausescu-led Party and Government delegation of Romanian Socialist Republic arrived Beijing. Hundreds of thousands of revolutionary crowds welcomed important guests on the road,” carried much the same message chronicling each and every meeting, handshake, step, and turn of the motorcade in a tone of awe and admiration. The Romanian press of June 3 carried the same events

¹⁶ Renmin Ribao, June 1, 1971;pp. 1-3; Scintea, June 2, 1971, p. 1

¹⁷ Scintea, June 2, 1971, p. 4

but enlivened it for a foreign audience with photographs depicting Ceausecu, Elena and Zhou En-lai riding on their feet in a late model convertible through Tiananmen square as rows upon rows of people greet them with enthusiastic waving of the arms.¹⁸

This spectacle of mass greeting was repeated over and over again with the very same elements present: masses of well-dressed people holding flags, banners, or flowers while enthusiastically cheering by the side of the road as the motorcade carrying the delegation passes by. They were variations on a theme. In Beijing performers dressed in traditional costumes performed choreographed music and dance scenes under a 20 meter high portrait of Ceausescu. In Nanjing hundreds of thousands of citizens waited around the city's many bridges decorated with placards stating, "We Welcome the Romanian party and government delegation." As the delegation crossed the bridge, people on and under the bridge began singing patriotic songs.¹⁹ Likewise, when the Romanian guests passed near the people's square, an organized chorus of citizens intoned, "We firmly support that Romanian people keep doing the independent rightful struggle!" "Long live friendship between the people of China and Romania."²⁰ In Shanghai the city committee organized military practice games for the dignitaries to view as they entered the city.²¹ In Pyongyang the, "working people of Pyongyang accompanied esteemed comrade Kim Il Sung, with the comrades of party and government, to met the guests at the airport...where Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu and his comrades got off the plane amid

¹⁸ Renmin Ribao, June 2, 1971;pp. 1-4; Scintea, June 3, 1971, p. 1

¹⁹ Renmin Ribao, June 6, 1971, p. 1

²⁰ Ibid., p. 4

²¹ Renmin Ribao, June 8, 1971, p. 1

loud acclamations.”²² The people carried two countries’ national flags, bouquets and various colors of balloons, posters bearing the words “Long live the Workers’ Party of Korea” and “Long live the Romanian Communist Party” “Warm welcome to the Party and government delegation of the Romanian Socialist Republic headed by Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu.” In Hamhung, workers, farmers, and young students surged into the main square where Ceausescu and Kim Il Sung had arrived from the airport and held a rally with small flags, bouquets, and various colors of balloons in their hands. The middle of the square was occupied by portraits of Kim Il Sung and Nicolae Ceausescu with baskets of flowers placed around them. “In the middle of the song of welcome Kim Il Sung and his wife Kim Sung Ae appeared in the stage together with Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena Ceausescu. At that moment, people shouted with joy like a thunderstorm exclaiming ‘Long Live’ as thousands of balloons were released to float heavenward....When Kim Il Sung shook hands with Ceausescu upon the completion of the latter’s speech, a shout of joy like a thunderstorm quivered the sky and the land.”²³

All of the communiqués, most of the speeches and a few of the reports published in the three dailies carried an unmistakable message of independence, national self-determination and even nationalism. This essential message was promulgated in various forms. Its most overt manifestations were Zhou En-Lai and Kim Il Sung praising Ceausescu for an independent line in foreign relations. In his address at Beijing airport Zhou waxed eloquent, “We are filled with joy that the Romanian people, under the guidance of the Romanian Communist Party led by Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu, won a

²² Nodong Sinmun, June 10, 1971, p. 1

²³ Nodong Sinmun, June 14, 1971, p. 1

seminal victory against the chauvinism of a great power in the titanic battle to build socialism.”²⁴ Ceausescu touched on the same subject upon his departure from Beijing, affirming a stance of mutual opposition to Moscow’s dictates. He proclaimed, “The strength of our [Chinese-Romanian] relationship is based on the fact that our societies are built on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and Proletarian Internationalism, on ample equality in reality and in reciprocal respect for independence and national sovereignty, on non-intervention in domestic affairs, and for comrade-like help...Every Communist party should elaborate its own political line, strategy and tactics of struggle. In light of today’s conditions there can not exist nor is there necessity for one center of the Communist or workers’ movement.”²⁵ In Hamhung, Ceausescu reiterated the message of his intent to maintain an independent line from Moscow noting that “the Romanian and North Korean people had been continuously been pressured by outside powers and struggled to secure their liberty and independence.”²⁶

Ceausescu re-iterated his calls for non interference in the politics of fraternal Communist parties in Pyongyang on June 14th, stating, “Romania is developing relations of friendship and collaboration with all socialist nations, takes action to diminish the differences that today exist between them...based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism...and strict respect for the independence and equality in rights, non-interference in internal matters. We believe that strong affirmation of these principles [as manifest in Romanian-North Korean ties] ... will stand as an example to people the world over...” In the same speech Ceausescu re-stated the same concept in the equivalent formulation in the North Korean

²⁴ Scintea, June 2, 1971, p. 3

²⁵ Scintea, June 8, 1971, p. 3

press, namely the anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggle directed at once against South Korea, Japan, the United States, and the Soviet Union.²⁷ In interspersed comments Ceausescu, Zhou and Kim sought to link “anti-imperial struggle” (i.e. China’s support of the Communist movements in Laos, Cambodia and to a lesser extent Vietnam and North Korea’s stalemate in the peninsula, hostility toward its colonial master, and strong antipathy toward both superpowers) to the Romanian rebuff of Moscow. The recurrent iteration of euphemisms for national sovereignty that mark the speeches of Ceausescu and his hosts point to the central importance attached by all sides to the Romanian rebuff of Moscow. For Zhou it justified the Sino-Soviet split of 1961, for Kim it legitimated his siding with China following the split and for Ceausescu it brought praise abroad in large enough quantities to outweigh and even overwhelm the negative sentiments held toward him by the leaders of the Warsaw Pact nations.

On June 7 Ceausescu toured the Ma Lu commune on the Yellow river and proceeded afterwards to inspect the Shanghai shipyards. Reports of both visits are filled with data on the enterprises in question with a focus on their economic successes. Both reports also contain excerpts of speeches made by Ceausescu on the spot. The difference between the speeches is striking. While at the commune Ceausescu exclaimed platitudes congratulating the agriculturalists, at the shipyards he exclaimed that, “in Romania as well the working classes, united with the agriculturalists, and all working people has been fighting to gain the victories of socialism...and under the leadership of the Communist Party is giving birth to a new socialist society to assure the well-being and happiness of

²⁶ Nodong Sinmun, June 14, 1971, p. 1

²⁷ Scintea, June 15, 1971, p. 3

all working people through unhindered development and national independence.”²⁸ On June 13th, the delegation visited Hamhung, the second largest city in North Korea and a major industrial center. The delegation visited a machine plant and took part in a mass meeting held in the town square. Ceausescu’s comments on North Korean industrialization as conveyed in the press amounts to but one short but provocative sentence, namely, “We evaluate DPRK’s efforts highly in that it improved the living standards of people in industry, agriculture, science, education, and culture are also developing.”²⁹ From the sparse evidence presented by the press, Ceausescu was not particularly impressed by communal farming, but he did make an intellectual link between industrialization and national independence on the one hand and the possibility of intensive investment in economic growth that does not necessarily squeeze out consumption.

During the visit to China and North Korea, Ceausescu had ample opportunity to witness ideological mobilization in education and culture firsthand. His experiences fall into two categories, visits to Universities in both countries and performances of mass spectacles of theater, dance, and drama on national themes performed in a socialist realist style. Both sets of experiences seem to have made a great impression on Ceausescu.

The day following their arrival in China, Ceausescu and the delegation visited Qing-Hwa University in Beijing. The cordiality and warmth of this visit is readily apparent both in the reporter’s text and in the attendant photos that portray entire delegation arm in arm

²⁸ Scintea, June 8, 1971, p. 3

²⁹ Nodong Sinmun, June 14, 1971, p. 3

with smiling, enthusiastic students, some in Red Guard uniforms. The spectacle must have been unusual, though pleasant for Ceausescu. Instead of serious students walking around Ceausescu saw, “red flags, colorful flags and cards of welcoming words hanging from the ceiling on every floor of the building. Thousands of faculty members and students stood on both sides of the path where the Romanian guests walked through and enthusiastically welcomed the guests. They were carrying two countries’ national flags and bouquets, singing and dancing, and shouting with joy.”³⁰ The entourage visited two machine plants at the university, after which Ceausescu concluded by saying, “I am very happy to visit here. What you have done till now leads us to see that you have been making efforts to synthesize education and production; this process turns university students into capable and productive workers.”³¹ On June 11th, the Romanian delegation visited the People’s Economy College in Pyongyang. The Nodong Sinmun reported that, “The Romanian guests showed a deep interest in the live educational methodology in which the theory and practice are closely related. Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu conversed with some students who had worked as plant managers or engineers before studying at the university. He said that the structure of cultivating cadres in the university was very good.”³² These newspaper accounts of the two visits to institutions of higher learning suggests that Ceausescu was very much taken with the idea of prefacing or combining theoretical education with practical training in a skill. It is not, however, apparent from the accounts whether Ceausescu was aware that during for three years, 1966-1969, during the height of the Cultural Revolution, universities across China were closed and that the combination of theoretical and vocational education was not a product of a new

³⁰ Renmin Ribao, June 3, 1971, p. 1

³¹ Ibid., p. 3

educational method but rather marked the last remaining vestiges of an educational system that had been thoroughly destroyed by politically driven fanaticism.

On June 3, 1971 the Chinese Communist Party and Bureau of Foreign Affairs hosted a theater performance to welcome the Party and Government delegation of the Romanian Socialist Republic. This was Ceausescu's introduction to socialist realism a la Jiang Qing's revolution in culture. The Renmin Ribao reported that the "Romanian guests watched a modern art performance on revolution entitled 'Red Color Female Soldiers.'" ³³ The evening of June 8th the Romanian visitors to Shanghai were treated to a rendition of another piece of revolutionary modern art performance entitled "White Haired Woman." ³⁴ On June 10th, a dance entitled "Our Honorable Country" was performed in Pyongyang as a sign of welcome for the Romanian delegation. The Nodong Sinmun reported that, "the dance was greatly appreciated highly by the [Romanian] guests because it was ideologically artistic....After the performance, comrade Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena Ceausescu gave flower baskets to the performers celebrating the fruitful result of the performance." ³⁵ Other than these brief comments Ceausescu's impressions of these pieces of revolutionary theater were not reported.

In his parting speech given at the mass meeting in Pyongyang on June 14th, Ceausescu summarized his experiences in North Korea. The impressions he chose to highlight were: appreciation of the hospitality accorded him by the people, admiration for the

³² Nodong Sinmun, June 12, 1971, p. 1

³³ Renmin Ribao, June 4, 1971, p. 3

³⁴ Renmin Ribao, June 9, 1971, p. 3

³⁵ Nodong Sinmun, June 11, 1971, p. 2

achievement North Korea had in developing its agriculture and industry all the while providing an increasing standard of living for its people, interest in the educational experiments under way to combine theory and practice, and resonance with “performances of a high artistic level which show concern paid to art which is a powerful weapon in enhancing the consciousness of the masses and in socialist education.”³⁶

Conclusion: What does the Evidence Imply?

It is hard if not impossible to draw definitive conclusions for a transfer of ideas from an account of a journey as reported second hand by a press consummately at home in the world of propaganda. Following an extensive review of the Chinese, Korean and Romanian press accounts of Ceausescu’s 1971 trip, one can nevertheless come to some understanding of the possible impact the trip may have had on the “Conducator” and his politics. First and foremost, Ceausescu and the entire Romanian delegation was constantly exposed to extreme forms of mass adulation and seem to have been very much impressed by the size, omni-presence, responsiveness and intensity of the crowd. Judging from his comments and photographs it is apparent that both Elena and Nicolae Ceausescu enjoyed participating in these spectacles.

Second, Ceausescu was keenly aware that his stature as a respected and welcome leader came from his independent line taken vis a vis Moscow concerning the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. He and his hosts referred to this fact repeatedly and various camouflaged terms. It is apparent from the speeches and communiques that the Sino-Romanian and North Korean-Romanian friendship is based on little other than their

³⁶ Nodong Sinmun, June 15, 1971, p. 3

mutual opposition to the perceived dominance of Moscow. Yet there is no evidence that an independent foreign policy line was equated with economic autarky or use of nationalism to buttress national independence.

Third, Ceausescu spent but a few hours of the total of two weeks spent in China and North Korea either visiting industrial establishments or publicly addressing economic topics. There is no evidence to suggest that he was exposed to techniques of ideological mobilization in industry. Nevertheless his comment on the ability of the North Korean regime to develop while increasing the standards of living of the population suggests that he may have learned something about the Chollima (10,000 Mile Gallop) movement that in essence was a revival of Shakhnovism with a dash of re-education added.

Last but not least Ceausescu witnessed ideological mobilization in education and culture first hand. Nevertheless it is impossible to ascertain whether the scant remarks told second hand by the masters of propaganda in Pyongyang and Beijing reflect any deeper impression the re-organization of the educational system and large-scale socialist realism made on the General Secretary.

The implications of these conclusions are also, of necessity, inconclusive. There is ample evidence to suggest that Deletant's thesis of "reproducing the spectacles" may be correct. Ceausescu certainly witnessed and was favorably been impressed by the techniques of mass adulation. A full confirmation of the thesis would need to include however, a documentation of orders given for the creation of similar mass spectacles upon his return

to Romania. Likewise there is ample evidence to suggest that during the course of the Asian trip Ceausescu realized that his popularity at home and abroad was based on his independent line taken vis a vis Moscow and that he understood that the Kim Il Sung's popularity also depended to a large extent on this. Yet no evidence emerges from the newspaper accounts to suggest that Ceausescu copied Kim's cult of personality as a means of creating "false legitimacy." Rather the opposite seems to be true. Ceausescu was riding high on his own legitimacy in 1971 and did see hard times ahead in which the cult could be put to use.

Verdery's beautifully complex thesis is for the most part not substantiated by the review of the evidence. Her thesis assumes that during his Asian trip Ceausescu was impressed by the near messianic powers wielded Mao and Kim and saw these as achievable through ideological mobilization of the party and the producers of culture. Quite the opposite, Ceausescu seems to have been impressed by elements of the Chinese and North Korean politics and did not apparently see the complex connections that Verdery sees in her careful study of the late Ceausescu period.

In conclusion it must be stated that the conclusions arrived at in this investigation inconclusive and a deeper investigation of the links between Ceausescu's Asian trip and the development of his distinct form of political control need to expand the scope of the study in both time and depth.