This chapter examines the creation of the Soviet Man, the first such communist new man in world history. The concept of the new man, or the idea of remaking people, together with a belief in human malleability facilitated by environmental determinism, originated in the Enlightenment and was first tested in the French Revolution. During the nineteenth century, Marxism and especially the Russian radical intelligentsia further developed this idea with more specific ideological and moral attributes. At the turn of the twentieth century, Vladimir Lenin conceptualized the idea and shifted its emphasis from creating revolutionary vanguards to educating the masses; he also stressed the necessity of using “consciousness” to replace “spontaneity.” The Russian Revolution then allowed the first nationwide experiment of remolding people; the institutions and methods introduced for that purpose were inherited by socialist countries established later.

The Global Impact of the Communist New Man

Yinghong Cheng

This chapter examines the global influence of the Russian, Chinese, and Cuban new men. The first is the similar efforts in remaking people in the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba. The second is the admiration of the communist new man by some Westerners who became alienated from their own societies and sought alternative social systems. The third is
the favorable perceptions of the communist new man by some Third World leaders, who were seeking ideas and methods for developing their own countries and for nation building despite many obstacles, and were inspired by the alleged selflessness and sacrifice of people in communist countries.

Creating the New Man
Yinghong Cheng

The idea of eliminating undesirable traits from human temperament to create a “new man” has been part of moral and political thinking worldwide for millennia. During the Enlightenment, European philosophers sought to construct an ideological framework for reshaping human nature. But it was only among the communist regimes of the twentieth century that such ideas were actually put into practice on a nationwide scale. This book examines three culturally diverse sociopolitical experiments—the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, China under Mao, and Cuba under Castro—in an attempt to better understand the origins and development of the “new man.” The book's fundamental concerns are how these communist revolutions strove to create a new, morally and psychologically superior, human being and how this task paralleled efforts to create a superior society. It begins by exploring the origins of the idea of human perfectibility during the Enlightenment. The discussion moves to other European intellectual movements, and then to the creation of the Soviet Man, the first communist new man in world history. Subsequent chapters examine China's experiment with human nature, starting with the nationalistic debate about a new national character at the turn of the twentieth century; and Cuban perceptions of the new man and his role in propelling the revolution from a nationalist, to a socialist, and finally a communist movement. The last chapter considers the global influence of the Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban experiments.