

Beyond the Kremlin's Reach? Eastern Europe and China in the Cold War Era - Transfers and Entanglements

Veranstalter: The Centre for the History and Culture of East Central Europe at the University of Leipzig (GWZO), Research Group Transnational Contemporary History of East Central Europe (GWZO, Leipzig); The German Association for East European Studies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde e.V., DGO); Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies, Ludwig Maximilian University Munich; Centre for Cold War International History Studies, East China Normal University Shanghai

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The international conference „Beyond the Kremlin's Reach? Eastern Europe and China in the Cold War Era - Transfers and Entanglements“ had the aim to bring together scholars currently researching the relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the non-Soviet socialist states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Albania from 1949 to 1989. The central question to be answered was to what degree relations between China and the „Soviet satellites“ in Europe developed independently from Soviet leadership against the backdrop of changing Sino-Soviet relations, which evolved from alliance in the 1950s to split and hostility in the 1960s and 1970s, and towards rapprochement in the final phase of the Soviet state. The conference focused especially on the social consequences and everyday dimensions of these relations, from cultural exchange to the transfer of technology and policy techniques, thus going beyond the analysis of classic diplomatic governmental interactions.

In the welcoming speech, Stefan Troebst (Leipzig) made a statement reminiscing about the German professor, political scientist, journalist and government advisor, Klaus Mehnert, who held sway over the study of Sino-

Russian/East European relations for almost half a century, between the 1930s and 1980s. JAN ZOFKA's (Leipzig) opening remarks focused on the importance of the global dimension of 20th century state socialism, insufficiently reflected in the context of Eastern European Studies in Europe. In fact, he remarked, as history is written separately in different areas, with Eastern Europe experts dealing with Eastern Europe and Sinologists covering the Chinese history, international conferences can contribute to overcoming this separation. Zofka suggested that research on Sino-Eastern European relations could build upon approaches of „Socialist globalization“ and the debates on relations between the socialist camp and the global South.

SHEN ZHIHUA (Shanghai) opened the conference with an interesting keynote speech, entitled „Structural Problems of Socialist International Relations“. As the title suggests, his talk focused on „structural problems“ as the center for his analysis of the backgrounds of the Sino-Soviet split. According to Shen, the peculiarity of socialist international relations was rooted in the new states' leaders common experiences in the international workers' movement, which highly affected diplomatic patterns. He underlined that, while the countries in the Western camp enjoyed mechanisms of conflict prevention and diplomatic dialogue, the relations between the countries in the socialist camp, which lacked such mechanisms, were characterized by escalating conflicts. Shen defined these patterns of socialist international relations as the main cause of the Sino-Soviet split dismissing attempts to try to explain the split in terms of ideology or economic interests.

Opening the first panel, which addressed the topic of trade and economic cooperation, GE JUN (Shanghai) investigated in his talk, the economic ties and trade between the PRC and the GDR in the early 1950s. Through an examination of archival material from China and Germany, Ge revealed that during the period of the Sino-Soviet alliance, the GDR relied on Moscow's permission to manoeuvre in matters of economics and policy-related issues. However, the GDR tried to monopolise the trade relations between the PRC and West

Germany. This was conducive to achieving two objectives: firstly, the GDR became Germany's only representative in Sino-German relations and secondly, by taking advantage of West Germany's commercial interests with China, the GDR managed to influence the society of West Germany in order to obtain political benefit in the matter of German reunification.

DANIELA KOLENOVSKA (Prague) analyzed the Sino-Czechoslovak relations, by looking at bilateral cooperation in agriculture. Kolenovska's paper offered an interesting insight into such collaboration through a case study of the cooperation between the Vinařice agricultural cooperative and the cooperative farm in Cangzhou. Her exploration provided a picture of Prague's foreign policy, that caved in to the ideological Marxist-Leninist vision of the world and shared its experience in building a communist society.

The presentation opening the second panel, on cultural exchange between the Soviet Union and China during their phase of affection, was AUSTIN JERSILD's (Norfolk) paper on cultural attitudes and beliefs. This gave insight into cultural exchange and representation within the „Second World“, with a special emphasis on the socialist bloc image of China both at home and in China itself. Jersild argued that the socialist bloc's European countries sense of their cultural mission and sense of purpose regarding China, promoted cohesion and unity, rather than division, between the Soviet Union and East European countries. Soviet Union leaders transferred their domestic concepts of „internationalism“ and „people's friendship“, which implied a Russian-European hegemony, to the international sphere, and Europe was conceived as the centre and origin of culture.

JOZSEF BÖRÖCZ's (New Brunswick) paper, looked into the tour of an orchestra of the Hungarian People's army to China in 1956, as an example of cultural exchange between the two countries. Böröcz emphasized that the ensemble founders came up with a programme which was marked by the predominance of a Hungarian national frame on the one hand, and by a striking absence of Party-oriented Stalinist propaganda art, on the other. The program worked to broaden

the official view of the revolutionary transformation, to include at least some segments of the peasantry under the concept of the „working class“, that could, in turn, be regarded as a class endowed with the historical agency to carry forward the task of transforming the Hungarian society in a socialist direction. Hence, Böröcz concluded, the ensemble's program not only managed to cope with its assigned task to represent Hungary and the socialist transformation, but it was received with enthusiastic reactions by the Chinese audiences.

The third panel on deviationist policies in the socialist bloc, was opened by JAN ZOFKA's (Leipzig) discussion on the Bulgarian political elites' viewpoints of the Chinese „Great Leap Forward“ campaign. Zofka pointed out that the Chinese campaign was initially regarded with appreciation by the Bulgarian press and party leadership, who rapidly called for an „economic leap“. Although the Bulgarian campaign was not a perfect reflection of the Chinese model, it had however, several similarities with the comrades' operations in the PRC. However, Zofka argued, the „Chinese“ elements in the Bulgarian economic policies were not meant to be a provocative step against the Soviet leadership, but rather reflected the openness of the situation in the „socialist world“ in the second half of the 1950s.

MARGARET K. GNOINSKA (Troy) depicted the figure of Kazimierz Mijal, a once high-ranking level communist in the leadership of the Polish People's Republic and a Stalinist activist attracted by Maoism. This curious dissident figure dared to challenge the authority of the Polish United Workers Party and promoted the Chinese model of socialism in the 1960s. At the time, the Sino-Soviet split was at its height and Wladyslaw Gomułka's government sided with Moscow only unwillingly. Gnoinska argued that Mijal's actions and the support received from Mao as part of Beijing's differentiation policy towards Eastern Europe, were actually not a useful political tool for the Polish party leadership, but rather had unwanted consequences, as they further aggravated Warsaw's relations with Moscow and contributed to the deterioration of Sino-Polish ties.

Within the fourth panel, on „Representations of the Other in the Chinese and Eastern European Press“, SÖREN URBANSKY and MAX TRECKER (both Munich) analyzed different ways of reporting on China between the mid-1950s and late 1960s. Urbansky and Trecker took into account the three leading official daily newspapers of the communist parties of Hungary, Poland and East Germany, as viable indicators of the respective governments' publicly communicated official position. Their focus was on not only „what“ but also „how“ the press reported on China, by considering the language means, the arrangements of the articles on pages, the discrepancies and omissions in the China coverage of the press. The differences in reporting reflect the varying positions towards Moscow and Beijing taken by East-Berlin, Warsaw and Budapest during the time of the cooling of Sino-Soviet ties. Hence, especially between 1957 and 1962, the China press coverage was inconsistent, whereas subsequently, a gradual harmonization can be observed in the three countries.

LI RUI (Beijing) examined the changing image of Eastern Europe in the Chinese press, by outlining Chinese internal dynamics to deal with the problems of the East European countries. Li's analysis reflects a closer relationship between the PRC and Eastern European countries in the 1950s, in comparison with the 1960s and 1970s. The changing image of Eastern Europe in China during the early 1980s developed on the background of incompatible policy practice. Hence, on the one hand, the Chinese government became more active and paid more attention to Eastern Europe, and as a result allowed different kind of information to be introduced domestically, while on the other hand, Eastern Europe remained passive in the face of Chinese attempts to revitalise relations, partially because it was undergoing considerable social change in the 1980s.

The last panel, on transfers of policies and technologies between Eastern Europe and China, was opened by ANA LALAJ (Tirana), who focused on the Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution's perception in Tirana and its influence on Albanian practice. Lalaj asserted that, after the breakdown of relations with the Soviet Union, it was only natural for Albani-

ans to look up to the distant China. Hence, in 1966, with the implementation of Chinese practices and reforms, students, army members, workers and officials were sent to villages and new arable lands were created. Moreover, she argued that by virtue of the Chinese aid, Albanians carried out the industrialization of the country and upgraded the army to pursue complete fortification.

PETER VAMOS (Budapest) investigated Chinese-Hungarian relations during the last decade of Cold War, with a major focus on Deng Xiaoping's interests in the Hungarian reform experiences. While in China reforms lacked a clear goal and a guiding theory, in Hungary they had achieved outstanding results in certain fields, within a relatively short period of time. At first, the Chinese were searching for a socialist mode of economic management system on the Yugoslavian model, but by the early 1980s' they were already looking at the Hungarian model. By the mid 1980s, the Soviet experience on issues of economic modernization began to be considered by Chinese leaders as most-relevant to the practice-oriented reforms on which the PRC was embarking. Soon, Vámos concluded, Sino-East European relations gained importance for their own sake, with trade expanding quite rapidly but, by 1987, Hungary seemed to lose its prioritized position in China and the Hungarian reform was no longer a Hungarian *Sonderweg*.

In the closing plenary discussion, participants pointed out that, in spite of all deviations and autonomous action in the socialist world, the Soviet authority consistently remained present in the Sino-Eastern European relations, be it as the „elephant in the room“ or be it as a more direct advisor. However, discussion statements also pointed out to a structural distance between order from above and implementation by actors beyond communist parties' leaderships, or „beyond the Kremlin“. To further elaborate the tension between central power and the room to manoeuvre of actors on the ground remains one of the crucial tasks for the studies of socialist international relations.

Conference Overview:

Opening Remarks - Stefan Troebst (Leipzig),

Jan Zofka (Leipzig)

Keynote Speech

Shen Zhihua (Shanghai): Structural Problems of Socialist International Relations

Panel 1: Trade and Economic Cooperation during the Sino-Soviet Alliance

Ge Jun (Shanghai): The GDR as Gate to the West? Early Trade Agreements between PRC and GDR

Daniela Kolenovská (Prague): Sino-Czechoslovak Cooperation on Agricultural Cooperatives

Comments: Uwe Müller (Leipzig)

Panel 2: Cultural Exchange during the Sino-Soviet Alliance

Austin Jersild (Norfolk, VA): From 'Originality' (samobytnost') to Beethoven: Socialist Bloc Ideas about Culture in Revolutionary China, 1950-1964

József Böröcz (New Brunswick, NJ): Performing Socialist Hungary. The Ensemble of the Hungarian People's Army Visits to China in the Fall of 1956

Comments: Beáta Hock (Leipzig)

Panel 3: Deviations in the Soviet Bloc in the Context of Changing Sino-Soviet Relations

Jan Zofka (Leipzig): Repercussions of the Chinese Great Leap Forward in Bulgaria

Małgorzata Gnoinska (Troy, AL): China's Differentiation Policy toward Poland: the Case of Kazimierz Mijal (1960-1976)

Comments: Stefan Troebst (Leipzig)

Panel 4: Changing Representations of the „Other“ in the Chinese and Eastern European Press

Sören Urbansky/Max Trecker (Munich): Népszabadság, Neues Deutschland, Trybuna Ludu. The Nuances of Reporting on China in Eastern Bloc Press

Li Rui (Beijing): The changing image of Eastern Europe in the Chinese press during the early 1980s

Comments: Dennis Deletant (Washington,

DC)

Panel 5: Transfers of Development Models, Policies and Technologies

Ana Lalaj (Tirana): The Influence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the Reproduction of Some of its Features in Albania

Péter Vámos (Budapest): A Hungarian Model for China? Economic reforms in China and Sino-Hungarian relations, 1979-1989

Comments: Jordan Baev (Sofia)

Roundtable: Mapping Sources I: China and East-Central Europe

Chair: Yu Weimin (Shanghai)

GDR: Ge Jun; Poland: Margaret K. Gnoinska/Li Rui, ČSSR: Gao Xiaochuan (Shanghai)/Daniela Kolenovská; Hungary: Tai Yuri (Shanghai)/Péter Vámos

Roundtable: Mapping Sources II: China and Southeastern Europe

Chair: Shen Zhihua

Yugoslavia: Kong Fanjun (Beijing); Romania: Liu Yong (Beijing)/Dennis Deletant; Bulgaria: Xiang Zuotao (Beijing)/Jordan Baev; Albania: Ana Lalaj

Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Beyond the Kremlin's Reach? Eastern Europe and China in the Cold War Era - Transfers and Entanglements*. 30.06.2015–02.07.2015, Leipzig, in: H-Soz-Kult 01.12.2015.