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Introduction by Yafeng Xia, Long Island University

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Contents

Introduction by Yafeng Xia, Long Island University	2
Review by Jeremy Friedman, Princeton University	6
Review by Lorenz Lüthi, McGill University.....	10
Review by Vojtech Mastny, Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security and National Security Archive, Washington D.C	18
Author's Response by Sergey Radchenko, University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China.....	22

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Introduction by Yafeng Xia, Long Island University

At the center of inquiry on the history of Sino-Soviet relations during the Cold War is the nature of the origins of the Sino-Soviet split: was it a result of ideological cleavages, cultural differences, or clashing of national interests?

Two recent monographs have advanced the study on the Sino-Soviet split to a new level. Making use of a wide-range of Chinese, Russian, and American and European sources, Lorenz Lüthi's 2008 book, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, identifies the primary role of Sino-Soviet disputes over Marxist-Leninist ideology. He argues that the source of this estrangement was Mao Zedong's ideological radicalization at a time when Soviet leaders, mainly Nikita Khrushchev, became committed to a more pragmatic domestic and foreign policy. Lüthi's volume covers Sino-Soviet relations from 1956 to 1966, and supersedes all previous studies on the Sino-Soviet split. As Vojtech Mastny aptly puts it, "Lüthi's 'Cold War in the communist world'" unfolds in a broader international setting. In the fall of 2008, *H-Diplo* published a roundtable review of Lüthi's book, which has proved to be an interesting discussion on how to interpret the cause of the Sino-Soviet split.¹

Sergey Radchenko's book examines the dramatic deterioration of relations between the Soviet Union and China in the 1960s, especially from 1962 to 1967. Utilizing original documents from Russian and Mongolian archives and a large array of secondary sources, Radchenko traces the policy deliberations and decisions of the Soviet leaders to the Sino-Soviet dispute. According to Radchenko, Khrushchev viewed the dispute with the Chinese as a "power struggle" to maintain his own, as well as the Soviet Union's, leadership in the international Communist movement. Toward the end of his political career, he regarded the split a clash of civilizations between Moscow and the "cunning' and untrustworthy" Chinese. (p. 119) His successors saw China as "an enemy in the *realpolitik* sense and in the cultural sense." (p. 197) As Lorenz Lüthi notes in his review, the book "provides an important impressionistic aspect of the Sino-Soviet relationship – a feel for the split ..."

The reviewers commend Radchenko's success in mining and creatively using the former Soviet archives. His "focus on the Soviet side provides a critical contribution to the historiography" (Lorenz Lüthi) and "can hardly be improved upon, regardless of what additional Soviet documents may be found in the future." (Vojtech Mastny) Radchenko succeeds in offering a nuanced and insightful analysis of Soviet management of the Sino-Soviet split. But there is a consensus among the reviewers and this author that it is necessary to further explore the Chinese language sources, especially the Chinese foreign ministry archives, and to tell the Chinese side of the story.

¹ Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. See *H-Diplo Roundtable Review* 9, no. 25 (2008), <http://www.h-diplo.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-IX-25.pdf>.

How do Chinese Cold War scholars interpret the cause of the Sino-Soviet split? After consulting with Professor Zhihua Shen of East China Normal University, who is the preeminent Cold War scholar in China, I will attempt a very short explanation:

This was a rivalry for leadership in the international Communist movement and authority to determine the socialist ideological orthodoxy. The disagreements and contradictions between Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin were often more grave than those between Mao and Khrushchev. Yet Mao willingly accepted Stalin's leadership and adopted a "leaning-to-one-side" policy – to the Soviet Union. The main reason for Mao to do so was that at that time the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was not in a position to challenge Moscow's leadership. By the mid-1950s, the relative positions of the CCP and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in the socialist bloc transposed gradually. The CPSU's "self-criticism" at its 20th Party Congress significantly damaged Moscow's prestige and undermined its leadership in the socialist bloc.

Meanwhile, the CCP was on the ascendant. In particular, after China assisted in solving the Polish and Hungarian Crises of 1956, and had successfully achieved the First Five-Year Plan in 1957, Mao felt that he could and should assume a greater responsibility for the future of all humanity. It was at this juncture that Mao and Khrushchev revealed their divergences in the understanding of the world situation and its future directions. Their political lines and policies were in direct opposition to each other and proved to be incompatible. Whereas the Soviet Union promoted détente and peaceful coexistence, China was in favor of international tensions; whereas the Soviet Union was longing for a peaceful environment, China was agitating for revolution. The crux of the disagreements was how to build socialism and how to lead the socialist camp in the struggle against world capitalism. The most important issue in leading the internationalist Communist movement was ideological authority. In theory, the communist parties of the world would support either the Soviet Union or China as a qualified leader only if it could uphold the banner of Marxism and Leninism and maintain ideological orthodoxy. Therefore, the Sino-Soviet disagreements in concrete foreign policy and domestic issues were translated into a struggle over political and theoretical agenda in the ideological arena.

Although, for the sake of larger and more fundamental interests, concessions and compromise could be made in a pure contest over interests, this was not the case in a competition over the leadership position in the international Communist movement. A contest for leadership would not be determined by the balance of power and interests but by the validity of ideological and political lines. This was a principled struggle in which reconciliation had no position. In reality, neither the CCP nor the CPSU departed ideologically from the Marxist-Leninist orbit. Their national interests were also fundamentally in concert. What they disputed was their respective right to interpret Marxism and Leninism in the international Communist movement, i.e. the domination of ideological orthodoxy. The consequence of the dispute would not only determine the parties' qualifications for leading the international Communist movement but would also affect the party leaders' authority and status within their respective states and parties. Therefore, the matter assumed a magnitude of life and death to these parties and their leaders. Of course the Chinese and Soviets were by no means ignorant of the unanimity of

their ideologies and the commonality of their fundamental interests, and, as a pair of brothers, they did not want to split the family. But the question was who should be the head of the family. Thus, in the contest, “Marxists” and “Revisionists” could not live under the same roof, and “Leninism” and “Dogmatism” were irreconcilable like water and fire. From this perspective, the break of the Sino-Soviet alliance was inevitable.

This roundtable review is a continuation of the discussion on the causes and processes of the Sino-Soviet split. Radchenko and Lüthi, two very talented young historians have produced two tomes on the same topic. Though they may not see eye to eye on many of the issues, they respect each other’s interpretations and carefully present their own arguments. The three reviewers and Radchenko have offered many insights for pondering and reflection. They have provided a sound model of how to debate and disagree while maintaining professional courtesy and respect.

Participants

Sergey Radchenko is Lecturer at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China. He is the author of *Two Suns in the Heavens: the Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (2009) and many articles, and a co-author (with Campbell Craig) of *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (2008). He lives in Ningbo, the People’s Republic of China.

Yafeng Xia is an Associate Professor of East Asian and Diplomatic history at Long Island University, Brooklyn, and a guest professor at the Center for Cold War Studies, East China Normal University, Shanghai. He is the author of *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-72* (2006). He has also published numerous articles in such publications as *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, *Diplomatic History*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *Cold War History*, *The Chinese Historical Review*, *The International History Review*, among others. He is currently at work on a monograph on the early history of the PRC’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, tentatively titled *Revolutionary Diplomacy and Institution Building: New China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1949-1958*.

Jeremy Friedman graduated from Stanford University in 2004 with a B.A. in history and philosophy and is currently completing his PhD at Princeton University with a dissertation project entitled “Reviving Revolution: the Sino-Soviet Split, the 'Third World,' and the Fate of the Left.” He recently published an article in the journal *Cold War History* entitled “Soviet Policy in the Developing World and the Chinese Challenge in the 1960s,” based on a paper presented at the conference on Sino-Soviet relations in Shanghai in January 2009 and the LSE/GWU/UCSB Graduate Student Cold War Conference in London in April 2009.”

Lorenz Lüthi is an Associate Professor of the history of international relations at McGill University in Canada. He has been a post-doctoral fellow at the Olin Institute at Harvard and a member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. As a Cold War historian, his research focuses on relations between socialist states, with a particular emphasis on China. He is the author of *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (2008). His articles have been published in *Cold War History*, the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, and the *Cold War International History Bulletin*. He is currently working on a book project about

developments in East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe during the second half of the Cold War.

Vojtech Mastny coordinates the Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security, www.php.isn.ethz.ch, an international research network based at the Center for Security Studies in Zurich. He has been professor of history and international relations at Columbia University, University of Illinois, Boston University, and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He was also Professor of Strategy at US Naval War College and the first Manfred Wörner Fellow of NATO. His representative works include *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity* (1996) and the edited *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1991* (2005) and *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War: Threat Perceptions in the East and West* (2006).

The Cold War is over, Marxism-Leninism as an ideology is effectively dead, but the dilemma of Sino-Russian relations lives on. Sergei Radchenko's book *Two Suns in the Heavens* begins with a seemingly innocent little vignette of daily life on the Sino-Russian border that is intended to immediately throw into question the very association of the Sino-Soviet split with the global ideological conflict known as the Cold War. While crossing a remote section of the border by bus, Radchenko remarks upon the egregious mistreatment of Chinese traders by Russian border guards, evidence of residual racial and national animosities and anxieties, which have only grown stronger on the Russian side in recent years as China's economic explosion has contrasted sharply with Russia's post-Soviet decline. Ironically, as Radchenko points out, this scene takes place under a Soviet flag, yet to be removed or replaced, a fact which sows a seed of doubt in the mind of the reader about what that Soviet flag was really meant to signify: a global ideological crusade or a Russian nationalists "great power chauvinist" project? Or, as Radchenko might argue, are they one and the same?

In this book, Radchenko is to a significant degree swimming against the prevailing contemporary historiographical current on Sino-Soviet relations. It would be incorrect to say that his book represents a complete departure from the rest of the literature since he himself declares in the introduction that the book "does not provide a radically new interpretation of the split." (17) Nevertheless, there is perhaps more originality in his interpretation than he gives himself credit for, as a quick glance at the rest of the field demonstrates. While the question of the role of ideology versus *realpolitik* considerations was always central to the debates surrounding Soviet and Chinese foreign policy during the Cold War, the weight of opinion, especially in the wake of the Sino-American rapprochement of 1971-2, tended to strongly favor the latter as the predominant approach. However, much of the recent scholarship has tended to emphasize the role of ideology as a motivating factor in both the domestic and foreign policies of the USSR and PRC. Chen Jian, in his very influential book *Mao's China and the Cold War*, presents Mao's foreign policy from the decision to enter the Korean War in the initial stages of revolutionary consolidation, through the Taiwan Strait crisis at the time of the Great Leap Forward, to the campaign to support North Vietnam during the Cultural Revolution as largely a tool to spark and maintain a heightened level of domestic revolutionary enthusiasm and mobilization. Similarly Lorenz Lüthi, in his book *The Sino-Soviet Split*, argues that Mao decided to pursue a break with the Soviets in large part because of his battle with his perceived enemies within the leadership, whom he saw as being domestic representatives of the same revisionism supposedly ascendant in Moscow. As both of these examples show, the renewed emphasis on ideology as an explanatory factor in the Sino-Soviet split in particular has been accompanied by a distinct emphasis on the role of the Chinese, and Mao in particular, in creating the split, with the Soviets always one step behind.

Radchenko acknowledges as well that the Kremlin often found itself in a reactive position, but he does an excellent job of writing the Soviet leaders back into the story as crucial, complicated actors who themselves made important policy choices and were not merely

tools for Mao to manipulate. In particular, Radchenko's marvelous use of sources is evident in his very interesting portrayal of Khrushchev, especially with regard to his self-perception as a revolutionary leader, both during his time in power and afterward in his memoirs, as well as the racial and cultural prejudices which formed the background for his ideological judgments and policy decisions. In this, Radchenko presents Khrushchev as very much a product of a long Russian tradition of "fear of neighbors, especially Asian neighbors," a factor which helped blind not only Khrushchev, but others in the Soviet leadership, to the "great power aspirations" of their own policy and its effect upon a proud but humiliated China, struggling to emerge from its century of humiliation at the hands of the European imperialist powers (199-200). Given the nature of the two countries' histories and imperial projects, Radchenko argues that the alliance was essentially doomed from the start as the Soviet Union could no more accept an alliance of equals than the PRC could accept continued subordination.

At the risk of oversimplifying then, Radchenko reminds us that the Sino-Soviet split was not just about disputes between Communists, but between Russians and Chinese. Ideology does play a role to some degree in his interpretation, as the dogmatic nature of Marxist-Leninist ideology, which could allow for only one infallible center of objective truth, meant that any Communist alliance needed to be hierarchal. At the same, it is not clear if for Radchenko a Sino-Russian alliance of any sort could fail to be hierarchal given the history of relations between the two, a fact which has ominous implications for contemporary relations. Radchenko also does not assert that either the Soviet or Chinese leaders were employing ideological terms merely as cynical tools of manipulation and mobilization. However, he clearly states that, in his view, the "ideological disagreements only served as a cover for the power struggle...in which ideology was merely a means to an end." (12) It seems that for Radchenko this is not a contradiction because while ideology was important to each of the Communist regimes per se, he does not believe that it provides an adequate explanation for the intensity of the break between the two, which can only be explained with reference to the power struggle in its proper historical and cultural context.

The argument, however, raises a number of questions. The first is one that can be asked of almost any book on the topic, namely the role of Mao in the creation of the split. Radchenko asserts that the "inherent inequality of the Sino-Soviet relationship" was something "which Mao could not and would not accept." (12) Later on, however, he quotes Deng Xiaoping's words to Gorbachev in 1989 that "The Chinese people felt humiliated." (206) The question is then, whose ego is at stake here? Was this simply a matter of Mao personally being unwilling to submit to Khrushchev or the Chinese people in general being unable to accept a new form of imperialist domination? Would a different Chinese leader – Zhou, Deng, Liu – have been compelled to bend to such forces as well and ultimately break with Moscow? It would seem that for both Chen and Lüthi, the Sino-Soviet split was so deeply tied to Mao's personal political agenda that without him, there would have been no split. The logic of Radchenko's argument, however, seems to point in a different direction.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the argument is the implication that the Sino-Soviet conflict was qualitatively different from the Soviet-American Cold War. Radchenko writes that China became "an enemy – not a competitor in the socialist bloc or an ideological

opponent, but an enemy...in a *cultural* and *racial* sense.” (200, italics his) He then goes to assert that, for the Soviet leadership, the conflict with China was more akin to that with Nazi Germany than with the capitalist West. The Russian fear of the “yellow peril,” most famously expressed in Andrei Amalrik’s *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?*, is well-known, but the actual evidence for its effect on the policy decisions of Soviet leaders is not completely convincing. In American politics in the aftermath of the Second World War, the failure to meet the Nazi threat with sufficient force at an early stage, in particular the policy of appeasement followed at Munich in 1938, became an argument for the use of force, preemptively if necessary, to deal with political forces deemed to be dangerous. Similarly, had the Kremlin leaders been able to return to 1939, with full knowledge of Hitler’s intentions but this time possessing overwhelming military superiority, it is hard to imagine that they would not have at least attempted “regime change.” Though Moscow did briefly consider a preemptive strike against the PRC’s nuclear facilities in 1969, Radchenko admits that the Soviet leadership soon settled into a policy of “containment.” (164) Those Soviet and Chinese divisions facing each other across remote stretches of border in Inner Asia as their governments conducted endless negotiations, postured for international moral ascendancy, and even fought proxy wars in Angola and Cambodia, bore a much stronger resemblance to the NATO and Warsaw Pact forces deployed across Central Europe than to the armies of the Eastern Front.

According to Radchenko, during the 1960s, the willingness of the Kremlin to seek a rapprochement with Zhongnanhai depended upon its perception of the reasons for the divide. In 1962-3, and later in the initial period of the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership, the belief of the Soviet leaders that ideological divisions could be overcome because, after all, the USSR and PRC were on the same side of the Iron Curtain, led them to take steps to improve relations. By late 1965, however, the new Soviet leadership was supposedly firmly convinced that the actions of the Chinese were motivated by “great power aspirations,” a position which was only confirmed by the events of the Cultural Revolution, according to Radchenko. However, if, from that point on, the Soviets ceased to see China as ideological threat or a competitor in the socialist bloc as Radchenko argues, then why did they only in late 1967 organize Interkit, a body created for the purpose of coordinating anti-Chinese and anti-Maoist ideological propaganda among the Eastern Bloc states? In 1969, the Soviets held a new conference of the international communist parties, largely in order to try to fully isolate the CCP. Throughout the 1970s, Soviet diplomats, journalists, and scholars spent tremendous amounts of time, energy, and resources combating “Maoism” around the world, particularly among the so-called “national liberation movements” of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It seems then that the Soviet leadership took the PRC as an ideological threat very seriously indeed.

The most interesting question posed by Radchenko’s argument is the nature of the role played by racial and ethnic divisions in Sino-Soviet and, consequently, Sino-Russian relations. In particular, his claim that Khrushchev was more interested in aiding Cuba than North Korea or North Vietnam because of his greater sympathy for “Western” rather than “Eastern” revolutions deserves further exploration. He makes a persuasive case that such considerations were never far from the thoughts of Soviet leaders, but without a deeper discussion of the nature of racial animosities between Russians and Chinese, it is difficult to

put this in its proper historical context. Was the U.S.-Japan alliance during the Cold War beset by similar tensions and if not, then why not? What in particular made this racial divide so treacherous and does it have something larger to tell us about the role of racial and ethnic divisions in the international arena, or is it merely an idiosyncratic situation? Only one thing is certain – by raising the question, Radchenko greatly increased the potential interest in the causes, dynamics, and results, of the Sino-Soviet split.

After I saw my own book on Sino-Soviet Split being published in the spring of 2008, I started to wonder about the imminent release of Sergey Radchenko's volume on a similar topic. Since I met him the first time in early 2002, I had always been anxious about the possibility that we would write the same dissertation and then compete against each in the race for publication. I am happy to write that we produced two different tomes with diverse approaches and distinctive interpretations. Radchenko has set the bar high when he reviewed my book for *H-Diplo* two years ago. He wrote an exceptionally thorough and critical but simultaneously fair and gracious review. I hope that my review of his book will reach the standard that he set.

Radchenko focuses on the five years of the Sino-Soviet relationship after major public disputes had occurred by 1962, even though he considers events beforehand and covers developments in the relationship afterward. Framed by the double crisis around Cuba and in the Himalayas and by the second siege of the Soviet embassy in Beijing in early 1967, he explores the Sino-Soviet struggle over the hearts and minds of what Mao called the intermediate zone, although he mostly focuses on Korea, Indochina, and Outer Mongolia. From the very beginning, the author states his position on the major thrust of his interpretation: "The book leans to the side of enlightened realism" (17). Conversely, Radchenko is skeptical about "the power of ideas" or even the role of ideology in his story (18).

On the basis of formerly Soviet archives and a multitude of personal contacts in Moscow, Radchenko, a native Russian, has written an important book focusing on the Soviet side of the relationship between Moscow and Beijing. How did Khrushchev and his successors understand and react to the provocations from their Chinese comrades? The author paints a picture of a Soviet leadership hardly in control of the management of the socialist camp, clumsy at party and personal diplomacy, and indecisive and dithering with regard to the formulation of its own policy. I enjoyed reading the book because it taught me a lot about Sino-Soviet relations I did not know, particularly since the author's focus is so different from mine. It is a great and exciting read, but I have reservations with regard to Radchenko's overall interpretation.

While Radchenko acknowledges that "Mao, more than any other individual, was responsible for the breakdown of relations with the Soviets," he argues that "the alliance fell apart precisely because its essence was interpreted differently in Beijing and Moscow" (17). Implicitly, the author distinguishes between responsibility on a personal level and on a collective level. This allows him to blame Mao as the individual bearing most of the responsibility and, simultaneously, to conclude that "Soviet leaders ... shoulder at least as much blame as the Chinese leaders for the deterioration of relations, for their inability to see that in its current form the alliance was basically unsustainable" (18). Nevertheless, for most of the book Radchenko reduces the Soviet leadership as a group just to Khrushchev himself—"Soviet foreign policy in the early 1960s reflected the opinions, hopes, and delusions of one man" (23)—and then to the duumvirate Brezhnev and Kosygin.

At this point, I fear, Radchenko is blurring the hierarchy of causes. While I agree that Moscow for most of the 1950s and 1960s had a hard time to understand what the alliance really was about,¹ I find it difficult to see this as a sufficient—as opposed to a merely necessary—cause to explain the split. Differences about the meaning of the partnership might have been necessary causes, but that simply seems to point to a universal characteristic of most alliances. Thus, they cannot be the only reason for the collapse of the Sino-Soviet alliance. The presence of wood and oxygen is necessary to start a camp fire, but only a match, once lit, is *sufficient* to set it ablaze. That match clearly was Mao Zedong. As I point out further below, Moscow indeed was insensitive towards Beijing, but virtually no amount of Soviet understanding would have dissuaded Mao from wrecking the alliance. By the late 1950s, the Chinese leader had decided that he did not want any relationship with the Soviets—not even an equal one.

For the purpose of clarity, I suggest separating the causes for the split itself, which is not the main focus of Radchenko's book, from the events that unfolded during the period immediately after the outbreak of public polemics, which is what Radchenko is actually interested in exploring. We should not mistake the reasons behind a divorce for the actual divorce proceedings—they often do not match. Attitudes are dynamic—they change over time. Thus, the fundamental question is: how did the Sino-Soviet relationship evolve once major—probably even insurmountable—disagreements had occurred in public? How did Moscow react to Beijing's repeated provocations? How did Khrushchev, and later Brezhnev and Kosygin, deal with a Mao hell-bent on wrecking the alliance? Did the Kremlin have realistic alternatives to the policies it ultimately pursued?

Here, Radchenko's focus on the Soviet side provides a critical contribution to the historiography. In this context, his insistence on a realist interpretation also makes more sense than focusing solely on the reasons for the split itself. In the end, the Sino-Soviet relationship in the mid-1960s was a competition for worldwide influence at the expense of the other. As Radchenko skillfully explains over the course of his book, in this struggle Soviet behavior was simultaneously aggressive and clumsy.

I agree with the general periodization of Radchenko's book—1962-67—but I am skeptical if the double crisis in the Caribbean and the Himalayas in October of 1962 and the embassy siege in the early weeks of 1967 are meaningful time markers, particularly given the title of his book. Mao started to focus on the intermediate zone, shifting his attention away from the socialist camp, in the period from August to early October of 1962, when he declared enmity to the United States, the Soviet Union, India, and Yugoslavia. Beijing's behavior during the double crisis—hostility towards New Delhi, Moscow, and Washington, while supportive of Havana—merely indicated this new emphasis in PRC foreign policy—it was not the source of conflict. Similarly, the embassy siege marked a low point in the Sino-Soviet relationship but not an end point in the bilateral competition. On a global level 1967 symbolizes the climax but not the conclusion of this struggle. Although many African

¹ See my own chapter "Sino-Soviet Security Cooperation" in: Vojtech Mastny and Zhu Liqun, *The Security Challenge: From Alliance Systems to Cooperative Security* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2010) (forthcoming).

nations had turned away from China in the previous year, developments in the aftermath of the Six-Day War in June revealed China's loss in the struggle for the Middle East. And unrest in the PRC Foreign Ministry in August divulged that China had no functioning foreign policy apparatus that could participate in such competition with the Soviet Union in an effective manner. No wonder that Mao ordered a reduction of external propaganda in 1968.

The problems with periodization might point to a larger issue Radchenko does not completely address in his book: the struggle for supremacy was not one exclusively about predominance within the Sino-Soviet relationship (Mao had anyway given up on that partnership long before), or preponderance in the socialist camp (too many parties followed the Soviet party, and among the rest were some of the craziest), or about supremacy with regard to Cuba or in East Asia (Radchenko spends many pages on Korea, Outer Mongolia, or Indochina). The competition primarily was about the hearts and minds of the *whole* intermediate zone: Asia (including South Asia and the Middle East), Africa, and Latin America, some of which receive little or no treatment in Radchenko's book. And this struggle, of course, continued into the 1970s.

Despite my disagreements on these questions, Radchenko has written a gripping book. In particular, I admire his ability to tell stories deftly; I wish I could do it only half as well. The saying of the late historian Ernest R. May that "Description is revelation" must have been Radchenko's guiding principle while writing. As his book is meandering through the landscape of Sino-Soviet relations in the mid-1960s, it provides an important impressionistic aspect of the Sino-Soviet relationship—a feel for the split—that surely would be lost in a purely analytical exploration from the vantage point of a soaring eagle. For many a reader who has not lived through the time, Radchenko recreates the crackling atmosphere of the struggle. Given the incomplete access to primary documentation, his approach of constructing such a narrative perfectly serves his endeavor of understanding the Sino-Soviet struggle for supremacy.

For the remainder of my review, I will discuss his book on a chapter-by-chapter basis and then add some remarks on the conclusion and on the useful documentary appendix. *Chapter 1* covers the events between the Sino-Indian border war in October of 1962 and the Sino-Soviet party talks and concurrent Soviet-British-American Test Ban Treaty talks in Moscow in the early summer of 1963. Radchenko addresses the fallout over the border war, the Sino-Soviet polemics over Cuba and the struggle for its loyalty, the role of domestic politics in both countries, the preparations for the parallel talks in Moscow and the consultations themselves.

But what do the frequent references to ideology in the whole chapter tell us about the role of ideas? Although Radchenko states in the introduction to the book that the power of ideas doesn't mean that much to him, his chapter title still is: "Who Betrayed the Revolution?" (23). He himself portrays Khrushchev as the "high priest of Marxism-Leninism" (23) and depicts Chinese polemics in strong ideological terms (33-36). While Radchenko writes about Khrushchev's fondness for supporting revolutionary wars and wars of liberation movements, he claims that "China had something different to offer to the revolutionaries [across the world]: creed and example" (36-37). I certainly agree with creed (although

Mao's was a strange variation thereof), but by late 1962, China was just starting to support North Vietnam with military aid after a long hiatus since 1954. Otherwise, it was not supporting any revolutionary or national liberation wars—except the one in Laos, and in other cases only through its propaganda claims. At that point in time, China offered *mostly* ideology.

The chapter reveals the tension between the role of ideology and the Sino-Soviet power struggle for supremacy which Radchenko himself—and, in my view, unnecessarily—raised in the introduction. The two are not mutually exclusive, as the book's introduction seems to suggest. The power struggle occurs within the parameters of a common but disputed set of ideological beliefs. In the end, Radchenko himself admits that the 1962-63 period displayed a “remarkable interconnection of the struggle for ideas and the struggle for power” (69). Yet, he concludes that Mao was a “revolutionary realist” who “worked towards one goal alone: China's—and his own—power” (69). But this seems to me only one side of the coin. Mao worked toward a *revolutionary* China that was run by what he believed he himself represented: the true heir to the succession of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. In this realm, Mao was not different from Lenin, who was an ideologue and a pragmatist at the same time.

An egg-or-chicken question, this problem brings us back to the hierarchy or causes. I disagree with Radchenko about the predominance of realist behavior over ideological thinking during the period which he focuses on. Yet, regardless of the fact that Mao and Khrushchev had an incomplete understanding of Marxism-Leninism, their disagreements originated in ideological disputes of the 1950s and were couched in ideological tones. This does not mean that they could not make tactical decisions that were pragmatic, or that they used arguments of national security and national pride to make the case for war against a third country, as Mao did before the outbreak of the border conflict with India (28). It simply means that the Sino-Soviet conflict throughout the 1962-1963 was a power struggle within a mutually accepted, although partially disputed, set of ideological beliefs. To separate the two is an artificial division.

Chapter 2 covers the twelve months from August 1963 to August 1964. Here, Radchenko describes, correctly in my view, the Sino-Soviet rift both as a struggle for “the leader[ship] of the socialist camp and the international communist movement” (107) and for predominance in Asia. Believing in the “strength of their ideals” (72), the author writes, the Chinese communists essentially bought North Korean and North Vietnamese loyalty with economic and military aid. Other Asian countries, like Outer Mongolia, decided to exploit the Sino-Soviet rift to get more aid from the Soviet Union (84). Yet, this alignment of East Asian communist countries at these respective feeding lots was not necessarily the result of the struggle itself, but also reflected earlier and unrelated policy-decisions. While Moscow had not really cared about Vietnam beforehand,² Beijing had cut its aid to Outer Mongolia

² Zhai Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 123, 125.

in the early 1960s after Ulaanbaatar had asserted its claim to autonomy against Chinese hegemonic aspirations by entering the United Nations and COMECON in 1961.³

While I agree with Radchenko's portrayal of a struggle over loyalty through aid in Asia, I believe that he overstates the inroads the PRC made in Africa in this regard (82). In reality, Chinese financial aid to the newly decolonized nations was meager at best. Thus, Khrushchev's "surprise by the Chinese penetration of the Third World" is an interpretative embellishment, since the supposedly "minimal" (84) Soviet aid to India, Egypt, Cuba, and a selected few African nations was not only extant in real life but, with some token exceptions, also was much greater than what China was able to offer and was providing. Interestingly, Radchenko himself states that Mao overestimated the anti-Soviet potential of the Third World, writing that Chinese calls "stirred few souls to actions in Asia and even fewer Africa" (82, 83).

In this chapter Radchenko portrays Khrushchev as clumsy and consistent solely in being inconsistent (71) with regard to his attempts at preserving the alliance, while Mao, in comparison, comes across as astute and consistent in his effort to wreck the partnership (87-91). This stunning divergence was certainly related to Mao's skillful tactical maneuvering, Khrushchev's insistence to play the first fiddle (92), his lack of understanding what the disputes were about (91), and the Soviet tendency to be "at all stages of the split almost invariably a step behind China, often reacting to developments in Beijing that they [the Soviets] could neither control nor understand" (103). Yet, Khrushchev's contradictory policies seem to me not that incomprehensible although I agree that they were far from being well thought-out or even effective. Inconsistency in itself is not a vice, and consistency is not necessarily a virtue. I agree that "Mao was consistent" (91), but that does not mean that he was *prudent*. If he really wanted to gain supremacy in a united socialist world, wrecking the alliance probably was not the right way to achieve this. And Khrushchev's indecisive attitude reflects his various attempts at coming to terms with the collapsing relationship and at saving the unity of the socialist camp—as a whole including China or as a rump without it.

Chapter 3 on the period from Khrushchev's fall in October 1964 to the conclusion of the Soviet-Mongolian defense treaty in early 1966 is the heart of the book, at least in my view. Dissecting in detail the developments of post-Khrushchevite Soviet policy towards China, Radchenko argues that Kosygin and Brezhnev, although they insisted more on a class-conscious foreign policy, came to the same conclusions about China which Khrushchev had arrived at before: there was little left from the alliance to save. Thus, "Khrushchev's departure did not result in a dramatic reversal" (162), but only in a different explanation for the collapse of the alliance.

The chapter is extremely well researched and argued, particularly in view of the surging Vietnam War. The reader gets a good understanding of how the Soviet leadership tried a

³ See my own article: "The People's Republic of China and the Warsaw Pact Organization, 1955-63," *Cold War History* 7/4 (November 2007), 487-488.

new beginning after Khrushchev's fall, and how an accident—the Malinovskii incident—and the Indochina conflict undermined all their well-laid plans. Yet, its conclusion raises an important question: If there was, in effect, no real divergence in the approaches to China between Khrushchev and the Brezhnev-Kosygin team, what exactly could the Soviets have done differently to save the alliance? The book leaves that question open, but this chapter suggests “nothing” for an answer. That, of course, seems to contradict Radchenko's claim from the introduction that, on a leadership level, Moscow bears equal if not greater responsibility than Beijing for the collapse of the alliance. It suggests that by the 1960s the Chinese side, particularly Mao, was calling the shots on the fate of the alliance, regardless of what the Soviets were trying to do.

In *Chapter 4* on the starting year of the Cultural Revolution, Radchenko focuses on the story of the setting of one of the two suns. Here, he more strongly stresses the importance of perception. While still blaming Moscow for pursuing a policy of isolating Beijing in the socialist camp, he emphasizes that the Chinese tried to impose Maoism on other countries (165). Yet, as the year progressed, China lost one after the other of its few adherents. It was losing the struggle for supremacy in the communist world, inside and beyond the socialist world (171).

Radchenko's subtle analysis of a Soviet shift in perception towards *realpolitical* terms is particularly convincing and well-argued. Throughout 1966, the struggle moved from an ideological struggle to great power competition, at least in the Kremlin's eyes (172). While Moscow missed the significance of developments in China during that summer, Soviet diplomats in Beijing started to understand the mainly domestic significance of the Cultural Revolution by the end of the year (177, 186). Nevertheless, this did not help to change the Soviet perception at the top; fearing war, Moscow was willing to cooperate with Washington to contain Beijing (180, 188).

The *Conclusion* sketches two decades plus of Sino-Soviet relations to Gorbachev's visit in 1989. Enmity continued beyond the 1976 death of Mao, whose “grotesque, paranoid view of Soviet intentions” (204) primarily was responsible for much of the bitterness in the broken relationship. In the last pages of the conclusion, Radchenko returns to the meaning of ideology within the alliance. In the struggle for supremacy in the 1960s, he writes, ideology was the only means for China to assert itself within the alliance; it was not an end in itself, but a means to an end (206). Here again, it seems to me, it is important to distinguish between the struggle once disagreements had occurred, and the reasons why disagreements occurred in the first place. Of course, China was poor in the 1960, and a struggle, couched in ideological terms, was one way for China to assert a semblance of equality. But why was China poor in the 1960s to begin with? Was it the result of Russian great power chauvinism, the lack of Soviet aid, Moscow's insensitivity, or just the consequence of Mao's own ideologically shaped economic policies, such as the Great Leap Forward? Radchenko himself cannot escape the primacy of ideology in his conclusion, since, as he asserts, the nature of the ideological conflict allowed for “no compromise” (206).

Radchenko includes the translations of four very useful documents of Sino-Soviet exchanges—three from the former Soviet foreign ministry archive and one from the Polish party archive—in the appendix. Ranging from early 1963 to late 1965 (unfortunately, the second one is misdated 1965 instead of 1964), they provide the reader with a selection of important personal clashes among some of the most important protagonists in the later stages of the Sino-Soviet split. Simultaneously, they both reveal the pettiness of the debates and provide a great window into the ideological contortions both sides went through to make their case for the correct political position. In my view, they leave no doubt about the ideological nature of the conflict, even if some participants—Mao in particular—suffered from delusions about the outside world.

With regard to the third document—the Mao-Kosygin talks in Beijing on February 11, 1965—I myself have raised in the past some doubts about its reliability.⁴ A Polish-language translation twenty pages long, it originally stems from the *Archiwum Akt Nowych* in Warsaw, but has also been found in the Romanian archives in a Russian-language version. It was co-written by the late Oleg Troyanovskii in the plane from Beijing to Pyongyang, some hours after the actual meeting, as he himself told me in an interview some years ago.⁵ I always had reservations about its fidelity, given that it was not written at the time of the talks (but, in fact, is a memory protocol based, probably, on handwritten notes). More importantly, Kosygin even toyed with the idea of sanitizing it for the sake of sparing his colleagues in the Politburo from Mao's invective.⁶ During my May 2009 visit to China, I had the good fortune to conduct research in the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archive where I found the 56-page Chinese version of the talks.⁷ A side-by-side comparison confirmed, to my surprise, that the contents, including the sequence in which individual topics were raised, are very similar, although the Chinese version is more detailed and has an additional number of participants beyond Mao and Kosygin. I thus have concluded that the Polish version provides a reliable but not complete version of the talks, and I am glad to see it in Radchenko's book for the use by students and scholars.

Ultimately, Sergey Radchenko has written a thrilling book. He has produced much new evidence, particularly on the Soviet side, and has provided a page-turning interpretation. I enjoyed reading it, but I reached different conclusions. I agree that Moscow's understanding of Beijing was insufficient, and the Soviet leadership should have tried harder to learn about its partner. I also concur that Soviet policy toward the Chinese ally was clumsy, insensitive, and inconsistent. But in this respect, Soviet foreign policy was no different from its counterpart towards East Europe. Well-trained Soviet party and

⁴ See my own dissertation, *The Sino-Soviet Split, 1956-1966*, Yale University, 2003, 514.

⁵ Author's interview with Oleg A. Troyanovskii, Moscow, June 8, 2002.

⁶ *The Sino-Soviet Split, 1956-1966*, 514.

⁷ "Record of Chairman Mao Zedong's conversation with Kosygin and other people," 2/11/1965, *Waijiaobu dang'anguan [Archive of the Foreign Ministry]*, 109-03957-07, 181-236.

government diplomats were few, and the Soviet bureaucratic system did not leave much room for self-critical inquiry about one's own biases. Surely, in this regard, the Chinese side was not much different.

Radchenko suggests that changes in Soviet attitudes toward and a better understanding of the Chinese ally would have made a difference. His argument implies that the inherent inequality of the alliance demanded this from Moscow in order to accommodate Beijing's sensitivities. Certainly, the alliance was an unequal one; in fact, it was a one-way conveyor belt from Moscow to Beijing, providing security, technology, aid and more in immense quantities. Apart from some strategic materials, semi-finished products, and food it received, the Kremlin often wondered what it actually got in return for its massive investments. An official thank you would have been more welcome than supercharged ideological provocations and a struggle for supremacy.

It is true that Moscow neglected, to a certain degree, the well-being of the alliance in the late 1950s and was caught by surprise by the sudden deterioration of relations. However, this raises two questions: Was China willing to stay in the alliance in any meaningful way after its first decade (once it had gotten most of the goodies it wanted), and how far would the Soviet leadership have been willing to go to accommodate the Maoists in the Chinese capital? Since I am not convinced that Beijing intended to fill the alliance with life beyond the 1960s, I don't believe that anything, short of outright Soviet ideological surrender and the resulting elevation of Mao to the leadership of world communism, could have saved it. But why should a superpower with global interests and an increasing international reputation have submitted to an isolated regional ally that was economically poorer and militarily weaker as a result of its own policies? No amount of comprehension of Chinese culture, sensitivities, interests, and motives would have induced the Soviet Union to have done so.

Review by Vojtech Mastny, Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security and National Security Archive, Washington D.C

The Soviet-Chinese relationship has been emerging as a prime topic of Cold War research, superseding in important ways the relationship between the two superpowers. For one thing, the Soviet Union is no longer here while China is becoming another, but different, superpower, and its past interaction with the Soviet Union can be illuminating of the difference. For another, so many new sources about their interaction have been coming out that our understanding of it is bound to be subject to continuous revision for many years to come.

Happily for scholarship, no study of China's recent history can therefore be regarded as "definitive." More importantly, a growing number of studies utilizing new sources build up better understanding of the Sino-Soviet split. Radchenko's book is one of them, as is that on the same subject by Lorenz Lüthi, reviewed previously on H-Diplo.¹ The two are complementary rather than competing because of their authors' respect for each other's conceptions and interpretations—quite unlike the attitudes of the Soviet and Chinese protagonists of their studies.

Radchenko has gone about as far as anyone currently can in mining former Soviet archives while also making prodigious use of the extensive, if selective, Chinese evidence that has come to light since Lüthi completed his book a year before him. Since Radchenko completed his, however, even more documentation has become accessible, particularly at the archives of the Chinese foreign ministry. The main contribution of his book is on the Soviet side of the story.

The portrayal of Khrushchev and his immediate successors in their dealings with China, as presented in the book, can hardly be improved upon, regardless of what additional Soviet documents may be found in the future. The same cannot be said about Mao—a more complex and elusive personality, whose re-evaluation from Chinese sources will continue to challenge historians as they seek to come to grips with China's Maoist past.

Although Radchenko, like Lüthi, is open to multi-causal interpretation, they differ in their understanding of which forces were the most formative of the Sino-Soviet relationship. Lüthi, as well as for Chen Jian, see a relationship driven by ideology, dependent on domestic politics, and shaped by the personalities of the leaders.² Radchenko, while recognizing the importance of all these factors, perceives a more traditional competition for power and influence, determined by historic animosities with cultural and racial connotations. As suggested by the respective subtitles, his account is mainly about the two neighbors'

¹ Lorenz M. Lüthi. *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. See *H-Diplo Roundtable Reviews* 9, no. 25 (2008): 7-12, <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-IX-25.pdf>.

² Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 49-84.

“struggle for supremacy,” whereas Lüthi’s “Cold War in the communist world” unfolds in a broader international setting.

Both approaches have their merits—Lüthi’s that of focusing on how the unlikely alliance came about in the first place and why it lasted as long as it did, Radchenko’s that of addressing the question of why, despite its formidable appearance, it was doomed. More inclined toward determinism than Lüthi, he starts with a discussion of the relationship at its peak, before turning to an analysis of its seemingly irresistible decline and eventual disintegration.

The account appropriately opens with a discussion of the 1962 war between India and China—an episode within the Cold War but in retrospect an event of lasting implications. India served as a catalyst of the Sino-Soviet rift by forcing Khrushchev to choose between what he wanted to see as two “friendly and peace-loving” countries.³ The book leaves no doubt about his preference; during the war, Moscow went as far as supplying China with sensitive intelligence about India. Yet Khrushchev’s tilting toward Beijing did not make him friends there, whereas Indians persisted in regarding the Soviet Union as a reliable friend.⁴

On the connection between the 1962 war and the simultaneous Cuban missile crisis the book offers no conclusive evidence. Radchenko and Lüthi differ in their views of how much the Chinese knew of Khrushchev’s Caribbean adventure before it started unraveling. Each crisis followed its own dynamics, both of them undermining Sino-Soviet friendship but their outcomes were determined by other factors. Indian sources show that Moscow’s shift toward support for India, which initiated its massive arming with Soviet weapons, followed its call for American help.⁵ All the same, Khrushchev’s attempts to mend fences with China continued.

“Khrushchev’s only consistency was his inconsistency,” (71) Radchenko notes pithily. He detects shifts in Soviet policy that most authors have missed, particularly during 1963—the year often misinterpreted as critical in Soviet turn toward détente with the West because of the conclusion in July of the Limited Test Ban Treaty. Focusing on China as Khrushchev’s higher priority, Radchenko calls attention both to Moscow’s “anti-liberalization” campaign as an inducement to Beijing in advance for Khrushchev’s ill-fated attempt at reconciliation that preceded the treaty and to his subsequent, and last, attempt to woo Beijing in the treaty’s aftermath.

³ Record of Khrushchev-Nehru conversation, 13 February 1960, SDC, subject file 24, 1960, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, also at <http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?lng=en&id=94793&navinfo=96318>.

⁴ Vojtech Mastny, “New Light on Indian-Soviet Partnership,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, forthcoming in 2010.

⁵ T.N. Kaul, *A Diplomat’s Diary (1947-99): China, India and USA (The Tantalising Triangle)* (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 2000), 77-78.

As late as September 1963, Khrushchev professed seeking “reconciliation and agreement.” (88) Yet he also insisted that “we should not only defend ourselves but should attack” (87)—defend, that is, against Chinese accusations of revisionism and therefore attack Western imperialists more vigorously than Beijing did. In the end, however, he “remained passive despite his realization that *something* needed to be done about the Chinese.” (94) Romania’s Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who unsuccessfully tried to mediate in the spring of 1964, lamented that “the Soviets missed a very favorable moment. What a lack of flexibility! What rigidity!”⁶ Amid the overall “collapse of Soviet authority in Asia” that year, (74) the bankruptcy of Khrushchev’s foreign policy was evident even before he was overthrown for other reasons.

Radchenko describes Mao as a “revolutionary realist,” who “worked toward one goal alone: China’s—and his own—power.” (69) Such goal can explain his stubborn refusal to respond to Khrushchev’s overtures but hardly China’s turn in 1962-64 to global revolutionary policy through the promotion of “Afro-Asian solidarity” under Chinese leadership. The policy may have nourished the chairman’s “illusions of grandeur” (28) and brought China—as Beijing’s mayor Peng Zhen claimed before he fell out of Mao’s favor —“an ever growing number of friends” in the Third World (72), but ultimately undermined its power as well as security.

Despite Khrushchev’s attempts at reconciliation, Mao saw an increased Soviet military threat because of the intensified ideological competition he had been fomenting. He confided in North Korean leader Kim Il Sung his estimate that Moscow regarded war as an option. At the same time, he shocked the Soviet Union by challenging the legality of the common border, describing it as a product of nineteenth-century unequal treaties and warning that China had “not yet presented the bill for this list.” (113) He envisaged the need to “prepare for war on both sides”—with the Soviet “revisionists” as well as with the American “imperialists.” (112)

In view of such “realism,” the “sense of euphoria” that seized Khrushchev’s successors, including the otherwise level headed Premier Aleksei Kosygin, is hard to understand except in ideological terms. (131) Once his Chinese counterpart, Zhou Enlai, agreed to come to Moscow for talks, Kosygin saw a real chance to restore “class” ties with Chinese communists. Radchenko is more skeptical than Lüthi about their willingness to reciprocate, dwelling on the abundant evidence of tension on both sides. His account of the incident when a drunken Marshal Rodion Ia. Malinovskii counseled the Chinese to get rid of Mao as the Soviets did of Khrushchev, and Zhou expatiated on his own sincerity when drunk. is one of the highlights of the book.

The Kremlin’s attempt in 1964-65 to “reconnect theory with practice and restore ‘class-consciousness’ to Sino-Soviet relations” (122) reflected the Soviet leaders’ ignorance of Chinese politics, not least because of their racial prejudices. They were “almost invariably a

⁶ Record of Romanian politburo meeting, 30-31 March 1964, dated 4 April 1964, Party Chancellery Collection, file 12/1964, 4-34. National Archives of Romania.

step behind China, often reacting to developments in Beijing that they could neither control nor understand.” (103) Not surprisingly, Soviet diplomats on the spot tended to be better attuned to what was happening than their Moscow superiors but their assessments rarely made a difference to policy.

Radchenko’s analysis of the Kosygin-Mao meeting in February 1965 differs from Lüthi’s in portraying the chairman as dominating the discussion, “emphatically sarcastic” about Soviet support of Third World liberation movements and resistant to “even [a] semblance of agreement,” desired by Kosygin (145-46). In contrast, Lüthi sees Mao as a “shadow of his former self,”⁷ politically insecure because of his domestic failures and the meager results of his revolutionary foreign policy, already bent on provoking the Cultural Revolution in an attempt to shore up his power at China’s expense.

By the fall of 1965, Kosygin lost all his euphoria, confiding in Danish Prime Minister Jens Otto Krag that “our disagreement with China is so fundamental that personalities cannot influence it.” (159) Yet it was Mao’s personality, more than anything else, that influenced the course of events. The book describes the devastating effect of his Cultural Revolution on Sino-Soviet relations in gripping detail, including the two sieges of the Soviet embassy in Beijing by Red Guard mobs. Despite growing Soviet fears of war, reciprocated by Mao, as late as 1967, the Soviet army was “basically unprepared for hostilities with China.” (190)

Both Radchenko and Lüthi end their accounts in 1966-67. They see disagreements about assistance to North Vietnam as decisive in accelerating the slide to hostility that brought the former allies to the verge of war in 1969. They conclude with thoughtful overviews of the hostility that persisted for another two decades—a period, unlike the previous one, defined not by reckoning with the past but by calculations about China’s future. If the Sino-Soviet split had “buried the shared consciousness among communists . . . that communism was a workable solution to the problems created by the worldwide process of modernization,” the Chinese-American rapprochement presaged China’s later development by having “obscured the distinctions between socialist and capitalist ways to modernity.”⁸

“It was the intrinsic inequality of the Sino-Soviet alliance that brought it to ruin,” (206) writes Radchenko. Yet, throughout history, unequal alliances had been formed and prospered before disintegrating or fading away for other reasons than their inequality. More pertinent is his conclusion that the Soviet leaders’ “inability and unwillingness to understand Chinese culture and traditions . . . fed the feeling of mistrust and perception of the Chinese as cunning crafty, and aggressive . . . [with] far reaching consequences for the international system.” (207-208). Such is the main message of the book that is of abiding relevance to other foreign leaders as well.

⁷ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 295.

⁸ Chen Jian, “The Cold War in Transition and Transformation: China, East Asia and the Two Superpowers, 1964-1972,” 5, in the reader for conference “Nexus Years in the Cold War,” McGill University, Montreal, 16-17 October 2009.

Author's Response by Sergey Radchenko, University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China

Jeremy Friedman, Lorenz Lüthi and Vojtech Mastny have written fair, insightful and deeply sophisticated reviews of my book. It is a privilege to offer a response to these thought-provoking comments, which forced me out of intellectual complacency to rethink assumptions at the core of my work. I am very grateful to the three reviewers both for the generosity of their comments and for the challenging questions that they pose.

It is true that in the book I have registered a generally skeptical attitude towards ideology as the driving force behind the Sino-Soviet split. This is a function of cynical disposition inherited from my close encounter with disintegrating Soviet socialism. In a sense, this means – as Friedman notes perceptively – that I have tried to swim against the current of the new Cold War historiography. It is a powerful current, too; for Sino-Soviet relations it is represented by the formidable scholarship of Chen Jian, Lorenz Lüthi, Niu Jun and, indeed, my Ph.D supervisor Odd Arne Westad. By raising the banner of rebellion against ideology, I risk exposing myself to justified criticism for reading history backwards, and an inability to explain change and other intellectual handicaps commonly associated with “realism,” even with its “enlightened” variety which I profess in the *Two Suns*.

The book is somewhat unbalanced; as Mastny points out, it is researched at greater depth on the Soviet than on the Chinese side. From the fact that most of the criticism leveled at my arguments by the reviewers concerns the Chinese side of my interpretation, I take it that the Soviet part of the story raises no great objections. Just to recap, the basic line of argument is: 1) the Soviet leaders believed that the Sino-Soviet split was simply a result of China's effort to challenge the Soviet leadership in the socialist bloc and the broader non-capitalist world, and not about some abstract ideological matters; 2) the Soviet leaders believed that China had no right or ability to claim leadership; that idea appeared as simply absurd; 3) Soviet policy making was strongly influenced by unfavorable Russian stereotypes of the Chinese as treacherous and deceitful; the way events played out in Sino-Soviet relations in the 1960s confirmed for the Soviets that they had been taken advantage of by the ‘ungrateful’ Chinese. On the whole, Soviet policy towards China suffered a great deal from chauvinistic myopia and cultural insensitivity, which seriously exacerbated the conflict.

These being some of the key conclusions of the book, I could not of course overlook the broader question: why did the alliance fail, and, as Lüthi put it, who lit the match? Lüthi raises a very relevant and important point: when Mao was bent on wrecking the alliance, could better cultural sensitivity or flexibility really have made that much of a difference? What Lüthi alludes to is in fact another version of the ‘lost chance’ thesis. The original lost chance thesis, as scholars of China's foreign relations would know, referred to the notion that the United States missed an opportunity to establish diplomatic relations with China in 1949, despite possible willingness on the part of the CCP leadership. The thesis was popular once upon a time, when the U.S. diplomatic record revealed the details of contacts between Huang Hua and the U.S. Ambassador John L. Stuart, and additional documentation

concerning possible divergences on policy within the top CCP cadres in 1948-49. The lost chance thesis has since been criticized in the new Cold War historiography as basically U.S.-centered: China was never America's to lose. What makes me think that the Soviets could have done any better?

While I appreciate the importance of domestic politics for Beijing's foreign policy (and, indeed, I subscribe to a multi-causal explanation of the split), I suspect that the backlash against the lost chance thesis goes a bit too far in putting China at the center. From this perspective, only what Mao thought and did matters, yet we should not forget that Mao acted in certain international conditions, which may have constrained or even defined his actions. Much as we cannot know what would have happened if the U.S. de-recognized the Guomindang in 1949 and attempted a full-fledged rapprochement with the Communists, so we cannot know what would have happened if the Soviet Union had acted with more circumspection and avoided the sort of foreign policy mistakes Khrushchev committed with increasing frequency from 1956 in complete obliviousness about the consternation his chauvinistic impulses caused in the ranks of the Chinese leadership. As we cannot say whether Mao would have still "cleaned out the house before inviting guests" if the U.S. had been more accommodating, so we cannot really conclude that Mao would have ruined a "more equal" alliance with the Soviets.

My argument is that the Soviets never recognized the inequality of this alliance, and yes, it means that there was a lost chance. After all, the future is never set in stone. In other words, I doubt that a reference to Mao's ideological proclivities alone explains anything. Mao's push for a "continuous revolution" in China was in large part a reaction to the peculiar circumstances the Chinese leader – and his country – found themselves in the 1950s. "Continuous revolution" was simply Mao's shortcut to greatness; the Soviets were in the wrong not because they disagreed with the parameters of this revolution but because they denied China her greatness. This denial was at the very core of the Sino-Soviet alliance; for this reason, the alliance was unsustainable as such; Mao or no Mao, it was not meant to last. For the Chinese leadership, it was a temporary expedient, a means to an end. I say in the book that the intrinsic inequality of the alliance brought it to ruin. Mastny rightly points out that such approach is deterministic, for many alliances exist in spite of their intrinsic inequality. Indeed, inequality was not so much the problem as the Soviet inability to recognize this inequality, and make adjustments. To misuse a concept from E.H.Carr's work, if this were a more dynamic alliance, allowing for some form of internal appeasement and change, it could have lasted longer.

The issues I encountered while writing this book inspired further research on the subject of Sino-Soviet relations. I have now finished another manuscript, in which I look at the reasons for the rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing in the 1980s. Here, again, a multi-causal explanation works best. It is curious (though not unexpected of course) that I found that the Soviet willingness to recognize China as a great power was a vital component of this rapprochement. "One has to understand the Chinese," Mikhail Gorbachev

put on one occasion. “They have a right to become a great power, we should not call it ‘chauvinism.’”¹ He implored his Politburo colleagues to talk “respectfully” about China. Gorbachev’s key ally Aleksandr Yakovlev had a similar disposition, saying in March 1988: “One has to be a realist. [China] is a great power. ... If we talk about foreign policy, one must get rid of imperialist pretensions. This concerns us as well. One has to get used to living as equals among equals.”² By accepting China as an “equal” (as opposed to Khrushchev who was explicit in his claims that China was not an equal of the USSR) the later Soviet leaders created an indispensable precondition for rapprochement. But who lit the match? I think both sides were parties to the arson: as my favorite Chinese saying goes, it takes two hands to clap.

I also would like to clear up a possible misunderstanding about the role of “ideology” in Sino-Soviet relations in the 1950s and the 1960s. It strikes me in retrospect as a serious omission that I did not attempt to define “ideology” in the book, unlike Lüthi who actually spent several pages on the subject (see *The Sino-Soviet split*, pp. 8-10). I think had I explained my understanding of ideology, many of the apparent contradictions in my interpretation would have been smoothed out. For what I meant by ideology was the so called textbook Marxism-Leninism. This textbook version of Marxism-Leninism cannot be summarized in a word or two, for it was a complicated doctrine – or “faith” – with its competing body of interpretations, peddled by government-appointed philosophers or “theoreticians” in China and in the USSR. The correct parameters of this faith were being argued out in the great polemics of the early 1960s. The bottom line in the *Two Suns* is that what was being said in that barrage of mutually incriminating polemical salvos did not actually make any difference for Sino-Soviet relations. As Deng Xiaoping told Gorbachev in May 1989: this was all empty words (*konghua*).

But if we adopt a broader understanding of ideology as a basic system of coordinates, then it is very pertinent to understanding Sino-Soviet relations, for it explains why the Sino-Soviet struggle for supremacy took on such strange forms. What I mean by a system of coordinates is that both the Soviet and the Chinese leaders recognized that their foreign policy was guided by a certain doctrine, i.e. communism. What they meant by communism need not matter – perhaps their versions were quite incompatible. Both sides recognized that the other adhered in theory to the same doctrine as itself. Also, both the Soviet and the Chinese leaders understood that there was only one – absolute – Truth: the doctrine did not allow for divergent interpretations. In this system of coordinates, any Chinese challenge (even the smallest challenge) to the Soviet Union was a violation of the Truth, a challenge of leadership. For as long as both Beijing and Moscow operated within the parameters of one doctrine – one faith – their struggle for leadership was simply irreconcilable. Other socialist countries at different times had ideological disagreements with Moscow but no one challenged the Soviet leadership in this system of coordinates the

¹ Anatolii Cherniaev et al. (eds.), *V Politbiuro TsK KPSS...* (Moscow: Al’pina Biznes Buks, 2006), p. 72.

² Aleksandr Iakovlev’s statement before the staff of the Soviet Embassy in Ulaanbaatar, March 17, 1988, State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF): fond 10063, opis 2, delo 115, list 44.

way that China did.

Friedman raises an extremely important question with regard to my argument that ideology ceased to play any role in the Soviet assessment of China by the late 1960s (and the other way around), and that the Sino-Soviet split in fact marked de-valuation of ideology in Soviet (and Chinese) foreign policy in general, and in this sense heralded the beginning of the end of the Cold War. Friedman in particular refers to the creation of the Interkit – quasi-institutional arrangements set up in December 1967 ostensibly with the purpose of enforcing ideological conformity among Soviet allies on the China question. I would argue, however, that the Interkit had nothing to do with the Soviet perception of an ideological threat or ideological competition from China. It was just a way to keep the allies in line, so that no one improved relations with China to the detriment of Soviet national interest and bloc politics. China was neither an ideological threat nor a competitor of the USSR in the 1970s because it was already operating in a different system of coordinates. For a more nuanced analysis of the Interkit – whose importance had been generally overlooked in the scholarly literature – see “Interkit: a Soviet Attempt to Establish an Anti-Chinese United Front, 1967–1985” by James Hershberg, Sergey Radchenko, Péter Vámos, and David Wolff (forthcoming working paper with CWIHP).

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