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Evolution and Revolution: Sino-Hungarian Relations and the 1956 Revolution

By Péter Vámos
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Péter Vámos

Evolution and Revolution: Sino-Hungarian Relations and the 1956 Revolution

The Hungarian government, on Soviet advice, initiated relations with the Communist leadership of “Free China” in the summer of 1949. Subsequent to the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on 1 October, Hungary, following the Soviets’ example, and, together with Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, recognized almost immediately, on 4 October, the newly-formed state as China’s sole legitimate representative, contributing to the international legitimacy of the PRC. Two days later, the Chinese government’s reply arrived, in which it “warmly welcomed the immediate assumption of diplomatic relations.”¹

The establishment of relations was followed by a period of acquaintance, and a rather slow development of corresponding institutions. The global situation had been transformed by October 1949. During the first years of the Cold War, two opposing blocs had emerged in Europe: NATO came into existence on 4 April; Comecon held its first session on 24 April; the Federal Republic of Germany was formed on 21 September, the German Democratic Republic on 7 October. The efforts of more socialist states to gain admittance to the UN fell through. Hungarian foreign policy, including China policy, rested on identical founding principles to that of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries belonging to the Soviet sphere of interest and, in practice, closely followed Soviet steps. Before reviewing the Sino-Hungarian relations of this early period, therefore, it is worth recalling the development of Sino-Soviet relations which were, by this time, already rather complex.

China in the Soviet sphere of influence

By the end of the 1940s, Cold War confrontations were being replicated in Asia, with the evolution of two political blocs. China became a part of the rivalry between two opposing ideological and power-political systems, and two Chinese states came into existence: the Communist PRC, allied with the Soviet Union; and Taiwan, under the leadership of the Guomindang, retained the ROC name, with the support of the United States. This division strongly influenced Chinese foreign policy of the 1950s (and of the following half-century), as well as the internal development of the two Chinese entities.

Until 1971, Taiwan represented the whole of China at the UN and other international organizations. The PRC had become isolated. In the 1950s, Beijing’s international contacts, apart from relations with the Soviet Union and socialist countries, only extended to the Third World, and often took the form of inter-party relations, rather than state-to-state contacts.

In the summer of 1949, Mao Zedong announced the guiding principle of “leaning to one side,” and the Party’s second-in-command, Liu Shaoqi, agreed with Stalin in Moscow that while the Soviet Union would remain the center of the

¹ On the establishment of bilateral relations and the exchange of ministers see: Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives (CFMA), Beijing, 109-00011-01.

international communist movement, the task of leading world revolution in Asia would be that of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).² The Soviet Union strove to provide all political and economic assistance in this respect. At first, the PRC's leadership pursued a "new democratic" policy which included, at least in theory, populist policy, coalition government, and the acceptance of the existence of a mixed economy. In October 1953, Mao announced the "general line for socialist construction" which signaled the direct adoption of the Soviet command economy model, replicating Stalin's violent collectivization policies of 1929, and rapid leaps in development. Following the commencement of the first Chinese Five-Year Plan (1953-7), more than 150 major investment projects were initiated (with Soviet assistance), designed to serve the development of heavy and chemical industry. With the free transfer of manufacturing expertise becoming regular practice, Chinese factories and workshops were built based on Soviet plans. Thousands of Soviet experts—political and military advisers, technical and technological specialists—worked in China, while tens of thousands of Chinese engineers and students were trained in the Soviet Union.

The "friendly" or "fraternal" socialist countries supported Chinese socialism, depending on circumstances and opportunities. Despite an emphasis on developing heavy industry, a certain division of labor emerged. China, which was exceptionally underdeveloped in industrial terms but rich in natural resources, imported much of its means of production, with all imports coming from the countries of the Eastern bloc. Prices were set at levels acceptable to both sides, annual interest on ruble credits never rose above 2%, and China's socialist partners did not use their good bargaining position to gain economic advantage.³ Solidarity also characterized economic negotiations. Communist parties took the expression "fraternal country" seriously, and the "great task of building socialism" helped to settle disputes.

Drawing on a strong imperial tradition, China's leadership imagined that the Middle Kingdom had become an autonomous, sovereign member of the Soviet-led international alliance of socialist countries, and approached international politics accordingly. China's ideological foundation, Marxism-Leninism supplemented by Mao Zedong Thought, drew a clear distinction between China and the "imperialist" powers and ensured for itself a community with socialist "fraternal countries," while the emphasis on China's developmental peculiarities also provided an appropriate framework for a pragmatic foreign policy that took China's own interests into account. This proved indispensable when, after Stalin's death, it became evident that the Soviet model was undergoing a general crisis, as a power struggle at the highest political level combined with the excessive expansion of heavy industry, the deterioration of living conditions and the exercise of terror. This crisis swept across the whole of Eastern Europe: it began with demonstrations against monetary reforms in Czechoslovakia, leading to riots in East Germany and anti-Soviet demonstrations in Poland. The crisis affected Romania and Bulgaria, and brought about a change of government in Hungary.

Contradictions between ideology and political reality did not, however, prompt the Chinese leaders to question the validity of their worldview. Instead, the

² Chen, Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). pp. 74-5.

³ William C. Kirby, "The Two Chinas in Global Setting. Sino-Soviet and Sino-American Cooperation in the 1950s". p. 34. In Robert S. Ross–Jiang Changbin (eds.), *Re-examining the Cold War. U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973*. (Cambridge (Mass.)-London: Harvard University Press, 2001). pp. 25-45.

role played by ideology in foreign policy gradually changed. The CCP's ideology continued to define the regime's identity internally, but internationally, theoretical principles and norms—primarily the five principles of peaceful coexistence—were cited only when criticizing the behavior of other countries.⁴

The reception and impact of the 20th Congress of the CPSU were also different in China than in Eastern bloc countries, including Hungary. Khrushchev delivered his secret speech at a time when, the momentum to build socialism was beginning to wane in China. The agricultural collectivization policy carried out in 1955-6 had directly impacted 80-85 percent of the PRC's population. The failures of Mao's violent measures were so similar to the Soviet experience of collectivization that Khrushchev's attacks on Stalin's crimes could have been interpreted as indirect criticism of Mao's failures. Under these circumstances, Mao was compelled to defend himself. He reasoned that open support for Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin would open the way for criticism against him. He did not want to awaken "unhealthy interest," and forbade the circulation of the secret speech even within the party apparatus.

At its 20th Congress, the CPSU, citing Lenin (and relying on its global military power), renounced the principle of the inevitability of war, and declared the possibility of peaceful coexistence with the capitalist world. Mao felt that the time had come to articulate his own policy.

Wu Lengxi, then editor of *Renmin Ribao*, reports in his memoirs that the Chinese leadership first dealt with Khrushchev's speech on 17 March, at a session of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CCP Central Committee (CC). Mao had not yet completely formed his opinions, but it was clear that he wanted to direct the discussion to favor his own position, and the future of his policies. While he was pleased that Stalin's cult of personality had come to an end, he viewed the Soviets' behavior as a manifestation of great-power chauvinism. He called Khrushchev's speech a surprising attack, and resented the fact that the Soviets had not consulted with fraternal parties beforehand. Mao felt that he had not been treated with the respect he deserved.⁵

Two days later, Mao came forward with a much firmer opinion. He spoke of Stalin's work as seventy percent correct, and thirty percent incorrect, and claimed that his errors were less important than his achievements. Moreover, according to the Chairman, Stalin had committed errors against the policies and person of Mao.⁶ Mao was, essentially, using his criticism of Stalin's cult of personality in order to strengthen his own.

At the next meeting on 24 March, Mao initiated the process of writing an assessment of Stalin to shed light on the biases in Khrushchev's speech.⁷ Its

⁴ Steven I. Levine, "Perception and Ideology in Chinese Foreign Policy". p. 39. In Thomas W. Robinson-David Shambaugh (eds.), *Chinese Foreign Policy. Theory and Practice*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). pp. 30-46. The five principles (Pancha Shila) were: respect for the territorial integrity of other countries; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-intervention in domestic affairs; cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual advantage; and mutual peaceful coexistence.

⁵ Wu, Lengxi, *Shi nian lunzhan, 1956-1966. Zhong-Su guanxi huiyilu. 1-2*. [Ten Years of Polemics, 1956-66. Recollections on Sino-Soviet Relations.] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999, 2000²). pp. 6-7.

⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

publication was timed to coincide with the visit of Anastas Mikoyan on 6 April.⁸ The article, “On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” addressed the charges made in the secret speech (the cult of personality and despotism; crimes committed by Stalin during the period of his rule; the neglect of agriculture and living standards of the peasantry; and the Yugoslav question) as well as other hitherto unacknowledged errors committed (against China, according to Mao) by Stalin and the Soviet Union. The article emphasized Mao’s thesis on the contradictions among the people, and accused Stalin of ascribing insufficient importance to the continuation of class struggle.

A month later, Mao reaffirmed his assessment. In the section of his speech on the ten major relationships, dealing with the relationship between China and other countries, he acknowledged that the CCP had picked up the weaknesses of the Soviet Union earlier, that is, it had followed Stalin’s incorrect line. However, he shifted the blame onto the “Left” adventurism and “Right” opportunism of Wang Ming, which, Mao argued, had originated with Stalin. On the relationship between revolution and counter-revolution, it was established that “the suppression of counter-revolutionaries in 1951-2 was necessary.” On the counter-revolutionaries, it was established that “it is essential that different counter-revolutionaries be dealt with on the merits of each case.” On the executions, “Stalin put the wrong number of people to death,” but it was noted that with regard to executions in China, “it was absolutely correct to execute those counter-revolutionaries.”⁹ As Swiss historian Lorenz Lüthi has argued, Mao was able to learn from de-Stalinization, but was unable, or unwilling, to acknowledge that he himself had applied Stalinist methods.¹⁰ In the speech on the ten major relationships, Mao said that although “[w]e must draw a clear distinction between ourselves and the enemy,” he also stated that “[a]ll counter-revolutionaries should be given a chance to earn a living, so that they can start anew.”¹¹ With regard to those who erred, Mao said that “first we must observe and second we must give help [...]. A clear distinction must be drawn between right and wrong, for controversies over principle within the party are a reflection in the party of the class struggle in society, and no equivocation is to be tolerated.”¹² The Political Committee discussed Mao’s speech on the ten major relationships between 25 and 28 April, and came to a decision on the new guidelines for artistic and intellectual life. A few days later, on 2 May, Mao proclaimed the new slogan: “Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend!”¹³

In preparation for the CCP’s 8th National Congress (15-27 September 1956), Mao’s ten-point program was debated at provincial level, yet the congress still brought success for opponents of Mao’s personality cult and economic reforms. The party’s new constitution contained no reference to Mao Zedong Thought.¹⁴ In the

⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

⁹ *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung Vol. V.* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1977). pp. 288-9.

¹⁰ Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split, 1956-1966*. PhD. Dissertation, 2003. Manuscript. p. 60.

¹¹ *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung Vol. V.:* p. 291.

¹² Ibid., pp. 292-3.

¹³ Pang, Xianzhi–Jin, Chongji, *Mao Zedong zhuan. 1949-1976*. [Biography of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976.] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003.): vol. 1., pp. 486-92.

¹⁴ The Party Constitution adopted on 26 September stated that “The Chinese Communist Party takes Marxism-Leninism as its guide to action. Only Marxism-Leninism brings to light the laws governing the development of human society...” In *Kína Kommunista Pártjának VIII. kongresszusa. Rövidített jegyz könyv*. [The 8th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. Short Minutes.] (Budapest: n.p., 1956). p. 339.

spirit of strengthening the principle of collective leadership, four deputy chairmen were chosen by the Central Committee alongside Chairman Mao (Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and Chen Yun), and the direction of the Central Secretariat fell under Deng Xiaoping's control. The official and organizational basis of Mao's cult was thus severely shaken. The Congress also announced that the class struggle had reached an end in the PRC, and voted for the next Five-Year Plan (1958-62), setting out balanced economic development.

Sino-Hungarian relations between 1949 and 1956

Hungary, like the other socialist states, supported the PRC's domestic and international aspirations from the start. In the spirit of mutual recognition, bilateral agreements were signed, and exchange visits began in 1950 despite great geographical distance.¹⁵ Alongside mutual visits by politicians, exhibitions and visits by art ensembles were also organized during this period to popularize Chinese and Hungarian culture.¹⁶ During the first phase of relations, a system of pacts and agreements evolved which culminated in a treaty of friendship and cooperation signed by the parties on 6 May 1959 in Beijing.¹⁷

Personal contacts in the first half of the 1950s were confined exclusively to official trips. Trade contacts began in 1951. The section of the Hungarian ambassador's annual report of 1951 regarding economic relations highlighted the following: "On our part, we experienced difficulties because the style of negotiations was completely unknown to us, and market demands were in part unfamiliar." Hungarian Ambassador Safrankó added, however, that "[the Chinese] valued the friendship honestly, and the shipments, by virtue of their nature, got under way from China even during the negotiations." The Hungarian leadership was surprised by the fact that "it was relatively easy for the Chinese to meet our demands," unlike the Hungarians, who could not keep to deadlines, and were unable to match expectations

¹⁵ The first official Chinese delegation arrived in Hungary on 5 April 1950. The eleven-member government delegation was led by China's military attaché to Moscow. See minister extraordinary and plenipotentiary Endre Sík's strictly confidential letter to the embassy of the People's Republic of Hungary (PRH) in Beijing, "The visit of the Chinese government delegation," Budapest, 29 April 1950, Hungarian National Archives (HNA) Foreign Ministry (FM) Secret Administration (SA) Kína XIX-J-1-j-Kína-4/i-00528-1950. The most notable visits before 1956 were: Foreign Trade Minister Ye Jizhuang's visit to Budapest, April 1953; Deputy Premier Deng Zihui's visit to Hungary on the occasion of the Hungarian national day celebrations, March-April 1955; and Hungarian Deputy Premier András Hegedüs's visit to China, September-October 1954, part of which was to attend the celebration of the fifth anniversary of the founding of the PRC.

¹⁶ The ambassador's first notable public event was a reception and a photo-documentary exhibition on 4 April 1950. Ambassador Safrankó stated that the aim of the events was: "to acquaint Hungary with Chinese leading comrades, and to bring to the widest possible Chinese masses, that there is a Hungary which, even though it is small, fulfils a definite role on the peace front." See Ambassador Emánuel Safrankó's annual report of 1950. HNA FM SA Kína XIX-J-1-j-Kína-47-0028286-1950, box no. 8. That this was the first in the series of the socialist countries' similar events contributed to the success of the Hungarian events.

¹⁷ The PRH and the PRC signed the following agreements prior to 1956: agreement on exchange of goods and payments (Beijing, 22 January, 1951); agreement on cultural cooperation (Beijing, 12 July 1951); accord on the exchange of films (20 August 1951); agreement on trade in postal services and telecommunications (Beijing, 16 July 1953); agreement on scientific and technological cooperation (Beijing, 3 October 1953); agreement on radio cooperation (Beijing, 15 October 1953); agreement on mutual cooperation to protect against crop diseases and pests (Beijing, 28 December 1954). Law decree No. 1955/33.

of quality.¹⁸ The development of economic relations was stymied since the Hungarians were never able to provide the quantities of goods laid down in the annual agreements. Given the great distance, and the limited ability of both economies to fulfill their respective sides of the agreement, Sino-Hungarian trade relations were not of primary importance for either country. Hungarian debt to China grew from year to year, and, consequently, the trust of Chinese foreign trade bodies in their Hungarian counterparts gradually eroded. In the spring of 1956, Rákosi and Mao attempted to solve the problem through personal correspondence.¹⁹

In January 1956, the Hungarian Foreign Ministry was dissatisfied with the work of the embassy, finding both its reports and its relations with the Chinese to be unsatisfactory.²⁰ The ambassador in Beijing worded his report in much more specific and self-critical terms: “in practice, the policy of our party towards the PRC is not succeeding. Our cultural agreement is pitiful, our publicity work is not at all satisfactory, in our economic relations we do not pay sufficient attention to deadlines, and the quality of our transported goods is objectionable. Likewise, the work of the embassy in extending contacts is feeble. Contact between the press attaché and representatives of the Chinese press has ceased completely, nor have personal contacts been established on the economic policy front which, had they existed, might have brought some assistance to the commercial attaché. On the cultural front, the embassy’s contacts were entirely insignificant.” According to the report, the situation somewhat improved after the November 1955 arrival of two new Chinese-speaking staff members, Endre Galla and Barna Tálás, although “contacts cannot yet be described as satisfactory.”

The Hungarian ambassador, more accustomed to “fraternal solidarity,” expressed his disapproval and incomprehension: “recently the Chinese have only wanted to purchase goods of outstanding quality, which is why they seek trade relations with those countries who can supply accordingly. The Chinese apply the principle of ‘getting the best’ across the board.” Hungarian diplomats attempted, nevertheless, to improve relations, organizing separate exhibitions on textiles and geology at the beginning of 1956, as well as courses for tractor drivers in China which “assisted in popularizing our tractors.” It was all in vain, however, because in 1955, Hungary was once again unable to fulfill its annual obligations required by the trade agreement with China.²¹

Hungarian embassy staff frequently found keeping up with Chinese domestic and foreign policy to be an impossible task, due to restrictions on access to

¹⁸ Emánuel Safrankó’s annual report of 1951. HNA FM SA XIX-J-1-j-Kína-27-00875-1952, box no. 8. In terms of the product structure of Hungarian exports, the proportion of engineering industry items rose from 12% in 1951 to 20% in 1952, while the proportion of consumer goods fell from 34% to 3.4%. In 1953, Hungary’s heavy industrial goods amounted to over 75% of its exports (1,800 various vehicles, 500 tractors, deep borers, and telecommunications equipment). In Beijing in 1956, one quarter of the buses transporting the population of three million were produced by the Hungarian Ikarus company. In the same year, the Csepel car factory made a test run of its trucks in Tibet. China exported primarily agricultural products, raw materials and other goods to Hungary, which it would otherwise have had to buy from Western countries.

¹⁹ For Mao’s letter to Rákosi see *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao Zedong’s Manuscripts since the Founding of the People’s Republic] Vol. 6. (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992). p. 53.

²⁰ Deputy Minister József Kárpáti’s memorandum to the Ambassador to Beijing: “The work of the embassy.” Budapest, 17 January 1957. HNA FM SA Kína XIX-J-1-j-Kína-12-001575-1956, box no. 2.

²¹ Ambassador Ágoston Szkladán’s report to Foreign Minister János Boldóczy: “Comments on Points 5, 6 and 7 of the Annual Report.” Beijing, 18 January 1956. HNA FM SA Kína XIX-J-1-j-Kína-27-003260-1956, box no. 8.

information and their non-existent Chinese language skills. Party and state leaders only rarely made contact with diplomats working in Beijing, and kept themselves well away from regular communication and maintaining contacts. Information imparted during meetings of Chinese officials with foreign diplomats was no different than the contents of articles published in the press, while lower-ranking cadres were unwilling to speak to foreigners.

Over the course of 1955-6, in the period following the Bandung Conference, China significantly improved its relations with Japan, as well as with South and Southeast Asian countries, primarily Burma, India, Cambodia, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.²² Diplomatic bodies in Beijing sensed this change in the behavior of Chinese officials. Chargé d'affaires József Száll wrote in the summer of 1956 that "[...] ever since the party has decided to improve relations with the capitalist countries, and has further solidified friendships with Asian and African countries, the staff of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, as well as other state leaders, have devoted themselves with total enthusiasm to this task."

Száll, who had headed the Hungarian Foreign Ministry's Information Department for five years prior to his May 1956 appointment to China, saw the problem not only in the behavior of the Chinese. Hungary had, in his opinion, underestimated China's international influence, and this had impacted on the development of Sino-Hungarian relations. He believed that the momentum following the formation of the PRC and establishment of relations had been lost, and that trade relations had not developed sufficiently, which could not be counterbalanced in adequate measure by the political initiatives of Hungarian diplomacy. Party and state leaders of other socialist countries (Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Poland and the USSR), who had acknowledged the importance of political relations, had made more frequent visits to China, whereas the only high-ranking visit of the Hungarian government had been the trip made by Deputy Premier András Hegedüs in 1954. Száll, in August 1956, judged that the Chinese had written off Hungary somewhat: "of the European people's democracies, only Czechoslovakia and the GDR are regarded as important. Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania are of ever-declining interest, and the reason for this is, mostly, [these states'] lack of information, which characterizes Hungary's relations in particular ... [The Chinese leaders] do not wholly regard these countries as truly independent, and do not attach any importance to their role in international politics." According to Száll, the Chinese leaders felt that "foreign trade and economic relations with these countries held no real prospects for China."²³

The account provided by press attaché József [P.] Szabó appears to confirm the accuracy of this view. In June 1956, press attachés of friendly foreign countries were called to the editorial offices of *Renmin Ribao* and informed that from 1 July, the paper would no longer appear in its four-page format, but over eight pages. In the interest of strengthening its foreign policy columns, more foreign correspondents would be dispatched, "because only colorful writings based on personal experiences

²² By 1956, one of the central elements of Hungarian Asian policy was to prepare the way for establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan. In June 1956, József Száll prepared a memorandum for departmental head József Marjai, on the necessity of activating Hungarian Far East policy. Száll thought that Hungary could put its friendly relations with China to much better use in order to further the development of relations with other countries in the region. He proposed that widening contacts, for example towards Japan, would require arrangements to be made from Beijing.

²³ József Száll's report: "Some characteristics of Chinese foreign policy," Beijing, 16 August 1956. HNA FM SA Kína XIX-J-1-j-Kína-006707-1956.

will bring an end to the paper's grayness."²⁴ Correspondents would be sent first to the people's democracies and Asian countries, but the paper also wished to widen its journalist exchange program with Western countries. To date, it had not had any correspondents in Eastern Europe, and in 1956, journalists had been sent to Belgrade and Prague. Establishing a post for a Budapest correspondent did not figure among its plans. In line with the expansion of the paper, every edition would carry one full page of news and articles from the Soviet Union and the people's democracies. [P.] Szabó's opinion on this may be interpreted as both criticism of Hungarian policy, and self-criticism: "Not one friendly country, other than the Soviet Union, has been able to exploit the opportunity accordingly."²⁵

During the first half of 1956, visits between Hungary and China took place only as gestures or according to protocol, symbolizing a demonstration of basic policy, rather than direct economic or cultural relevance. Of the mutual visits, three events may be highlighted: PRC Deputy Chairman Zhu De's visit to Hungary in January; the visit to Beijing by the Presbyterian minister (and later Foreign Minister) János Péter; and the visits of Party Central Leadership secretaries Béla Vég and József Köböl (returning to Hungary from the 3rd Congress of the Korean Workers' Party).

The most important political message of Zhu De's trip was the fact of the visit itself. Zhu and his retinue (Nie Rongchen, Liu Lantao, interpreter Shi Zhe, and two secretaries) visited European socialist countries and spent three days in Hungary. It appears from their program, however, that substantial discussions did not occur, and that the visit was primarily a matter of protocol.²⁶ With reference to the visit, the Chinese ambassador in Budapest emphasized that Rákosi toasted "the peace camp of 900 million, led by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China."²⁷

János Péter was the guest of Protestant church leaders of Beijing and Nanjing for two weeks in March. The visit came about by way of participation in the 15-23 March congress held by the "Three-Self" patriotic movement of Protestant churches, which acknowledged the leading role of the Communist Party and enjoyed the trust of both party and state. The Chinese inquired into the planned meeting in Hungary of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in the summer of 1956.²⁸

The Hungarian Workers' Party's two secretaries were also received as guests in Beijing in May, together with Polish, Romanian, Albanian, and GDR delegations returning home from the Korean Workers' Party Congress. A dinner was held in honor of the friendly delegations, and although Mao Zedong did not take part, the

²⁴ Chargé d'affaires József Száll's report (reported by József [P.] Szabó): "Renmin Ribao's invitation," Beijing, 8 June 1956. HNA FM Admin. Kína XIX-J-1-k 5767-1956.

²⁵ Chargé d'affaires József Száll's report (reported by József [P.] Szabó): "Articles for Renmin Ribao," Beijing, 8 June 1956. HNA FM SA XIX-J-1-j-Kína-005767/1-1956.

²⁶ Deputy Head of Department Irén Rózsa's memorandum to the Hungarian embassy in Beijing: "Chinese Delegation in Hungary," Budapest, 27 January 1956. HNA XIX J-1-j-Kína-4/b-001565-1956.

²⁷ Telegram from the embassy in Hungary on the visit of Deputy Chairman Zhu De, Budapest, 20 January 1956. CFMA, 109-01030-05 (1). The report from Budapest mentioned among the embassy's oversights, that the delegation was listed as an official government delegation. The mistake was rectified only on the 14th, when it was noticed by Liu Lantao, but by that time Hungarian newspapers had already been writing about the official visit for two days.

²⁸ The World Council of Churches was formed in Amsterdam in 1948, and Chinese Protestant churches were involved in its work until 1951. Representatives of the Chinese Protestant churches "cleansed" in the patriotic movement did not take part in the Galyatet conference in the summer of 1956, but the Hungarian organizers made it possible for them to pay a "friendly visit" to Hungary at the time of the conference.

CCP was represented by Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Deng Xiaoping, Dong Biwu, Peng Zhen, and Peng Dehuai. Peng Dehuai spoke—a good eighteen months ahead of Mao’s 1957 Moscow conference speech—of how China would, within the next three or four Five-Year Plans, attain and exceed Great Britain’s levels of steel production. At the meeting, Béla Vég raised the possibility of signing a long-term Sino-Hungarian treaty, to which Zhu De replied that the Chinese were already holding discussions on the matter.²⁹ Zhu enquired about Rákosi’s state of health, and noted that Rákosi would be expected in China during the second half of the year.³⁰

The visit could not take place, as Rákosi lost his party positions in the summer of 1956. Following Rákosi’s fall, Chinese behavior towards the Hungarians changed perceptibly for better. Chargé d’affaires József Száll informed the Chinese Foreign Ministry about the Central Leadership meeting even before press reports came out. The Chinese reaction to the information was that “Comrade Mao Zedong himself attributed great importance to the changes in Hungary.” Thereafter, the Chinese partners, one after the other, “naturally” accepted the embassy’s dinner invitations, even taking family members to official dinners in July and August, with the head of protocol attending once with his wife and son, emphasizing that he would regard and fulfill similar requests in the future as a friend.

In September, a Hungarian Party delegation led by János Kádár attended the 8th National Congress of the CCP. The other delegation members included István Hidas, Zoltán Szántó, and Ágoston Szkladán, the Hungarian ambassador to Beijing. For Kádár, the trip represented his first serious foreign engagement, and the usually-reluctant traveler immediately took the plane journey lasting a few days. He was greatly impressed by the “indescribable” attentiveness of the Chinese. In a letter to his wife, he wrote with enthusiasm that on the shelves next to the “tulle-canopied, four-poster bed” was *Szabad Nép* alongside Chinese newspapers, folded up “just the way I put it on the shelves in the dining room at home.”³¹ He addressed the Congress on 17 September in the name of the Hungarian Workers’ Party. Participation in the congress allowed him the opportunity to meet various party leaders in person. After the congress finished, the Hungarian delegation went to Tianjin, Mukden, and Shanghai, and took part in the 1 October celebrations in Beijing.

During the congress Zhou Enlai received the Hungarian delegates and “conducted a long discussion with them on the questions of Hungarian domestic policy and Chinese foreign policy.”³² Back at home, Kádár reported on his Chinese trip to the Politburo; unfortunately the minutes of his discussions in China no longer exist. We only know the details of Kádár’s three-hour discussion with Premier Zhou Enlai indirectly, from Ern Ger’s account to Soviet Ambassador Andropov. Zhou repeated to Kádár the CCP’s positions on Khrushchev’s secret speech and Stalin’s achievements and errors. To Andropov’s question, whether Ger had informed Mikoyan and Suslov of what was said at the meeting, the Hungarian replied that he

²⁹ József Száll met Premier Zhou Enlai on 13 May, who told him that a few days earlier, the Politburo had discussed the long-term trade agreement. See József Száll’s report: “Conversation with Comrade Zhou Enlai,” Beijing, 9 June 1956. HNA FM SA XIX-J-1-j-Kína-5/e-005791-1956.

³⁰ Ambassador Szkladán’s report (reported by Endre Galla): “The visit of Comrades Végh [*sic*] and Köböl in China,” Beijing, 25 May 1956. HNA FM SA XIX-J-1-j-Kína-005778-1956.

³¹ Huszár, Tibor, *Kádár János politikai életrajza*. [Political Biography of János Kádár] (Budapest: Szabad Tér–Kossuth, 2001). Vol. 1. p. 293.

³² Szobolevszki, Sándor–Vida, István (eds.), *Magyar–kínai kapcsolatok, 1956–1959. Dokumentumok..* [Hungarian-Chinese Relations, 1956-1959. Documents.] (Budapest: MTA Jelenkor-kutató Bizottság, 2001). pp. 70-1., document no. 9.

“could not inform them, because it was agreed beforehand that Comrade Kádár would do so during the discussion. This he did not do, however, saying that “there was no opportunity” to do so.” Ger also said that he “presumed that the Chinese comrades had certainly informed the CPSU CC of their standpoints, he [Ger], however, wanted the CPSU CC to be informed that the Chinese comrades raised these questions during discussions with the Hungarian delegation.”³³

János Kádár’s biographer, Tibor Huszár, writes that China, the Chinese model and meeting with Chinese leaders left a lifelong impression on Kádár despite the fact that the Chinese only provided the Hungarian delegation with a Russian interpreter, and Kádár did not know Russian well.³⁴ Meanwhile, we know from the report of the Hungarian embassy in Beijing that the CCP’s International Department consented to the Hungarian request that the speeches and comments in the congress hall be translated into Hungarian, which made it possible for all embassy political staff to participate directly in the congress meetings.³⁵ What makes Kádár’s trip to China even more important—especially in light of the events of October and November—was that the Chinese leaders were able to make his acquaintance personally.

After the congress, Hungarian Workers’ Party Politburo member and First Deputy Premier István Hidas, and Foreign Trade Minister József Bognár, who was holding trade talks in Beijing, were received on behalf of the Chinese government by three experts on economic affairs, First Deputy Premier Chen Yun, Deputy Premier Li Xiannian, and Foreign Trade Minister Ye Jizhuang. Once again, the question of a possible long-term agreement came up, and, at the request of the Hungarian delegation, the question of bilateral economic and trade relations was put on the agenda. Despite the country’s economic difficulties, the Chinese, on their part, promised to secure a foreign currency credit to the value of 3.5 million GBP, which Hungary could repay in the form of any goods.³⁶

Shortly after the Hungarian party delegation returned to Budapest, Kádár, accompanying Ern Ger , departed for Yugoslavia. Hungarian public opinion was, at this point, stirred by the events in Poland. The return of Gomułka, the deployment and then retreat of the Soviet army, and the fierce debate with Soviet party leaders forced the Chinese leaders to take a position. On the morning of 20 October Mao improvised a meeting of the Politburo in his bedroom. It was decided that the Soviets be cautioned to refrain from the deployment of military force, and from intervention in Poland’s domestic affairs. Mao, who spent the whole day in pajamas, immediately

³³ Andropov’s report on his meeting with Ern Ger , 12 October 1956, cited in Szereda, Vjacseszlav–Rainer, M. János (eds.), *Döntés a Kremlben, 1956: A szovjet pártelnökség vitái Magyarországról*. [Decision in the Kremlin, 1956: The debates of the Soviet Party Presidium on Hungary.] (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1996). pp. 167-8.

³⁴ Huszár, *Kádár János politikai életrajza*. pp. 294-5.

³⁵ Szobolevszki-Vida, *Magyar–kínai kapcsolatok, 1956–1959*. p. 70, document no. 9.

³⁶ Report of Ambassador Ágoston Szkladán: “Summary report of the visit of the Hungarian Party delegation led by János Kádár,” Beijing, 12 October 1956. Szobolevszki-Vida, *Magyar–kínai kapcsolatok, 1956–1959*. p. 71. On 20 October, the Foreign Ministry’s Far East Department enquired from the Chinese embassy in Budapest whether an official written confirmation of Minister Ye’s verbal promise would be received, and whether the fact of the loan should be publicized. The reply wire, dated 26 (!) October, informed the Budapest embassy that Minister Ye’s response should be considered official, and that further written confirmation would not be required. In the second part of the reply the Chinese Foreign Ministry advised against publicizing the loan, referring to the fact that the China would grant the loan despite its own difficult situation with regard to foreign exchange reserves. “The exchange of telegrams between the embassy in Hungary and the Foreign Ministry on the loan of 3.5 million GBP to Hungary,” 20-26 October 1956, CFMA, 109-00766-01.

summoned the Soviet ambassador, and told him that “If the Soviet Union sends troops, we will support Poland against you, and we will condemn your military intervention in Poland.”³⁷ Mao voiced his categorical warning on 20 October, although Khrushchev had already halted Soviet troop movements in Poland and agreed with Gomulka to continue talks. In the evening, the Chinese ambassador in Warsaw Wang Bingnan met with his Soviet counterpart, yet he did not mention one word of Mao’s opinion. At the same time, Ponomarenko said that despite the fact that Khrushchev had spent only one night in Warsaw, he was aware of the situation and would report on Polish political developments to fraternal countries so that they could discuss necessary steps together. Ponomarenko spoke of Poland as the weakest link in the chain of socialist countries, which was why the socialist countries had to find the correct solution to the Polish situation together: “I cannot say what the Soviet Union will do regarding Poland in the future, because I cannot speak about what lies outside my jurisdiction”—added the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw.³⁸

According to the notes of Vladimir Nikiforovich Malin, head of the CPSU CC General Department, at a meeting of the CPSU Presidium on 20 October, Khrushchev was not convinced that there would be no need for military intervention in Poland (“There’s only one way out—put an end to what is in Poland. If Rokossowski is kept, we won’t have to press things for a while.”³⁹) and it seems likely that the decision for a peaceful solution was chosen only on 21 October, after Rokossowski’s dismissal. Nevertheless, Chinese sources are in agreement that the PRC did not have a direct role in the resolution of the Polish crisis.

China’s role in the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution

For half a century, debate has raged over the nature of the PRC’s role in the armed suppression of the Hungarian Revolution. More precisely, the question is: what role did the Chinese play in influencing Soviet decision-making? According to the official Chinese version of events published during the Sino-Soviet disputes of 1960, “at the end of October 1956, when the counter-revolutionary terror in Hungary had spread throughout almost the whole country, the CPSU CC, with Comrade Khrushchev at its helm, was preparing to withdraw Soviet troops from Hungary. At this point, we informed the CPSU CC of our opinion that it was necessary to repel the attack by imperialists and counter-revolutionaries against the great socialist family. At first the CPSU CC objected to our opinion, and only after much vacillation did they come to concur with us.”⁴⁰

The Soviet response, in contrast, called the Chinese position incomprehensible. The Chinese version of events is that Chinese advice had compelled the CPSU CC to take a stand on the Hungarian unrest. However, the Soviets felt that “the Chinese comrades have appropriated, groundlessly, for

³⁷ Wu, *Shi nian lunzhan*. p. 39.

³⁸ Major issues discussed between Wang Bingnan and Soviet Ambassador Ponomarenko, Warsaw, 20 October 1956, CFMA, 109-01141-02

³⁹ “The »Malin Notes« on the Crises in Hungary and Poland, 1956.” Translated and annotated by Mark Kramer. p. 388. *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 8/9, Winter 1996/1997. pp. 385-410.

⁴⁰ Szobolevszki, Sándor, “1956: Kína és Magyarország.” [1956: China and Hungary.] p. 86. In *Társadalmi Szemle*, November 1996, pp. 75-95.

themselves the direction of Soviet actions in the stifling of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary uprising.”⁴¹

The Chinese position and Soviet reaction were shaped by the increasingly bitter power struggle, disguised in ideological garb, between Beijing and Moscow. The lack of decisive documents from the period means that we are unable to judge the accuracy of these positions. In May 2006, documents relating to the Polish and Hungarian events at the archives of the Chinese Foreign Ministry were opened up (mostly telegrams and reports from the Chinese embassy in Budapest) which deepen our knowledge and provide nuances. Yet Russian documents remain the only sources on the decision-making process: Malin’s notes and the diary of Soviet Ambassador to China Pavel F. Yudin on his discussions with Liu Shaoqi in Moscow on 30 October, and even they only allow us to draw hypothetical conclusions. Nevertheless, the new Chinese sources shed new light on the post-1956 manifestations of Chinese officials, and the ways in which they used the Hungarian events for their own propaganda purposes.

The Chinese party delegation in Moscow, 23-31 October 1956

According to the available records of the CPSU Presidium meeting on 20 October, the Soviet leaders originally wanted to invite party leaders from only Central and Eastern Europe to discuss the Polish question, and merely inform the Chinese of the decisions.⁴² On the following day, it was decided that representatives of the CCP be invited, and a special plane was sent to Beijing on 22 October. Veljko Micunovic, the Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow, recorded in his diary that the Soviets “knew that Mao Zedong would not be able to come, so they had asked for others; Liu Shaoqi, secretary of the Chinese Communist Party,⁴³ and Zhou Enlai (who Khrushchev said was a ‘great *diplomat*’).”⁴⁴ According to Micunovic, the Soviets wanted to hear the Chinese opinion because “they were further away from events in Poland and Hungary, and were not directly involved, and could see things better than the Russians who were affected by inertia and the habits of the past.”⁴⁵

The CCP leadership decided to send its second-in-command, Liu Shaoqi, to Moscow. Mao Zedong was convinced that the reason behind the invitation was the Chinese party’s position on the Polish question.⁴⁶ A few hours before the Chinese delegation’s departure to Moscow in the early morning of 23 October (still the evening of 22 October in Central Europe), the highest party leadership (Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun, Deng Xiaoping, Wang Jiaxiang, and Hu Qiaomu) held a meeting in the presence of Soviet ambassador Yudin. The only item on the agenda was the Polish problem.⁴⁷ The conference decided to send a “mediating” delegation. The Chinese delegates were under strict orders from Mao to speak to the Soviet and Polish parties separately, because he did not think it proper to criticize the Soviets in front of the Poles, or vice versa.⁴⁸ According to Wu Lengxi, Mao’s thinking

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴² Szereda-Rainer, *Döntés a Kremlben*, p. 22.

⁴³ In fact, he was the Deputy Chairman of the Politburo Standing Committee.

⁴⁴ Veljko Micunovic, *Moscow Diary*, trans. David Floyd, with an introduction by George Kennan, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980). p. 138.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Wu, *Shi nian lunzhan*, p. 43.

⁴⁷ Bo, Yibo: *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu. 1-2*. (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1997). p. 596.

⁴⁸ Wu, *Shi nian lunzhan*, p. 44.

proved correct: in their discussions with the Chinese, both the Soviets and the Poles accused the other party of past errors, while the Chinese endeavored, in accordance with their self-appointed mediating role, to bring both parties' common interests into the foreground while driving national grievances into the background.⁴⁹

The delegation remained in Moscow from 23 to 31 October. At the meeting on the 24th, the unfolding Hungarian events were also discussed. Liu Shaoqi, however, in accordance with his authority, spoke only on the Polish question. Liu stressed that he approved of the actions of the Central Committee towards Poland. At the meetings in the Soviet capital, the CCP delegates attempted to strengthen the position and influence of the Chinese party within the socialist camp, and to limit, wherever possible, the influence of Moscow. Liu adhered to the principle that the Soviet Union was the center of the socialist camp, and there could be no other center, though he also said that the Soviets had committed errors which had to be rectified. One of the errors he identified was that which Mao had termed "great-power chauvinism": that "they had at times imposed [their will] on us." Moreover, Liu linked all this to hurried decisions and formal errors, and surmised that the errors be corrected in advance, and only then made public knowledge.⁵⁰ There is no hint in either Malin's notes on the Soviet Presidium meeting, or in Chinese documents on the background to the events, that the Chinese played any sort of role in the Soviets' first decision in favor of military intervention in Budapest. Liu took part on the meeting of the Soviet Presidium on 26 October, and although he could already have known of the Hungarian developments by the time of the meeting during which Hungary was also discussed, Liu only spoke up in connection with Rokossowski and Gomułka. As on 24 October, he had nothing to say about the Hungarian events.⁵¹

On 27 October, the Foreign Ministry in Beijing sent a summary to their embassy in Moscow and to Deputy Chairman Liu, reviewing the fraternal countries' reactions to events in Poland and Hungary. Unfortunately, the summary contained only a few short and general notes on the Hungarian situation.⁵²

On 30 October Yudin held talks with Liu Shaoqi. According to Yudin's notes, Liu talked mostly on Soviet advisers working in socialist countries. The Chinese leader stated, not mentioning names but probably referring to Rokossowski and the Polish events, that the Soviet Union should withdraw all its political advisers from socialist countries, because "they barely know the peculiarities of the situation in the respective countries," and "they basically fulfilled their task," and that their presence "lead frequently to negative occurrences."⁵³ Liu, bearing in mind China's need for

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 46-7.

⁵⁰ Szereda-Rainer, *Döntés a Kremlben*, pp. 30-1.

⁵¹ "The Malin Notes", p. 389.

⁵² Citing the opinion of the Czechoslovak Deputy Premier, the report establishes that: "The Hungarian situation is no less serious than the Polish. An editorial in the Hungarian trade unions' paper has demanded Rákosi's arrest. The dissolved literary and cultural organizations may reform after Rajk's state funeral. It could be said that the Hungarian Party has absolutely no proposition concerning Nagy, and is acting in a wholly contradictory fashion." According to the head of the GDR Defense Ministry's Information Department, the Hungarians were even more disaffected than the Poles. The university students' self-governing body had been formed, drawn up numerous criticisms and demanded, amongst other things, freedom of expression in the press, and the freedom for university students to travel abroad. "The Foreign Ministry summary of the fraternal countries' reactions to the Polish and Hungarian events," 27 October 1956, CFMA, 109-00972-05.

⁵³ "Zapis besedy s tovarishchem Liu Shaoqi, 30 oktyabrya 1956 goda," Archiv Vnesnei Politiki Rossiyskoi Federacii, fond 0100, opis 49, delo 9, papka 410, pp. 202-3. English translation of the document kindly provided by Lorenz Lüthi.

Soviet technological help, immediately qualified this by saying that naturally, the technical experts could remain.

Hungarian events were raised at the end of the discussion. Liu said on this subject only that “the events in Poland and Hungary should serve as a “healthy lesson for the whole communist movement.” “We communists,” he stated, “needed to generalize the experience theoretically, as Marx in his day generalized and analyzed the reasons for the defeat of the Paris Commune, and Lenin the reasons for the defeat of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia.”⁵⁴ Liu’s words may be read as an indictment of Soviet policy, but there was no word urging Soviet intervention, and no explicit opinion given on the Soviets’ possible second intervention in Hungary.

After the meeting, Yudin reported on his discussions with Liu and other members of the Chinese delegation to the Soviet Presidium. The Soviet source from the time, Malin’s notes, only include a few keywords on Yudin’s report, (“What’s the situation: will Hungary leave our camp? Who is Nagy? Can he be trusted? About the advisers.”⁵⁵), which appear to give credence to the subjects of Liu and Yudin’s discussion.

On 30 October, the Soviet Presidium debated the declaration on the relationship between the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Khrushchev made the Chinese opinion known, according to which the Soviet Union should take account of the views of the countries in which Soviet troops were based.⁵⁶ Judging by the Soviet leaders’ notes, Liu Shaoqi informed the Soviets of the Chinese party’s opinion on the declaration, which also appeared in the Chinese declaration of 1 November, namely that Pancha Shila—the five principles of peaceful coexistence drawn up in 1954, on the basis of which the Chinese and the Indian Premiers had reviewed relations between the two states with different social systems⁵⁷—should be extended to relations between socialist countries. The Soviet leaders’ notes reacted to this: Bulganin: “The Chinese comrades have an incorrect impression of our relations with the countries of people’s democracy.” Molotov: “On the view of the Chinese comrades—they suggest that relations with the countries of the socialist camp be built on the principles of Pancha Shila. Relations along interstate lines are on one basis and inter-party relations on another.” Kaganovich: “Pancha Shila, but I don’t think they should propose that we build our relations on the principles of Pancha Shila.”⁵⁸

The Chinese opinion on the withdrawal of troops changed on 30 October. According to Chinese memoirs, this change took place after Liu had consulted with Mao on the telephone. During the meeting on the 30th, in which Chinese delegates also took part, Liu Shaoqi indicated “on behalf of the CCP CC that troops must remain in Hungary and in Budapest.”⁵⁹ Khrushchev then said that: “There are two paths. A military path—one of occupation. A peaceful path—the withdrawal of troops, negotiations.”⁶⁰ It is very probable that the report sent from Budapest on 30 October by Mikoyan and Suslov on the rapidly deteriorating situation played a

⁵⁴ As quoted by Yudin, *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ “The Malin Notes”, p. 393.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

⁵⁷ The declaration was published in *Népszava* on 2 November 1956. Published in Szobolevszki-Vida, *Magyar–kínai kapcsolatok, 1956–1959*. pp. 83–4, document no. 12.

⁵⁸ “The Malin Notes”, p. 392.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

decisive role in producing the change in Chinese opinion, and the more ambivalent stance of the Soviet leaders.⁶¹

Analysis of Malin's notes suggests that it was events in Hungary, and not pressure from China, which led to the change in Soviet opinion. According to Hungarian historian Csaba Békés, the decision of 31 October and the invasion of 4 November were the logical and inevitable consequences of a poor political decision taken in Moscow on 23 October. Békés argues that armed suppression of the Hungarian uprising was not merely one of the alternatives, but the result of the fact that after 30 October, the Soviets could no longer grant the Nagy government further concessions that would allow it to be able to consolidate the situation within the framework of the communist system, thus maintaining the unity of the Soviet bloc.⁶² This is confirmed by Khrushchev's notes of 31 October. Referring to Egypt—where the Soviet Union also had interests and, by virtue of its military advisers, was part of the conflict, but where Premier Bulganin only threatened the Western powers with armed intervention, which never took place—he stated that “we should reexamine our assessment and should not withdraw our troops from Hungary and Budapest. We should take the initiative in restoring order in Hungary. If we depart from Hungary, it will give a great boost to the Americans, English, and French—the imperialists. They will perceive it as weakness on our part and will go onto the offensive. We would then be exposing the weakness of our positions. Our party will not accept it if we do this. To Egypt they will then add Hungary. We have no other choice.”⁶³ According to Malin's notes, not one member of the Soviet leadership made any statement to the effect that they would have been willing to accept Hungary's departure from the camp of socialist countries. Having just returned from Hungary on 1 November, Mikoyan stated that “We simply cannot allow Hungary to be removed from our camp,” while Suslov declared that “the danger of bourgeois restoration has reached its peak.”⁶⁴

Having made the decision to intervene, Khrushchev mentioned the Chinese once again in connection with work to be done: “We should inform the Chinese comrades, the Czechs, the Romanians, and the Bulgarians.”⁶⁵ This statement demonstrates that the Soviet leadership did not deal with the CCP any differently from the other fraternal parties.

Chinese memoirs supporting the official Chinese position (those of Wu Lengxi and Shi Zhe) recall that Mao Zedong criticized the Soviets on 30 October for, on the one hand, committing errors in Poland by wanting to intervene where

⁶¹ Anastas Mikoyan's son, Sergo A. Mikoyan, a historian living in America who is working on the publication of his father's legacy, stated fifty years later that the decision was made only after the reports from Budapest were received, and in which the Chinese played no role whatsoever. Author's interview with Sergo Mikoyan, Budapest, 1 November, 2003.

⁶² Békés, Csaba, “Szovjet döntéshozatal és az 1956-os magyar forradalom.” pp. 166-7. In Csaba Békés, *Európából Európába. Magyarország konfliktusok keresztjében, 1945–1990*. [From Europe to Europe. Hungary in the Crossfire of Conflicts, 1945-1990.] (Budapest: Gondolat, 2004.) pp. 162-170.

⁶³ “The Malin Notes”, p. 393. The Israeli attack on Egypt began on 29 October, with the English and French participation in the bombing beginning two days later on the 31st. In Hungarian historian László Borhi's opinion, the Suez crisis was the reason why the Soviet leaders changed their position and decided on the intervention in Hungary. See: Borhi, László: *Magyarország a hidegháborúban. A Szovjetunió és az Egyesült Államok között, 1945–1956*. [Hungary in the Cold War – Between the Soviet Union and the United States, 1945–1956.] (Budapest: Corvina, 2005). pp. 261-262.

⁶⁴ “The Malin Notes”, p. 394.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

intervention was unnecessary and, on the other, because they had wanted to withdraw from Hungary, where intervention was in fact required.⁶⁶

But it appears from the aforementioned that if Mao's opinion changed after 30 October, his opinion had no influence on the Soviet decision makers. Not one Soviet leader implied that the Chinese would have supported intervention. On 1 November Bulganin commented on the decision taken the day before: "The international situation has changed. If we don't take measures—we will lose Hungary."⁶⁷ Kaganovich added that "The discussion was complicated. The Chinese said that we should not withdraw troops."⁶⁸ Neither Bulganin nor Kaganovich said, therefore, that the Chinese supported intervention. Kaganovich's words imply that the Chinese spoke only on the question of whether troops should remain in or withdraw from Hungary.

The Soviet statements cited above do not contradict the Soviet explanation given during the later disputes of the 1960s, that although the Chinese opposed the troops' withdrawal, Liu had said that patience was required, that the "counter-revolutionaries" should be allowed time to rage themselves out, and only after should be seized upon.⁶⁹ Indeed, the memoirs of the Chinese delegation's interpreter undoubtedly bear out this variation. According to Shi Zhe, Mao told Liu during their telephone conversation that both options—withdrawal and intervention—should be considered. Mao leaned toward the latter, saying that the best solution would be to wait a little until the counter-revolutionaries burned themselves out, and action should be taken only when the people could see more clearly.⁷⁰

According to Shi's memoirs, Khrushchev met the Chinese delegation at the airport before their flight home on the evening of 31 October, where he informed them that he had decided on armed intervention in Hungary. He said that "we have so many units there that, if we throw Hungary aside now, under these circumstances, and allow the counter-revolutionaries to claim victory, revolutionaries and communists of the entire world will chide us and call us fools. This is why we have chosen in favor of intervention."⁷¹

Chinese diplomatic records corroborate this interpretation of the Chinese role, reporting that the Chinese ambassador in Budapest knew nothing of Moscow's

⁶⁶ Wu, *Shi nian lunzhan*, p. 51.

⁶⁷ "The Malin Notes", p. 394.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

⁶⁹ The Soviet version of the events, dated 5 November 1960, runs as follows: "A couple of days later, already after the suppression of the Hungarian counter-revolution, at a meeting with the Soviet ambassador in Beijing, Comrade Liu Shaoqi said that it was too early for the Soviet troops to interfere and suppress the counter-revolutionary revolt. »It is probable—he said—that your decision was too hurried. If the Soviet troops had marched in 7 or 10 or even 20 days later, by that time the Hungarian people could have seen better the true face of the reaction, and could have understood better the role of the Soviet Army. By the time the counter-revolution had come to an end, reactionary forces would have become totally unrestrained. They would have driven away Imre Nagy, and Mindszenty and his friends would have come to power. They would have exposed themselves even to a greater extent with their terrorist actions, and the real communists and other progressive people would have escaped to the Soviet troops, to Romania and other countries.«" See Szobolevszki, "1956: Kína és Magyarország." p. 87.

⁷⁰ Shi, Zhe, *Zai lishi juren shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu*. Ed. by Li, Haiwen. [With Historical Giants: Shi Zhe's Memoirs] (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao chubanshe, 1998). p. 561.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 562. On 2 and 3 November, Khrushchev tried to convince the Polish, Czech, Romanian, Bulgarian and Yugoslav leaders of the correctness of the decision in Brest, Bucharest, Sofia and Brioni.

decision, and only learned of Soviet preparations for intervention from Imre Nagy.⁷² Moreover, since the Chinese embassy in Budapest did not possess a radio transmitter-receiver, and had no secure telegram connection with Beijing during the last days of October, the ambassador's messages did not arrive in Mao's hands until a few days later. Between 28 and 31 October, Beijing did not receive any communication from their embassy in Budapest.⁷³

The Soviet declaration of 30 October and the Chinese statement of 1 November

On 30 October the Soviet leadership issued its famous declaration, according to which the Soviet Union, in its ongoing policy with socialist countries, regarded respect for the principles of full equality, respect for territorial integrity and state sovereignty, as well as non-interference in one another's domestic affairs as being authoritative. Chinese authors read the declaration as irrefutable proof that the Chinese had brought pressure to bear on the Soviet leaders to break with the policy of great-power chauvinism, in the interest of recognizing the principles of Pancha Shila. We do not know the details of the Chinese role in the formulation of the declaration, but they may have played a part in its publication, for which they promised immediate support.

The Chinese leadership's reaction to the declaration, setting out new foundations for the relationship between the Soviet Union and socialist countries, was immediate. The Chinese statement appeared in *Renmin Ribao* on 1 November which, given the time difference, was less than 24 hours after the Soviet declaration was made public.⁷⁴ The reason behind the unusually swift reaction may have been that by

⁷² "The embassy has been reporting continually on the development and nature of events. On whether further Soviet troops will be sent to Hungary, we know nothing." The Chinese embassy to Budapest's telegram to the Chinese Foreign Minister, on the meeting between Imre Nagy and Ambassador Hao Deqing, sent at 2.00 p.m. on 2 November 1956. CFMA, 109-01041-01.

⁷³ On the telegrams sent by the Chinese embassy to Budapest to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the time of sending, the time of arrival at the Foreign Ministry, and the time of transcription are indicated. The dates show that 2-3 days passed between the sending of the telegram, and its issue in written form. Between 28-30 October, no communications from Budapest whatever were received at the Foreign Ministry. Communications sent after 11.00 a.m. from Budapest on 28 October arrived only on the 31st, or even later, in Beijing. (For the records of the Chinese embassy in Hungary, see "Telegrams sent during the counter-revolutionary events in Hungary on the Hungarian domestic situation," 23 October – 5 November 1956, 117 pages. CFMA, 109-01041-01). The 1956 annual report of the Chinese ambassador to Budapest states that: "Events changed rapidly in the confused situation, meetings [with official Hungarian bodies] and personal contacts ceased, newspapers were difficult to procure, the telegraph connection to the Center was secure ... When the Hungarian Post and Telegraph Office signal went down, we sent messages home via the [Hungarian] Foreign Ministry and the Hungarian embassy in China. Some reports we sent twice, to ensure against loss. A later investigation found that although all our telegrams were sent to the Center, there were certainly some that arrived late, especially those reports sent around 30 October, when the entire telegraph equipment was down for a few days, and messages sent via the Soviets and Czechs [reached their destination] slower. There were some reports that arrived late by a few days. This serves as a lesson on what consequences will be from not have our own radio equipment in emergency situations." "The Hungarian embassy's 1956 annual report and proposal for the 1957 work plan," 18 January 1957, CFMA, 109-01037-01.

⁷⁴ The Chinese leadership's official standpoint was (and still is) formed only after careful deliberation. The first (and only public statement until the fall of 1956) official Chinese reaction to the CPSU 20th Party Congress in February 1956, and Khrushchev's secret speech, was the article published on 5 April in *Renmin Ribao*. The Hungarian events of October 1956 were reported very carefully. News on Hungary first appeared in *Renmin Ribao* on 27 October on the basis of reports from the Prague correspondent of the Xinhua News Agency. At the head of the page was: "The Hungarian Workers' Party's Central Leadership has changed the title of the leading bodies," with the sub-heading "Kádár is First Secretary, Apró et. al. members of the Politburo." Underneath, in small type, was the following:

the end of October, Mao had already formulated a strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union. His April article in *Renmin Ribao*, his speech on the ten major relationships, and the Hundred Flowers campaign launched during the spring, were all elements of this strategy that sought to restrict direct Soviet influence on Chinese culture and science.

The Chinese statement condemned Soviet “great-power chauvinism,” which “seriously harms the solidarity and common affairs of socialist countries.” One would have good reason to presume that Mao, who strove for the distinction of becoming theorist and leader of the international communist movement, was not motivated primarily by concern over Hungarian events at that time, but by concern for the future of his own policies. His emphasis was on the fact that “the leaders of our government, its officials, and the whole people must be vigilant to forestall the errors of chauvinism in relations with socialist and other countries,” and that “we must engage in non-stop education of our officials, and of our whole nation, in firm opposition to great-power chauvinism. Thus our responsibility is the promotion of peaceful coexistence among *all nations* [emphasis mine: PV] and in the cause of world peace.” This was nothing other than a criticism of Soviet policy, a highly refined formulation of Chinese independence from the Soviets, and a possibly high-handed countenance against Soviet military intervention.⁷⁵

From the PRC’s point of view, the statement was crucial because it furthered the principles of Pancha Shila. From his home in Hong Kong, László Ladányi, a Hungarian Jesuit and former missionary who had edited the weekly *China News Analysis* newsletter since 1953, reviewed the Chinese statement in detail. According to “China watcher” Ladányi, this was the first time the expression “chauvinism” (*shawenzhuyi*) appeared in Chinese in print.⁷⁶

After 1 November, the Chinese leadership, having criticized the Soviets, lined up behind the Soviet Union or, more precisely, and according to its own intentions, lined up alongside it. On 2 November, Zhou Enlai received the Hungarian ambassador to Beijing, Ágoston Szkladán, on his parting visit. The Chinese premier noted repeatedly that Hungary was facing a very difficult period, but added that the

“Students hold peaceful demonstrations in Budapest and elsewhere, counter-revolutionaries exploit the occasion and their interventions cause armed disturbances.”

⁷⁵ After 1 November, Radio Free Europe’s Hungarian broadcast frequently addressed the Chinese statement. The 10.00 p.m. news program on 1 November 1956 already broadcast the following: “Beijing radio has emphasized, in connection with the Central European events, that according to Red China, the demand of Hungary and Poland for the establishment of democracy, independence and equality, is wholly justified. Beijing radio added however, that a distinction must be made between the rightful wishes of the masses of the two peoples, and the conspiratorial activities of reactionary elements. International diplomatic circles have established that the radio announcement is Beijing’s first official position since the beginning of the Hungarian events.” Tibor Seb k, in his commentary of 2.10 p.m. of 2 November, argued that “[The Soviets] feel that they are isolated, because it is not only the free peoples who are turning away from them, but Yugoslavia and Poland too. Indeed, even Red China has condemned the clumsy intervention in Hungary’s domestic affairs.” In the international press review broadcast at 10.20 p.m. on 3 November, an article in the French publication *Aurore* was mentioned: “The paper repeats as a matter of interest, that while Mao Zedong has protested in the name of Red China against the Russians’ intervention in Hungary, the representative of Chiang Kai-shek’s National China at the UN Security Council has also come out in favor of the Hungarians. This is the first time that the two deadly enemies have agreed upon something.” See: “This is Radio Free Europe ... 23 October – 5 November 1956.” Edited and compiled by György Vámos. Manuscript.

⁷⁶ *China News Analysis*, Hong Kong, 9 November 1956, pp. 1-2. According to Wu Lengxi’s memoirs, Mao had already used the term “great-power chauvinism” (*daguo shawenzhuyi*) at the 17 March 1956 meeting of top CCP leadership. Wu, *Shi nian lunzhan*, p. 6.

Hungarian people and party fighting for socialism could trust in the support of the Chinese people and party.⁷⁷ The editorial of *Renmin Ribao* of 3 November championed the great unity of socialist countries. The paper wrote that “the Chinese people stand firmly on the side of the Soviet-led socialist camp. The friendship of the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union is eternal and unshakeable.” The *Renmin Ribao* editorial of 5 November announced—with record speed in the history of the paper, according to László Ladányi—the victory of Soviet forces in Hungary. Because of the time difference, the article dated 4 November must have been written when Soviet forces were only beginning the action. (The title of the *Renmin Ribao* editorial was “The Hungarian Workers’ and Peasants’ Revolutionary Government has been formed. The counter-revolutionary restoration conspiracy has been routed with assistance from the Soviet Army.”) According to the article congratulating the Hungarian people on their great victory, “The importance of the friendship of the great Soviet Union for every socialist country was, once again, gloriously in evidence in this Hungarian incident.” “There are some who did not count on the international spirit of the Russian people, or on the necessity of unity among socialist countries.” The article continued, “the success of Hungarian counter-revolutionary restoration would have meant that the independence, freedom and security of the European socialist countries would have been threatened by the aggression of imperialist forces. This threat would have extended not only to the socialist countries of Europe, but also to the Asian socialist countries, and likewise to the world socialist and workers’ movement [...]. Respectful greetings to the Soviet people and the Soviet Army which has liberated the Hungarian people *twice*.”⁷⁸ The article contained no mention of chauvinism, or any kind of criticism of the Soviet Union. Here we may concur with Ladányi, according to whom the message of the article was that the leadership in Beijing, grappling with serious domestic political problems, realized that it could not achieve military independence from the Soviet Union: the Soviet Army could as easily march in on Manchuria or Beijing, as it had done on Budapest.⁷⁹

Intent on improving its position as much as possible, the Chinese leadership came out in resolute support for the Soviet military intervention.

China’s role in the consolidation of the Kádár government

In the fall of 1956, the Honvéd (Hungarian Army) Ensemble was on tour in China. On 15 November, Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai paid an unusual and—for international public opinion—symbolic visit to the ensemble. Zhou met the artists after their performance, and said that the people’s dissatisfaction had been justified, because the party and the government had committed errors in the past, but the counter-revolutionaries had tried to exploit the demonstrations for their own ends. The Hungarian military had crumbled, and was unable to restore order. Zhou continued: “Had there been a Hungarian military ready for combat, it would not have been necessary to call in Soviet troops. Such a Hungarian military would have to be

⁷⁷ Minutes of the meeting between Premier Zhou and Hungarian Ambassador to China Szkladán, 2 November 1956. CFMA, 109-01038-02.

⁷⁸ “Congratulations to the Hungarian people on their great victory! The Hungarian Workers’ and Peasants’ Revolutionary Government has been formed. The counter-revolutionary restoration conspiracy has been routed with help from the Soviet Army,” *Renmin Ribao*, 5 November 1956, p. 1. Emphasis mine: PV.

⁷⁹ *China News Analysis*, Hong Kong, 9 November 1956, p. 2. Ladányi’s assessment is confirmed by the fact that the Chinese press in November and December of 1956 were primarily concerned with the relations between socialist countries, and the censure of great-power chauvinism.

strong enough to secure order, and secure against all foreign interventions in the country. In the present conditions therefore, the assistance of Soviet troops must not be classified as “aggression”, but as the sort of assistance that all fraternal socialist countries would provide to each other in similar circumstances, in the spirit of proletarian internationalism.”⁸⁰

On 6 November Zhou Enlai informed János Kádár by telegram that “the Chinese government guaranteed the Hungarian Workers’ and Peasants’ Revolutionary Government a freely-transferable and unconditional material and monetary donation to the value of thirty million rubles, as an expression of its friendly assistance and support to the fraternal Hungarian people.”⁸¹ Kádár ascribed exceptionally great significance to the sympathy of the Chinese comrades. He met regularly with Ambassador Hao Deqing and reported on their talks with the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party Provisional Executive Committee. At a meeting on 16 November, he reported: “I spoke with the Chinese ambassador who especially informed me that *Renmin Ribao* published four important editorials about the Hungarian situation, which could help us in our political work. Watching the activities of the Imre Nagy government, they judged our situation as very serious and were very pleased with the determined actions. He modestly told me that the 600 million Chinese people and their government were ready to provide us with any sort of support they could provide. He officially handed me the declaration by Comrade Zhou Enlai. As a communist, he also gave me some unofficial advice. The Chinese call our system “people’s democratic dictatorship” which also expresses, in terms of its contents, the essence of our system: democracy towards the people, and dictatorship towards counter-revolution. Dictatorship towards counter-revolution must always and systematically prevail. Now, in the present situation, emphasis is on dictatorship. If we are not relentless, we will be swept away.”⁸² It transpires from the following notes that the Chinese recommended the same strategy that Mao had worked out following the 20th Congress of the CPSU: tasks must be emphasized, errors of the past must be spoken of less, and theoretical conclusions must be drawn when “the fundamental consolidation of forces has already taken place.” “If the Hungarians speak only of the errors of the past, they will create more difficulties for themselves.”⁸³

Kádár could claim another success when Zhou Enlai changed the original plan of his visit to Eastern Europe and, after his visit to Poland, spent a day in Budapest on 16 January 1957. Zhou had participated in a summit meeting called by Khrushchev in Moscow to mend their relations with fraternal states and to work out the new direction of the communist movement. Khrushchev attempted to bring the Chinese into the process of reordering the socialist camp. For the Chinese, Zhou’s invitation from Moscow, and his visits to Poland and Budapest, provided a good opportunity to put forward their policies.

⁸⁰ Szobolevszki-Vida, *Magyar–kínai kapcsolatok, 1956–1959*. p. 94. It is worth nothing that in 1968 Zhou Enlai called the Soviet leaders social imperialists, and compared the Soviets’ intervention in Czechoslovakia to the Americans’ aggression in Vietnam, and condemned it in the strongest possible terms. Hungarian reports do not mention that on 27 November 1956, the Chinese second-in-command, Liu Shaoqi, also met with the ensemble’s leaders. For the text of the conversation, see CFMA, 109-01038-03.

⁸¹ Zhou Enlai’s telegram to János Kádár, 6 November 1956, CFMA, 109-01042-01

⁸² Minutes of the HSWP Provisional Executive Committee meeting on 16 November 1956. HNA Fond 288, packet 5, stock unit 2, p. 9.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Zhou left Beijing for Moscow on 7 January. He was welcomed on arrival at the airport by the entire Soviet leadership, Otto Grotewohl, premier of the GDR, the ambassadors of countries maintaining diplomatic relations with the PRC, the ambassadors of Austria, Israel, Cambodia, and Sudan, and the French deputy chief of mission.⁸⁴ As part of the honorary procedures, Zhou was awarded an honorary doctorate by Moscow University on 9 January.⁸⁵ It was agreed by the parties on the first day of meetings on 8 January that the main task was the restoration of calm in the socialist camp. Khrushchev asked Zhou to fly to Budapest, and ensure the Hungarian leadership of his support. Though the Chinese Premier decided to add a day in Budapest after visiting Poland, he also sought out the Hungarians for discussion in Moscow. Kádár and Marosán were immediately summoned to Moscow, but because of a snow storm their plane was forced to land in Prague, not arriving in the Soviet capital until 10 January.⁸⁶ Zhou met the Hungarian leaders in the afternoon of the same day at the Kremlin.⁸⁷ Kádár was informed that it had been decided at Khrushchev's initiative that the Chinese delegation should visit Hungary. Kádár was decidedly pleased at the news, and said that it did not matter that the visit would be short, because the visit itself was the important thing.⁸⁸ Central to the talks lasting into the evening were the Hungarian situation and relations with Yugoslavia. Khrushchev suggested that Tito also be invited to Budapest, but this was rejected by Zhou on the grounds that he had not yet consulted with Beijing on the question of Sino-Yugoslav relations.⁸⁹ The parties issued a joint statement on the discussions on 11 January.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Summary report of the visit by Zhou Enlai and delegation to the Soviet Union, Poland and Hungary, I, 9 January 1957, CFMA, 203-00072-01.

⁸⁵ *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949-1975*. [Chronology of Zhou Enlai's Foreign Relations Activities, 1949-1975.] Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiaobu Waijiaoshi yanjiushi (ed.). (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1993). pp. 183-4.

⁸⁶ Xia, Daosheng, "Yi Zhou Enlai zongli 1957 nian fangwen Xiongyali." [Memoirs of Premier Zhou Enlai's 1957 Visit to Hungary.] pp. 24-5. In Waijiaobu Waijiaoshi Bianjishi (ed.), *Xin Zhongguo waijiao fengyun. Zhongguo waijiaoguan huiyilu. Vol. 2*. [New China's Stormy Foreign Relations. Memoirs of Chinese Diplomats.] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1991). pp. 23-28.

⁸⁷ The agenda was as follows: Zhou had lunch with the Hungarian Party and government delegation at noon, held talks with Kádár from 3 p.m., and tripartite discussions took place with Soviet and Hungarian leaders from 6.30 p.m. *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949-1975*. p. 182.

⁸⁸ Xia, "Yi Zhou Enlai zongli 1957 nian fangwen Xiongyali." pp. 23-8. See also Li, Lianqing (ed.), *Zhongguo waijiao yanyi. Xin Zhongguo shiqi*. [History of China's Foreign Relations. The Period of New China.] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1995). pp. 144-5. The invitation of the Chinese Premier-Foreign Minister had already arisen for the Hungarians. In his letter of 27 December, Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Beijing József Száll wrote that "Comrade Zhou Enlai's Budapest visit would be of the utmost importance for foreign and domestic policy;" and, amongst other things, that it "would bring to the forefront the question of the loan." Chargé d'affaires József Száll's letter to Deputy Foreign Minister István Sebes, Beijing, 27 December 1956. HNA XIX-J-1-j-Kína-4/b-00371-1957. Published in Szobolevszki-Vida, *Magyar-kínai kapcsolatok, 1956-1959*. pp. 107-10. At the end of December, Hungarian chargé d'affaires József Száll put it to the Chinese authorities that the Hungarians would gladly receive Zhou Enlai in Hungary after his trip to Moscow and Poland, or would travel to Moscow to hold talks with him there. On 30 December, Száll informed the Chinese Foreign Ministry officially that the Hungarian government would invite Zhou to visit Hungary. According to the Beijing Foreign Ministry's records of 8 January, Zhou accepted the invitation, although Khrushchev's role is not mentioned. See "The circumstances of the Foreign Minister's Hungarian invitation," Foreign Ministry, 8 January 1957. CFMA 203-00023-01.

⁸⁹ Xia, "Yi Zhou Enlai zongli 1957 nian fangwen Xiongyali." p. 25. Zhou did consult with Mao on this question, but Mao's opinion was that the time in Hungary was too short, and the situation not ripe to meet with the Yugoslavs. See Wang, Suli, "Bo-Xiong shijianhou Mao Zedong dui guonei jiejidouzheng jushi panduan bianhua de lishi xiansuo." [Historical Factors of Changes in Mao Zedong's Considerations Concerning Domestic Class Struggle After the Polish and Hungarian Events] In *Dangdai Zhongguoshi yanjiu*. 1999/1, pp. 35-44. p. 285.

The following day the Chinese delegation departed for Poland. Zhou held talks with Gomułka and other leaders in Warsaw, and later took part in election rallies in other major cities.⁹¹

Zhou Enlai was the first head of government to visit Hungary after the events of October. One member of his entourage, Budapest attaché Xia Daosheng, writes that during his one-day stay in Budapest, the Chinese premier gave a total of five speeches, and held talks with Kádár lasting close to seven hours.⁹² Hungarian and Chinese archival sources confirm this.

Zhou inquired into Hungarian domestic affairs, and the parties reviewed the international dimensions of the Hungarian events. During the talks, Zhou stated that “Imre Nagy’s traitorousness left its mark on the Hungarian situation. János Kádár could only save the socialist cause in Hungary by opposing Imre Nagy and with Soviet help.” However, on the subject of retributions, Zhou stressed that: “The democratic character of the dictatorship must by all means be underlined [...]. [The] crime [of Dudás] is unquestionably great, he deserves the death penalty, but the matter does not need to be rushed. It is better if we have living evidence in our hands. If he is executed, the enemy can later claim that false testimony was forced from him. If he lives, on the other hand, his punishment can be lessened if he makes a full confession [...]. If we sentence him to death as he deserves, we should at least not carry out the sentence, so that we can later use him as a living witness [...]. If you allow the leading counter-revolutionaries to live, you can accumulate more material, and public trials will have a more educative effect.” Kádár disagreed with Zhou’s position: “If the leaders are not punished, then the masses will not be shown that this government seriously wants to settle the score with the counter-revolution.” Münnich’s commentary consisted only of the following: “If the leading counter-revolutionaries are executed, then the strength of the counter-revolution would be considerably lessened, and weapons would be handed in much more readily.”⁹³ Zhou’s opinion ultimately had no influence over the Hungarian leaders’ decision: two days later, József Dudás was executed.

At the party aktiv called in honor of the Chinese leader in Budapest, Zhou confirmed that the Hungarian people could always count on the help of the 600 million Chinese people.⁹⁴ A more concrete manifestation of this assistance was the issue of a credit to the value of 100 million rubles with an annual interest rate of two percent, to be repaid to the Chinese government within ten years, with a three-year

⁹⁰ “Xiongyali, Zhongguo, Sulian Gongchandang he Gongrendang ji zhengfu de daibiao zai Mosike huitan de gongbao. 11 January 1957.” [Joint Statement of Hungarian, Chinese and Soviet Governments and Communist and Workers’ Parties Delegations at Their Moscow Meeting, 11 January 1957.] In *Geguo gongchanzhuyi zhengdang wencong guanyu Xiongyali shijian*. [Documents of Communist Parties on the Hungarian Events.] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1957). p. 112.

⁹¹ *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949-1975*. pp. 185-6.

⁹² Xia, “Yi Zhou Enlai zongli 1957 nian fangwen Xiongyali.” pp. 23-8.

⁹³ For the first Hungarian publication of the minutes of the meeting between the Hungarian and Chinese delegations in Budapest see: Zinner Tibor, „...hogy megkönnyítsék a Nagy-kormány likvidálását...” In *Társadalmi Szemle*, 1989/12. pp. 93-8. English translation by David Evans, published in Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, János M. Rainer (eds.), *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution. A History in Documents*. (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2002.) pp. 496-503. document no. 109.

⁹⁴ Csou, En-laj, “A magyar nép mindenkor számíthat a hatszázmillió kínai nép segítségére.” [The Hungarian People Can Always Count on The Help of The 600 Million Chinese People.] In *A magyar-kínai barátság dokumentuma. 1957. január 16-17*. [Document of Hungarian-Chinese Friendship. 16-17 January 1957.] (Budapest: n.p., 1957). pp. 13-19.

period of grace.⁹⁵ A joint declaration was made to close the visit, which was signed in Parliament at dawn on 17 January,⁹⁶ and the Chinese premier departed for Moscow in the early hours of the morning.

Zhou's diplomatic activities led to a perceptible increase in China's political influence among European socialist countries. Moreover, the Chinese leadership felt that Sino-Soviet relations had improved significantly in comparison to the Stalinist era, and that Moscow, instead of practicing "great-power chauvinism," was ready to consult with Beijing as an equal partner.

The impact of the Hungarian events on Mao's domestic and foreign policy

The quelling of the Hungarian revolt and the continued unity of the socialist camp were important to China in many respects. As we have seen, Mao sensed an opportunity after the 20th CPSU Congress to increase his influence as theoretician and leader, and to enhance his authority within the communist movement. Nevertheless, he did not feel that the international position of his country and system were secure and feared an external attack. Only a few years had passed since the end of the Korean War and the rather uncertain ceasefire agreement. American troops were stationed in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Taiwan Strait. Despite Zhou Enlai's successful representation of Chinese foreign policy in 1954-5, as a consequence of which China's international standing had grown, the country remained isolated internationally. Mao voiced his concerns in a number of speeches. On 27 January 1957, he mentioned Sino-American relations only in the terms of Eisenhower's "hard-line policy towards the Communists" and "his hopes on disturbances breaking out in our midst."⁹⁷ In February, he emphasized that "the US imperialists and the Chiang Kai-shek clique are constantly sending in secret agents to carry on disruptive activities. Even after all the existing counter-revolutionaries have been combed out, new ones are likely to emerge. If we drop our guard, we shall be badly fooled and shall suffer severely."⁹⁸ In his speeches and writings of 1957, he made numerous mentions of Hungary and the Hungarian events, among other things, in connection with nuclear war: "Internationally, the worst would be the outbreak of a world war and the use of atom bombs. At home, it would be at most nationwide riots or a 'Hungarian incident,' with several million people rising up against us, occupying a few hundred counties and advancing on Beijing. All we would need to do then would be to go back to Yanan where we came from."⁹⁹

⁹⁵ On 3 December 1956, János Kádár requested from the Chinese, on behalf of the government, long-term credit to the value of 200 million rubles. Szobolevszki-Vida, *Magyar-kínai kapcsolatok, 1956–1959*. pp. 106-7, document no. 24. On 10 January 1957 the Chinese granted 100 million rubles of free currency to the Hungarian government. The credit agreement between the PRH and the PRC was signed on 13 May 1957. See "Agreement between the People's Republic of Hungary and the People's Republic of China on the credit granted by the People's Republic of China to the People's Republic of Hungary." HNA XIX-J-1-j-Kína-23/b-003184-1957. As agreed under the third point of the agreement, repayment was due from 1960. This point allowed for repayment in the form of goods dependent upon further discussions between the two parties. Thanks to the rapid consolidation of the Hungarian economy, Hungarians began repayments early, and had repaid the entire amount by 1962.

⁹⁶ *A magyar-kínai barátság dokumentuma. 1957. január 16-17.* pp. 20-24.

⁹⁷ *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung Vol. V.*: p. 363.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

By the end of 1956, the CCP leadership had drawn new conclusions from the 20th Congress. In November, Mao reaffirmed Stalin's crucial role, referring to the Polish and Hungarian events: "I think that there are two 'swords': one is Lenin and the other Stalin. The sword of Stalin has now been discarded by the Russians. Gomulka and some people in Hungary have picked it up to stab at the Soviet Union and to oppose so-called Stalinism ... We Chinese have not thrown it away."¹⁰⁰ On the Chinese attitude, he stated that "unlike some people who have tried to defame and destroy Stalin, we are acting in accordance with objective reality."¹⁰¹

At the end of December, the CCP publicized its position in another article entitled "More on the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat," the continuation of the article published in April. The Chairman felt that the article should not contain too many details on the Hungarian events, and should defend the positive elements of the 20th Congress, while at the same time emphasizing that the criticism of Stalin had been too negative, that on the whole the policies of the CPSU should be supported but its mistakes criticized, and finally that Stalin was a great Marxist. As with the first article, carefully chosen arguments were used in order to confront the Soviets with a *fait accompli*. During discussions on the writing of the article, Mao opposed Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist measures much more vehemently than ever before. He said that it was "wrong to divide the Communist Party into Stalinist and non-Stalinist elements," because Stalinism was "Marxism [...], Marxism with shortcomings." He eventually reached the conclusion that "so-called de-Stalinization is nothing other than de-Marxification, or revisionism."¹⁰² Lüthi notes that this was the first time Mao drew a distinction between the opinions of the CPSU and the CCP, and between subjective revisionism and objective Marxism.¹⁰³

Mao could regard Khrushchev's principle of peaceful coexistence as revisionist because the logical conclusion to this line of thought was that a peaceful, parliamentary conversion to socialism could take place in non-socialist countries. In Mao's eyes, this was tantamount to revisionism because it rejected the dictatorship of the proletariat and accepted bourgeois democracy, in other words the dictatorship of the capitalist classes. "As for the sword of Lenin, hasn't it too been discarded to a certain extent by some Soviet leaders? In my view, it has been discarded to a considerable extent [...]. Khrushchev's report at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union says it is possible to seize state power by the parliamentary road, that is to say, it is no longer necessary for all countries to learn from the October Revolution. Once this gate is opened, by and large, Leninism is thrown away."¹⁰⁴ In other words, according to Mao, Khrushchev's speech was a step back to pre-October Revolutionary times, and the Soviet leader had, therefore, rejected not only Stalin, but also Lenin. According to Wu Lengxi, during the preparation of the "More on" article, Mao realized that complete rejection would not find support, and so followed a two-pronged tactic. He cites Mao: "from a strategic point of view, we must be ready to seize power by violent means and with revolutionary struggle, but in the interests of gaining the support of the masses, from a

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 341.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 341.

¹⁰² Wu, *Shi nian lunzhan*, p. 68.

¹⁰³ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split, 1956-1966*: p. 69.

¹⁰⁴ *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung Vol. V*: p. 341.

tactical point of view, we must say that we are willing to accept the peaceful transformation.”¹⁰⁵

The Soviet theory of peaceful coexistence was the result of the changes in the Soviet Union’s economic and global political situation. In China’s case, however, the “imperialist threat” was seen as an immediate risk. Lorenz Lüthi demonstrates that the American threat was the prime reason for China’s rejection of Khrushchev’s February 1956 proposal of the peaceful coexistence of the socialist and non-socialist worlds. The Chinese felt that Khrushchev had not taken into consideration the idea of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries inherent in the Pancha Shila: that with its “occupation” of Taiwan, the USA had intervened in Chinese domestic affairs. Lüthi cites Zhou Enlai who wrote that the Hungarian events had strengthened the Chinese conviction that “the Western world had used the Hungarian incident to mount an anti-Soviet, anti-Communist tide.”¹⁰⁶

The Chinese leadership followed events in Eastern Europe with such close attention because they affected not only the future of Poland and Hungary, but of other socialist countries as well. Zhou Enlai spoke on the international situation that had evolved on the basis of the Hungarian events at the 4 November meeting of the Politburo. He said that in every fraternal Party there were wavering elements and those who objected to the system.¹⁰⁷ There were demonstrations around 4 November in Romania (mostly in Transylvanian towns), Czechoslovakia (Bratislava), and the Soviet Union.

The opinion of Mao Zedong and the Chinese leadership on the Hungarian situation was also influenced by events within China. Neither was Chinese domestic politics free from storms. In the second half of 1956, though prior to the Polish and Hungarian events, dozens of strikes and incidents occurred throughout the whole country. Tens of thousands took to the streets. In the southern part of the country, hundreds of thousands left the agricultural cooperatives and university students and high school pupils across the country demanded higher grants. Riots broke out in Tibet in the summer involving, according to Western reports, 400,000 demonstrators.¹⁰⁸ Mao first addressed the disturbances in January 1957.¹⁰⁹ He mentioned only two locations, Shijiazhuang and Beijing, although we know from other Chinese and foreign sources that similar events occurred throughout the country at the end of 1956. The Hungarian ambassador to Beijing gave an account of clashes in Shanghai, and Wuhan, and other locations.¹¹⁰ The protesters frequently mentioned Hungary in their slogans. In a few instances, police and the use of armed force were required to restore order.¹¹¹ Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi told the Hungarian party and government delegation visiting China in the spring of 1959 that China had also seen

¹⁰⁵ Wu, *Shi nian lunzhan*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. In 1959, Mao drew a parallel between the Hungarian events and the Tibetan question. See footnote no. 147.

¹⁰⁷ Wu, Lengxi, *Yi Mao zhuxi*. [Remembering Chairman Mao.] (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1995). p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ Chargé d’affaires József Száll’s report: “The Tibetan situation and uprisings in Sichuan,” Beijing, 16 August 1956. HNA XIX-J-1-j-Kína-5/j-006716-1956.

¹⁰⁹ *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung Vol. V*. p. 362.

¹¹⁰ Annual report of 1957 of the Chinese Ambassador to Beijing, “Domestic politics,” p. 2. HNA M-KS-288/32/1958/9.

¹¹¹ Bo, Yibo: *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu. 1-2*. [Reflections of Certain Important Decisions and Events] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1997). p. 590.

smaller-scale “Hungarian events,” influenced by the “Hungarian counter-revolution.”¹¹²

Mao used the Hungarian example to reclaim his personal authority, which had been shaken at the September 1956 8th CCP Congress. Indeed, as later events have proved, this is where the actual meaning of October 1956 in Hungary lay for Mao. As has already been mentioned, the 8th Party Congress declared that the revolutionary era had come to an end and that the country was entering a new, peaceful stage in the construction of socialism. In 1957, however, he returned to his earlier policy. Chinese reports appearing over the past few years have corroborated this position.¹¹³ Mao took the first step in his speech of 27 February 1957 on the correct handling of contradictions among the people: “Today, matters stand as follows. The large-scale, turbulent class struggles of the masses characteristic of the revolutionary era have, in the main, come to an end, but class struggle is by no means entirely over.”¹¹⁴ This turn (that the class struggle had, *fundamentally*, come to an end, but was not *completely* over) may be understood as the continuation of the class struggle. We know now that Mao’s response to the Chinese disturbances was the identification and liquidation of “counter-revolutionary” and “right-wing” elements. The re-launch of the “Hundred Flowers” campaign in the spring of 1957 was followed, within a few months, by the anti-Rightist campaign.

In his speeches of 18 January and 27 February, Mao spoke of cleansing typhoons among the cadres. “Before it rains in a typhoon, ants come out of their holes, they have very sensitive ‘noses’ and they know their meteorology. No sooner had the typhoon of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU struck, than a few such ants in China came out of their holes [...]. It’s a good thing that some people inside and outside the party sang the praises of the Polish and Hungarian incidents. They could not open their mouths without talking about Poznan and Hungary. In so doing, they gave themselves away. Ants came out of their holes and turtles, tortoises, and all the scum of the earth left their hiding places [...] One good thing about the Hungarian incident was that these ants in China were thus lured out of their holes.”¹¹⁵

In educational institutions, “a handful of counter-revolutionaries had seized the opportunity to agitate, to organize a demonstration,” and certain professors had said things such as “the Communist Party should be done away with, socialism is no good.” During the uprising in Hungary, counter-revolutionary elements had “hoped that Hungary would be thrown into chaos and, best of all, China too.”¹¹⁶ On 18 January, Mao said the following: “Gomułka has been very popular with a number of our college students, as have Tito and Kardelj. On the other hand, at the time of the

¹¹² Mao told Münnich and his colleagues that: “The Hungarian events happened in 1956, and in 1957 we followed your example, creating more than 10,000 small-scale Hungarian events throughout the country. We forced the right-wing elements to strike wildly. These right-wing elements were the same as your Pet fi Circles.” Minutes of the meeting between Chairman Mao Zedong and the Hungarian Party and government delegation, p. 8., Beijing, 6 May 1959. Chinese FM Archives, 204-00073-03. On the discussions between Liu and the Hungarian delegation, see “Report to the Political Committee on the visit to the Far East by the Hungarian Party and Government delegation,” Archives of the Institute of Political History, Budapest, Károly Kiss papers, 905, fond 59.

¹¹³ Yan, Xiaoming, “Jianlun Mao Zedong yu Ba Da luxiande gaibian”. [On Mao Zedong and the Change of Line of the 8th Congress.] In: *Dangdai Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 1997/6, pp. 88-94; Wang, “Bo-Xiong shijianhou Mao Zedong dui guonei jiejidouzhenq jushi panduan bianhua de lishi xiansuo.”

¹¹⁴ *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung Vol. V*. p. 395.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 354-5, 358.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 352-3, 371.

riots in Poland and Hungary, most of the landlords and rich peasants in the countryside, [as well as] the capitalists and members of the democratic parties in the cities, behaved better and made no attempt to stir up trouble, or come out with threats to kill thousands and tens of thousands of people. But one should be analytical about their behavior. Because they no longer have any political capital, the workers and the poor and lower-middle peasants won't listen to them, and they have no ground upon which to stand."¹¹⁷ "In Hungary, great democracy toppled the party, the government, and the army once it was set in motion. This will not happen in China. If a handful of schoolchildren can topple our party, government, and army by a show of force, we must all be fatheads."¹¹⁸ He fulminated against "revisionist" views that washed away the differences between socialism and capitalism, and between proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois dictatorship: "In the main, the large-scale, turbulent class struggles of the masses characteristic of the revolutionary era in our country have come to an end, but there is still class struggle—chiefly on the political and ideological fronts—and it is very acute too."¹¹⁹ Similar proclamations from Mao followed one another over the course of the year. On 9 October 1957, he openly criticized the resolution of the 8th CCP Congress: "... the principal contradiction is between socialism and capitalism, between collectivism and individualism, or, in a nutshell, between the socialist road and the capitalist road. The resolution of the 8th Congress makes no mention of this question. It contains a passage that speaks of the principal contradiction being that between the advanced socialist system and backwards social productive forces. This formulation is incorrect."¹²⁰

We still do not know many details of the campaign.¹²¹ What we do know, however, is that the Chinese communists, who had studied the Hungarian example so thoroughly, and who did not rely on the resources or strength of any other party, used ideological provocation to goad the opposition into speaking out, before ruthlessly defeating them. As a result of the anti-Rightist campaign and party rectification movement, around 530,000 people, one tenth of the Chinese intelligentsia, were declared Rightists, and in the proceeding years, became the subjects and victims of various counter-measures. The Chinese acted, in their eyes, as their Hungarian comrades should have done.

The Hungarian events in Chinese propaganda

The first Chinese evaluations on the reasons for and lessons of the Hungarian events were in line with the official Hungarian version agreed at the HSWP Provisional EC plenum of 2-5 December 1956, and endorsed at the June 1957 party conference.¹²² During his conversation with members of the Honvéd Ensemble in Beijing on 15 November 1956, Zhou Enlai had said that "the past errors of the [Hungarian Workers'] Party and government rightfully resulted in the dissatisfaction of the

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 353.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 358.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 435.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 492-3.

¹²¹ For a recent Chinese interpretation of the anti-Rightist campaign, see Zhu, Zheng, *1957 nian de xiaji. Cong baijia zhengming dao liangjia zhengming*. [The Summer of 1957. From One Hundred Schools Contending to Two Schools Contending] (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1998).

¹²² See "A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt országos értekezletének határozata." [Decision of the National Conference of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.] In *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt országos értekezletének jegyzőkönyve. 1957. június 27-29*. [Minutes of the National Conference of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, 27-9 June 1957.] pp. 244-75.

masses, [...] however, the prepared forces of counter-revolution wanted to exploit this outbreak for their own ends.”¹²³ In connection with the reasons behind the Hungarian events, the editorial published in *Renmin Ribao* on 29 December 1956 entitled “More on the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat,” stated that: “the resolution of the Provisional Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party has established that the Hungarian events were the consequences of numerous factors, both internal and external. The one-sided explanation is incorrect, but among the factors, international imperialism played a major and decisive role.”¹²⁴ The joint statement entitled “Document of Hungarian-Chinese Friendship,” published during Premier Zhou Enlai’s visit to Hungary on 16-17 January 1957, announced that “the two government delegations have reached complete agreement regarding the Hungarian situation.”¹²⁵

Until 1960, official Chinese propaganda, in line with Zhou Enlai’s remarks to the Honvéd Ensemble of 15 November 1956 and the “More on” article of 29 December, held the Soviets’ military, political and economic assistance to Hungary in high esteem, and strove to convince those wavering of the necessity of Soviet military “assistance.”

Between 1957 and 1959, Chinese leaders mentioned the Hungarian events almost exclusively in relation to their influence on Chinese domestic politics. The new Hungarian ambassador to Beijing, Sándor Nógrádi, left Budapest to take up his post on 9 May 1957 and, almost immediately after his arrival, on 17 May, presented his credentials to Mao Zedong.¹²⁶ There, Mao said that “the Chinese Party had learned from the Hungarian events. The errors committed in Hungary have occurred and still occur also in China, in no small measure...” He then turned to questions of domestic concern: problems with the intelligentsia, the “Hundred Flowers” campaign and the party rectification movement. He did not mention the Sino-Soviet controversies.¹²⁷ Liu Shaoqi, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, said during Ambassador Nógrádi’s introductory visit with him on 29 May, that China had learned much from the Hungarian events, and the errors preceding them. “In essence, similar mistakes were made in China, although the intensity and degree of seriousness were not as strong as in Hungary.” He acknowledged that excesses had also taken place in China, but their scope and impact had not reached the level of that in Hungary. “During the liquidation of the counter-revolution, innocent people were imprisoned and killed here too, but in the main, it was primarily counter-revolutionaries who were liquidated. In Hungary however, it was largely the communists who suffered, while the counter-revolution remained more or less at large. This also explains, to a certain extent, the origins of the October events.”¹²⁸

¹²³ Szobolevszki-Vida (2001), p. 94, document no. 20.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 111, document no. 26.

¹²⁵ *A magyar–kínai barátság dokumentuma. 1957. január 16-17.* p. 21.

¹²⁶ Sándor Nógrádi was elected a member of the Central Committee on 29 June 1957 at the HSWP national congress.

¹²⁷ On the conversation see Szobolevszki-Vida, *Magyar–kínai kapcsolatok, 1956–1959.* pp. 190-4, document no 45. For the Chinese text, see “Chairman Mao Zedong receives Sándor Nógrádi, Hungarian Ambassador to China, at the presentation of his credentials,” Meetings minutes, p. 5, CFMA 109-00806-03.

¹²⁸ Ambassador Sándor Nógrádi’s report of his introductory visit with Liu Shaoqi, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, Beijing, 5 June 1957. HNA FM SA XIX-J-1-j-Kína-4/c-002925-1957. Published in Szobolevszki-Vida, *Magyar–kínai kapcsolatok, 1956–1959.* pp.

