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## **INTERPRETING SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS IN SOVIET HISTORIOGRAPHY**

### *Abstract*

The interpretation of Sino-Soviet relations in Soviet historiography is a complex issue that reflects various stages in the history of the Soviet Union, portraying contradictions and transformations in the interaction between the two communist states. Exploring this topic allows us to unveil the evolution of relations, the impact of domestic and foreign policy factors on diplomatic ties, and the changing perceptions of China within the USSR.

The article provides an overview of the history of relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union. The main milestones in the history of these relations are highlighted, with a focus on key features and major events. The experience of cooperation between the Soviet Union and the PRC in the early stages of their relations, prior to the Sino-Soviet split, is examined.

During the initial phase of Sino-Soviet diplomacy, Soviet historiography emphasized the solidarity of the two nations united by communist ideals. However, over time, discrepancies emerged, manifesting in the absence of a unified stance on international communism. Amid the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the USSR started perceiving its eastern neighbor as marked by radicalism and hostility.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet historiography began to highlight failures in relations, reflecting real divisions and competition. Research during this period focused on external challenges and the strategic significance of China for the USSR.

The interpretation of Sino-Soviet relations in Soviet historiography indicates the complexity and dynamics of diplomatic ties between the two countries. It

also reflects the internal political and geopolitical transformations occurring in both nations over time.

**Keywords:** Sino-Soviet Relations, Soviet Historiography, Marxist Ideology, Historical Interpretations, Political Discourse, Historical Narratives.

### *Introduction*

The article holds significant relevance in understanding the historical perspectives and scholarly interpretations of the complex relationship between the Soviet Union and China. The importance of this article lies in its comprehensive analysis of how Soviet historians portrayed and analyzed the dynamics between these two major communist powers. Firstly, the article sheds light on the historical context by exploring the chronological development of Sino-Soviet relations. This provides a nuanced understanding of the evolving dynamics, offering insights into the key periods and transitions in the relationship. Secondly, by delving into Soviet historiography, the article unveils the various narratives and interpretations crafted by Soviet scholars. This helps in understanding the ideological underpinnings that shaped the portrayal of Sino-Soviet relations within the Soviet academic and intellectual framework. Moreover, the article's exploration of the historiographical evolution during different periods adds depth to our comprehension of how political changes and ideological shifts influenced scholarly discourse. The examination of varying interpretations over time contributes to a richer understanding of the complexities involved in analyzing international relations. Additionally, the relevance of the article extends to its impact on contemporary perspectives. By critically examining Soviet historiography, it prompts a reevaluation of existing narratives and encourages scholars to consider multiple viewpoints in the ongoing study of Sino-Soviet relations.

*The aim* of the article is to critically examine how the historical relationship between the Soviet Union and China has been portrayed and analyzed within the framework of Soviet historiography. The primary objective is to shed light on the prevailing narratives, perspectives, and biases that shaped the Soviet understanding of Sino-Soviet relations during different historical epochs.

### *Methods*

To achieve this goal, the article employs a meticulous review and analysis of primary sources, scholarly works, and official documents within the Soviet historiographical context. By delving into the writings of Soviet historians, the article aims to identify the key themes, interpretations, and nuances that characterized their discussions on the Sino-Soviet relationship. This method involves a comprehensive exploration of historical archives, academic publications, and official statements to unveil the evolving narrative and shifts in interpretation over time.

Additionally, the article adopts a comparative approach, juxtaposing multiple viewpoints within Soviet historiography to highlight discrepancies and evolving perspectives on Sino-Soviet relations. Through a nuanced examination of these sources, the article seeks to contribute valuable insights into the historiographical trends that have influenced the portrayal of this critical geopolitical relationship within the Soviet academic discourse.

### *Results*

#### **Impact of dramatic historical events on Sino-Soviet period of friendship**

The historical trajectory of Sino-Soviet relations has been punctuated by a series of dramatic events that have significantly shaped the course of this geopolitical alliance. The beginning of Soviet-Chinese relations begins in 1917, relatively speaking with the events of the Russian revolution. It refers to diplomatic relations between China, both the Republic of China 1912–1949 and its successor, the People’s Republic of China, and various forms of Soviet rule. In the period from the 1920s to the 1940s, territorial conflicts arose between China and the USSR. For example, one can recall the Sino-Soviet conflict of 1929 [Patrikeeff et al., 2002], or Soviet invasion of Xinjiang (1934, 1937) [Wang, 1999]. “The new development, which began in 1935, led step-by-step to the CCP’s emancipation from the Soviet Union by 1945. The most important step in this development can be seen to have begun when Mao Zedong was able to assert his authority against the faction subservient to Moscow that had predominated to that point in an Enlarged Session of the Politburo in Zunyi (Guizhou Province) during the legendary Long March in January 1935. Mao had already realized that directives from Moscow revealed little familiarity with the situation in China and were unlikely to lead the revolution to victory and had begun to act independently from as early as 1927. He appears to have assumed military leadership *de facto* after the Zunyi Conference and to have thus laid the foundations for his rise to Party leader” [Heinzig, 2004: 7].

In 1937, the Soviet Union forged a non-aggression pact with China. Joseph Stalin, perceiving Japan as a potential adversary, refrained from providing assistance to the Chinese communists from 1937 to 1941. This decision aimed to avoid undermining the efforts of the Nationalist government. The early years of the Chinese Communist Party’s ascent to power, culminating in the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, marked a watershed moment. The Soviet Union, under Joseph Stalin, promptly recognized the new Chinese government, laying the foundation for a strategic alliance. However, the Korean War (1950-1953), as conflicting interests, tested this initial camaraderie and ideological differences strained the Sino-Soviet bond.

Upon the ascent to power by the Chinese communists, led by Mao Zedong, the formal establishment of the People’s Republic of China took place on October 1,

1949. Remarkably, on October 2, 1949, the Soviet Union assumed the role of the inaugural state to extend official recognition to the People's Republic of China. A significant turning point occurred on February 14, 1950, with the formalization of the *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance*. The ratification of this treaty marked a pivotal moment in the initiation of diplomatic ties between the two nations. Subsequently, numerous consequential agreements were reached under the auspices of this treaty, heralding a new epoch in Sino-Soviet relations. A plethora of scholarly works within historiography has delved extensively into this transformative phase in the diplomatic history of the two countries. Professor Bruce A. Elleman, author of a dissertation on Sino-Soviet relations, argues that there is evidence of earlier agreements between the two countries, which he describes in more detail in his book *Diplomacy and Deception: The Secret History of Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917-1927* (1997) [Elleman, 1997].

### **Soviet Assistance in the Industrialization of China: a transformative collaboration**

The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a dynamic alliance between the Soviet Union and China, marked by Soviet assistance in propelling China towards industrialization. This article explores the multifaceted collaboration, focusing on the establishment of factories, the creation of new industries, and advancements in transportation and infrastructure. One of the cornerstone contributions of Soviet aid was the establishment of factories and plants across China. Soviet expertise and resources played a pivotal role in setting up manufacturing units that became instrumental in fostering economic growth. These factories became hubs of innovation, producing a wide array of goods and contributing significantly to China's burgeoning industrial landscape. "In 1958-1959, after eight years of fluctuating but impressive expansion, Sino-Soviet trade had responded vigorously to China's 'Great Leap Forward.' In two years, China's imports from the Soviet Union rose by 75 per cent, her exports by 49 percent. China had regained first place among the Soviet Union's trade partners. The Soviet Union, in turn, came to account for nearly half of China's total trade. It also remained China's principal, and vital, source of imports of machinery and equipment, petroleum, and other goods which China would have found difficult to obtain elsewhere in the face of Western restrictions, the United States embargo, and shortage of foreign exchange" [Hoeffding, 1963: 97].

The collaboration between the Soviet Union and China extended beyond traditional sectors, ushering in the creation of new industries. Notably, the partnership facilitated advancements in key sectors such as transportation, metallurgy, and energy. The establishment of metallurgical plants, expansion of energy production, and the introduction of modern transportation systems underscored the transformative impact of this collaboration on China's economic landscape. "BOTH Soviet Union and China are vast in size and endowed with rich resources

and varied climate. Both started their processes of industrialisation from very low levels of development. Both have identical motivations — to build communism and catch up and surpass ‘in the shortest historical period the highest indices of capitalism’. Yet, if we look at their development over a long period of time, we find significant differences in their strategies of economic development. China began with the preferred Soviet ‘model’ of development, but soon realised its impracticability, and started looking for indigenous solutions” [Jayashekar, 1968: 1623]. Soviet assistance was not confined to industrial sectors alone; it extended to comprehensive infrastructure development. Construction of roads and the establishment of a robust aviation network became instrumental in connecting disparate regions of China. The collaborative efforts aimed at modernizing transportation infrastructure played a pivotal role in fostering economic integration and national development.

The collaboration between the Soviet Union and China in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century marked a transformative period in China’s industrialization. From the establishment of factories to the creation of new industries and the development of critical infrastructure, this partnership laid the foundation for China’s emergence as an industrial powerhouse. The legacy of this collaboration endures as a testament to the strategic alliance that shaped the economic trajectory of both nations.

### **Historical and philosophical foundations of Soviet historiography of Sino-Soviet relations: fluctuations between friendship and enmity**

By the end of the 1950s, the parties increasingly exchanged mutual criticisms at socialist party congresses, in official publications, through ambassadors and delegations. China criticized the CPSU for revisionism and a softening stance towards the West. The USSR, in turn, criticized the CCP for social experiments like the “Great Leap Forward” for an assertive foreign policy that triggered the Taiwan Strait Crisis and the Sino-Indian border conflict. These conflicts stemmed from divergent ideological perspectives. Despite both nations subscribing to similar philosophical frameworks, variations in interpretation arose, resulting in mutual misunderstandings in both domestic and foreign policy. “During the second half of 1937, Mao began to develop a philosophical basis for his adaptation of Marxism to concrete social conditions in China. He employed the formula Sinification of Marxism for the first time at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Central Committee in October 1938, although it was not included — clearly out of deference to Moscow — in the final resolution. With this formula, Mao established his claim to a special form of Marxism valid only for China: “Consequently, the Sinification of Marxism [*Ma-ke-si zhuyi de Zhongguo hua*] — that is to say, making certain that in all of its manifestations it [Marxism] is imbued with Chinese peculiarities, that is, that it is practiced according to these peculiarities — becomes a problem that must be understood and solved by the whole Party without delay” [Heinzig, 2004: 11].

In the texts dedicated to Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong in the publications of the magazine *Ogonek*, a common trend of the Soviet discourse of the 1930s-1950s is reflected. During this period, the transition to socialism was interpreted through various forms of struggle, confrontation, and overcoming. These phenomena were viewed in a positive light, interpreted as integral norms of Soviet life, simultaneously emphasizing the “correct” path of development not only for the USSR but also for its allies, particularly Communist China. “Ordinary people all over the world are watching the liberation struggle of the Chinese people with a feeling of friendship and warm sympathy. All the sincere friends of the great, brave and hardworking Chinese people learned with great joy the other day about the opening of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, designed to resolve extremely important issues” [Ogonek, 1949: 7].

Since 1958, the magazine *Soviet-Chinese Friendship* began to be published regularly. The narrative of Soviet historiography on Sino-Soviet relations was based on translations of key texts.

Numerous volumes of archival documents and materials represent soviet-Chinese historiography. To describe the documents alone, several monographs will be required, so the essence of this article is not a complete description of the form of this phenomenon, but an exploration of the essence. In addition, this essence is very dramatic and dynamic. Just a quick list of documents is worth it: *Legislative acts of the People’s Republic of China* (1952), *Collection of documents on Sino-Soviet friendship* (1953), *Soviet-Chinese relations. 1917 – 1957. Collection of documents.* (1963), *USSR-PRC (1949-1983). Documents and materials* (1985). *The USSR and Stalin in the fate of China. Documents and certificates of participants in the events: 1937-1952* (1999) and many others. Numerous articles in newspapers, monographs, collections of texts and materials both in the USSR and in China formed the basis of the relational narrative and served as dynamic vectors for the development of Sino-Soviet historiography.

The ideological core was represented by the works of Mao Zedong, in 1952, the State Publishing House of Foreign Literature translated from Chinese and published a four-volume set of *Selected Works in 4 volumes* (1952). Mao Zedong’s significant works, spanning various periods of the Chinese revolution, are included in the collection of his selected writings. This compilation brings together his writings that cover different phases of this historical process. The works included in the collection are organized chronologically, corresponding to the five periods of the history of the Communist Party of China. This structure allows readers to trace the evolution of Mao Zedong’s thoughts and ideas throughout different stages of the Chinese revolution. The first volume covers the works of the period of the First Civil Revolutionary War, the second covers the period of the Second Civil Revolutionary War, and the third, fourth, and fifth volumes are dedicated to works created during the war against Japanese invaders. This categorization enables readers to gain a deeper understanding and

analyze Mao Zedong's contribution to key moments in China's history, as well as track the development of his thoughts during various stages of the country's political and social development. In 1975, *Speeches by Mao Zedong, previously unpublished in the Chinese press* (1972), *Speeches and statements by Deng Xiaoping. Collection* (1979) were also published. All these speeches were of great interest to historiographers.

In his 1982 book, *From the History of Soviet-Chinese Relations in the 50s: On the Discussion in the PRC about Mao Zedong* (1982), Oleg Borisov elucidates the pivotal role played by Mao Zedong and his associates in the trajectory leading to the seizure of power and the formulation of an anti-Soviet stance. This ideological shift is increasingly interwoven with the policies of international imperialism. Given the contemporary developments in the PRC, including the ongoing discourse surrounding Mao Zedong, there is a pertinent need to delve into the historical context of the Chinese revolution. This exploration aims to delineate Mao Zedong's position within that revolution, ascertain his accountability to the Chinese populace, and assess his impact on the global revolutionary movement. "The current trajectory pursued by Beijing, leveraging the contradictions between the two global social systems and striving to achieve China's great-power objectives by aligning with the imperialist policy against three revolutionary streams, especially the USSR and the global socialist community, poses a significant threat to both global peace and the socialist cause within China itself" [Borisov, 1982: 4].

In 1990, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a natural reassessment of Sino-Soviet relations took place, leading to a shift in historiographical narratives. In his monograph *China and the Outside World* (1990), Evgeniy Bazhanov articulates a comprehensive understanding of the historical evolution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) over a span of 40 years. With a lucid exposition and profound subject knowledge, Evgeniy Bazhanov delves into the various external and internal factors that shaped the PRC, examining significant changes in its foreign policy, politics, and philosophy. The monograph particularly emphasizes the analysis of China's relations with the USSR, major Western nations, and the developing world. "In China, referring to past experience, it is argued that socialist countries are prone to enter into mutual conflicts and even engage in warfare with each other. At the same time, they can successfully collaborate with non-socialist states, provided they have an appropriate social system. Until recently, such statements evoked strongly negative emotions from us. We perceived them as non-class, non-Marxist, aimed at justifying the Chinese leadership's policy of close ties with the West. Conflicts, real conflicts in the socialist world, we either did not notice, or, when it became impossible to ignore them, explained as the 'guilty' party's deviation from Marxism-Leninism. A primitive scheme, established during the Stalinist period, was in operation, and we continued to adhere to it, if not in belief, then at least in practice" [Bazhanov, 1990:

19]. Sino-Soviet relations experienced notable fluctuations oscillating between phases of friendship and enmity throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The early years marked by alliance and cooperation eventually gave way to ideological and geopolitical divergences, leading to periods of tension and hostility. These dynamic shifts have significantly impacted historiography, influencing the narratives and interpretations crafted by scholars as they navigate the complex and evolving nature of this geopolitical relationship. The ebb and flow of Sino-Soviet relations continue to serve as a compelling subject for historians seeking to unravel the intricate dynamics that shaped the course of these two influential nations.

### *Conclusions*

The development of relations between the USSR and China can be divided into two key periods: from the 1940s to the 1960s and from the 1960s to the 1990s. These periods are characterized by differences in the scope, intensity, and effectiveness of cultural, philosophical, and political interactions. Chronologically, they coincide with the peak activity in cultural cooperation and the gradual reduction of intensity in all aspects, culminating in a complete cessation in 1965. This was driven by political and ideological (Sinicized Marxism) disagreements and the unique foreign policy courses of both countries. The pivotal event foreshadowing the political-ideological confrontation between the two nations was the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU, which had a profound impact on the state of Soviet-Chinese relations.

The confrontation between the USSR and China in the 1960s and 1970s led to a deep crisis in their relationship. Trade between the PRC and the Soviet Union decreased significantly. However, despite the crisis with the USSR and the Eastern Bloc countries, China managed to emerge from political isolation by the early 1970s. It established diplomatic ties with developed nations, actively participating in the affairs of developing countries in Asia and Africa. During the 1970s, China also sought to improve relations with the United States. However, events in the 1980s marked a new stage in the history of Sino-Soviet relations, initiating a normalization process reflected in the historiography of Chinese-Soviet relations.

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## **ІНТЕРПРЕТАЦІЯ РАДЯНСЬКО-КИТАЙСЬКИХ ВІДНОСИН В РАДЯНСЬКІЙ ІСТОРІОГРАФІЇ**

### *Резюме*

Інтерпретація радянсько-китайських відносин у радянській історіографії є комплексною проблемою, яка відображає різні етапи історії Радянського Союзу, відображає протиріччя та трансформації у взаємодії між двома комуністичними державами. Дослідження цієї теми дозволяє розкрити еволюцію відносин, вплив факторів внутрішньої та зовнішньої політики на дипломатичні зв'язки та зміну сприйняття Китаю всередині СРСР.

У статті подано огляд історії відносин між Китайською Народною Республікою (КНР) і Радянським Союзом. Висвітлено основні віхи в історії цих відносин, зосереджено увагу на ключових рисах і основних подіях. Розглянуто досвід співпраці між Радянським Союзом і КНР на ранніх етапах їх відносин, до китайсько-радянського розколу.

На початковому етапі китайсько-радянської дипломатії радянська історіографія наголошувала на солідарності двох націй, об'єднаних комуністичними ідеалами. Проте з часом виявилися розбіжності, які виявилися у відсутності єдиної позиції щодо міжнародного комунізму. На тлі Китайської культурної революції СРСР почав сприймати свого східного сусіда радикально і з ворожістю. 1970-х і 1980-х роках радянська історіографія почала наголошувати на невдачах у відносинах, що відображало реальні розбіжності та конкуренцію. Дослідження цього періоду були зосереджені на зовнішніх викликах і стратегічному значенні Китаю для СРСР.

Трактування радянсько-китайських відносин у радянській історіографії свідчить про складність і динамічність дипломатичних зв'язків між двома країнами. Це також відображає внутрішні політичні та геополітичні трансформації, що відбуваються в обох країнах з часом.

**Ключові слова:** радянсько-китайські відносини, радянська історіографія, марксистська ідеологія, історичні інтерпретації, політичний дискурс, історичні наративи.

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