

## China's relations with the USSR 1937-1956

### KEY ISSUE:

How national rivalries between the USSR and China eclipsed ideological similarities between the two Communist Parties

### TO UNDERSTAND:

- Mutual suspicion of Mao and Stalin
- Territorial rivalries in certain areas such as Xinjiang
- Soliarity as Communist powers
- Fear of US imperialism

### OVERVIEW

1. Sino-Soviet relations began with the Russian Revolution of 1917, the formation of the Soviet Union and the Moscow Comintern, which provided support and direction for the fledgeling CCP.
2. In late 1949 Mao visited Stalin in Moscow. While Mao felt undervalued and disregarded by Stalin, the two leaders signed an important treaty and military alliance.
3. In public Mao and CCP propaganda hailed Stalin as a visionary leader of world socialism, however, in private Mao felt betrayed by Stalin's lack of support and involvement during the Korean War.
4. In 1956 Nikita Khrushchev denounced the brutality that occurred under Stalin's leadership. This condemnation of Stalin placed Mao in an awkward position and forced the CCP to reevaluate its position on Stalin.
5. Sino-Soviet relations continued to worsen from 1957, driven by ideological divisions, different attitudes to the West, provocative and hostile remarks, failed talks between Mao and Khrushchev, and border disputes that led to a brief conflict in 1969.

<https://alphahistory.com/chineserevolution/sino-soviet-relations/>

### **China and USSR post 1917 Revolution - 1936**

Russia post revolution was an appealing role model to Chinese revolutionaries.

Very early small Marxist study groups appeared, one in Changsha in 1920 under Mao Zedong.

These expanded when the Comintern was set up by the Russian Bolshevik government in March 1919.

The Comintern was set up to promote proletarian revolution worldwide (any national communist party became a branch of an international 'communist' army)

The CCP was formed in 1921 after a meeting with a representative of the Comintern. Early reservations included the Chinese assertion that China's proletariat was small and they were not keen on working with the GMD.

The Comintern provided cash to the new party so was crucial in the early days. However, they insisted on cooperation with the GMD as the Soviets saw them as more useful as they were larger and more established. It was an ongoing debate but 1922 saw cooperation so as to combat the warlords, 1923 the CCP (guided by the Comintern) joined the GMD as the 'bloc within'.

Mao joined the GMD, was an active promoter of the United Front and won a place on the Central Committee. However, he remained unsure of the power of the tiny Chinese proletariat and leaned towards Chinese communist, Peng Pai, who emphasised the revolutionary force of the Chinese peasantry. He left the central committee in 1925 and went to a training centre for rural militants.

CCP had 200 members in 1922 but this was 58,000 in 1927, the **third largest Communist party in the world then.**

Despite this, Russia favoured the GMD, supporting Sun Yat-Sen and later Jiang Jieshi. They helped model the GMD policy of Three Principles (nationalism, democracy, people's livelihood) and supplied masses of arms to Canton plus advisors who helped to set up the Whampoa Military Academy. Jiang Jieshi and Zhou Enlai (CCP) were trained there.

1927 GMD grows increasingly uneasy with USSR influence and cooperation with CCP. Mao maintains policy of USSR which is CCP/GMD cooperation.

GMD show they have a left and right wing, Jiang Jieshi in charge of the right wing. Jiang Jieshi proves to be the stronger leader and in 1927 Russia see the United Front has disintegrated and order the Russian advisors to the GMD home. Chinese Communists go it alone and the 'revolutionary proletariat' are rapidly crushed by the GMD in Shanghai and Canton. At first, the USSR under Stalin see this as the Chinese Communists being non Communists but when it is clear that the remainder of the GMD was now right leaning, under Jiang Jieshi, Moscow look to Mao and the CCP. A total volte face in policy.

CCP growth stalled - Mao and the pro peasant Communists retreat to Jiangxi - and it became dangerous to have CCP Congress in China. 1928 Congress was held outside Moscow and the CCP. The party was constantly arguing over the Russian/Comintern influence and their desire for a proletarian revolution versus the Chinese version. Mao was not yet pre-eminent within the party but did join the Central Committee again in 1928.

**Xian Incident 1936:** Jiang Jieshi is captured by Young Marshal Zhang who was a GMD leader in Manchuria. Jiang was not assassinated which is seen as a stroke of political genius by the Communists as they can be seen to be lenient in order to promote a United Front against the Japanese.

However, it is also said that Stalin sent word that Jiang should not be killed as he would be a good focus for national unity against Japan.

### **Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945**

Russia helped the GMD war effort with planes and pilots. NB CCP still small and largely in the Northern countryside.

In addition, the Red Army (USSR version) held the border of Manchuria. Japan had control of Manchuria and was trying to push through to Russia. 1938 and 1939 saw border clashes and USSR was victorious both times.

USSR behaviour here nationalistic (defending its own border) but could be helpful to China as this weakened and overstretched Japan forces in Manchuria and China.

### **The Yanan Years 1937-47**

Mao was dominant but did face competition. One was Wang Ming who was the leader of the Chinese section of the Comintern. He was sent from Moscow to ensure the smooth working of the (2nd) United Front, which Stalin was very supportive of.

Mao was pragmatic in realising USSR support was needed but he was suspicious of the GMD and had differing ideological views to the USSR.

In 1941 the CCP Politburo accepted Mao's version of Communism as against pure Marxism. A speech restating this at the Party School in 1942 set in train the Rectification campaigns to root out those who did not believe in Mao's version.

### **Mao and the Soviet Union 1935-1945**

Mao did not get much help from the Russians, under Stalin, through the Yanan years.

#### **Why? Three main reasons:**

1. Mao's version of Communism was not that of Russia
2. Russia viewed the GMD as a stronger ally
3. A stronger Chinese ally would help Russia fight off any Japanese aggression along its border (although there was a non-aggression pact signed bt Japan and Russia in 1941.)

#### **Another reason why Mao did not admire or trust Stalin:**

When Germany invaded Russia in 1941, in the Barbarossa campaign, Zhou Enlai (of the CCP) had notified Russia of the plan as he had learnt of it via the GMD anti Japanese spy network (NB the second united front was in place at this point). Stalin had ignored the intelligence as it suggested his own detente with Germany had come to end (Nazi-Soviet pact 1939). USSR suffered badly with this invasion and Stalin's decision to ignore Chinese information left Mao convinced he was not to be trusted and, equally, did not see them as equal partners.

#### **1943 the Comintern was disbanded**

Its disbandment was an effort by the USSR to please its new ally, the US. Why?

It was also, perhaps, an admission that the Russian influence on Chinese communism was failing.

See p96 for overview graphic

#### **Would Russian communism have worked in China?**

#### **Sino Soviet Treaty 1945**

Agreement with GMD and Russia to allow Russia forces into Manchuria as long as the USSR did not support the CCP and recognise the GMD as the legitimate authority.

#### **USSR/US relations 1945-49:**

During WW2, USSR/US had been allies and the USSR had been privately glad of US support, without which they would have struggled.

After 1945, the relationship deteriorated and led to the Cold War. Stalin was nervous of the US and its nuclear weaponry, US nervous of the USSR military power and its ideology.

At the end of WW2, Russia had invaded Manchuria, taking it from Japan. Much of the weaponry was handed over the CCP in Manchuria. That said, the Soviet Minister, on the day Japan surrendered, signed a treaty with Jiang and the GMD, still seeing the GMD as their best bet in China. They also did not want to antagonise the US.

#### **In the Chinese Civil War, US half heartedly backed Jiang, USSR half heartedly backed CCP (tho' they did not expect the CCP to be victorious across the entire country!)**

In fact, the USSR were largely neutral/negative to the CCP to start. In 1945-6 when attempts to avoid civil war were taking place, Stalin had ordered the Chinese Communists to hand over

Manchurian Cities as the US were supporting the GMD who seemed strong in Manchuria at that point and the USSR wanted to appease the US.

General Marshall appeared and halted the fighting, an agreement was made that there would be a coalition and the Russians start to pull out of Manchuria.

### **Sino Soviet Treaty 1950**

Mao negotiated this in order to guarantee economic and military help, although Stalin was not keen. It included a return of some remaining Manchurian territory, an agreement to support each other in conflict and \$300 million loan. In fact, it came at a heavy price and many, including Krushchev after Stalin, commented it was almost an exploitative treaty in the manner of the colonialist treaties of the 1800s.

Eg

10,000 Soviet economic and military advisors who went to China were paid for in full by China; China handed over most of its bullion to the USSR

\$300 million loan had to be repaid including interest, it was not a 'friendly' agreement.

### **Korean War 1950-53**

That said, **Stalin** was certainly involved. It is thought that:

- Kim Il Sung, the leader of North Korea, had convinced Stalin they could overwhelm South Korea spreading Communism.
- The US would be sucked in if this happened and would be unlikely to win as Kim had said the North Koreans were very capable.
- Should the North Koreans succeed, the US would be humiliated and the USSR, by doing very little, would win a 'communist' victory in Asia. Stalin saw great gain for no military commitment, simply political backing.
- Stalin also thought that they might be able to persuade China to get involved, which would distract China from challenging USSR's role as the leader of international communism and from causing trouble over disputed territories in China. It would also be a great PR coup for international communism.
- With this in mind, Stalin wrote to Mao in 1950 urging them to enter the war, as the USSR would.

### **The PRC and The USSR**

Lynch believes that tension rather than harmony was the defining characteristic of the relationship between China and the USSR (Mao and Stalin) post 1949, despite ideological differences.

Their differences stemmed from 4 main factors:

Territorial disputes

Ideological differences

National rivalry

Mao and Stalin personality clash

#### **Territorial disputes**

At the end of WW2, Manchuria was returned to China from Japan.

However, before its return, the USSR invaded Manchuria as the major offensive in the Soviet-Japan War 1945, which was part of the final throes of WW2. It had been agreed at Yalta in 1945 (and previously at Tehran) that the USSR would attack Japan and be a major force in the 'Asian theatre.

On Manchuria's eventual return to China, the USSR stripped the region of resources. Border disputes were a constant issue here.

NB - go back and re-read Civil War notes for differing views of the USSR in Manchuria in particular whether they helped or hindered the CCP victory. It is not entirely agreed.

Xinjiang was also an area of difficulty. Russia has invaded in 1934 to be repelled by the Nationalist Revolutionary army (largely comprised of Muslims).

During the Sino-Japanese war, the USSR supported Uyghur nationalists in their uprising in Xinjiang and set up Second East Turkestan Republic against the GMD. After the CCP defeated GMD in 1949, the USSR terminated support for the Second East Turkestan Republic.

Xinjiang was brought back into 'mainland China' with the reunification of China under Mao.

### **Ideological differences**

Mao believed in Marxism with a nationalist focus whilst Stalin believed the USSR interpretation of Marxism was the only true one.

### **National Rivalry**

Mao believed that Stalin did not want a strong China, ie he was not driven by a desire for global communism more a desire to pursue a strong USSR under the guise of Communism.

An example might be that in 1945, the Soviet Union signs a Soviet-GMD friendship treaty. This allowed Soviet forces into Manchuria as long as the Soviet Union recognises the GMD as the only legitimate authority in China. USSR being pragmatic as the GMD were recognised internationally at this stage hence, is Communism really the aim?

However, Mao needed to rely on USSR for economic resources in the early years due to the decimated economy under the GMD/Civil war years.

### **Mao and Stalin**

They did not get on personally and Mao felt Stalin often treated him with disdain Eg Barbarossa; meeting to agree the Sino-Soviet treaty in 1950, Mao felt no official arrangements were made, thus showing disrespect

### **Korean War**

USSR manipulated China into being involved at a point when the Chinese were just trying to forge the PRC.

### **Why continue in this relationship?**

Mao had no experience of building an economy/industrialisation so felt he should copy the USSR model. He did not want to copy the capitalist West, not that he had any allies within. (he said as much in a speech in 1962). Although in 1958, he decided to become more independent with his policies.

<https://chinese posters.net/themes/sino-soviet-cooperation.php>