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On November 2, 1966, a delegation of the Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society arrived in Beijing with the stated purpose of coordinating a celebration of the 49th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution with the Society's Chinese branches. The delegation, representing the cream of the Soviet crop, included a Hero of the Soviet Union, a city soviet deputy, a Communist Labor Shock Worker, a professor, and a Pravda commentator.¹ As the members of the delegation were well aware, the Chinese Cultural Revolution was in high gear—in the week before their arrival General Secretary Deng Xiaoping and Head of State Liu Shaoqi had offered humiliating self-criticisms in a meeting of the Chinese Central Committee, and on November 3, the day after the arrival of the Friendship Society, Mao attended the sixth in a series of massive Red Guard rallies in Tiananmen Square.² The Friendship Society hoped that its members and the Chinese who received them could rise above the atmosphere of tension to renew a sense of mutual understanding and respect.³

These hopes were quickly dashed when, on the second day of their trip, the delegates were forced to leave an art exhibit by crowds of Red Guards chanting anti-Soviet slogans. They returned to their hotel only to find anti-Soviet propaganda on the walls and sidewalk surrounding it. These were only the first in a litany of insults the delegation suffered, the worst of which, as several members attested, was the comparison of the USSR to Hitler's Germany. The atmosphere of hostility was so overwhelming that the group ultimately decided to cut short its trip and return home on November 18. Upon their arrival, several members of the delegation gave a press conference, adding their voices to a growing chorus of Soviet commentary on the Chinese Cultural Revolution.⁴

Hostility toward the Soviet Union and criticism of Soviet socialism were an essential feature of the Red Guard movement. Some scholars believe that Mao conceived of the Cultural Revolution as a way of purging opponents who advocated close relations with the

¹ "Why our trip to the C.P.R. was interrupted," *Izvestiia*, 22 November 1966. Translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XVIII, no. 47 (1966): 8-12. I would like to thank Olga Matich for useful suggestions, as well as Patrick Henry and Zhenya Polissky for help translating poems, jokes, and songs.

² Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*, trans. D.W.Y. Kwok (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 98-99. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 15, *The People's Republic, Part 2: Revolutions within the Chinese Revolution 1966-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 149.

³ "Why our trip to the C.P.R. was interrupted."

⁴ *Ibid.*

USSR and a Khrushchev-style thaw in China. Mao and his supporters believed that de-Stalinization had led the Soviet Union to abandon the path to true egalitarian socialism; hence they accused the Soviet leadership of “revisionism.” After Stalin’s death, Mao considered himself the leader of world socialism. Although China had been openly critical of the Soviet Union for several years before the Cultural Revolution, the Soviet response had been muted, suggesting a reluctance to exacerbate the conflict. In fact, the deterioration in relations with China had been a source of dissatisfaction with Khrushchev among some who supported Brezhnev’s bid for power. Their hopes for an improvement in relations after Khrushchev’s ouster may have accounted for some of the caution in the Soviet response.⁵

The increasingly intense Chinese attacks on the USSR became ever more difficult to downplay, however, posing a variety of dilemmas for the Soviet leadership. For one thing, China had been one of the most important members of the worldwide socialist family. Indeed, Soviet reporting about the Cultural Revolution mourned the loss of a protégé and expressed a certain sense of betrayal. Furthermore, as one scholar of the Sino-Soviet relationship has pointed out, the alliance was steeped in the Marxist-Leninist rhetoric so central to each country’s domestic claim to power.⁶ The Soviet Union somehow had to publicly extricate itself, and defend itself from China’s assaults, without repudiating the very rhetoric that China was using for its attacks. Hence the attempt to distinguish Soviet and Chinese socialism was a key part of the Soviet reaction to the Cultural Revolution. As we shall see, this endeavor produced a curious snapshot of Soviet concepts of socialism, culture, and revolution in the late 1960s.

But attempts to differentiate China and the Soviet Union were dogged by widespread recognition that the two were actually quite similar, a recognition that was potentially problematic for Moscow. For Brezhnev and his cronies, who had been in power less than two years in 1966 and who were seeking to reverse at least some elements of the Khrushchev thaw, the Chinese attack on de-Stalinization came at a most inauspicious moment. As the historians Genis and Vail’ have pointed out, China during the Cultural Revolution presented a

⁵ Peter Jones and Sian Kevill, comps., *China and the Soviet Union, 1949-1984* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1985), 60-72. Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 20-32.

⁶ Westad, 2-3.

picture of the sort of extreme material and cultural poverty that the Soviet Union had once experienced under Stalin and that many feared could yet re-emerge. The regime faced an incipient dissident movement which might have been expected to seize upon the Cultural Revolution as a weapon against re-Stalinization—and in many ways, it did.

Yet to see the Soviet reaction to the Cultural Revolution entirely in terms of domestic politics divided into two hostile camps, with distinct channels of “official” and “unofficial” communication, is to miss half the picture. At least in 1966, the divisions between the regime and its critics, when it came to China, were not so clear. Indeed, the Chinese attacks on Soviet socialism presented a dilemma for dissidents as well, who in their passionate condemnations of the Cultural Revolution did not always appear sure that the Soviet socialism they were experiencing was so terrible, at least relative to China. Fear of a Chinese invasion provoked expressions of patriotism, however ambiguous, from many who would normally be considered “unofficial” voices in the Soviet sphere.

If fear was one element that unified Soviet attitudes toward China, laughter was another. As might be expected, the Cultural Revolution (and even the notion of a Chinese invasion) provided no end of material for the Soviet Union’s indefatigable humorists. It also inspired three Vysotskii songs. Perhaps more surprising was the fact that satire, often based implicitly on the similarity between China and the Soviet Union, also pervaded many press reports about China in papers like *Pravda* and *Literaturnaia gazeta*, normally mouthpieces of the regime. This satire suggests that the “official” position on China was characterized by a certain ambiguity, just like that of the dissidents.

The Soviet reaction to the Chinese Cultural Revolution is fascinating, then, on several levels. It illustrates how the regime dealt rhetorically with rebellion in the socialist camp through a language of loss and delegitimation of the upstart. It shows ideologues straining to create formulations of socialism, culture, and revolution suitable for a particular moment. Finally, and most provocatively, it shows Soviet public opinion facing east instead of west. From this perspective, the lines between the official and the unofficial, government ideology and dissidence, the earnest and the satirical, were blurred and at times even disappeared. Moreover, the Chinese Cultural Revolution opened the way for a widespread critique and mockery of an important socialist country, and thereby set a potentially destabilizing precedent.

Lamenting the loss

One of the most striking aspects of the eyewitness accounts of the initial months of the Cultural Revolution was the sense of loss they expressed over the change in the Soviet-Chinese relationship. Many of those who produced these accounts were people whose careers and even senses of self were heavily invested in China. To them, the Sino-Soviet relationship was a highly personal one, characterized by genuine affection and scholarly interest. One eyewitness introduced a report of his own journey to China by informing readers that “people who study Chinese language and its written characters all their lives—and through it [Chinese] culture, history, and economics—are called sinologists. All sinologists try to find their way to China, but going there isn’t easy, particularly in the past eight years.”⁷ A review of the memoir of a Soviet woman who had been present during China’s Civil War in the 1920s approvingly characterized the memoirist as “a student trained in Chinese studies, in love with China...engrossed in the everyday life of the great country, its ancient and unique culture...”⁸

Affection for China could be based not only on scholarly dedication, but also on shared experience fighting and sacrificing to build socialism. As A. Ovcharenko, the professor who went to China with the Friendship Society, exclaimed, “China... For Soviet people of my generation this word was one of the most precious and was invariably joined with attributes like ‘revolutionary,’ ‘resisting,’ ‘fighting,’ ‘victorious.’” Quoting a Maiakovskii poem whose narrator is overcome by enthusiasm for early Chinese revolutionaries, Ovcharenko reminisced about how he and his friends used to devour news of Communist victories in China.⁹ “It’s unbelievable,” he continued, “that someone is already

⁷ “‘Kul’turnaia revoliutsiia’ s blizkogo rasstoianiiia,” *Novyi mir*, no. 1 (1968): 97. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. In many cases, translations of press articles were available through the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, subsequently abbreviated as *CDSP*.

⁸ “Pages from the History of Proletarian-Internationalism,” *Novyi mir*, no. 8 (1966). Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XVIII, no. 38 (1966): 4.

⁹ A. Ovcharenko, “Tragicheskie Kitai,” *Druzhba narodov*, no. 9, (1966): 206. The Maiakovskii poem, as I have translated it from Ovcharenko’s quotation, reads: “And I bawled out/having strayed from my poetic tone/louder/than the priestly mobs:/Comrades!/with the workers/and the troops of Canton/they are taking Shanghai!” Ovcharenko capitalized on his experience in China, writing not only three installments for *Druzhba narodov*, but also publishing an abbreviated version in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on March 8 and 15, 1967. Recycling eyewitness accounts for different publications was a rather common practice that produced a sort of echo effect in the press coverage.

expunging the golden pages of international friendship and cooperation from the history of the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people.”¹⁰ The theme of friendship based on mutual goals also surfaced in a November 1967 obituary for the First Secretary of Anhwei province in China, written by a Soviet colleague for *Literaturnaia gazeta*. “Occasionally we argued about the solution to one technical problem or another. But these were always arguments between two people with the same dreams, desiring the same goals. I considered him my friend, and I think he felt the same way about me.”¹¹

If the obituarist intimated that the Soviet-Chinese relationship was one of two equals, there were plenty of other reports that reminded readers that the USSR was the elder brother. Paternalistic attitudes toward China, which included surprise at any sign of Chinese impudence, certainly predated the Cultural Revolution; the popular bard Vladimir Vysotskii captured them in a 1963 song titled “Letter from the workers of Tambov factory to the Chinese leaders”:

When you were washing rice down with water
We showed internationalism.
I dare say when you were chewing Russian bread
You weren’t talking about opportunism!¹²

On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, *Pravda* published an account of all that the Soviet Union had done to assist the Chinese, from helping China to defeat the Japanese during World War II, to defending China’s interests in the international arena, to building over 200 major industrial sites in China.¹³ Other, more academic reports emphasized Soviet guidance

¹⁰ Ibid, 207.

¹¹ V. Voronin, “One More Victim of the ‘Cultural Revolution,’” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 15 November 1967. Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 47 (1967): 16-17.

¹² Vladimir Vysotskii, “Pis’mo rabochikh Tambovskogo zavoda kitaiskim rukovoditeliam,” in *Sobranie stikhov i pesen v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1 (New York: Apollon Foundation and Russica Publisher, 1988), 160. Vysotskii’s portrayal surely included some irony. A 1958 joke questioned the extent of Soviet help to China during the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward. When Mao cables Khrushchev asking for help, Khrushchev tells him to tighten belts. Mao answers, “Send belts.” Dora Shturman and Sergei Tiktin, *Sovetskii Soiuz v zerkale politicheskogo anekdota* (Jerusalem: Express, 1987), 430.

¹³ M. Leont’ev and V. Sharapov, “V internatsional’noi splochnosti—sila kommunistov,” *Pravda*, 1 July 1966.

in the early stages of the Chinese revolution, sometimes stressing the inability of the Chinese to grasp revolutionary concepts without Soviet help.¹⁴

Eyewitness accounts also remarked upon Chinese inferiority. A Soviet student from Tashkent who studied in China told how she couldn't convince a Chinese teacher who came to visit her room and saw a picture of a cotton-picking combine on her wall that such machines really existed. Because it offered a glimpse of such wonders, for non-Soviet students the Soviet dorm room at Peking Language Institute—number 422, *Komsomol'skaia pravda* informed readers—was a sort of museum.¹⁵ Such paternalism was not limited to intellectuals. The shock worker who had been a member of the Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society delegation commented, “The working people of China have great strength and energy. If they are directed and organized properly their backwardness can be overcome, even if not so quickly as might sometimes be desired.”¹⁶

But by late 1966, such comments referred to a relationship that no longer existed. Soviet students at the Peking Language Institute were expelled by the Chinese government in early October 1966, forced to flee their own farewell party at the Institute as Red Guards tried to intimidate them into chanting Mao slogans.¹⁷ *Komsomol'skaia pravda* wistfully lamented their departure: “Now, there is no photograph of the Soviet emblem on the door of number 422.”¹⁸ As the Cultural Revolution progressed it became abundantly clear that the younger brother was no longer interested in tutelage. The Soviet press reported in great detail on the increasing Chinese impudence and hostility, and lamented the change.

Most shocking was the outright murder of Soviet sympathizers by Red Guards. Li Pao-hua, the Anhwei First Party Secretary whose obituary was so affectionately written by his Soviet colleague, had been killed by Red Guards, after being tortured and dragged through the

¹⁴ See “Pages from the History of Proletarian-Internationalism.” See also L.P. Deliusin, “Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i Kitai,” *Narody Azii i Afriki*, no. 6, (1967): 32-39. Iu. Kostin, “Dva vospriiatiiia Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii v Kitae,” *Narody Azii i Afriki* no. 5 (1967): 76-84. *Narody Azii i Afriki* was a bi-monthly publication of the USSR Academy of Science's Institut Narodov Azii and Institut Afriki. Geared toward specialists, it superseded *Sovetskoe vostokovedenie*; from 1956-1961 it was called *Problemy vostokovedeniia*.

¹⁵ “Students leave the C.P.R.,” *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 9 October 1966. Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XVIII, no. 40 (1966): 14.

¹⁶ “Why our trip to the C.P.R. was interrupted.”

¹⁷ “Students leave the C.P.R.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

streets of Beijing wearing a dunce cap. The obituarist claimed that Li Pao-hua was known for his warm feelings toward the USSR and had been on the board of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Society “until his very last days.”¹⁹ Professor Ovcharenko reported that among those killed at a Beijing middle school he visited was a Russian language teacher, who was burned alive.²⁰

Vandalism or renaming of various buildings and monuments built by the Soviets in China also were carefully and sorrowfully reported in the Soviet press. Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society buildings in both Beijing and Shanghai were desecrated. In Shanghai, a sculpture that “depicted two toilers, standing shoulder to shoulder and symbolizing the friendship of our peoples” was destroyed by Red Guards.²¹ The Beijing street on which the Soviet embassy was located was renamed “Struggle Against Revisionism Street.” And the Beijing Chinese-Soviet Friendship hospital, built and operated with the help of the Soviet Union, was renamed “Antirevisionist Hospital.”²²

Visitors to China experienced the Chinese rejection of Soviet socialist symbolism in a most personal way. The *Pravda* commentator in the Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society delegation related an incident in which his group had been surrounded by Red Guards shouting anti-Soviet slogans. When the Soviets got up to leave, they found their exit blocked by an angry crowd. Uncertain how to respond, in desperation they began to sing the Internationale. But the universal music of proletarian unity didn’t calm the crowd, which answered by striking up the anthem of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, “The East is Red.” The Soviets barely escaped.²³

This was one of several incidents on the trip that were characterized by fundamental dissonance. Ovcharenko, for example, was dismayed when he heard some well-educated Chinese call Belinsky, Dobroliubov, and Chernyshevskii “bourgeois critics.” “But when we pointed out that Marx and Engels had called Dobroliubov and Chernyshevskii great Russian scholars and critics, the two socialist Lessings, and that Marx studied Russian expressly to

¹⁹ Voronin, “One More Victim of the ‘Cultural Revolution.’”

²⁰ Ovcharenko, “Tragicheskii Kitai,” 217.

²¹ “Prezhnim Kursom,” *Pravda*, 21 October 1966. See also: “Khunveibiny poluchaiut odobrenie,” *Pravda*, 17 September 1966.

²² “Kul’turnaia revoliutsiia’ v Kitae prodolzhaetsia,” *Pravda*, 3 September 1966.

²³ “Why our trip to the C.P.R. was interrupted.”

become familiar with Chernyshevskii's economic works, it turned out that none of them know about this; also it took a long time to explain to them who Lessing was."²⁴

If the breakdown of a unified discourse seriously upset and confused the Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society, other accounts of mutual incomprehensibility verged on the comical. One traveler reported how, exasperated with the Maoist sloganeering of his tour guide, he asked her to "tell us, please, some specifics, about interesting buildings, interesting places... Tell us about what we are seeing directly outside the window of our bus." But she answered coolly, "OK. Here on the right you will see a big warehouse. On the walls of that warehouse you see big characters. They say, 'The light of Mao's ideas is in the hearts of peoples of the whole world.'"²⁵ Another visitor portrayed himself as querying the Red Guards: "'Why are you acting so inhumanely?' The answer was guffaws (*khokhot*)."²⁶

It was this breakdown in understanding, and the Soviet bewilderment about it, that Vysotskii so effectively satirized in his 1966 song, "Tau Kita." Vysotskii described a trip to the "faraway planet of Tau Kita" where "our comrades in conscience," the "*taukitaiskii* brotherhood has lost its wits." When a signal sent to Tau Kita to ask what is going on there provokes only obscenities in response, the singer, like our Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society delegation, decides to fly to Tau Kita "to sort it out on the spot." But once he arrives there, he can't find anyone to explain to him what is going on. He tries to tell inhabitants of Tau Kita that the galaxy is ashamed for them, but the only answer he receives is some kind of inscrutable flashing. The *taukitaiskii* brotherhood seems perfectly happy with its situation. In frustration the singer yells out some obscenities. Thoroughly confused and ashamed of himself, he eventually manages to leave the planet. Like the delegation, he departs with no greater understanding than he had when he arrived, having only exacerbated tensions in the relationship he was trying to restore.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Revoliutsiia vo imia kul'tury ili vo imia kul'ta," *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 24 February 1967.

²⁶ "V tsarstve krivykh zerkal," *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 25 February 1967. This article provided the title for this paper. Genis and Vail', whose analysis of Soviet sentiment toward China will be discussed later, also referred to China as a '*krivoe zerkalo*.' Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: Mir Sovetskogo cheloveka* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1998), 281.

²⁷ Vladimir Vysotskii, "Tau Kita," in *Sobranie*, 95-96. Vysotskii may have been playing on Alexei Tolstoi's 1923 story of revolution on Mars, *Aelita*. Thanks to Patrick Henry for pointing out his connection.

Rethinking the Relationship: Defining the Differences

By reporting in such detail on China's increasingly blatant hostility, the Soviet press acknowledged a rift that required explanation. Because the Chinese claimed that their attack on the USSR was based on Marxist-Leninist principles, it presented a particular challenge to Soviet ideologues. As the Chinese Cultural Revolution progressed, the Soviet press worked out the differences between Chinese and Soviet concepts of revolution, culture, and socialism—and in the process articulated an updated version of Soviet reality. Some aspects of the official critique of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, particularly related to culture, resonated deeply with rhetoric produced by less official writers.

Soviet observers of the Chinese Cultural Revolution were disturbed by the mass chaos it engendered. Professor Ovcharenko commented, "It is beginning to seem, that 'cultural revolution' is thousands of young people who, having donned red arm bands, roam around the sidewalks and bridges, not knowing where or towards what to apply their forces."²⁸

Commentators were also alarmed by the repeated mass rallies in which as many as a million Chinese youths crowded into Tiananmen Square to get a look at Mao, who came out to spur them on.²⁹ The fact that the authorities encouraged youth chaos rather than controlling it was particularly disconcerting.³⁰ During the second mass rally, *Pravda* reported, it was actually announced that all college students were to be allowed to come to Beijing.³¹

Judging from the sheer number of references to it, the fact that the Chinese Revolution was led by students was even more problematic than its chaotic nature. *Pravda* commented, "Questions arise: Why are non-Party youths and school children called upon to criticize

²⁸ Ovcharenko, 214.

²⁹ "Khunveibiny poluchaiut odobrenie," "Rally and demonstration in Peking," *Pravda*, 1 October 1966. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XVIII, no. 40 (1966): 14.

³⁰ "Kul'turnaia revoliutsiia v Kitae prodolzhaetsia." "Khunveibiny poluchaiut odobrenie." Soviet dismay over Mao's encouragement of the Red Guards is particularly interesting in light of the fact that Soviet youth was becoming restive in 1966, according to Heller and Nekrich. They write that the Soviet regime took a proactive stance in controlling youth groups. "Prophylactic" measures were applied to them: individual talks with officials; lectures on morality; time spent in industrial production for 'reeducation' purposes; reassignment to other schools; meeting with parents; and denunciation meetings." Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr Nekrich, *Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present*, trans. Phyllis B. Carlos (New York: Summit Books, 1986), 612-613. If this picture of the Soviet response to youth activists is accurate, it contrasts sharply with Mao's decision to unleash the young and the restless.

³¹ Several articles cited the statistic that 20% of China's transport budget was being spent on ferrying the Red Guards around the country. "Prezhnim kursom." See also "Porochnyi kurs," *Pravda*, 23 October 1966.

Communists and to judge the work of Party bodies? Why is this ‘proletarian’ movement proceeding without any participation of the working class of China?”³² And, a week later, it rephrased the question: “Where is the working class? Where in this thing are the party and government organs, the professional societies, and other social organizations?”³³ Similarly, “It is worthy of note that to carry out a cultural revolution it was necessary to create a special youth organization based on the personal loyalty of its members to Mao, standing outside of the party and the komsomol.”³⁴ Evidence of army support for the students was noted with particular consternation.³⁵

If the Chinese “Cultural Revolution” was a chaotic, violent, mass movement led by students loyal only to their leader and bolstered by the army, then what was a genuine revolution? The clearest criterion was that a revolution should be led by workers and the party.

Not one country, not one communist party, can escape the growing and in the end decisive role of the working class, chosen by history to lead, organize, and bring about the liquidation of class society... No kind of hysterical campaign, no kind of retreat from Marxism-Leninism, however it is masked, can violate objective necessities and laws of development.³⁶

Another lengthy *Pravda* article castigated the Chinese for seeking revolutionary leadership “either in the army, or in student youth, or in lumpen proletarian, declassé elements, or in the peasantry...but not in the working class.”³⁷ In fact, the press repeatedly reported on working class opposition to the Cultural Revolution.³⁸ *Pravda* claimed that when

³² “The ‘Hung Weiping’ continue the ‘cultural revolution,’” *Pravda*, 16 September 1966. Translated in *CDSP* vol. XVIII, no. 38 (1966): 3-4.

³³ “Porochnyi Kurs.”

³⁴ “Kul’turnaia revoliutsiia’ prodolzhaetsia,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 22 September 1966. The idea that good workers and party members could fall victim to outside forces acting on behalf of a despotic leader was not new; it had been a key element of Khrushchev’s criticism of Stalin in his famous secret speech.

³⁵ “Khunveibiny deistvuiut,” *Pravda*, 23 September 1966. On the role of the army in the Cultural Revolution see also “Stolknoveniia prodolzhaetsia,” *Pravda*, 9 October 1966, “Pruzhdina ‘kul’turnoi revoliutsii,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 25 January 1967 and “Strana na kazarmennom rezhime,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 23 November 1967.

³⁶ “Polnoe otstuplenie ot marksizma-leninizma,” *Pravda*, 14 October 1966.

³⁷ T. Timofeyev, “Questions of Theory: Scientific Socialism and Petty Bourgeois Ideology,” *Pravda*, 24 October 1966. Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XVIII, no. 43 (1966): 4-6.

³⁸ “Khunveibiny deistvuiut,” *Pravda*, 23 September 1966. “Prezhnim kursom.” “Clash between workers and the hungweiping,” *Pravda*, 9 December 1966. Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XVIII, no. 49 (1966): 10, 34.

Red Guards tried to burn the City Party Committee building in Nanking, they were met by “thousands” of workers. “Workers came out in defense of their vanguard—the party.”³⁹ Similar clashes were reported in Szechuan and Hunan, the latter with thousands of casualties.⁴⁰ If a revolution is led by workers, and workers oppose the Chinese Cultural Revolution, it can’t possibly be a genuine revolution.

Less clear but discernable nonetheless is the position that a cultural revolution is gradual and nonviolent. *Pravda* summoned a professor to explicate “Evolutional and Revolutionary Forms of Development of Society.” Conjuring the ghost of Trotsky to warn against blind faith in great leaps, M. Rozental explained that revolution is a long process, that the only phase which may require sudden change or violence is the seizure of power by the working class, that even this may occur slowly and preferably without violence, and that no sudden, radical change can be effective that is not preceded by gradual evolutionary change.⁴¹ According to this scheme, China had already experienced all the radical change and violence warranted during the Communist seizure of power in 1949. Hence the confusion expressed in an earlier *Pravda* piece: “How to explain the fact that in a socialist country, led by a communist party, a major rebellion is required to realize a cultural revolution?”⁴² If the country is socialist, then change can only be accomplished gradually and peacefully. Violent rebellion has no place in a socialist context.

While *Pravda* had to trot out professional ideologues to explicate Chinese “revolution,” more creative minds were ruminating on Chinese “culture.” Nothing, apparently, was more anathema to cultural sensibilities of all persuasions than the destruction of ancient Chinese, Soviet, and particularly Western culture that was a key feature of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Evgenii Evtushenko scolded the Chinese: “How disgusting, how stupid/ To burn reproductions of Goya, El Greco!”⁴³ Less earnestly, Vysotskii’s ode to the Red Guards opened with the image of Red Guards ransacking Beijing for old paintings

³⁹ “Stolknoveniia prodolzhaitsia.”

⁴⁰ “Zalpy po khunvebinam,” *Izvestiia*, 28 June 1967. On clashes see also “New clashes in China,” *Pravda*, 15 January 1967. Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 2 (1967): 26.

⁴¹ M. Rozental, “Questions of Theory: Evolutional and Revolutionary Forms of Development of Society,” *Pravda*, 30 September 1966. Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XVIII, no. 39 (1966): 28-30.

⁴² “Nichego obshchego s revoliutsiei,” *Pravda*, 17 September 1966.

⁴³ Evtushenko, “Na krasnom snegu ussuriiskom.”

and statues: “Instead of statues there will be trashcans for the Cultural Revolution.”⁴⁴ The most passionate condemnation of the Chinese destruction of culture came from Andrei Voznesenskii:

Will Shakespeare be forced to make public confession of ignorance of ‘isms’
Will Stravinsky be dragged through warring streets with a garbage pail on his gray
head?

I think—

Question: Is the majority always right?
Was the Florentine flood right, cracking palazzos like big pistachios?
Yet Cellini will win, and not the tide.

I think—crowd or individual?
Which lasts longer—the century or the instant
That Michelangelo achieved?
The century died, but the instant lives on.

For Voznesenskii, the Chinese Cultural Revolution is the triumph of mass ignorance over individual creativity, a triumph that history has proven can only be temporary.

Given the potentially subversive nature of Voznesenskii’s verses in the Soviet context, it may come as a bit of a surprise that it was published in the pages of *Literaturnaia Rossiia* in early 1967.⁴⁵ Evtushenko’s poem was featured two years later in *Literaturnaia gazeta*.⁴⁶ Both poems dovetailed nicely with a message that had been appearing regularly in the press at least since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution: socialist culture is cumulative and inclusive, not only of a revolutionary country’s pre-socialist heritage, but also of the Western cultural legacy. “In the history of culture were not the creations of Beethoven, Leonardo da Vinci, or Shakespeare a disclosure of man’s spiritual potentialities?” asked a Professor Frantsev in the pages of *Izvestiia*. He reminded readers of Lenin’s instructions to draw upon capitalist achievements to reach socialist goals.⁴⁷ For Professor Ovcharenko, the Chinese Red

⁴⁴ Vladimir Vysotskii, “Khunveibiny,” in *Sobranie*, 158-159.

⁴⁵ Andrei Voznesenskii, “From the Walkie-Talkie Cycle: Prologue to a Poem,” *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 24 March 1967. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 13 (1967): 17.

⁴⁶ Evgenii Evtushenko, “Na krasnom snegu ussuriiskom,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 19 March 1969.

⁴⁷ Iu. Frantsev. “Talks with readers: revolution and culture,” *Izvestiia*, 27 September 1966. Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XVIII, no. 39 (1966): 27-28. For other formulations of the idea that socialist culture is inclusive and that the Chinese are violating this basic precept, see: “Kul’turnaia revoliutsiia—zakonomernost’ razvitiia sotsializma,”

Guards were reminiscent of the Soviet *proletcult*, whose extreme ideas about revolutionary culture, according to Ovcharenko, had been repudiated by Lenin.⁴⁸ Soviet intellectuals apparently agreed: the Chinese Cultural Revolutionists were gravely mistaken if they believed they could build socialist culture on the ruins of Western art.

In contrast to the formulations of revolution that emerged in the press in contradiction to the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the formulations of culture exhibited a curious lack of positive socialist content. True socialist revolutions, for example, were led by workers, not students. But true socialist culture? The cogitations of Professor Frantsev on the subject are worth quoting at length.

It should be added that of course the land of the October Revolution did not adopt anything mechanically. Indeed, assimilation of the cultural achievements of other peoples excluded any kind of blind worship. It was not without reason that in music and literature we created Soviet schools for understanding and interpreting the great works of genius of other peoples and centuries. It was not a process of ‘imitation,’ but a process of creating Soviet culture, i.e., a process of creativity that awakened the great cultural forces of the people.⁴⁹

But what, exactly, is Soviet culture? The curious reader searches the press coverage of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in vain for an answer to this question. It appears that no socialist cultural program was advanced.

Absent such a program, the content of socialist culture can only be inferred from references to artists and writers. Soviet journalists and eyewitnesses mention the Chinese failure to appreciate writers such as Sholokhov or Fadeyev and composers like Shostakovich. But specific references to [Soviet?] culture are more often references to pre-Soviet or non-

Pravda, 26 September 1966. “Two Eyewitness Accounts of the ‘Cultural Revolution,’ Science and the ‘Hung Weiping,” S. Kovalev, “Questions of Theory: Socialism and Cultural Heritage,” *Pravda*, 16 September, 1966. Translated in *CDSP* vol. XVIII, no. 38 (1966): 3-4. “Komu meshaet kul’tura?” *Izvestiia*, 21 February 1967. “Kitai, ‘kul’turnaia revoliutsiia’: programma unichtozheniia iskusstva,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 11 June 1967.

⁴⁸ Ovcharenko noted that Chinese denigration of traditional and western art in favor of worker-produced art “is surprisingly reminiscent of the thoughts that the Proletcult theorist V. Pletnev once formulated... Sometimes it seemed as if we were simply being offered a bad translation of Pletnev’s article.” “Why our trip to the C.P.R. was interrupted.” It is noteworthy that Ovcharenko referenced the *proletcult* in connection with China. Sheila Fitzpatrick has argued that Soviet cultural militancy during the first five-year plan, 1928-1931, was a clear precedent for the Chinese cultural revolution. Interestingly, however, Fitzpatrick emphasizes upward social mobility for workers as a key feature of cultural revolution—a point that many Soviet commentators were citing as a factor that differentiated Soviet cultural revolution from the Chinese variant. Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed. *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978), 1-40.

⁴⁹ Frantsev. “Talks with readers.”

Soviet culture, and it is Chinese denigration of non-Soviet artists that evokes the most emotional responses. Professor Ovcharenko, for example, was appalled that the Chinese considered Pushkin a non-proletarian writer.⁵⁰ *Izvestiia* took the Chinese press to task for its campaign against “Tolstoi, Shakespeare, Balzac, Rolland, Chekhov and even Rabelais.”⁵¹ A more lighthearted report titled, “Venus ‘Commits an Offense’” mocked members of the Chinese embassy staff in Cairo for destroying a reproduction of the Venus de Milo.⁵²

The curious impression arises that the true purpose of Soviet cultural activity is to educate the masses so that they can appreciate the masters of bourgeois culture. Again Frantsev informs us:

On the eve of the October Revolution, voices were to be heard on every side saying that the Bolsheviks would not succeed in raising the masses of people to the heights of culture connoted by the names of Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, Mendeleev, and Pavlov...But communism would not have been a great force for progress if it had let what was advanced fall back to the level of what was backward, and if it had not raised backward people to the level of advanced people.⁵³

In other words, Soviet culture is process as much as content. Frantsev cited rising literacy figures and numbers of books published as quantitative indicators of Soviet cultural progress. The essence of cultural revolution, it seems, is not the replacement of non-socialist by socialist culture, but rather, (incorporating the ideas of “revolution” as discussed above) a gradual increase in the education level of the masses under the leadership of the party.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ “Why our trip to the C.P.R. was interrupted.” Apparently unaware of any contradiction in his own position, Ovcharenko also satirized supposedly educated Chinese who criticized Beethoven without having heard his music: “To the question of what was their attitude toward Beethoven the ‘r-r-revolutionaries’ answered: ‘It’s critical.’ ‘What specifically do you find unacceptable in the ‘Appassionata?’ ‘We haven’t heard it yet but we still take a critical attitude toward it.’”

⁵¹ “Komu meshaet kul’tura?” Similar lists are found in many other articles. Shakespeare, Stendahl, Tolstoy, and Rolland are found in “Kitai, ‘kul’turnaia revoliutsiia’: programma unichtozheniia iskusstva.” Shakespeare, Rolland, and Goethe merit a mention in “Kak prokhodit ‘kul’turnaia revoliutsiia v pekine,” *Izvestiia*, 27 August 1966. *Trud* highlights Shakespeare, Balzac and Tolstoy. “Nichego obshchego s revoliutsiei,” 15 October 1966. Composers banned in China included Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Lizst, Chopin, Tchaikovskii, Bartok, and Shostakovich, “Pekin v khode ‘kul’turnoi revolutsii,” *Pravda*, 26 August 1966.

⁵² “Venus ‘commits an offense,” *Izvestiia*, 22 October 1966. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XVIII, no. 42 (1966): 21.

⁵³ Frantsev, “Talks with readers.”

⁵⁴ “Contrary to the Interests of the Chinese People,” *Pravda*, 16 August 1967. Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 34 (1967): 3-5.

China could not possibly be experiencing a cultural revolution because the opposite was occurring there: books were being destroyed, cultural production had come to a standstill, learned people were being persecuted. Hence the quotation marks that surround every mention of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in every article on the subject. The fact that Chinese schools were closing so that students could participate in the Cultural Revolution was, to Soviet observers, the ultimate irony.⁵⁵ Vysotskii highlighted Maoist school closings in his ode to the Red Guards: “Now their leader comrade Mao/Thought up a game for them/Don’t go, children, to school!/Help fight sedition!”⁵⁶ Whatever education was still occurring was clearly compromised. *Aziia i Afrika segodnia* published a list of quotes from Mao on education, which—bordering on the satirical—revealed that even before the Cultural Revolution began, he had wanted to cut down dramatically the number of subjects taught in school, give children the questions that would appear on their exams in advance, and allow cheating. “They have to read so many books... It’s a terrible torment. It must be stopped.”⁵⁷

If education had a purpose beyond providing citizens with the means of accessing bourgeois culture, the Soviet press coverage of the Cultural Revolution made clear, it was to improve their material well-being. Socialism, it seems, is a rising standard of living:

The gist of [Mao’s] reactionary course, aimed at preserving the most backward social forms, is that it essentially removes from the agenda the chief, prime task confronting every people who embark on the road to socialism—comprehensive, proportional development of the productive forces of the country and, on this foundation, a steady rise in the material and cultural level of the popular masses.⁵⁸

Unlike their Soviet counterparts, it was pointed out, Chinese workers did not receive paid vacations and had access only to the most rudimentary health care.⁵⁹ Not only China’s

⁵⁵ On school closings see “Why our trip to the C.P.R. was interrupted.” See also K. Dashev, “Voluntaristic challenge to socialism,” *Izvestiia*, 4 October 1967. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 40 (1967): 23-24.

⁵⁶ Vysotskii, “Khunveibiny,” in *Sobranie*, 158-159.

⁵⁷ “Mao Tsze-Dun o reforme obrazovaniia,” *Aziia i Afrika segodnia*, no. 2 (?) (1968): 27. *Aziia i Afrika segodnia* was, like *Narody Azii i Afriki*, issued by the USSR Academy of Science’s Institut Narodov Azii and Institut Afriki. But it seems to have been geared toward a less specialized audience. From 1957-1961 it was called *Sovremennyi vostok*.

⁵⁸ L. Deliusin and L. Kyuzadzhian, “A threat to socialism in China,” *Izvestiia*, 4 July 1967. On this theme see also “What lies behind the struggle against ‘economism,’” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 28 February 1967. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 9 (1967): 4-5, 11. and V.G. Gel’bras, “K voprosu o stanovlenii voenno-biurokraticeskoi diktatury v Kitae,” *Narody Azii i Afriki*, no. 1 (1968), 21.

⁵⁹ K. Dashev, “Voluntaristic challenge to socialism.”

poverty, but also, more importantly, Mao's glorification of that poverty was evidence that China was not on the road to socialism.⁶⁰ In fact, the contrast between Soviet economic success and Chinese economic failure was a threat to the legitimacy of Maoism.⁶¹

The Soviet press drew a wide range of contrasts between Soviet socialism and Maoism. Internationally, socialist countries were engaged in the fight against imperialism, the most obvious manifestation of this being the war in Vietnam. China's failure to adequately support these efforts suggested that it belonged in the imperialist camp, not the socialist camp. China's inadequacies in Vietnam were a cornerstone of official rhetoric; Brezhnev mentioned it in three of his speeches in November of 1966, to the near exclusion of other mentions of China.⁶² Economically, Soviet socialism represented specialization of labor; Maoism advocated a return to an undifferentiated economy in which communes engaged in industry, trade, agriculture, and education simultaneously.⁶³ Socialism also meant collective farming. But peasants in China were engaging in spontaneous decollectivization as a protest against the Cultural Revolution.⁶⁴ Politically, Soviet socialism represented democracy, as evidenced by elections and meetings of representative bodies; the fact that China's representative bodies were scarcely meeting at all further undermined China's status as a socialist country.⁶⁵ In fact it appeared that China had so completely violated the principles of socialism that it was possible to deduce a model socialist country by simply taking the opposite of Chinese behavior. China, then, was a perfect negative image of the Soviet Union.

⁶⁰ "Aggravation of Situation in China," *Pravda*, 28 January 1967. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 4 (1967): 8. "What lies behind the struggle against 'economism.'"

⁶¹ "On the anti-Soviet policy of Mao Tse-Tung and his group," *Pravda*, 16 February 1967. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 7 (1967): 6-9.

⁶² L.I. Brezhnev, "Iz rechi na torzhestvennom sobranii, posviashchennom vrucheniiu gruzii ordena Lenina, vo dvortse sporta v Tblisi," 1 November 1966, p. 69; "Iz rechi na ix s'ezde Bolgarskoi kommunisticheskoi partii," 15 November 1966, p. 73; "Iz rechi na ix vengerskoi sotsialisticheskoi rabochei partii," 29 November 1966, p. 78-79 in *Ob internatsionalizme i druzhbe narodov* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1981).

⁶³ Deliusin and Kyuzadzhian, "A threat to socialism in China."

⁶⁴ "Kul'turnaia revoliutsiia' v Kitae i krest'iane," *Sel'skaia zhizn'*, 12 April 1968.

⁶⁵ F. Kalinychev (Doctor of Jurisprudence), "Democracy and Legality," *Izvestiia*, 12 February 1967. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 6 (1967): 8-9.

Playing with the Fun-House Mirror: Seeing the Similarities

Or was it? If the Soviet Union and China were so different, why was it necessary to draw distinctions between them so painstakingly, so thoroughly? Such strident proclamations of difference suggest fear of similarity, a fear that lurked behind even the most official accounts and that made a full appearance in jokes and dissident writings. China truly was a fun-house mirror, whose reflections of the Soviet Union could be hilarious, grotesque, even frightening. These distorted images raised questions about the influence each country could have on the other. Was the Soviet Union somehow responsible for the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution? Could Maoism ever have a real influence on Soviet people?

The very first hint of nervousness on account of Soviet-Chinese similarities may be found in the terminology used to describe the Chinese Red Guards. The logical translation probably would have been “Krasnaia Gvardiia” but this is seldom, if ever, encountered. In all likelihood it was simply unacceptable to use a term so central to Soviet history. Various Russian terms were used instead: *okhrana*, *strazha*, *oprichnina*, *khuligany*, *smut’iany*, *malen’kie zastrelshchiki*, etc.⁶⁶ But the vast majority of commentators eschewed Russian words altogether in favor of a transliteration of the word for Red Guard in Chinese: “khunveibin” or “khunveibiny” in the plural. In Russian this exotic, faintly obscene name provided no end of amusement. The refrain Vysotskii penned for his song, “Khunveibiny,” played on the name: “And really, the key thing is that I know perfectly/how they pronounce their name/But something highly indecent/is on the tip of my tongue:/ Khuuuu....nveibiny.”⁶⁷ Various *chastushki* riffed on the sound of it as well. “I fell in love with a khunveibin/And hung up his picture/But when I woke up early this morning/The khun was hanging and the bina was gone.”⁶⁸ This moniker might have been preferable to the Russian alternatives not only for its hilarious pronunciation but also because it precluded any Soviet connotation.

⁶⁶ The presence of such terms is so ubiquitous in press coverage that nearly any article will contain one word or another. For a good selection of terms see I. Gavrilov, “Za fasadom ‘kul’turnoi revoliutsii’ v Kitae,” *Dal’ni vestok*, no. 2 (1967). For an explicit definition of “khunveibiny” see “‘Khunveibiny,’ i kto imi komanduet,” *Agitator*, no. 24 (1966): 51-53. *Agitator* explained, “khunveibiny in translation means *krasnaia okhrana* or *krasnaia strazhka*.”

⁶⁷ Vysotskii, “Khunveibiny.”

⁶⁸ A *chastushka* is a two-line or four-line rhymed poem on some topical theme. Also: “On the clothesline is hanging/a yellow kerchief/My darling is a khunveibin/And I am a khunveibinochka.” Iu. Borev, *XX vek v*

Such implications could hardly be escaped, however. Eyewitnesses and commentators betrayed an uneasy sense of recognition through references to China as a caricature, farce, or distortion of the Soviet Union. It seems that the General Secretary of the Australian Communist Party, who proclaimed that “what is going on in China mustn’t be regarded as anything but a caricature of the ideas and principles of communism,” may have been the source of this soon-to-be well-worn phrase.⁶⁹ In 1969 Evtushenko was still wringing his hands over the mess the Chinese made of Marxism:

Oh, if only Marx could see,
How this tragic farce of impudent pseudo-communism
Has been so pitifully and shabbily performed!

Even an enlightened idea
Can change
In the hands of a villain!⁷⁰

Similarly, Hero of the Soviet Union and Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society delegate I.P. Kozhar commented, “The working class overthrows the capitalists and wins power seemingly only to perpetuate its poverty. Isn’t this a caricature of Marxism?”⁷¹

The problem with referring to Chinese socialism as a caricature of the Soviet, or of true Marxism-Leninism, is that it implies some sort of fundamental similarity. Caricature, of course, is an exaggeration through ludicrous distortion of parts of the whole. And often the funniest visual caricatures are those which, in their exaggeration, somehow reflect our true opinion of the person or object in question. The author of a joke walked the line between reflection and distortion with a certain vulgar grace: “Who are the Chinese? Russians, squinting and yellowed (*okosevshie i pozheltevshie*) from an excess of Marxism.”⁷² Sakharov expressed similar sentiments more ceremoniously in his famous *Thoughts on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom*:

predaniia i anekdotakh b shesti knigakh, vol. 4, 1953-1984: *kholodnaia voina za pravo uluchshat’ mir, ukhudshaia ego po-svoemu*. (Khar’kov and Rostov-na-donu: Folio and Feniks, 1996), 451.

⁶⁹ “Nichego obshchego s revoliutsii,” *Trud*. See also: “Kitaiskaia karikatura na idei marksizma,” *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, 8 September 1966.

⁷⁰ Evtushenko, “Na krasnom snegu ussuriiskom.”

⁷¹ “Why our trip to the C.P.R. was interrupted.”

⁷² Shturman and Tikhtin, 431. This joke is not dated.

In recent years an element of demagoguery, force, cruelty and baseness has once again gripped a great country, set on the path to socialist development. I am speaking, of course, about China. It is impossible to read without horror and pain about the mass infection of antihumanism, which the great helmsman and his colleagues are spreading... The idiocy of the cult of personality in China has taken monstrous, grotesque, tragicomic forms, taking to the absurd many characteristics of Stalinism and Hitlerism.⁷³

Yet where some observers saw caricature, others saw resemblance. “How are relations between the USSR and China defined?” another joke went. “As hostile coexistence of great powers with similar socio-political systems.”⁷⁴ Less whimsically, the dissident Andrei Amalrik wrote: “It seems to me that the Chinese revolution is passing through the same stages [as the Soviet revolution]: the international period has been followed by a nationalist period (borrowing from us even its terminology...)”⁷⁵ If official ideologues purported to see no resemblance between the Soviet Union and China, dissidents saw the resemblance but didn’t see any humor in it. It was left to the anonymous jokers to search out the laughs Soviet people enjoyed at their own expense.

Yet these distinctions don’t quite hold, for the official press was full of articles about the Cultural Revolution which, while they made no reference to the Soviet past, could not help but recall it, and sometimes in the most hilarious ways. Often the tip-off that something funny was in store was the use of direct quotations with minimal or no commentary, even extending to the reprinting of entire articles from the Chinese press with little or no introduction. Hence, in early 1966, before the true dimensions of the Cultural Revolution were even clear, *Literaturnaia gazeta* was carrying articles such as “Let’s talk about the philosophical aspects of the sale of watermelons in large cities.” Reprinted from a Chinese paper, this article was apparently written by a Chinese salesman of watermelons who claimed to have overcome the number one enemy in the watermelon business—the rotting of watermelons—by applying Maoist ideology to his work.⁷⁶ Two months later, *Literaturnaia*

⁷³ Andrei Sakharov, “Razmyshleniia o progresse, mirnom sosushchestvovanii i intellektual’noi svobode,” in *A. Sakharov v bor’be za mir*, compiled by Ia. Trushnovich (Frankfurt: Possev-Verlag, 1973), 36.

⁷⁴ Shturman and Tikin, 431. This joke dates from the late 1960s.

⁷⁵ Andrei Amalrik, *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1970), 46.

⁷⁶ “Pogovorim o filosofskikh voprosakh prodazhi arbuzov v krupnykh gorodakh,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 24 May 1966.

ran a similar but even more hilarious article, “Let’s talk about the dialectic in the hairdressing business.” Here the author proclaimed, “I realized more and more that to cut hair is to make revolution....” He decided to use the time with his clients to inundate them with Maoist propaganda, and claimed that Maoist thought had helped him to overcome the devilish contradiction between cutting hair well and cutting it quickly.⁷⁷ The fact that such articles included no commentary by *Literaturnaia gazeta* suggests that their subject—the cult of personality—required no introduction at all, as readers were well familiar with it. Coming a decade after Khrushchev’s attacks on the Stalinist personality cult, but before Brezhnev attempted to resuscitate it, these stories are little caricatures of the Stalin cult, and funny ones at that. They are the journalist’s answer to jokes that play on the theme more directly: “When will Mao Tzse-Dun’s cult of personality end? When they lay him in the Mao Zo Leum.”⁷⁸

Sometimes humorous caricature could pop up in the middle of an otherwise serious piece. In May 1967 *Izvestiia* featured an expose of the Chinese model oilfield, Tatsing, charging that the supposedly high levels of production achieved there were the result of horrendous exploitation of workers. The article was one of many, as noted above, that decried the poverty of Chinese socialism. But midway through, its tone of indignation gave way, momentarily, to one of pure comedy:

“‘The model worker,’ ‘the hero of our era,’ ‘the knight of socialist construction,’ Chinese propaganda claims, is to be found right here in Tatsing. The person meant is one ‘iron Wang,’ the leader of a driller’s brigade. Whereas the semi-mythical Lei Feng (a soldier in the People’s Liberation Army) dreamed of becoming ‘a little rust-proof screw,’ the ideal of ‘iron Wang’ is the humble buffalo. ‘All my life I have wanted to be a buffalo,’ he is supposed to have said, renouncing the personal ‘I,’ ‘to achieve a high level of production and to confine my personal life to a low level.’”⁷⁹

Immediately after this passage, the article reverted to its original, more didactic tone, reminding readers that Chinese workers were inculcated with hatred for the Soviet Union. Even the most righteous indignation could, it seems, dissolve in a fit of giggles. Yet there is

⁷⁷ “Pogovorim o dialektike v parikhmakerskom dele,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 30 July 1966.

⁷⁸ Shturman and Tiktin, 432. The compilers date this joke to 1966.

⁷⁹ “What is the Spirit of Tatsing?” *Izvestiia*, 19 May 1967. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 20 (1967): 14-15. Here we have the spectacle of American academics—those who compiled the *Current Digest*—laughing at China, too—or perhaps, laughing at Russians laughing at China.

something ambiguous about the humor. Who is the subject of it? What better caricature of the Soviet Stakhanovite could there be than “iron Wang?”

While Evtushenko was lamenting the farce the Chinese were making of revolution, the press was savoring it. One commentator poked fun at Beijing writers, who succeeded in overfulfilling their plan by writing five hundred works in three months. He noted that Mao’s portrait has been painted even on Chinese plates, so that Mao’s face looks up at the Chinese as they eat. He particularly mocked the propaganda fest that followed Mao’s swim across the Yangtze in the summer of 1966, which he characterized as Mao’s “hour-long bath in the Yangtze.”⁸⁰ Other articles reported that Chinese students decided that narrow pants and pointed shoes were forbidden, and gave notice that if anyone was caught wearing them, their pants would be cut short and the toes of their shoes cut off to make sandals. Sunglasses, perfume, and cosmetics were outlawed, as was long hair. “One splendid braid after another falls from Chinese girls,” *Izvestiia* reported with a certain frisson.⁸¹ Red Guards also decided that because red is the color of revolution, cars should stop on green and go on red; parades should march eastward rather than westward.⁸² Such descriptions of the more whimsical side of Red Guard activities—more common in early 1966 than later on—emphasized the juvenile aspects of a movement populated largely by Chinese youths.

Although many commentators blamed Chinese adults for corrupting children and encouraging youthful rebellion, the Soviet press hardly portrayed Chinese children as unambiguous victims. A Friendship Society delegate described how adults made even very young children mouth Maoist propaganda.⁸³ Similarly, one Sinologist indicted Chinese adults for warping children. “These young people have grown up in an upside-down world, in the reign of fun-house mirrors (*v tsarstve krivvykh zerkal*),” he wrote.⁸⁴ At the same time, however, many press reports showed children as happily taking advantage of the Cultural

⁸⁰ Gavrilov, “Za fasadom ‘kul’turnoi revoliutsii’ v Kitae,” 152-160.

⁸¹ “How the ‘Cultural Revolution’ in Peking is proceeding,” *Izvestiia*, 27 August 1966. Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XXI, no. 34 (1969): 4-5.

⁸² For accounts of such revolutionary changes, see “On the course of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ in China,” *Pravda*, 13 September 1966, translated in *CDSP*, vol. XVIII, no. 38 (1966): 4. “Pekin v xhode ‘kul’turnoi revoliutsii,” *Pravda*, 26 August 1966; “Kul’turnaia revoliutsiia prodolzhaetsia,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 22 September 1966.

⁸³ “Why our trip to the C.P.R. was interrupted.”

⁸⁴ “V tsarstve krivvykh zerkal,” *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, 25 February 1967.

Revolution to usurp the adults who were normally supposed to care for and control them. Several accounts related how students were taking control of schools, determining which subjects should be taught, and disciplining their teachers.⁸⁵ Children also gained power over their parents. *Pravda* told of a six-year-old girl, Tsiu Khun, who studied the works of Mao at the age of five and could recite Mao's works by six. This child was paraded through various enterprises and military units, and when asked whether she missed her family, answered, "To think of one's family is dogmatism."⁸⁶ Other commentators told of children spying on and denouncing their parents.⁸⁷

The consequences of childish insubordination could be frightening. The press did not hesitate to report fully on the violence of the Cultural Revolution. A particularly gruesome example was an article that appeared in *Literaturnaia gazeta* in June of 1967, entitled "Blood on the school walls." In a tone that can only be described as morbid sensationalism, journalist V. Georgev described how the Red Guards at school number six in Beijing built a chamber where they tortured people to death at night, ringing the school bell to drown their victims' cries. The article included many graphic descriptions of their methods. Georgev vowed that his story was "documented from beginning to end" and quoted directly from victims' testimony, saying that their names had not been revealed to protect them.⁸⁸

Some reports of Cultural Revolution violence appeared more contrived. *Komsomol'skaia pravda* published a "letter" from a Chinese girl, chronicling her own suffering at the hands of the Red Guards. Titled "I want to live," the letter described how the Red Guards persecuted her parents so terribly that they decided to commit suicide by electrocution. "However," she wrote, "because the voltage wasn't strong enough, my mother didn't die." Her mother then tried to cut her wrists but was saved when her daughter came home. Eventually, after various beatings, the girl was sent to the countryside by the Red Guards. Thinking over her life, she came to the conclusion that she didn't want to die. "I am still young! I want to study, to work, to live, as a human being, to devote myself to humanity,

⁸⁵ Ovcharenko, "Tragicheskii Kitai," 217. Gavrilov, "Za fasadom 'kul'turnoi revoliutsii' v Kitae," 154.

⁸⁶ "What Chinese young people are being taught," *Pravda*, 11 March 1969. Translated by CDSP, vol. XIX, no. 11 (1967).

⁸⁷ Gavrilov, "Za fasadom 'kul'turnoi revoliutsii' v Kitae," 152.

⁸⁸ V. Georgiev, "Krov' na shkol'noi stene." *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 7 June 1967.

but how?” At that moment, she realized her fate was in the Soviet Union, “the great, very greatest Soviet Union.” *Komsomol'skaia pravda* didn't say whether her hopes had been granted. However, the subtitle stated that her name had been withheld to protect her, implying that she remained in China. How this letter would have reached *Komsomol'skaia pravda* from rural China is unclear.⁸⁹

Such tales of the most extreme aspects of the Cultural Revolution, whether comical or horrific, probably repelled readers and reminded them of the difference between themselves and the objects of their voyeurism. The alienation of Soviet people from the Chinese found its most complete—and hence perhaps ironic—expression in Vysotskii's “Tau Kita,” in which it is unclear whether the bard is using references to aliens to describe the Chinese or the reverse. Yet there was something of a vicious circle at work, for it is unlikely that the idea of caricature was ever far from the minds of attentive observers. Absorbing the accounts of Chinese children spying on their parents, could Soviet readers have forgotten about Pavlik Morozov? How different were the torture chambers of the Red Guards from the basement of the Lubyanka? Wasn't the difference one of degree, rather than one of essence? Stories that alienated readers from the Chinese could not help but simultaneously recall Soviet analogs, obliterating the space they were trying to create.

Furthermore, if Chinese adults bore some responsibility for the behavior of their children, didn't the Soviet Union face a similar responsibility for its protégés? Indeed, the behavior of Chinese children toward their teachers and parents had its analog in the behavior of the Chinese nation toward its mentor. Commentators have since suggested that Soviet humor about the Cultural Revolution betrayed not only embarrassment regarding the similarities between Chinese and Soviet communism, but also a sense of responsibility for having inspired such horrors. Dora Shturman and Sergei Tiktin, compilers of a comprehensive collection of jokes about China, suggested, “It's very symptomatic that, while playing on various aspects of life in Communist China, anecdotists didn't forget the responsibility of the USSR for everything that happened in China...”⁹⁰ Similarly, in their book on the 1960s Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis wrote that the Soviet person of the late

⁸⁹ “Ia khochy xhit’,” *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 18 February 1967.

⁹⁰ Shturman and Tiktin, 429.

1960s “felt his own responsibility for the Beijing *khunveibiny*. You see China was a threatening caricature of the Soviet Union.” To support this view, they related what was apparently a well-known joke: “How can we tell that the earth is round? Because all the trash that we send west comes back to us from the east.”⁹¹ Vail’ and Genis also noted Sakharov’s formulation of Soviet responsibility for the Cultural Revolution: “Sakharov, hoisting the Frankenstein complex onto his own shoulders (which were accustomed to the weight), wrote that the Chinese tragedy is the result of the ‘incomplete and belated character of the war with Stalinism in the USSR.’”⁹²

Vail’ and Genis’ saw the Soviet fixation with the Cultural Revolution as a manifestation of a certain Soviet narcissism in the 1960s: the only international events that garnered any attention in the Soviet Union were those with some analog in domestic politics. China became a national obsession because it resonated so clearly with the Soviet political debate between the Leninists and the Stalinists. To the former, China indicated that liberalization was necessary to escape a resurrection of Stalinism; to the latter, China was a threat against which the Soviet Union must steel itself with renewed commitment to traditional values.⁹³

This critique of Soviet narcissism raises an interesting question. Could the recycled trash that was flowing back to the Soviet Union from the east have in the USSR the impact it was originally intended to have in the West? The dissidents, for all their fear of a revival of Stalinism, did not seem to see Maoism as an impetus for it, locating the potential causes in Soviet domestic high politics or the philistinism that was a universal aspect of human nature. For them, China itself was little more than a metaphor or a military threat. But was there any revolutionary hysteria left in the Soviet masses? Any hatred of the intelligentsia? Blind adoration for the leader? If so, could China inspire, rather than repel?

On this question, only silence comments, with the possible exception of an oblique reference in the scholarly journal *Narody Azii i Afriki*. An obscure article entitled “Towards a characterization of the views of Maksim Gorkii toward the East (1918-1921)” took up the question of eastern influence in Russia. Gorkii labored tirelessly to acquaint Russian workers

⁹¹ Vail’ and Genis, 281.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, 280.

with eastern art but appears to have gotten a bit carried away. He worried that Russia, isolated from Europe, would be forced into an eastern alliance and would eventually come under eastern cultural influence. Gorkii became obsessed with “a nightmarish vision—Russia, following the East.” Fortunately, Lenin came to the rescue, taking time out of his busy schedule of revolution to explain to the mesmerized Gorkii that the proper relationship of West to East was leader to follower.⁹⁴

Containing as it did no specific mention of China, this article may not have been intended as a commentary on the inspirational value of the Cultural Revolution. Yet it did raise the specter of an isolated Russia becoming ever more dependent on its neighbors to the east, the largest and most powerful of which was certainly China. The article seemed to reassure readers that inspiration, or trash, flows only out of the Soviet Union. In any case, the dearth of discussion on this question suggests that contemporary observers were not concerned about the Soviet masses voluntarily succumbing to Mao-inspired Cultural Revolution fever. As we shall see, commentators of all sorts were more apt to express the view that Maoism, if it reached the Soviet Union at all, would have to force its way across the border.

Fearing the Alien Invasion

If the question of whether the fun-house monsters could invade from within was open to debate, the fear of an invasion from without was frequently discussed and reached near-hysterical proportions. Judging from the press, dissident writings, jokes, poems, and songs, this fear was widespread.⁹⁵ It encompassed worries not only about a military attack— involving either a human tidal wave or a nuclear bomb—but about a rhetorical offensive as well. A border conflict at Damanskii Island in 1969 embodied both aspects of the Soviet nightmare, insofar as it was simultaneously a rhetorical and a military invasion. Regardless of the military balance of forces, the Damanskii incident gave substance to the worst Soviet fears. Yet it also served to locate the enemy represented by the Cultural Revolution outside

⁹⁴ D. I. Belkin, “K kharakteristike vsigliadov Maksima Gor’kogo na Vostok (1918-1921),” *Narody Azii i Afriki*, no. 3 (1968).

⁹⁵ Hedrick Smith, former Moscow bureau chief for the *New York Times*, took note of this fear in the 1970s: “On no other issue did private opinion seem to coincide more closely with the official line than in the deep-seated Russian fear and mistrust of the Chinese.” Hedrick Smith, *Russians* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), 449.

Soviet borders, rather than inside, and thereby may have helped to unify Soviet public opinion.

Press reports about numerous incidents in which Chinese accosted Soviets with Maoist propaganda reveal that anxiety about a rhetorical invasion by the Chinese was literal, not theoretical. Travel accounts to China during this period often included reports of being inundated with propaganda in a Chinese train station or airport, or even in the plane on the way. The writer Vladimir Turkin traveled to China by train and reported back that he was overwhelmed by propaganda the minute he crossed the border.⁹⁶ Similarly, for Hero of the Soviet Union Kozhar, the rhetorical assault began when the Chinese-American Friendship Society delegation transferred to a Chinese plane in Irkutsk. A portrait of Mao and several posters of quotations hung on the cabin walls, the in-flight magazines were filled with Mao quotes, and the stewardesses sang Mao songs and played radio broadcasts praising Mao.⁹⁷

Chinese tourists inside the Soviet Union did not always behave according to expectation either, daring to bring the war of rhetoric to the symbolic heart of Soviet socialism. In an incident that made the papers for days afterward, Chinese tourists visiting the Lenin Mausoleum on January 25, 1967 “began rudely to violate the established and commonly known rules for visiting the V.I. Lenin Mausoleum.” They jumped over a barrier and began chanting Mao quotes, holding up their little red books. Soviet citizens in line “waited patiently” and guards asked the Chinese to move on, but the Chinese just kept singing and even demanded that Soviet onlookers join them. Then one Chinese tourist allegedly hit a Soviet woman, and the rest began attacking other onlookers. This lasted a few minutes, until, according to *Izvestiia*, Soviet tourists “locked arms, formed a human chain, and forced the Chinese group several meters away from the Mausoleum...”⁹⁸

Embassies were another battleground in the war of words, and here more than elsewhere the attack threatened to become physical. In August of 1966 the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent the first of several notes to the Chinese embassy in Moscow protesting

⁹⁶ “Revoliutsiia vo imia kul'tury ili vo imia kul'ta.”

⁹⁷ “Why our trip to the C.P.R. was interrupted.”

⁹⁸ I. Ivanov, “Insolent sally by hung weiping,” *Izvestiia*, 29 January 1967. Translated by *CDSF*, vol. XIX, no. 4 (1967); 6.

aggressive Chinese behavior outside the Beijing embassy.⁹⁹ In perhaps their most successful raid, on August 14, 1969 Mao enthusiasts climbed over the embassy gate, dealt minor injuries to several embassy staff, ransacked the embassy, and put a portrait of Mao up in front of the embassy. The next day they brought loudspeakers and began shouting obscenities and beat up an embassy official as he left the building.¹⁰⁰ A joke dated from 1967 asked, “What is the Soviet embassy staff in Peking doing right now?” The answer was, “Studying the biography of Griboedov,” a famous Russian writer and diplomat killed in the Persian embassy in 1829.¹⁰¹

The threat of physical danger caused the Soviet Union to evacuate women and children from its embassy in Beijing, an event reported in the press with a certain element of Russian nationalism. *Izvestiia* told of the arrival of the evacuees:

Hundreds of Muscovites were at Sheremetyevo to greet them. An airplane rolled up to the gangway. The door was opened. Schoolchildren and women, many with infants in their arms, stepped out onto native soil... They gave hurried accounts of their ordeal. Ordinary Russian names resounded: Olga, Natasha, Marina. The narratives were eloquent, shattering, and painful.¹⁰²

Watching one evacuee with a child in her arms, an *Izvestiia* writer was inspired to comment on the moral aspects of the situation:

The infant in her arms looked wearily at those around him. How was it to be explained to him, who had thought the world consisted only of good people, the meaning of what had happened? How inhuman were those who endangered the health of the little Soviet citizen and took away his sleep.¹⁰³

Even as the women and children were boarding the plane, they reported, they had been surrounded by hostile Red Guards. In what may have been the ultimate symbolic act of the

⁹⁹ “USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” *Pravda*, 28 August 1966. Translated by *CDSF*, vol. XVIII, no. 34 (1966); 5. “In the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” *Pravda*, 10 February 1967. Translated by *CDSF*, vol. XIX, no. 6 (1967): 6.

¹⁰⁰ “Kul’turnaia revoliutsii v kitae prodolzhaetsia,” *Pravda*, 3 September 1966. See also “Porochnyi kurs.”

¹⁰¹ Shturman and Tiktin, 433.

¹⁰² Iu. Kosyukov and A. Aleksandrov, “They have returned from Peking,” *Izvestiia*, 7 February 1967. Translated by *CDSF*, vol. XIX, no. 6 (1967): 6-7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

rhetorical campaign, “An eight-month-old girl was struck on the head with the collected sayings of Mao Tse-Tung.”

Whereas embassies were obvious symbolic staging grounds for the Chinese rhetorical campaign, perhaps more unexpected was an attack that took place on a ship. In August of 1967 *Izvestiia* reported that Chinese authorities in Dal’nii arbitrarily detained the Soviet steamship *Svirsk*. When a Soviet seaman refused to put on a Mao button, the Chinese became very angry and started a “vile uproar.” The ship’s captain refused to surrender the seaman to the Chinese, at which point he was taken into Chinese custody, beaten, and paraded around the city with his hands tied behind his back and his head down. But this was as nothing compared to the rhetorical assault on the ship. “When Viktor Antonovich looked at the ship, his self-control abandoned him, probably for the first time. The entire ship, from keel to truck, was packed with armed hooligans. The entire hull of the vessel was covered with slogans and obscenities.”¹⁰⁴ When the Red Guards finally found the guilty seaman, they dragged him and the captain to a stadium where the two were subjected to verbal attacks by a mob. It seems to have taken a note from Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin to Chinese Prime Minister Chou Enlai to end the incident.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps most ominously of all, the Soviet border was also subjected to rhetorical attack periodically during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. These incidents did not appear to garner much attention in the press, at least until the skirmish at Damanskii Island. However, after that incident *Pravda* published what it claimed was testimony from a border guard a year previously. His formulation sounded much like an joke:

This is the situation: A fisherman comes, sticks a pole with Mao’s portrait on it in the snow and begins to dig a hole. We explain that it is forbidden to cross the border. We escort him back. The next day 20 fishermen come. Three have nets and each one has

¹⁰⁴ P.Demidov, “The *Svirsk* arrives in Vladivostok,” *Izvestiia*, 19 August 1967. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 33 (1967): 3-4, 25.

¹⁰⁵ “Act of Lawlessness and Highhandedness—To Chou Enlai...” *Pravda*, 13 August 1967. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 33 (1967): 3. “Vandalism of the hung weiping,” *Izvestiia*, 15 August 1967. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 33 (1967): 3. Apparently, the Chinese not only attacked Soviet boats, but also used their own ships to further the rhetorical war. In November 1967 *Izvestiia* reported that shiploads of Red Guards and Maoist propaganda had been arriving illegally in all sorts of countries. Referring to such a boat that arrived in Morocco, *Izvestiia* wrote, “Had not the authorities ordered it to ‘turn right around and leave,’ almost every person in Morocco’s population of 10,000,000 would have received a booklet of quotations and several badges. Longshoremen in London engaged in hand-to-hand combat with Peking propagandists who handed them booklets of quotations and tried to pin on them badges bearing Mao’s likeness.” “Who pays for recklessness?” *Izvestiia*, 12 November 1966. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XIX, no. 45 (1967).

a booklet of quotations. They wave them around so that the fishing will be better. We escort them back to the border. About 500 people are brought to the border. There are women and children among them. They organize a rally and beat drums. They are loaded on trucks and head for the Soviet shore. Our fellows stand in a chain. The trucks race at them, intending to frighten them. Nothing happens, and they go away....¹⁰⁶

Perhaps Soviet television aired some footage of these sorts of events, for Andrei Tarkovskii's *Zerkalo* contains an image of just such an incident. In a black and white sequence devoted to images of the Cultural Revolution, Tarkovskii shows Chinese men rushing toward a human chain of Soviet border guards in the snow. They wave little red books and shout, pressing unsuccessfully to break through the Soviet chain. The Soviet guards maintain a blank, business-as-usual expression. The attack is repelled. It is interesting that Tarkovskii showed the successful defense of the Soviet border, rather than an incident in which the border was transgressed. For notwithstanding the casual swagger of the border guards, the haphazard Chinese rhetorical attacks did ultimately give way to a more organized military assault.

* * *

“On the night of 1-2 March 1969, about three hundred Chinese frontier guards and regular soldiers dressed in white camouflage crossed the Ussuri River ice from the Chinese bank to Chen-pao Island, dug foxholes in a wooded area, laid telephone wire to the command post on the Chinese bank, and lay down for the night on straw mats. Early in the morning, the duty man at the Soviet outpost south of the island reported activity on the Chinese bank. Around 11:00 A.M. twenty or thirty Chinese were seen moving toward the island, shouting Maoist slogans as they went. The Soviet commander, Strelnikov, and his subordinates set off for the island in two armored personnel carriers, a truck, and a command car. Arriving, Strelnikov and several others dismounted and moved out to warn the oncoming Chinese, as they had done several times previously. Following a procedure developed for such occasions, the Russians strapped their automatic rifles to their chests and linked arms to prevent the Chinese from passing. A verbal altercation took place at this point. The Chinese arrayed themselves

¹⁰⁶ Iu. Apenchenko and Iu. Mokeyev, “That’s how it is on the border,” *Pravda*, 12 March 1969. Translated by CDSP, vol. XXI, no. 11 (1969): 3.

in rows and appeared to be unarmed. But when the Chinese had advanced to about twenty feet from the Russian group, the first row suddenly scattered to the side, exposing the second line of Chinese, who quickly pulled submachine guns from under their coats and opened fire on the Russians. Strelnikov and six others were killed outright. Simultaneously, from an ambush to the Russians' right, the three hundred Chinese in foxholes also opened fire, catching the entire Russian unit by surprise...The Soviet unit was overrun... ”¹⁰⁷

Such is the account given by *The Cambridge History of China* of the beginning of the Sino-Soviet border clash of March 1969.¹⁰⁸ It corresponds with information given at a press conference in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 8, 1969, except for a few specifics.¹⁰⁹ Both the *Cambridge History* and the Soviet press reported that Soviet border guards eventually succeeded in repelling the Chinese. The March 2 incident was followed by another battle on March 15, which received less attention in the press than the first; what coverage there was indicated that March 15 began in the same way as the previous battle.¹¹⁰ The *Cambridge History*, on the other hand, contends that it is unclear who started the second battle and that it was certainly not a surprise to the Soviet side. Chinese troops outnumbered the Soviets by ten to one, and there were 800 Chinese casualties compared to 60 on the Soviet

¹⁰⁷ Twitchett and Fairbank, eds.

¹⁰⁸ This account of the onset of the conflict is more detailed than others that appeared in publications such as *China and the Soviet Union, 1949-1984*: 92-95; O.B. Borisov and B.T. Koloskov, *Sino-Soviet Relations* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975): 309-310; George Ginsburgs, *The Damansky/Chenpao Island Incidents: A Case Study of Syntactic Patterns in Crisis Diplomacy*, (Edwardsville, Illinois: University Graphics and Publications, Southern Illinois University, 1973): 9-16. Thomas Robinson, the author of the *Cambridge History* chapter on Sino-Soviet relations during the Cultural Revolution including the passage cited above, states that there is “an almost total absence of high-quality primary data” on the Damanskii Island clashes. His version accords with what appears to be a consensus view, at least among non-Chinese historians. Even less clear is why the Chinese instigated the March 2 incident. For a discussion of this issue, see Twitchett and Fairbanks, eds., 261-265.

¹⁰⁹ “Press Conference in the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” *Pravda*, 8 March 1969. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XXI, no. 10 (1969): 4-5. Soviet press reports do not mention that there were rows of Chinese and that a first row which appeared unarmed suddenly scattered to reveal a second, armed row. However, they do mention that the Soviet guards were shot point blank, suggesting that the Chinese weapons must have been concealed somehow, and that the Soviet guards must have assumed that they were heading into a typical rhetorical attack.

¹¹⁰ “The U.S.S.R. borders are inviolable—Maj. Gen. of Border Troops Aleksandr Anikushin comments on the events on the Soviet-Chinese border,” *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, 19 March 1969. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XXI, no. 12 (1969): 3.

side.¹¹¹ Other academic analyses describe March 15 as a massive, deliberate counter-attack by the USSR.¹¹²

The March border incidents appear to have been patriotic, unifying events for a variety of segments of the Soviet public. Press accounts of the heroism and martyrdom of the border guards were florid, but the most eloquent was certainly the poem Evtushenko wrote, “On the Red Ussuri Snow,” which was published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on March 19, 1969, and which has been quoted several times above. The poem depicts a mother mourning her son, who was shot and then bayoneted at Damanskii, “For what? For his freckles? For his sky-blue eyes?” On the same page as the poem appears a picture of a smiling Strel’nikov, in uniform, playing with his three-year-old son and five-year-old daughter.¹¹³

The press was saturated with Soviet patriotism in the aftermath of the event. Reports noted that the incident had inspired soldiers to submit their applications to join the Communist Party, and that new waves of settlers were headed East “on assignment from their own consciences.”¹¹⁴ Elections for deputies to the local Soviets began shortly thereafter; many candidates were border guards, and “voters say that the courage shown by Soviet troops on Damansky Island is the best appeal.”¹¹⁵ People in the Far East “are working in an especially organized and disciplined fashion, and all the shops and sections are overfulfilling their plans.” In contrast to the mourning mother in Evtushenko’s poem, *Pravda* quotes a mother of three who states, “I shall bless my sons to go defend the homeland, should it come to that.”¹¹⁶ On March 7 and 8, demonstrations of 50,000 and 100,000 Soviet protesters took

¹¹¹ Twitchett and Fairbanks, eds., 260-261.

¹¹² R.K.I. Queded, *Sino-Russian Relations* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984): 139.

¹¹³ *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 19 March 1969. An entire page is devoted to Damanskii, including the picture, the poem, and several articles. For a particularly patriotic account of the behavior in battle of the Soviet guards, see “What happened on Damanskii Island,” *Izvestiia*, 8 March 1969. Translated in *CDSP*, vol. XXI, no. 12 (1969): 6-7.

¹¹⁴ A. Lazebnikov, “New Settlers go to the Far East,” *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, 20 March 1969. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XXI, no. 12 (1969): 3-4. Actually, this quote comes from a recently resettled tractor driver who states that as soon as his friends receive his reports, they will “start packing on assignment from their own consciences.”

¹¹⁵ “That’s how it is on the border.”

¹¹⁶ “Near the Border,” *Pravda*, 22 March 1969. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XXI, no. 12 (1969).

place outside the Chinese embassy in Moscow; demonstrators threw rocks and other objects at the embassy, breaking windows.¹¹⁷

If the Damanskii Island incident roused feelings of patriotic unity, perhaps this was because it served to locate the Chinese threat firmly outside Soviet borders. Genis and Vail' have argued that the battle with Maoism could only be won on Soviet soil, because in reality the reason the Cultural Revolution attracted so much attention was that it provided ammunition for the battle between Leninists and Stalinists. The Soviet government, they write, settled the argument by avoiding it altogether, thus freezing Soviet reality in the status quo. Yet this picture of the government settling a dispute between an unreconciled left and right is undermined by the Damanskii incident and the reaction to it, which revealed a left and right unified in fear of war with China.

The Damanskii Island incident both crystallized and fueled anxiety about a Chinese attack, anxiety centered on the size of the Chinese population and China's potential as a nuclear power. The large number of jokes on the subject suggests that Chinese numerical superiority was, in fact, threatening to many Soviet citizens. "How will the war between the USSR and China end? With the unconditional surrender of the USSR after it has taken 400 million Chinese as prisoners of war."¹¹⁸ Or, "Is it possible to destroy the Chinese by putting them in columns and machine-gunning them? Yes, if they multiply slower than you shoot."¹¹⁹ Judging from the jokes, war with China seemed imminent, and the Chinese seemed likely to win. Many played on the idea that China would swallow the Soviet Union, including jokes about a not-so-distant future in which Polish streets have Chinese names, Finland shares a border with China, and the price of vodka is calculated in yuan. Several jokes suggested that Russian speakers had best learn Chinese.¹²⁰

Fears of China's massive population mingled with worries about its nuclear capabilities. China had detonated its first atomic bomb in 1964, and its belligerent behavior during the Cultural Revolution only heightened Soviet anxiety about the Chinese nuclear

¹¹⁷ *China and the Soviet Union, 1949-1984*, 93-94. Also, "Angry Protest and Indignation," *Pravda*, 8 March 1969. Translated by CDSP, vol. XXI, no. 12 (1969): 5.

¹¹⁸ Shturman and Tiktin, 431. The compilers date this joke from 1963.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* This joke is not dated.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, and Borev, 449.

threat.¹²¹ As Vail’ pointed out, Evtushenko warned of new Mongol hordes with nuclear weapons in their sacks.¹²² In a similar vein, Voznesenskii warned, “Dust rises above the Horde in a mushroom-shaped sand-storm.”¹²³ And Vysotskii’s 1963 “Pis’mo” suggested that China had so many people, it could afford to lose thirty million in a nuclear war.¹²⁴ Press discussions of Chinese nuclear weaponry suggested genuine concern, sometimes mixed with a dose of mockery. On New Year’s Day 1969 *Literaturnaia gazeta* noted with a measure of sarcasm that a nuclear bomb had been tested in western China a few days previously, and that Chinese New Year’s cards depicted not traditional Chinese New Year’s greetings but a nuclear mushroom cloud with the greeting, “A great victory for the ideas of Chairman Mao.”¹²⁵

It was the famous dissident Andrei Amalrik who articulated the most thorough vision of war with China.¹²⁶ Recall that Amalrik believed that China was following the Soviet model closely—an international period followed by a national period. “In the logic of events a period of external expansionism must ensue.”¹²⁷ Writing in the aftermath of Damanskii, Amalrik argued that just as the Soviet Union had sought to expand westward, so China had its eye on the lands of Siberia and the Soviet Far East. Seeking to become the “supreme controller of the fate of the world,” China would start a war using a combination of nuclear and guerrilla tactics (to take advantage of its numerical superiority) to solve its economic problems and gain its rightful place of dominance in the world. Furthermore, it might be difficult to tell when the war had actually begun, because China would escalate conflict

¹²¹ Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., 117.

¹²² Vail’ and Genis, 281.

¹²³ Voznesenskii, “From the Walkie-Talkie Cycle: Prologue to a Poem.”

¹²⁴ Vysotskii, “Pis’mo.”

¹²⁵ V. Shestak, “A nice greeting!” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 1 January 1969. Translated by *CDSP*, vol. XXI, no. 1 (1969).

¹²⁶ Other dissidents expressed similar fears. See, for example, Sakharov’s *Memoirs*, in which he notes his own fear of Chinese expansionism, as well as that of Solzhenitsyn. Interestingly, writing his memoirs in the late 1980s, Sakharov claims that by 1972 his fears of war with China had abated, and opines that Soviet propaganda exaggerated the threat of war with China. Andrei Sakharov, *Memoirs*, translated by Richard Lourie (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), 321, 366.

¹²⁷ Amalrik, 46.

simply by intensifying border skirmishes. “These skirmishes will be escalated into total war at the moment most suitable to China.”

It was this war with China, according to Amalrik, that would cause the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet military was overextended, so Germany would take advantage of the war to reunite and Eastern Europe would slip away from the USSR and assert various territorial demands. The nationalist tendencies of non-Russian Soviet peoples would grow under wartime tensions, and new states would emerge in the borderlands. The only way to avoid this fate would be to democratize and forge a lasting alliance with the United States, an unlikely scenario. Amalrik predicted that the war with China would begin within five or ten years, at the most—between 1975 and 1980. Hence the title of his landmark essay, “Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?”¹²⁸

Historians such as Genis and Vail’ have emphasized aspects of the reaction to the Cultural Revolution that indicated conflict rather than those that pointed to consensus. Similarly, Amalrik’s essay, like other dissident works, was hailed in the West for its courageous stance against the Soviet government.¹²⁹ Yet on some level, it was also a patriotic plea for the preservation of the Soviet Union, albeit with a reformed political system.¹³⁰ Viewed from the point of view of China, rather than the West, the Soviet reaction can be seen as evidence of a remarkable consensus. Even if they disagreed on the implications, it seems clear that commentators on opposite ends of what we have become accustomed to thinking of as the Soviet political spectrum expressed fear of and contempt for China.

Conclusion

The early Soviet response to the Chinese Cultural Revolution was striking not only for its humor and creativity but also for its spontaneity, the uncertainty of its implications, and, in retrospect, for the remarkable snapshot it generated of Soviet identity. Genis and Vail’ have

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Henry Kamm, “Portrait of a Dissenter,” preface to *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), vii-xv.

¹³⁰ Indeed, Lev Kopalev produced a damning critique of fellow dissidents—he focused on Solzhenitsyn—whose visions of war with China bolstered the aggressive ambitions of the Soviet regime. Lev Kopalev, “The Lie Can Be Defeated Only by the Truth,” in *Political, Social and Religious Thought of Russian ‘Samizdat,’* Michael Meerson-Aksenov and Boris Shragin, eds., (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1977), 315-316.

portrayed the reaction as almost entirely self-referential, with Leninists and Stalinists deliberately and dogmatically picking and choosing what they needed from events in China to bolster arguments about Soviet politics. Yet the evidence presented here suggests just the opposite: China not only brought out the patriotism of the regime's critics, but also the cynicism of its defenders, ultimately blurring the lines between the two and suggesting that neither "side" deliberately structured its response. What was most noteworthy about the reaction to the Cultural Revolution was the almost accidental unity it revealed.

But what, exactly, was the source of this consensus, and what were its implications? If an iconic image emerged of the Soviet response to the Chinese assault, Tarkovskii suggested in *Zerkalo*, it is of Soviet citizens calmly locking arms to form a human chain against Chinese aggressors, as they were alleged to have done at the border as well as at the Lenin mausoleum. Were they (supposed to be) joining to protect Soviet soil, Soviet socialism, Russia, or—as Voznesenskii proclaimed (“All the bullets for Rome, for Vienna, sinking into us!/Russia the savior!”)—Europe? If unity was motivated by some sort of nationalism, was it Soviet or Russian, or were the two inextricably linked? Was it a nationalism based on blood and soil, or was it based on a defense of common values, or both?

The picture of socialism presented in the Soviet reaction to the Cultural Revolution might have generated a fair amount of consensus. This was a socialism that emphasized cultural freedom at a time when that freedom was under threat; the criticism of Chinese cultural persecution in the official press seems somewhat incongruous when one considers that the famous trial of the writers Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky, later seen as a bellwether of increasing repression, occurred in February 1966. No wonder Evtushenko and Voznesenskii lined up behind official criticism of Chinese cultural policy. It was a socialism that emphasized a rising standard of living rather than sacrifice for a distant goal. It was also a socialism based on gradual, “evolutionary,” rather than “revolutionary” change. Indeed, the nearly universal condemnation of China's attempt at instant, radical transformation to an egalitarian socialist society suggests widespread agreement that the Soviet revolution was over.

A key question about the unity revealed by the Soviet reaction was whether it was a momentary aberration, or a more fundamental feature of late Soviet society. Was the nationalism provoked by the Chinese threat a fleeting or enduring phenomenon? If the

reaction to China reflected agreement about socialism, was that agreement the remnant of a dying consensus or a hint of changes to come? The universal condemnation of Cultural Revolution violence and cult of personality could be seen as the last gasp of widespread support for the Khrushchev thaw before the dispatch of tanks to Prague and the birth of the Brezhnev cult. In this interpretation, whatever consensus existed between the regime and its critics could be attributed to the fact that the conflict between them was still in its early stages, and their positions were as yet undifferentiated. On the other hand, it could be that the reaction to the Cultural Revolution revealed a deeply-rooted agreement about certain features of socialism that combined with a dose of some sort of nationalism to create a rough consensus that lasted into the Brezhnev era, and perhaps beyond. It seems that the sources of cleavage and consensus in late socialist political identity deserve further investigation.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that unity was necessarily a source of stability. One is struck, reading both the ideological and the satirical reactions, at how little these authors seem to have considered the potential significance of their rhetoric. Ideologues who questioned China's legitimacy as a socialist country because it was poor, undemocratic, and repressive could not have known that these categories would be applied in the future with fatal force to the Soviet Union. Those who expressed loss over the breakdown of socialist unity could not have realized the magnitude of the loss that was to come. Even satirists, who were no doubt aware of the double entendre in their humor, could not have foreseen how thoroughly pervasive mockery of Soviet socialism would become in the Brezhnev era. And whereas in the case of China tensions could be released by externalizing the enemy and fearing an invasion, once the criticism and the laughter were aimed directly inward, release was more difficult to achieve. Indeed, while the Cultural Revolution may have unified some segments of the Soviet population, the precedent set by the Soviet reaction to it was decidedly dangerous. The lambasting and lampooning of China was an unwitting dress rehearsal for the critique and mockery that would eventually help to bring Soviet socialism to its knees.