

# The sino-soviet split essay sample



Recognised as one of the key influences on the fate of the Cold War socialist bloc, the decline in Sino-Soviet relations has been the focus of extensive historical analysis since it first made international headlines in the 1960s. The tight control exercised by both Soviet and Chinese government agencies, however, has obstructed progress towards a complete understanding of the issue, barring access to relevant documents until only a few years ago. Earlier publications on the subject that are consequently dependent on Western sources tend to express the erroneous view that the split was the direct result of Washington's "wedge strategy," an explanation that was initially accepted by the intellectual world. But the opening of national archives has seen a dramatic movement away from this interpretation, showing instead that the Sino-Soviet relationship self-destructed as a result of long term competition.

Throughout the ten year duration of their alliance, the leaders of both Russia and China were involved in campaigns aimed at consolidating their national position in the context of the Cold War - as Yang Kui Song puts it, "communists...tend to be nationalists when it comes to international affairs." Concerns over the Eastern bloc were critical, then, but of secondary importance to the private goals of the Kremlin and the CCP. It was only while the Sino-Soviet alliance presented itself as a mechanism through which each participant could advance its own economic, military and political standing that it was viewed with any real interest. Ultimately, as mutual criticism arose, and the divergent backgrounds of the two parties caused them to develop different 'paths to socialism', the friendship that had been hailed as "eternal" and "unbreakable" <sup>3</sup> disintegrated into heated confusion and

rivalry, escalated by the nuclear hazard and consciousness of the ever present American threat.

The early years of the Sino-Soviet relationship were characterized by “ Soviet disinterest and Chinese mistrust.” In the late 1940s, when the Chinese Communist Party had been working towards the Revolution of 1949, its leaders had approached Stalin for military assistance, but were turned down with instructions to “ obey the GMD wholeheartedly.”<sup>5</sup> From this occasion, and a number of others, it became clear to the CCP that Stalin was willing to jeopardize the success of their revolution in order to prevent Western alarm about China’s political alignment. This tendency would be a source of constant disappointment in the years to come, as Mao “ pinned...his future on (Soviet) aid”<sup>6</sup> only to find that Stalin was content, especially in the first few months of the alliance, to offer only minimal economic support.

Considering the immense pressure that the CCP was under in the weeks immediately following the revolution, it is understandable that this lack of interest should place Mao in a dilemma. Forced to present the Soviets as the heroes of the Marxist cause in order to strengthen the Chinese population’s faith in communism, he was nonetheless frustrated with them for being so reluctant to assist in the construction of a Chinese utopia. Particularly important to him was the complete defeat of the Nationalist Party stationed in Taiwan, which was not militarily dangerous, but undermined the CCP victory as a symbol of rebellion. The Soviets, however, were not committed to taking any action against the Nationalists, with whom the Americans had close ties, and this thwarted Mao’s efforts to build a strong public image.

The Soviets perhaps underestimated the urgency of this campaign to strengthen China's national identity because they did not recognize its roots. Having a history of foreign occupation and imperialist oppression, the Chinese people were desperate to prove their merit in the international arena, a sentiment which Mao had, during his rise to power, promised to satisfy with the creation of a new and resurgent China. He was particularly eager to erase every vestige of the Nationalist rule, which he associated with meekness, and, now that his victory was complete, set about the task of rectifying some of the issues that had been the focus of domestic indignation. In a meeting with Soviet ambassador Mikoyan shortly after the CCP triumph, Mao communicated his intention to ignore all treaties made between the GMD and other countries. He also requested control of Port Arthur, Outer Mongolia, industries in Dalian, and the Soviet funded Changchun Railway, in an attempt to empty China of all foreign presence. These moves constituted an important part of his campaign to show the Chinese that the CCP would liberate them from the long-standing problem of imperialism.

As had been the case before the revolution, Stalin's lack of interest proved to be a major inhibition to the success of this scheme. He agreed to leave Port Arthur after three years, and acceded to the requests about the Dalian industries and the Changchun Railway, but was immovable over Mongolia, insisting on its independence. In addition, and this was by far the most important problem, he did not respond to Mao's hints that a new Treaty of Friendship and Alliance be drafted to replace the old one signed by the Soviet Union and the GMD. When the Chinese leader traveled to Moscow to

discuss this issue, Stalin did not even turn up at the station to meet him, a disrespectful gesture which deeply wounded Mao's dignity. Then, during meetings, he expressed an unwillingness to draw up a new treaty on the basis that such action might give the West a pretext for revisionism over the control of certain offshore islands. Mao eventually agreed to give up the idea, and left Moscow defeated, only to be faced with a barrage of criticism from within the Party at his inability to bring home the necessary concessions.

The fact that Stalin changed his mind on this issue in early 1950, after the West defied his calculations and took steps to establish relations with the PRC, further bolstered the impression that Mao was completely at the mercy of Stalin's diplomatic goals. To combat this sense, Mao sought greater concessions during the negotiations over the treaty than was perhaps expected, causing Mikoyan to exclaim, " I don't know what sort of allies our two countries can...become!" Clearly, Mao's distrust of the Soviets grew substantially over this issue, but on the whole he achieved what he had set out to achieve and went home a relatively happy man.

Tensions did not subside, however, and conflict flared up again as Stalin insensitively proposed that a series of Soviet funded joint ventures be initiated in Northern China. Although he agreed to this at first, Mao became alarmed at the hostility with which the populace received this evidence of Soviet control. As Stalin brought in more and more capital, and suggested that more and more cooperatives be established, Mao began to object, feeling that to allow this to continue would be inconsistent with the image of national self-sufficiency that he was trying to create. Eventually, he

interpreted Stalin's interest in Northern China as a sign of distrust and a "racist" desire to supervise domestic affairs. This realization prompted his famous explosion: ' You think Russians are superior and Chinese are inferior, only capable of botching everything up!'"

The next few years saw these sentiments fade somewhat, as the Chinese contribution in the Korean War made a clear statement of their worth as allies. In addition, the presence of an immediate military threat distracted both the Chinese and the Soviets for a time, drawing them together to "reverse the tide of the United Nations advance." Movements towards greater equality in the Sino-Soviet alliance had already begun, then, when Stalin, the main proponent of a "father-son" relationship, died in 1953. Feeling perhaps that these events had combined to "remove...the shadow of the father-son relationship,"<sup>10</sup> Mao became more open to the increase in military and economic aid that followed the Korean War, accepting it as a means of building up China's ability to deter an American attack. That this was a genuine Soviet concern, possibly prompted by the US signing of a Treaty of mutual defense with Taiwan in 1954, was demonstrated in Khrushchev's expressed willingness to share nuclear weapons technology with Mao.

The root of these efforts to equalize relations with China- Khrushchev's desire to rectify what he perceived to be mistakes on Stalin's part- would eventually open up a massive split in the Sino-Soviet relationship. It is interesting to note, however, that Khrushchev's denouncement of Stalin at the 20th National Congress of the Soviet Union was initially received as a welcome instance of the "self-criticism" that Mao had always held to be central to the development of Marxism. The CCP also appeared to approve of <https://assignbuster.com/the-sino-soviet-split-essay-sample/>

Khrushchev's rapprochement approach; in early 1956, party member Nie Rongjen had "praised East-West *dǐjǐtente*, and urged rapprochement between the two German states." 12 Indeed, before the adverse effects of this method became apparent with the uprisings in Poland and Hungary, the Chinese had indicated that they were quite happy to follow the Soviet lead in these matters, informing the Yugoslavians that "as long as the Soviet Union did not criticize Stalin, we would be in no position to do so...as long as (they) did not restore diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia, we could not establish relations with you." Substantial changes, however, in the domestic, local, and international arenas, brought about a dramatic shift in Mao's views on the Soviet revisionism, and consequently in his approach to the Sino-Soviet relationship.

The rebellions in Poland and Hungary, for instance, showed the CCP that promotion of self-criticism and *dǐjǐtente* was generating a dangerous polycentrism within the communist bloc. This led to the Chinese rejection of rapprochement, and their subsequent attempts to "persuade" 14 the Soviets to abandon this approach for the time being. Taking new leadership in the socialist camp, the Chinese actually offered advice to the Kremlin, influencing "both their decision not to intervene in Poland, and their decision to intervene in Hungary." 15 In addition, they served as mediators in the numerous conflicts which sprung up between the Soviet Union and its client states. The increasing Chinese popularity, which led some to observe that "the center of the international communist movement has been shifted to China," was a worry for Khrushchev, and caused the competition between the two parties to escalate once more.

While now on an equal footing with the Soviets in most facets of communist bloc administration, Mao was surpassed in one arena: Khrushchev clearly took the lead in the question of economic competition with the West.

Recognizing this as an inequality that posed a potential threat to his new-found position, Mao quickly matched the Soviet proposal to “ catch up with the United States in fifteen years”<sup>16</sup> with a domestic program known as the Great Leap Forward. This entailed “ surpassing Britain”<sup>17</sup> in a financial sense, a goal which would be achieved through numerous agricultural and economic reforms in China. In addition to being important to Mao’s standing in the Eastern sphere, the Great Leap Forward was also intended to quiet growing paranoia at home by offering reassurance against an imperialist invasion. The CCP leader’s approach at this time was perhaps best expressed in his statement at the 8th National Congress of the CCP, where he said, “ The Soviet way can build socialism, but we can also have another way to do this.”<sup>18</sup>

Initially very successful, the Great Leap Forward posed a significant threat to Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe. The Chinese invented commune, for instance, a structure that reaped better results than the Russian collective farming system, was the focus of extensive Soviet censure throughout 1958 and early 1959, to which Mao responded by supporting derogatory references to Khrushchev in the national press. Later, when the tables turned and the program proved to be a failure after all, Khrushchev’s patronizing sympathy further aggravated the Chinese leader. It was after this point, when it became apparent that his economic plans for China had failed, that Mao turned his attention to the philosophical debate. This indicated that his



outburst against Soviet revisionism was based more in a general desire to do something to undermine Soviet power in the communist bloc than in any fervent wish for ideological purity.

Having said that, it is necessary to point out that the CCP's opposition to *dǐ; 1/2*tente did coincide with its traditional approach to imperialism. It would be incorrect to assume that China adopted the position it did for the sole purpose of continuing its power struggle with the Soviet Union. Rather, the ideological debate represented a genuine “ divergence...in perceptions of the American threat” 19; the fall out over the Great Leap Forward merely saw Mao pick up this issue as his next weapon against Soviet domination.

The central conflict in this debate: whether world revolution was intrinsic to the advance of socialism, can perhaps be traced to the geopolitical differences between China and the Soviet Union. Through years of experience with the West, the Soviets had learned that coercive methods of gaining control had a disastrous effect on public image, and had decided to imitate the more successful US approach of influencing politics through economic relationship. In addition, Russia shared its borders with relatively developed peoples who exhibited no desire for revolution. China, on the other hand, had a completely different perspective that can be attributed to its national background: surrounded by militant countries seeking to wrest free of colonial rule, its leaders saw ‘ revolutionary fervour’ everywhere they looked. These divergent outlooks, then, led to a lack of uniformity in foreign policy. The Soviets and the Chinese disagreed over the use of nuclear technology, their duty to assist revolutions such as the Iraqi conflict of 1959, and approaches in Taiwan. The ultimate result of these debates was the

statement made by the CCP in late 1959: “ To oppose revisionism...is our primary goal at present.” 20

The Chinese fought rapprochement in several different ways over the next few months. Claiming that this policy violated the basic Marxist doctrine of world revolution, the CCP staged an anti-dǐjǔtente demonstration in Jinmen, which it bombed without Soviet consent in a deliberate effort to “ keep the US on the verge of war.” 21 It also pursued an aggressive policy with regards to Taiwan, although fully recognizing that this was an American centre of interest, and engaged in a border conflict with India. These actions caused Khrushchev to view the Chinese with increasing mistrust, a sentiment which culminated in 1960, with the withdrawal of Soviet experts, the shutting down of Sino-Soviet co-operatives, and the termination of nuclear aid.

Relations after this point were decidedly cold, as Mao turned his attention from dominance within the communist bloc to the task of shoring up his domestic position. After the failure of the Great Leap Forward, many doubted his ability to shape China into the utopian state that had first been idealized; as a response, Mao adopted a radicalist stance and launched the Cultural Revolution of 1965. In the years that followed, China was isolated not only from the Soviet Union, but from the other members of the communist bloc, and, in addition, the Western powers. Little or no contact with the Kremlin was maintained, although there was a brief period of co-operation during which Soviet arms were transported across China into North Vietnam. The antagonism that defined this period was perhaps best expressed during the border skirmishes of 1969, over which both sides declared themselves willing to resort to nuclear exchange. In fact, it was only fear of the American

response to such an outbreak that restricted the scope of this conflict and prevented it from developing into a major war.

As American journalists began to put out material on the decline in Sino-Soviet relations, with Harrison Salisbury publishing *The Coming War Between Russia and China*, the extent of Sino-Soviet hostility prompted international discussion. How, historians reflected, could an alliance that had apparently promised so much, deteriorate to such levels in the space of ten years? Attempted answers to this question have been limited until recent times, and even now can offer little more than tentative speculation, but it would appear that numerous basic differences, combined with a mutual desire to control the communist bloc, were the primary factors in precipitating the split.

The period from 1956 to 1958 is considered highly important, as Khrushchev's promotion of self-criticism and *dtente* during this time prompted Mao to develop his own 'road to socialism.' In addition, seemingly minor incidents such as the bombing of Jinmen have, in the last few years, emerged as central intensifiers of the post-1958 conflict, bringing both sides into confrontation with the West. Ultimately, as the various episodes of the Sino-Soviet decline unfolded, one thing became clear: both Mao and Khrushchev would have to identify one primary enemy, to choose between the Americans and each other in order to avoid becoming isolated. Mao's decision, at any rate, is obvious in his establishment of a diplomatic relationship with the U. S. A during the 1970s, an event which had a significant effect on the development of the Cold War.

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