



The Hungarian Connection: the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and its Impact on Mao Zedong's Domestic Policies in the late 1950s

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Abstract: Despite being a highly relevant event in the history of the Cold War, the 1956 Hungarian revolution remains underanalyzed from the perspective of the People's Republic of China. The domestic policy changes in the PRC that were influenced by the Hungarian uprising are equally undertreated in scholarly literature. For these reasons this paper examines the PRC's changing perception of the nature of the 1956 Hungarian revolution and answers the question whether the Chinese leadership influenced Nikita Khrushchev and the Kremlin elite in favour of an armed intervention in Budapest. The second half of the article assesses the impact of the Hungarian crisis on Mao's domestic policies in the late 1950s, particularly to the Hundred Flowers campaign and the Anti-Rightist campaign.

Keywords: 1956 Hungarian Revolution; Cold War; Hungarian History; Mao Zedong; China; Soviet Union.

Introduction

Despite its failure, the 1956 Hungarian revolution was a highly influential event in the history of the Cold War. It was analyzed by numerous historians, however, the perspective of the People's Republic of China rarely received attention, let alone the policy implications of the uprising in Budapest.

In this paper, firstly I aim to provide a brief national and international historical background before the 1956 Hungarian crisis and touch upon subjects such as the secret speech of Khrushchev during the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the workers' protest in the city of Poznan, the changes in Hungarian domestic politics and the so-called Polish October.

Secondly, I will analyze the Hungarian revolution from the Chinese perspective using a wide variety of primary sources from diplomatic cables to newspaper articles to speeches.

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ISSN - 2464-9929, © ARISS, Global Politics Review, <http://www.globalpoliticsreview.com>

I am especially interested in finding out the reasons why the Chinese leadership changed its position from advocating the withdrawal of the Soviet troops to urging Khrushchev to intervene militarily and crush the violent riots. Also, I will pay close attention whether this shift in the Chinese stance influenced the Soviet leadership in its decision to mobilize the Soviet military and suppress the anti-Communist “counterrevolution”. If it is the case, then to what extent did Mao influence Khrushchev? Did the Chairman’s opinion play a significant role in favour of a Soviet armed intervention?

Lastly, I will assess the impact of the Hungarian crisis on Mao’s domestic policies in the late 1950s, particularly to the Hundred Flowers campaign and the Anti-Rightist campaign. In addition, I will determine whether the Hungarian events contributed to the factors behind the Sino-Soviet split.

National and International Developments Before the 1956 Hungarian Revolution

In February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev delivered his famous closed door speech during the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in which he criticized Stalin’s methods of rule and denounced his cult of personality.

The political upheavals in Poland and Hungary in the same year were direct results of the de-Stalinization process started by this speech. The first sign of destabilization of both the Polish and the Hungarian regimes appeared in the summer of 1956. In late June, factory workers of Poznan held demonstrations that escalated into a genuine uprising involving around one hundred thousand people, more than half of the population of the city. According to Andrew Walder, “Communist Party offices were set on fire, and demonstrators led by factory workers clashed with security forces and the Polish army, leading to at least seventy-four deaths and hundreds wounded.”¹

Meanwhile in July, Hungarian Communist Party (HCP) Secretary Mátyás Rákosi was forced by the Soviets to step down in the wake of Khrushchev’s February speech. He was replaced by Ernő Gerő. As a hardline Stalinist, Rákosi was responsible for a series of show trials and purges of party leaders labeled as “Titoist spies”, “reactionaries” and “rightist deviants”. Ironically, Rákosi was responsible for creating the Petőfi Circle in March 1955, a discussion forum for intellectuals that eventually turned against him and became one of the main driving forces behind the 1956 Hungarian revolution.

In October 1956, the general anti-Stalinist and nationalist atmosphere combined with the accumulated tensions of the workers’ uprising in Poznan “resulted in the election of a new politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PUWP) excluding pro-Soviet, Stalinist leaders. The new PUWP leadership headed by Wladyslaw Gomulka also planned to remove Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, a Russian who had held the position as

1 Andrew G. Walder, *China Under Mao – A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 131.

Poland's defense minister since 1949.”² Gomulka represented reform and national independence for the Polish people. Needless to say, the Soviet leaders were shocked to see their own reliable human assets removed from power without prior consultation, and viewed Gomulka as a threat to their dominance in Poland.

In the end, the Kremlin decided to use both political and military pressure on Poland: on 19 October a high-level Soviet delegation led by Khrushchev flew to Warsaw while the Soviet troops surrounded the Polish capital. Although full-blown military intervention was a real option, Gomulka managed to convince Khrushchev, amid anti-Soviet campaigns throughout the country, that he was willing to cooperate with the Soviet leadership and did not intend to leave the socialist camp. In the end, the Soviets chose to resolve the Polish problem peacefully and tolerated Gomulka's agenda pursuing a more independent policy concerning domestic affairs.

It is important to provide the Chinese view of the Polish October given that it indicates a shift in Mao's thinking and offers a nice comparison to his reaction to the upcoming events in Hungary. Author of the first book-length study of Mao's China and the 1956 Hungarian revolution, Zhu Dandan writes that on 21 October the Chairman summoned a Politburo Standing Committee meeting to discuss the Polish issue. In this meeting, he shared his reading of the events:

When the son fails to obey, the rude father picks up a stick to beat him. When a socialist power uses military forces to intervene in the internal affairs of a neighboring socialist country, this is not only a violation of the basic principles of international relations; this is also a violation of the principles governing the relations between socialist countries. This is serious *big-power chauvinism* [my emphasis], which should not be allowed in any circumstances.³

All the participants of the meeting opposed Soviet military intervention of Warsaw. This message was delivered personally by Mao to the Soviet ambassador to China, Pavel Iudin. According to Zhu, “Iudin immediately phoned Khrushchev to inform him of the Chinese position. However, when Mao's message reached Khrushchev, the Soviet leadership had already decided to make concessions to Gomulka and the Poles.”⁴ The Polish October offered Mao an opportunity to express his discontent with the unequal relationship between China and the Soviet Union. He aspired to go beyond the “father-son” relationship with Moscow and become a superior voice in the international Communist movement regarding ideological and political matters in order to widen the sphere of Chinese influence. Mao clearly wanted China to occupy a more prominent position in the

2 Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 146.

3 Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 147.

4 Dandan Zhu, *1956 – Mao's China and the Hungarian Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia, 2013), 107.

Communist bloc.

After receiving a telegram from Moscow, Mao summoned another Politburo Standing Committee meeting on 22 October. The Chairman informed his colleagues that the Soviets invited the Chinese leaders to Moscow to exchange views on the Polish events. As all members agreed on sending a high-level delegation to the Soviet Union, Mao selected his right-hand man, Liu Shaoqi, to lead the delegation and briefed him on their main task. He defined their agenda as “mediating the problems between the Soviet and Polish comrades by, on the one hand, criticizing the Soviet party’s ‘big-power chauvinism’ and, on the other hand, advising the Polish comrades to consider the overall interests of the socialist camp.”⁵ The Chinese delegation arrived in Moscow on 23 October – the same day the Hungarian uprising started to unfold. This peculiar coincidence meant that a group of top Chinese leaders (Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and others) followed the developments in Hungary from Moscow along with Khrushchev and may have directly influenced the Soviet decision makers to intervene militarily in Budapest.

The 1956 Hungarian Revolution from Chinese Perspective

China had four major channels to collect information on the Hungarian events: the cables sent from the Chinese embassy in Budapest, news reports, Chinese intelligence sources in the Eastern bloc and the delegation in Moscow.⁶ Mao was informed of the spillover effect of the Polish October by a cable sent from the Chinese Embassy in Hungary on 23 October. This cable described that a major daily Hungarian newspaper, *Szabad Nép* (“Free People”) responded very positively to the election of Wladyslaw Gomulka as the new Polish party secretary and commented that the Polish events carry “decisive importance not only for the Polish people, but for the future path of the international communist movement.” The cable also mentioned a Polish paper’s (*Sztander Mlodych*) editorial that contained “Hungary and Poland are at the forefront of the de-Stalinization process and the restitution of popular power.” Lastly, it reported that on 22 October Budapest university students organized a demonstration expressing support for the Polish developments. It was attended by tens of thousands of people and their slogans were “independence, freedom, democracy”.⁷

The Chinese delegation was not familiar with the Hungarian events, and they were briefed on the deteriorating situation by Khrushchev himself after witnessing a phone call between the First Secretary of the CPSU and Marshal Georgy Zhukov who reported a mass riot on 23 October and forwarded the request of the Hungarian regime to mobilize

5 Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 150.

6 Zhu, *1956 – Mao's China and the Hungarian Revolution*, 137.

7 “Cable from the Chinese Embassy in Hungary, ‘The 8th Plenum of the Polish Party Central Committee Has Met with a Great Respons in Hungary,’ 23 October 1956,” accessed 25 May, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119971>.

the Soviet military forces stationed outside Hungary.⁸ Khrushchev and the Presidium members agreed to send in the Soviet forces. The Soviet military entered the Hungarian capital with 6000 soldiers and 700 tanks on the dawn of 24 October.⁹ After hearing this, Liu Shaoqi immediately made a telephone call to Mao to inform him on the situation in Budapest. Consequently, the Chairman received the news on the Hungarian uprising almost simultaneously with Moscow. From this point on, Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) paid close attention to the Hungarian crisis due to domestic and international considerations. The Chairman was interested whether the newly (24 October) appointed Prime Minister of Hungary, reformist communist Imre Nagy, had the ability to restore order in Hungary just like Gomulka did in Poland. Without determining this, the CCP leadership did not form an official position on the nature of the Hungarian events.

On 24 October, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were invited to a plenary session of the CPSU Presidium held at the Kremlin. The second man of China, Liu, loyally stuck to Mao's agenda and argued that the tensions between the Soviet Union and Poland stemmed from Moscow's "big-power chauvinism."¹⁰ On the same day, the Chinese embassy in Hungary sent a cable to Beijing stating that "yesterday's anti-Soviet demonstration turned into counterrevolutionary rebellion at eleven o'clock in the evening."¹¹ This was the first time a Chinese source called the Hungarian crisis counterrevolutionary in nature. Two days later, another cable from Budapest highlighted the increasing seriousness of the Hungarian uprising, reporting about "wild rattle of gunfire [that] did not cease the whole night."¹² However, these cables were not enough for the CCP leadership to induce a change in its stance – Mao still thought that the Soviets made an error and mismanaged their relations with weaker Communist satellite states.

On the evening of 29 October, Liu Shaoqi conveyed the message of Mao to the Soviet leaders that they should adopt a reformed policy toward other socialist states. He suggested not to interfere with other partner countries' internal affairs and recommended the high-level Soviet comrades to follow the five principles of *pancha shila* in handling with them. (This concept was introduced by a joint statement between India and China in June 1954. The five principles were the following: (1) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, (2) non-aggression, (3) non-interference in another country's internal affairs, (4) equal and mutual benefit, and (5) peaceful coexistence¹³). The two sides agreed on these basic principles and Khrushchev ordered the immediate drafting of a new Soviet

8 Zhu, *1956 – Mao's China and the Hungarian Revolution*, 199.

9 Walder, *China Under Mao – A Revolution Derailed*, 133.

10 Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 152.

11 "Cable from the Chinese Embassy in Hungary, 'Summary of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion Taking Place in the Hungarian Capital,' 24 October 1956," accessed 27 May, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119972>.

12 "Cable from the Chinese Embassy in Hungary, 'The Situation in the Hungarian Capital Following the Outbreak of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion,' 26 October 1956," accessed 27 May, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119973>.

13 Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 154.

declaration. This official government declaration became known as the “Principles of Development and Further Strengthening of Friendship and Cooperation between the USSR and Other Socialist Countries” and was approved and issued by the CPSU’s Presidium on 30 October in order to stop the violent riots in Hungary that, at that time, already spiraled out of control. The key sentence of this document must be highlighted: “Believing that the further presence of Soviet Army units in Hungary can serve as a cause for even greater deterioration of the situation, the Soviet Government has given instructions to its military command *to withdraw* [my emphasis] the Soviet Army units from Budapest as soon as this is recognized as necessary by the Hungarian Government.”¹⁴ In addition, Khrushchev requested his special envoys in Budapest (Anastas Mikoyan and Mikhail Suslov) to transmit the declaration to the Hungarian government as an effort of peacemaking. At this point of time, the Soviets genuinely thought that this conciliatory gesture would lead to the cessation of fighting in Hungary. Along with the Chinese side, they also underestimated the severity of the situation.

As we can see, at first the Chinese were sympathetic to the Eastern European satellite states’ claim for more independence (within the political and ideological limits of Communism), and they heavily criticized and lectured the Kremlin elite. However, after getting to know two reports on 30 October, Mao fundamentally reconsidered his position on the Hungarian crisis. Firstly, he received a special report by the chief Hungarian correspondent of the *People’s Daily*, Hu Jibang, who wrote that “reactionary forces, with the support of international imperialists, were doing everything possible to overthrow the Hungarian [Communist] government.”¹⁵ Secondly, the Chinese delegation was allowed to have access to the secret cables of special Soviet envoys (Mikoyan and Suslov) who described not only an anti-Soviet, but a bona fide anti-Communist atmosphere in Budapest.¹⁶ Liu Shaoqi immediately phoned Mao and briefed him on the cables. After Mao consulted with the enlarged session of the CCP’s Politburo, he reached a conclusion that the potential of a “reactionary restoration” exists in Hungary due to a major “international imperialist plot.”¹⁷ The Chairman therefore ordered Liu Shaoqi via telegram to express his opposition to the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Hungary. On the evening of the same day (30 October) Liu repeated Mao’s stance to the Soviet Presidium members, however, the Soviets opposed the Chinese position given that they had already reached a consensus on the withdrawal of the troops and issued an official government declaration.

On 31 October, when the Chinese delegation arrived at the airport to return to Beijing, Khrushchev informed Liu Shaoqi that the Soviet Presidium decided to change its

14 “Principles of Development and Further Strengthening of Friendship and Cooperation between the USSR and Other Socialist Countries,” accessed 27 May, 2015, <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1956soviet-coop1.html>.

15 Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 155.

16 Zhu, *1956 – Mao’s China and the Hungarian Revolution*, 169.

17 Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 156.

position. Instead of a retreat, the Soviet military was authorized to use force to suppress the Hungarian revolt in order to defend socialism. What was the reason of the reversal of the Soviets' policy toward Hungary? Did the Chinese play a crucial role in their decision making process? Scholars who extensively covered this subject arrived to diametrically opposed conclusions concerning the case: on the one hand, Shen Zhihua argues that the Chinese delegation's involvement was *the* decisive factor, while on the other hand, Péter Vámos holds the view that the Chinese played no role whatsoever in the Kremlin's decision.¹⁸

In my view both scholars are wrong in their assessments. Vámos uncovered that the Chinese ambassador did not know a thing about the decision of the second Soviet intervention. Also, he argued that due to technical problems in the telegraph communication, Beijing did not receive any cables from the Chinese embassy in Budapest between 28 and 31 October.¹⁹ Although these facts are true, his reasoning is spurious: as I explained, Mao used two other sources and did not make a decision on supporting the Soviet intervention based on the diplomatic cables coming from Hungary.

Shen Zhihua's exaggeration of the influence of the Chinese delegation on the Soviet leaders is also highly problematic. There were much more important factors to be considered by Khrushchev than Mao's take on the Hungarian events. The first one is the Suez crisis that started on 27 October and unfolded simultaneously with the Hungarian revolution. Khrushchev stated that "if we depart from Hungary, it will encourage the Americans, English, and French – the imperialists," and warned that "besides Egypt, we will give them also Hungary."²⁰ The second one is the United States' stance on Hungary: they did not look on Hungary as a military ally according to US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' speech delivered on 27 October.²¹ This statement defused the Soviet fears that the USA would come to aid Hungary if Moscow intervened militarily. In addition to the two international factors, there was a domestic Hungarian variable as well: the situation further deteriorated when Prime Minister Imre Nagy proclaimed the restoration of a multiparty system on 30 October.²² I consider these three elements more relevant for the Soviets than the weight of Chairman Mao's opinion. Interestingly, Vámos dismissed Shen's point using a different, perhaps more colorful reasoning that is worth contemplating nonetheless: "This argument is probably an attempt to cover up the fact that the Chinese

18 Zhu, *1956 – Mao's China and the Hungarian Revolution*, 173.

19 Péter Vámos, "A magyar forradalom szerepe a Kínai Kommunista Párt politikájában." [The Role of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in the Policymaking of the Chinese Communist Party], in *Az 1956-os forradalom visszhangja a szovjet tömb országáiban*, [The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Soviet Bloc Countries' Reactions and Repercussions] eds. János M. Rainer and Katalin Somlai (Budapest: The Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, 2007), 157.

20 Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split – Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 59.

21 Csaba Békés, "The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Great Powers," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 13 (1997): 56.

22 Zhu, *1956 – Mao's China and the Hungarian Revolution*, 174.

merely conformed to the Soviets' decisions, because Mao did not feel the time yet right for an open confrontation with Moscow."²³ In sum, my view is that the Chinese influence was one of the many factors, and could be categorized among the less important ones.

On 1 November, Imre Nagy turned to the Chinese as a last resort to prevent a second Soviet invasion. He summoned to his office the Chinese ambassador to Hungary, Hao Deqing, in order to ask him (and indirectly Mao Zedong himself) to take a stand against the Soviet military intervention. The Hungarian Prime Minister was clearly not aware of the fact that the Chairman fundamentally shifted his position. Nagy still considered the Chinese as advocates for a more independent domestic policy within the socialist bloc. Such a false view was prevalent in Hungary, documented by the *Irodalmi Újság* ("Literary Gazette") which reported a day later that "the West and the East are on our side, America has proclaimed faith in our cause as clearly as have powerful nations like China and India."²⁴ A Chinese cable from Budapest sent on the very same day to Beijing also described the wishful thinking of the Hungarians: "The third edition of the Hungarian paper *Igazság* ('Justice') today published in bold letters: 'According to news from Warsaw, China views the Soviet army's intervention in the Hungarian revolution as imperialist aggression'."²⁵

According to a cable sent by the Chinese embassy in Budapest, Nagy stated that "we are communists, we want social democracy. [...] The Soviet army intervened with tanks and other weapons. This led to the situation where the entire people turned against the Soviet Union. [...] The people demand as one that the Soviet army withdraw from Hungary."²⁶ The Chinese Embassy concluded that the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party "had degenerated and that Nagy was especially suspicious politically. He is at the very least a careerist, which has become apparent judging by his words and action after the outbreak of the crisis."²⁷

On the morning of 4 November, the suppression of the Hungarian revolution began. The Soviet troops entered Budapest and in the following days they killed approximately 2500 Hungarians. On 7 November, a new Soviet-backed government led by János Kádár was set in place that also satisfied the expectations of the Chinese leadership.

As we have seen, Mao's stance on the Polish and Hungarian case was identical with the Kremlin's position only in the beginning. He saw Poland's aspirations for autonomy

23 Péter Vámos, *Sino-Hungarian Relations and the 1956 Revolution* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2006), 38.

24 János Radványi, "The Hungarian Revolution and the Hundred Flowers Campaign," *The China Quarterly* 43 (1970): 122.

25 "Cable from the Chinese Embassy in Hungary, 'The Hungarian Paper Justice Incorrectly Interpreted Our Statement,' 2 November 1956," accessed 1 June, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119975>.

26 "Cable from the Chinese Embassy in Hungary, 'On the Meeting Between Imre Nagy and Ambassador Hao Deqing,' 2 November 1956," accessed 1 June, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119976>.

27 Zhu, *1956 – Mao's China and the Hungarian Revolution*, 177.

an adequate tool to use against the Soviet Union and question the default pattern of big-power chauvinism of the country. However, the Hungarian events eventually played out differently, because the leadership in Budapest failed to restore order after the anti-Communist uprising. When the Chinese leadership realized that Nagy is not as skillful as Gomulka, and the unity of the Eastern bloc was at stake, they immediately changed their position and stood behind the Soviets (e.g. the description of the Hungarian events by the Chinese *People's Daily* is rather telling: first, the paper called the case a “riot”, then an “incident”, and finally, in early November, “counterrevolutionary” in nature²⁸). Advocating Moscow’s military invasion indicated that Mao Zedong considered the integrity of the Communist camp more important to his interest than competing with the Soviet Union – at least at that particular point in time.²⁹

The Impact of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution on Chinese Domestic Policies

The Chinese delegation arrived in Beijing on 1 November and only a few hours later a CCP Politburo Standing Committee meeting was convened to hear the reports of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping on the Polish and Hungarian cases. Later that month (10-15 November: second plenary session of the CCP’s Central Committee), the Chinese leadership discussed and summarized the lessons of the Hungarian uprising. Mao concluded that:

the fundamental problem with some Eastern European countries is that they have not done a good job of waging class struggle and have left so many reactionaries at large; nor have they trained their proletarians in class struggle to help them learn how to draw a clear distinction between the people and the enemy, between right and wrong, and between materialism and idealism. And now they have to reap what they have sown; they have brought the fire upon their own heads.³⁰

The Chairman heavily criticized the weak Hungarian leadership, but also highlighted three areas in which the Soviets contributed to the escalation of the Hungarian crisis. First, Moscow’s big-power chauvinism generated tensions between the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries. Second, Khrushchev’s secret speech led to profound confusion among the leadership throughout Eastern Europe. Third, the Kremlin did not have a correct understanding of the Polish and Hungarian riots and misread the events: Khrushchev mistakenly planned to intervene in Warsaw, and equally mistakenly wanted to withdraw the Soviet troops from Hungary.³¹

28 Ibid., 214.

29 Ibid., 192.

30 Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 159.

31 Ibid., 159.

In order to avoid similar incidents in China, Liu Shaoqi suggested to avoid bureaucratic mismanagement in the CCP's leadership and expressed his view that the speed of industrialization should be slower. Zhou Enlai also addressed the unbalanced economic policies in Poland and Hungary that contributed to the crises. He recommended to raise the people's standards of living thereby focusing more on agriculture and light industry, and agreed with Liu to slow down the pace of industrialization.³² Mao accepted the suggestions and readjusted the economic plan for 1957.

However, the Chairman was more concerned with the ideological and political implications of the events in Eastern Europe. Fearing that similar revolts could break out in China, he adopted a peaceful, soft method to guide the political thoughts of various groups and displace incorrect ideas. In order to relieve tensions in China, he channeled social dissatisfaction into the Hundred Flowers campaign (1956-57) and an inner-party rectification campaign. Mao stated: "From now on, all problems among the people and inside the party are to be solved by means of rectification, by means of criticism and self-criticism, and not by force."³³ The Hundred Flowers campaigns allowed greater freedom of expression and independent thinking as a tool to monitor the consciousness of the Chinese intellectuals while the rectification campaign dealt mainly with the problem of sectarianism and bureaucratism within the CCP.³⁴ These policies were clearly influenced by the Hungarian revolution. Lawrence R. Sullivan goes as far as to say that the Hundred Flowers campaign "was a reaction to the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution."³⁵

Although Mao expected that the Chinese intellectuals and non-Communist politicians would praise the CCP and their confidence in the Party would be soon consolidated, a flood of criticism ensued and the leadership failed to suppress the dissenters. Given that the Chairman's love child, the Hundred Flowers campaign turned out to be a spectacular failure, party criticism was labeled as a counterrevolutionary activity starting from June 1957. Such labeling signified the origin of the notorious Anti-Rightist campaign (1957-58), a vicious counterattack against revisionism and rightism, during which more than half a million people were punished "ranging from the rather mild penalty of a reduction in pay and rank for 'ordinary rightists' and 'middle rightists', to more severe retributions of dismissal from the Party and from employment and/or sentencing to labor camps to undergo 'thought reform' and 'reform through labor' for 'extreme rightists'."³⁶ Mao underestimated the strength of the intellectual class to disrupt socialism, but after this bitter realization, he believed that he acted as the Hungarians should have handled their domestic opposition in 1956.³⁷

32 Zhu, *1956 – Mao's China and the Hungarian Revolution*, 203-06.

33 Ibid., 221.

34 Ibid., 246.

35 Lawrence R. Sullivan, *Historical Dictionary of the People's Republic of China* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2007), 260.

36 Ibid., 70.

37 Vámos, "A magyar forradalom szerepe a Kínai Kommunista Párt politikájában," 165.

Mao Zedong watched the actions of the Chinese intelligentsia with increasing suspicion after he examined the details of the Hungarian crisis. In one of his speeches delivered on 27 February, 1957, he talked about the influence of a famous Hungarian forum for intellectuals, the Petőfi Circle: “Hungary’s university students are 60 percent the sons and daughters of workers and peasants. The sons and daughters of the workers and peasants are big on going on strike, big on demonstrating, listening to the orders of the Petőfi Circle.”³⁸ As Roderick MacFarquhar put it, “Mao became quite obsessive about the Petőfi Circle syndrome.”³⁹ Following the logic of the Hungarian example, Mao thought that the driving force behind a counterrevolution is the intelligentsia. For him, the reactionary elements denoted the Petőfi Circle itself.

However, the Chairman learned the lesson of the Hungarian revolution and did not surrender any measure of ideological and political control, so nobody could effectively challenge the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. In March, he confidently proclaimed at a conference for party cadres that “China is not Hungary; here the Communist Party and the People’s Government enjoy considerable reputation among the people.”⁴⁰ In another speech, he added that “big riots like those that took place in Hungary won’t happen in China. Perhaps only a few will make a fuss here and there and advocate big democracy.” Regarding the treatment of the rightist and reactionary elements, Mao proposed a rather simple method: “If there is anyone who wants to use big democracy of whatever form to oppose the Communist system, to overthrow the leadership of the Communist party, we should exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat on him.”⁴¹

The records of meetings between Chinese, Hungarian and other leaders also shed light on the CCP’s understanding of the Eastern European events of 1956. When Premier Zhou Enlai and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru met in December 1956, Zhou stressed that the “Hungarian leaders were biased in the process of correcting their past errors. [...] Hungarian reactionary forces aided by Western countries carried out subversive activities, deceived the masses, and led the masses to turn to Western countries.”⁴² In January 1957, a Chinese government delegation led by Zhou Enlai visited Budapest at Prime Minister János Kádár’s request. The main purpose of the visit was to show Chinese support for the new Kádár regime. During the meeting Zhou told the Hungarians that “the characteristics of the Hungarian and Polish events were different. Gomulka’s leadership is fundamentally correct, while events in Hungary played out quite differently.” He emphasized that “the

38 “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People, 27 February, 1957,” in *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao – From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward*, ed. Roderick MacFarquhar et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1989), 144.

39 Ibid., 144.

40 “On Ideological Work, 19 March, 1957,” *ibid.*, 338.

41 Zhu, 1956 – *Mao’s China and the Hungarian Revolution*, 225.

42 “Cable from Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong and the Central Committee ‘Discussion with Nehru on the Hungary Issue,’ 3 December, 1956,” accessed 4 June, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116534>.

situation here could not have been solved without the Soviet troops.”⁴³

Arguably the most fascinating primary source turned out to be a meeting between Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Münnich and Mao Zedong in Beijing in the spring of 1959. Mao described the Hundred Flowers campaign the following way to the Hungarian delegation: “The Hungarian events happened in 1956, and in 1957 we followed your example, *creating* [my emphasis] more than 10 000 small-scale Hungarian events throughout the country. We forced the right-wing elements to strike wildly. These right-wing elements were the same as your Petőfi Circles.”⁴⁴ The Chairman made a particular mention of the Wuhan incident (1957). In Wuhan, students and professors attempted to change the discussions into street riots in order to capture the Party building of the city. However, learning from the Hungarian events, the local Party leadership retained full control, mobilized the workers and crushed the uprising in a two-day fight without calling in the army units. Mao referred to the Wuhan incident as “little Hungary”.⁴⁵ In his annual report of 1957, the Hungarian Ambassador to Beijing reported to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry about the clash in Wuhan (and other cities, such as Shanghai), and highlighted that the protesters frequently mentioned Hungary in their slogans.⁴⁶ The Chairman told Münnich that he urged Khrushchev to take military action against the Hungarian counter-revolutionists and claimed that he had dismissed the possibility of any armed intervention from the Western powers, let alone the USA, since America was a “paper tiger”.⁴⁷ In sum, the Chairman told his Hungarian counterparts that they provided good service to the international Communist camp and that the Chinese side profited a great deal from their experiences.

Conclusion

The 1956 Hungarian crisis had a profound impact on the orientation of Chinese domestic policies from late 1956 to the end of 1957. As Zhu Dandan rightly put it, the Hungarian connection is “under-treated in historiography”⁴⁸. However, after the Hungarian events, Mao adopted increasingly radical policies in the name of ongoing class struggle and continuous revolution. The Eastern European developments of 1956 also strengthened the belief of the CCP leadership that China should occupy a more prominent position within the international Communist movement.

Although during the Hungarian uprising China did not openly confront the Soviet

43 “Minutes of a Meeting between the Hungarian and Chinese Delegations in Budapest, January 16, 1957,” in *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, ed. Csaba Békés et al. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002), 497-498.

44 Vámos, *Sino-Hungarian Relations and the 1956 Revolution*, 26, footnote 112.

45 Radványi, “The Hungarian Revolution and the Hundred Flowers Campaign,” 128.

46 Vámos, *Sino-Hungarian Relations and the 1956 Revolution*, 25.

47 Radványi, “The Hungarian Revolution and the Hundred Flowers Campaign,” 126.

48 Dandan Zhu, “The Hungarian Revolution and the Origins of China’s Great Leap Policies, 1956–57,” *Cold War History* 12 (2012): 465.

Union, because Mao considered bloc unity more important than the ideological differences between the two countries, the events after 1956 indicated an ever deepening rift between Beijing and Moscow. The Hundred Flowers campaign convinced Mao that “not only was de-Stalinization incorrect but, paradoxically, China also needed more political and economic development along revolutionary Stalinist lines.”⁴⁹ Starting from 1957, the ideological development of the Soviet Union and China took fundamentally different directions. For the first time in history, Mao made a clear distinction between the stance of the CCP and the CPSU: “the so-called de-Stalinization is nothing other than de-Marxification, or revisionism.”⁵⁰ After the Soviets abandoned the banner of Stalin, the CCP leadership felt the duty to play a central role in advocating true Marxism-Leninism. Thus, ultimately the 1956 Hungarian revolution indirectly influenced the relationship between China and the Soviet Union and contributed to the factors that eventually lead to the Sino-Soviet split. **GPR**

49 Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split – Cold War in the Communist World*, 47.

50 Vámos, *Sino-Hungarian Relations and the 1956 Revolution*, 24.

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