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Zhihua Shen  
Editor

# A Short History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917–1991

Translated by Yafeng Xia (Preface, and Parts II and III),  
Hongshan Li (Part I), and Xiaohong Liu (Part IV)

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## PREFACE

From the perspective of international relations, no bilateral relationship experienced so many ups and downs as that between the Soviet Union and China during the Cold War period. In the early 1950s, the two countries formed a strategic alliance based on a friendship that was described as “everlasting” and “unbreakable.” But with escalating differences and growing conflicts between the leaders of the two countries, within a mere few years the Sino-Soviet alliance collapsed. Thereafter, Sino-Soviet hostilities deepened, ultimately leading to armed border conflicts in 1969. In the 1970s, China adjusted its diplomatic strategy to normalize relations with the United States. Not only did the correlation of power during the Cold War confrontation undergo fundamental changes but the ideological and political conflicts became more pronounced. The all-out showdown between the two nations was a primary factor in Cold War international relations prior to the mid-1980s. When China and the Soviet Union finally normalized relations in the late 1980s, almost simultaneously the global Cold War came to an abrupt end.

The evolution of Sino-Soviet relations is closely related to China’s developmental path. Ever since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) pursued the Soviet socialist model to develop its economy, thereby establishing a highly centralized mandatory state planned economic system. Politically, the PRC system followed in the tracks of Soviet proletarian dictatorship and class struggle. But by the late 1950s, when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev began to reform and adjust the Soviet political system, there was a rupture in Sino-Soviet relations. China steadfastly insisted on continuing to take the Stalinist road, reaching an apogee during the period of China’s “Cultural Revolution.” China’s “reform and opening” to the outside world in the late 1970s and the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations in the late 1980s are closely related to their respective abandonment of the Stalinist model.

This important yet tortuous historical period, which opens up numerous questions for academic research, has attracted much attention. Nonetheless,

due to the paucity of original documents (the archives in the two countries were not open to researchers) and the limitations in research methodology (scholars mainly relied on political science and international relations approaches), little work of academic value was published during the Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s and with the rise of the “New Cold War History” research approach, during the past decade, several Western scholars, such as Lorenz Lüthi, Sergey Radchenko, Austin Jersild, and Jeremy Friedman, among others, have explored the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations during the Cold War period based on newly released archival sources and have published works of significant academic value.<sup>1</sup>

Within China, due to prolonged ideological restrictions coupled with the lack of access to archival materials, academic research on Sino-Soviet relations remained a “forbidden area,” and publications on the subject were considered “revisionist political texts.” This situation gradually began to change in the 1980s, and with China’s “ideological emancipation” and the declassification of primary archival sources in both China and the Soviet Union, a new generation of Chinese scholars began to open a window to the history of Sino-Soviet relations.

All the authors in this volume, myself, together with Li Danhui, Niu Jun, and Yang Kuisong, were born in the 1950s. We personally experienced and were deeply affected by the legacy of the “revolutionary era.” For us, our studies on the history of Sino-Soviet relations are not only an academic activity; they also represent our responses to the intellectual and political issues of the time. It is precisely our concern about such “intellectual issues” that differentiates our work from that of Western scholars.

In the mid-1990s, together with Chen Jian, Niu Dayong, Zhang Baijia, and Zhang Shuguang, we formed close bonds due to our common academic interests. During the last 20 years, we have worked together to mentor a younger generation of Cold War historians in China. The four authors in this volume approach their respective topics with great passion. Li Danhui, Niu Jun, and Yang Kuisong write about the history of Sino-Soviet relations from the perspective of Chinese diplomacy, whereas in Part II, I examine the topic from the perspective of Soviet diplomacy. Together, we frequently attended conferences, participated in trips abroad, shared documents, and debated various issues. This volume represents the fruit of our many years of academic collaboration.

The evolution in the study of Sino-Soviet relations from a “forbidden area” to producing major works attracting the attention of current Chinese leaders and resulting in excellent university textbooks is indicative of the great changes in the understanding of history taking place within mainstream Chinese society. Indeed, this book is a reflection of the academic pursuits by Chinese historians of our generation.

From an academic perspective, our work is characterized by the following:

First, we have made use of declassified and published and unpublished archival sources from Russia, China (including Taiwan), and the United States, as well as eyewitness accounts and oral history materials (including reports by three generations of Russian-language interpreters for Mao Zedong). In addi-

tion, we have made great efforts to obtain all available Russian historical materials. During the last 20 years, we have been closely following the progression of declassification and the availability of Russian archival documents, have sought both official and private Chinese historical materials, and have used and promoted the opening of the Chinese archives.

Second, in order to restore the original face of this history, we offer a series of new perspectives and interpretations of many well-known historical events, such as the formation of the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty, the characteristics of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1950s, the Chinese evaluation of the 1956 Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and the Sino-Soviet border negotiations, among others. Although many of our views are still open to debate, they represent a reflection of our current level of understanding. Every generation writes its own history, and this work exemplifies the interpretations of this history by members of our generation. Nevertheless, as scholars, we are making great efforts to offer “value-free” judgments.

Third, this book covers 74 years in the history of Sino-Soviet interactions, that is, from 1917 to 1991. It proceeds chronologically as well as historically. Such a presentation is relatively rare in the currently available Western-language sources on this topic. The main story line is the evolution of the changes in CCP-CPSU relations. Prior to 1949, CCP-CPSU relations and Sino-Soviet state relations proceeded in tandem but at various times they also intersected. After the CCP seized national power in China in 1949, the two relationships merged. Since then, although Sino-Soviet state relations underwent varying periods of alliance, honeymoon, cooperation, divergence, rupture, and conflict, CCP-CPSU party-to-party relations remained dominant. Only when Sino-Soviet state relations were gradually restored in the 1980s did the two sides realize that the party should not take the place of the state and Sino-Soviet state-to-state relations should dominate the bilateral relationship. In effect, this is a more accurate meaning of Sino-Soviet “normalization.”

This book is structured on the basis of the above perspective: Part I covers 32 years (1917–1948), whereas Parts II, III, and IV cover only 43 years (1948–1991). This framework better reflects the historical stages, highlighting the dominant role and then the changing status of CCP-CPSU relations.

Fourth, all the authors in this volume are historians, and they have no formal training in international relations theory. Thus, the focus of this book is on the historical process. Nevertheless, the history of international relations and the theory of international relations are closely related. Studies based on the theory of international relations are premised on historical studies, and likewise historical studies cannot be divorced from theory. In this regard, this book attempts to combine both theory and process. For one, we provide a new analytical framework to understand Sino-Soviet normalization based on three factors: the historical structure of state-to-state relations, domestic politics, and China-US-USSR triangular relations. This framework represents a novel and creative innovation in current scholarship. Additionally, in our attempt to analyze the fundamental causes for the rupture of the Sino-Soviet alliance, we seek

to break out of the structural dichotomy between “ideology” and “national interest/power” and we propose that there existed a “structural defect” in Sino-Soviet relations—immature and illogical state-to-state relations within the socialist alliance. This often manifested itself in the way that interparty relations controlled state-to-state relations, in how ideology dominated the national interest, and in how sovereignty and equality were subject to “internationalism.” This structure led to both the fragility and the turbulence in the socialist alliance during the Cold War.

The Chinese version of the book was first published in 2007 by Xinhua Publishing House. Within less than one year, it was reprinted four times and it won numerous book awards. It attracted much attention from Chinese scholars as well as Chinese political leaders. Since then, due to the more recent release of many archival collections on Sino-Soviet relations, we made major revisions and published a 2011 edition (a later 2016 edition was issued with additional minor revisions) both published by Social Sciences Academic Press. This volume is a condensed translation of the 2016 Chinese edition.

So that the sources will be more accessible to Western readers, we have substituted the Chinese-language footnotes with the relevant English-language literature. Detailed *pinyin* (Chinese romanization) footnotes can be found in Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership, 1945–1959: A New History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015) and Danhui Li and Yafeng Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959–1973: A New History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018). For those in our field who read Chinese, the original Chinese-language sources can be found in the Chinese version of the book. I thank Lexington Books, *The International History Review*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, and *Modern China Studies* for permission to reprint some of the materials in this new volume.

We wish to thank the three translators of the volume: Xia Yafeng (Preface, and Parts II and III), Li Hongshan (Part I), and Liu Xiaohong (Part IV). We are especially grateful to Nancy Hearst of the Fairbank Center at Harvard for her very careful and professional editing of the manuscript, and we are indebted to the editors at the Social Sciences Academic Press and Palgrave Macmillan for facilitating the entire publication process.

Shanghai, China  
August 2018

Zhihua Shen

## NOTE

1. Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962–1967* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford: and Stanford University Press, 2009); Austin Jersild, *The Sino-Soviet Alliance: An International History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AUCP (b)	All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
CAS	Chinese Academy of Science
CC	Central Committee
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CMC	Central Military Commission
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPV	Chinese People's Volunteers
<i>CWIHP</i>	<i>Cold War International History Project</i>
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
<i>FBIS-China</i>	Foreign Broadcast Information Service-China
<i>FRUS</i>	Foreign Relations of the United States
FYP	Five-Year Plan
ILD	International Liaison Department
JCP	Japanese Communist Party
KSČ	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
LCY	League of Communists of Yugoslavia
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NA	National Archives
NSCF	National Security Council Files
PCF	French Communist Party
PHP	Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security
PKI	Communist Party of Indonesia
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany
TFD	Third Front Defense
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions