

## The East is Red? Images of China in East Germany and Poland through the Sino-Soviet Split

by

David G. Tompkins

For the population of East Germany, the spring of 1960 foreshadowed a significant blow to the notion of a unified socialist world moving inevitably forward towards a glorious future. At the GDR's high-profile annual agricultural exhibition in Markkleeberg that year, the Chinese pavilion extolled its "People's Communes" as the ultimate stage in the collectivization process and one of the key aspects of its radical "Great Leap Forward." After a decade of relentlessly celebrating China as a great friend and model to their societies, Central European Communists had become increasingly anxious about tensions between China and the Soviet Bloc over ideology and foreign policy, and this disagreement on collectivization proved the tipping point in the GDR. The Party leadership publicly disagreed with Chinese policy and began a gradual and fraught process of transforming the widely propagated positive image of China from highly-prized friend and model to that of pariah, with great effects on the worldview disseminated by Party officials among the population. To evoke the then-ubiquitous Chinese mass song *The East is Red*, was China in fact still communist—and if not, what did this mean for citizens of the communist world?<sup>1</sup>

More generally, such representations of friends and enemies played key roles in the worldview constructed by Central European Communists during the early Cold War. Party members and sympathizers used these figures, based in reality but interpreted to serve ideological goals, to help define and develop their ideal vision for society and claim legitimacy for their program. They carefully formulated these profiles of the "other" and encouraged citizens to emulate or reject them. Such images were pervasive in everyday life through the press and other popular media, and proved crucial to the Parties' attempts to mobilize and influence their populations. For citizens, these omnipresent representations formed part of the imagined world of the new socialist reality and shaped their lived experience of communism in Central Europe.

The many and diverse members of the socialist camp itself offered a broad palette of friends, perhaps none more impressive than the People's Republic of China (PRC), which occupied an important but then increasingly problem-

---

<sup>1</sup> The song was well known throughout the Communist world; its title in German is *Der Osten erglöhht*.

atic place in the symbolic world of Poland and East Germany, two representative examples within the Soviet Bloc. China was initially, of course, a stunning addition to the brotherhood of new socialist states that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War: that the world's most populous country had gone red was depicted as a great achievement and celebrated relentlessly. As these fledgling Central European Communist regimes struggled to gain control over their populations and build a new social order, they used China as an example to motivate their citizens, many of whom were lukewarm to the Communist project at best. And indeed, the PRC proved to be an effective and inspiring symbol throughout the 1950s, as many Poles and East Germans accepted the heroic representation of the Chinese as admirable representatives of the Communist world. Furthermore, the Polish and East German parties looked to the PRC to garner support for each country's particular insecurity with respect to national borders as well as acceptance on the international stage more generally. But given Mao's increasing resistance to Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization efforts and the pursuit of "peaceful coexistence" with the West, and with China's radical turn towards a more aggressive foreign policy and its domestic "Great Leap Forward," the ideological differences between the USSR and China grew ever larger. By 1960, the dispute became more public and acrimonious. In the following years, harsh polemics emerged between the two countries that swept up Communist Parties throughout the world. After enjoying an increasing degree of autonomy from the USSR in the years following Stalin's death, East German and Polish leaders aligned themselves ever more closely with the Soviet Union and began to radically revise their public image of the PRC from that of an ally to an enemy, thereby undermining the fundamental precept of the inexorable success of socialism and producing an intractable dissonance among officials and throughout society.

This article analyzes the construction, dissemination, and reception of this evolving portrayal of China in these two members of the Soviet Bloc. While much interesting research on the high politics and diplomacy in the relationship between China and the countries of the Soviet Bloc has been conducted, little has been written on how the image of the PRC circulated in Central European societies and how it was used as a political and pedagogical tool.<sup>2</sup> This article explores these important latter dimensions and argues that the repre-

---

<sup>2</sup> A notable exception is JOACHIM KRÜGER: *Das China-Bild in der DDR der 50er Jahre*, in: *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 25 (2001), pp. 257-273, but it fails to engage in a deeper analysis of the dissemination of this representation. The more general literature on the Sino-Soviet split is large and growing. See especially MINGJIANG LI: *Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split. Ideological Dilemma*, New York 2012; SERGEY RADCHENKO: *Two Suns in the Heavens. The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967*, Washington, D.C. 2009; LORENZ LÜTHI: *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, Princeton 2008; CHEN JIAN: *Mao's China and the Cold War*, Chapel Hill 2001; ODD ARNE WESTAD (ed.): *Brothers in Arms. The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1964*, Stanford 1998.

sentation of the PRC made up a crucial pillar of the ideological foundation for Communist rule in 1950s Central Europe due to the ascribed importance of China's presence in the Communist camp and the role it played as an instructive example to Poles and East Germans. Consequently, the disappearance of this key legitimating symbol in the 1960s sowed confusion and undermined faith in communism among the populations of the two countries. To assess attempts to create and propagate this image, a wide range of sources will be considered, including Party and state documents, the materials of the mass organizations, newspapers and other publications, and information relating to festivals, concert tours, demonstrations, public events, exhibitions, and exchanges and delegations of all kinds. Throughout, the reception of and reaction to this image will be analyzed where possible through the voices of rank-and-file Party members and ordinary citizens found in these documents.

## 1 Establishing and Introducing a Positive Representation

Throughout the Soviet Bloc, an unsurprising flurry of positive press coverage celebrated the declaration of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949 as a huge victory for the Communist world. The PRC's subsequent military support of North Korea also received extensive and favorable attention. In general, China was lionized as a vast country with untold potential that would benefit the socialist cause. Press reports and official speeches depicted it as dynamic and willing to fight for the success of communism at home and abroad. For the fledgling regimes in East Germany and Poland, this victory and example was seen as an important confirmation of their own paths and a motivational symbol for their populations. The Party leaderships around 1950 thus laid the groundwork for a useful representation of a powerful China that would serve as an appealing model.

The East German Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) celebrated China's entry into the socialist firmament with particular enthusiasm, and this propaganda campaign received a sympathetic response from Party members and much of society. The SED pointed to a number of meaningful similarities, including the two countries' founding dates in early October 1949, the analogous existence of "national" territory dominated by the imperialist enemy, and their respective positions on the frontiers of the socialist world. Already in 1950, the Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend, FDJ) sent a representative to China who returned after 40 days to give speeches and publish articles intended to motivate young Germans to emulate "the heroic Chinese people [whose] fight is an example and impetus to work more energetically for the defense of peace and the unity

of a peaceful, democratic Germany.”<sup>3</sup> At the end of May of that year, 700 000 East Germans and 30 000 West Germans met at the “Germany-Meeting” (Deutschlandtreffen) and carried a sea of Mao portraits during their main parade.<sup>4</sup>

The first major East German initiative to elaborate and propagate a positive and politically useful representation of China occurred in June 1951 during and around the ambitious “Month of German-Chinese Friendship.” The SED and other mass organizations blanketed the country with events to promote the guiding themes in this image campaign, and portraits of Mao were omnipresent.<sup>5</sup> Film screenings took place all over the GDR, including *Sonne über China* (Sun over China), seen by 6000 in Chemnitz, and *Siegreiches China* (Victorious China), which in Halle alone appeared in seven cinemas and garnered nearly 53 000 viewers.<sup>6</sup> Officials distributed tens of thousands of books and posters, as well as three million pamphlets and three million flags. Postcards and stamps were made and records of the Chinese national anthem produced.<sup>7</sup> The opening celebration in Berlin on 6 June 1951 included speeches and the reading of works by Stalin and Mao, interspersed with mass songs from both the GDR and China; so many spectators came that thousands had to listen to the event over loudspeakers on the street.<sup>8</sup>

After appearing at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and the Hermitage in Leningrad, a major exhibition of 800 works of Chinese art, including many created in 1949 and 1950, came to Berlin for the summer of 1951 as part of the “Month” celebrations and drew hundreds of thousands of visitors.<sup>9</sup> In an introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue, Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl claimed that “Chinese artists are today taking part in the moral education of the nation in such a great and intensive manner, that they are awakening the consciousness of society for the transformation of an unjust capitalist world. Let the exhibition in this sense communicate joy, encouragement, and

<sup>3</sup> Letter from the FDJ to the Neue Demokratische Jugendliga Chinas, March 1951, in: Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (in the following: SAPMO-BArch), DY 24 (Freie Deutsche Jugend), 2402.

<sup>4</sup> RAINER ECKERT: Führer der Arbeiterklasse. Der visuelle Kult um die “Liebe” der Genossen, in: GERHARD PAUL (ed.): Das Jahrhundert der Bilder. 1949 bis heute, Göttingen 2008, pp. 56-63, here p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> FRITZ JENSEN: Die Brücke von Berlin nach Peking, Berlin 1951, pp. 6, 48-50.

<sup>6</sup> Es lebe die Volksrepublik China, unser mächtiger Freund! Einige Tatsachen und Argumente für Diskussionen im “Monat der deutsch-chinesischen Freundschaft”. Landesleitung der SED Sachsen-Anhalt, Abteilung Agitation, Heft Nr. 7, Halle 1951.

<sup>7</sup> Protokoll des Sekretariats, Nr. 70, 21.05.1951, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 (Zentralkomitee der SED), J IV 2/3/197.

<sup>8</sup> Kundgebung zur Eröffnung des Monats der Deutsch-Chinesischen Freundschaft, Büro des Präsidiums des Nationalrates der Nationalen Front des Demokratischen Deutschland, 1951; JENSEN (as in footnote 5), p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> KRÜGER (as in footnote 2), p. 266.

serious lessons to Germans, and in particular to our artists.”<sup>10</sup> An informational booklet for the exhibition claimed that viewers would be deeply affected by the works, and would “be motivated for their own work and the national fight.”<sup>11</sup> Officials hoped that through exposure to the exhibition’s portrayal of China, the country would prove an example as well as a motivational tool for East Germans. To this end, the Free German Trade Union Federation (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, FDGB) devoted 100 000 Deutsche Mark<sup>12</sup> for a thoroughgoing, nation-wide effort to bring workers to Berlin to view the exhibition and included with the tickets a booklet that proclaimed: “Chinese art is for us today already an example for our own cultural development.”<sup>13</sup> These chosen workers then returned to their factories to give speeches and presentations in an effort to propagate these ideas about China and the lessons that should be drawn from them.

The FDGB made significant efforts to involve all workers in the activities of the month of celebration. For many it was the first time that they had heard about the Chinese Revolution in any detail, and thus officials took the framing and presentation of the PRC’s image quite seriously. In its organizational and planning materials, the FDGB drew clear links to what it considered the unjust oppression of West Germans: “The heroic fight of the Chinese people for the liberation of their homeland from the imperialist yoke is an example for us in the fight [...] for the unity of Germany.” From the Chinese Communists’ long struggle against Japan and the American-supported Chiang Kai-shek, East Germans were to conclude that determined resistance to the United States and Britain would result in Communist victory.<sup>14</sup> Each branch of industry propagated this heroic image of China through “friendship rallies,” meetings large and small, talks, concerts, and the like. Factories organized book discussion groups, set up small exhibitions about China in their “red corners,” and decorated their walls with photos of Mao, Chinese flags, and slogans like “the German people welcome a powerful and free China as a friend and ally

---

<sup>10</sup> Kunstaussstellung der Volksrepublik China. Staatliche Museen Berlin, Berlin 1951, pp. x, xiv.

<sup>11</sup> Kunstaussstellung der VR China. Staatliche Museen Berlin, ab. 15. Mai 1951, Dresden [1951].

<sup>12</sup> The East German currency was known officially as the “Deutsche Mark” from 1948 to 1964, then briefly as the “Mark der Deutschen Notenbank,” and from 1968 to 1990 as the “Mark der DDR.”

<sup>13</sup> Beschluss des Sekretariats des Bundesvorstandes von 29. Mai 1951 zur Besucherorganisation aus der DDR für die große Kunstaussstellung der VR China in den Staatlichen Museen Berlin, [Berlin] 1951.

<sup>14</sup> Die Festigung der Freundschaft des deutschen Volkes mit dem großen chinesischen Volk – ein Beitrag zur Stärkung des Weltfriedenslagers, p. 10, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV 2/20/116.

in the fight for peace and national unity.”<sup>15</sup> Some factories featured a cultural program that included a speech explaining “what the patriotic fight of the Chinese people for freedom teaches us for our fight for Germany’s unity,” and workers were encouraged to donate an hour or two of their wages to support China.<sup>16</sup> Pledging to work extra in recognition of the Chinese was an integral part of this campaign, as in Rostock, where the workers in one factory promised additional hours in recognition of “China’s achievements in its struggle against imperialists, capitalists, and war-mongers the world over.”<sup>17</sup> Workers at the railway station in Wiesenburg near Brandenburg unloaded 22 extra wagons, a group in Chemnitz assembled a meat grinder, and workers in a myriad of other factories worked extra shifts or raised their output in honor of the Chinese.<sup>18</sup> The celebrations also included a visit by a delegation of a dozen Chinese men and women, including nurses, soldiers, peasants, and workers, who traveled all around the GDR and interacted extensively with hundreds of thousands of workers in factories, meeting with considerable interest.<sup>19</sup> In a typical interaction, one factory in Mecklenburg gave the delegation a “rousing welcome;” the female Stakhanovite worker Liu Yin Fu became a “celebrated favorite of the GDR [who] conquered all hearts in a storm” and prompted one female textile worker in Thuringia to exclaim: “It’s as if a bit of the future has come to us with you.”<sup>20</sup>

FDGB officials claimed convincingly there was great curiosity and enthusiasm among the working population for the PRC, and furthermore that the intended message had been communicated: “Our workers make the correct conclusions about the fight for German unity against remilitarization and against the imperialist war-mongers in Germany and America.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, they believed significant interest from workers had gone untapped due to failures by officials and, although much good had been achieved during this mass

<sup>15</sup> Bericht über die Durchführung des Monats der deutsch-chinesischen Freundschaft, 27.08.1951, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 34 (FDGB), 23248; photo from Kraftwerk Chemnitz, *ibidem*, 25078.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Schilling, Industriegewerkschaft Nahrung-Genuss-Gaststätten, and Else Gundelach, Büro für Internationale Verbindungen, 15.06.1951, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 42 (Gewerkschaft Handel, Nahrung, Genuss), 643.

<sup>17</sup> Zwischenbericht FDGB Mecklenburg, 29.06.1951, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 34, 25078.

<sup>18</sup> Bericht über die Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Monats der deutsch-chinesischen Freundschaft, Juni 1951, *ibidem*, 23248.

<sup>19</sup> Der Monat der deutsch-chinesischen Freundschaft, Juni 1951, Büro des Präsidiums des Nationalrates der Nationalen Front des Demokratischen Deutschland, 1951, pp. 26, 64, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV 2/20/116; JENSEN (as in footnote 5).

<sup>20</sup> Bericht FDGB Mecklenburg, 9.07.1951, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 34, 25078; JENSEN (as in footnote 5), pp. 19-21.

<sup>21</sup> Bericht über die Durchführung des Monats der deutsch-chinesischen Freundschaft, in: BArch DR 1 (Ministerium für Kultur), 23248. One report asserted the enthusiasm was genuine, unlike the situation related to a recent, similar set of events connected to Poland: Bericht FDGB Mecklenburg (as in footnote 20).

mobilization, much more could have been done. Nonetheless, FDGB leaders concluded that “despite all the flaws, it was an important contribution to the strengthening of the fight for peace and against the imperialist war-mongers.”<sup>22</sup> China, portrayed as a country that recently liberated most of its territory for the Communist cause, was to be emulated by Germans who should strive for the same in their country. Millions of East Germans encountered this image through the many initiatives associated with the month of celebration.

Influencing the younger generation was also a major goal of the celebrations. After a screening of the Chinese film *Die Töchter Chinas* (China’s Daughters), a 14-year-old female student from Brandenburg wrote in a school essay:

“When people thought about China earlier, they imagined the Chinese as yellow and with slanted eyes, a ponytail, and a strange alphabet [...] Today, peace-loving people think otherwise. China has become a synonym for the revolutionary fight for freedom against domestic and foreign oppressors. China is for all peoples an example and proof of the invincible power of the people. This people is the victor in the fight for democracy, national freedom, and a better life.”<sup>23</sup>

Also in 1951, the World Festival of Youth and Students in Berlin, attended by hundreds of thousands of East Germans, offered another opportunity for the youth to develop positive opinions of the Chinese. At the opening ceremonies, Chinese representatives received a “hurricane of applause [which] demonstrated love, reverence, and esteem for the Chinese people.”<sup>24</sup> The Chinese delegation garnered significant attention at the Festival more generally, in part with an opera about fighting injustice that featured both music and a libretto written collectively.<sup>25</sup> After this flurry of attention in the summer of 1951, the focus on China subsided somewhat. Political meetings continued to be held, however, based in part on the booklet *Tatsachen über die Volksrepublik China, die jeder wissen soll*, which emphasized the importance of the PRC in world affairs, its contributions to the socialist camp, and its “close and brotherly ties” to the GDR.<sup>26</sup> The FDJ circulated information on China that sought to educate young Germans on the importance of China as part of the socialist camp.<sup>27</sup> More generally, China permeated the East German educa-

<sup>22</sup> Bericht über die Durchführung des Monats der deutsch-chinesischen Freundschaft, in: BArch DR 1, 23248. See also the reports in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 34, 25078.

<sup>23</sup> JENSEN (as in footnote 5), pp. 11-12, 46-48.

<sup>24</sup> Letter to the Chinese Food Workers’ Trade Union, 12.09.1951, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 42, 643: “Liebe, Verehrung und Achtung.”

<sup>25</sup> ERNST HERMANN MEYER: Die chinesische Oper “Das Mädchen mit den weißen Haaren,” in: III. Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten für den Frieden. Bilder und Berichte, Berlin 1951, pp. 15-16.

<sup>26</sup> *Tatsachen über die Volksrepublik China, die jeder wissen soll*. Materialien für Agitatoren und Referenten, [Berlin] 1951/54.

<sup>27</sup> Was weißt du über die Volksrepublik China?, Berlin 1954.

tional system at all levels, with a significant presence in history and social studies, but also with many stories and examples used in other classes. The covers of millions of blank notebooks featured propaganda related to China, with messages praising Mao, the People's Army, and Chinese support for the peace movement. In the middle of the decade, a school in Crimmitschau completed a major, year-long project involving China, which was held up as an example for other schools across the GDR.<sup>28</sup> The basis for the intensification of interest seen in the second half of the decade had been laid.

In Poland in the early 1950s, the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) also attempted to establish and deploy China as a motivational image. The PRC was celebrated as a "heroic country" in the press, with much laudatory coverage about its contribution to the fight for peace and against imperialism.<sup>29</sup> Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz stressed to his countrymen the historical importance of the Chinese Revolution, and the first anniversary celebrations included speeches extolling China and claiming "each success of the Chinese nation is also our success."<sup>30</sup> The aforementioned exhibition of Chinese art in Berlin was also shown at the National Museum in Warsaw in late 1951, while a few Chinese films appeared on screens and a smattering of Chinese plays on stages throughout Poland.<sup>31</sup> Press articles discussed the Chinese collectivization of agriculture in glowing terms and promoted it as an example for Poles.<sup>32</sup> At official parades, Mao's portrait was only marginally less important than those of Stalin and Polish President Bolesław Bierut.<sup>33</sup> But in Poland, associations with Stalin and collectivization were not particularly effective ways to generate excitement. On an official level as well, Polish-Chinese relations were largely non-

<sup>28</sup> KRÜGER (as in footnote 2), pp. 262-264.

<sup>29</sup> DOMINIK MIERZEJEWSKI: *Obraz Chin w polskich mediach. Refleksja krytyczna* [The Image of China in the Polish Media. A Critical Reflection], in: BOGDAN GÓRALCZYK (ed.): *Polska-Chiny. Wczoraj, dziś, jutro*, Toruń 2009, pp. 65-105, here pp. 66-68.

<sup>30</sup> JAN ROWIŃSKI: *Wahadło. Czyli stosunki polityczne PRL-ChRL* [Pendulum. Or, the Political Relations of People's Poland and the People's Republic of China], *ibidem*, pp. 11-64, here p. 22; *Rozmowa na dzisiejszej uroczystej akademii, zorganizowanej z okazji I-szej rocznicy powstania ChRL* [Talk given on the occasion of the first anniversary of the founding of the PRC], in: *Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN)* [Archive of Modern Records], Komitet Centralny Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (KC PZPR) [The Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party], 237/XXII-341, pp. 18-30.

<sup>31</sup> MARCIN JACOBY: *Zarys historii wymiany kulturalnej pomiędzy Polską a Chinami w latach 1949-2009* [Overview of the History of Cultural Exchange between Poland and China in the Years 1949-2009], in: GÓRALCZYK (as in footnote 29), pp. 331-367, here pp. 336-338.

<sup>32</sup> PAWEŁ JASIEŃKA: *Kraj nad Jangcy* [The Country on the Yangtse River], Warszawa 2008, p. 93; first published in 1957 as "Kraj nad Jangtse."

<sup>33</sup> PIOTR OSEKA: *Rytuály stalinizmu. Oficjalne święta i uroczystości rocznicowe w Polsce, 1944-1956* [Rituals of Stalinism. Official Holidays and Anniversary Celebrations in Poland, 1944-1956], Warszawa 2007, p. 133.

existent, thus offering little fodder for press coverage or the staging of public events.<sup>34</sup> In the middle of the decade, Polish officials were still trying to launch a very basic information campaign in the press and radio about China for the Polish population.<sup>35</sup> These early Polish attempts to construct and disseminate a positive, useful image of China were markedly less successful than those in East Germany, arguably due to too great a gap between official efforts and public receptiveness. In the GDR, real similarities between the two countries provided a basis on which the party could present the PRC as a compelling example for East Germans. While the Month of German-Chinese Friendship staged by the SED attracted real interest from its citizens, in Poland a closer alignment between Party aims and popular expectations came only later, at the peak of the thaw in 1956.

A 1953 visit to Poland by the Central Song and Dance Ensemble of the PRC demonstrates the extent of initial indifference and indeed animosity towards China among Poles. The weeks-long trip started inauspiciously when the train stopped for 15 minutes after crossing over from Czechoslovakia, and the border town residents stared silently and failed to join in with a party activist on the megaphone in the shouting of slogans about Mao and Polish-Chinese friendship.<sup>36</sup> From there, things went downhill as functionaries for the PZPR showed little enthusiasm for the visit, and performing spaces were not readied for the Chinese ensemble. At the National Rail Carriage Factory in Wrocław, the clubhouse was unprepared for the concert, the factory leadership complained about the unwanted appearance, and the workers left in the middle of the performance due to hunger and lack of interest.<sup>37</sup> In Katowice (then Stalinogród), the audience reacted coolly to both the opening speech by the ensemble leader and the political cheers.<sup>38</sup> And in Krakow, a casual meeting between 17 of the most prominent members of the Chinese ensemble with 35 representatives of the local cultural elite was a fiasco. None of the Krakovians were prepared for the discussion, and acted as if they'd been com-

---

<sup>34</sup> SHEN ZHIHUA, LI DANHUI: *The Polish Crisis of 1956 and Polish-Chinese Relations Viewed from Beijing*, in: JAN ROWIŃSKI (ed.): *The Polish October 1956 in World Politics*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 75-113, here p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> Letters from 3. and 15.09.1955, in: AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XXII/780, pp. 27-28.

<sup>36</sup> Notatka służbowa dot. pobytu w Łodzi Chińskiego Zespołu Pieśni i Tańca [Memo regarding the visit to Łódź of the Chinese Song and Dance Ensemble], 8.9. do 10.9.53, in: AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XXII/345.

<sup>37</sup> Notatka służbowa dot. pobytu w Wrocławiu Chińskiego Zespołu Pieśni i Tańca [Memo regarding the visit to Wrocław of the Chinese Song and Dance Ensemble], 11.9. do 12.9.53, *ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> Notatka służbowa dot. pobytu w Stalinogrodzie Chińskiego Zespołu Pieśni i Tańca [Memo regarding the visit to Stalinogród of the Chinese Song and Dance Ensemble], 14.9. do 17.9.53, *ibidem*.

pelled to attend, creating a “heavy, artificial, and forced atmosphere [...] one could feel the lack of interest in the culture and art of China.”<sup>39</sup>

The low point in Łódź involved cascading disasters. A local youth group showed no enthusiasm for meeting with the Chinese ensemble members. At a clothing factory, few workers showed up to greet the ensemble during a tour of the grounds, and those who did mostly just stared, with the exception of a few friendly younger workers. The director of the factory attempted to organize a larger group to send off the Chinese, but these workers too were mostly apathetic, failing to join in cheers about Chinese-Polish friendship and in praise of Mao. The visit climaxed with the main concert in the Athletics Hall, where a group of “hooligans” broke in during the concert, shouting and causing a commotion. These troublemakers then went to the ensemble members’ hotel, where they threw stones at their cars and shouted “yellow peril” (*żółta zaraza*), a slogan linked to the idea originating in the late nineteenth century that masses from the East would overrun the world. Mercifully, the Chinese apparently misinterpreted this scene as “expressions of interest and sympathy.”<sup>40</sup> Although some Poles reacted positively to the Chinese visit, the general reaction was indifference or hostility.<sup>41</sup>

By contrast, the trip of a Polish group to China that same year met with a much warmer reception. Andrzej Panufnik, Poland’s leading composer at the time, led a sizable delegation of nearly 200, including the Chamber Orchestra of the Warsaw Philharmonic and the acclaimed Mazowsze Song and Dance Company, for a months-long tour of China. In a nearly antithetical experience to that of the Chinese in Poland, he was impressed by the organizational skills of the Chinese hosts, as well as the friendliness and enthusiasm with which they greeted the Poles; he also greatly enjoyed the “divine food” and Chinese culture more generally.<sup>42</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Chinese attended the concerts, with millions more hearing radio broadcasts, and the Polish press transmitted these impressions back home.<sup>43</sup> The positive experiences of these

<sup>39</sup> Notatka służbowa dot. pobytu w Krakowie Chińskiego Zespołu Pieśni i Tańca [Memo regarding the visit to Krakow of the Chinese Song and Dance Ensemble], 18.9. do 21.9.53, *ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> Notatka służbowa dot. pobytu w Łodzi Chińskiego Zespołu Pieśni i Tańca [Memo regarding the visit to Łódź of the Chinese Song and Dance Ensemble], 8.9. do 10.9.53, *ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> For positive responses, see: Sprawozdanie z pobytu w Polsce Zespołu Pieśni i Tańca ChRL od 26.8.-30.9.53 [Report about the visit in Poland of the Song and Dance Ensemble of the PRC from 26.8. to 30.9.53], in: AAN, Komitet Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą (KWKZ) [Committee of International Cultural Cooperation], 111.

<sup>42</sup> ANDRZEJ PANUFNIK: *Composing Myself*, London 1987, pp. 217-220.

<sup>43</sup> JACOBY (as in footnote 31), p. 334; Letter from Warsaw, undated, in: AAN, KWKZ, 112, p. 6. A smaller-scale delegation the next year was greeted with similar enthusiasm. See: Raport Ambasady PRL w Pekinie [Report from the Polish Embassy in Beijing], Nr. 10, 17.11.1954, in: AAN, KWKZ, 110, p. 2.

Poles among the Chinese prefigured a real change in attitude towards the PRC shortly thereafter.

Early in the decade, Poland and China had signed an agreement on cultural cooperation, and a significant exchange of touring ensembles followed through the 1950s.<sup>44</sup> As with the examples above, tours by these groups were impressive undertakings, often numbering more than 100 performers and lasting weeks or even months in-country. Other examples include the Chinese National Acrobatic Troupe's tour in early 1951, followed later that year by the massive 212-person Youth Arts Ensemble of the PRC, including groups featuring opera, drama, dance, acrobats, and singing as well as an orchestra.<sup>45</sup> Other Chinese ensembles toured roughly annually through the mid-1960s, while their Polish counterparts made the trip eastwards every other year or so. Smaller groups of Chinese artists traveled to Poland as well to see the country and meet its people.<sup>46</sup> And a dozen or so Polish soloists and singers performed in China at this time, while composer Zygmunt Mycielski and musicologist Zofia Lissa undertook trips to the PRC.<sup>47</sup> Officials framed these visits for maximum effect, and the press worked to shape an image of the Chinese as worthy of emulation.

Such cultural exchanges were a staple of this era and beyond, and included smaller delegations of leading cultural figures. Paweł Jasienica, Wanda Wasilewska, Jerzy Putrament, Adam Ważyk, and a handful of other well-known writers traveled to China and returned to publish articles and books that celebrated Chinese achievements. Putrament went in 1951 and 1960, and wrote two books describing his experiences. Minister of Culture Włodzimierz Sokorski produced his own observations in book form, illustrated by Aleksander Kobzdej, one of the leading socialist-realist artists of the era. Tadeusz Kuliewicz, another well-known artist, traveled to China in 1952 and published a cycle of drawings from the trip. Such books made up a small genre of their own at the time, and helped to both shape the image of China and also of course propagate it, as some of the books had print runs in the tens of thousands. The common themes mentioned in this literature were, strikingly but perhaps not surprisingly, similar. All noted the huge population and lower living standards, but stressed the potential as well as the stunning progress already achieved—and furthermore encouraged Polish citizens to emulate Chinese successes and aspire to the ascribed qualities of politeness, honesty, orderliness, self-discipline, optimism, hunger to learn, a well-developed aesthetic sensibility, willingness and enthusiasm to work hard, and heroism in crea-

---

<sup>44</sup> See reports in: AAN, KWKZ, 110-112; JACOBY (as in footnote 31), pp. 331-367.

<sup>45</sup> Sprawozdanie z pobytu w Polsce Młodzieżowego Zespołu Artystycznego ChRL w czasie od 19.11.51 do 23.12.51 [Report on the visit to Poland of the Youth Arts Ensemble of the PRC], in: AAN, KWKZ, 111; JACOBY (as in footnote 31), p. 334.

<sup>46</sup> JACOBY (as in footnote 31), pp. 335-336.

<sup>47</sup> See reports in: AAN, KWKZ, 112; MARIAN KALUSKI: Polacy w Chinach [Poles in China], Warszawa 2001, p. 34; JACOBY (as in footnote 31), p. 336.

ting and protecting the Communist Revolution.<sup>48</sup> Many of the authors spun off articles that appeared widely in the press of the day, often reprinted in regional newspapers and thus amplifying the message.<sup>49</sup> These efforts to popularize this representation of China, in Poland and also the GDR, increasingly dovetailed with broader political developments related post-Stalin.

## 2 Intensifying and Mobilizing a Favorable Image

In both countries, albeit for different reasons, events in the mid-1950s accelerated the dissemination of a positive, pedagogically useful image. The emerging thaw in Poland catalyzed the propagation of this favorable representation of China, as the PRC attracted more interest among political and cultural elites as well as the population more broadly in the context of the increased freedoms of de-Stalinization and the related political events of the Polish October in 1956. Coinciding with and symbolic of the growing liberalization was the more open 1955 Warsaw iteration of the World Festival of Youth and Students, where the Chinese delegation attracted a great deal of curiosity.<sup>50</sup> Despite the great distance, their delegation was one of the larger ones at 706 members.<sup>51</sup> A Chinese choir impressed and charmed with its rendition of the Polish folk standard *Kukuleczka* on the second day.<sup>52</sup> Such was the enthusiasm for China among Party members and Polish youth that the Chinese gala concert was overrun.<sup>53</sup> Chinese artistic ensembles stayed after the festival and toured the country as well—to sold-out concerts and cheering crowds.<sup>54</sup>

Official contacts between the leaders of the two countries provided an opportunity to spotlight China in the public and in the press. The increased number of visits starting in 1954 represented an intensification of contact with and

<sup>48</sup> See in particular JASIENICA (as in footnote 32); TADEUSZ KULISIEWICZ: *Rysunki z Chin i ze Szlembarku* [Drawings from China and Szlembark], Warszawa 1953; JERZY PUTRAMENT: *Chińszczyzna* [Sinology], Warszawa 1961; IDEM: *Notatnik chiński* [Chinese Notebook], Warszawa 1952; JADWIGA SIEKIERSKA: *Ludzie i miasta* [People and Cities], Warszawa 1956; WŁODZIMIERZ SOKORSKI: *Dziennik podróży* [Travel Journal], Warszawa 1954; TADEUSZ STRUMFF: *Żółte rzeki* [Yellow Rivers], Warszawa 1961; WANDA WASILEWSKA: *30 dni w chinach* [30 Days in China], Warszawa 1957; ADAM WAZYK: *Widziałem kraje środka* [I Saw the Land in the Middle], Warszawa 1953.

<sup>49</sup> See articles in: AAN, Akta Jadwigi Siekierskiej [Jadwiga Siekierska Files], 67.

<sup>50</sup> Andrzej KRYWICKI: *Poststalinowski karnawał radości. V Światowy Festiwal Młodzieży i Studentów o Pokój i Przyjaźń*, Warszawa 1955 r. [Post-Stalinist Carnival of Joy. The Fifth World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship, Warsaw 1955], Warszawa 2009, p. 280.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 304.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 199.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 207.

<sup>54</sup> *Sprawozdanie z Towarzyszenia Młodzieżowemu Zespołowi Pieśni i Tańca Chiń* [Report from the Association of the Youth Arts Ensemble of China], in: AAN, KWKZ, 111.

attention to the PRC.<sup>55</sup> Chinese delegations came at least seven times in the 1950s, including Mao himself in 1950 and Premier Zhou Enlai in 1954 and 1957. High-ranking Polish delegations went east on a handful of occasions, such as Bierut in 1954 and Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz in 1957, as well as the crucial September 1956 visit by Edward Ochab, First Secretary of the PZPR, that helped lay the groundwork for Chinese opposition to Soviet intervention in Poland later that fall.<sup>56</sup> He traveled to China looking for support for greater Polish autonomy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and he found it.<sup>57</sup>

The Chinese stance in the Polish October of 1956 made a spectacular impression on Polish political elites, and this positive association spread widely throughout society in the following years. Although their precise role in the crisis remains unclear, the Chinese supported Polish sovereignty against potential Red Army intervention during the crucial days of late October.<sup>58</sup> At high-level meetings in Moscow at that time, the Poles complained openly and with feeling to the sympathetic Chinese about their suffering under Soviet pressure.<sup>59</sup> Khrushchev conceded the unsurprising fact that Poles viewed the PRC more favorably than the Soviet Union.<sup>60</sup> In the aftermath, Zhou Enlai traveled to Poland to meet with the new Polish leadership in January 1957 and commiserated with the Poles over the less desirable aspects of Soviet hegemony.<sup>61</sup> The Chinese Premier also made a number of very welcome public statements, reported widely, that Poland's western Oder-Neisse frontier was a border of peace. The Polish press in turn celebrated the PRC for its contributions to Polish security and as a model Communist country.<sup>62</sup> Also reported in

<sup>55</sup> ROWIŃSKI, Wadhadło (as in footnote 30), p. 24.

<sup>56</sup> Historia stosunków polsko-chińskich [History of Polish-Chinese Relations], URL: <http://www.gochina.gov.pl/index/?id=35f4a8d465e6e1edc05f3d8ab658c551> (9.07.2012).

<sup>57</sup> TERESA TORAŃSKA: "Them". Stalin's Polish Puppets, New York 1987, pp. 66-72.

<sup>58</sup> The literature is extensive. See in particular LÜTHI (as in footnote 2), pp. 54-58, 66-67; CHEN (as in footnote 2), pp. 145-162; DERS., YANG KUISONG: Chinese Politics and the Collapse of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, in: WESTAD (as in footnote 2), pp. 246-294, here p. 264; KRZYSZTOF PERSAK: The Polish-Soviet Confrontation in 1956 and the Attempted Soviet Military Intervention in Poland, in: Europe-Asia Studies 58 (2006), 8, pp. 1285-1310; JAN ROWIŃSKI: ChRL a wydarzenia październikowe 1956 r. w Polsce. Czy Chińczycy uchronili nasz kraj przed radziecką interwencją? [The PRC and the October 1956 Events in Poland. Did the Chinese Protect Our Country from Soviet Intervention?], in: GÓRALCZYK (as in footnote 29), pp. 239-289; ANDRZEJ WERBLAN: The Polish October of 1956. Legends and Reality, in: ROWIŃSKI, The Polish October 1956 (as in footnote 34), pp. 30-33; ZHIHUA/DANHUI (as in footnote 34), pp. 75-113.

<sup>59</sup> CHEN (as in footnote 2), p. 158.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, p. 151.

<sup>61</sup> L.W. GŁUCHOWSKI: Poland, 1956. Khrushchev, Gomulka, and the "Polish October", Document 4, in: Cold War International History Project Bulletin (1995), 5, pp. 1, 28-49, here pp. 43-45; LÜTHI (as in footnote 2), pp. 66-67.

<sup>62</sup> Jesteśmy przekonani, że naród polski osiągnie nowe sukcesy w budowie socjalizmu [We are Convinced that the Polish Nation Will Reach New Successes in Socialist Con-

detail was Zhou Enlai's warm meeting with Varsovians at which Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz stated: "we view the Chinese victory as our own."<sup>63</sup> The Polish leadership continued to try to foster closer ties to China during Cyrankiewicz's visit to Beijing in April 1957, where he echoed earlier statements that the activities and work of Comrade Mao were very meaningful for the Poles.<sup>64</sup>

Popular enthusiasm for China flowed from that country's support for the political transformation in Poland. At least some press outlets at this time mentioned the PRC's key role during the Polish October, and it would appear that wide public knowledge of this fact also spread through less formal channels.<sup>65</sup> The favorable Chinese position towards Poland prompted expressions of interest in and appreciation of China at this time in the population more broadly.<sup>66</sup> Banners with the slogan "We have Mao's support" had appeared on the streets of Warsaw in October 1956, and the Chinese Embassy reported that Poles considered China's assistance crucial.<sup>67</sup> Additional resonances and commonality can be seen in China's so-called "Hundred Flowers Campaign," which encouraged societal criticism of the Party there. It lasted from late 1956 through the summer of 1957, thus paralleling the high water mark of the thaw in Poland, and engendered a certain amount of interest and commonality between the two countries.<sup>68</sup>

In this atmosphere, the first circle of the Association for Polish-Chinese Friendship (*Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Polsko-Chińskiej*) was formed in Gdańsk in 1957 on the initiative of those involved in the Polish-Chinese shipping trade. Party officials gave their support, and helped launch a national found-

---

struction], in: *Trybuna Ludu* from 14.01.1957; *Naród chiński uważa Odrę i Nysę za granicę pokoju: Przemówienie tow. Czou En-laia we Wrocławiu* [The Chinese Nation Recognizes the Oder and Neisse Rivers as a Border of Peace. The speech of Comrade Chou Enlai in Wrocław], in: *Trybuna Ludu* from 15.01.1957; *Wspólnie oświadczenie delegacji rządowych Polski i Chin* [The Joint Statement by the Governing Delegations of Poland and China], in: *Trybuna Ludu* from 17.02.1957.

<sup>63</sup> *Spotkanie Premiera Czou En-laia z ludnością Warszawy* [The Meeting of Premier Chou Enlai and the People of Warsaw], and: *Cyrankiewicz: Zwycięstwa i sukces bratnich Chin traktujemy, jako swoje własne* [Cyrankiewicz: We Treat the Victories and Successes of Our Brother China as Our Own], in: *Trybuna Ludu* from 13.01.1957.

<sup>64</sup> MERCY KUO: *Contending with Contradictions. China's Policy toward Soviet Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1953-1960*, Lanham/MD 2001, p. 122.

<sup>65</sup> ZHIHUA/DANHUI (as in footnote 34), p. 89.

<sup>66</sup> LESZEK CYRZYK: *U zarania Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Polsko-Chińskiej* [At the Dawn of the Association for Polish-Chinese Friendship], in: *Azja-Pacyfik* 11 (2008), pp. 238-245, here p. 239.

<sup>67</sup> ZHIHUA/DANHUI (as in footnote 34), p. 89.

<sup>68</sup> CYRZYK (as in footnote 66), p. 239.

ing conference in Warsaw in May 1958.<sup>69</sup> The Association developed in a less top-down and more popular basis than most other friendship societies, and attracted considerable interest from Poles, quickly gaining 17 branches across the country with 20 000 members, a number that grew to nearly 300 000 in a few years. In 1959 alone, it put together 73 large and 222 small exhibitions, 1262 lectures, 446 film screenings, and nearly 100 special parties and events.<sup>70</sup> The main office in Warsaw was given a central location in the former Zamoyski Palace and offered, complete with Chinese lamps and other decorations, a lecture room, reading room, library, outdoor area for open-air film screenings, and even a café that served Chinese food at reasonable prices—all of which made it an attractive place to spend time.<sup>71</sup> From 1959 to 1963 the Association published its own illustrated monthly magazine *Chiny*, with a circulation of 15 000, which featured articles about the history, economy, and culture of China, interspersed with photographs, drawings, fiction, and interesting facts and sayings. The Association also worked with success to spread information about China in the daily press, radio, and television.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, the main Polish Press Agency and the leading daily *Trybuna Ludu* both had correspondents in Beijing throughout the period who reported frequently.<sup>73</sup>

In the later 1950s, broader cultural and scientific ties developed rapidly, which helped to filter knowledge of the PRC throughout the population.<sup>74</sup> Several dozen Poles studied in China in the 1950s, while over 200 Chinese attended Polish schools. Except for a few years during the Cultural Revolution, there were always lecturers from China in Warsaw and from Poland in Beijing.<sup>75</sup> Denoting a certain status accorded China was the existence of both an official, expensive Chinese restaurant on Marszałkowska and a store selling

<sup>69</sup> ZDZISŁAW GÓRALCZYK: 52 lata działalności Towarzystwa Przyjaźni Polsko-Chińskiej [52 Years of Activity of the Association for Polish-Chinese Friendship], in: B. GÓRALCZYK (as in footnote 29), pp. 161-181, here p. 163.

<sup>70</sup> CYRZYK (as in footnote 66), p. 241; ZDZISŁAW GÓRALCZYK: Pięćdziesięciolecie Towarzystwa Przyjaźni Polsko-Chińskiej [50 Years of the Association for Polish-Chinese Friendship], in: *Azja-Pacyfik* 11 (2008), pp. 232-237, here p. 232; ANDRZEJ HALIMARSKI: Poland and the People's Republic of China. Relations between Polish People's Republic and People's Republic of China (1949-1984), Warszawa 1985, p. 30. For a description of some of its 1961 exhibitions, see: *Chiny*, January 1962, p. 49.

<sup>71</sup> Z. GÓRALCZYK, 52 lata działalności (as in footnote 69), p. 166; CYRZYK (as in footnote 66), p. 241.

<sup>72</sup> CYRZYK (as in footnote 66), p. 243; HALIMARSKI (as in footnote 70), p. 30.

<sup>73</sup> JAN ROWIŃSKI: China in the Crisis of Marxism-Leninism, in: MARIE-LUISE NÄTH (ed.): Communist China in Retrospect. East European Sinologists Remember the First Fifteen Years of the PRC, Frankfurt a.M. et al. 1995, pp. 65-96, here p. 96.

<sup>74</sup> CYRZYK (as in footnote 66), p. 243.

<sup>75</sup> ROWIŃSKI, China in the Crisis (as in footnote 73), pp. 65-66; KALUSKI (as in footnote 47), p. 20.

Chinese goods on Jerozolimskie, the two major thoroughfares in Warsaw.<sup>76</sup> It would seem that, as a Polish scholar related later about his contemporaries in the second half of the 1950s, “China was hip.”<sup>77</sup>

In the GDR at this time, a positive image of China intensified for very different reasons, but was nonetheless also received by the population with considerable interest. Party General Secretary Walter Ulbricht and his Party allies sought to limit de-Stalinization and found in Mao a strong ally. More generally, the East German leadership found much to like in the Chinese variant of communism. Furthermore, Chinese recognition of the German Democratic Republic itself as well as the Chinese position with respect to the unification of Germany prompted much praise from the SED.<sup>78</sup> In the second half of the 1950s, official relations with China were quite close, and continued to grow closer. Indeed, some scholars even describe a “Peking-Pankow” axis in light of domestic political similarities combined with intensive economic and cultural relations, while another asserts that the SED put China on equal footing with the USSR as the two leading powers in the Communist world.<sup>79</sup> Through diverse and manifold channels, Party officials worked to spread this positive image of the PRC widely, and successfully encouraged and deployed it for Party goals.

Consonances between Chinese and East German domestic policy were many if not total. At a high-profile workers’ conference in late 1956, for instance, Ulbricht praised Chinese “proposals and experiences” as “interesting and noteworthy,” although he also remarked that the GDR could not follow the Chinese example exactly.<sup>80</sup> One of the rare points of disagreement came during the Hundred Flowers Campaign, which Ulbricht’s critics referenced to help push forward de-Stalinization in the GDR in 1956/57. Ulbricht felt compelled to address the issue at the SED Central Committee’s 30<sup>th</sup> plenary session in January 1957 by warning against “harmful weeds,” and this evocation

<sup>76</sup> CYRZYK (as in footnote 66), pp. 242, 244. A Chinese tearoom opened in the East Berlin District of Prenzlauer Berg in August 1961 to great interest from East Berliners, see: Im Rückblick, in: Berliner Zeitung from 30.07.2011, URL: <http://www.berlinerzeitung.de/archiv/im-rueckblick,10810590,10946288.html> (27.03.2013); see also KRÜGER (as in footnote 2), p. 268.

<sup>77</sup> MIKOLAJ MELANOWICZ: Moja Japonia [My Japan], in: Tygodnik Powszechny (2000), URL: <http://www.tygodnik.com.pl/japonia/melanowicz.html> (7.11.2011).

<sup>78</sup> HOPE M. HARRISON: Driving the Soviets up the Wall. Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961, Princeton 2003, pp. 78-81.

<sup>79</sup> Pankow is a district in Berlin where many East German leaders lived. WERNER MEISSNER (ed.): Die DDR und China 1949 bis 1990. Politik – Wirtschaft – Kultur. Eine Quellensammlung, Berlin 1995, p. 67; HARALD MÖLLER: DDR und VR China. Unterstützung der VRCh auf politischem, ökonomischem und militärischem Gebiet (1949-1964). Eine Dokumentation, Berlin 2003, p. 43; KRÜGER (as in footnote 2), p. 261.

<sup>80</sup> Arbeiterkonferenz am 7. und 8. Dezember 1956, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV 2/1.01/314, p. 30.

of China found its way into the press as well.<sup>81</sup> In this vein, a few months later journalist and SED functionary Georg Krausz published an article after a trip to China that asked “which flowers should bloom?”<sup>82</sup> Ulbricht greatly welcomed the Chinese reversal of this policy in the summer with the Anti-Rightist Movement, where Mao cracked down on the criticism encouraged by the Hundred Flowers Campaign. Ulbricht’s enthusiasm only seemed to increase in the following years, as he claimed in early 1958 that the GDR was also making a “great leap,” and he cited Mao and China as positive examples at the SED Party meeting later that year.<sup>83</sup> He and other East German leaders were genuinely interested in Chinese political and economic policy; a number of GDR initiatives at this time were remarkably similar to those already undertaken in the PRC, including that officials and army officers had to spend a month each year among common workers and soldiers, respectively, and that artists should also spend more time in factories and the countryside.<sup>84</sup> These statements and initiatives received broad coverage in the daily press and helped to create an image of China as a country to be admired and emulated.

Ulbricht and other prominent East German and Chinese leaders made frequent and high-profile trips to the other country, beginning in summer 1954 with a visit by Zhou Enlai to the GDR. Officials organized a large public gathering in the Werner Seelenbinder Arena, where the Chinese Premier was introduced with a speech that framed his appearance for the large audience. President of the National Front Erich Correns urged East Germans to see China’s recent liberation struggle as inspiration and example for their own fight for national unity.<sup>85</sup> Headed by Foreign Minister Lothar Bolz, the first major East German delegation traveled to China a few months later for the fifth anniversary of the Chinese revolution, and the participants visited factories and worksites and reported back on Chinese discipline, high morale, modesty, and willingness to make sacrifices.<sup>86</sup> Other visits by both sides took place for major Party meetings but also on a variety of occasions, like the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of each country’s founding. Walter Ulbricht himself went to China in 1956 and was greatly impressed. Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl led an official delegation to China in early 1959 for a “friendship visit” and reported

<sup>81</sup> NICOLE FRANÇOISE STUBER-BERRIES: *East German China Policy in the Face of the Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1966*, Ph.D. diss., University of Geneva 2004, p. 75.

<sup>82</sup> Welche Blumen sollen blühen?, in: *Neues Deutschland* from 11.04.1957, quoted *ibidem*, p. 78.

<sup>83</sup> KRÜGER (as in footnote 2), p. 270.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 270-271; CAROLA STERN: *East Germany*, in: WILLIAM E. GRIFFITH (ed.): *Communism in Europe. Continuity, Change, and the Sino-Soviet Dispute*, vol. 2, Cambridge 1966, p. 101; STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), pp. 55-57, 68-70, 78-82. Most of these policies were ended in late 1960 and early 1961, *ibidem*, pp. 216, 218.

<sup>85</sup> *Ansprache Prof. Dr. Erich Correns für die Großkundgebung am 24.7.54 in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle*, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 6, 4004.

<sup>86</sup> *Bericht über die Reise einer Delegation in die VR China, 1954*, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, J IV 2/2J/82.

back enthusiastically about developments there, while Chinese delegations came to celebrate President Wilhelm Pieck's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1956 and again on the occasion of his death a few years later.<sup>87</sup> All such occasions were featured in the press and seized as opportunities to portray the PRC in a positive light.<sup>88</sup> Notable here is that in the second half of the 1950s, the GDR leadership assiduously pursued closer political and cultural relations with China. These efforts were of a piece with a more general attempt to increase the GDR's diplomatic profile and standing on the international stage, but are nonetheless noteworthy in their intensity in comparison to those of the Soviet Union and other Bloc countries.<sup>89</sup>

Less high-profile East German delegations to China were another important means to propagate a positive image of the PRC back home. As with Poland, smaller groups of leading figures from society more broadly visited the other country, generating a great deal of publicity. An early visit in 1951 of cultural luminaries including writers Anna Seghers and Kurt Barthel (KuBa) resulted in speeches and publications upon their return.<sup>90</sup> As seen in their Polish equivalents, such articles and books praised the progress China had achieved, and encouraged fellow citizens to be inspired by the supposed Chinese qualities of hard work, humility, discipline, and enthusiasm.<sup>91</sup> Delegations of less prominent individuals also traveled to the other country as well. A group of FDGB officials to China later in the decade reported: "We felt everywhere the power and unrelenting will of the Chinese working class and peasantry to build socialism," and praised the mobilization of society and progress there.<sup>92</sup> Upon their return, these individuals gave presentations in workplaces and wrote reports for specialized publications. The next year, on the occasion of the PRC's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a delegation of 14 workers traveled there and returned convinced of the importance of developments in China for the entire socialist camp, and prepared to give presentations at their factories and organizations.<sup>93</sup> Many factories and unions also forged contact, albeit highly formalized, with their counterparts in China through letter exchanges that largely consisted of greetings, slogans, and mutual praise, but that also

---

<sup>87</sup> CLAUDIE GARDET: *Les relations de la République populaire de Chine et de la République démocratique allemande (1949-1989)*, Berlin 2000, pp. 30-32.

<sup>88</sup> STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), pp. 53-54; STERN (as in footnote 84), pp. 101-111.

<sup>89</sup> STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), pp. 44-49.

<sup>90</sup> Protokoll des Sekretariats, Nr. 102, 10.09.1951, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, J IV 2/3/231.

<sup>91</sup> See STEPHAN HERMLIN: *Ferne Nähe*, Berlin 1954; BODO UHSE: *Tagebuch aus China*, Berlin 1956; KUBA [KURT BARTEL]: *Osten erglüht*, Berlin 1954.

<sup>92</sup> Bericht über die Mai-Delegation des FDGB nach China, 3.06.1958, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 34, 16738.

<sup>93</sup> Bericht über die Delegation der Werktätigen, die anlässlich des 10. Jahrestages der VR China besuchte, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV 2/20/115, pp. 39, 45.

exhibited a genuine interest in sharing techniques of production and management.<sup>94</sup>

As in Poland, cultural exchanges were an important aspect of relations between the two countries and offered important opportunities to craft and spread China's image throughout the population of the GDR. Similar to the Panufnik-led Mazowsze trip in 1953, late that same year the 230-person State Folk Art Ensemble embarked on a ten-week concert tour of China. Miner-cum-journalist Karl-Heinz Schleinitz accompanied the group and wrote *Reisebilder aus China*, which painted a stirring picture of China's development and people for consumption back home.<sup>95</sup> Cultural relations between the two countries intensified greatly after the signing of a new cultural agreement in 1955. The following year a dozen East German arts-related groups traveled to China as well as an orchestra of the People's Police (Volkspolizei), and nearly that many came from China to the GDR, to great public interest and press attention.<sup>96</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of both countries in 1959 inspired a wide-ranging series of exchanges, including scholars from various disciplines, musical ensembles and soloists, several exhibitions, and a film delegation.<sup>97</sup>

More generally, press reports and books on Chinese developments appeared regularly in the GDR of the 1950s and found a receptive public. Hundreds of thousands of copies of Mao's writings were published, and proved popular. The Dietz Verlag, for example, put out Mao's collected works in the mid-1950s; the second volume's initial print run of 10 000 sold out quickly, and second, third, and fourth printings of 10 000 each followed over the next several years. As a result, the initial print runs for volumes three and four were increased to 20 000, and both had subsequent printings as well.<sup>98</sup> East Germans had access to dozens of novels in translation and non-fiction books about China in bookstores and libraries, some of which came out in multiple printings of tens of thousands.<sup>99</sup> Pamphlets like "The People's Republic of China Takes a Great Leap," published on the ninth anniversary of its founding in 1958, communicated an image of a country making great strides thanks to socialism.<sup>100</sup> The Chinese-published glossy monthly magazine *China im*

<sup>94</sup> Letter from Welm, Gewerkschaft Handel, Nahrung und Genuss, to Allchinesisches Komitee der Gewerkschaft der Handelsarbeiter, 23.05.1959, and many other letters, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 42, 1058.

<sup>95</sup> See manuscript *Zehn Wochen China, Reportage über die Tournee des Staatlichen Volkskunstensembles der DDR*, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 34, 1511, and KARL-HEINZ SCHLEINITZ: *Reisebilder aus China*, Berlin 1956.

<sup>96</sup> STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), p. 34.

<sup>97</sup> Arbeitsplan für das Jahr 1959 zum Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der VR China über kulturelle Zusammenarbeit, in: SAPMO-BArch DY 30, IV 2/9.06/81, and related documents.

<sup>98</sup> See reviews in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, 18186.

<sup>99</sup> KRÜGER (as in footnote 2), p. 263; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV 2/9.06/81, pp. 84-90.

<sup>100</sup> Die VR China macht Grossen Sprung nach vorn, zum 9. Jahrestag der Gründung der VR China, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV 2/9.06/81, p. 53.

*Bild* circulated widely in the 1950s and early 1960s, and articles on the PRC regularly appeared in the mid-1950s in the East German monthly *Von Peking bis Tirana*, which covered the Communist world.<sup>101</sup> Starting in 1954, scarcely a month went by without a positive mention in the leading daily *Neues Deutschland*.<sup>102</sup> In the second half of the decade, the frequency and intensity of praise for China's achievements was striking, with paeans about "the incredible speed of Chinese economic development" and "the enormous radical change of the Chinese economy."<sup>103</sup> China was consistently portrayed as a loyal and reliable ally of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp, reflecting the alleged strength of the Communist world as a whole.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, China staunchly supported East German positions with respect to West Germany, which was much appreciated and proclaimed publicly to validate GDR policy and ideology.<sup>105</sup> The many press articles also emphasized the similar challenges facing the two divided nations, which added an extra intensity to the relationship and resonance for the population.<sup>106</sup> Chinese support for the GDR and its "German policy" was highlighted repeatedly, especially in late 1958 during the second Taiwan Straits Crisis and continuing Berlin tensions, when both sides vocally backed each other against the imperialist aggressors; an article in *Neues Deutschland* stated: "Washington interferes in [the] domestic affairs of the German nation and wants to increase tensions and make discontent and insecurity a permanent state of affairs, both in West Berlin as well as on the coast of China."<sup>107</sup> To help drive this all home, officials organized "China circles" throughout the country in order to increase awareness of the "socialist achievements of that great Asian power." Informational materials and the related discussions revolved around breathless descriptions of China's progress.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *China im Bild* appeared bi-monthly from 1958 to 1960, was published in English as *China Pictorial*, and also appeared in numerous other languages, although not in Polish.

<sup>102</sup> See SAPMO-BArch, DY 42, 1058, for an article collection.

<sup>103</sup> Articles from spring 1956 in *Neues Deutschland*, quoted in STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), p. 51.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 88-92.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 130-159. After returning from China in late 1955, for example, Grotewohl published an article that proclaimed: "It is a happy feeling for the German people to know that it has the great and strong People's Republic of China as a powerful ally, which totally agrees with us in the question of the necessity of and the means for the reestablishment of a peaceful, democratic, and unified Germany." See OTTO GROTEWOHL: Wir fahren mit guten Ergebnissen zurück, in: *Neues Deutschland* from 28.12.1955, quoted in STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), p. 146.

<sup>106</sup> STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), pp. 145-146.

<sup>107</sup> Dulles setzt Westberlin mit Quemoy gleich, in: *Neues Deutschland* from 27.9.1958, quoted in STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), p. 135.

<sup>108</sup> KARIN TOMALA: China on the Eve of the Cultural Revolution, in: NÄTH (as in footnote 73), pp. 159-183, here p. 159.

Positive depictions of China in the GDR reached another high point with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic in the days around 1 October 1959, when officials organized a broad program of exhibitions, meetings, and lectures across the GDR in an effort to encourage "deep-rooted fraternal solidarity with the Chinese people."<sup>109</sup> Major events included a commemorative evening featuring speeches by leading East German political figures and a tour by the Szechuan Opera Ensemble in major cities. Preparatory materials for lectures on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrated the 650 million Chinese as "loyal and staunch friends" and praised the Great Leap Forward.<sup>110</sup> The delegation of East German workers who traveled to China for the celebrations reported that the experience was "a spur for their work in the GDR [...] and gave firm confidence in the building of socialism as a better system."<sup>111</sup> These trips, publications, and celebrations helped to foster great enthusiasm about China in the 1950s; one contemporary claimed that the PRC "assumed an increasing political popularity within the GDR" and another scholar even asserted a "euphoria" among East German artists for the PRC in the 1950s.<sup>112</sup> This would all soon change as the East German leadership made a sharp turn away from China and its policies in 1960, and its image and use thereof suffered accordingly.

### 3 Anxiety and Disruption as China Moves from Friend to Foe

With minor caveats, the representation of China both in Poland and the GDR through the end of the 1950s was a highly positive one among the elites and society more broadly, and provided the Parties with an effective ideological tool for the building of their respective brands of socialism. Sino-Soviet relations, however, had been growing ever more complicated and problematic and began to buffet the other Bloc countries at the end of the decade. Chinese policies also began to affect the satellite countries directly, prompting major changes in how China's image was presented and propagated. In December 1959, Khrushchev made an appeal at the Hungarian Party congress for all countries of the Soviet camp to "synchronize our watches," which was a barely veiled call to line up with the Soviet Union and against the PRC.<sup>113</sup> Ulbricht and PZPR First Secretary Władysław Gomułka eventually introduced

---

<sup>109</sup> Letter to Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Information über die Veranstaltungen der Nationalen Front anlässlich des 10. Jahrestages der VR China, 6.11.1959, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 6 (Nationalrat der nationalen Front), 4535.

<sup>110</sup> See the pamphlet *10 Jahre Volksrepublik China*, Büro des Präsidiums des Nationalrats der Nationalen Front des demokratischen Deutschland, Berlin, 1959.

<sup>111</sup> Bericht über die Delegation der Werktätigen (as in footnote 93), p. 39.

<sup>112</sup> TOMALA (as in footnote 108), p. 159; MEISSNER (as in footnote 79), p. 298.

<sup>113</sup> LÜTHI (as in footnote 2), p. 153.

fundamental changes to the representation of China for their respective publics, albeit at different times and for somewhat different reasons.

Gomułka and his supporters in Poland, while appreciative of Chinese backing in October 1956 and keenly interested in Bloc unity as a bulwark against potential West German revisionism vis-à-vis Poland's western border, were increasingly in disagreement with Chinese policy beginning already in 1957, and ultimately Gomułka aligned himself more closely with the Soviet Union in the succeeding years.<sup>114</sup> Domestically, Poland's move away from collectivization was very different from the Chinese drive for People's Communes.<sup>115</sup> Gomułka strongly disagreed with Mao's relaxed attitude toward nuclear war and China's aggressive foreign policy more generally, and the two did not get along on a personal level or trust each other.<sup>116</sup> Increasingly, Khrushchev pushed the Poles, still economically dependent on the USSR, firmly to the Soviet side.<sup>117</sup> As the Sino-Soviet split intensified around 1960, the Chinese attempted to garner Polish backing by referencing their support in 1956, but to little avail.<sup>118</sup> At an important meeting of the world's Communist Parties in November 1960, Gomułka implicitly criticized the Chinese as dogmatists, schismatics, and sectarians.<sup>119</sup> He did nonetheless also provide a moderating tone in the following years as he urged Khrushchev to try to find some kind of compromise with Mao and avoid a complete break. His motives here were less a selfless support for China than an expression of the fact that the ongoing conflict made the Soviet Union more reliant on its existing allies and thus allowed them somewhat more independence.<sup>120</sup> Gomułka stood up to Khrushchev on several anti-Chinese moves in 1963/64, again in self-interest, that is, in an effort to address Poland's perceived security concerns with respect to the Oder-Neisse border by weakening Khrushchev's agreements with the West and in particular with West Germany.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Ibidem, pp. 54-72; PERSAK (as in footnote 58), pp. 1285-1310; ANDRZEJ PACZKOWSKI: *The Spring Will Be Ours. Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom*, University Park/PA 2003, pp. 318-320.

<sup>115</sup> ZHIHUA/DANHUI (as in footnote 34), pp. 107-113.

<sup>116</sup> LÜTHI (as in footnote 2), pp. 77-80; ROWIŃSKI, *China in the Crisis* (as in footnote 73), p. 83.

<sup>117</sup> LÜTHI (as in footnote 2), p. 68.

<sup>118</sup> PERSAK (as in footnote 58), p. 1298. Such appeals continued throughout the 1960s. See: *Notatka z rozmowy z ambasadorem ChRL w czasie kolacji u niego* [Note from the Meeting with the PRC Ambassador during Lunch at his Place], in: AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XXIII/1364.

<sup>119</sup> RODERICK MACFARQUHAR: *The Great Leap Forward, 1958-1960*, New York 1983, p. 289.

<sup>120</sup> RADCHENKO (as in footnote 2), pp. 84-87, 96, 109.

<sup>121</sup> DOUGLAS SELVAGE: *Poland and the Sino-Soviet Rift*, in: Cold War International History Project, e-Dossier No. 10, URL: <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/e-dossier-no-10-poland-and-the-sino-soviet-rift-1963-1965> (14.07.2012).

Although these tensions mounted in the new decade, the Polish press continued to talk about “the strengthening of friendship and cooperation with China” for several more years before beginning to print more critical coverage.<sup>122</sup> Chinese officials also sought to influence the Polish population directly by sending and distributing propaganda materials, starting already in 1960.<sup>123</sup> As the Sino-Soviet disagreement gathered force, the Chinese leadership in effect mobilized all of their citizens worldwide to attempt to convince Poles of the correctness of their positions. Chinese sailors and port personnel distributed materials to their Polish counterparts in China and around the globe, and the Chinese-Polish Shipping Association (Chipolbrok) had its Chinese employees engage in propaganda activities.<sup>124</sup> The small number of Polish tourists to China, 52 in 1966, for example, found pro-Chinese political literature in hotels, restaurants, museums, and theaters, and at least some took the materials back to Poland.<sup>125</sup> Chinese students studying in Poland sought to influence their peers.<sup>126</sup> Activists in Beijing even attempted to convince Polish Embassy personnel there of the correctness of the Chinese positions.<sup>127</sup> Polish officials claimed the Chinese had some, if minimal, success at their efforts.

And sympathy for China among many Poles endured. Some continued to show interest in Chinese policies, especially students who attended film screenings or gatherings at the Chinese Embassy in Warsaw or the Consulate in Gdańsk and obtained ideological materials there.<sup>128</sup> A tiny minority actively backed the PRC and its policies, especially those associated with the underground Communist Party of Poland headed by Kazimierz Mijal, and sought to

---

<sup>122</sup> ROWIŃSKI, *Wahadło* (as in footnote 30), p. 30.

<sup>123</sup> Notatka z rozmowy z Ambasadorem ChRL [Note from Meeting with the Ambassador of the PRC], 4.09.1960, in: AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XXIII/1166, p. 42. In 1966, many thousands of magazines, brochures, and books were distributed throughout Poland. See Informacja dot. działalności propagandowej ambasada ChRL [Information about the Propaganda Activity of the PRC Embassy], 16.12.1966, in: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN) [Institute of National Remembrance], BU 1585/2954, p. 127.

<sup>124</sup> Undated letter from circa October 1963, in: AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XXII/1166, p. 75; Informacja Nr. 12/K/67, *Chińska Propaganda na Polskich Statkach* [Chinese Propaganda on Polish Ships], in: AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XXII/5225, p. 61; Notatka z rozmowy z ambasadorem ChRL [Note from Meeting with the Ambassador of the PRC], 21.09.1964, in: AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XXII/1364, p. 9.

<sup>125</sup> Informacja dot. działalności propagandowej ambasada ChRL (as in footnote 123), p. 130.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129.

<sup>127</sup> Letter from the Polish embassy in Beijing, 4.02.1967, in: IPN, BU 1585/2954, p. 28.

<sup>128</sup> Informacja Nr. 34/A/4332, Warszawa, 11.10.1967, in: AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XXIII/5224, pp. 150-151; Notatka dot. pokazu filmów [Note about the Film Screening], 15.03.1967, in: AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XXIII/5296, p. 64; Informacja dot. działalności propagandowej ambasada ChRL (as in footnote 123), pp. 128-129.

convince their fellow citizens of the correctness of the Chinese path.<sup>129</sup> Jan Rowiński, a scholar involved in China issues in the 1960s, asserts that: “China continued to stand fairly high in the public’s estimation for the way it had behaved in October 1956 and, more surreptitiously, for having dared to defy the Russians.”<sup>130</sup> One contemporary journalist reported that China still enjoyed a positive opinion among many Poles in the second half of the 1960s.<sup>131</sup>

But this image began to fundamentally change for the negative with the Cultural Revolution; China was increasingly seen as a destabilizing factor in international relations.<sup>132</sup> As the conflict peaked in 1967, some Poles defaced the Chinese Embassy in Warsaw and the Consulate in Gdańsk.<sup>133</sup> In addition to highly critical reporting of events in China, Polish officials began to use the new, negative depiction of China for political ends, referring, for instance, to the March 1968 student protesters as “hunwejbini”—the Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution—in an effort to denounce this group of allegedly misguided and troublemaking Polish youth. Such minor propaganda uses, however, hardly made up for disorientation among Poles and the loss of a powerful legitimizing symbol for Polish Communists.

The GDR’s much more enthusiastic and thorough-going cultivation of China’s image in the 1950s caused considerable confusion among East Germans when the SED leadership turned against the PRC in the following decade. Initially, troubled waters at the elite political level had not made an impression on the Party or society more broadly. Indeed, after the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations the previous fall, officials planned a major “Week of German-Chinese Friendship” for sometime in the first half of 1960. Much like the similarly named month-long celebration from 1951, it was to feature lectures and meetings in schools, factories and in the countryside, book exhibitions, plays, articles in the press, radio reports, TV features, and film screenings. The extensive planning made it clear that developments in the PRC and its contributions to world communism were to serve as examples to East Germans, and it even adopted the rhetoric of China’s new ideology for application to developments in the GDR: “The Week [...] will multiply the patriotic activities of our workers in their efforts to fulfill the demands of the seven-year plan in our own Great Leap.”<sup>134</sup> Despite considerable planning, however, the event was canceled due to increasing tensions with China.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Informacja Nr. 18/K/67, Warszawa, p. 73, and Informacja Nr. 25/K/67, p. 97, Warszawa, in: AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XXIII/5225; Informacja dot. działalności propagandowej ambasada ChRL (as in footnote 123), p. 130.

<sup>130</sup> ROWIŃSKI, *China in the Crisis* (as in footnote 73), p. 96.

<sup>131</sup> STANISŁAW GŁĄBIŃSKI: *Notatki z Chin [Notes from China]*, Warszawa 1969, p. 94.

<sup>132</sup> MIERZEJEWSKI (as in footnote 29), p. 76.

<sup>133</sup> See reports in IPN, BU 1585/2954, pp. 65-100.

<sup>134</sup> *Betr. Woche der deutsch-chinesischen Freundschaft*, 19.12.1959, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 6, 5446, and *Betr. Vorbereitung und Durchführung der “Woche der deutsch-chi-*

Both external and internal factors pushed the GDR leadership to attenuate its relationship to China, and ultimately to completely overturn its carefully constructed representation. The Sino-Soviet conflict eventually led to Soviet pressure on East Germany to align itself against China. While the East German leadership resisted longer than most, it recognized that the Soviet alliance was paramount, and it began to limit its enthusiastic portrayal of the PRC.<sup>136</sup> Concurrently, a major issue, referenced in the introduction, materialized in relation to the People's Communes. These became official state policy in China in 1958, and amalgamated smaller agricultural collectives into much larger units with thousands of households. The East German press initially reported favorably on these *Volkskommunen* and the SED adopted certain elements in its own collectivization policy. They were featured at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations and were to be a centerpiece of the week-long celebrations in 1960.<sup>137</sup> But the Soviet Union had been critical of People's Communes since 1958, and East German officials also began experiencing problems with their ongoing collectivization drive. They welcomed the chance to avoid further agitating the rural population with the prospect of intensified collectivization, and therefore came out publicly and forcefully against the People's Communes, which negatively affected East German-Chinese relations. Thereafter they directly and indirectly began to modify the image of China in a less positive direction. The Chinese featured these communes in their pavilion at the Agricultural Exhibition in Markkleeberg in the spring of 1960, and a local newspaper article in early June reported that the Director of the Chinese pavilion asserted that collective farms like the East German LPGs (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft*, or agricultural production cooperatives) were a stage on the way to People's Communes. Although the Chinese maintained the Director never made such a claim, and a sharp exchange ensued between East German officials and Chinese diplomats, *Neues Deutschland* pushed forward, publishing a rebuttal on 17 June, stating that the GDR did not plan to introduce People's Communes.<sup>138</sup> Ulbricht himself got involved in the conflict, condemning the presentation of the Chinese pavilion

---

nesischen Freundschaft" in der DDR in der Zeit vom 29.5.-4.6.60, 28.01.1960, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, 2/20/115.

<sup>135</sup> See STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), p. 170, who writes that it was a simple bureaucratic failure to fix a date, but the growing tensions were likely a significant factor as well. See Protokoll 6/60 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK, 3.02.1960, p. 3, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, J IV 2/3/674.

<sup>136</sup> MÖLLER (as in footnote 79), p. 43.

<sup>137</sup> Die VR China macht großen Sprung nach vorn, zum 9. Jahrestag der Gründung der VR China am 1. Oktober 1958, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV 2/9.06/81, pp. 53-73; MÖLLER (as in footnote 79), p. 12; STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), pp. 57-67.

<sup>138</sup> See documents in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/221, pp. 24-32; Letter from Skodowski, 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Landwirtschaft, to Walter Ulbricht, 4.07.1960, in: SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182 (Nachlass Walter Ulbricht), 1221, pp. 45-47.

and ordering a 10 000-copy print run of a pamphlet on the communes to be destroyed.<sup>139</sup>

The People's Communes served as a symbolic tipping point for both the deterioration of East German-Chinese relations and the PRC's representation in the GDR, although significant enthusiasm continued among many East Germans and Ulbricht continued to use the relationship with China as a lever to pressure Khrushchev and influence Soviet policy.<sup>140</sup> A co-produced film and a long-planned photographic exhibition set to travel around the GDR developed into major irritants, as the Chinese refused East German demands to modify both the film and captions on the exhibition photos depicting the People's Communes. Both initiatives fell through.<sup>141</sup> East German officials also stopped distributing a dozen or so books that mentioned the Communes, for fear of misleading and confusing GDR citizens.<sup>142</sup> A few years later, books by Mao and other leading Chinese thinkers and politicians were withdrawn from circulation, and sales of Chinese newspapers and magazines came largely to a halt.<sup>143</sup> The SED also worked up strict guidelines for press reporting on developments in China, and sought to eliminate descriptions that contradicted official SED policy.<sup>144</sup> Cultural exchanges were significantly reduced.<sup>145</sup> In short, and in short order, China went from the status of a frequently-mentioned positive force to one mentioned rarely and with reserve.

Stymied by SED officials, and similar to their efforts in Poland, the Chinese in the early 1960s sought to reach out to GDR citizens directly in an effort to promote their own image. In the GDR itself, the Chinese Embassy distributed informational materials to East Germans by mail or by handing out

<sup>139</sup> Letter from Walter Ulbricht to Skodowski, 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Landwirtschaft, 25.07.1960, in: SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182, 1221; Hausmitteilung 13.05.1960, in: SAPMO-BArch DY 30, 20272.

<sup>140</sup> HARRISON (as in footnote 78), pp. 164-165, 204. In an interview with Horst Brie, a diplomat for the GDR, he claimed that many East German Communists were sympathetic to the Chinese model of socialism. *Ibidem*, p. 264, footnote 159, and pp. 288-289, footnote 92.

<sup>141</sup> See documents in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, 2/20/115, and SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182, 1221.

<sup>142</sup> Protokoll des Sekretariats, Nr. 28/60, 8.11.1960, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, J IV 2/3/696.

<sup>143</sup> STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), p. 346.

<sup>144</sup> 3. Entwurf, Vorschläge zur künftigen Gestaltung der Berichterstattung über Probleme der VR China in der DDR-Presse, 1. Außereuropäische Abt., Sektion China, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, 2/20/115, pp. 150-153; Protokoll des Sekretariats, Nr. 10/62, 21.02.1962, in: SAPMO-BArch DY 30, J IV 2/3/793; Entwurf: Hinweise für Veröffentlichungen über die VR China in unserer Presse, 23.01.62 in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/222, pp. 1-4; Jahresbericht 1965 über die Entwicklung der Beziehungen zur VR China, Botschaft der DDR in der VR China, 11.11.65, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/223, pp. 155-170.

<sup>145</sup> STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), pp. 203-207, 359-363.

pamphlets at factories.<sup>146</sup> A particular conflict emerged in the late spring of 1960, when the Chinese Embassy distributed “Long Live Leninism!”, a diatribe inspired by Mao that attacked “Soviet revisionism.” GDR officials vigorously protested these acts and sought to block distribution of these and future materials.<sup>147</sup> The Chinese repeatedly tried to circumvent such efforts and claimed doing so was legal.<sup>148</sup> Chinese students at East German universities attempted to influence their peers through meetings and passing out materials, and Chinese delegations to the GDR undertook similar propaganda activities.<sup>149</sup> On official trips to the PRC, East German participants reported that Chinese officials attempted to supply them with propaganda material, either directly or by leaving information in their hotels or strategically placed on trains.<sup>150</sup> The several hundred East German tourists who traveled to China annually starting in the late 1950s also described major attempts to influence them ideologically.<sup>151</sup> Even as they sought to block this Chinese propaganda, in public the East German leadership and press scarcely mentioned the growing rift with China for several years, and continued to paint a positive image, if a much more moderated one.<sup>152</sup>

By the Sixth Congress of the SED in January 1963, acrimony had reached an unprecedented level and the negativity began to filter out more broadly into East German society. Ulbricht gave a tough speech critical of the Chinese, and *Neues Deutschland* reported that Chinese positions “must be opposed with all determination.”<sup>153</sup> In the spring, the press returned to its silence on China or made attempts to accentuate the positive, but in the summer after the failure of Sino-Soviet talks, a point of no return was reached. The press then published extensively and negatively with respect to the PRC and its positions, with the Politbüro itself spearheading a series of high-profile arti-

<sup>146</sup> See reports in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/222, pp. 49, 212, 219; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/223, pp. 68, 171-174; SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182, 1221, pp. 120, 206-210.

<sup>147</sup> Niederschrift über eine Unterredung zwischen den Genossen Florin und dem Botschafter der VR China in Berlin am 17.6.1960, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, 2/20/115.

<sup>148</sup> Report, 2.07.1963, in: SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182, 1222, p. 42.

<sup>149</sup> See reports in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, 2/20/115, pp. 300-326; SAPMO-BArch, DY 34, 2436; Zusammenfassender Bericht über den Aufenthalt der chinesischen Mai-Delegation, 27.05.1964, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, 2/20/221, pp. 1-6.

<sup>150</sup> See reports in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, J IV 2/3/692, p. 2; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/221, pp. 37-39; SAPMO-BArch, DY 34, 2435, p. 8; SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182, pp. 30-35.

<sup>151</sup> Aktenvermerk über eine Aussprache mit der Leiterin der DER-Reisegruppe 940, Marga Beyer, am 7.09.63, Botschaft Peking, 13.09.63, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/221, pp. 73-78.

<sup>152</sup> STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), pp. 215, 227, 241, 245-246, 254.

<sup>153</sup> LÜTHI (as in footnote 2), p. 234; STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), pp. 364-365.

cles.<sup>154</sup> That the initial articles in *Neues Deutschland* caused the newspaper to sell out in the early morning indicates a pent-up hunger among the population for reporting on the increasing disagreement with the once lauded ally.<sup>155</sup> A large-scale campaign against China ensued, fundamentally altering the public image of the former friend. The PRC was increasingly depicted as ideologically unsound and reckless, and as undermining the socialist camp and the cause of peace.<sup>156</sup> And with the onset of the Cultural Revolution and the nadir of Sino-Soviet relations in 1966, press articles that fall clearly painted the Chinese as a negative entity, a complete reversal from just a few years earlier.<sup>157</sup>

The sudden reversal from friend to foe provoked a wide array of bewildered responses throughout the Party ranks and broad swaths of the population in 1963-64.<sup>158</sup> In response, concerned party officials organized and prioritized a powerful working group to undertake an extensive campaign to assess and shape the reactions of East Germans.<sup>159</sup> The Politbüro launched a renewed press and broader propaganda campaign and initiated an extensive series of discussions with Party members and workers.<sup>160</sup> Citizens were surprised and unnerved to learn of the conflict, especially in light of the recent fulsome praise for Mao and the Great Leap Forward; many worriedly and even plaintively asked whether China was still a socialist country and what the rift meant for the Communist world, international politics, and the GDR's place in both.<sup>161</sup> The SED claimed that the great majority of East Germans agreed with the policies of the GDR and Soviet Union, and rejected those of China.<sup>162</sup> However, a significant minority expressed dissenting opinions that reveal a positive view of the PRC. Some continued to read Chinese-produced materials and listen to Radio Peking.<sup>163</sup> Many praised China for standing up to Soviet dominance. Here the prior encouragement to compare the East Ger-

<sup>154</sup> STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), pp. 364, 374-376; Protokoll der Sitzung des Politbüros, Nr. 29/63, 27.08.1963, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, J IV 2/2/893, p. 10.

<sup>155</sup> Information über die Meinungen und Stellungnahmen zur Veröffentlichung des Offenen Briefes der KPdSU an die Grundorganisationen und des Briefes der KP Chinas vom 14.6.63, Abt. Parteiorgane, 20.07.1963, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/5/22, p. 1.

<sup>156</sup> STUBER-BERRIES (as in footnote 81), pp. 374-376.

<sup>157</sup> Ibidem, pp. 404-405.

<sup>158</sup> See the many reports in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/5/22 and IV A 2/4/3.

<sup>159</sup> Vorlage für die ideologische Kommission, 25.02.1964, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/9.01/3.

<sup>160</sup> Protokoll der Sitzung des Politbüros, Nr. 7/65, Betr. Stellungnahme zur Spaltertätigkeit der Führung der KP Chinas, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, 4674, pp. 90-92.

<sup>161</sup> See reports in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/222, pp. 148-150; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/5/22 and IV A 2/4/3, throughout.

<sup>162</sup> See the Informationsberichte in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 6, 4957 and 5065, and SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/5/22.

<sup>163</sup> See reports in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/4/3, pp. 1-4, 30.

man and Chinese situations seems to have come back to haunt the SED, with some citizens speaking unfavorably of the seemingly obedient East German official response to Soviet hegemony. A more nuanced version of this sentiment expressed by some citizens asserted that these ideological differences were good, as they inhibited dogmatism. Other East Germans continued to view China's revolutionary drive positively and supported the more radical economic and foreign policies of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>164</sup> Still other discordant voices revealed a seemingly growing—or perhaps revived—racist element. Throughout the country, from factories to the countryside, discussions in the fall of 1963 and the following spring repeatedly featured the phrase “yellow peril” (*gelbe Gefahr*).<sup>165</sup> A more enlightened variant of this idea held that China's large production of engineers or huge population posed a threat.<sup>166</sup> With rare exceptions, such negative conceptions of the PRC were absent in the 1950s, when China's size and strength were a cause for celebration and awe.<sup>167</sup>

Reports from the second half of the 1960s continued to portray a mixed view of China among East Germans. Party officials worried about the ongoing disorientation among Party members and the population, and conducted repeated informational campaigns.<sup>168</sup> Czechoslovak diplomats in Berlin complained that SED officials as well as ordinary citizens continued to support Chinese policies and showed enthusiasm for the country.<sup>169</sup> In the aftermath of the Six-Day War and a defeat for the Soviet Bloc's allies in the Middle East in 1967, some citizens asserted that China should have been listened to more.<sup>170</sup> SED officials claimed in 1966, however, that East Germans condemned the Cultural Revolution and China's aggressive foreign policy.<sup>171</sup> A scientific public opinion survey from the end of the decade asked whether China's policies were a danger to the socialist world system, and nearly 73

---

<sup>164</sup> Reports in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/5/22, and IV A 2/4/3, throughout; Informationsbericht, Gera, 4.05.1964, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 6, 4957; Informationsbericht, Dresden, 30.04.1964, *ibidem*, 5065.

<sup>165</sup> See the reports in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/5/22 and IV A 2/4/3, throughout.

<sup>166</sup> Information über politisch-ideologische Unklarheiten und Argumente an den technischen Hochschulen, Sektor Bildungswesen und Kulturarbeit, 4.06.1964, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/222, pp. 137-142.

<sup>167</sup> The only reference to the “Gelbe Gefahr” in the 1950s that I have found comes from a small-town school in late 1956. See Bericht über die Stimmung der Bevölkerung, Magdeburg, 13.11.1956, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV 2/5/732, p. 130.

<sup>168</sup> Letter, Zentralkomitee der SED an die Mitglieder und Kandidaten des ZK der SED, Berlin, 27.01.66, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/995, pp. 31-32.

<sup>169</sup> Aktenvermerk, 14.09.1965, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/20/223, pp. 129-132.

<sup>170</sup> Information, Betr.: Zusammenfassende Einschätzung von ca. 2500 Resolutionen und Solidaritätserklärungen zur israelischen Aggression im Nahen Osten, Abt. Internationale Verbindungen, FDGB-Bundesvorstand, 15.06.1967, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 34, 7973.

<sup>171</sup> Reports from 14.10.1966 and 17.11.1966, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30, IV A 2/9.02/44.

percent agreed, although a significant minority of 17 percent disagreed while 10.5 percent did not answer.<sup>172</sup> By the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China's founding in 1969, the relationship was such that the commemorations in the GDR remained muted and were not coordinated with Chinese officials. At the small official ceremony in Berlin, the main speaker lamented the current "military-bureaucratic dictatorship" there, but stressed solidarity with the Chinese people, who would certainly overcome the current deviations and return to the socialist camp.<sup>173</sup>

#### 4 Conclusion

SED officials were surely pleased that nearly three-quarters of East Germans agreed with the approved, revised image of China, one that was virtually the mirror-image of that propagated for most of the previous two decades. The fact, however, that one in six still held positive views of the former ally, despite its radical turn in politics and years of negative reporting, caused consternation and anxiety among Party leaders. In the GDR as in Poland—two key countries within the Soviet-led Communist world—Party officials and educated elites had worked with considerable success in the 1950s to formulate a portrayal of the PRC as a valued new ally and indeed in many respects as a model to be emulated. A far-reaching campaign in the press, books, and other media, in meetings, concerts, exhibitions and rallies, and through personal contacts, sought to create an effective, potent representation of the Chinese realizing socialism in the world's most populous country. Ordinary East Germans and Poles were encouraged to follow the example of their Chinese comrades and work to fulfill the plan and fight for Party goals.

Initially, SED officials had an easier time with this ambitious project since they could draw on domestic and geopolitical similarities between the two countries as a means to resonate with their population. China also occupied a more important position in the East German context since the SED leadership was in search of support and legitimacy on the international stage. The PRC, with its political clout and socialist to boot, provided handsomely. By the late 1950s, China had become an important symbol in the imagined world of many East Germans, occupying a key position both for implementing actual policy and buttressing Party authority. The SED leadership exhibited a genuine enthusiasm for China and its policies, and this positive portrayal spread widely throughout society and was effectively mobilized for Party aims. Po-

<sup>172</sup> The question was phrased: "Auf der Beratung in Moskau haben sich die Vertreter verschiedener Brüderparteien mit der Politik der Mao-Tse-tung Gruppe auseinandergesetzt. Ist Ihrer Meinung nach die Politik der Mao-Tse-tung Gruppe eine aktive Unterstützung der aggressiven Politik des Imperialismus und damit eine Gefahr für das sozialistische Weltsystem?" HEINZ NIEMANN: *Meinungsforschung in der DDR. Die geheimen Berichte des Instituts für Meinungsforschung an das Politbüro der SED, Köln 1993*, document XIII.

<sup>173</sup> Speech given 1.10.1969, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY 13, 2296.

lish officials on the other hand struggled in the early 1950s to create and disseminate an image of China, which seemed too far away geographically and too closely linked to a Stalinist order that most Poles disliked. The PRC's initial acceptance of de-Stalinization encouraged the Polish reformers around Gomułka to embrace China as a political actor and as a useful symbol for public consumption. With Chinese support for the Polish October in 1956, a consonance between Party goals and public interest materialized, and a portrayal of the PRC as a strong and independent socialist actor captivated many Poles and could be deployed by officials as a source of inspiration and legitimacy. For their part, Ulbricht and his Party allies welcomed the Chinese turn against de-Stalinization soon after, and saw in China a symbol to propagate their own aims among the East German population. In both cases, when China's criticism of the Soviet Union and its policies went too far, both the SED and PZPR deemphasized China, albeit at different times and speeds. As the Chinese increasingly turned away from Khrushchev's political line in the late 1950s, Polish and East German officials were forced to upend this positive representation in recognition of the growing divide. The effects of this volte-face rippled through Central Europe as officials and citizens confronted the gradual loss of a powerful symbol and motivational tool. The rending of the socialist camp in the 1960s was not merely an international crisis for the Soviet Bloc, but also a significant challenge to both the Communist project and the worldviews of millions of Central Europeans.

### Zusammenfassung

#### *Der Osten erglüht? China-Bilder in Ostdeutschland und Polen während des chinesisch-sowjetischen Zerwürfnisses*

Dieser Artikel analysiert die Konstruktion, Verbreitung und Rezeption der sich nach und nach entwickelnden Darstellung der Volksrepublik China (VRC) in Polen und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (DDR) von den späten 1940ern bis in die späten 1960er Jahre. Es wird untersucht, wie Parteioffizielle das China-Bild als ein politisches und erzieherisches Mittel nutzten und in welcher Weise diese Darstellung in der Gesellschaft zirkulierte. Im Beitrag wird der Standpunkt vertreten, dass dieses Bild der VRC ein wichtiger Stützpfeiler des ideologischen Fundaments der kommunistischen Regierungen in Zentraleuropa in den 1950er Jahren gewesen ist. Dies erklärt sich aus der Bedeutung, die der Präsenz der VRC im kommunistischen Lager zugeschrieben wurde und der Rolle, die China als lehrreiches Beispiel für Polen und Ostdeutsche spielte. Anfangs wurde China als eine willkommene Bereicherung im sowjetischen Block begrüßt, und die neuen kommunistischen Regierungen Zentraleuropas benutzen China als ein motivierendes Beispiel für ihre Bevölkerungen. Während der 1950er Jahre erwies sich die VRC als effektives und inspirierendes Symbol, da viele Polen und Ostdeutsche die heroisierende Darstellung der Chinesen als bewundernswerte Mitglieder der kommunistischen Welt akzeptierten. Zudem erhofften sich die polnischen und ostdeutschen Parteien Unterstützung von der VRC in Bezug auf die individuellen Unsicherheiten hinsichtlich ihrer nationalen Grenzen und internationalen Anerkennung. All dies änderte sich, als das chinesisch-sowjetische Zerwürfnis um 1960 stärker hervortrat und die Regierungen Polens und der DDR damit begannen, das Bild der VRC radikal von dem eines Verbündeten zu dem eines Feindes zu verändern.

Dass dieses wichtige Legitimationssymbol verschwand, sorgte in beiden Ländern für Verwirrung und sinkendes Vertrauen in den Kommunismus unter der Bevölkerung. Um diese sich nach und nach entwickelnde Darstellung beurteilen und präsentieren zu können, wird eine große Bandbreite an Quellen herangezogen. Unter anderem werden Partei und Verwaltungsdokumente, Quellenmaterial von Massenorganisationen, Zeitungen und andere Printmedien, Festivals, Konzerttourneen, Demonstrationen, öffentliche Veranstaltungen, Ausstellungen sowie Austauschprogramme und Delegationen aller Art untersucht.