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# Sino-Cuban Relations during the Early Years of the Castro Regime, 1959–1966

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On the evening of 18 October 1964, when Wang Youping, the Chinese ambassador to Cuba, was about to leave for the day, the embassy's reception clerk rushed into the office telling him that Fidel Castro and Emilio Aragones (a member of the secretariat of the Cuban Communist Party) had stopped by. Wang immediately ordered the embassy's cooks to report for duty and headed to the reception area to greet the visiting dignitaries. Castro smiled and told Wang: "Today is Sunday, and we would like to have Chinese food for dinner."

According to recently published memoirs by Chinese diplomats who served in Cuba, it was not unusual in the early to mid-1960s for Cuban leaders—Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Raúl Castro, among others—to come to the Chinese embassy without warning (and sometimes even through the back door outside regular business hours) to enjoy Chinese cuisine. Although the Cuban leaders were known for their disdain for "bourgeois formalities," these unexpected visits caused problems for the embassy cooks, who often had to prepare half-cooked dishes and store them in refrigerators for such contingencies. Fidel Castro was especially fond of northern Chinese dishes such as Beijing duck, and at his request the Chinese government sent two cooks from the famous Beijing Quanjude Duck Restaurant to the Chinese embassy in Havana. After dinner, Castro often stayed until the early morning hours talking incessantly, leaving almost no opportunity for the Chinese to interrupt him or switch topics.<sup>1</sup>

On the evening of 18 October 1964, however, Castro came to the Chinese embassy for a much more important reason. The leader of the Soviet

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1. Wang Youping, *My Career as Ambassador in Seven Countries* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Publisher, 1996), pp. 85–87. When citing books, articles, and journals published in Chinese, the titles are translated in English.

Union, Nikita Khrushchev, had been ousted on 15 October, and Castro was hoping to take advantage of this development to mediate between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the USSR. The Cuban leader was also excited by China's first nuclear weapons test, which had taken place only two days after Khrushchev's downfall. The unannounced visit that night was just the beginning of a series of efforts by Castro to improve not only Sino-Soviet relations but also Sino-Cuban and Soviet-Cuban relations. Subsequent developments showed that Castro's sudden visit to the Chinese embassy on 18 October, at the high point of Sino-Cuban ties, marked the start of a drastic deterioration of relations between Beijing and Havana.

The Sino-Cuban relationship in the first half of the 1960s was an important factor in the world Communist movement. Heavily affected and ultimately doomed by Sino-Soviet antagonism, the Sino-Cuban relationship moved from close friendship to deep hostility in 1959–1966.<sup>2</sup> Previous studies of Sino-Cuban relations in the 1960s have shed useful light on the major events, but the majority of these works were written in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>3</sup> The official control of information in both countries forced the authors to rely primarily on official materials such as public speeches and statements issued by the Communist parties and state organizations, on Western newspaper coverage, and on some interviews.

This article draws on recently published Chinese materials, especially memoirs and autobiographical articles written by a special Chinese envoy and by the first two Chinese ambassadors to Cuba in the early 1960s. Among other relevant sources are memoirs written by former reporters for the Xinhua News Agency (XHNA) and by former interpreters who were sent by the Chi-

2. After 1966, although mutually alienated, the two regimes demonstrated significant resemblance. Their radical social transformations reached a peak in China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and Cuba's Revolutionary Offensive (1968–1970). For a comparison of the two events, see Yinghong Cheng, "Revolutionary Offensive: The Cuban 'Cultural Revolution' and 'Great Leap Forward,'" *Twenty-First Century*, No. 50 (December 1998), pp. 90–99.

3. On China's relations with Latin America and Cuba in the early 1960s, see Cecil Johnson, *Communist China and Latin America, 1959–1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970); and Cheng Ying-Hsiang, *Idylle sino-cubaine brouille sino-sovietique* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1973). Cheng's book deals with the period from 1959 to 1962. Daniel Tretiak's *Cuba and the Soviet Union: The Growing Accommodation* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1966), analyzes Soviet-Cuban relations in the first half of the 1960s, with adequate treatment of Sino-Cuban relations as an important part of the context. Tretiak also co-authored an article with Frederick D'Ignazio, "Latin America: How Much Do the Chinese Care?" *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (Spring 1972), pp. 36–46. Other works include Andres Suarez, "Castro between Moscow and Peking," *Problems of Communism* (Washington, DC), September–October 1963, pp. 56–78, which is probably the earliest piece on the topic; and Ernst Halperin, "Peking and the Latin American Communists," *China Quarterly*, No. 29 (January–March 1967), pp. 111–154. For a relatively recent study, see Damian J. Fernandez, "Cuba's Relations with China: Economic Pragmatism and Political Fluctuation," in Donna Rich Kaplowitz, ed., *Cuba's Ties to a Changing World* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 1993), pp. 17–32.

nese Communist Party (CCP) to Cuba to work for government delegations, economic representatives, and the embassy.<sup>4</sup> The article explores key issues in Sino-Cuban relations and in the Beijing-Moscow-Havana triangle from the spring of 1959, when Chinese and Cuba delegations began to make contact, to March 1966, when Castro made his most vehement anti-Chinese speech, marking the complete rupture of Sino-Cuban amity. The article discusses the growing Sino-Cuban confrontation, Castro's involvement in the Sino-Soviet dispute, and the ideological and strategic impact of the split on Cuban politics, notably with Che Guevara's departure from Cuba.

The latest evidence from Chinese and Cuban sources shows that Sino-Cuban relations were much more important and intimate than previously assumed in the West. China influenced the Cuban revolution first through the relationship between the CCP and the Cuban People's Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Popular, or PSP) from early 1959 to late 1960 and then directly via state-to-state relations after diplomatic ties were formally established. In the beginning, the Chinese were anxious to learn about the political nature of the Cuban revolution (democratic-nationalist or socialist). Even before Castro publicly declared his party's commitment to Marxism, the Chinese began to promote their own model of transformation. After Castro openly allied Cuba with the socialist camp, the Chinese supported Havana with substantial eco-

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4. The most important materials used in this article are diplomatic memoirs. Zhen Tao, *My Seventeen Years of Diplomatic Career* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Publisher, 1997); Shen Jian, "The Bygones of My Foreign Missions," in Liu Xiao, Wu Xiuquan, and Shen Jian, eds., *My Ambassador Careers* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Publisher, 1993), pp. 111–125, a collection of autobiographical articles by Chinese diplomats who served from the 1950s to 1980s; and Wang, *My Career as Ambassador in Seven Countries*. Zhen was stationed in Havana as head of the Cuban branch of the XHNA from March 1960 to March 1961. Shen was the first Chinese ambassador to Cuba, from December 1960 to spring 1964. Wang was the second Chinese ambassador to Cuba, from May 1964 to May 1969. In all of these accounts, Cuban-Chinese ties play an important part. I also have drawn on memoirs written by Chinese journalists and interpreters who served in Cuba. They include Kong Mai, "The Breakthrough in America's Backyard: My Journalistic Career in the Early Years of Cuba's Independence," in Gao Qiufu, ed., *My Journalistic Careers in the Countries without Official Relationships with China* (Beijing: Xinhua Publisher, 1999), pp. 111–135 (The title of this article is misleading: "Cuba's Independence" actually means "the Cuban Revolution." Before 1959, the CCP regarded Cuba as a U.S. "colony." Later the CCP argued that the Communists had made the country "independent.") Kong was the first reporter of the XHNA sent to Cuba in April 1959. I also have used two interpreters' accounts. Huang Ziliang, who served in the first Chinese trade delegation to Cuba in July 1960 and was assigned to stay in Cuba to assist China's economic representative in Havana, wrote *The Rediscovery of the New World: Zhou Enlai and Latin America* (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Publisher, 2004) and three articles (which overlap in content). Liu Jinyan, who was Huang's wife and worked as a Chinese-Spanish interpreter, also wrote an article. Wang Mei, a female Chinese Communist cadre who participated in the receptions held for Che Guevara during his visits to China in 1961 and 1965 and for a delegation of Latin American Communist parties led by Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, Cuba's economic leader, in November 1964, wrote "The One Who Lit the Morning Clouds," *People's Monthly* (Beijing), July 1998, pp. 135–142. In addition to these personal accounts, I have used Wang Taiping, *The Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China*, Vol. 2, 1957–1969 (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Publisher, 1998), an official account of the history of Communist China's foreign policy written by official diplomatic historians and assisted by former diplomats.

conomic assistance. The CCP was willing to provide this aid even though China itself was still recovering from the devastation inflicted by Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward. Above all, CCP leaders hoped that Castro would remain neutral in the Sino-Soviet confrontation.

## **Initial Contacts between Beijing and Havana**

Immediately after Fidel Castro's guerrillas entered Havana at the start of 1959, Mao realized the significance of this momentous political change so near the U.S. coast. The official *People's Daily*, in an editorial published on 4 January 1959, hailed the Cuban revolution as a victory of a "national democratic movement," and China's official Central Trade Unions, Women's Federation, and Association of Youth held a joint mass rally on 24 January to celebrate the political change in Cuba.<sup>5</sup> The CCP's official assessment of the nature of the Cuban revolution remained unchanged until 16 April 1962, when Castro declared his revolution's socialist nature. In the absence of any official channels between Havana and Beijing (Castro's new government did not terminate diplomatic relations with Taiwan until September 1960), China's XHNA became the first Chinese government organization to make contact with Castro's regime. At a time when China had few embassies and consulates worldwide, the mission of the XHNA went far beyond journalism. Kong Mai, a XHNA reporter stationed in New Delhi, was sent to Chile in March 1959 with a Chinese acrobat team in order to make contact with the Cuban authorities.<sup>6</sup> In Chile, Kong attended a news conference for a Cuban journalists' delegation led by the director of the Cuban national radio station. Kong met with the delegation head and requested permission to visit Cuba. The Cuban transmitted Kong's request to Havana, where it was quickly approved with the assistance of the PSP. On 12 April, Kong and Pang Bingan, an interpreter, arrived in Cuba. The XHNA reporter quickly set to work and sent out his first news report on 15 April.<sup>7</sup> More important was his meeting on 17 April with Che Guevara, who helped him to complete the registration process for foreign reporters in Havana. In December 1959, Cuba officially approved China's application for the establishment of XHNA's Havana branch, the first such outlet in the Western Hemisphere. The branch dissemi-

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5. Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 489.

6. Kong went to Chile under the auspices of the acrobats' delegation, not of XHNA. According to Kong, it would have been impossible for a XHNA reporter to receive a visa to enter any Latin American country at that time because of the likelihood of U.S. objections. See Kong, "The Breakthrough in America's Backyard," p. 230.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 230–231.

nated materials reflecting China's official policy—materials that were essentially the Spanish versions of XHNA's daily reports and commentaries.

In the summer of 1959, Che Guevara traveled on behalf of Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement to a number of non-Western countries, including Morocco, Egypt, and Indonesia. Guevara not only sought diplomatic support for the new Cuban government but also “secretly contacted the Chinese diplomats in these countries and expressed the hope of developing relations with China.” He urged the Chinese to purchase Cuban sugar in the future if Cuban-U.S. economic relations deteriorated. Upon receiving this request, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai immediately reported it to Mao, who approved it. Zhou then directed the Chinese embassies in the three countries to inform Guevara.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, in Havana on 13 July 1959, Cuban Armed Forces Minister Raúl Castro met with Yao Zhen, the head of the Chinese journalists' delegation. Castro explained Cuba's difficult situation and its hopes of establishing a close relationship with the PRC. He said that Cuba would gradually sever its diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favor of the PRC. But he hoped that even before diplomatic relations between Cuba and the PRC were formally established an “important Chinese cadre” could come to serve in Havana as an envoy.<sup>9</sup> This was the first time that the new Cuban leaders sent a clear, direct message expressing their interest in developing relations with the PRC. Raúl Castro was probably the most appropriate member of Castro's inner circle to send out this signal because he was the only member with overt connections to the world Communist movement at the time. Raúl Castro had joined the Cuban Communist Party's youth organization at Havana University in the early 1950s (even as Fidel Castro himself was still claiming to be a democratic nationalist revolutionary) and had attended the World Youth Festival in Sofia, Bulgaria, in May 1953. This festival was an annual gathering, held on a rotating basis in the capitals of the Soviet bloc and attended by Communist and pro-Communist youth representatives from around the world.<sup>10</sup>

The Chinese response to the Cuban overtures was favorable. On 19 August, Mao wrote instructions on the telegram Yao Zhen had sent from Havana. Addressing Zhou Enlai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi, Mao wrote: “Comrades Enlai and Chen Yi: Has this matter [Castro's request for having a Chinese representative in Havana] been taken care of? I think we should send a comrade who is politically very experienced and is at a rank equivalent to

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8. Huang, *The Rediscovery of the New Continent*, p. 76.

9. Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 489.

10. Many of the “festival” participants from non-Communist countries were recruited by Soviet agents. Whether Raúl Castro had such a connection remains unclear.

minister plenipotentiary or chargé d'affaires, but under the guise of being the head of the XHNA branch. Let me know if this is appropriate.”<sup>11</sup> To fulfill Mao’s directive, Zhou Enlai sought a person who could work under complicated and dangerous circumstances, eventually settling on Zhen Tao, the deputy director of the secretariat of the CCP’s municipal committee in Shanghai.<sup>12</sup> Zhen had worked as a member of a Communist delegation led by Zhou in the Nationalist-ruled zone in the 1940s and also had close ties with Chen Yi when the latter was mayor of Shanghai. In October 1959, Zhen Tao had received a delegation of the Cuban PSP led by Anibal Escalante, the party’s executive secretary, when it visited China and Shanghai. Zhen’s deft handling of his meetings with the Cubans must have impressed his superiors in Beijing. Zhen was appointed by Zhou as the PRC’s envoy in Havana in January 1960. Zhen was aware of the importance of his new assignment—he was not only the PRC’s first government envoy to Cuba but also the first such representative in the whole of Latin America (Communist China had no official relations with any Latin American countries at that time).

On 11 March 1960, Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi convened an interagency meeting to discuss Zhen Tao’s post. Prior to the meeting, senior officials from the Foreign Ministry, the Foreign Affairs Office of the State Council, the CCP’s International Liaison Department (CCPILD, a party organ established in 1952 to handle party-to-party affairs, especially with Communist parties that were not yet in power), and the XHNA discussed proposals and questions. At the meeting, Zhou Enlai emphasized the profound significance of the Cuban revolution in Latin America and the world, but he also warned that U.S. intervention in Cuba was likely (a warning that proved well-founded). He said that Zhen’s mission was to find “opportune moments” to urge the Cuban leaders to be vigilant and to consolidate the revolution by adopting flexible strategies and tactics. The meeting laid out guidelines for XHNA’s Havana branch, putting it under the supervision of both the Foreign Ministry and the XHNA headquarters.

The meeting then shifted to discussion of an important technical issue. Because of Cuba’s long-time exclusive reliance on American facilities and technology, open-cable communication from Havana had to be sent out through the U.S.-made communications network even after the revolution. This channel was obviously inappropriate if the XHNA branch had to com-

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11. Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong’s Manuscripts since the Foundation of the PRC* (Beijing: People’s Publisher, 1996), Vol. 8, p. 465.

12. Huang Ziliang, “The First Case of the Sino-Latin American Friendship,” in Yu Wuzhen, ed., *The Diplomatic Experience of the New China* (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Publisher, 1996), p. 82. The CCP’s Shanghai municipal committee nominated two candidates for the post, the other of whom was Zhang Chunqiao, who became one of the “Gang of Four” during the Cultural Revolution. Huang, *The Rediscovery of the New Continent*, p. 79.

municate with Beijing about sensitive political matters. Hence, the XHNA director, Wu Lengxi, and the head of the State Council's Foreign Affairs Office, Liao Chengzhi, suggested that Zhen Tao bring its own communications and encryption equipment to Havana. But one of the deputy foreign ministers at the meeting (Zhen's account does not give the name) disagreed. He said that arrangements for such matters between China and foreign countries required each side's news agency to use only the communication facilities provided by the host government. All of XHNA's existing foreign bureaus sent out their reports through open channels. Any confidential communications would be made either through delegations or through messengers. The deputy foreign minister also said that the PRC should not risk the capture of Chinese encryption gear if the United States invaded Cuba. According to Zhen Tao, the deputy foreign minister's objections were persuasive to Zhou and Chen Yi, who decided that the branch should not have its own encrypted communications equipment. Chen Yi ended the discussion on a bewildering note, ordering Zhen Tao to bring with him copies of Mao's "On Protracted War" (a brochure read by the Chinese Communists in the guerrilla war against Japan) and to be prepared for possible guerrilla war in Cuba.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that the XHNA Havana branch did not have its own communication facilities surprised Che Guevara. In late April 1960, shortly after Zhen arrived in Cuba, he was invited to Guevara's home. In a somber mood, Guevara told Zhen that intelligence sources pointed to the likelihood of an imminent U.S. invasion. The Cuban government wanted to inform the Chinese authorities of this danger. Obviously the Cubans were anticipating China's support, and Guevara seemed surprised and disappointed when Zhen told him that he had no way to communicate directly with his government. Guevara then switched the topic to Zhen's assessments of the likelihood of an invasion. Zhen told him that based on XHNA intelligence collection and analysis, he did not believe that such an invasion was imminent. Zhen's analysis proved correct at the time, and Guevara was impressed. According to Zhen, this meeting forged a bond of trust and friendship between them and may also have helped Zhen to convince Beijing that the branch must have independent communication facilities. The problem was solved in July 1960 when the Chinese deputy foreign trade minister visited Cuba. At Zhou Enlai's instruction, he brought secure communications gear to Zhen's office.<sup>14</sup>

One might ask why Zhou and Chen Yi did not send communications equipment to Havana in the first place if they really thought Cuba was important to China. The answer might lie in China's attitude toward the Cuban

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13. Zhen, *My Seventeen Years of Diplomatic Career*, pp. 6–8.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

revolution at the time. Mao and Zhou had great expectations tempered by caution and some confusion. The Chinese leaders wanted to make the news agency's Havana branch an important post, but they apparently were concerned about several issues, including the possibility of U.S. military or covert intervention, which might put an end to Castro's regime. According to Shen Jian, the first Chinese ambassador to Cuba, who was dispatched there in December 1961, all Chinese personnel in the embassy, including cooks, had to receive extensive military training and study Mao's guerilla warfare theory before they set off for Cuba.<sup>15</sup> Mao and Zhou were also a bit skeptical about the nature of the Cuban revolution and wanted to see whether it would move in a socialist or a nationalist direction. After all, Fidel Castro did not openly proclaim his revolution a socialist one until April 1962, a year after the Bay of Pigs invasion. The Chinese leaders also wanted to monitor the Cuban government's concrete steps toward ending its relations with Taiwan. One further problem was that Mao and Zhou were not entirely sure which institution would emerge ascendant: Castro's 26th of July Movement (or the Castroists) or the PSP. All of these uncertainties contributed to the PRC's initially cautious approach toward Cuba.

## **The Nature of the Cuban Revolution**

Castro's 26th of July Movement was a new phenomenon in the world Communist movement. Until January 1959, Castro and his movement had enjoyed much greater attention in the Western media than in the media of the Soviet Union and China (neither of these Communist countries had a news bureau on the island). When Castro and his forces entered Havana, Chinese leaders and their diplomats and intelligence analysts knew little about him. During the first two years of Castro's rule, the Chinese were unsure whether the Cuban revolution would become overtly socialist in orientation.

The Chinese leaders found that they were dealing with two kinds of revolutionaries. First were the guerrillas from the 26th of July Movement, which led the revolution and controlled the government but had no official ties with the international Communist camp. The movement had insisted on its non-socialist and non-Marxist direction from the beginning to win over Western, particularly U.S., public opinion and to isolate the government of Fulgencio Batista, which would miss no chance to tie the guerrillas to world Communism. Whether Castro was in fact already a firm Marxist before 1959 is beyond the scope of this article. Regardless, until 1959 he repeatedly and pub-

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15. Shen, "The Bygones of My Foreign Missions," p. 111.

licly denounced socialism and Communism, even though some of his fellow guerrillas were known to be pro-Communist or even Communist.<sup>16</sup> Castro maintained this position in 1959 and into 1960, claiming on many occasions that his revolution was targeted at exploitation, capitalism, and imperialism, without mentioning the word “socialism.” Although his economic policies increasingly resembled those of a Communist state, he tried to avoid statements that would provoke U.S. intervention. For the same reason, Castro’s government avoided official communications with Communist countries, especially at high levels, in 1959 and most of 1960.

The other revolutionaries in Cuba were those directly affiliated with the PSP. The PSP had been known as the Cuban Communist Party from 1925 to 1944 and had established ties with the CCP as early as 1949, when Lazaro Pena, the party’s chief labor leader, traveled to Beijing to attend the Trade Union Conference of Asian and Australasian Countries. Blas Roca, the PSP General Secretary, visited China in September 1956 and was among the Communist party leaders from around the world who attended the CCP’s Eighth Congress as guests.<sup>17</sup> The PSP contributed little to Batista’s fall because of what party leaders construed as the absence of “objective conditions” for a proletarian revolution in Cuba, a line also espoused by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the CCP in the 1950s.<sup>18</sup> The PSP realized its mistake after December 1958 and did its best to integrate itself into the new regime. To communicate with both the 26th of July Movement and the PSP, China established two channels: the XHNA branch in Havana, which acted as a government agency and communicated with the Castroists and Cuban government before diplomatic recognition was established; and a link between the CCPILD and Cuba’s PSP.<sup>19</sup> Zhen Tao’s mission, as he was clearly instructed, did not include any direct dealing with the PSP.

Chinese leaders’ doubts about the nature of the Cuban revolution were

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16. These leanings are evident in the messages exchanged in January 1958 by Che Guevara and Raúl Castro, two of the major field commanders of the guerrilla army. The letters fell into the hands of the Batista government after the arrest of the messenger. The letters clearly reveal the Marxist outlook of the two correspondents and were made public by the government in order to link Castro’s forces with world Communism. The 26th of July Movement claimed, incorrectly, that the letters were not authentic.

17. William Ratliff, “The Chinese Communist Domestic United Front and Its Applications to Latin America,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Washington at Seattle, 1974, p. 120.

18. Some connections between the 26th of July Movement and the PSP existed before 1959. The PSP sent delegations to visit Castro in the Sierra Maestra and had representatives ensconced with the guerrilla but did not cooperate with Castro’s forces in large-scale actions.

19. Although China’s former diplomats, including former XHNA officials, have been allowed to write memoirs, former CCPILD officials have largely kept silent. In the case of Chinese-Cuban relations, the retired diplomats have revealed a considerable amount of information, whereas the former CCPILD officials have disclosed almost nothing. Consequently, Cuban-PRC state-to-state relations are easier to discuss than CCP-PSP ties.

allayed by the PSP, which moved quickly after January 1959 to promote socialism in Cuba and establish links with the world Communist movement. The PSP helped to establish communication between the CCP and the Cuban government, reassured the Chinese about the future of socialism in Cuba, and promoted the Chinese model of socialist transformation for Cuba. The PSP also played a crucial role when Kong Mai applied for a visa to Cuba from Chile. The visa application was supported by Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, a senior member of the PSP Politburo who had maintained close ties with the Castroists through his secret visits to their encampments during the guerrilla war. When Kong Mai and Pang Bingan arrived in Havana in April 1959, they were received by the PSP's youth organization. The Cuban customs officials, who were mostly holdovers from the Batista regime, were reluctant to let in the Chinese envoys and even took away their passports, claiming that they were illegal immigrants. The PSP, Rodriguez in particular, contacted Che Guevara, who ordered the customs official to return the passports.<sup>20</sup> The PSP also provided Kong with inside information about the complicated political situations in post-revolutionary Havana. Accompanied by José Louis, a reporter for Prensa Latina (Cuba's official news agency), Kong visited Guevara on the fifth day of his trip. In May, Juan Marinello, the PSP chairman, visited China. Anibal Escalante, the PSP's executive secretary, followed him in October. Both of them were guests of the CCP, not the state. The memoirs and Chinese materials used in this article do not reveal any details about these two visits, except some vague descriptions such as "consolidating and expanding the relationship between the two parties."

The connections between the CCP and the PSP continued to develop in 1960. When Zhen Tao arrived in Cuba in early April 1960 to run the XNHA branch, he was supposed to communicate primarily with the Cuban government and the Castroists, but he also found himself receiving considerable information from the PSP. Anibal Escalante (the PSP executive secretary) met Zhen at the airport, offering an enthusiastic welcome that overshadowed the official one from Cuba's Foreign Ministry. Escalante's welcome of Zhen seemingly reciprocated Zhen's reception of him in Shanghai half a year before. Escalante assured Zhen that the PSP would assist him in all aspects of his business. Two days later, the PSP sent a Mercedes Benz and armed driver to Zhen. Soon thereafter, PSP General Secretary Blas Roca, who also had recently visited China, sent a Politburo member to drive Zhen to Roca's home. According to Zhen, Roca provided him with comprehensive information about the Cuban revolution, "including the role of the PSP in the revolu-

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20. Kong, "The Breakthrough in America's Backyard," pp. 230–232.

tion.” Obviously, Roca’s version of the PSP’s role in the revolution and in post-revolutionary developments was intended to impress Zhen.<sup>21</sup>

As relations between the CCP and the PSP continued to develop, PSP officials continued to stress that their party provided the only assurance that the Cuban revolution would take a socialist road. In April 1960, Qian Liren, the deputy head of CCPILD, led a Chinese youth delegation to attend the Fourth Congress of the League of Cuban Socialist Youth (the PSP’s youth organization) and met with Escalante, who was supervising the congress. Zhen Tao, who attended the meeting, later recalled that Escalante and Qian discussed the possibility of uniting three revolutionary forces in Cuba—the PSP, the Castroists, and the Revolutionary Directorate (Directorio Revolucionario, DR), a small but active student political organization that participated in the overthrow of Batista—into a single party, an indication that the Castroists had become more willing to join openly with Communists. In August 1960, Wu Xiuquan, a CCP Central Committee member and deputy head of the CCPILD, led a Chinese delegation to the PSP’s Eighth Congress. With Zhen Tao accompanying him, Wu met Blas Roca, who told him that “there is a 95 percent possibility that, together with the PSP, Castro will be taking the socialist road.”<sup>22</sup> This statement, combined with the economic policies recently adopted in Cuba, especially the nationalization of heavy industries and foreign businesses, further strengthened Zhen’s belief that the Cuban revolution was moving in a socialist direction.

The PSP also assisted the Castroists in developing their relations with the CCP. In November 1960, immediately after the two countries formally established diplomatic relations, Guevara visited China in his capacity as leader of Cuban industry and finance. The Cuban delegation included a high-ranking PSP official (a Central Committee Secretary), whose name was not released and who never appeared in public during the visit. Wang Mei of the CCPILD was assigned to receive this PSP guest. Wang later explained that

at that time, the 26th of July Movement, the PSP, and the DR were preparing to unify. The PSP’s aim in sending one of its leaders to accompany Guevara was to advise Guevara on Chinese affairs and to show the Chinese their close tie with the 26th of July Movement, and of course to demonstrate to the 26th of July Movement their links with the Chinese in order to enhance their leverage vis-à-vis the 26th of July Movement. There is no doubt about this intention.<sup>23</sup>

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21. Zhen, *My Seventeen Years of Diplomatic Career*, p. 19.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

23. Wang, “The One Who Lit the Morning Clouds,” p. 135. This article was written in memory of Guevara on the thirtieth anniversary of his death.

In a further gesture toward the CCP, the PSP attempted to introduce the Chinese model of socialist transformation to Cuba. William Ratliff in his doctoral dissertation emphasized the PSP's understanding of the similarities between China and Cuba—from the traditional Marxist perspective, both countries lacked “objective conditions” for a socialist revolution—and highlighted the party's efforts to introduce the “Chinese road” as soon as the new Cuban government was established. At a PSP Central Committee plenum in January 1959, Escalante praised the political changes led by the 26th of July movement and called for a transition to socialism with the PSP's assistance: “Rather than following the classic revolutionary road, the Cuban revolution has followed the ‘road’ that begins and develops in the distant countryside and finally envelops the cities.” He noted that Cuba had broken with “pre-established dogmas and critiques” and that “the vision of Fidel Castro and his military staff have been raised on high,” but he then stressed that “it is necessary to recognize the important role played by the PSP in opening the way for the ‘Chinese road.’”<sup>24</sup>

According to Ratliff, the PSP's introduction of the “Chinese road” was actually meant to slow down the transformation to socialism under the Castroists. As he put it, “the Cuban Communists were concerned, and increasingly with good reason, that the Castroists would push ahead too quickly; the precedent of the Chinese Communists, whose anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolutionary credentials could not be doubted, might convince Castro that the middle class could and should be encouraged to contribute to the construction of socialism in its early stages.”<sup>25</sup> As early as May 1959, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez published an article in *Hoy* (the PSP's main newspaper) praising China as “a historical example” of a country with a proletariat that worked “in league with” the national bourgeoisie not only in “the anti-imperialist and agrarian revolution” but also “in the transition to socialism.” Rodríguez argued that in Cuba, too, “cooperation with the bourgeoisie” was essential for the time being.<sup>26</sup> Two months later, Blas Roca recalled Mao's advice to him in 1956 about the need for as broad a base as possible for socialist construction.<sup>27</sup> In August 1960, when Castro began to nationalize “Yankee” firms, Roca said that the policy was correct, but he cautioned that national capitalism was still “necessary” and “plays an important role” in the Cuban economy. On 13 September, when Castro began to nationalize Cuban-owned

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24. Ratliff, “The Chinese Communist Domestic United Front,” p. 121.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

enterprises, Roca wrote an open letter to *Hoy* responding to the question “Is China a socialist regime?” His answer was that China politically was socialist but economically was not socialist because state-owned enterprises in China coexisted with privately owned businesses and with firms jointly owned by the state and individuals.<sup>28</sup> At the end of September, as Castro’s nationalization drive intensified, *Hoy* published a lengthy summary of a China’s *People’s Daily* editorial emphasizing the positive role of the national bourgeoisie in socialist construction. But as Ratliff points out, the PSP’s allusions to China fell on deaf ears, and by the end of 1960 the PSP had nothing significant left to defend in China’s actual experience.

The reality of what was happening in China was at odds with the anodyne depictions in *Hoy*. Maoist China became “socialist” as the result of a radical social transformation from the mid-1950s on. The Chinese Communists, especially Mao, did not allow the revolution to follow a “nationalist and democratic” path after their 1949 victory, contrary to what they had promised in earlier decades when they sought to recruit as many supporters and sympathizers for the revolution as possible. Instead, after a number of political and economic campaigns to consolidate CCP rule in the early 1950s, they embarked on a Stalinist transformation in the mid-1950s by socializing most privately owned businesses and forcing peasants into collective farms and the People’s Communes, followed by the devastating Great Leap Forward, which resulted in mass starvation. Given the PSP leaders’ close ties with China and their familiarity with China’s socialist transformation, they must have known more about the situation there than the Castroists did. Was the PSP exaggerating the importance of the bourgeoisie in China to make their case for a gradual transition in Cuba? The evidence is ambiguous, but in any case the dulcet version of the “Chinese road” was openly discussed in Cuba in 1959–1960 as an alternative path to socialism.

In addition to highlighting China as a model, the PSP sought advice from the CCP regarding the transition. The PSP sent a copy of its draft constitution, adopted in October 1959, to the CCPILD. The constitution was intended to reflect the new circumstances after the revolution and the prospects for socialist transformation in Cuba. The CCPILD gave a Chinese translation of the draft to Mao in April 1960. The official compilation of Mao’s papers and documents reveals the notes he made in the margins of the PSP constitution, as well as the original texts of the PSP’s draft on which Mao made his comments.<sup>29</sup> Mao’s marginal comments indicate that he, and pre-

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28. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

29. The editor of the volume arranged Mao’s numbered comments in sequential order. For each com-

sumably the Soviet leaders as well, were fully aware that the Cuban revolution would likely move toward socialism, assisted by the PSP. Mao evidently hoped for a gradual and moderate transformation in Cuba, similar to China's New Democracy rather than the crash transformation implemented in the USSR during the Stalin era. Mao believed that the PSP should pursue a united front involving a variety of social classes instead of an overt one-party regime, and he also believed that Cuba for the time being should focus on Latin America rather than siding immediately with the Communist world. These comments underscored Mao's reservations about the Cuban revolution. In his view, a premature socialist transformation would endanger the revolution, and a hasty decision to join the Communist world would alienate other Latin American countries. Mao also undoubtedly hoped that if Cuba followed the "Chinese path," Castro likely would orient himself more to Beijing than to

ment, a footnote quoting the corresponding part of the PSP text, sometimes with explanation, is given. Mao's most important comments were the following. (1) Mao: "Nationalist capitalists should be included." The PSP text: "We must win over the urban petty bourgeoisie, keeping them in the revolution, strengthening cooperation with them, neutralizing the waverers, and cracking down on the anti-revolutionary elements." (Mao put a question mark next to this paragraph and pointed out that the "nationalist capitalists" should be "included.") (2) Mao: "It should be changed to: The sympathy of peoples in Latin America, in the socialist camp, and among the oppressed Western peoples." The PSP text: The Cuban revolution can count on "the sympathy of the socialist camp, the nationalist countries, and the American people." (7) Mao: "Establish a patriotic people's front of all ethnic groups, all democratic classes, all democratic parties, all people's organizations, and the army." No corresponding PSP text exists for this comment. The editors' explanation reads: "This is Mao's notes on the constitution's 'The Rights of Citizens and the Political System' section." (9) Mao: "Should mutual trade be considered?" The PSP text: "Cuba also should establish relationships with the Soviet Union, China, and other socialist countries, which will be extremely important to consolidate Cuba's independence and developing economy. In diplomatic policies, Cuba should take into consideration its relationship with Latin American countries in terms of unity, friendship, and cooperation." Mao moved this last sentence up and put it before the one emphasizing Cuba's relationship with socialist countries, indicating that priority should be given to Cuba's relations with Latin American countries, not the socialist camp. (10) Mao: "Will foreign banks be confiscated without compensation?" This question was written alongside a paragraph in the PSP text dealing with nationalization of foreign banks in the future. (11) Mao: "How to explain 'redemption' and 'liquidation'?" This comment appeared next to the section in the PSP text regarding the nationalization of foreign enterprise in Cuba. The section used those two terms. (12) Mao: "Should organizing some bigger cooperatives based on the developmental stage be considered?" This comment appeared next to the section on "Land Reforms" in the PSP text. (13) Mao: "Problem of small-scale economic freedom, particularly small pieces of private land immediately adjacent to peasants' houses." Here Mao was responding to the "Land Reform" section in the PSP text, which read: "Cooperatives should oppose individualism, advocate collectivism and the cooperative spirit of peasants, and oppose exploitation." At the time, some CCP leaders and local officials were proposing economic policies that would allow peasants to develop a certain degree of private production based on individual farm plots in order to alleviate economic difficulties brought about by the Great Leap Forward. Mao was not in favor of this proposal, but his comments on the PSP text were neutral. (14) Mao: "What about reversing the order?" Here Mao was suggesting that the PSP give priority to Latin American countries over the USSR and China as Cuba's foreign trade partners, reversing the order of priority in the PSP draft. (15) Mao: "Steel and machinery manufacturing industry should be added." Here Mao was responding to the PSP's industrial plan, which put agriculture first and the iron and copper industries second. For all of these, see Mao, *Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Foundation of the PRC*, Vol. 8, pp. 163–167.

Moscow. It is unclear how (or even whether) Mao's marginal comments were forwarded to the PSP, but irrespective of that, his advice did little to slow Castro's accelerated course to socialism.

Although the Castroists did not openly proclaim their dedication to socialism until the spring of 1961, they were consistently more impatient and radical than the PSP in the drive toward socialism. The PSP's connection with world Communism, however, gave it an important role in the new regime. In July 1961 the Castroists, the PSP, and the DR announced that they were unifying to form the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas). The name was changed to the United Party of the Socialist Revolution (Partido Unido de la Revolucion Socialista) in 1963 and, finally, in October 1965 to the Communist Party of Cuba (Partido Comunista de Cuba, or PCC). Although the 26th of July Movement's personnel dominated the PCC Central Committee (Castro was the First Secretary), most of the leading PSP officials joined the PCC. Escalante, the PSP's most active leader with close ties to the Soviet Union, was appointed to the key post of Secretary for organizational matters, and Carlos Rafael Rodriguez served as Cuba's chief economic official for more than three decades. The leaders of the PSP may well have cheered their success, but Fidel Castro had at least as much reason to celebrate. The PSP's ties with foreign Communist parties enabled the Castroists to communicate with and get support from the Soviet Union and China without overtly provoking the United States. As soon as Castro openly declared himself a Communist, he moved quickly to establish his authority as the only authentic interpreter of Marxism and Communism in Cuba. Emulating tactics used by Stalin and Mao, Castro strengthened his hold through purges, removing Escalante on 26 March 1962, only nine months after the merger. Appearing on a nationally televised news program, Castro accused Escalante of trying to foster bureaucracy and sectarianism within the party.<sup>30</sup>

As soon as Castro announced his Communist aspirations and established a dominant role in the Cuban polity, the Chinese authorities moved quickly to consolidate Sino-Cuban relations and to woo Castro himself. For example, Chen Yi promptly endorsed Castro's purge of Escalante.<sup>31</sup> *Heroic Cuba*, which was published in Beijing right after Castro proclaimed his Communist loyalties, lavished praise on the Cuban leader. The book was a collection of articles

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30. Escalante went to Moscow afterward and then returned to Cuba when Castro strengthened his ties with the USSR in 1965, only to be ousted again in 1968 and sentenced to fifteen years in prison when Castro launched his Revolutionary Offensive. Escalante's fate may be compared with those of the Chinese Communist leaders who were trained and trusted by Moscow but ousted by Mao.

31. Johnson, *Communist China and Latin America*, p. 148.

by Chinese journalists and other visitors to Cuba, starting with a portrait of Castro titled “The Great Helmsman of the Cuban Revolution,” an obvious allusion to Mao’s own title in China.<sup>32</sup>

## **Sino-Cuban Diplomatic Recognition and Mutual Assistance**

Diplomatic relations between China and Cuba were formally established in September 1960. On 2 September, Fidel Castro spoke to a crowd of more than one million people and asked them for “approval” of the government’s decision to sever diplomatic ties with Taiwan and recognize the PRC as the legitimate representative of China. The crowd voiced its “approval” in a deafening chorus lasting several minutes. Historians have been uncertain whether negotiations between the two countries preceded this action. The Chinese diplomats’ memoirs indicate that no such talks took place beforehand. Castro announced the decision spontaneously, although he was certain that China would not decline his offer.<sup>33</sup> On 9 September, a week after Castro’s announcement, Zhen Tao was authorized by the Chinese government to iron out the details of a communiqué with the Cubans. The final text was broadcast on 28 September.

Zhen notes that after diplomatic relations were established, his own mission was completed. Castro, however, had not yet declared himself a Communist, even though the 26th of July Movement had merged with the PSP and Castro’s nationalization of foreign and Cuban industries were unmistakably socialist policies. Zhen left Cuba in March 1961 after helping Shen Jian, the first Chinese ambassador to Cuba, adjust to the post. Within two weeks after returning to Beijing, Zhen provided four separate briefings on his mission in

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32. Tan Wenrui, “The Great Helmsman of the Cuban Revolution,” in *Heroic Cuba* (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Publisher, 1962), p. 1.

33. Zhen claims that from the time he first met Castro in late April 1960, the Cuban leader made clear that his government would treat Zhen according to diplomatic protocol. On 2 September 1960, Zhen and Zhou Siyi (the Chinese trade representative who arrived in Cuba in July 1960 with the Chinese trade delegation and stayed in Havana thereafter) were present at the rally, with seats near Fidel Castro. Zhen and Zhou had been invited to the rally the previous evening but had not been told what would happen there. After Castro suddenly “asked” the crowd whether Cuba should establish diplomatic ties with China and cut off its links with Taiwan and the crowd responded with loud approval, Castro exclaimed, “The Chinese representative is already here!” He then walked to Zhen, pulled him to the podium, and held his hand high while announcing the decision. The XHNA Havana branch immediately tried to cable this news to Beijing, but, according to Zhen, the United States delayed transmission for seventeen hours because XHNA was still using the international cable service (through the United States) to send unclassified messages. See Zhen, *My Seventeen Years of Diplomatic Career*, pp. 32–34.

Cuba and presented his analysis of the nature and future of the Cuban revolution. His first briefing was to senior Foreign Ministry officials (though Chen Yi may not have been present), and his second was to the ministry's entire staff. Zheng's third briefing was to Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi, and his final report was to the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress. On each occasion, Zhen said that although some Chinese diplomats still believed that the Cuban revolution was "bourgeois democratic" in nature, he was convinced that it was socialist.<sup>34</sup> Zhen's reports were completed during the first wave of the Bay of Pigs invasion, which prompted Castro to announce that he was a Communist and that the Cuban revolution was socialist. In June 1963 China publicly suggested, in a statement titled "Proposal by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement," that Cuba, already a de facto member of the socialist camp, was now a formal member.<sup>35</sup>

Because Cuba was the first Latin American country to recognize China and was also the only Communist country in the Western Hemisphere, Chinese leaders took great care in selecting their first ambassador to Cuba. They finally settled on Shen Jian, who had been serving as ambassador to India, one of the most important diplomatic posts for the PRC. Shen was chosen not only because of his diplomatic experience but also because of his background in foreign intelligence. From 1938 to 1947, he was a Communist spy in the headquarters of Hu Chongnan, a Nationalist general who was supposed to attack Yanan and capture Mao. Shen and other Communist spies disclosed information that not only contributed to Hu's defeat, but also earned Mao the reputation of a legendary military genius who could predict his enemy's every move. Before Shen set out for Cuba, Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi gave him orders similar to those given to Zhen Tao over a year earlier—to understand Cuba's situation, to remind Cuban leaders about the danger of U.S. intervention, and to urge them "to be patient and cautious" in pushing the revolution forward.<sup>36</sup>

After the establishment of Cuban-PRC relations, Chinese economic aid to Cuba increased and became more open. In November 1960, Che Guevara led an economic delegation to China, meeting with Mao, Zhou, Chen Yi, and other Chinese leaders. A treaty signed by Guevara and Li Xiannian, China's deputy premier, provided Cuba with a long-term interest-free loan of

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34. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

35. On the gradual change in China's official attitude toward the Cuban revolution, as reflected in *People's Daily* and *Red Flag*, from 1959 to 1962, see Johnson, *Communist China and Latin America*, pp. 138–142.

36. Shen, "The Bygones of My Foreign Missions," p. 111. Also see Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 491.

the equivalent of 60 million dollars over five years (1961–1965).<sup>37</sup> When a Cuban trade delegation visited China in February 1963, Zhou told them that “the loan was just a form of aid. If you are unable to pay it off when it is due, you can postpone it. If later on you are again unable to pay it, you can postpone it again.”<sup>38</sup> Upon hearing the news, Guevara told his colleagues: “It is unbelievable there is such a loan in the world: interest-free, no due date, and even no responsibility for paying it off.”<sup>39</sup> Guevara’s visit also secured a Chinese purchase of one million tons of Cuban sugar in exchange for rice, the major item Cuba wanted to obtain from China.<sup>40</sup> To compete with the Soviet Union, China promised to buy Cuban sugar at the rate fixed between Cuba and the Soviet Union. When international sugar prices went up, the Soviet Union raised its compensation rate from 0.0411 to 0.0611 U.S. dollars per pound, and China immediately adopted the same rate.<sup>41</sup> In October 1963, when Cuba was struck by tornadoes, the PRC (whose people were still suffering from the disastrous results of the Great Leap Forward) immediately provided 5,000 tons of grain, 3,000 tons of pork, and large quantities of medicine, clothing, shoes, and stationery to Cuba. Zhou Enlai and Li Xiannian personally coordinated this aid and ordered different provinces to make contributions.

According to the official history of Chinese foreign policy, the cash value of trade between China and Cuba averaged \$150 million annually in the first half of the 1960s and reached a peak in 1965 of \$224 million.<sup>42</sup> By that point, China was Cuba’s second trading partner (after the Soviet Union), and Sino-Cuban trade accounted for 14 percent of the island’s total foreign trade.<sup>43</sup>

In addition, China provided extensive economic advice to Cuba. Bo Yibo, the head of China’s Central Planning Committee, wrote an article for

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37. “Facts on Sino-Cuban Trade,” *People’s Daily* (Beijing), 10 January 1966, p. 4. This article was given in the form of an interview, though the names of the interviewer and the interviewee were not mentioned at the time. The Chinese revealed their identity later on after Sino-Cuban relations deteriorated (see below). The interview was reprinted by *Peking Review*, 14 January 1966, pp. 21–23.

38. Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People’s Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 196.

39. Shen, “The Bygones of My Foreign Mission,” p. 121.

40. Cuba’s per capita rice consumption was much higher than that of the average Latin American country. Before the revolution, the United States was the main rice provider for Cuba, but because of the Castro regime’s mismanagement and the imposition of U.S. economic sanctions, rice was rationed in Cuba beginning in 1962.

41. Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People’s Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 495. According to Wang, the first Chinese purchase of Cuban sugar (50,000 tons) was made in December 1959, and the second (500,000 tons) was in July 1960 of sugar diverted from the Soviet Union. China’s third purchase was made during Guevara’s November 1960 visit. Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People’s Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 492.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 495.

43. Fernandez, “Cuba’s Relations with China,” p. 19.

*Cuba Socialista* (the PCC's main organ, similar to China's *Red Flag*) in October 1963 introducing the Chinese experience with socialist industrialization.<sup>44</sup> PRC officials even ventured to suggest that Cuba change the island's single-crop export economy. Zhen Tao began to discuss this issue with Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, Cuba's agricultural leader, as early as September 1960. When Rodriguez complained about Cuba's food shortage, Zhen said he "took the chance to suggest that Cuban peasants should learn how to grow grains," instead of only sugar cane. Zhen told Rodriguez that China's experience showed that this was not just an economic issue but a political one as well. Without enough grain a socialist country could not maintain its independence. But Rodriguez obviously preferred the idea of "socialist labor division," an economic doctrine endorsed by the USSR. In Cuba's case this entailed exports of Cuban sugar in exchange for food and other necessities from other socialist states. Zhen went further to introduce Mao's "Self Reliance" doctrine, but it did not impress Rodriguez, who suggested that China import more Cuban sugar and export more rice to Cuba along with other necessities.<sup>45</sup>

A similar but more serious discussion took place between Shen Jian and Guevara in the aftermath of Cuba's 1963 tornado disaster. Shen suggested that Cuba cultivate as many crops as possible to achieve self-reliance in its food supply. Guevara accepted the suggestion and asked Shen for technical support. Shen immediately cabled Beijing to send rice experts to help the Cubans change their agricultural structure.<sup>46</sup> China's advice and assistance stemmed less from any real concern about Cuba's food production than from the Sino-Soviet competition. The Chinese authorities understood that the Cuban economy's dependence on sugar exports was the main reason for Cuba's reliance on Moscow. China's efforts were in vain, however. Cuba remained dependent on Soviet potato and flour exports for the next three decades.

China also provided Cuba with military support. According to Wang

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44. Bo Yibo, "The Socialist Industrialization of China," *Peking Review*, No. 41 (11 October 1963), pp. 20–23.

45. Zhen, *My Seventeen Years of Diplomatic Career*, pp. 21–22. Zhen notes that 25 years later, in 1986, when he led a Chinese People's Congress delegation to Cuba, his request to visit a Cuban grocery store was reluctantly granted, but his host, the head of Cuba's Foreign Trade Commission, frankly acknowledged that the food supply in Cuba was worse than in China. When Zhen went to a Cuban grocery store, he found very little to buy, especially without a ration card. Zhen emphasized that the food shortages were the result of Cuba's disregard of his earlier suggestion. Zhen's claim here is, of course, fanciful: China solved its food problem in the 1980s not by sticking to Maoist self-reliance but by reintroducing non-socialist incentives. In 1986, Zhen met Rodriguez, who wanted to learn more about China's economic policies and asked many specific questions. In 1991, Rodriguez visited China and expressed further interest in China's economic reforms. In the early 1990s, Cuba began to introduce a few limited economic reforms, especially allowing foreign tourists to visit Cuba.

46. Shen, "The Bygones of My Foreign Missions," p. 121.

Youpin (the second Chinese ambassador to Cuba, serving from May 1964 to May 1969), China supplied its most advanced anti-aircraft weapon—multi-barrel ground-to-air machineguns—to Cuba to strengthen the country's air defenses. Cuba's first hundred pilots were also trained in China.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to supplying economic and military help, China sent many cultural and political delegations to Cuba in the early 1960s. Delegations representing trade unions, the women's federation, the youth league, artists' and writers' unions, scientific organizations, peasants' groups, circus groups, and other entities traveled to Cuba. The Chinese performing arts organization sent 98 of the top Chinese singers and many stage performers, especially from the Beijing Opera, to Cuba in 1961. The delegation stayed in Cuba for two months and staged performances in all thirteen provinces. The performances were enthusiastically received, even those of the Beijing Opera, which is often considered difficult for foreigners to appreciate. This delegation and others from China were warmly praised by Cuban leaders. Press coverage of the events was extensive, and some were even televised. Delegation members were invited to participate in mass rallies and perform volunteer work. Zhang Baifa, Beijing's model construction worker in the 1950s and 1960s who became deputy mayor of Beijing in the 1990s, joined the Chinese youth delegation in 1961 and worked as a volunteer at a construction site in the Sierra Maestra. These cultural and political activities helped to foster the atmosphere of revolutionary festival promoted by the Cuban authorities in the early 1960s to symbolize what they claimed was the popular nature of the Cuban revolution.<sup>48</sup> In return, Cuba sent similar delegations to China. One detail revealed by the Chinese diplomats is that Castro's eleven-year-old son led a Cuban children's delegation to China.

Although Cuba was the main beneficiary of these ties, China also received significant benefits. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, China was struggling to achieve oil and energy self-reliance in order to end its dependence on the Soviet Union. Shen Jian visited Cuba's oil refinery right after he arrived in Cuba. Cuba had been the experimental site for some American technologies, particularly for oil refineries and communications. The refinery Shen visited was built in 1958, a year before the revolution, with advanced American technology. Shen requested the blueprints and other data from the

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47. Wang, *My Career as Ambassador in Seven Countries*, p. 88. Wang does not make clear whether the pilots were military pilots.

48. One may assume this was an outgrowth of the "cultural diplomacy" conducted by both China and the Soviet Union in Latin America in 1959. This "cultural diplomacy" was a source of influence in non-socialist countries without being overtly political. See Frederick D'Ignazio and Daniel Tretiak, "Latin America: How Much Do the Chinese Care?" *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1972), p. 36. China's cultural delegations in Cuba were intended to intensify the revolutionary atmosphere in Cuba and expand China's political influence on the island.

Cuban government and received a package of detailed information.<sup>49</sup> The official history of China's foreign relations acknowledges that "China's first large-scale refinery facilities were established with the help of Cuban technology."<sup>50</sup> China's drive for energy self-sufficiency in the early 1960s was an important theme in China's propaganda (for example, the legend of the DA Qing Oil Field in Manchuria, which is said to have been established solely with China's own technology, was inspired by the Maoist self-reliance doctrine), but the use of "Cuban" (i.e., American) technology was never mentioned. Another Cuban contribution that was omitted from Chinese propaganda was some pieces of American missiles. In late December 1960, a U.S. missile landed accidentally on the eastern part of Cuba. It broke apart but did not explode. Shen immediately went to the site to observe. Afterward he urged the government in Beijing to send missile experts to Cuba, who, upon arrival, were given parts of the missile and allowed to take them back to China.<sup>51</sup>

## Cuba between Beijing and Moscow

Throughout the first half of the 1960s, Cuba found itself caught between China and the Soviet Union. The Cubans sought to remain on good terms with both China and the USSR for as long as possible in the hope that the two would someday bridge their ideological divide. Cuba's official position in this regard was reflected in one of Guevara's statements in August 1963:

The Sino-Soviet quarrel is, for us, a sad development, but because the dispute is a fact, we tell our people about it, and it is discussed by the party. Our party's attitude is to avoid analyzing who is right and who is not. We have our own position, and as they say in the American films, any resemblance [presumably of Cuba to either contestant] is purely coincidental.<sup>52</sup>

Cuba's neutrality was exploited by both Beijing and Moscow, who treated the island as a propaganda battleground. From 1960 to 1964, China and the So-

49. Shen, "The Bygones of My Foreign Missions," pp. 121–122.

50. Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 496. Wang was well aware that such technologies were not Cuban but American. See also Wang, *My Career as Ambassador in Seven Countries*, p. 88.

51. Shen, "The Bygones of My Foreign Mission," p. 122.

52. Herbert L. Matthews, *Revolution in Cuba: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), p. 78. Matthews was a senior journalist for *The New York Times* whose interview with Castro in early 1958 greatly enhanced Castro's popularity in the West. In that sense, Matthews was to Communist Cuba what Edgar Snow was to Maoist China. See Anthony DePalma, *The Man Who Invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, and Herbert L. Matthews of The New York Times* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006).

viet Union disseminated propaganda materials in Cuba (largely through the sale of newspapers and pictorial magazines in Cuban bookstores and the distribution of them to government offices through the Cuban post office). The Chinese were much more aggressive, and they often sent such materials directly to the homes of Cuban party officials and military officers. The Cubans did not seek to curtail this propaganda war, but in their own publications they did not mention the Sino-Soviet debate. When they translated and reprinted Chinese and Soviet materials, they often omitted the mutual accusations.

As Sino-Soviet polemics intensified, Cuba, like the other socialist countries, was increasingly forced to choose sides. The Castro regime's situation was further complicated by the ideological divisions among its own leaders, partly mirroring the Sino-Soviet split. Even the statement by Guevara cited above, while seemingly embracing a position of neutrality, was coy in its allusion to "our position" and "any resemblance."

Among the Cuban leaders, Guevara was the most pro-Chinese, and Raúl Castro and Rodríguez leaned most clearly toward the USSR. This ideological division gave rise to a Great Debate, as Cubans called it, from 1962 to 1965 over the issue of whether material incentives should be adopted to improve the economy.<sup>53</sup> This debate echoed the discussions in the Soviet Union about economic reform in the early to mid-1960s involving senior officials like Aleksei Kosygin, who advocated greater reliance on market mechanisms, independent management, and individual incentives. This debate generated a sympathetic response in most East European countries but was harshly criticized by the Chinese as another example of Soviet "revisionism." The Soviet debate gave a boost to reform-minded economic officials in Cuba such as Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, the head of the Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria; and Marcelo Fernández, the minister for foreign trade. They seized this opportunity to blame the Stalinist command economy for Cuba's economic difficulties. But Guevara argued that state planning, central budgeting, and leveling of wages were prerequisites for a Communist system. Eschewing the Soviet proposals, Guevara endorsed the Maoist emphasis on people's consciousness and sacrifice reflected in volunteer work and egalitarianism. The Cuban reformists and Guevarists exchanged their opinions openly through publications and experimented with their preferred methods within their own domains.<sup>54</sup>

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53. The Cuban economic situation had been deteriorating since 1962, shortly after large-scale state intervention in the economy began and the major industries and banks were nationalized. The U.S. embargo aggravated but did not fundamentally cause the situation. By 1962, almost all daily consumer goods, such as rice, meat, cooking oil, eggs, and chicken, were rationed.

54. For a comprehensive analysis of this debate, see Bertram Silverman, *Man and Socialism in Cuba: The Great Debate* (New York: Atheneum, 1971). See also Che Guevara, "On the Budget System of Fi-

Fidel Castro was not involved in this debate and kept silent from 1962 to 1964. His silence was at least partly attributable to his desire to remain outside the Sino-Soviet polemics. As for Castro's own view on the issue of incentives and more broadly on the approaches espoused by China and the Soviet Union, he was undoubtedly much closer to the Chinese side than the Soviet. Chinese and Cuban Communism in the 1960s shared some fundamental features that differed significantly from those of the Soviet Union. Among the similarities were their emphasis on people's consciousness and dedication rather than on social and economic circumstances; and their reliance on mass organization and mass mobilization (often inspired directly by Mao and Castro themselves) rather than on bureaucracy and technocracy to solve social and economic problems.<sup>55</sup> The similarities between Cuba's Revolutionary Offensive (1968–1971) and China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) were the direct result. Another factor that reinforced Cuba's tilt toward China was Castro's resentment of what he viewed as Khrushchev's humiliating retreat in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, especially Khrushchev's failure to inform the Cubans before he struck a deal with President John F. Kennedy. But unlike Guevara, Castro was much more pragmatic and flexible and understood the indispensability of economic assistance from Moscow. Castro therefore was torn between Beijing and Moscow from 1960 to early 1965. As K. S. Karol observed: "Castro's stomach is in Moscow but his heart is in Beijing."<sup>56</sup> In early 1965, however, Castro put an abrupt end to the debate on incentives by stating that the revolution's task was not to have philosophical arguments. He evidently was worried about the party's unity, but his changing attitude toward Moscow and Beijing at the time also contributed to his decision to break his silence.

nance," in Rolando Bonachea and Nelson Valdes, eds., *Selected Works of Ernesto Guevara* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969), pp. 112–136; Che Guevara, "The Cuban Economy," in Bonachea and Valdes, eds., *Selected Works of Ernesto Guevara*, pp. 137–148; and Che Guevara, "Socialism and Man in Cuba," in Bonachea and Valdes, eds., *Selected Works of Ernesto Guevara*, pp. 155–169.

55. On the similarities between Communist China and Cuba and between Mao and Castro, see the relevant essays in Carmelo Mesa-Lago, ed., *Comparative Socialist Systems: Essays on Politics and Economics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975). Maurice Meisner, when analyzing the relationship between Marxism, utopianism, and Maoism, briefly mentions the anti-urban tendency shared by Mao and Castro. Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism: Eight Essays* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), pp. 72–73. For a more recent and comprehensive comparison of the Chinese and Cuban revolutions in the 1960s, see my forthcoming book, *Creating the New Man: From Enlightenment Ideas to Socialist Realities*, to be published by the University of Hawaii Press. See also Yinghong Cheng and Patrick Manning, "Revolution in Education: China and Cuba in Global Context, 1957–76," *The Journal of World History*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Fall 2003), pp. 359–391.

56. K. S. Karol, *Guerrillas in Power: The Course of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1969), p. 304. Karol was a Polish-born, Soviet-educated intellectual who became disaffected with Stalinism and lived in Paris during the 1960s. He made trips to China and Cuba in 1966–1968, in search of a new Communism. Afterward he provided some stories and observations of Cuban attitudes toward China and the USSR, as well as comparisons between China and Cuba.

From 1963 to 1965, Castro's "stomach" (to use Karol's metaphor) gradually came to outweigh his "heart." An early sign of his leaning toward Moscow was his lengthy visit to the Soviet Union in 1963 (from 26 April to 6 June) and his praise of everything he saw there in a speech broadcast on Cuban television upon his return from Havana. The visit indicated that Castro's pragmatic considerations had trumped his resentment of Khrushchev. The fact that Castro chose Moscow rather than Beijing as the site of his first state visit, and the unusual length of the trip, gave Chinese leaders an inkling that trouble lay ahead. According to Zhen Tao, China sent invitation signals to Castro as early as March 1961, when Zhen completed his work at the XHNA Havana branch. During a farewell dinner for Zhen at the Chinese embassy, Zhen asked Castro: "Comrade Premier, when I get back to Beijing, what should I say if asked by my leaders: When will Comrade Castro wish to visit China?" After some complimentary remarks about China's greatness, Castro said: "If I go abroad, the first country will be China."<sup>57</sup>

Castro's second visit to Moscow, in January 1964, just nine months after his first visit, further worried the Chinese. Castro was compelled to visit Moscow by Cuba's economic plight and was ready to assume "a position that more nearly approached that of the Soviets." The Soviet-Cuban communiqué at the end of the visit contained condemnations of "factionalist and sectarian activity in the rank of the Communists"—the first time that Cuban leaders had failed to remain neutral in the Moscow-Beijing dispute.<sup>58</sup> Three months later, when Shen Jian completed his tenure as the first Chinese ambassador to Cuba, Castro met him and uttered some words that sounded apologetic and ominous: "The Sino-Cuban relationship is very intimate and we have a lot in common. . . . We have no complaints against China and will always be grateful for China's assistance. . . . [But] Cuba's situation is different from China's. We have almost no room for maneuver."<sup>59</sup> In retrospect, these words appear to be a signal that Havana was going to change its policies concerning Cuban-Chinese and Cuban-Soviet relations.

Mao was fully aware of Cuba's difficult situation. In March 1964 he commented on Soviet influence in Cuba: "In Cuba they [the Cubans] listen to half and reject half; they listen to half because they can't do otherwise, since they don't produce oil or weapons."<sup>60</sup> Shen's successor as ambassador, Wang Youping, also acknowledged that "China did everything it could to accom-

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57. Zhen, *My Seventeen Years of Diplomatic Career*, p. 46.

58. Johnson, *Communist China and Latin America*, p. 160.

59. Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China*, pp. 496–497.

60. Stuart Schram, ed., *Chairman Mao Talks to the People* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), p. 198. Mao made these comments at a meeting with members of the CCP Central Committee on 13 February 1964, roughly a month before Castro went to the Chinese embassy to see Shen Jian off.

modate Cuba, but it could not match the Soviet Union in supplying oil, energy, and major weaponry.<sup>61</sup> This was amply shown by China's policy during the Cuban missile crisis. The memoirs of Chinese diplomats, journalists, and translators indicate that China lacked the ability to provide any direct military and technological support to Cuba during the crisis. Instead, the Chinese embassy merely prepared for the worst-case scenario—a U.S. invasion and overthrow of the Cuban government. According to Shen and Huang Ziliang, the embassy distributed AK-47 submachine guns supplied by the Cuban government, divided its staff into different groups (command, fighting, communications, and logistics), and ordered the staff to study Mao's *On Protracted War*. Shen emphasized to his subordinates the importance of proletarian internationalism and revolutionary morale and sacrifice.<sup>62</sup> At no point did Cuban leaders ask China for immediate support or even contact the Chinese embassy. By all indications, the Chinese were simply forgotten by the Cubans during the crisis.

In mid-1964 Cuba requested that China and the Soviet Union restrain their propaganda activities in Cuba and reduce their distributions of propaganda materials.<sup>63</sup> Because China had to rely more on propaganda to expand its influence in Cuba, as opposed to the Soviet material presence, this request put more restrictions on China than on the Soviet Union.

## The Turning Point and the Showdown

The turning point in Sino-Cuban relations came with a series of events from October 1964 to February 1965. On 1 October 1964, Castro, Guevara, and other Cuban leaders attended the celebration banquet for the Chinese National Day at the Chinese embassy together with more than 1,300 guests. That same day, the two governments arranged for Zhou Enlai to make a state visit to Havana in late December 1964.<sup>64</sup> But before the planned visit could be announced, circumstances dramatically changed.

On 15 October 1964, Nikita Khrushchev was removed from power in Moscow and replaced by Leonid Brezhnev. In Castro's view, Khrushchev not only was responsible for Cuba's humiliation in the 1962 missile crisis but was also to blame for the USSR's split with China. Castro sensed that, with Khrushchev out of the picture, Sino-Soviet relations might quickly improve.

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61. Wang, *My Career as Ambassador in Seven Countries*, p. 88.

62. Zhen, *My Seventeen Years of Diplomatic Career*, p. 44.

63. Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 497.

64. Wang, *My Career as Ambassador in Seven Countries*, p. 84.

With this hope in mind, the Cuban leader paid his unannounced visit to the Chinese embassy on the evening of 18 October.

During the visit, after partaking of Beijing duck, Castro congratulated China on its nuclear test, which he said would “give a boost to the Cuban people in their struggle against U.S. nuclear blackmail.” Castro then came to his main point: “Now that the Soviet Union has changed its leader, China and the Soviet Union, as socialist states, have no reason not to mend their relations.” He stressed the importance of the Sino-Soviet relationship for the world Communist movement. Wang Youping realized that Castro was hoping to mediate between China and the USSR and to gauge China’s attitude toward the Soviet Union in the aftermath of Khrushchev’s ouster.

Wang Youping conveyed the message to Beijing, but Chinese leaders showed no interest in Castro’s mediation. A month later, in late November, Castro convened a Conference of Latin American Communist Parties in Havana, the first such continental gathering in Latin America. The communiqué from the conference stressed two points that must have irritated the Chinese: first, that “the Meeting demands an immediate end to public polemics” between Communist parties; second, that “factional activities, no matter what their source or nature,” should be condemned.<sup>65</sup> The first point is unambiguous, but the second needs a bit of clarification. The “factional activities” might refer either to the pro-Chinese Cuban cadres led by Guevara or, more likely—because the statement was issued at a multiparty conference—to China’s efforts to infiltrate and split Latin American Communist parties as part of the competition with the Soviet Union. By early 1965, China had established pro-Chinese factions or organizations within the Communist parties of Brazil, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay. This development reinforced Castro’s change of attitude toward China. Castro still saw himself as the indisputable head of the Latin American Communist movement and as a unifying figure within it.

After the conference, a delegation consisting of representatives from nine Latin American Communist parties, led by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, visited the Soviet Union and China. This venture was initiated by Castro to persuade the Chinese to halt their ideological polemics and other “sectarian activities.” The delegation met with Mao and other Chinese leaders but left with empty hands. The nature of the delegation’s trip was only recently revealed by the Chinese.<sup>66</sup> According to Wang Mei, who was at the reception for the delegation, Rodríguez was “particularly disappointed” by China’s uncompromising

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65. Johnson, *Communist China and Latin America*, p. 162.

66. Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People’s Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 497; and Wang, *My Career as Ambassador in Seven Countries*, p. 88.

stand.<sup>67</sup> Wang does not provide more details other than a general statement that China rejected Cuba's request. But the tensions between the Chinese host and the delegation actually went far beyond Wang's discreet account. According to a Bolivian writer who was well-informed about the delegation's visit, Mao was furious during the meeting and accused Castro of being so afraid of the "two demons"—"imperialism" and the "atomic bomb"—that he accepted the third demon, "revisionism," referring to Cuba's alignment with Moscow. When a Uruguayan delegate tried to interrupt, Mao became furious. The Chinese leader argued that he was "speaking in the name of 650 million people," and he asked the Uruguayan delegate how many he represented. Mao also exchanged sharp words with Rodriguez.<sup>68</sup> The delegation's visit was not made public, but it was a signal to both sides that a drastic change had occurred in Sino-Cuban relations. It comes as no surprise that Zhou Enlai's scheduled state visit to Havana was never mentioned again. Whether the two sides formally cancelled the visit or just let it fall by the wayside is unclear.

Two months later, Guevara suddenly interrupted his visit to a number of African countries (as he was preparing his secret guerrilla war in the Congo) and flew to China with two other members of the PCC Politburo (Osmany Cienfuegos and Emilio Aragones, who traveled directly from Havana). The real purpose of his sudden visit to China was unknown until recently. According to Chinese sources, Castro sent Guevara to China for the same reason that he sent the delegation led by Rodriguez: to persuade the PRC to make concessions vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. In China, Guevara met Liu Shaoqi, the head of state, and Deng Xiaoping, the CCP General Secretary, but Mao declined to see him. Guevara stayed in China from 2 to 9 February but did not succeed in his mission. According to Wang Mei, who was at the reception for Guevara in Beijing, the Cuban official looked grave and declined any arrangements beyond official meetings. It must have been a difficult moment for Guevara. He had been considered a pro-Chinese figure among Cuban leaders (and perhaps that was why Castro asked him to go to China), and he had been regarded as a critic of the Soviet Union—he was soon to voice his harshest criticism of Moscow when he returned to Africa from Beijing.<sup>69</sup> Whether he was really

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67. Wang, "The One Who Lit the Morning Clouds," p. 139.

68. Johnson, *Communist China and Latin America*, pp. 162–163.

69. Returning to Africa from China in mid-February, Guevara spoke as a special guest at the Second Economic Seminar of Afro-Asian Solidarity in Algiers. Without mentioning the Soviet Union, he attacked the Soviet notion of "mutual benefit" in foreign trade, particularly as a requirement for Soviet economic aid to developing countries and claimed that those who subscribed to this notion were advocating the capitalist notion of "the law of value" and serving as "accomplices in imperialist exploitation." See Tretiak, *Cuba and the Soviet Union*, p. 24.

committed to his mission to China—to persuade the Chinese to compromise with Moscow—is questionable.<sup>70</sup>

All of these events—Castro’s sudden visit to the Chinese embassy, the conference of Latin American Communist parties in Havana, and the dispatch of the Rodriguez and Guevara delegations to China—were indicative of Castro’s efforts to foster a Sino-Soviet reconciliation in the wake of Khrushchev’s downfall. Evidently, Castro failed to understand the real nature of the Sino-Soviet quarrel: that it did not hinge solely on the fate of any single leader in Moscow. Rather, what was at stake was the leadership of world Communism, of Marxist revolutions in the developing world, and of different approaches toward Communism on domestic matters.<sup>71</sup> Castro may also have taken China’s rejection of his overtures as a sign of arrogance—a sign that China regarded small countries like Cuba as insignificant. Mao’s demeanor toward the Uruguayan delegate was clear evidence of such arrogance, and Castro undoubtedly learned about it from the Cuban members of the delegation. In addition, China’s infiltration of the Latin American Communist movement further aggravated relations between Beijing and Havana. This series of developments from October 1964 to February 1965 pushed Castro further into Moscow’s arms and set the stage for a split with Beijing. Castro at around this same time put an end to the debate on incentives in the Cuban economy, a reflection of how the Sino-Soviet rift was affecting the PCC.

On 13 March, a month after Guevara’s visit to Beijing, Castro spoke at a mass rally celebrating the anniversary of a student uprising against the Batista

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71. Castro was not totally wrong. China did make an effort to improve its relations with the USSR in the event of Khrushchev’s resignation. In early November 1964, Zhou Enlai led a Chinese delegation to Moscow for the annual celebration of the Bolshevik Revolution. But the visit merely made the Chinese believe that the Soviet Union had no intention of making significant concessions. The Chinese were particularly angered when Soviet Defense Minister Rodion Malinovskii suggested that the Chinese remove Mao, emulating the ouster of Khrushchev. Malinovskii made this suggestion at a banquet when he seemed half-drunk, but the Chinese construed it as a test of the unity of Chinese leadership. See Yu Zhan, “Memoir on Premier Zhou Enlai’s Last Visit of the USSR,” in Luo Guibo, Han Nianlong, and Gong Dafei, eds., *My Years of Diplomats* (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publisher, 1995), pp. 45–46. When Zhou Enlai met with Guevara, he told the Cuban official, “If Cuba has any difficulty, please let us know. Do not hesitate. Do not worry about our capabilities to meet your needs. If we cannot provide what you need now, we will do our best to provide it next year or the year after.” Wang, *The Diplomatic History of the People’s Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 497. According to Li Lianqing, a senior Chinese diplomat, Zhou met Guevara at breakfast on 11 November and specifically told him about Malinovskii’s provocation, adding that this incident had exposed Moscow’s intention of “overthrowing Comrade Mao Zedong.” See Li Lianqing, *Zhou Enlai: The Great Diplomat*, 5 Vols. (Hong Kong: Tiandi Publisher, 2001), Vol. 5, p. 280.

regime. He criticized China by referring to “Byzantine feuds” and accused the Chinese of smuggling propaganda materials—the “apple of discord”—into Cuba.<sup>72</sup> Castro repeatedly said that the PCC had the right to decide its own policies vis-à-vis the world Communist movement and that such “contraband” from China was not at all welcome. According to Peter Schenkel, Castro was referring to China’s practice of spreading propaganda materials in Cuba, a practice he had condemned during a private meeting with students a few days earlier.<sup>73</sup> The text of Castro’s 13 March speech appeared in translation in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* on 18 March.<sup>74</sup> A month later, Raúl Castro openly defied Maoist doctrine concerning imperialist military power when he said that the war in Vietnam had shown that imperialism was not a “paper tiger.”<sup>75</sup> Most likely, Raúl was responding to Mao’s allegation four months earlier that the Cubans were afraid of imperialism. Although the Castro brothers did not mention China by name, their target was obvious to observers. In the meantime, Mao’s writings disappeared from Cuba’s bookstores, and Castro made another visit to Moscow.

China did not directly parry the attacks, but, according to Tretiak, as early as February 1965 some of China’s ideological allies, such as the Albanian and Belgian Communists and some pro-Chinese Latin American Communist parties, voiced their criticism of Cuba, particularly concerning the meeting held in Havana of Latin American Communist parties. These parties almost certainly were not acting spontaneously.<sup>76</sup>

Wang Youping experienced this difficult period in Sino-Cuban relations from his vantage point in Havana. He later recalled the great unease he felt when he heard about the Castro brothers’ statements, which confirmed his suspicion that Guevara was under tremendous pressure from other Cuban leaders because of his pro-Chinese standpoint. According to Wang, from June 1964 to March 1965 he met Guevara nine times, including two dinners and subsequent long talks. The last meeting was on 26 March 1965, thirteen days after Castro publicly made his insinuations about China. Wang was received by Guevara along with a Chinese textile delegation. When the meeting was over, Guevara asked Wang to stay in his office, and the two of them talked for more than one hour. According to Wang, Guevara looked blue and was coughing all the time and constantly using a mini sprayer to alleviate his

72. Johnson, *Communist China and Latin America*, p. 167.

73. Peter Schenkel, “Cuban Relations with the Communist World,” in J. Gregory Oswald, ed., *The Soviet Union and Latin America* (New York: Pall Mall Publishers, 1970), pp. 151–152.

74. Jacques Lévesque, *The USSR and the Cuban Revolution: Soviet Ideological and Strategic Perspectives, 1959–77* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978), p. 113.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Tretiak, *Cuba and the Soviet Union*, pp. 40–41.

cough (he had suffered from asthma since childhood). Although Guevara was short of breath, the conversation was almost a monologue. He told Wang that he was leaving Havana for Oriente Province for summer harvest, which later became a cover for his disappearance. He then began to praise the Chinese revolution and culture and told Wang that he was an admirer of China. Guevara smoked a pipe during the conversation and mentioned that he had bought the pipe in Beijing the previous month.

Guevara did not dwell on any substantive matters, but his small talk was, in Wang's view, more compelling than any substantive discussion. As Wang observed,

Guevara spent a much smaller amount of time with the textile delegation than with me, and he was talking all the time during the two meetings. My sense was that his meeting with the Chinese textile delegation was a subterfuge. His real intention was to meet the Chinese ambassador [i.e., Wang]. At that time, Sino-Cuban relations were increasingly deteriorating, so any direct contact between a Cuban leader and the Chinese ambassador would be politically too sensitive. Therefore I think the meeting with the Chinese textile delegation just provided him with an opportunity to meet me and say goodbye without raising suspicion among other Cuban leaders.<sup>77</sup>

Wang was proud that he was the last foreign ambassador whom Guevara met as a Cuban official. Although Guevara was apparently the most pro-Chinese and anti-Soviet Cuban leader, Wang recalled that he never talked to him about the Sino-Soviet division, nor did Wang mention having broached any sensitive issues in Sino-Cuban relations when he met with Guevara, even privately. The evidence now available suggests that Guevara decided to avoid revealing his personal views on such issues in front of the Chinese, who might have interpreted his words as evidence of dissension in the Cuban party.<sup>78</sup>

In August 1965, as more evidence emerged that Cuba's relations with China were deteriorating, Wang Youping felt compelled to return to Beijing for instructions. Wang said that because Cuba was the first and only Latin American country in which "the five-red-stars flag [the PRC flag] could be raised," he felt that many Chinese policies and practices on the island needed to be reviewed before the situation became helpless.<sup>79</sup> Most likely, he was referring to China's propaganda activities in Cuba, which soon became the target of Castro's open attack on China. Wang arrived in Beijing on 8 August and two days later reported to Qiao Guanhua and Ji Pengfei, two deputy foreign ministers. Qiao told him to compress his report to only 700 words and

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77. Wang, *My Career as Ambassador in Seven Countries*, pp. 91–92.

78. *Ibid.*, 93.

79. *Ibid.*, 89.

said he would deliver it to Mao and Zhou. The demand for a brief report and the fact that Wang was not allowed to speak directly even to Chen Yi reveal the Chinese government's low expectations for Sino-Cuban relations at that point.<sup>80</sup>

On 26 August, Wang hurried to the Foreign Ministry to meet Qiao and find out what instructions Mao and Zhou had given. For reasons of confidentiality, Wang did not want to bring the instructions with him when he went back to Havana, so he summarized the instructions in four metaphoric, rhythmic sentences (so they could be easily memorized and only he himself would know the meaning): "When wolves are roaming around, why go after foxes?" (i.e., that China would not treat Cuba as an equal rival while fighting the USSR); "To treat a dead horse as if it were still alive" (i.e., that he should do what he could even if the situation was hopeless); "No line crossed, no response made" (i.e., that he should be tolerant of the Cubans and never initiate debate); and "Be cautious when dealing with any new problems."<sup>81</sup> However, the Chinese leaders gave no indication that propaganda activities in Cuba would change.

On the evening of 15 September, two days before Wang's scheduled return to Havana (it was customary to have the ambassador host the celebration of the First of October, which was two weeks away), he received a call from Qiao and was asked to come to the Foreign Ministry immediately. In Qiao's office, Wang read a cable that had just arrived from the Chinese embassy in Havana reporting that on 14 September Fidel Castro and Cuban President Oswaldo Dorticos had suddenly summoned Huang Wenyou, the chargé d'affaires of the embassy. Wang's memoir is discreet about what Castro and Dorticos said, but he reveals that both Castro and Dorticos looked irate and that on the table in the meeting room the Cubans had displayed samples of *Pekin Informa* (the Spanish edition of *Peking Review*) and *XHNA Telegraph Text*, the two main propaganda publications the Chinese had been disseminating in Cuba. Wang also indicates that Castro and Dorticos accused the Chinese of "disseminating seeds of discord among the Cubans" and behaving "even worse than the American imperialists."<sup>82</sup> The accusations shocked Wang because Cubans until that time had been lining up in front of the Chinese embassy waiting for these materials, and Guevara was even suggesting that a Spanish or English version of China's *People's Daily* be sold in Cuba. According to Wang, the parallel drawn between China and the imperialist United States was especially offensive. Qiao ordered Wang to postpone his re-

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80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., p. 90.

82. Ibid., pp. 89–90.

turn and let the attaché host the celebration on 1 October as a protest against the Cubans' accusation.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the escalating tensions between China and Cuba, the Chinese decided not to respond openly to any accusations as long as they were not voiced in public and did not directly name China (the Cubans did not publicly disclose the 14 September meeting until February 1966). Up to that point, the Chinese guidelines for dealing with Cuba had remained largely unchanged: "still calling them 'comrades,' maintaining the same level of economic and technological exchange, and not making the first move toward further deterioration of relations."<sup>84</sup> However, the guidelines soon changed.

Toward the end of 1965, Sino-Cuban relations were sharply declining. Daniel Tretiak has shown that press coverage in each country (but especially China) of the other side's political and economic development was drastically reduced from 1964 to 1965.<sup>85</sup> This development was apparent to many careful Western observers.<sup>86</sup> In the meantime, more evidence was emerging of Havana's increasingly close relationship with Moscow. Raúl Castro attended the joint maneuvers of four Warsaw Pact countries in October 1965, and Moscow even invited Cuban scientists and pilots to participate in its space project.

The final straw for Sino-Cuban relations came when the annual economic negotiations between the two countries collapsed in 1966. That year, Cuba requested that 250,000 tons of Chinese rice (the same amount as in 1965) be traded for 800,000 tons of Cuban sugar, but China rejected this request because of an alleged rice shortage. China said it could provide only 135,000 tons of rice.<sup>87</sup> Because China had provided Cuba with rice and other daily necessities in the past even when millions of Chinese were starving, this rejection was undoubtedly intended as retribution for Cuba's increasingly pro-Soviet and anti-Chinese stand. The negotiations were long and difficult. The Cuban delegation was led by Ismael Bello, the head of the Foreign Trade Ministry's Department of Trade with Asian Socialist Countries. The negotiators arrived in Beijing on 10 November, but 50 days of talks failed to produce any results.<sup>88</sup> As the negotiations dragged on, Castro openly attacked China

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83. Wang stayed in Beijing until the end of October. He continued to serve as China's ambassador in Cuba until May 1969. His memoir gives no details about Sino-Cuban relations from March 1966 until his departure in 1969.

84. Wang, *Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 498.

85. Tretiak, *Cuba and the Soviet Union*, pp. 36–41.

86. See, for example, Richard Eder, "Castro's Romance with China Fades," *The New York Times*, 14 November 1965, p. E6.

87. Wang, *Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China*, Vol. 2, p. 498.

88. "Facts on Sino-Cuban Trade," *Peking Review* (Beijing), 14 January 1966, p. 14. The article was originally published in *People's Daily* on 10 January 1966; it is based on an interview between a XHNA reporter and a spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Trade, both of whom are anonymous.

on 2 January 1966 at a mass rally celebrating the seventh anniversary of the revolution. Amid displays of T-55 tanks and MiG-15 fighters just shipped from the Soviet Union, Castro enumerated Cuba's enemies and warned his people of a new threat: the diminishing rice ration. He told Cubans that the rice ration for next year would drop from six pounds to three pounds a week because China had broken its promise to maintain the same level of rice export. Castro then accused China of joining the U.S. economic blockade of Cuba. Castro's open denunciation of China coincided with the opening of the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana (starting on 3 January), in which almost 600 delegations represented Communists, nationalist revolutionaries, and sympathetic intellectuals from 82 countries. As the host of the conference, Castro undoubtedly wanted to assert his role in such movements and minimize China's influence by silencing the pro-Chinese delegations in advance. The conference also allowed Castro to clarify his attitude toward the Sino-Soviet split. According to Cole Blasier, "the Soviet main concern at the conference was to outmaneuver the Chinese in this three-continent Third World forum."<sup>89</sup>

The CCP published Castro's "remarks" in *People's Daily* on 10 January along with an interview with the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Trade titled "Facts on Sino-Cuban Trade." The text of the interview was reprinted in *Peking Review* in English and Spanish on 14 January. The XHNA official conceded that the amount of rice allocated to Cuba for the following year (1966) would be less than in 1965 but added that it would be higher than in 1962 and 1963 and at "roughly the same level as in 1965." Moreover, he said, China never promised to maintain a fixed level of rice trade. The official asked why Castro had made the issue public when the negotiation was still ongoing and why he had taken such "an extraordinary step on the eve of the Three Continents Peoples' Solidarity Conference in Havana? This offers food for thought."<sup>90</sup> The dispute was later called the "rice affair."

In subsequent months, Castro intensified his anti-China rhetoric. On 6 February, he made another lengthy speech attacking China and condemning the PRC's propaganda activities in Cuba:

On 12 September [1965], the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces reported that mass distribution of this material was being carried out systematically among the officers of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba by representatives of the Chinese government. Chinese representatives also tried to make direct contact with Cuban officers and in some cases went so far as to approach

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89. Cole Blasier, *The Giant's Rival: The Soviet Union in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), p. 80.

90. "Facts on Sino-Cuban Trade," p. 23.

officers in an apparent attempt to recruit them, either to convert them or perhaps to obtain information.<sup>91</sup>

Castro then revealed the meeting he had had on 14 September 1965 with the Chinese chargé d'affaires. He said that the Chinese diplomat promised to convey the Cuban protest to Beijing and report back to the Cuban government but that nothing had actually happened. On the contrary, China had stepped up its propaganda activities, which Castro described as a "flagrant violation of the norms of the most elementary respect" that should exist even between non-socialist countries.<sup>92</sup> It was no coincidence that the Soviet Union had signed a treaty with Cuba for a loan of \$90 million only nine days after Castro's anti-China statement.

From Beijing's perspective, the Cubans' public complaints about China had "crossed the line." The Chinese responded by publishing an editorial in *People's Daily* on 22 February stating that Castro "has taken an active part in the anti-China chorus" organized by Washington, Moscow, and all "international reactionaries." The editorial defended China's propaganda activities in Cuba, arguing that the Cuban embassy in Beijing conducted similar activities (the distribution of printed materials and the like). The editorial also asked why Soviet materials "deluge" Cuba, whereas Chinese publications were dreaded like the "plague." The editorial sardonically questioned "why [the Cuban party has] such a lack of confidence in its own cadres and officers and its own people." Regarding Cuba's deepening economic problems, which Castro blamed on China because of the reduction of rice exports (a "criminal act of economic aggression," as Castro put it), the editorial pinned the blame on Moscow and served as a pungent reminder of China's "self-reliance" advice to Cuba in previous years:

In recent years, not only has the Cuban sugarcane monoculture, which is a legacy of colonialism, remained unchanged, but what the Khrushchev revisionists call "the principle of international division of labor" has been put into practice, further aggravating this lopsided situation and creating grave economic difficulties for Cuba. Is this the result of advice given by the Chinese? Are Chinese to blame?

The editorial ended by noting that it was not a full response to the Cubans and that China reserved the right to reply at greater length in the future.<sup>93</sup> The appearance of the Chinese response in *People's Daily*, the authoritative or-

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91. "Text of Speech by Fidel Castro," *Granma Weekly Review*, 6 February 1966, p. 1 *Granma* is the PCC daily, and *Granma Weekly Review* is its English weekly edition.

92. *Ibid.*

93. Editorial, *People's Daily*, 22 February 1966; reprinted as "Renmin Ribao (People's Daily) Editor's Note on Prime Minister Castro's Anti-China Statement," *Peking Review*, 25 February 1966: pp. 13, 14.

gan of the CCP, suggests that it was directed at Castro himself. As Wang Youping had summarized the guidelines earlier: “When wolves are roaming around, why go after foxes?” *Peking Review* also reprinted Castro’s 6 February speech, along with two articles written by pro-Chinese foreign Communist parties.<sup>94</sup>

Sino-Cuban polemics reached a peak on 13 March 1966 with another of Castro’s lengthy televised speeches attacking China. Speaking at the University of Havana, Castro said that by cutting rice supplies to Cuba, the Chinese were committing “economic aggression.” China’s “mass distribution of propaganda,” he argued, was “in the same style as the Yankee embassy. . . . If they persist with those activities, we will do as we did with the U.S. Embassy.” The diminished rice ration was insignificant, he told the Cubans, because it would only make Cuban people accustomed to wheat, which was healthier and more nutritious. Then Castro directly attacked Mao, calling him a “senile idiot” and vowing that Cuban leaders’ ages would never exceed 60 (Mao was 73 at the time, whereas Castro was 38). He said “I advise the man to read *The Dialectic of Nature* by Engels. With the passing of years, even the sun will be extinguished.”<sup>95</sup> Castro was ridiculing the Chinese personality cult of Mao, which compared Mao to the red sun. Presumably, Castro engaged in these ad hominem attacks because he was still incensed about what Mao had said about him at the meeting with Latin American Communists. As for the Chinese diplomats in the embassy who until recently had served him Beijing duck and patiently listened to his nightlong talks, Castro said “they are packing. Let them go.”

Castro’s anti-Chinese speech on 13 March 1966 formally ruptured the Chinese-Cuban partnership against the United States. The evidence now available does not reveal how Chinese leaders and diplomats reacted to Castro’s harsh attacks on China and Mao, but their reactions can be inferred from the long estrangement and hostility that ensued between the two countries.<sup>96</sup>

94. When the *Peking Review* reprinted the editorial, it also reprinted Castro’s 6 February speech along with two articles written by pro-Chinese foreign Communist parties. See “Castro Speaks of Unity, But Has Chosen a Split,” *Peking Review*, 25 January 1966, p. 23; and N. Sanmugathan, “Castro Joins Anti-China Chorus,” *Peking Review*, 25 January 1966, pp. 23–24. “Castro Speaks of Unity,” by an unnamed author, was originally published in the *Belgian Communist Party Weekly*. The article by Sanmugathan, a member of the political bureau of the Communist Party of Ceylon, was originally published in *Kamkaruwa* (Labor).

95. “Castro University Speech Blasts CPR Betrayal” *Granma Weekly Review*, 15 March 1966, p. 2. Apparently, Castro referred to Friedrich Engels’s *The Dialectics of Nature* because of its focus on laws of science and the universe.

96. From 1966 to the early 1990s, the two countries (as well as the two Communist parties) had no serious contact, although they still annually traded rice for sugar. The two countries even became enemies in the 1980s when they accused each other of becoming lackeys of the Soviet Union and the United States (Cuba was following Soviet global strategies by sending troops and engineers to Africa in particular; China, which saw the Soviet Union as the more dangerous enemy, was cooperating with

## Conclusions

The first half of the 1960s was a crucial period for world Communism. The Soviet Union's brief forays into economic reform, though largely stillborn, contributed to the eventual rise of a new generation of leaders represented by Mikhail Gorbachev. Maoist China was determined to take a different approach, and Cuba, as the newest member of the world Communist club, wavered between the two giants and was eventually forced to choose. Although Sino-Soviet relations and Cuban-Soviet relations during this period have been explored at considerable length, Sino-Cuban relations and the triangular relationship between Havana, Beijing, and Moscow have undergone much less scrutiny.

The recently published Chinese materials have substantially enriched our understanding of Sino-Cuban relations against the backdrop of the Cold War. From 1960 to 1964, Sino-Cuban relations were much closer and more intimate than many observers had assumed. The Cuban leaders' frequent unannounced visits to the Chinese embassy, and the personal ties between Chinese diplomats and senior Cuban officials, are indicative of the close relationship. Economic and technological cooperation between the two countries went far beyond mere exchanges of rice for sugar, and the close relationship lasted much longer than has often been suggested. The Chinese materials are also valuable in assessing Cuba's political development in the early 1960s. Scholars have long debated when the Cuban revolution became "socialist" or "Marxist" and whether U.S. hostility was the main factor pushing the Castroists into Soviet arms. The Chinese materials indicate that as early as 1959 Beijing was fully aware of the likelihood that the Cuban revolution would move in a Marxist direction. Mao's notations in early 1960 on the PSP's draft constitution indicate his concern that Cuban leaders were pursuing too radical a course.<sup>97</sup> The new evidence from China thus bears out the notion that Castro

the United States on some strategic matters). Castro also harshly criticized China's post-Mao reforms. But in the early 1990s, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the catastrophic decline of the Cuban economy led to a rapprochement between China and Cuba. According to Wang Youping, who was still a high-ranking diplomat (though no longer in Cuba), Castro suddenly began to visit the Chinese embassy again, enjoying Chinese food and having lengthy and sometimes night-long talks there. Within roughly a year (Wang does not give specific dates), the Cuban leader came to the embassy eight times. Wang, *My Career as Ambassador in Seven Countries*, pp. 94–95. In November 1995, Castro made his first trip to China. According to Chen Jinhua, who headed China's Central Planning Committee and accompanied Castro during the visit, the Chinese showed Castro how Beijing duck, his favorite, was prepared and roasted in the famous Quanjude Beijing Duck Restaurant. See Chen Jinhua, "I Accompanied Castro When He Visited China" *Zhongheng Monthly* (Beijing), No. 5 (May 2003), p. 14.

97. The Chinese pattern of socialist transformation—for example the policies of redemption and "co-ownership" of formerly private firms, as opposed to the Soviet approach of direct nationalization—was attractive to many East European Communist leaders in the early 1950s. China emphasized the issue

was a Communist long before his public declaration and that Cuba would have become a Communist country regardless of U.S. policy.

China's influence was also reflected in the PCC's ideological and strategic divisions. After Guevara's disappearance, Castro denied that any divisions had existed within the party, but historians have long surmised that the PCC's inner circle was in fact riven by ideological and strategic divisions, especially regarding Guevara's pro-Chinese and anti-Soviet statements.<sup>98</sup> The new materials, especially the record of Guevara's final meeting with Wang, confirm the existence of these divisions. The concurrence of Castro's criticism of China and Guevara's disappearance from Cuba's political scene in early 1965 was not coincidental. Whether a conspiracy was being instigated against Castro by the Chinese through propaganda and secret contacts in the Cuban army and party, as Castro himself alleged and some analysts have argued, is not yet clear.<sup>99</sup> One thing is for sure: In early 1966, when Castro openly turned against China, the Chinese embassy in Havana did make some desperate efforts to salvage the situation, albeit in vain. As Wang Youping put it: "Treat a dead horse as if it were still alive."

Sino-Cuban relations from the beginning were overshadowed and ultimately doomed by Sino-Soviet relations. But unlike China's relations with the East European countries (other than Romania), relations between Beijing and Havana were not tied rigidly to Beijing-Moscow relations. Rather, the interactions between Beijing and Havana were driven by their own dynamics. Until a late stage, Cuba tried hard to remain neutral. Furthermore, Castro sought a mediating role between Beijing and Moscow through his personal ties with the Chinese, rallying the Latin American Communist parties behind him and finally sending Guevara to Beijing as a last resort. These efforts should not be regarded as merely an attempt to secure or maintain support from both Beijing and Moscow. Castro was probably also trying to maintain his own party's unity. The final showdown between Beijing and Havana, when it eventually came, sundered the PCC. Not only Sino-Cuban relations but the Cuban party itself were victims of Sino-Soviet antagonism.

when trying to expand its influence in Eastern Europe. See Yinghong Cheng, "Beyond Moscow-Centric Interpretation: The China Connection in Eastern Europe and Vietnam in the Era of De-Stalinization" *Journal of World History*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (December 2004), pp. 487–519.

98. Lévesque has argued that Guevara and Castro were "in profound disagreement" about "Cuba's positions regarding the Sino-Soviet conflict." See Lévesque, *The USSR and the Cuban Revolution*, p. 108.

99. Damain J. Fernandez noticed that Chinese attempts to influence the Cuban army "coincided with the 'microfaction affair,' in which a group of former members of the PSP were allegedly planning a putsch against Castro" and that this incident heightened "the leadership's sensitivity to outside interference in domestic affairs." See Fernandez, "Cuba's Relations with China," p. 19.