

CATCH UP AND SURPASS:
**SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS AND THE AMERICAN
QUESTION IN THE PAGES OF SUZHONG YOUHAO**

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Executive Summary

The paper explores the discussions surrounding the short history of Suzhong youhao (Sino-Chinese Friendship), a journal produced in Moscow in Chinese for distribution in China during the later years of the Sino-Soviet alliance (1958-1960). Soviet officials hoped the journal would address and help reverse the deteriorating Sino-Soviet relationship during Chairman Mao's Great Leap Forward. The story of the journal illustrates the influence of the Chinese and the broader socialist bloc upon central aspects of Soviet political culture and foreign policy under Khrushchev.

Introduction

“Catch up and surpass” (dognat’ i peregnat’), a central preoccupation of Soviet foreign policy toward America under Khrushchev, drew on a long history of competitive admiration for the technological and industrial achievements of America.¹ Western and especially American standards of living provided the model and background for a very socialist debate about the eventual transition to “communism.” This debate as well had its roots in Stalin’s era. Stalin declared that the Soviet Union had successfully created the foundations of socialism at the Seventeenth Party Congress in 1934.² The subsequent Khrushchev era “rush to communism,” as A.A. Danilov and A.V. Pyzhikov explain, first emerged under Stalin, only to be interrupted by the war.³

The reformist efforts of the post-Stalin leadership also unfolded in the context of the competitive cold war with the United States. At the discussions dedicated to agriculture in the fall of 1953, Central Committee members solemnly pondered comparative consumption levels of bread, flour, potatoes, milk, eggs, fruit, and vegetables in America, England, France, and the Soviet Union.⁴ At a subsequent discussion Anastas Mikoian, long an expert on socialist bloc affairs and central to important meetings and exchanges with Chairman Mao, lamented that these

¹ Alan M. Ball, Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 158.

² David L. Hoffmann, Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 119.

³ A.V. Pyzhikov, “Sovetskoe poslevoennoe obshchestvo i predposylki khrushchevskikh reform,” Voprosy Istorii, 2 (2002), 40; A.A. Danilov and A.V. Pyzhikov, Rozhdenie sverkhderzhavy: SSSR v pervye poslevoennye gody (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001), 149. See also János Kornai, The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 53.

⁴ “O merakh dal’neishego moshchnogo pod’ema sel’skogo khoziaistva,” N.S. Khrushchev, September

matters were not addressed years ago, and reminded his colleagues of the international cost of Soviet consumer weakness. “We have paid dearly” for this delay, he warned. Mikoian’s comparative reference was no longer tsarist Russia or the socialist bloc but the “per capita consumption levels in the more or less wealthy capitalist countries.”⁵ In the competitive cold war with the United States, Soviet consumer weakness was a matter of international significance, similar to the American debate over race relations in the 1950s.

“Catch up and surpass” was also shaped by the larger socialist bloc, with its diverse areas distant from Moscow and closer to other worlds. The Czechoslovaks, for example, well aware of Europe’s postwar recovery in the West, relentlessly returned to the matter of improvements in standards of living that would place inhabitants of the socialist world on par with America. From their standpoint, this was the primary purpose of the Twenty-first Party Congress of the Soviet Union in early 1959. The Congress was host to the “builders of communism,” the international gathering of socialists from the bloc and the broader world who were greeted by numerous reports of the “new successes of the Soviet people.”⁶ Czechoslovak reporters toured Moscow and the country, and insisted that average workers could recite in detail comparative production statistics in numerous areas for the socialist and capitalist worlds.⁷ From the perspective of the East and Central Europeans, closer to the affluence of the West, a crucial component of the eventual stage of “communism” was new forms of consumerism and higher

1953, in Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishii istorii (RGANI) f. 2, r. 6207, op. 1, d. 47, l. 6-30.

⁵ “Obsuzhdenie doklada...Khrushcheva,” September 5, 1953, in RGANI f. 2, r. 6209, op. 1, d. 54, l. 19-36.

⁶ “Sjezd budovatelů komunismu,” Rudé právo, no. 26 (January 27, 1959), 1; “Moskva před XXI. Sjezdem KSSS,” Rudé právo, no. 25 (January 26, 1959), 1.

standards of living.

“Catch up and surpass” was central to Sino-Soviet relations during the short history of Suzhong youhao (Soviet-Chinese Friendship), a journal collaboratively produced by both Soviets and Chinese to improve the deteriorating Sino-Soviet relationship of the late 1950s.⁸ Publicly at least, Chairman Mao supported Soviet efforts to overtake the United States, and attempted to complement the effort by focusing China’s competitive fire on England. At the Eighth National Congress of Chinese Trade Unions, December 2, 1957, Liu Shaoqi visualized a complementary effort against their common “imperialist” rivals: “In 15 years time the Soviet Union will be able to catch up with or surpass the United States in the output of the most important industrial and agricultural products and in this time we, on our part, should strive to surpass Britain in respect of output of iron and steel and of other major industrial products. In this way, the socialist world will leave the imperialist countries far, far behind.”⁹

Privately, however, Mao was increasingly skeptical of the Soviet model, and his turn

⁷ “XXI. Sjezd KSSS ozařuje naři cestu k socialismu,” Rudé právo, no. 31 (February 1, 1959), 1.

⁸ For recent work on the political disputes at the center of Sino-Soviet relations, see Lorenz Lüthi, The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Boris Kulik, Sovetsko-kitaiskii raskol: prichiny i posledstviia (Moscow: Institut dal’nego vostoka RAN, 2000); Li Danhui, ed., Beijing yu mosike: Cong lianmeng zouxiang duikang (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2002); Pu Guoliang, Zouxiang bingdian: Zhongsu da lunzhan yu 1956-1965 nian de zhongsu guanxi (Beijing: Guoji wenhua chubanshesi, 1999); Dieter Heinzig, The Soviet Union and Communist China, 1945-1950: The Arduous Road to the Alliance (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004); Odd Arne Westad, ed., Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963 (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998). For explorations of the practices and experiences of the Sino-Soviet exchange, see T.G. Zazerskaia, Sovetskie spetsialisty i formirovanie voenno-promyshlennogo kompleksa Kitaia (1949-1960 gody) (St. Petersburg: NIIKH, 2000); Douglas A. Stiffler, “Building Socialism at Chinese People’s University: Chinese Cadres and Soviet Experts in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-57” (Ph.D. dissertation: University of California, San Diego, 2002); Shen Zhihua, Sulian zhuanjia zai zhongguo (1948-1960) (Beijing: Zhongguo guoji guangbo chubanshe, 2003).

toward the people's communes and the Great Leap Forward was watched with alarm by Soviet officials in China. The Sino-Soviet dispute eventually became public. Khrushchev communicated his concerns about the Great Leap Forward to socialist bloc visitors in Moscow at the start of the Twenty-First Congress, on January 27, 1959.¹⁰ Peace was temporarily restored, as the Chinese affirmed Soviet leadership in the matter of the construction of communism, and Khrushchev conceded that the bloc countries would get there simultaneously.

With conditions in China through 1959 significantly worsening, however, Mao was enraged by the pointed criticisms of Marshal Peng Dehuai and others who addressed the issue at the Lüshan plenums in July 1959.¹¹ Khrushchev explicitly criticized the People's Communes again before the Poles on July 18, 1959. While the Poles deleted these comments from their published account of the meeting, the Soviets inserted them in their version in Pravda on July 21, 1959. The Chinese Great Leap Forward, Khrushchev emphasized, was a misunderstanding of the proper stages of socialist economic development.¹² The Chinese were far from prepared for a competition over standards of living with the West, while the Soviets were in the lead. "Their heads have gotten somewhat dizzy because China is back on her feet and became visibly stronger," complained ideologist Mikhail Suslov at a December 1959 plenum of the Central

⁹ Liu Shaoqi, December 2, 1957; also Zhou Enlai, February 10, 1958, in Harold C. Hinton, ed., The People's Republic of China 1949-1979: A Documentary Survey, vol. 2 (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1980), 618, 623-26.

¹⁰ Pu Guoliang, Zouxiang bingdian, 78-9.

¹¹ Lüthi, The Sino-Soviet Split, 116-135. See also Thomas P. Bernstein, "Mao Zedong and the Famine of 1959-1960: A Study in Willfulness," The China Quarterly, no. 186 (June 2006); Dali L. Yang, "Surviving the Great Leap Famine: The Struggle over Rural Policy, 1958-1962," in Timothy Cheek and Tony Saich, eds. New Perspectives on State Socialism in China (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 262-302; Li Jie, Mao Zedong yu xin zhongguo de neizheng waijiao, 100-105, 148.

Committee, but they had exaggerated the “degree of maturity of socialist relations in China.”¹³

Sino-Soviet Relations and the Image of the United States

These are the issues—comparative standards of living between the socialist and capitalist worlds, the effort to overtake the Americans, the influence of the larger socialist bloc upon Soviet politics and culture, and the deteriorating Sino-Soviet relationship—that form the background to the production of Suzhong youhao and the numerous editorial discussions dedicated to improving the increasingly precarious state of the Sino-Soviet “Great Friendship.” Central trends in Soviet domestic and foreign policy, in this case the question of “catch up and surpass” directed at America, were shaped by the experiences, needs, and expectations of the broader socialist bloc. The Soviets were in a dialogue with the “friendly” peoples of the bloc, which shaped aspects of international relations and foreign policy central to the Cold War.

The familiar institutions engaged with the production of Soviet culture and the handling of the Sino-Soviet exchange collaborated in the production of Suzhong youhao. The State Committee of Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries provided some financial support, Sovinformburo in China helped with its distribution, and the Friendship Society provided several editorial board members and regular oversight and advice.¹⁴ To complement the work of the thirty-five Soviet contributors and cover the crucial issues of translation, local production and

¹² Pu Guoliang, Zouxiang bingdian, 232-33.

¹³ “A New ‘Cult of Personality’: Suslov’s Secret Report on Mao, Khrushchev, and Sino-Soviet Tensions,” December 1959, CWIHPB, nos. 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997), 244.

¹⁴ P. Kriukov, V. Rogov, K. Ianbukhtin, December 10, 1957, in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (GARF) f. 9324, op. 1, d. 1, l. 2.

distribution, the journal engaged fourteen Chinese as literary editors, advisors, translators, and production workers, including Li Zhuang and Ding Haode from Renmin ribao and Fang Xian from Xinhua.¹⁵

By April 1960 the staff of the journal had grown to seventy people, consisting of fifty-seven Soviets and thirteen Chinese. Fourteen of the fifty-seven Soviets knew Chinese. Soviet officials proclaimed their customary enthusiasm for the potential and possibilities of the relationship, and those with a scholarly and literary bent even imagined the journal as a significant intellectual contribution and form of engagement with the Chinese intelligentsia, in the tradition of Vissarion Belinskii and the social critics of the nineteenth-century.

The Chinese, however, quickly raised numerous concerns to the editorial board, and especially the experienced Soviet hands in China paid attention. Li Zhuang, the advisor from Renmin ribao, engaged Soviet scholar and diplomat S.L. Tikhvinskii in a series of discussions designed to communicate these Chinese concerns to the Soviets. Several of these issues were practical and familiar to workers in the world of communist propaganda. The journal, Li Zhuang emphasized, needed more colored photographs, clearer captions to images, catchier titles, and more material that addressed matters beyond the Soviet Union itself.¹⁶

More worrisome, however, especially to Soviet China watchers who were by 1958 long concerned about the state of Sino-Soviet relations, was Li Zhuang's view that the journal was unable to connect with the interests and concerns of the Chinese reader. Li Zhuang was frustrated with articles and titles that "say nothing to the Chinese reader," or those that failed to

¹⁵ N.P. Zakharov and Lin Lang, October 15, 1957, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 2, l. 1; Doklad, January 10, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 5, l. 2-6.

¹⁶ Zapis' besedy, May 4, 1958, S.L. Tikhvinskii and Li Zhuang, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 9, l. 7.

be “concrete” and “lively.” Even thought-provoking articles often “do not correspond to issues of life in China.”¹⁷ Renmin Ribao, he explained, was much better. Tikhvinskii got the point, and raised further for his Soviet colleagues the more serious matter of the overall transferability of the Soviet experience. How do we identify and convey, he wondered, the “specific topics that will help systematically express the experience of socialist construction in the USSR?”¹⁸ Our Chinese colleagues, he warned, expect and await useful help in the resolution of “pressing tasks in the construction of socialism in China.”¹⁹

The chorus of Chinese complaints came to the attention of Ambassador Iudin, who pushed M.V. Zimianin of the Far East Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, A.A. Andreev from the Friendship Society, and G.A. Zhukov from the Committee on Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries to devote their energy to the matter of improving the quality and effectiveness of the journal.²⁰ These were important officials within the Soviet diplomatic establishment. Chinese criticism of the Soviet model was well-known to top officials by 1957 and 1958, and Mao’s turn to the Great Leap Forward bewildered and alarmed Soviet officials in China even as they failed to comprehend its meaning and implications.

The quality of Soviet work was always a concern for Soviets in China, as they knew the Chinese were watching carefully. “Poor articles will only embarrass us before our Chinese

¹⁷ Zapis’ besedy, May 4, 1958, S.L. Tikhvinskii and Li Zhuang, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 9, l. 7.

¹⁸ Zapis’ besedy, May 4, 1958, S.L. Tikhvinskii, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 9, l. 12.

¹⁹ Zapis’ besedy, May 4, 1958, S.L. Tikhvinskii, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 9, l. 12.

²⁰ P. Iudin to M.V. Zimianin, A.A. Andreev, G.A. Zhukov, March 13, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 9, l. 18.

friends,” explained Friendship Society Chair A.A. Andreevii.²¹ Fashioning himself a significant theoretician, Iudin characteristically suggested more “solid, theoretical, summarizing, articles and essays with a specific problematique.”²² The editorial board of the journal, headed by V.N. Rogov and joined by N.M. Potanov, P.S. Kapitsa, S.L. Tikhvinskii, B.G. Kokashvili, Iu.I. Balanenko, and I.S. Shcherbakov, sponsored a series of discussions from 1958-1960 that drew on the expertise of these institutions, with substantial Chinese contributions as well. The Friendship Society played host to these “Readers’ Conferences” in numerous Chinese cities, among them Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan, Chengdu and smaller provincial cities. They also invited further Soviet attendance at these events from officials associated with the Central Committee, the Academy of Sciences, Soviet publishing houses, and numerous other institutions and enterprises. Rogov and his editorial board read unsolicited letters to the journal from the Chinese, and pushed for effective and regular Readers’ Conferences in Beijing and throughout China, in order to respond to the concerns of the Chinese and improve the deteriorating relationship.

In response to the overwhelming Chinese criticism, the Soviets quickly dropped their initial pretensions about Belinskii and the traditions of the intelligentsia from the nineteenth-century. We cannot direct our message, offered Comrade Zakharov, at “one category of people,” by which he meant the educated; instead Chinese peasants, workers and their specific concerns needed to be expressed in the journal if it were to be successful.²³ Connecting with the Chinese

²¹ Priem, December 12, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 9, l. 16.

²² Tezisy doklada, April 4, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 8, l. 10.

²³ Vypiska iz pis'mo, Zakharov, June 6, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 10, l. 2.

reader meant addressing the concerns of peasants and the “simple Chinese man,” similarly offered Comrade Popenko from GURV at an October 1958 discussion.²⁴ Khomenko suggested a section called “On the Street,” which would provide information about “any street in any city, and show who lives on this street, how they live, and the theaters, clubs, stores, and schools there.”²⁵

Popenko managed to insult this imagined reader even as he attempted to recognize his needs. The concession to the interests of the reader, offered Popenko, was a particular challenge because the “simple Chinese reader is insufficiently educated compared to our average reader.”²⁶ The failures of the journal raised for these concerned scholars, advisors, and officials questions about the very notion of “friendship” between the Soviets and the Chinese. How might they address the everyday needs and “small details” of relationships between individuals that raised issues far different from matters of collaboration between enterprises and institutions? Numerous Chinese letter-writers to the journal echoed similar issues, and Soviets such as Popenko and his colleagues were aware that they had failed to produce material that spoke to the “situation in China.”²⁷

Dissonance about the Nature of Chinese Society

Yet the numerous and concerned Russian contributors to this discussion could only

²⁴ Stenogramma, October 11, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 7, l. 6.

²⁵ Zasedanie redkollegii, October 24, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 6, l. 12.

²⁶ Stenogramma, October 11, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 7, l. 5.

²⁷ Stenogramma, October 11, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 7, l. 7.

visualize a traditional resolution to the problem of improving the relationship. At a meeting sponsored by the Society for Soviet-Chinese Friendship in Moscow in July 1958, with only one Chinese voice present, Russians from a wide variety of institutions proclaimed their affection for Chinese culture, tradition and architecture. Officials more distant from recent developments and tension in the Sino-Soviet relationship especially tended to return to traditional Russian notions about the purpose and potential of the Russian mission in Asia. Comrade Cherniak from Gosstroï and Comrade Gubareva from the Ministry of Culture both suggested more attention to stories about Chinese traditional literature and architecture, and the history of Chinese opposition to western imperialism. Kaigorodov from the Library of Foreign Literature wanted to read more about “national customs, customs, mores, and so on.”

Others proclaimed their respect for ancient Chinese history. At a June 1958 discussion, P.P. Khoroshikh from Irkutsk State University explained that many works of Chinese architecture “were created close to five thousand years ago” and “attest to the creative value of the Chinese people.”²⁸ This Russian preoccupation with antiquity was common in the borderland regions of the Russian/Soviet empire. Soviet rule, in this conception, made possible the proper cultivation of the national past among non-Russian peoples. China too, in contrast to its recent experience under pressure from predatory imperialist powers, was to enjoy this possibility.

Other concerned Russians remained oblivious to the Maoist preoccupation with the importance of peasant culture and the problem of the accessibility and significance of high culture. Comrade Severin of the Ministry of Culture suggested more attention to the writings,

²⁸ Doklad, V.D. Kudriavtsev, June 20, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 12, l. 42.

birthdays, and biographies of famous Russian writers, composers, and theater directors, as well as more material on violin and piano competitions in which Soviet musicians excelled. “In China the piano schools have not attained the accomplishments of our own,” he proclaimed.²⁹ Severin continued to frustrate the Chinese by suggesting the journal focus more on the example of the Uzbek adoption and use of aspects of Russian and European high culture. We often criticize the talent of the Central Asians, he offered, while instead we should proudly celebrate the appearance of such work in Central Asia and the East.³⁰ China too was to his mind a related example. This perpetual reference to the extension of culture to the Soviet Asian frontier insulted a nation comfortable with its own civilizing missions toward its frontier peoples.

The Chinese press heralded the appearance and potential of Suzhong youhao in China, but characteristically in a way that reflected and served Chinese visions of future development and the Friendship. Contributors to Jiefang ribao, Renmin ribao, Guangming ribao, and numerous other publications drew on the typical notions about proletarian internationalism, socialist solidarity, the Friendship, and the Soviet Union as “China’s tomorrow,” but in a way that recast the Soviet experience and visualized future goals in Chinese terms.³¹ Chinese letter-writers to the journal and contributors to the numerous Readers’ Conferences throughout China similarly visualized Chinese experiences in the Soviet Union. At a Readers’ Conference in Tianjin in July 1959, Chinese contributors professed excitement about the “high speed” and

²⁹ Stenogramma, October 11, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 7, l. 16.

³⁰ Stenogramma, October 11, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 7, l. 20-21.

³¹ Ba Jin, “Ezhenedel’nik ‘Sovetsko-Kitaiskaia druzhba’,” Jiefang ribao, and Wu Jingyou, “Pyst’ vechno rastsvetaiut tsvety druzhby,” Guangming ribao (March 30, 1959), in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1957-1959, d. 3, l. 15-27.

“grandiose extent” of industrial accomplishments in the USSR.³² The supposed struggles and victories of the GLF were apparently unfolding in the Soviet Union. Li Yi similarly imagined Soviet production growth in steel as a Soviet version of a “great leap.”³³ In Shanghai in March 1958 Chinese attendees to the Readers’ Conference also referred to the great upsurge in productivity currently taking place in the Soviet Union.³⁴

By visualizing the Soviet Union in Chinese terms, the Chinese could thus convince themselves that the Great Leap Forward and the increasingly radical Maoist themes in Chinese culture and politics did not necessarily represent a challenge to the Soviet model. The Soviets and the Chinese were together making rapid strides forward. “The Chinese people under the leadership of the Communist Party,” emphasized Weng Yunsheng of the Dagongbao Publishing House, “utilizing the achievements of Soviet science and technology, will be able even faster to make a leap in its development.”³⁵ Lung Yunqing, a rural schoolteacher from Sichuan Province, wanted to learn about the role of “physical and intellectual labor” in overcoming the divide between the city and the countryside. Li Haijiong described a “cultural revolution” in the world of Chinese education, which was “quickly educating a red, proletarian intelligentsia,” and suggested the Soviets offer material to further such a development.³⁶ Other Chinese letter-writers expressed their interest in heroic and utopian Soviet activities, such as the experiences of

³² Materialy chitatel’skoi konferentsii v Tianjin, July 1959, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 84, l. 19.

³³ Beseda, October 24, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 11, l. 14-18.

³⁴ Kratkoe reziume vystupleniia na konferentsii chitatelei, March 30, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 13, l. 55.

³⁵ Materialy chitatel’skoi konferentsii v Tianjin, July 1959, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 84, l. 24.

³⁶ Svodka pisem, May 23-29, 1960, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 148, l. 76-78.

settlers in the Virgin Lands.³⁷ Gorkii was worth reading, argued Zhang Yuquan from Beijing Pedagogical Institute, because he persuasively linked “education with labor.”³⁸

The Soviet effort to “catch up and surpass” the advanced West was at the forefront of Chinese perceptions of the general Soviet program and purpose. Chinese writers made grandiose claims about the journal as a “bridge” between Soviet and Chinese society, and as an illustration of the “glorious victories of the USSR” in every imaginable area. “The Soviet Union in several important areas of science and technology” wrote He Bizhang in Fuxian Ribao, “has already by far overtaken the leading capitalist countries.”³⁹ A contributor to Zhongguo gongren directed readers to Suzhong youhao precisely because it provided evidence from Soviet economists about catching the United States in iron production by 1968, and steel the following year.⁴⁰ Chinese letter-writers and those queried in the Readers’ Conferences routinely requested more material in the journal about the heroic efforts to construct Soviet socialism in the past, and the future achievements that would catapult the socialist world past the world of the advanced West. Song Ji told Rogov in October 1958 that Chinese readers wanted to learn more about the “work and struggles of the Soviet people (for example, about the acquired strengths of the Soviet people that will enable them to surpass the USA in the course of seven years).”

³⁷ Svodka pisem chitatelei, May 8-15, 1960, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 148, l. 93; Svodka pisem, 18-24 August 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 16, l. 215.

³⁸ Svodka pisem, December 22-27, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 85, l. 246.

³⁹ He Bizhang, “Khoroshii uchitel’ i blizkii drug,” Fuxian ribao (May 27, 1959), in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1957-59, d. 3, l. 126.

⁴⁰ “Sovetskie rabochie boriutsia za pretvorenie zhizn’ semiletneho plana,” Zhongguo gongren, no. 10 (1959), in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1957-59, d. 3, l. 51.

The most significant recasting of the Soviet model thus concerned the United States. Yao Zhen, a journalist and a Central Committee official in international propaganda, bluntly told Rogov and his colleagues: “If you want to have more subscribers, regularly print in each number material about how the USSR is overtaking the USA. In China right now everyone is interested in one question: how the PRC is overtaking England and how the USSR is overtaking the USA.” Avoid generalities and vagueness, he continued, and stick to the “concrete: facts and figures.”⁴¹ Xiong Fu, an official from the Chinese Society of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, hoped to see all discussions of Soviet achievements in comparative context, and of course the comparison that mattered concerned the United States. Tell us “concretely in what areas the USSR will surpass America,” he asked the editorial board at a Readers’ Conference.⁴² Lu Xiangxiang also suggested “Chinese workers” wanted specific information about Soviet measures to overtake America.⁴³

The Chinese pushed the Soviets to be precise and make good on their vague claims about the glorious transition to communism. The journal needs to provide, argued Cheng Guangrui of Renmin ribao, “concrete examples of how the USSR will exceed in per capita production the United States.”⁴⁴ Deng To, the Renmin ribao editor who took his own life as the Cultural Revolution unfolded in 1966, similarly advised: “In the area of economic information it would

⁴¹ Beseda, October 31, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 11, l. 45.

⁴² Materialy chitatel’skikh konferentsii, March-April 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 13, l. 20.

⁴³ Materialy chitatel’skikh konferentsii, March-April 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 13, l. 38.

⁴⁴ Kratkaia zapis’ o konferentsii chitatelei, October 28, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1 d. 14, l. 15; also Svodka pisem chitatelei zhurnala ‘Sovetsko-kitaiskaia družba’, January 25-30, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 16, l. 11.

be best to make comparisons with the capitalist countries. In such a way the material will be the most pertinent, and will inspire enthusiasm and strengthen the faith of the reader that we will overtake the capitalist countries.”⁴⁵ With different interests but along the same lines, Wen Zijie, a young man from Shanghai, wanted to know about how the Soviet volleyball team fared against the Americans in their recent trip there.⁴⁶

Basic Dilemmas in Sino-Soviet Cultural Relations

Chinese concerns about the moral and ethical dimensions of daily life and struggle in the construction of a new utopian society illustrated some of the basic dilemmas of the Sino-Soviet relationship. What were the Chinese looking for as an alternative to a distant Soviet Union that seemed too “abstract and imprecise,” as Shen Zheng of the PLA suggested?⁴⁷ We have a “great interest in the daily life of Soviet people, in their habits and customs,” emphasized Qi Ke, a poet and editor of the newspaper Yangtze. Rogov and his colleagues had solicited contributions from a collection of literary and newspaper figures in the fall of 1958. At an earlier such exchange that year, Yan Hansheng, associated with both the Ministry of Literature and Culture as well as Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries, focused on personal matters: “We are very interested in the family life of Soviet people, such as the relations between spouses, parents and children, and

⁴⁵ Materialy chitatel'skikh konferentsii, March-April 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 13, l. 22. On Deng Tuo, see Timothy Cheek, Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁴⁶ Svodka pisem chitatelei, March 7-13, 1960, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 148, l. 146.

⁴⁷ Kratkaia zapis' o konferentsii chitatelei, October 28, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 14, l. 6.

so on.”⁴⁸

Li Erzhuang, a writer, Friendship Society administrator, and Wuhan City Party Secretary, similarly pushed the Soviets for more information about poems, songs, and pictures of Soviet daily life: “material about the way of life of Soviet people.”⁴⁹ At a similar discussion in Shanghai, Xingwan editor Liu Shimo looked for basic human moments of camaraderie and care: he appreciated a story about Soviet doctors taking a personal interest in Chinese patients in Heilongzhang.⁵⁰ Yu Changfu from Harbin offered his own story about personal help from a Soviet border guard after he broke his leg near the Sino-Soviet border.⁵¹

The world of daily life and personal relationships was a contradictory problem for the Soviets, however. How could this enormous governmental relationship, signed into law by the agreement between Mao and Stalin in 1950, address and cultivate these moments of cultural exchange from daily life? How could the vast “Friendship,” which after all meant a series of socialist bloc exchanges in industrial and economic development, address the personal matters of affection and care suggested by the term itself? And what could the Soviet Union in the wake of Stalinist dictatorship and the tragic degradation of public life possibly offer to anyone in this area?

Indeed, the surliness of Russian public life has been a well-known constant throughout

⁴⁸ Materialy chitatel'skikh konferentsii, March-April 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 13, l. 14.

⁴⁹ Mnenie o zhurnale, October 5, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 11, l. 30-32; also Zhurnal ‘Sovetsko-kitaiskaia družba’, 1960, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 145, l. 36; Svodka pisem chitatelei, February 1-7, 1960, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 148, l. 178.

⁵⁰ Beseda o zhurnale, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 11, l. 36.

⁵¹ Svodka pisem chitatelei, April 11-17, 1960, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 148, l. 116.

the entire twentieth-century. Ironically, it was precisely the “empathetic” character of American consumerism, as Victoria De Grazia puts it, which specifically addressed these matters.⁵² Suzhong youhao contributors attempted to address this issue with articles on topics such as the positive experiences of Chinese students in the Soviet Union, the affectionate family life of a typical Russian worker, the fine relationships cultivated by a Soviet music teacher in China, and various other connections between Russians and Chinese as examples of “friendship.”⁵³

The expectations, demands, and needs of socialist bloc allies such as the Chinese pushed the Soviets to recast their own history and experience in a way they knew would conform better to current Chinese concerns, however divorced this was from Soviet reality and history. In June 1958 V.D. Kudriavtsev enthusiastically welcomed Mao’s speech about the arrival of the “east wind” in international politics. He addressed Chinese efforts to overtake England in steel and iron production, and professed that Soviets were “genuinely happy about the successes of the workers of China in the industrial area.”⁵⁴ Zakharov recognized the Chinese desire to see Soviet readers more respectful and interested in Chinese conditions and contributions, and suggested stories about traditions and practices foreign to Soviet readers, such as the big character posters currently common in China (dazibao), the glorification of physical labor, and the experience of

⁵² Victoria De Grazia, Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵³ “Zhongguo xuesheng zai mosike daxue,” Suzhong youhao, no. 6 (1958), 31; “Youyi,” Suzhong youhao, no. 6 (1958), 32; “Women shenghuo zai youyi zhong,” Suzhong youhao, no. 13 (1958), 33; “Mosike xuesheng xue zhongwen,” Suzhong youhao, no. 12 (1958), 24, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1958, d. 19, l. 118-119, 258, 234; Li Wen, “Xilin gongchengshi xianzai de gongzuo he shenghuo,” Suzhong youhao, no. 7 (1959), 9, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 87, l. 9.

⁵⁴ Doklad, V.D. Kudriavtsev, June 20, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 12, l. 30-34.

agricultural labor in the countryside for urban cadres and intellectuals.⁵⁵

Radical trends characteristic of the interests of Chairman Mao were depicted by the Soviets as familiar and part of their experience. Current Chinese artists depicting peasants were behaving as good socialist realists, painting the “life of the village.”⁵⁶ Soviet history itself needed to be more effectively recast in current Chinese terms. As a means to connect with Chinese readers, Rogov suggested the journal return to the earlier stages of the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union, and describe the difficulties and dramatic struggles of the 1929-33 era.⁵⁷ The Soviet Union as well had its youthful experience with revolutionary change, cultural revolution, and utopian idealism. From Beijing, embassy official N.G. Sudarikov similarly complained to Zhukov, the Chair of the State Committee for Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries. The Chinese were interested in labor history, historic Russian efforts to construct socialism, and communist education methods, but instead Soviet publications focused on theater, art, music, and film.⁵⁸ Sudarikov pushed for more attention to the “advantages of the Soviet system,” the “economic strength of the USSR,” Soviet accomplishments in industry and agriculture, Soviet aid to the countries of the bloc, and Soviet support for developing countries. Provide “portraits of simple Soviet people, who labor without losing their strength,” advised one board member.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Vypiska iz pis'mo, Zakharov, June 6, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 10, l. 3.

⁵⁶ Konferentsiia chitatelei zhurnala ‘Druzhba,’ July 10, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 12, l. 3-17.

⁵⁷ Stenogramma, October 11, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 7, l. 10.

⁵⁸ N. Sudarikov to G.A. Zhukov, January 26, 1959, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 81, l. 4.

⁵⁹ Zasedanie redkollegii, October 24, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 6, l. 14.

The Soviets understood that the central matter for the Chinese was the delicate matter of “catch up and surpass,” which illustrates how the Sino-Soviet relationship and the wider bloc directly influenced this important trend in Soviet foreign policy. Soviets with experience in China saw the party program unveiled at the Twenty-First Party Congress as useful in Sino-Soviet relations, for these were the official events where the nature of the transition from socialism to communism and its meaning were clarified. Let’s publicize in full the party program, argued editorial board member Kakashvili to his colleagues.⁶⁰ Embassy advisor in China N.G. Sudarikov similarly picked up on this issue, and suggested information on “problems relating to the transition from socialism to communism in the USSR.”⁶¹ The Soviet embassy in Beijing in 1958 regularly brought attention to this issue of the stages of socialist development, and the “theoretical” matter of the “gradual transition from socialism to communism.”⁶²

Soviets themselves thus rendered their portrayal of events such as the Twenty-First Party Congress and the Seven Year Plan in a mode familiar to Chinese political culture. Before the Chinese audience, the Soviets worked hard to emphasize that indeed the arrival of communism in the Soviet Union was imminent. Soviet plans and recent events, suggested Soviet expert Karasev, illustrated that “we are decisively moving toward the next stage of advanced communism.”⁶³ The journal itself was thus “sinicized” in its presentation of these topics, as if

⁶⁰ Protokol, September 9, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 6, l. 1.

⁶¹ N. Sudarikov to G.A. Zhukov, January 26, 1959, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 81, l. 6.

⁶² Vypiska iz otcheta posol’stva SSSR v KNR za 1958 g., in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 81, l. 11.

⁶³ Kalaxiefu, “Gongchanzhuyi yiding neng jiancheng,” Suzhong youhao, no. 4 (1959), 4, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 4.

the Soviet Union itself was working in tandem with the radical Maoist “leap” of 1958-60.⁶⁴ Soviet officials in foreign affairs, culture, and propaganda worked together with Chinese colleagues in Moscow and China to craft these stories and general vision evident in the pages of Suzhong youhao.

The language itself of the journal was suggestive of Chinese political history and culture. The collaborative nature of the production of the journal and the need to address the assumptions of the Chinese audience encouraged even the use of slogans and terms suggestive of contemporary Chinese politics. As a result of the “good path” (meihao de daolu) articulated in the new Seven Year Plan, the Soviet Union was daily “striding toward communism” (xiang gongzhanzhuyi maijin).⁶⁵ Soviet industrial development was marked by its “speed” and rapid development.⁶⁶ Khrushchev’s competitive notion of peaceful coexistence and “catch up and surpass” was a “campaign” and “movement.” “This movement has the support of the party and the entire people,” offered the editors in early 1959.⁶⁷ Russian slogans and notions were inevitably sinicized in the process of presentation and translation. “The party’s plan is the Soviet people’s plan,” (Dang de jihua shi sulian renmin de jihua), wrote Karasev (Kalaxiefu).⁶⁸ Or sometimes the language about the Soviet experience was entirely drawn from China. “The

⁶⁴ O rabote redaktsii zhurnala ‘Sovetsko-Kitaiskaia druzhba’, June 4, 1960, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 145, l. 3-4.

⁶⁵ “Wo you qinian jihua,” Suzhong youhao, no. 7 (1959), 5-6, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 87, l. 5.

⁶⁶ “Zuotian, jintian, mingtian,” Suzhong youhao, no. 2 (1959), 15, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 87, l. 15.

⁶⁷ “Sulian chushengye chanpin shengchan yiding chaoguo meiguo,” Suzhong youhao, no. 3 (1959), 5, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1 d. 87, l. 5.

⁶⁸ Kalaxiefu, “Gongchanzhuyi yiding neng jiancheng,” Suzhong youhao, no. 4 (1959), 3-4, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 3.

Soviet people's path is glorious" (Sulian renmin de daolu shi guangrong de), concluded Karasev. "Communism definitely will be constructed!"⁶⁹

Fears and Strains Realized

Soviet observers aware and also fearful of the direction of Chinese politics advised caution in this complicated effort to address simultaneously two very different reading audiences. At the height of the Great Leap Forward in June 1959, B. Gurevich and Iu. Lysenko argued for the necessity of "tact" in the presentation of sensitive political matters. For Chinese readers, they suggested the journal refrain from discussing the prevalence of "material incentives" in Soviet industry.⁷⁰ They were aware of the pointed concerns from many radical Chinese readers about the apparently suspect "class structure" still in existence in the Soviet Union. "Are there in your cities and countryside classes, like landlords, kulaks, and capitalists," asked Zao Dengwan of the PLA?⁷¹ But there were Soviet readers of the journal as well, and they were likely to be confused by too much knowledge about what was really happening in China. For Soviet readers, Gurevich and Lysenko suggested the journal shy away from articles on the people's communes in China, "even though the organization of the communes throughout the country on a massive scale had already been completed."⁷² Certain basic trends and practices in both societies were best left unexplored at present.

⁶⁹ Kalaxiefu, "Gongchanzhuyi yiding neng jiancheng," Suzhong youhao, no. 4 (1959), 4, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 4.

⁷⁰ B. Gurevich and Iu. Lysenko, *Spravka*, June 1959, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 145, l. 18-20.

⁷¹ *Svodka pisem*, May 4-9, 1959, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 85, l. 198.

⁷² B. Gurevich and Iu. Lysenko, *Spravka*, June 1959, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 145, l. 18-20.

An acceptable topic for everyone, however, was more information on how the Chinese were going “to catch up and surpass England” in the next fifteen years.⁷³ The Chinese thus played a fascinating role in pushing the Soviets to take seriously their own claims about the making of a communist society. Publish the speech from Lenin at the Third Komsomol Congress, suggested an editorial board member in October 1958, because here Lenin claims that “communism will soon be built.”⁷⁴ “Show in the journal the country in 1965,” pushed a Soviet contributor queried at a November 1958 session; a picture of a factory, a collective farm, industrial productivity, a television station and so on as they will be in this future.⁷⁵

Chinese contributors to the journal could offer personal testimonies about the seriousness of the Soviet commitment to tackle the “construction of communism as a great objective and task.”⁷⁶ Vague claims about the distant future are perhaps the easiest to make, but what was helpful in one context did not necessarily work in another. Closer to the West and more informed about its prosperity, Czechs and Slovaks found Khrushchev ineffective because he was ultimately “unrealistic” in his numerous plans and grandiose claims, especially regarding this

⁷³ B. Gurevich and Iu. Lysenko, *Spravka*, June 1959, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 145, l. 18-20; see also *Zasedanie redkollegii*, October 24, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 6, l. 15.

⁷⁴ *Zasedanie redkollegii*, October 24, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 6, l. 13.

⁷⁵ *Protokol zasedaniia*, November 13, 1958, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 6, l. 27. For an example of such an article the following year, see “1965 niande sulian jichuang zhizaoye,” *Suzhong youhao*, 3 (1959), 28, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 28.

⁷⁶ Ge Lizhong, “Sulian gonghui he qinian shili,” *Suzhong youhao*, no. 13 (1959), 3, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 3.

matter of catching up with the West.⁷⁷

The Soviets continued to have difficulty absorbing the Chinese concerns and complaints, even as Rogov and his colleagues tried to listen. The continuing Chinese complaint about the absence of a “mutual” exchange baffled Soviets who took their pedagogic mission for granted. Still in May 1960 Li Zhuang continued to remind N.G. Sudarikov that “in the Soviet Union there is less printed and discussed about China in the newspapers and journals than about the Soviet Union in China.”⁷⁸ Why were the Russians not more interested in the Chinese and their culture? The journal sought out stories and experiences that illustrated Russian learning from the Chinese, and published articles about Russians students engaged in Chinese language lessons, Russian enthusiasts of Chinese traditional medicine, the study of Chinese literature in the Soviet Union, and the positive experiences of Chinese workers, specialists, and graduate students in the Soviet Union.⁷⁹ The founding of the Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society in the Soviet Union in 1957, a companion institution to the much larger and more significant Chinese-Soviet Friendship Society in China, was conceived with this problem in mind as well. If the institution in China served to acquaint the Chinese with the virtues and ways of the Russian world, the companion institution in the Soviet Union would publicize and present Chinese culture and ways to Soviet citizens.

⁷⁷ Václav Kotyk, “Výkum vztahů mezi socialistickými státy v ústavu pro mezinárodní politiku a ekonomii,” in Petr Drulák and Petr Kratochvíl, ed., et al., 50 let českého výzkumu mezinárodních vztahů: od ÚMPE k ÚMV (Praha: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 2007), 40.

⁷⁸ Iz zapisi besedy, N.G. Sudarikov, May 25, 1960, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 146, l. 4.

⁷⁹ “Mosike xuesheng xue zhongwen,” Suzhong youhao, no. 12 (1958), 24, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1958, d. 19, l. 234; Svodka pisem, February 9-14, 1959, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 85, l. 262; Bu Cheng, “Zai sulian shoudu xinangu shenghuode yinian,” Suzhong youhao, no. 4 (1959), 29-31, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 29-31; “Yong hasa kewen chubian de zhongguo zuopin,” Suzhong youhao, no. 3 (1959), 25, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1 d. 149, l. 25; “Youyi, jinbu, heping,” Suzhong youhao, no. 7 (1959), 7-8, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 87, l. 7.

Even the progress of Central Asia under Soviet rule, a matter of pride for the Soviets and visualized by them as directly pertinent to the experience of China, was interpreted differently by the Chinese. Suzhong youhao often visualized 1965 in places like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, when Central Asia was to be a central contributor to the socialist bloc community in machine tool production, precious metals, the chemicals industry and other areas. Steel factories in Kazakhstan were “better and then some than America’s best factories.”⁸⁰

Over the course of 1959-1965, Kazakhstan planned to build some thirty new electric power stations, again bringing the region “near to the American level” in the quantity of electric power produced per person.⁸¹ The Kazakhs routinely sent their ballet and other cultural groups to Moscow, much to the appreciation of sophisticated audiences in the capital.⁸² This vision, however, was not necessarily an appealing one to the Chinese, who did not imagine themselves as beneficiaries of Russia’s traditional civilizing mission in Asia.

Conclusion

The discussions surrounding the production of Suzhong youhao illustrate the complicated dialogue and diverse interests that influenced the making of the Soviet notion of “catch up and surpass,” which was a central component of the Soviet Union’s foreign policy culture under

⁸⁰ “1965 niande hasakesidan,” Suzhong youhao, no. 3 (1959), 30, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 30.

⁸¹ “1965 niande hasakesidan,” Suzhong youhao, no. 3 (1959), 30, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 30; also Kalaxiefu, “Gongchanzhuyi yiding neng jiancheng,” Suzhong youhao, no. 4 (1959), 4, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 4.

⁸² Hasake baleiwu zai mosike,” Suzhong youhao, no. 3 (1959), 24-25, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 24-25.

Khrushchev. In many ways, communication and collaboration between the Russians and Chinese was difficult. Both sides misunderstood the other, and recast the very different foreign society as something familiar and comprehensible. Soviets aware of the radical trends shaping Chinese politics in 1958-60 encouraged the Chinese and themselves into believing that the success of socialism, on the brink of a transition to full “communism,” was ultimately to be judged by its ability to compete economically with America. Chinese deluded themselves into thinking that the Soviet Seven-Year Plan and Twenty-First Party Congress amounted to a familiar mobilization “campaign” from Chinese political history. Competing with America was an impossible proposition for anyone in 1959 and a dangerous dilemma for ruling communist parties who now justified their rule upon these unending public discussions and pronouncements about the nature and timing of a future “communist” society. Socialist bloc collaboration pushed and pulled the Soviet Union in diverse directions that it could not possibly accommodate.

The obstacles and impediments to Sino-Soviet reconciliation by 1960 obviously extended beyond the world of Suzhong youhao. Khrushchev made his famous journey to America to see President Eisenhower in September 1959, and the two superpowers were carefully initiating the negotiations that led to the test ban agreements of 1963. Chairman Mao was not impressed and enjoyed reminding his colleagues and eventually the world that the Russians were busy selling out the heritage of Marxism-Leninism. Frustrated by the downward spiral in relations, the Soviets suddenly withdrew their many advisors and exchange participants in July 1960. Suzhong youhao was shut down in September 1960. Chinese interpreters and journalists such as Wang Yiyang departed Moscow on September 12, 1960, still hopeful that the journal, a “small

link in our great and eternal friendship” would someday make a comeback.⁸³ That would never happen, and relations would not thaw until both countries, many years later, adopted a dramatically different posture toward economic development and their relationship toward America.

⁸³ Beseda s tov. Du Po, September 12, 1960, in GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 146, l. 9.