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Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia. "The Whirlwind of China: Zhou Enlai's Shuttle Diplomacy in 1957 and Its Effects." *Cold War History* Vol. 10:4 (Fall 2010): 513-535. DOI: 10.1080/14682740903167978. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682740903167978> .

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Review by **Mark Kramer**, Harvard University

Even though the People's Republic of China (PRC) remains firmly under authoritarian rule, many remarkable changes have occurred there in the 35 years since the death of Mao Zedong. One of the most heartening changes has been the gradual emergence of a coterie of Chinese experts — some living in the PRC, others living abroad — who are producing valuable scholarship about the politics and foreign policy of Mao's China. Scholars such as Chen Jian, Qiang Zhai, Michael Sheng, Zhang Shuguang, Hua-yu Li, Yinghong Cheng, and Xue Litai, among others, have contributed greatly to the historiography on China's role in the Cold War. Two of the finest of the burgeoning group of Chinese historians are Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, the authors of the article under review.¹ Shen is a university professor at East China Normal University (ECNU) in Shanghai and the founding director of ECNU's Center for Cold War International History Studies. He has been a driving force behind the development of Cold War studies as an academic field in the PRC. Xia is an associate professor of history at Long Island University and a senior research fellow at Shen's center at ECNU. They are co-writing a book about Chinese foreign policy during the Mao era, giving particular emphasis to Sino-Soviet relations and the Sino-U.S.-Soviet triangle.

Because the brief article under review is derived from a chapter of that larger book project, the topic of the piece — a series of visits by a high-level Chinese delegation led by Zhou Enlai to three Soviet-bloc countries in January 1957 — might appear somewhat narrow to readers who have not seen other parts of the book. Shen and Xia do, however,

¹ Shen Zhihua's name is more familiarly rendered in the Chinese style, with the surname preceding the given name. But because Yafeng Xia (who currently lives in the United States) has been using his name with the order reversed in English-language publications, he and Shen Zhihua felt it was appropriate to use a parallel ordering for their names in this English-language journal.

seek to provide broader context for their article, sketching in events from roughly the time of Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Iosif Stalin at the 20th Soviet Party Congress in February 1956 to the holding of a world conference of Communist parties in Moscow in November 1957. The bulk of the article, dealing with the PRC delegation's visits to the USSR, Poland, and Hungary, is perceptive and contains fascinating nuggets of information. The shorter contextual discussion is less successful because the authors at times make claims that are dubious or exaggerated. Nonetheless, the article as a whole, drawing mainly on Chinese sources and translations of declassified Soviet and East European documents, will be of great use for anyone interested in China's relationship with the USSR and Zhou Enlai's role in Chinese foreign policymaking in the latter half of the 1950s.

The visits by Zhou's delegation came shortly after crises in Poland and Hungary in the summer and fall of 1956 had destabilized the Soviet bloc, culminating in the full-scale Soviet invasion of Hungary in November 1956. The Chinese mediation efforts in the USSR, Poland, and Hungary — the three countries most directly affected by the unrest in 1956 — were designed to promote renewed cohesion and unity in the international Communist movement. Shen and Xia argue that Zhou's "shuttle diplomacy" was successful overall in achieving the objectives set by Mao, but the evidence adduced by the authors indicates that the delegation actually failed to attain several of its primary goals — a point to which I will return.

Shen and Xia recount the Zhou delegation's visits briskly and insightfully. Although the visits have been discussed elsewhere, including in some of the earliest works analyzing the Sino-Soviet split, Shen and Xia go into greater depth and bring out the connections between the visits more clearly. Their narrative presents some revealing episodes, such as the description of how "the Soviet army and the Soviet Interior Ministry were put in charge of Zhou's security" (524) during the delegation's visit to Hungary, a country that was still very tense after the traumatic violence of October-November 1956. The protection of the Chinese delegation was overseen and coordinated by the Soviet ambassador in Hungary, Yuri Andropov, who had long been in the habit of treating the country as his personal fiefdom. Andropov had orchestrated the initial Soviet military intervention in Hungary in October 1956, and he was outspoken in urging a larger intervention (which took place on 4 November), warning that all vestiges of Soviet influence in Hungary would disappear unless Soviet troops acted decisively to crush the revolt.

The article rightly touches on what was undoubtedly the most important accomplishment of Zhou's diplomacy, even though Shen and Xia relegate their discussion of it to the final section. They point out that Khrushchev had deflected China's requests for Soviet assistance in developing missile technology and nuclear weapons prior to Zhou's mission, but that "the situation changed after Zhou's visit to Moscow" (527). A highly classified protocol "On Assistance to the People's Republic of China in Special Technology" was signed by Soviet and Chinese leaders in late March 1957, paving the way

for extensive, crucial Soviet aid to the PRC's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs through mid-1959.

Shen and Xia maintain that "Zhou Enlai's shuttle diplomacy . . . restored some of the badly shattered unity of the socialist countries and strengthened the socialist bloc," but they sharply qualify this judgment by repeatedly noting that any positive impact Zhou's visits may have had lasted only "a brief period of time." (526) This "brief period" clearly was not long enough to make an appreciable difference or to outweigh the negative consequences of the Chinese delegation's visits. Despite offering a favorable assessment in some places, Shen and Xia elsewhere acknowledge that "Zhou was not totally satisfied with what he had accomplished during the visit," that "Soviet leaders, especially Khrushchev, felt extremely dissatisfied and uneasy while Zhou was 'lecturing' them," and that this "eventually led to the emotional and heated dispute between the Chinese and Soviet leaders in October 1959" (528). The authors also emphasize that "the CCP's stance deviated from the democratic and independent aspirations of Eastern European people," that "the CCP's stance was not in step with national conditions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (including Yugoslavia)," that "from a long-term perspective the CCP's approach ran counter to what the Soviets and Eastern Europeans believed," and that "the Soviets, the Hungarians, the Poles, and the Yugoslavs [all refused] to accept the CCP's imperious bearing and self-righteousness." Shen and Xia further concede that China's failure to "satisfy Hungarian needs for credit loans . . . must have been a disappointment to the Hungarian government" and that Zhou failed even in his approaches to Yugoslavia, which defied his entreaties by "declin[ing] to attend the Moscow conference of world Communist and workers' parties and [refusing] to accept ideological unity with both China and the Soviet Union." (528)

Given all of these negative results from Zhou's shuttle diplomacy, Shen's and Xia's earlier claim that "Zhou's trip strengthened the socialist bloc, consolidated the Sino-Soviet alliance, and elevated China's position and influence in the socialist bloc" seems incongruous, even if we keep in mind the authors' important qualifier that the positive impact of the delegation's visits lasted only "a brief period of time." (515)

At certain points in the article, especially toward the beginning, Shen and Xia give the impression that any setback for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) translated into a gain for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). For example, they write that "the open 'self-criticism' of the CPSU and the unveiling of Stalin's mistakes lowered the CPSU's prestige and shook its leadership role in the socialist camp. In this [sic] process, the CCP gained increased influence and new pride" (516). Perhaps this was the case, but Shen and Xia provide evidence elsewhere in the article that no such zero-sum dynamic was actually present much of the time. Sometimes both parties gained in strength and prestige; at other times neither of them made a net gain; and in certain instances both parties' standing declined.

The authors downplay the significance of China's efforts before and during the November 1957 conference of world Communist parties to promote the slogan of the "camp of socialist countries headed by the Soviet Union." When the Polish leader Władysław Gomułka objected to this formula, Zhou stressed that "recognition of Soviet leadership of the [socialist] Bloc" was crucial (521-522). The Chinese delegation's insistence on codifying the Soviet Union's role as the "head of the socialist camp" and the "leader of the bloc" is hard to square with Shen's and Xia's contention that the CCP had achieved "equal standing with the CPSU" and "a leadership role equal to [that of] the Soviet Union in the socialist camp," transforming "Beijing [into] a second parallel 'centre of world revolution,'" albeit only "for a brief period of time." Contrary to what Shen and Xia say, Zhou's firm emphasis on "Soviet leadership of the socialist camp" and "the advance role of the Soviet Union" does not imply "equal standing" for the PRC." (521, 529)

In certain places the article contains puzzling observations about the Soviet bloc. Shen and Xia write that "shortly after Zhou left Poland, the standing of the Polish party in the election took a 'decisive' turn for the better, and eventually they [presumably the Polish Communists] won the election" (526). The authors do not specify what election they are talking about, but I assume that they are alluding to the election for the Polish legislature (the Sejm) that took place in January 1957. Shen and Xia give the impression that the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) won the election only because of Zhou's visit to Poland. Suffice to say that this is not how "elections" worked in the Soviet bloc. Even though Gomułka, upon regaining his post as PZPR First Secretary in October 1956, had pledged to hold "free" elections, he abandoned that promise when he realized that the PZPR would not win a genuinely free election. A few minor procedural changes were adopted, but the outcome of the January 1957 Polish election was guaranteed in advance, with or without Zhou's visit: The only candidates who were allowed to run were PZPR members or close affiliates. Even though Poles could vote *against* a particular candidate, no one from the opposition was permitted to stand for election in Communist-era Poland until June 1989.

Shen and Xia have drawn on translations of Soviet and East European documents, but in certain instances on-site work in the former Soviet-bloc archives would have strengthened the article. At one point, Shen and Xia speculate about reader correspondence at the Soviet Communist newspaper *Pravda* based on indirect sources (517-518). The voluminous files of the editorial board of *Pravda*, including materials pertaining to correspondence from readers, are still being processed but have been at least partly accessible since the early 1990s in Fond 364 at the former Central Party Archive in Moscow (known as RGASPI since 1999). Perusal of the relevant files would have enabled the authors to find solid evidence about the point they are discussing more speculatively here.² When citing documents from another Russian federal archive, the

² Work in the archives also would have enabled Shen and Xia to pin down the correct name of the editor-in-chief of *Pravda* in 1957. They refer to him simply as "Sachiukov" (a surname that does not exist in Russian); the name should actually be Pavel Satyukov.

Russian State Archive of Recent History (RGANI), Shen and Xia invariably refer to it as TsKhSD, an acronym that fell into disuse in July 1999 after the archive received its current name.

Despite these drawbacks, the Shen-Xia article sheds interesting light on Zhou Enlai's visits to Soviet-bloc countries in January 1957. Readers will eagerly await their book covering the whole period under Mao.

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