When the Chinese leadership published a ‘Second Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU’, although it repeated some previous positions, there were less nuances in the best known editorials of Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily) and Hongqi (Red Flag), of September 13, 1963, On The Question of Stalin.

It was against instant judgements wanting a long term perspective ~ “It is likely that no final verdict can be reached on this question in the present century.”

It reiterated that the issues were greater than the person wanting to place the question in context ~ “The Chinese Communist Party has consistently maintained that the question of how to evaluate Stalin and what attitude to take towards him is not just one of appraising Stalin himself; more important, it is a question of how to sum up the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the international communist movement since Lenin’s death.”

It strongly condemned the motive and method for Khrushchev’s Secret Speech ~ “The Communist Party of China has always held that when Comrade Khrushchov completely negated Stalin on the pretext of “combating the personality cult”, he was quite wrong and had ulterior motives.”

With the equality of party relations to mind, the Chinese objected to the “failure” to consult the fraternal Parties in advance on this question of principle which involves the whole international communist movement, and afterwards tried to impose a fait accompli on them.”

It was not without its own criticism but was against “completely negated” Khrushchev has abused Stalin as a “murderer”, a “criminal” a “bandit”, a “gambler”, a “despot of the type of Ivan the Terrible”, “the greatest dictator in Russian history”, a “fool”, an “idiot”, etc.

“The leaders of the CPSU have accused the Chinese Communist Party of “defending” Stalin. Yes, we do defend Stalin. When Khrushchev distorts history and completely negates Stalin, naturally we have the inescapable duty to come forward and defend him in the interests of the international communist movement.”

The question is raised: “In what position does Khrushchev, who participated in the leadership of the Party and the state during Stalin’s period, place himself when he beats his breast, pounds the table and shouts abuse of Stalin at the top of his voice? In the position of an accomplice to a “murderer” or a “bandit”? Or in the same position as a “fool” or an “idiot”?"

Yet they “they laud the chieftains of imperialism to the skies.”

Earlier in his career, Khrushchev himself repeatedly extolled Stalin, during the period of Stalin’s leadership he himself was particularly active in supporting and carrying out the then prevailing policy for suppressing counter-revolutionaries.
Why does Khrushchev, who was in the leadership of the Party and the state in Stalin’s period and who actively supported and firmly executed the policy for suppressing counter-revolutionaries, repudiate everything done during this period and shift the blame for all errors on to Stalin alone, while altogether whitewashing himself?

There is a question of methodology; “The Communist Party of China has invariably insisted on an overall, objective and scientific analysis of Stalin’s merits and demerits by the method of historical materialism and the presentation of history as it actually occurred, and has opposed the subjective, crude and complete negation of Stalin by the method of historical idealism and the wilful distortion and alteration of history.

The Communist Party of China has consistently held that Stalin did commit errors, which had their ideological as well as social and historical roots. It is necessary to criticize the errors Stalin actually committed, not those groundlessly attributed to him, and to do so from a correct stand and with correct methods. But we have consistently opposed improper criticism of Stalin, made from a wrong stand and with wrong methods.”

Stalin made certain mistakes. “Some were errors of principle and some were errors made in the course of practical work; some could have been avoided and some were scarcely avoidable at a time when the dictatorship of the proletariat had no precedent to go by.” This was a charitable judgement that fails to address the criminal acts that set aside socialist legality and consideration of socialist morality in treatment of individuals, ethnic groups and societal goals.

- In his way of thinking, Stalin departed from dialectical materialism and fell into metaphysics and subjectivism on certain questions and consequently he was sometimes divorced from reality and from the masses.
- In struggles inside as well as outside the Party, on certain occasions and on certain questions he confused two types of contradictions which are different in nature, contradictions between ourselves and the enemy and contradictions among the people, and also confused the different methods needed in handling them.
- In the work led by Stalin of suppressing the counter-revolution, many counter-revolutionaries deserving punishment were duly punished, but at the same time there were innocent people who were wrongly convicted; and in 1937 and 1938 there occurred the error of enlarging the scope of the suppression of counter-revolutionaries.
- In the matter of Party and government organization, he did not fully apply proletarian democratic centralism and, to some extent, violated it.
- In handling relations with fraternal Parties and countries, he made some mistakes.
- He also gave some bad counsel in the international communist movement. These mistakes caused some losses to the Soviet Union and the international communist movement.

“Some mistakes” and the international impact on the communist movement is hidden in the unmentioned detail. And reflecting a more dialectical approach to the question that others should have adopted, the Chinese leadership argued that “since some of the wrong ideas put forward by Stalin were accepted and applied by certain Chinese comrades, we Chinese
should bear the responsibility. In the struggle against ‘Left’ and Right opportunism, therefore, our Party criticised only its own erring comrades and never put the blame on Stalin.”

There was from the late 1950s a developing Maoist criticism of the Stalin era that was less acknowledged or understood than the public defence of Stalin. The evaluation of Stalin did involve the assessment of an era. As part of a polemic, the detail is more lacking than the accusations. For all their criticisms Chinese communists judged “Stalin's life was that of a great Marxist-Leninist, a great proletarian revolutionary.”

The issues raised in the 1963 article, may have been pertinent but neither were they answered in any subsequent pronouncements. However it did inspire others to engage in an interrogation of Soviet developments yet Stalin remain an iconic figure within the anti-revisionist movement.

The subsequent Maoist evaluation of Stalin was guided by a number of iconic Chinese statements such as Mao’s generous 70-30 judgement, the provocative wreath judging Stalin “A Great Marxist-Leninist”, the notion of there being “two swords” expressed in Mao’s Speech at the Second Plenum of the Eight Central Committee (Nov. 15, 1956), and the reluctance, and foreboding sense, that any criticism would give credence to Khrushchev and anti-communists accounts.

Those who indiscriminately champions the universal contributions of theory and practice of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao on a pantheon fossilises those contributions in a ritual recipe of fidelity and ideological confusion. It fails to address the contradictions and problems that each era produces. With Stalin’s merits placed in the context of the first attempt, without precedent or experience to draw upon, the negative lessons are more clearly drawn. The evaluation remains disputed, but a defence of an individual is not the touchstone of what constituted anti-revisionist politics. However in the 21st century the defence of Stalin was placed in perspective as the iconic legacy of “Five heads” had by the Twenty-first century been reduced to three – Marxism-Leninism-Maoism

The context of Mao Zedong’s public approach to ‘the Stalin Question’ was described in H. Scott’s observation that,

“Mao tended to emphasize praise and support for Stalin in his public statements, though he did openly acknowledge that Stalin had made some serious errors. This may have been so that people would have time to reorient themselves about the Stalin era and not lose heart because of Khrushchev's revelations. It was probably also due in part to the growing need to reaffirm Marxist principles and traditions in opposition to Khrushchev's ever-more-evident revisionism. On the other hand, at meetings with leading Party cadres, Mao's remarks tended to focus more on a variety of specific criticisms of Stalin, in philosophy, in political economy, with regard to Stalin's political leadership and his leadership of the international communist movement, and with regard to his attitude and behavior toward the Chinese revolution. While Mao still often repeated that Stalin should be upheld in the main, in these more private meetings most of his comments about Stalin were quite critical, and
seem to have become more critical as time went on, partly in light of the unfolding experience of the Chinese revolution.”¹

“While defending Stalin, we do not defend his mistakes. Long ago the Chinese Communists had first-hand experience of some of his mistakes. Of the erroneous “Left” and Right opportunist lines which emerged in the Chinese Communist Party at one time or another, some arose under the influence of certain mistakes of Stalin’s, in so far as their international sources were concerned. In the late twenties, the thirties and the early and middle forties, the Chinese Marxist-Leninists represented by Comrades Mao Tse-tung and Liu Shao-chi resisted the influence of Stalin’s mistakes; they gradually overcame the erroneous lines of “Left” and Right opportunism and finally led the Chinese revolution to victory.”

“When Stalin did something wrong, he was capable of criticizing himself. For instance, he had given some bad counsel with regard to the Chinese revolution. After the victory of the Chinese revolution, he admitted his mistake. Stalin also admitted some of his mistakes in the work of purifying the Party ranks in his report to the 18th Congress of the CPSU(B) in 1939. But what about Khrushchev? He simply does not know what self-criticism is; all he does is to shift the entire blame on to others and claim the entire credit for himself.”

¹ http://www.massline.org/SingleSpark/Stalin/StalinMaoEval.htm