In contrast to the creative engagement of the Chinese leadership with the issues unleashed by the 20th Congress of the CPSU, the Russian leadership seem to be denying there were any lessons to be learnt from the Stalin era, others within the international camp – and not just the Chinese – were asking how much of the Soviet experience and of the Soviet model was universally valid and how much was a historical peculiarity that need not be repeated elsewhere?

The wider polemic that convulsed the international movement saw in the ensuing exchange of arguments under a collective imprimatur of ruling communist parties seeking to ideologically convince a wider audience of the merit of their analysis. The self-interest, and Soviet-influence over both ruling East European parties, and the non-ruling parties saw a more receptive audience in the established hierarchies in the debate over de-Stalinization and the strategic innovations that were introduced at the 20th Congress.

Conceding that there was “a great variety of concrete forms and methods of building socialism in the various countries depending on historical, national and other peculiarities in each country” was to open up many issues relating to the relationship between was counterpoised as the ‘Monolithic Unity’ or ‘Different Roads’. Torn between the perceived dangers of “national communism” with emphasis on its path of socialist construction that endangered the Moscow-defined “Interests of the socialist community” and “polycentrism”, seen to threaten the unity of that community, and feared as a centrifugal force that would spin out of control. It had been developing in the post-war years particularly among those parties who did not hold power; the Soviet model was followed by all the parties in power apart from Yugoslavia.

Was Stalin wrong in condemning Tito’s policies, not accepting Titoism as a “specifically Yugoslav form of Marxism-Leninism”? The Chinese were praising Mao for his application of Marxism to China, and a couple of years later the British Road had the endorsement of the Soviet Communist Party, and from Stalin himself. However the judgement was that Tito followed a bourgeois-nationalist line and ultimately fell into the American imperialist camp despite protestation of neutrality and non-alignment from Belgrade.

Clarity on the issues of party relations, and the degree of divergence in policies within a framework of communist unity, were issues forged in the glare of a hostile and critical environment exemplified by the inconsistencies in the attitude to the original “heretic”, Tito-led Yugoslavia. Crudely described as flip-flop politics, the inconsistency in the characterisation of Yugoslavia in Chinese political pronouncements only served to muddy the ideological offensive against revisionism within the international movement.

From virtual ex-communication in 1948 and “the prolonged conflict, the main guilt for which lies with Stalin” according to the CPSU, and the reconciliation in the mid-1950s, China followed the Soviet lead. China did not establish diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia until January 1955. Following the reconciliation initiated by Khrushchev, there were more favourable Chinese references to Yugoslav domestic policies and an apology from Mao to a visiting Yugoslavian delegation:

“In 1949 the Bureau condemned you as butchers and Hitler-style fascists, and we kept silent on the resolution [condemning you], although we published articles to criticize you in 1948. In retrospect, we should not have done that; we should have discussed [this issue] with you: if some of your

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1 https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.postww2/stalin-pollitt.pdf
2 Open Letter of CC of CPSU to Party Organisations (July 14 1963)
viewpoints were incorrect, [we should have let] you conduct self-criticism, and there was no need to hurry [into the controversy] as [we] did. The same thing is true to us: should you disagree with us, you should do the same thing, that is, the adoption of a method of persuasion and consultation. There have not been that many successful cases in which one criticizes foreign parties in newspapers. [Your] case offers a profound historical lesson for the international communist movement. Although you have suffered from it, the international communist movement has learned a lesson from this mistake. [The international communist movement] must fully understand [the seriousness of] this mistake.”

Mao answered his own question to the Yugoslav communists’

“You might wonder why [we] still pay a tribute to Stalin in China by hanging his portrait on the wall. Comrades from Moscow have informed us that they no longer hang Stalin’s portraits and only display Lenin’s and current leaders’ portraits in public parade. They, however, did not ask us to follow their suit. We find it very difficult to cope. The four mistakes committed by Stalin are yet to be made known to the Chinese people as well as to our whole party. Our situation is quite different from yours: your [suffering inflicted by Stalin] is known to the people and to the whole world. Within our party, the mistakes of the two Wang Ming lines are well known; but our people do not know that these mistakes originated in Stalin. Only our Central Committee was aware that Stalin blocked our revolution and regarded me as a half-hearted Tito.”

In the Chinese media, favourable references were made of the socialist nature of Yugoslavia which had achieved notable successes in the construction of socialism

However there was another turn in relations when “the Tito clique put forward its out-and-out revisionist programme in 1958 and set this banner of modern revisionism against the 1957 Declaration” and the Communist Party of China condemnation of Yugoslav politics resumed in the late 1950s

Yugoslavia was synonymous with the words “Soviet Union” in the Chinese criticism of modern revisionism. Just as from 1960 onwards when the CPSU criticised the Party of Labour of Albania it also meant the CPC. The Chinese argued that “uncompromising struggle” must be waged against Yugoslav revisionism, and use of unrestrained language implying that ‘Tito Clique’ had a role as tools of US imperialism. China withdrew her ambassador in September 1958 and the tone suggested that China was less inclined than the Soviet Union to normalised relations. In the throes of the Sino-Soviet split, Yugoslavia becomes a topic in the anti-revisionist polemic in 1963.

After Mao’s death Tito made his first official visit to China in August 1977. Although they maintain diplomatic relations, the Yugoslav and Chinese Communist parties had not maintain official ties.

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3 Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan [Selected Diplomatic Papers of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: The Central Press of Historical Documents, 1993), 251-262. Translated and Annotated by Zhang Shu Guang and Chen Jian
4 Ditto
5 People’s Daily editorial July 13th 1956.
7 In Refutation of Modern revisionism (1958) https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-soviet-split/cpc/yugoslavia.htm
Tito’s visit to Beijing was in his capacity as Yugoslavia’s president, and not in his party role, General Secretary (later Chairman of the Presidium) of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (1939–80).

Burt the “direction of travel” had been signposted in the early 1970s, while Mao was still in charge, of the restoration of party-to-party relations with what had been considered revisionist parties noted for their disagreements with the CPSU.

There is an irony in Tito’s visit: he was the first foreign leader to visit Mao Mausoleum. Pointedly, *Albania Today*, chose to republish an article re-titled, *Khrushchev Kneeling Before Tito.*

Enver Hoxha’s article was published for the first time in the “*Zeri i Popullit*” on September 13, 1963, under the title “Results of N. Khrushchev’s Visit to Yugoslavia”.

“A few days ago Khrushchev concluded his visit to Yugoslavia. Both the propaganda machine of the revisionists and the western press tried to give this visit the maximum “international political significance”. It is now clear to all that Khrushchev did not go to Yugoslavia for a vacation, as stated at first. He went there to complete the process of the full rehabilitation of the Tito clique, to unite openly with this band of traitors, long condemned by all the communist and workers’ parties, to hatch up new plots against the socialist camp, the international communist movement and peace, and to take another step in his rapprochement with US imperialism.”

Deng Xiaoping described Tito “as a person who opened a new page in the history of relations between the two parties. We and Tito reached an understanding then, forget the past, look forward.” said Deng. “This is the same attitude we adopted when we resumed relations with other Eastern European parties and countries.”

“We bear responsibility for the past,” said Deng, referring to the unhappy period when China had frictions with some Eastern European countries, “But that doesn’t mean they bear no responsibility. So it is best not to mention the past, taking today as a new beginning.”

The whole struggle against modern revisionism was to be subject to selective amnesia. Abdicating the task of re-visiting the validity of past disputes leaves the ideological questions hanging: why the inconsistencies in understanding the character of Yugoslavia and whether the political lines of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia were indeed revisionist or bitter fruit of an initially correct assertion of independence.

In essence, what had been adopted in settling past differences was the pragmatic, agnostic position, in the interest of unity, advanced by amongst others, Khrushchev:

“To put aside all disputes and differences, not to try and establish who is right and who is wrong, not to stir up the past, but to start our relations with a clear page.”

Against a background that dissociated itself from attacks on “the Cult of Personality”, anti-revisionists in and outside China, were opposing the notion of a party and state “of the whole people” that diluted the classic teachings on the class nature of the state, the singular notion of a “peaceful road to socialism” and internationally around the issue of the inevitability of war, the

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10 *Albania Today* No.5 1977. The following year saw Hua Guo-feng pay a nine-day visit to Yugoslav that saw a Balkan tour that excluded a visit to Albania.


policy of “peaceful existence” as promoted by Khrushchev. This seemed more an accommodation with American Imperialism in contrast with the anti-revisionist rhetorical support for militant (and armed) struggles against Imperialism.

In “Apologists for Neo-Colonialism” and other articles written in 1963 and 1964, the CCP argued that Khrushchev’s advocacy of peaceful competition and peaceful coexistence with U.S. imperialism was providing political cover for Soviet collusion with the U.S. and for the Soviet Union’s lack of support for national liberation struggles in Algeria, the Congo and elsewhere.

In fact, Khrushchev was not only promoting fear of and collusion with U.S. imperialism, he was leading the reversal from socialism back to capitalism, while still operating under the sign-board of socialism. How did this happen? This restoration of capitalism was not due to old pre-revolutionary remnants of the Russian bourgeoisie hiding and regrouping, biding their time and lying in wait for an opportune moment, and then making a grab for power. And it had not occurred as the result of an imperialist invasion, nor by external forces sneaking agents into the Soviet Union. No, Khrushchev had organized a coup as the leader of a new capitalist class that had grown up in the conditions of Soviet socialism, based on class privileges that were newly generated in a society focused on the development of productive forces.

The appeal of Maoism to its Western supporters was never simply negative, in part a means to differentiate one’s politics from Maoism’s converse – the Soviet Union and the politics of the pro-Moscow Communists. Maoism was not only a criticism of what had gone wrong, it provided an alternative. By the early Sixties the conviction, far from an orthodox position, that class contradictions and class struggle continues in socialist societies, led Mao to consider that if socialism had been overthrown in the Soviet Union, China could suffer the same fate and derail the historic struggle to go forward to build a communist society.

For its adherents, Maoism involves big questions: it provided a framework of reference for fundamental Marxist concern such as what constitutes a revolutionary road. The adoption of what was cumbersomely referred to as Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought, acknowledged that, the anti-revisionists (and later Maoist groups) had been formed for what they considered the renewal of the communist movement in the struggle against new forms of repression and exploitation represented in the ruling Soviet party.

During the Cultural Revolution, the distribution of unofficial speeches of Mao provided new insights into the issue of “Capitalist-roaders”. The developing Maoist restorationist thesis saw, as early as 1957, Mao asserted in “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” that classes and class struggle continue to exist in socialist society. If it happened in the Soviet Union, it could happen in China; Mao came to believe that there were capitalist roaders like Khrushchev at the highest levels of the Chinese Communist Party as well. These new understandings of the nature of revisionism were to inform the ideological and political foundations of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

It was not until after his death that western publishers, Monthly Review Press produced a collection of late 1950s writings by Mao under the title, A Critique of Soviet Economics that providing critical reading notes to Soviet political economic texts including one attributed to Stalin, Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R. In retrospect, a feature of the early anti-revisionist proponents was the extent to which they failed to engage with the developing Maoist criticism of the Soviet

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experience. To maintain ideological blinkers and a perspective of denial in addressing what is not a settled dispute but without employing the historical evidence in any evaluation remains a disservice and evasion by today’s activists.

In criticising Stalin from the Left, the Chinese communist did criticise certain aspects of Stalin’s work but these criticism were not consistently maintained or developed in part not to lend credibility to all sorts of accusations coming from the politically hostile. When investigation cannot be limited to bourgeois historiography about the Stalin period, then acknowledging the wrongs as well as the right choices provides an accurate and valid characterisation of the man and his era.

The Chinese position on Stalin was not a simple-minded embrace. However the initial anti-revisionists were simply defined as “pro-Stalin”. The nuisance approach as to what was defended and what elements were criticised were often lost in easy denunciation as “Stalinists”. This embrace of Stalin albeit critical, as a symbol of the heroic period of building socialism in the first socialist state, invoked a great deal of posturing, even machismo invoking Stalin in the hostile environment of capitalist society, served to hamper and curtail the way for a more critical understanding of his role and legacy.