

**The London School of Economics and Political Science**

*Defying Moscow, engaging Beijing: The German Democratic Republic's relations with the People's Republic of China, 1980-1989*

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## **Declaration**

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## Abbreviations

<b>BA</b>	Bundesarchiv, Berlin
<b>BStU</b>	Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik
<b>CAAC</b>	Civil Aviation Administration of China
<b>CC</b>	Central Committee
<b>CCP</b>	Chinese Communist Party
<b>CDU</b>	Christlich Demokratische Union
<b>CIA</b>	Central Intelligence Agency
<b>CoCom</b>	Coordinating Committee on multilateral exports control
<b>COMECON</b>	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
<b>CPGB</b>	Communist Party of Great Britain
<b>CPSU</b>	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
<b>CSCE</b>	Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>CSU</b>	Christlich Soziale Union
<b>DM</b>	Deutsche Mark
<b>EC</b>	European Community
<b>EEC</b>	European Economic Community
<b>FCO</b>	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
<b>FDJ</b>	Freie Deutsche Jugend
<b>FO</b>	Foreign Office
<b>FRG</b>	Federal Republic of Germany
<b>GBP</b>	Pound sterling
<b>GDR</b>	German Democratic Republic
<b>GQT</b>	Gongchanzhuyi Qingniantuan (共产主义青年团)
<b>HPA</b>	Hebei Provincial Archives
<b>ICBM</b>	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
<b>JPA</b>	Jiangsu Provincial Archives
<b>KMT</b>	Kuomintang
<b>KGB</b>	Soviet Committee for State Security
<b>KPD</b>	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Beijing

<b>MFAA</b>	Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten
<b>MFS</b>	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Stasi)
<b>NARA</b>	National Archives and Record Administration at College Park
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
<b>PAAA</b>	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin
<b>PDS</b>	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus
<b>PLA</b>	People's Liberation Army
<b>PZPR</b>	Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish Worker's Party)
<b>PRC</b>	People's Republic of China
<b>SAPMO</b>	Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR, Berlin
<b>SED</b>	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
<b>SEZ</b>	Special Economic Zone
<b>SMA</b>	Shanghai Municipal Archives, Shanghai
<b>SPA</b>	Shandong Provincial Archives, Jinan
<b>SPD</b>	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
<b>TNA</b>	The National Archives, London
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics

# Table of Contents

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Note on spelling and translations</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
<i>Simmering frictions with Moscow</i>	12
<i>Rebellion against Moscow, engagement with China</i>	16
<i>Incentives in bilateral relations</i>	17
<i>Structure &amp; Scope</i>	23
<i>Historiography</i>	25
<i>Sources</i>	42
<b>Chapter One - Diplomacy behind Moscow's Back: East German-Chinese Rapprochement, 1979-1982</b>	<b>44</b>
<i>Introduction</i>	44
<i>Between Moscow and Beijing: from "like-mindedness" to enmity, 1956-1976</i>	46
<i>From Maoism to Dengism: The effect of pragmatic domestic policy on Chinese foreign policy</i>	50
<i>Foreign policy as a means for reform: Renewed engagement with the GDR</i>	53
<i>The abandonment of Soviet China-policy – From total adherence to total disobedience</i>	55
<i>A changing tone – Inter-German relations' effect on Soviet-GDR relations</i>	60
<i>Don't threaten our détente – East Berlin's intransigence towards Moscow's war in Afghanistan</i>	63
<i>East German disillusionment and the Solidarność strikes</i>	66
<i>Soviet abandonment: Missing oil deliveries</i>	68
<i>Renewed contact between East Berlin and Beijing – 1980-1981</i>	70
<i>The waning importance of Soviet policy coordination</i>	73
<i>Soviet duplicity in China</i>	78
<i>Conclusion</i>	81
<b>Chapter Two - Defying Moscow - East German-Chinese relations during the Andropov-Chernenko power vacuum, 1983-84</b>	<b>83</b>
<i>Introduction</i>	83
<i>"Die China-Mafia" – Death of the Interkit</i>	85
<i>Frictions and opportunities – Sino-GDR relations seen through Soviet-East German tensions</i>	92
<i>Deepening Relations</i>	96
<i>Expanding Trade Relations</i>	101
<i>Conclusion</i>	113
<b>Chapter Three – Honecker meets Deng, 1985-86</b>	<b>115</b>
<i>Introduction</i>	115
<i>Gorbachev from Pankow's perspective</i>	118
<i>China and Gorbachev: Gaige Kaifang above Perestroika and Glasnost</i>	124
<i>Laying the groundwork – Sino-East German summitry leading up to Honecker's state visit</i>	128
<i>Beijing's interests</i>	133
<i>Setting the stage for a meeting</i>	136
<i>Honecker's visit</i>	139
<i>Honecker's lessons</i>	142
<i>Tangible results</i>	148
<i>Honecker the statesman</i>	153
<i>Conclusion</i>	159

<b>Chapter Four: Friends in the time of turmoil, 1987-88</b>	<b>161</b>
<i>Introduction</i>	161
<i>Soviet-East German relations: A growing sense of abandonment</i>	162
<i>Soviet-FRG relations from Pankow's view: Why can you and we can't?</i>	165
<i>Looking East – Soviet East Asian policy</i>	168
<i>Holding back East Berlin</i>	172
<i>China: Reform at a price</i>	176
<i>A budding ideological relationship</i>	179
<i>Conclusion</i>	184
<b>Chapter Five: Ideological Allies: Tiananmen and the Fall of the Wall, 1988-1990</b>	<b>188</b>
<i>Introduction</i>	188
<i>“Socialism in the Colour of the GDR” meets “Socialism with Chinese characteristics”</i>	191
<i>Unrest</i>	196
<i>Tiananmen</i>	200
<i>“Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben”</i>	206
<i>Conclusion</i>	212
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>215</b>
<i>Economics</i>	216
<i>A question of prestige</i>	218
<i>Ideology</i>	220
<i>Of ‘big ships’ and ‘small ships’</i>	224
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>228</b>
<i>Primary Sources</i>	228
<i>Secondary Sources</i>	232

## **Note on spelling and translations**

For Chinese words I have generally used the Hanyu Pinyin system due to both its widespread adoption and its employment as the standard for the Romanisation of Chinese characters by the People's Republic of China.

I have translated all original quotations in other languages into English in order to facilitate reading. I have opted against the Pinyin transliteration of Chinese book titles & archival sources, as doing so renders them more inaccessible for reference.

## Abstract

As Deng Xiaoping assumed China's paramount leadership position in 1978, he first and foremost sought to bring China out of a period of economic decline and international isolation defined by the Cultural Revolution. Having already established first contacts with the US and Western European states in the early 1970s, Beijing under Deng swung open its doors further to the rest of the world in order to source foreign investment as well as technology transfers.

While most existing literature has been focused on how Deng's rise was received in the US, Western Europe and Asia, almost no literature exists on how this change was perceived in Eastern Europe. This study aims to address this lacuna by examining how the Soviet Union's once 'most-loyal' client state and its bastion on the front lines of the Cold War, the GDR, increasingly defied a Moscow-imposed anti-China policy to engage China for economic and political gain during the 1980s.

Chapter one will begin with a general overview of GDR-China relations before the period of analysis. It will highlight that East Germany first enjoyed amicable relations with China, only to be reined in during the Sino-Soviet Split by Moscow to conform to a general anti-China line. It will argue that as Deng rose to power in Beijing and repeated frictions beset Soviet-GDR relations, East Berlin gradually sought an independent foreign policy towards China in order to take advantage of China's opening to the world. Chapter Two examines bilateral relations in the early 1980s. It argues that the GDR was at first motivated by potential trade ties with Beijing in order to bolster its sagging economy. Chapter Three reveals that relations continued to develop towards the middle of the decade, despite Moscow's protestations. Honecker was duly rewarded with a state visit to Beijing in 1986 for his efforts, the first by a Soviet-bloc leader after the onset of the Sino-Soviet Split. Chapters Four and Five show that amidst Gorbachev's *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* the GDR and the PRC increasingly found ideological commonalities in preserving the political status-quo in East Berlin and Beijing. This dogmatic resistance towards political reforms would eventually lead to very different consequences in both countries.



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Throughout it all, Zoe Gilmore has put up with late nights and long absences during the last four years. I thank her and her family for their love and unending support.

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All errors are my own.

## Introduction

*“We are following with great sympathy the monumental shifts in the Soviet Union. We wish our Soviet comrades success with their path, but we also say that the GDR faces different conditions.”*

Erich Honecker to Zhao Ziyang on 8 June 1987.<sup>1</sup>

On a cold autumn day in October 1986, East German leader Erich Honecker descended onto the tarmac at Beijing capital airport. Greeted like an old friend, the Chinese delegation led by the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Hu Yaobang welcomed the East German leader with an honour guard and all the other formalities bestowed upon a state visitor. For Honecker, this was a long sought-after prize. As the first Soviet-bloc leader to be granted a state visit to Beijing since the onset of the Sino-Soviet Split, he was to be the pathbreaker who would welcome China back to the socialist family. In late October 1986 a newspaper article from the International Herald Tribune was proudly circulated among the East German Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) elite. It featured Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the SED, embracing Deng Xiaoping, Chair of the Central Military Commission of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and de-facto leader of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The caption read “Honecker, in Beijing, Vows to Improve Relations”, with a sub-heading remarking “Mr. Honecker is the first leader of a close Soviet ally to make a state visit to China since the Chinese-Soviet ideological split.”<sup>2</sup> While contemporary observers suspected that the Soviet Union had given its tacit approval for East Berlin’s rapprochement with Beijing, the reality was very different.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, a Moscow-defying trend was a feature in East Germany’s engagement with

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<sup>1</sup> Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, henceforth PAAA, MfAA ZR 2493/90 – Besuch amt. GS ZK KP Chinas, Ministerpräs. Des Staatsrats der VR China, Zhao Ziyang – Niederschrift über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees des SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrats der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem amtierenden Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas und Ministerpräsidenten des Staatsrates der VR China, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, am 8. Juni 1987 im Hause des Zentralkomitees

<sup>2</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/2436 – Büro Erich Honecker, p. 292.

<sup>3</sup> “East Germany Steps up Contacts with China”, *New York Times*, 3 September 1986.

China throughout the decade and relates to one of the central questions of this thesis. Namely, why and how a formerly loyal client state that owed its very creation and existence to the Soviet Union could defy the Kremlin's antagonistic stance towards China at the end of the Cold War to pursue relations with a Soviet enemy? Thus, this thesis is first and foremost an addition to Cold War diplomatic history. Indeed, no comprehensive studies have been written on Eastern European-Chinese relations, especially on how Eastern European states sometimes sought to break free from the confines imposed by Moscow to seek their own agendas. Yet, recent work has shown us that Eastern European states were more than just obedient Soviet pawns during the Cold War.<sup>4</sup> Rather, they used whatever leverage they possessed over Moscow to achieve their own goals, even if this meant manipulating or actively defying the Kremlin to do so. Though Soviet leaders were able to enforce their wills on the foreign policies of Moscow's client states during the early years of the Warsaw Pact, this ability clearly diminished in the last decade of the Cold War. Owing to a leadership weakness in Moscow as well as the Kremlin's distractions with renewed Second Cold War superpower tensions, states such as East Germany found unprecedented space for diplomatic manoeuvre. Honecker wholeheartedly embraced these newly found freedoms and actively ignored Soviet protestations to engage with China.

This thesis focuses on the time between 1979 and 1989 and will ask why, during this last decade of the Cold War, East Germany went from an obedient follower of Soviet China policy to actively defying Soviet directives on China and specifically, what East Germany hoped to gain from improved relations with Beijing. And on the Chinese side, it asks why Beijing enthusiastically sought out relations with East Germany after Deng Xiaoping's rise and how both the desire to build a beneficial trade relationship and an ideological convergence drove bilateral ties. Though this thesis uses both East German and Chinese archival material to attempt to shed

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<sup>4</sup> Even during times of seeming solidarity, rifts emerged where client states asserted their own interests above those of the centre. Thus, during the onset of the Sino-Soviet Split in 1963, Poland, fearing a severance of trade links to China, successfully warded off Khrushchev's initiative to include Mongolia into the Warsaw Pact so as to redirect the alliance towards China. See Lorenz Luethi, *Sino-Soviet Split – Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 271.

light on the rationale and incentives in both Beijing and East Berlin in engaging in bilateral relations, it primarily adopts an East Berlin-centric approach.

In the following paragraphs I will first provide an overview of the main arguments of this study. This will be followed by a discussion of the structure and scope of this project. I will then outline the historiographical lacunae that this study will address and what sources it has used in doing so.

### **Simmering frictions with Moscow**

When long-time Soviet Ambassador Pyotr Abrasimov was asked in 1989 to describe East Berlin's foreign policy, he sternly answered "Homunculus sovieticus". In his opinion, just like the artificial being in Goethe's *Faust* which only gains brief life through the hands of its alchemist creators, the GDR lived an existence of absolute dependency and obedience to its masters in the Kremlin.<sup>5</sup> The truth however was more complicated than this simplistic answer would suggest. Throughout the existence of the GDR, Moscow's ties with East Berlin were subject to a series of fluctuations and frictions often dictated by diverging interests. After all, this was only natural - while the Kremlin was concerned with the advancement of world communism and tasks of managing the empire, the 'lesser' concerns of its clients in East Berlin were often sacrificed for grander designs.<sup>6</sup> To keep dissenting opinions from bubbling to the surface, much energy was expended on both sides to keep ties amicable. As such, with the incorporation of a paragraph that stressed the "irrevocable and eternal ties of the GDR to the Soviet Union" into a 1974 redrafting of the GDR constitution, Erich Honecker endeavoured to forever enshrine East

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<sup>5</sup> Stefan Wolle, *DDR*, (Berlin: Fischer, 2004), pp. 93-94, Ambrassimov was Ambassador from 1962-1971 and 1975-1983.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Moscow was reluctant to support East Berlin's initial forceful pushes for western recognition so as to not upset relations with Western Europe. See William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War – The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 16-17.

Berlin's bond with Moscow.<sup>7</sup>

However, this somewhat superficial attempt to cement East Berlin's allegiance with Moscow did not do away with inherent tensions between the two states. With Honecker having acquired new momentum for both East German sovereignty and foreign policy after the signing of the Basic Treaty in 1972, the East German leader was keen to define the GDR as a consequential and influential state in international affairs.<sup>8</sup> In Africa, for example, Honecker pushed for a bigger East German role and Pankow saw itself increasingly as equally as important as Moscow in spreading socialist ideals on the continent.<sup>9</sup> More often than not, this independent streak could not be reconciled with Moscow's general grand strategy, often leading to frictions between the centre and the client. In the Honecker era, this dynamic became increasingly visible as the East German leader reciprocated West Germany's *Ostpolitik* from the early 1970s on. Even though Moscow expended considerable effort to restrain the expansion of East German commercial and economic ties with Bonn, it became progressively apparent in the Kremlin that East Berlin would attempt to pursue its own self-serving course in inter-German relations.<sup>10</sup> The desire to take its future into its own hands, rather than having Moscow dictate it, soon became a permanent feature in East German foreign policy. Certainly, these independent tendencies were also on full display in East Germany's determined and forceful push to normalize relations with China in the 1980s. Defying Moscow's antagonistic stance towards Beijing throughout the decade, Honecker actively courted and engaged the new generation of pragmatic leaders under Deng Xiaoping in order to gain political as well as economic advantages. In doing so, Honecker

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<sup>7</sup> Having enjoyed Soviet support in ousting Walter Ulbricht to become the new General Secretary of the GDR in May 1971, Honecker was eager to refresh his commitment to his Soviet patrons. Gesetz zur Ergänzung und Änderung der Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 7. Oktober 1974 (<http://www.verfassungen.de/de/ddr/ddr-gesetz74.htm>), accessed 8 March 2014.

<sup>8</sup> On East Berlin's battle against the international ramifications of the Hallstein-doctrine see William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War – The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 21-26.

<sup>9</sup> Gareth Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 90-104

<sup>10</sup> J.F. Brown, "Eastern Europe's Western Connection" in Lincoln Gordon et. al, *Eroding Empire: Western Relations with Eastern Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987), pp. 56-60.

showed complete disregard for Moscow's wishes and in the process drove Moscow-East Berlin alienation to new heights.

In many ways, these observations seem unnatural and unexpected considering East Berlin's founding history as a Soviet client state. Indeed, during much of the Cold War, East Berlin's close relationship with Moscow was regularly interpreted and observed by outsiders as trouble-free. With often-repeated reaffirmations of their intimate bond during well-rehearsed meetings of Soviet-bloc forums and bilateral meetings, there was little to suggest trouble in socialist paradise.<sup>11</sup> And seemingly, the importance of the 'big brother' was a foregone conclusion, considering that only Moscow's intervention during the 1953 popular unrest in the GDR was able to guarantee East Berlin's survival. Reminders in 1956 and 1968 in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, respectively, further underlined to East German leaders how important the Soviet Union was in assuring the territorial and political integrity of the entire bloc.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the security guarantees that the Soviet Union provided, Moscow was of paramount importance to the GDR in ensuring its economic survival. Devoid of any natural resources, East Germany depended on subsidized raw material deliveries from the Soviet Union to stay afloat.<sup>13</sup> Thus, contemporary observers viewed the East German-Soviet relationship in the seemingly only logical way possible; that the GDR was a loyal and subservient client state of the Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup>

However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the gradual release of East German political and diplomatic archival material revealed a very different picture. Pages and pages of previously

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<sup>11</sup> Among works that judged the Soviet-GDR relations as trouble-free, see David Childs, *The GDR: Moscow's German Ally* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983)

<sup>12</sup> Especially the events surrounding the Prague Spring outlined Moscow's iron-fisted will to enforce the Brezhnev doctrine. See Karen Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert & detlef Junker (eds.), *1968: The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

<sup>13</sup> See Hans-Jürgen Wagener, "Anschluss verpasst? Dilemmata der Wirtschaft" in Helga Schultz et al., *Die DDR im Rückblick – Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kultur* (Berlin, Ch. Links Verlag, 2007), pp. 114-134; Andre Steiner, *The Plans that Failed – An economic history of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), pp. 69-140

<sup>14</sup> Even as late as the 1980s, the GDR was seen to be a 'reliable ally of Moscow'. See "Die Freiheit des treuen Vassalen" *Die Zeit*, 24 February 1984. (<http://www.zeit.de/1984/09/die-freiheit-des-treuen-vasallen/seite-2>), accessed 1 March 2014

inaccessible material shone a revealing light on the often-fractious nature of the East German-Soviet relationship.<sup>15</sup> And it was not long before a new interpretation emerged of the ‘loyal’ GDR’s foreign policy. Among the most vivid accounts of these unexpected Soviet-GDR divergences, Hope Harrison has shown how even the building of the Berlin Wall, an event previously thought to have been actively steered by Moscow<sup>16</sup>, was an East Berlin-initiated manoeuvre whereby Ulbricht cleverly used the perceived weakness of the GDR to secure Moscow’s backing for his project to permanently divide Germany. As Harrison comments, “the Soviet-East German relationship was more two-sided than previously understood”.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, using SED Politburo files, Hannes Adomeit has forcefully illustrated that rifts between East Berlin and the leaders in the Kremlin arose out of issues ranging from disagreements over East Germany’s social policies, its debt problem as well as its international strategy. Amongst other factors, Adomeit has shown that the SED’s tendency to keep important matters from the Kremlin created an absolute lack of trust between the two leaderships.<sup>18</sup> These observations seem to go against many presumptions that we have of the nature of the Soviet bloc. While divergences in opinion were expected in the American-led Western Alliance, as a multitude of views were a defining feature of democratic governments that ruled most of Washington’s allies, it was often assumed that the nature of authoritarian rule espoused by the Soviet bloc would also mean that Moscow’s satellites adhered strictly to the centre. This dissertation will argue that this simply was not the case. As Tony Smith has shown with his pericentric analysis of the Cold War, it was often the tail that attempted to wag the dog in the Moscow-led eastern bloc. For example, East Berlin did not waste time to mince words when it forcefully called for the crackdown on

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<sup>15</sup> Hans-Hermann Hertle, Konrad H. Jarausch (eds.), *Risse im Bruderbund – Die Gespräche Honecker-Breshnew 1974 bis 1982* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2006), pp. 46-52.

<sup>16</sup> The debate on who was the active hand is ongoing. Matthias Uhl of the German Historical Institute in Moscow has uncovered a conversation note from August 1, 1962 that seems to indicate that Khrushchev actively pushed for the construction of the Berlin wall. “The Khrushchev Connection: Who ordered the construction of the Berlin Wall?” *Der Spiegel* 23/2009 (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-khrushchev-connection-who-ordered-the-construction-of-the-berlin-wall-a-628052.html>), Accessed 11 March 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Hope Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998), pp. 235-297.

dissident voices in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and in Poland in 1980. As Smith argues:

What is most important about these new findings, however, is that they reveal a Soviet hesitation, indeed reluctance, to act forcibly to save the empire. Here, East Germany played the role of Lady MacBeth, again and again urging her wavering husband to strike the fatal blow.<sup>19</sup>

### **Rebellion against Moscow, engagement with China**

The main focus of this dissertation will be to analyze how and why East Berlin initiated and sustained its engagement with China in the 1980s, why the GDR leadership ignored Soviet warnings in doing so and how China responded. It asks how a client state so utterly dependent on Moscow was able to create the necessary diplomatic freedoms to engage with China. It will also posit that East Germany had all but abandoned its subscription to Moscow's world strategy by the 1980s. On the Chinese side, it analyzes what Chinese leaders considered when reengaging a close Soviet ally after the initiation of Reform and Opening in China. It asks why China suddenly found interest in engaging with East Germany after Deng's rise and how China viewed East Germany's rebellious streak towards Moscow. And overall, it asks how the changing international environment defined by superpower tensions during the 'Second Cold War' and the Sino-Soviet normalization process shaped bilateral relations. The specific time-period of the study, 1979-1989, will take us from the initial re-kindling of relations in the aftermath of the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979 to Tiananmen and the eventual collapse of the GDR. In addition, triangular dynamics with the Soviet Union will be taken into account to consider how common disagreements with Moscow on both sides served as a catalyst and a binding glue at various stages of East Berlin-Beijing engagement.

At its core, this is a study on how relations were conducted 'from above'. And thus, it is

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<sup>19</sup> Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War" *Diplomatic History*, 24:4 (2000), pp. 567-591, p. 583.



important to make the point that this dissertation focuses almost entirely on the highest echelons of government, specifically on how Honecker conducted relations with Deng Xiaoping and vice versa. As unquestioned and absolute power in their respective foreign policy realms rested in their hands, it is safe to assume that Deng and Honecker made or approved major decisions in all foreign policy bodies, ranging from the Politburo to the Foreign Ministry. Especially in terms of their respective grand strategies, they were masters of their domain. Thus, I argue that while Honecker used his far-reaching power in Pankow circles to actively steer East German engagement with China as Beijing ‘opened’ at the end of the 1970s, Deng was glad to reciprocate with the intention of re-embracing foreign policy after the Cultural Revolution and engaging with a leading socialist industrialized state to modernize China.

### **Incentives in bilateral relations**

While historians have habitually analyzed Beijing’s relations with both America and Asian states during the Reform and Opening process, virtually no studies exist on its simultaneous interaction and engagement with both Eastern and Western Europe after Deng Xiaoping assumed power in 1978.<sup>20</sup> Even though American support and influence on the Chinese reform process is undeniable, it would be depriving the reader of a complete picture if one were to discount China’s concurrent attempts to learn and engage with European powers.<sup>21</sup> This dissertation shows that after Beijing reciprocated East Berlin’s initial feelers, Zhongnanhai was keen to actively push forward its relations with the GDR in an attempt to not only drive a wedge between Moscow and a key Soviet client state during a period still defined by Sino-Soviet

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Chen Jian only mentions China’s engagement with America and the “four little dragons” of Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong during the Reform and Opening process in Chen Jian, “China’s changing policies toward the Third World and the end of the global Cold War” in Artemy Kalonovsky & Sergey Radchenko (eds.), *The end of the Cold War and the Third World* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 101-121.

<sup>21</sup> For some work which has been initiated to address this lacunae see Martin Albers, “Business with Beijing, détente with Moscow: West Germany’s China policy in a global context, 1962-1982”, *Cold War History*, 14:2, 2014, 237-257; Martin Albers, *The Policies of Britain, France and West Germany towards the People’s Republic of China, 1969-1982*, (Unpublished Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2014).

animosity, but also to seek specific industrial goods as well as East German industrial and economic know-how for its own Reform and Opening process. The latter point might seem incredulous since we now know how backward and inefficient the East German economy revealed itself to be after the collapse of the Iron Curtain. However, this is to read history backwards. In fact, very few outside observers were aware of the shortcomings of the GDR economy in the period under analysis.<sup>22</sup> Certainly to China, it presented a viable and seemingly successful model to emulate for much of the 1980s.<sup>23</sup> By engaging with a leading socialist economy like East Germany, it was thought, Beijing could gain an insight into how a socialist state could become world class.

As this study will show, economic interests also served as a key rationale for East Berlin to pursue better relations with China. For Pankow, the reality of declining Soviet raw material deliveries coupled with the long-known fact that trading with the COMECON community was a less than lucrative proposition meant that East German leaders were always looking for alternatives to bolster its economy. Having already started to open its door to Western European economies, Honecker now looked east after Deng's first moves to liberalize the Chinese market. Thus, much of the early exchanges between East German officials and their Chinese counterparts at the beginning of the decade revolved around establishing and solidifying trade links. Specifically, Honecker hoped that China could become an important export-market for East German finished goods.

While bolstering the East German economy was a very real incentive for Honecker when engaging with China, he also sought to use his budding relations with Beijing to solidify his as well as the GDR's international standing.<sup>24</sup> Having achieved diplomatic recognition from a host

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<sup>22</sup> Most outsiders estimated that the GDR was, while indebted to the West, still the most successful Warsaw Pact economy. See J.F. Brown, "Eastern Europe's Western Connection" in Lincoln Gordon et. al., pp. 56-60.

<sup>23</sup> On how successful East Germany was at 'covering up' its economic inefficiencies, see Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>24</sup> To see Honecker's quest to establish diplomatic relations and international standing before the basic treaty one only

of states as well as the inclusion of the GDR into international organizations such as the UN after signing the Basic Treaty with Bonn in 1972, Honecker increasingly used foreign policy as a means to underscore the GDR's legitimacy as a state. Thus, during his engagement with China Honecker was eager to define the GDR as an economically and politically successful country that Beijing could learn from. He also spared no energy to showcase his foreign policy successes and perhaps most important of all, he was adamant to outline the GDR as an independent actor that was capable of making its own decisions, free from Moscow's directives and dictates. In many ways, Honecker's engagement with China shows that his vision for the future of the Soviet bloc was not one where Soviet satellites were dominated and led by Moscow, but rather one where former client states would have more room for agency in their own affairs.

For both Honecker and Deng, pragmatic considerations centering on trade were quickly replaced by more pressing ideological concerns towards the end of the decade. As Mikhail Gorbachev took over the reins in the Kremlin in 1985 and rolled out his *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* soon after, East Berlin and Beijing found common language in their defiance to Moscow's new liberal path. Both were adamantly against any sort of reforms that could erode the centrality of the party. During the final part of the decade, conversations in bilateral meetings increasingly revolved around defying the Kremlin's proposed path. This ideological like-mindedness between Honecker and Deng was only strengthened further when East European regimes retreated at intense popular pressure in 1989.

Studying the above causes and circumstances in which East Germany and China embraced each other as fraternal states in the 1980s provides us with a unique perspective into the thinking of both regimes during the last decade of the Cold War. First, the simple fact that East Germany was considered by Zhongnanhai the -at least in the economic sense- most

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needs to observe the East German leader's proactive efforts to win allies in Africa to circumvent the international consequences of the Hallstein Doctrine. See Gareth Winrow, *GDR and Africa*, pp. 12-31.

successful socialist state in the Soviet bloc gave it special status in Beijing's eyes. Thus, studying this relationship gives us a unique look at what China sought to learn from socialist countries during the Reform and Opening process. Through analyzing the nature of economic exchanges between the two countries, one appreciates that China, in addition to paying attention to Western models, was very serious about also potentially learning from Eastern European economic examples. At least initially, it was hoped in Beijing that socialist economic models would be able to be adopted wholesale without much modification. Secondly, Pankow-Beijing engagement shows 'socialist' regimes continued willingness to be flexible when redefining 'communism' to fit pressing national interests.<sup>25</sup> In China, this entailed reshaping ideology to justify the abandonment of the central tenets of Mao's agrarian socialism in favour of large-scale urbanization and modernization projects in order to bring China out of decades of economic decline. Meanwhile, the GDR readily and willingly abandoned its subscription to Moscow's China-strategy and adopted a softer tone towards China in order to break down the last remnants of antagonism between itself and Beijing in order to derive economic benefits and international status. It is this unique willingness to be malleable and adaptable on both sides which allowed East Berlin's engagement with China to be so successful. In analyzing East German-Chinese relations, this thesis will also make the point that both domestic and foreign policy imperatives differed widely among Eastern European states. Thus, East Germany was by far the most active of the fraternal states in seeking a re-engagement with China after Deng's rise. This may seem like a well-known fact considering the amount of literature that exists in the West which analyzes the individual foreign policies of the fraternal states.<sup>26</sup> However, this approach will especially be beneficial for Chinese readers, a generation of whom have grown up with the myth

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<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this was nothing new. For example Moscow and Beijing each claimed to be the correct interpreter of Marxism-Leninism during the height of the Sino-Soviet split. See Lorenz Luethi, *The Sino-Soviet Split* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Stephen D. Roper, *Romania – the Unfinished Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2013); Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions – Moscow, Washington, Budapest and the 1956 Hungarian revolt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

that the fraternal states were but a monolithic bloc whose policies were entirely dictated by Moscow.<sup>27</sup>

Aside from its specific focus on East German-Chinese relations in the 1980s, my thesis also engages with wider fields of Cold War research. In studying the increasingly insubordinate behaviour of East Germany, it contributes to a broader understanding of the arising weaknesses of the Soviet Empire in the last decade of the Cold War.<sup>28</sup> Fully embracing a pericentric view, it will argue that East Germany's actions to satisfy its own needs came at the expense of bloc solidarity. This insubordination had a direct result in distracting Moscow from its more pressing tasks of managing Second Cold War tensions and forcing the Kremlin into concessions to East Berlin to maintain a façade of bloc unity. Indeed, instead of being a useful asset to Moscow, East Berlin often proved to be a rebellious nuisance which not only floated east towards China but, from Moscow's perspective, also seemed more than willing to give up ounces of its political stability for loans from the West.

To be sure, throughout the Cold War, the actions of the seemingly 'less important' allies of the superpowers mattered. We would not understand the greater Cold War dynamics if we were not to fully comprehend the impact that the strategic allies of the superpowers, such as North and South Korea, East and West Germany and North and South Vietnam, just to name a few, had on their patrons and international system.<sup>29</sup> Thus, understanding East Germany's actions in the final years of the Cold War not only grants us a glimpse into the tense bilateral

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<sup>27</sup> In China for example, the fraternal states are treated as one entity in general introductory works on China's foreign relations history, See 牛军, *中华人民共和国对外关系概论 一, 1949-90* (北京: 北京出版社, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> On Cold War 'imperial' rivalries see Charles Maier, "The Cold War as an era of imperial rivalry" in Silvio Pons, Frederico Romero (eds.), *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War – Issues, interpretations, periodizations* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 13-20.

<sup>29</sup> Indeed, a pericentric approach is useful to understand how the superpowers were 'dragged' into conflict, rather than being the active, planning party. Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War" *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Fall 2000), On Vietnam's machinations to involve the Soviet Union and China in the Vietnam War see Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); For Kim Il Sung's successful bid to involve both the Soviet Union and China in his drive to reunify Korea in 1950, see Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2011).

dynamics between Moscow and East Berlin but furthermore provides us with a vivid picture of the Kremlin's increasing inability to control its periphery. Cold War economic historians will also find the peculiar economic relationship between the GDR and China interesting. While both East Germany's economy and the Reform and Opening process in China have been analyzed in great detail individually, there has been no study to synthesize this information to explain China's drive to establish economic cooperation with Eastern European states, and vice versa, and to discuss why Eastern European states such as the GDR were interested in expanding trade with China.<sup>30</sup> Finally, it will also contribute to the burgeoning mosaic of literature dealing with the end of the Cold War.<sup>31</sup> Looking at bilateral relations towards the end of the decade will grant us an illuminating look at how both governments attempted to avert destabilization and maintain the centrality of the party in the final months of 1989. And here some surprising conclusions can be drawn. Though never expressly formulated, East Berlin's willingness to explore anti-Gorbachev commonalities with China up until the last minutes of its existence suggests that at least some in East Berlin were envisioning a recalibrated socialist world order in which East Berlin's ties with the Soviet Union would be loosened in favour of a closer link with Beijing.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> On the East German economy see Jonathan Zatin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Andre Steiner, *The Plans that Failed – An economic history of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997); Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro – Die Akte Honecker* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991). On the Reform and Opening Process see Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of HUP, 2011); Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin, 2012); Maurice Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era – An Inquiry into the fate of Chinese socialism 1978-1994* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996); 叶永烈, *邓小平改变中国: 1978 – 中国命运大转折* (成都, 四川出版社, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> See on this Jacques Levesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997); Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Revolutions of 1989* (London: Routledge, 1999); John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Stephen G. Brooks & William C. Wohlforth, "Clarifying the End of Cold War Debate", *Cold War History* 7:3, 2007, pp. 447-454; Vladislav Zubok, "Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War: Perspectives on History and Personality" *Cold War History* 2:2, 2002, pp. 61-100.

<sup>32</sup> Soon after Tiananmen, SED-Chief for Dresden Hans Modrow, Honecker's Deputy Egon Krenz and SED-chief for Berlin Günter Schabowski, all at the time potential successors for Honecker, made visits to China to reassure their solidarity with Beijing and to express their wish for continued relations. Hans Modrow, *In Historischer Mission* (Berlin: edition ost, 2007), p. 206.

## Structure & Scope

So what happened in the late 1970s and early 1980s to allow two previously estranged states to re-engage with each other after almost 30 years of complete diplomatic radio silence? As mentioned, much of the change can be attributed to the rise of Deng Xiaoping in China. After almost thirty years under Mao's rule, Deng took China in a new direction after the Chairman's passing in 1976. Trying to bring China out of a hermetic economic decline that had resulted from years of stagnation brought about by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Deng openly rekindled relations with other states. This reorientation by Beijing served as the necessary condition that facilitated an opening between China and the GDR. Realizing that Deng's rise presented a break from the past, Honecker and his diplomats started to slowly recalibrate its policies towards China. As relations improved, soon both the GDR and the Middle Kingdom were eager to shake a polemic past defined by Sino-Soviet animosities.

The first chapter provides both a background to Sino-GDR relations before the period under analysis and dissects the initial independent steps East Germany took towards China in the early 1980s. It asks why and how frictions between Moscow and East Berlin contributed to Honecker's independent course towards China and how they were reciprocated by Beijing. To be sure, having enjoyed comradely relations right after their respective states' founding in 1949, relations suffered an inevitable setback after the first signs of conflict between Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and Mao Zedong. While the details of the Sino-Soviet split are outside the scope of this study, it is important to note that the onset of tensions between Moscow and Beijing eventually directly translated into a Kremlin-imposed East Berlin-Beijing rift.<sup>33</sup> Through the

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<sup>33</sup> On the Sino-Soviet split, see: Lorenz Luethi, *The Sino-Soviet Split* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Politics of China 1949-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Odd Arne Westad (eds.) *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Washington, DC: Wilson Press/Stanford University Press, 1998); 吴冷西, *十年冷战. 1956-1966: 中苏关系回忆录* (北京: 中观文学出版社, 1991).

introduction of coordination mechanisms such as the *Interkit*, a forum convened by the CPSU International Department on an almost bi-annual basis to remind Soviet-bloc states to stick to an anti-China line, Moscow sought to control every aspect of its allies' China policies.<sup>34</sup> This resulted in a drastic deterioration of Sino-GDR relations. Thus, for much of the 1960s and 1970s, Moscow imposed the Sino-Soviet Split upon East Berlin. Only the rise of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 brought about a reassessment in East Berlin if continued adherence to the Soviet line was a wise choice forward. At the same time, a set of emerging frictions ranging from East Berlin's disagreement with the Soviet war in Afghanistan (as it threatened to unravel détente), the Kremlin's inaction during the Solidarnosc strikes to Soviet oil-delivery cut-backs fomented a sense of Soviet abandonment in East Berlin. As the Pankow regime's priorities increasingly diverged from Moscow's and East Berlin appreciated that Deng's rise might present a chance to restart Sino-GDR relations, Honecker was more than happy to turn a blind eye to Moscow's prohibitive China-policy for its allies to seek an advantageous economic and political relationship with Beijing. Attitudes changed greatly from February 1979, when East Berlin went out of its way to condemn Chinese aggression against Vietnam in line with Soviet coordination, to a year later, when cultural feelers were followed by first diplomatic contacts in the spring of 1980.

As Honecker sent out initial feelers to Beijing in light of Deng's rise, Moscow continued to call for East German restraint. Not only was Honecker ignoring these dictates but as I show in chapter two, by 1982, East Germany was openly rebelling against Moscow's China policy. Subsequently, the Kremlin's sour tone during both Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko's brief reigns could not slow, much less hinder, bilateral relations as mutual hope for a beneficial trade relationship pushed forward exchanges. Chapter three reveals that the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev did not bring about substantial transformations in the dynamics in this triangular

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<sup>34</sup> James Hershberg, Sergey Radchenko, Peter Vamos, David Wolff, *The Interkit Story: A Window into the Final Decades of the Sino-Soviet Relationship* (CWIHP Working Paper 63, February 2011).



relationship. Gorbachev, like his predecessors, was unable to discourage Honecker's regime from slowing its advances towards China. Meanwhile, Beijing continued courting the GDR. Sino-East German diplomacy reached new heights when Erich Honecker, as the first Eastern European leader, was granted a state visit to Beijing in October 1986. Interestingly, as chapter four further illustrates, what drew East Berlin and Beijing closer together from 1986 onwards was their common ideological commitment to fiercely resist any tinkering to the status-quo as proposed by Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. As Deng and Honecker attempted to insulate their countries from *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*, an ideological like-mindedness started to replace pragmatic wishes for a beneficial trade relationship as the driving force in bilateral relations. Chapter five discusses how this ideological convergence bound the two countries together in common defiance in the last years of the Cold War. While East Germany ardently supported China's hard-line stance towards internal unrest, Beijing held fast to its Eastern European ally and encouraged East Berlin to stick to its anti-Gorbachev, anti-reform stance until the very end. East Germany's eventual collapse, coupled with the subsequent collapse of the entire Soviet bloc, would send shockwaves through Zhongnanhai and propelled Beijing into a period of introspection on the future of China under the CCP.

## **Historiography**

The swift and sudden collapse of the GDR resulted in a flood of interest on the 'other' Germany.<sup>35</sup> The failed socialist experiment first and foremost aroused the interests of social historians trying to make sense of everyday life in the GDR. For example, Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle have traced how protest undercurrents were never washed away after the suppressed June 17, 1953 uprising in Berlin while Klaus Schroeder tried to push the idea that

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<sup>35</sup> See on this, Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002).

these rebellious undercurrents were heavily suppressed as the everyday *Lebenswirklichkeit* of GDR citizens was dictated and penetrated by SED policies.<sup>36</sup> More recently, Mary Fulbrook has presented an alternative view that argues that the SED did not reach into every crevasse of GDR life. Through labour unions, church organizations and academic groups, East Germans were able to live a life of relative ‘normalcy’.<sup>37</sup> This is complemented further by recent research done by Josi McLellan, who has lucidly shown that life in the GDR was more colourful than previously imagined, that between the assembly lines and FDJ meetings, a sexually liberal populace thrived.<sup>38</sup> These and other works have done a great deal to advance our understanding of how the GDR population lived under SED rule. Yet, while considerable ink has been spilled to analyze and argue over the exact nature of everyday life in the GDR, a significantly smaller amount of research exists on the GDR’s foreign policy.

Before the archives opened, few authors ventured onto the subject of East German foreign policy. Those who did were mostly SED party-historians who preached the Marxist-Leninist ‘theoretical foundations’ of East German foreign policy from behind the Berlin Wall.<sup>39</sup> Outside the iron curtain, one of the better-known early volumes is David Child’s study.<sup>40</sup> Piecing together what he could from GDR journals and newspapers, Childs presents the seemingly only plausible conclusion about the history of the GDR: That East Berlin was a faithful and loyal ally to Moscow. This view is also reinforced in other studies released before the collapse of the Iron Curtain. In an edited volume which praised the economic and political viability of the GDR,

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<sup>36</sup> See Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat: Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft, 1949-1990* (Munich: Hanser, 1999), Klaus Schroeder (eds.) *Geschichte und Transformation des SED-Staates* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), Armin Mitter & Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-89* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Mary Fulbrook (eds.), *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: the ‘Normalisation of Rule’?* (New York: Berghahn, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism – Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011); Also see Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (eds.), *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> Peter Klein et. al, *Geschichte der Aussenpolitik der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968); Werner Hänisch, *Aussenpolitik und internationale Beziehungen der DDR, Band 1* (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1972).

<sup>40</sup> David Childs, *GDR: Moscow’s German Ally* (London: Routledge, 1988).

Michael W. Oszwski described the Soviet-GDR dynamic as a “parent-child relationship”, going on to illustrate East Berlin’s affinity towards Moscow.<sup>41</sup>

Since the fall of the Wall however, a series of studies have emerged on the subject which challenge this premise. Among the more useful ones are Joachim Scholtyseck’s “Die Aussenpolitik der DDR” and Benno Eide-Siebs’ “Die Aussenpolitik der DDR, 1976-1989”.<sup>42</sup> Tracing relations from the GDR’s founding in 1949 until its collapse in 1990, Scholtyseck offers first and foremost an excellent historiographical discussion of works on GDR foreign policy. But it also delves deep into questions which cut right to the heart of East Berlin’s decision-making freedoms vis-à-vis China, namely if the GDR had any independent room when it came to constructing its own brand of diplomacy and how acquiescent it was to the Kremlin’s general Cold War grand strategy. According to Scholtyseck, from the founding of the MfAA until at least the 1970s, Moscow was the dog and East Berlin simply the tail that had to wag when the body commanded it to do so.<sup>43</sup> This trend was only partly reversed at the onset of the Second Cold War, when, according to Scholtyseck, East Berlin’s strategy turned into one of Honecker vigorously attempting to stem the negative effects that the onset of Superpower tensions would have on German-German relations and Honecker’s own détente with the West.<sup>44</sup> This is largely an endorsement of Benno-Eide Siebs’ work, who went even further in arguing for the existence of an independent trend in East German foreign policy. Siebs’ work on the GDR’s foreign relations under Honecker (covering 1976-1989) is useful for this thesis due to its specific focus on the last decade and half of the GDR’s existence. Eide-Siebs observed that from 1981 on, aided by the power vacuum during the late Brezhnev years, as well as during the brief reigns of Andropov and Chernenko, East German foreign policy gradually shifted to cater to its own,

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<sup>41</sup> Michael W. Olszewski, “The Framework of Foreign Policy” in Lyman H. Legters, *The German Democratic – A Developed Socialist Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978), pp. 179-198.

<sup>42</sup> Joachim Scholtyseck, *Die Aussenpolitik der DDR* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003); Benno-Eide Siebs, *Die Außenpolitik der DDR 1976–1989. Strategien und Grenzen* (Zurich: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 1999).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

rather than Moscow's interests.<sup>45</sup> Despite the Kremlin's earlier wariness about German-German contacts, East Berlin, to an extent, started to openly defy Soviet wishes in engaging in ever-closer contacts with Bonn.<sup>46</sup> Eide-Siebs' analysis of the latter part of the decade is also revealing. By outlining Honecker's intention to maintain the status quo while Gorbachev was embarking on drastic reforms centered on *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*, the author illustrates a clear point of divergence between Moscow and Berlin by 1987. This view is also entirely supported from the memoirs that former high-ranking SED-functionaries have penned since the collapse of the GDR. Hans Modrow, the former head of the SED in Dresden, Hermann Axen, the former head of the International Department of the SED Central Committee (CC) as well as Egon Winkelmann, East Germany's last Ambassador to the Soviet Union, all tell of mounting and finally insurmountable tensions in the 1980s between East Berlin and Moscow on issues ranging from inter-German cooperation to personality conflicts.<sup>47</sup> And the view does not shift significantly when one changes perspectives. Hannes Adomeit has shown that from the vantage point of the Kremlin, East Germany had become a diplomatic burden rather than a useful ally during much of the Honecker era.<sup>48</sup>

Not only Scholtyseck and Eide-Siebs but also seasoned SED historians such as Stefan Przybylski agree that, for the entirety of the Ulbricht and Honecker eras, East German foreign policy was a function of who was in charge at the very top.<sup>49</sup> Their predispositions in terms of geographic priority, political orientation and, in Honecker's case, his pursuit of a 'great-statesman' image, had a crucial bearing on the way that East Germany charted its course across

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<sup>45</sup> Eide-Siebs, p. 243.

<sup>46</sup> Eide-Siebs, p. 152.

<sup>47</sup> Hans Modrow, *In Historischer Mission* (Berlin: edition ost, 2007); Hermann Axen, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei* (Berlin: edition ost, 1998); Egon Winkelmann, *Moskau, das war's. Erinnerungen des DDR-Botschafters in der Sowjetunion 1981 bis 1987* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1997)..

<sup>48</sup> Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998), pp. 235-297.

<sup>49</sup> Stefan Przybylski argues soon after assuming power, his authority in the politburo left little room for discussion or opposition and by 1976, he alone had the power over high-level SED appointments. See Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro – Die Akte Honecker* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991), pp. 116-119.

the high seas of international politics. Michael Sodaro outlines the position of the General Secretary as having been “accorded sufficient leeway by his colleagues to set the agenda for domestic policy and to pursue his preferred foreign policy initiatives...With the final word on policy matters held indisputably by one individual, both the content of policy and the style of the policy-making process ultimately depend on the supreme leader”.<sup>50</sup> According to Sodaro, Honecker used this preponderance to pursue three related aims: The first was to reassure Moscow of East Berlin’s loyalty by, for example, pushing forward Soviet positions to Third World countries; the second was to enhance the visibility of the GDR in the eyes of the world and its own citizens by achieving legitimacy through foreign relations. And his third aim was ultimately connected to the previous two: To win the GDR to win greater room from Moscow to manoeuvre in foreign policy making and to push forward what East Berlin deemed as necessary economic relations with West Germany.<sup>51</sup>

Together, these studies by Scholtyseck, Eide-Siebs and Sodaro on East German foreign policy imperatives in the early 1980s provide evidence that Honecker sought to conduct a foreign policy which served the GDR’s purposes rather than Moscow’s. My thesis pushes this argument further. I argue that in the 1980s an intensification of existing and new frictions between Moscow and East Berlin served to strengthen East Berlin’s willingness to show an even brasher disdain towards Muscovite directives than before. Its engagement with Beijing revealed the Pankow regime’s readiness to not only rebel against Soviet coordination but also its willingness to engage a Soviet enemy in doing so. Certainly, Moscow’s two-faced attempts to rein in East Berlin while the Kremlin itself pursued normalization with Beijing only fuelled Honecker’s desire to accelerate his rapprochement with Beijing.

The approach of this thesis is particularly beneficial in two respects. Firstly, granting East

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<sup>50</sup> Michael J. Sodaro *Moscow, Germany and the West – From Khrushchev to Gorbachev* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), pp. 22-24.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24.

Berlin greater centrality in its own actions helps explain the GDR's insubordination towards Moscow through examining what the Pankow regime thought it would gain by doing so. This allows us to closely examine the individual factors pushing East Berlin's foreign policy in 1980s. Indeed, as David Priestland has argued, 'explaining communism' demands that we try to enter the mental world that Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevera, Gorbachev, and in this case, Erich Honecker, occupied in order to derive their intentions and imperatives when pursuing their policies.<sup>52</sup> Secondly, given its focus on the 1980s, this study examines the period when East German insubordination towards Moscow was arguably at its height, therefore allowing us to examine if a causal relationship existed between increasing East German-Soviet frictions and an independent GDR policy towards China. This will not only add to our understanding of East German foreign policy decision-making in the 1980s but also contribute to our conception of the drastically changing Warsaw Pact political landscape during the last decade of the Cold War.

Discerning readers of GDR history will first note that the hitherto most popular approach has been to analyze the GDR's history, whether its cultural or political aspects, in their entirety or focus on the two flash points that have defined East German history, namely its founding and its dissolution.<sup>53</sup> Within these studies, accounting the unforeseen and sudden collapse of the GDR has predictably been given more attention.<sup>54</sup> Due to the known fate of the GDR, studies of this nature have the tendency to see the 1980s through a lens of predetermined inevitability. That

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<sup>52</sup> David Priestland, *The Red Flag – Communism and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), p. xvii.

<sup>53</sup> Mike Dennis, *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1990* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); Winfrid Halder, *Von Ulbricht zu Honecker: Die DDR 1949-1989* (Berlin: Bebra, 2010); Hermann Weber, *Die DDR 1945-1990* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011), Henry Ashby Turner, *Germany from Partition to Reunification* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997); On the earlier period, see Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership, 1946-1973: Conflict and Crisis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass-Roots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-65* (London: MacMillan Press, 2000). On later GDR and the fall of the wall see Jeanette Z. Madarasz, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany, 1971-1989: A Precarious Stability* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR, 1971-1998* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) David Childs, *The Fall of the GDR: Germany's Road to Unity* (Harlow: Longman, 2001); Jonathan Grix, *The Role of the Masses in the Collapse of the GDR* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000).

is to say, they weave the immediate period before the GDR's collapse into a tapestry of unavoidable events which can only lead to the 'inevitable' demise of the GDR.<sup>55</sup> That is especially true for economic histories of not only the GDR but COMECON countries in general.<sup>56</sup> My study has attempted to shed this mantle of pre-determinism whenever it can, thus offering the reader a sense of East Berlin's hopes and goals at the time. For example, when looking at GDR-China economic relations, deconstructing the GDR's 1980s independent of the final result lets events have their own agency rather than being interpreted towards a predetermined outcome.<sup>57</sup> Thus, we can see that, far from resigned to the GDR's economic fate, Honecker was actually actively trying to secure the Middle Kingdom as an additional market for East German finished goods to bolster the domestic economy and reverse the GDR's economic problems.

In addition to contributing to the historiography of GDR foreign policy, this thesis also adds to our understanding of Chinese foreign policy intentions in the 1980s. Especially in China's dealings with Eastern European states, there exists a significant gap in the literature. Indeed, while the focal point of East German history has been on the formation and collapse of the GDR, historians dealing with modern Chinese foreign policy have in turn dedicated their attention on the one man who has defined China since 1949: Mao Zedong. Studies on his role in the Cold War<sup>58</sup>, his domestic mistakes<sup>59</sup>, his foreign policy<sup>60</sup> and his personal traits<sup>61</sup> have

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<sup>55</sup> Andre Steiner, *The Plans that Failed – An economic history of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 2010).

<sup>56</sup> Olaf Klenke, „Globalisierung, Mikroelektronik und das Scheitern der DDR-Wirtschaft“ *Deutschland Archiv*, 35:3, (May-June 2002), pp. 421-424; Johannes Bähr and Dietmar Petzina (eds.) *Innovationsverhalten und Entscheidungsstrukturen – Vergleichende Studien zur wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung im geteilten Deutschland* (Berlin: Dunkler & Humblot, 1996); On Central European economies transcending into an 'unstoppable downward spiral' see Ivan T. Berend, *Europe since 1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 39-41; Armin Mitter & Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten – Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Berlin: Bertelsmann, 1993).

<sup>57</sup> For example, far from abandoning socialism, many East Germans dissidents actually tried to reform it in the 1980s. See on this Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 12-15; See discussion why this determinist view is largely informed by hindsight in Jörg Roesler "Jedes Mal existenzgefährdend? Zur Charakteristik der fünf Wirtschaftskrisen" in Helga Schultz et al., *Die DDR im Rückblick – Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kultur* (Berlin, Ch. Links Verlag, 2007).

<sup>58</sup> Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>59</sup> For example on the Great Leap Forward see Frank Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), On

dominated historiography on the PRC both domestically and abroad. This is of course partly due to the People's Republic's timeline. Having had a hand in all aspects of China's domestic and international affairs for four decades, the Chairman played a role in every major Chinese foreign policy initiative before his death.<sup>62</sup> However, Mao's passing in 1976 brought about drastic changes to China's political landscape and ushered in a new generation of leaders around Deng Xiaoping.<sup>63</sup> It was under Deng that China not only gradually opened to the West and Asia but also to Eastern Europe. Outmanoeuvring and ousting the remnant old guard centered around the 'Gang of Four' which included 'Madame Mao' Jiang Qing, Deng immediately set out a new policy plan which was designed first and foremost to get China out of the debilitating economic decline that had resulted from the Cultural Revolution and onto a speedy modernization drive in order to improve the population's standard of living.<sup>64</sup>

To understand the roots of China's domestic and foreign policy in the 1980s, one must understand Deng Xiaoping's personal past and political experiences as Beijing's path during Deng's decade were inexorably intertwined with his formative journey and visions for the future.

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the Cultural Revolution see Roderick MacFarquhar & Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008); Edward Friedman & Yang Jisheng (eds.), *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine 1958-1962* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2008); Andrew Kennedy, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru: National Efficacy Beliefs and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011); 邓力群, *伟人毛泽东: 外交战略家* (北京: 中央民族大学出版社, 2004); 杨奎松, *毛泽东与莫斯科的恩恩怨怨* (郑州: 河南人民出版社, 2008); 薛庆超, *中欧外交重大突破—毛泽东“南方决策”* (成都: 四川人民出版社, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> Jung Chang & Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York, Random House, 2005); Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (New York: Random House, 1996); Jonathan Spence, *Mao Zedong: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Ren Zhigang, *Weishemeshi Mao Zedong* (Beijing, Guangminribaochubanshe, 2013).

<sup>62</sup> David Shambaugh, David L. Robinson (eds.), *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996); Also see on this Henry Kissinger's account of Chinese Foreign Policy. Henry Kissinger, *On China* (London: Penguin Books, 2011); For a slighter 'longer' perspective, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Restless Empire – China and the World since 1750* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

<sup>63</sup> Hua Guofeng was made to resign as both Chairman of the CCP CC and its Military Commission. Deng's close ally Hu Yaobang, the former Secretary-General of the CCP's Secretariat was chosen as Chairman of the CC; Deng Xiaoping was elected as Chairman of the Military Commission and Zhao Ziyang, another close Deng ally was elected as the Vice-Chairman of the CC. See David S. Goodman *The Sixth Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP: Look Back in Anger?* *China Quarterly*, 87, (1981) pp. 518-527.

<sup>64</sup> The roots of Dengist pragmatism have been traced as far back as 1962, where he famously said 'No matter if it is a white cat or a black cat' as long as it can catch mice, it is a good cat' (不管黑猫白猫, 抓到老鼠就是好猫) during a meeting of the CCP Secretariat. “不管黑猫白猫, 抓到老鼠就是好猫”, Xinhua News Agency, 13 October 2008.



And here, many studies exist that have done a great deal to illuminate Deng's motivations.<sup>65</sup>

While some Chinese studies have been published on this topic, political sensitivities on the mainland which often hinder even slightly unfavourable views of paramount leaders like Deng has meant that the more balanced and subjective accounts have appeared in the West.<sup>66</sup> Among these, one of the most comprehensive reviews of the many aspects of Deng's life was published first in a special issue in *China Quarterly* and then as an edited volume by a consortium of Deng experts on the occasion of his retirement from day-to-day party responsibilities in 1993.<sup>67</sup>

Tracing his life through the changing fortunes during his lengthy career in the CCP, which included three purges, the reader is left with a solid impression on why Deng did not see the party as a beacon of ideological purity but rather as an instrument to promote his pragmatic and progressive policies.<sup>68</sup> He knew that he was in a special position to realize his vision for a more modern China. Having proven himself as a capable politician in a variety of functions in the Party, Deng enjoyed widespread popularity from a broad power-base both within the army and the Party during much of his reign.<sup>69</sup> This, according to the current scholarly consensus, is one of the main reasons why he was able to impose his pragmatist policies without much resistance from different factions within the Party.<sup>70</sup>

In terms of Deng's foreign policy, it is important to note that his focus on an economic

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<sup>65</sup> On his personal experiences, few studies have been as insightful as Deng's daughter's account. See 毛毛 & 邓林, *我的父亲: 邓小平 Vol. 1-3* (北京: 中央文学出版社, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> Official and semi-official Chinese publications on Deng Xiaoping number in the 100s if not 1000s. See for example the posthumously compiled selected texts of Deng Xiaoping in *邓小平文选 Vol. 1-3* (北京: 人民出版社, 2004) or officially sanctioned works on his re-emergence from the three purges: 赵晓光 & 刘杰, *邓小平的三落三起* (沈阳: 辽宁人民出版社, 2011).

<sup>67</sup> Special Issue: *Deng Xiaoping – An Assessment*, *China Quarterly*, 135 (1993) subsequently republished as David Shambaugh (eds.) *Deng Xiaoping – Portrait of a Chinese Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

<sup>68</sup> Especially Benjamin Yang's contribution on Deng's early political career as well as Barry Naughton's insights into Deng's pragmatism in the economic sphere serve as good introductions into Deng's relative distance from conservative Maoism. See Benjamin Yang *The Making of a Pragmatic Communist: The Early Life of Deng Xiaoping, 1904-49*, *China Quarterly* 135 (1993) pp. 444-456; Virtually no economic decisions were made without his approval from his ascent to power in 1978 until his death in 1993. See Barry Naughton, *Deng Xiaoping: The Economist*, *China Quarterly*, 135 (1993), pp. 491-514.

<sup>69</sup> The exception of course being the immediate aftermath of Tiananmen, during which a conservative faction intended to roll back Reform and Opening to combat spiritual pollution. See David Shambaugh "Deng Xiaoping: The Politician", *China Quarterly*, 135 (1993), pp. 457-490.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Kwan Ha Yim, *China under Deng* (New York: FactsonFile, 1991).

revival in China could only be achieved through participating in the world market. Hence, fostering new linkages and abandoning the self-imposed international isolation embraced during most of Mao's time became a priority.<sup>71</sup> Barry Naughton and Li Zhidong, both experts on Deng's economic policies, have concluded that these policies were the driving force behind China's gradual opening to the world from 1978 on.<sup>72</sup> Recently, Ezra Vogel's work on Deng has also added considerably to our understanding of not only Deng's reforms but also the difficulties he experienced when attempting to impose them.<sup>73</sup> These 'modernization-first' motivations are only underlined when one studies his official *Nianpu*, or annals, as Deng repeatedly emphasized economic growth to foreign visitors.<sup>74</sup>

However, while most scholarship has focused on the undoubtedly important role that America and other Asian states had on China's modernization process, Vogel and others have largely ignored the European dimension.<sup>75</sup> Deng's new reformist-oriented domestic policy meant that China also looked to improve relations with advanced Western European states as well as seeking closer ties with Eastern European states such as the GDR in order to acquire technological know-how and to find new trade partners.<sup>76</sup> Within the small body of literature that tackles China's relations with both Western and Eastern Europe, an even smaller subset has been dedicated to the latter. As Michael Yahuda argues, a common conception seems to prevail that

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<sup>71</sup> Foreign Policy was painted as a reactionary and bourgeois activity during the Cultural Revolution. Ambassadors were often recalled and embassies closed down. See Melvin Gurtov, *The Foreign Ministry and Foreign Affairs during the Cultural Revolution*, *The China Quarterly* 40 (1969), pp. 65-102; Ma Jisen, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).

<sup>72</sup> Barry Naughton, *The Foreign Policy Implications of China's Development Strategy* in Robinson & Shambaugh (eds.), 理查德·邓小平传 (上海: 人民出版社, 1996) Also see Merle Goldman & Roderick MacFarquhar (eds.), *The Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reforms*, (Cambridge, HUP, 1999); William Byrd, *The Market Mechanism and Economic Reform in China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991); A. Doak Barnett, *China's Economy in Global Perspective* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1981); Edwin Lim, *China: Long-Term Development: Issues and Options* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

<sup>73</sup> Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of HUP, 2011).

<sup>74</sup> 中共中央文献研究室, *邓小平年谱* [上 & 下] (北京: 中央文献出版社, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> For example, while thoroughly describing China's engagement with Asian states and America, Vogel neglects the European dimension completely. See Vogel, pp. 297-348; 455-462.

<sup>76</sup> Martin Posth, *1,000 Tage in Shanghai: Die abenteuerliche Gründung der ersten chinesisch-deutschen Automobilfabrik* (Munich: Hanser, 2006); Martin Albers, "Business with Beijing, détente with Moscow: West Germany's China policy in a global context, 1962-1982", *Cold War History*, 14:2 (2014), pp. 237-257.

these relations have been traditionally less important than even China's minor ones with Western Europe.<sup>77</sup> Yahuda sees Sino-Eastern European relations not important in themselves; they only matter in as far as developments in Poland and Hungary at the end of the Cold War influenced Chinese decision-making in 1989 to stem destabilizing influences and preserve the CCP's legitimacy.<sup>78</sup> This view is largely upheld by Alyson J. K. Bailes. She argues that China and Eastern Europe started to develop meaningful contacts in the late 1980s, when both sides, amidst Gorbachev's declining ability and willingness to control Warsaw Pact states, started to build relations for their own national interests.<sup>79</sup>

While literature on this subject is generally lacking, there has been some recent interest in China's engagement with Eastern European countries due to a seeming 'awakening' by Cold War historians that these relations mattered more than previously thought. This has led to the convening of several high profile conferences on Sino-Eastern European relations, coordinated by the Parallel History Project at the ETH Zurich, the Cold War International History Project in Washington D.C. as well as a smattering of other academic institutions.<sup>80</sup> The findings of these conferences support our existing understanding of Deng's overall motivations. Former Soviet-Bloc ambassadors and policy-makers have corroborated that Beijing was curious at the experiences that socialist states like the GDR had made while undertaking their own economic reforms.<sup>81</sup> Certainly, these conferences have confirmed Gilbert Rozman's early findings that Beijing had often looked towards Moscow and its client states in order to assess the benefits and

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<sup>77</sup> Michael Yahuda, *China and Europe* in Thomas W. Robinson & David Shambaugh, *Chinese Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 175.

<sup>78</sup> Yahuda, p. 275.

<sup>79</sup> Alyson J.K. Bailes, *China and Eastern Europe: A Judgment on the Socialist Community*, *Pacific Review*, 3, 3 (1990), pp. 222-42.

<sup>80</sup> Xiaoyuan Liu and Vojtech Mastny (eds), *China and Eastern Europe, 1960s-1980s* (Zurich: Zürcher Beiträge, Nr. 72, 2004). 24-26 March 2004; for an earlier assessment of China's desire to learn from Eastern European reform experiences; Zhong Zhong Chen, 'Interkit': *An International Against China? Policy Coordination and National Interests in the Soviet Bloc in the Second Half of the Cold War*. 12.05.2011-13.05.2011, Freiburg im Breisgau, in: H-Soz-u-Kult, 22.07.2011, (<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=3737>); James Hershberg, Sergey Radchenko, Peter Vamos, David Wolff, *The Interkit Story: A Window into the Final Decades of the Sino-Soviet Relationship* (CWIHP Working Paper 63, February 2011).

<sup>81</sup> Xiaoyuan Liu and Vojtech Mastny (eds), p. 161.

downfalls of its version of socialism.<sup>82</sup>

My thesis will add further credence to the notion that Beijing did not only open its markets to the United States, Western Europe and Asia but, in the early 1980s, also proactively sought Eastern European cooperation during the Reform and Opening process. Among Eastern European states, I show that China placed special emphasis on East Germany as the leading socialist industrial state. By proactively engaging with East Germany, Zhongnanhai hoped to gain an insight into Eastern European economic processes. I argue that Beijing's engagement with Soviet bloc countries were an important part of China's learning process in the 1980s.

Another element of historiography that warrants mentioning are general studies which deal with the international environment of the 1980s. Certainly, together with the accompanying Warsaw Pact/NATO Missile crisis, the start of the so-called Second Cold War standoff between the superpowers had a profound impact on Soviet-GDR relations. As Cold War tensions reappeared after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Honecker was stuck between the need to uphold his loyalty to Moscow and his interest in continued détente with the West, specifically West Germany. Considering the economic needs of the GDR and the economic benefits East Berlin was able to gain from Bonn after Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, Honecker had a vested interest to keep détente alive. A. James McAdams and Michael J. Sodaro have both pointed out that as more and more loans and credits flowed from the FRG into the GDR, Honecker was adamant to propose the continuity of a 'Coalition of Reason' (*Koalition der Vernunft*)<sup>83</sup> between the two Germanies rather than to side with Moscow's anti-Western stance as superpower tensions emerged after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>84</sup> This independent

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<sup>82</sup> Gilbert Rozman, *The Chinese Debate about Soviet Socialism, 1978-1985*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

<sup>83</sup> This phrase would be used by Honecker to describe his hope for continued German-German relations amidst superpower tensions in an October 5, 1983 letter to West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, *Neues Deutschland*, 10 October 1983; in: Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen (Hg.), *Innerdeutsche Beziehungen. Die Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1980-1986*, (Bonn: 1986).

<sup>84</sup> Michael K. Sodaro *Moscow, Germany and the West – From Khrushchev to Gorbachev* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 297; A. James McAdams, "The New Logic in Soviet-GDR Relations", *Problems in Communism*, 37:1 (1988), pp. 47-

streak also played directly into East Berlin's willingness to ignore Moscow's warnings against seeking a reengagement with China in the 1980s.

In terms of the bigger geopolitical picture, transatlantic relations remained chilly under Brezhnev's successors Yuri Andropov (1982-1984) and Konstantin Chernenko (1984-1985). American President Ronald Reagan's proposal to create a Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) in 1983 served to stoke fears in the Kremlin that the project represented Washington's attempt to gain first-strike capability by rendering the Soviet ICBM-arsenal obsolete. Only the rise of Gorbachev to the helm of the Soviet Union in March 1985 brought about a substantial positive change in the nature of Soviet-American relations.<sup>85</sup> Sergey Radchenko's recent study on Soviet policy towards East Asia confirms that while Gorbachev sought to drive forward the stagnant Sino-Soviet normalization process in the latter part of the decade, his overtures were met with Deng's insistence that the Soviet Union pull back its troops from Afghanistan, the Sino-Soviet frontier and Vietnam before any advances in Sino-Soviet relations could be achieved.<sup>86</sup> Thus, as dialogue increased again between the superpowers, often with varying success, the antagonistic atmosphere between Beijing and Moscow largely remained. Péter Vámos and China's former Deputy Foreign Minister Qian Qichen have given us convincing accounts that Chinese anger at the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and disagreements on the Sino-Soviet negotiations framework meant that bilateral consultations between Moscow and Beijing only showed tangible progress at the end of the decade.<sup>87</sup>

This dissertation also delves deep into the question of what two anti-reform regimes in

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60; Ronald A. Asmus, "The Dialectics of Détente and Discord: The Moscow-East Berlin-Bonn Triangle", *Orbis*, 28 (1985).

<sup>85</sup> Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the end of the Cold War*, (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1994), pp. 197-291.

<sup>86</sup> Sergey Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries – The Soviet Failure in Asia at the end of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 124-158.

<sup>87</sup> Péter Vámos, *Only a Handshake but no Embrace: Sino-Soviet Normalization in the 1980s* in Thomas P. Bernstein & Hua-Yu Li (eds.) *China learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present*, (London: Lexington Books, 2010), pp. 79-104; Qian Qichen, *Ten Episodes in China's Diplomacy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) - The entire first chapter is dedicated to the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations.

East Berlin and Beijing did in order to repel the reformist tides washing up on its shores at the end of the Cold War. In analyzing this angle, this study has been fortunate to be able to build on a wealth of literature that has been produced on the Cold War's end.<sup>88</sup> First, Gorbachev's accession to the position of General Secretary of the Soviet Union in 1985 was a fateful moment for the entire Soviet bloc. Kremlinologists Archie Brown, Vladislav Zubok and Geir Lundestad have argued in convincing fashion that it was Gorbachev's personality and his hopeful, almost naïve vision which were the decisive factors in the path which would ultimately cost Moscow its client states and finally, its own existence.<sup>89</sup>

For the GDR, Gorbachev's seemingly careless tinkering with domestic reforms aroused anger and suspicion.<sup>90</sup> Among a batch of new work released on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fall of the Wall, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk's account (filtering out the often highhanded personal political opinions of the author) illuminates the fallout that Gorbachev's policies had on the GDR. For example, in a desperate attempt to stem the formation of any liberal opinions, the SED promptly banned reformist literature such as the Soviet journal *Sputnik* from circulation in East Germany in November 1988.<sup>91</sup> Pankow was not the only place where

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<sup>88</sup> To see how the end of the Cold War was perceived from the Chinese view, see Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Lorenz Luethi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008). For the Soviet view, see Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire - The Soviet Union and the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000). For the American view, see Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1946-2006* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A new History* (New York: Penguin, 2006), Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, The Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007). And for view from Europe, see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

<sup>89</sup> Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Vladislav Zubok, Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire – The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Geir Lundestad, “‘Imperial Overstretch’, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the End of the Cold War” *Cold War History*, 1:1, 1-20. Competing views have also emerged which stress economic decline and political constraints as the determining factors for Soviet collapse. See Stephen G. Brooks & William C. Woolforth, “Economic Constraints and the end of the Cold War” in William C. Woolforth (eds.) *Cold War Endgame: Oral History, Analysis, Debates* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003); see also Henry S. Rowan & Charles Wolf Jr., *The Impoverished Superpower: Perestroika and the Soviet Military Burden* (London: Institute for Contemporary Studies Press, 1990); Gertrude Schroeder, “Reflections on Economic Sovietology”, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 11: 3 (1995), pp. 197-234; Daniel Gros & Alfred Steinherr, *Winds of Change: Economic Transition in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Longman, 1995).

<sup>90</sup> Bernd Schäfer, “Die DDR und die ‘chinesische Lösung’ – Gewalt in der Volksrepublik China im Sommer 1989” in Martin Sabrow (eds.) *1989 und die Rolle der Gewalt* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012), pp. 162-172.

<sup>91</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Endspiel – Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2009), p. 270.

Gorbachev's newfound favour for greater political dialogue and transparency elicited worry. The GDR's anti-reformist stance was welcomed and praised in Beijing. As Stefan Halper, Michael Yahuda and David Shambaugh show, Deng was also less than enthusiastic about Gorbachev's calls for political reforms as he sought to use the CCP's strict political control to reform the economy.<sup>92</sup>

Indeed, China and the GDR became two of the most vociferous critics of Gorbachev's reform path. By providing a thorough account of how their common opposition to *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* played out in Sino-GDR relations, I will add to our understanding of how orthodox regimes sought any means necessary to counter the liberalizing trends coming out of Moscow. The dissertation will demonstrate that both regimes clung to the hard-line until the very last, with drastically different consequences. By analyzing this angle, this thesis adds to an emerging body of literature which analyzes how the last decade of the Cold War was perceived outside the purely bipolar perspective.<sup>93</sup>

My work of course builds on those that have gone before it. Claudie Gardet, Werner Meissner and Anja Feege, Bernd Schäfer and Martina Wobst have all done their part to add crucial arguments on why East Germany's engagement with China mattered.<sup>94</sup> Without a doubt, much can be learned from these works, and their analysis of the major turning points in bilateral

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<sup>92</sup> Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, (New York: Basic, 2010); Michael Yahuda, *Deng Xiaoping: The Statesman*, *China Quarterly*, 135 (1993), pp. 551-572; David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party – Atrophy and Adaptation* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2008).

<sup>93</sup> See on this especially Sergey Radchenko & Artemy Kalinovsky (eds.), *The End of the Cold War in the Third World: New perspectives on regional conflict* (London: Routledge, 2013). On the bipolar perspective, see Ronald E. Powaski, *The Cold War: The United States and the Soviet Union 1917-1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); John Prados, *How the Cold War ended: Debating and doing history* (Washington D.C., Potomac Books, 2011); Norman A. Graebner, Richard Dean Burns, and Joseph M. Siracusa, *Reagan, Bush, Gorbachev* (Westport: Praeger, 2008); Saki Ruth Dockrill also used the majority of her focus on Washington and Moscow's intentions, only departing briefly to the third world. See Saki Ruth Dockrill, *The End of the Cold War Era* (New York: Hodder Arnold, 2005).

<sup>94</sup> Claudie Gardet, *Les Relations de la République populaire de Chine et de la République démocratique allemande (1949-1989)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000); Werner Meissner & Anja Feege, *Die DDR und China 1949 bis 1990*, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995); Martina Wobst, *Die Kulturbeziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VR China 1949-1990*, (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004); Bernd Schäfer, "Die DDR und die 'chinesische Lösung' – Gewalt in der Volksrepublik China im Sommer 1989" in Martin Sabrow (eds.) *1989 und die Rolle der Gewalt* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012), pp. 162-172..

affairs have been very helpful for this study. However, both Meissner and Feege as well as Wobst's works are victims of their ambition as they try to provide an account of GDR-PRC relations in its entirety. While offering a general narrative account of bilateral affairs instead of focusing on pushing forward certain arguments, the authors do not explore the motivations and the intentions behind policy formulation, often leaving the reader wanting more. By contrast, Schäfer's work, which focuses on whether or not 'the Chinese solution' was considered in East Berlin as a remedy against popular unrest in 1989, provides a detailed account of bilateral dealings in the final months of the GDR's existence. However, viewing just 1989's events gives it the shortfall that it does not account for the long-term bilateral dynamics that led to this point of intense engagement between Beijing and East Berlin in 1989. Indeed, as I show, ideological like-mindedness had become a permanent and binding feature between the two regimes in the last half of the 1980s and viewed as such, SED 'crown-prince' Egon Krenz' visit in late 1989 was a reaffirmation of Beijing and East Berlin's common hard-line against reformist trends sweeping across the socialist world.

The little Chinese scholarship that exists on East German-Chinese relations have mostly been published after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (and the GDR's disappearance as a state), the impetus being the perceived need to learn from Soviet-bloc experiences in order to prevent a similar fate in China. Hua Shaoxiang's study, which draws on published German sources, is a good representative of this body of literature. With little or no material from Chinese archival sources, these works are mostly narrative accounts which merely superficially describe bilateral relations without giving any consideration to the driving factors behind policy.<sup>95</sup> An added problem with scholarship published on the mainland is that a large proportion of foreign policy studies have been fashioned to support 'Marxism-Leninism' or 'Mao Zedong Thought'. Noncompliance with these expectations is almost unimaginable and

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<sup>95</sup> 华少庠, "中国与东德对苏政策的比较", *广西社会科学* 7 (2006) pp. 130-134.



doing so would not only invite penalties but also negative consequences for the author. As the recent dismissal of outspoken dissident and free market proponent Xia Yeliang from his post as an economics professor at Peking University has shown, Beijing expects its academics to sing to its tune.<sup>96</sup> As Wang Jisi, the current director of Peking University's School of International Studies observed, all social science theories in the People's Republic of China are expected to contribute to the building of socialism.<sup>97</sup> Thus, scholarly debate on foreign policy in general, let alone GDR-PRC relations and Sino-Eastern European relations, remains very much restricted in Chinese scholarship.<sup>98</sup>

Addressing the lack of literature that exists on the topic of Eastern European-Chinese relations, I seek to position my research at the intersection of both diplomatic and political histories on China and East Germany as well as general histories of the last years of the Cold War. By doing so, I hope to open up a new discussion on Eastern Europe's engagement with China and vice versa, how Beijing actively sought closer relations with Eastern European countries after Deng's rise. In East Germany's case, this thesis will prove that for both Beijing and East Berlin, newly established relations were anything but inconsequential and had a critical function for both regimes. This research will show how both governments attempted to cleverly navigate the Cold War construct to find each other. In the end, both were posed with the fundamental question of socialism's compatibility with the evolving world around it, with one seemingly having found at least a version of the solution while the other one, owing to a series of structural and geographic factors, crumbled under internal and external pressures.

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<sup>96</sup> "Beijing's Assault on Academic Freedom" *New York Times*, October 21, 2013; Peking University's reponse is that he was fired simply for 'being bad at his job' See "Even in China, Dissidents sometimes get fired just for being bad at their jobs" ([http://english.pku.edu.cn/News\\_Events/News/Outlook/10590.htm](http://english.pku.edu.cn/News_Events/News/Outlook/10590.htm)), accessed 23 March 2014.

<sup>97</sup> Wang Jisi, "International Relations Theory and the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy: A Chinese perspective" in Thomas R. Robinson, David Shambaugh (eds.) *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 482.

<sup>98</sup> Only recently scholars such as Li Danhui and Shen Zhihua at East China Normal University have started to address this gap in literature. See 李丹慧和沈志华, 关于60年代中国与东欧五国关系若干问题 (Paper presented at Interkit conference on 12 May 2011 in Freiburg, cited with permission).

## Sources

Studies of bilateral relations ideally need to explore both sides with equal detail. However, owing to the restriction of archival materials in China for much of the modern CCP era, researchers are sadly confronted with the sobering reality that informative and revealing documents in the central party archives as well as the foreign ministry archives in Beijing are mostly inaccessible to foreign scholars.<sup>99</sup> This has forced historians of modern China to be creative. As central directives are often handed down into the provinces when the foreign policy direction changes in the centre, one way to triangulate the lack of access in Beijing has been to search for evidence of policy changes in the provincial archives. With this method, I have been able to obtain insights into Zhongnanhai's decision-making process from the Shanghai Municipal Archives, the Shandong Provincial Archives, the Jiangsu Provincial Archives as well as the Hebei Provincial Archives. In addition, I have also sought to creatively utilize CCP-internally circulated published material, as well as interviews with former Chinese diplomats stationed in East Germany to construct the Chinese picture. In a turn of luck, due to the release of East German materials, I have also been able to gauge the Chinese position from East German records of bilateral summits and meetings. Using these sources, I try to provide an internal look at the estimations and calculations behind Beijing's engagement with a country that it previously paid little attention to.

In contrast, the dissolution of East Germany has resulted in the release of SED politburo documents as well as politburo members' personal files. These have been meticulously organized and made available at the *The Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv* (or SAPMO) collection at the Federal Archives in Berlin. They offer a penetrating look inside Pankow's decision-making rationale to actively engage China in the

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<sup>99</sup> The Foreign Ministry Archives only holds selected files from before 1965, presumably not publishing later files due to sensitivities arising out of the events of the Cultural Revolution. Since late 2012 however, the archives have been closed entirely due to a variety of incidences where archival files have been published and circulated in the popular press. Selected files are however available to CCP party historians.

1980s. In addition to this, special access to consult the Sektor 1 “China” files of the East German Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (MfAA) in the German Foreign Ministry Archives (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, PAAA) has done a great deal to illuminate the diplomatic intricacies of bilateral exchanges. These were in turn supplemented by files from the East German Security Services (Staatssicherheitsdienst, Stasi) at the *Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten für die Stasi-Unterlagen* (BStU), which showed that even the security services were engaged in the rapprochement process. Furthermore, interviews with former GDR diplomats stationed in China have provided me with a first-hand account of how relations developed between the two states.

# **Chapter One - Diplomacy behind Moscow's Back: East German-Chinese Rapprochement, 1979-1982**

## **Introduction**

The new character of East German-Chinese relations in the 1980s cannot be understood without giving consideration to how Moscow defined this relationship in the decades before. Thus, this chapter will begin with an introduction into the history of Sino-GDR relations from 1949 to 1979. It will be shown that the GDR's relations with communist China enjoyed an 'independent' phase between 1949 and the early 1960s, during which relations remained relatively unaffected by the immediate fall-out of the growing Sino-Soviet antagonism that arose from Khrushchev's 1956 de-Stalinization campaign. This phase of like-mindedness was short-lived however, as Moscow reined in East Berlin under its general anti-Chinese line when Sino-Soviet tensions escalated in the early 1960s. Due to Moscow's strict coordination of Soviet-bloc states' China policies, Sino-East German relations remained cool until early 1979. During this time, East Berlin was not only willing to uphold Soviet anti-China policy but it was even prepared to go a step further in demonstrating its increasing weight in the foreign policy sphere by actively promoting an anti-China line. Nowhere was this more evident than during the Sino-Vietnamese border war in 1979. Even though some in East Berlin had begun considering a possible recalibration towards China as Deng consolidated power in 1978, Chinese aggression against a historically close ally brought about fierce condemnation by Honecker and arguably the last instance of close foreign policy cooperation between East Berlin and Moscow.

Yet as the Sino-Vietnamese war ended in the summer of 1979, a series of frictions between Moscow and East Berlin caused the latter to reconsider its absolute adherence to Soviet anti-China policy. Contributing to this shift was the erosion of trust brought about by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Moscow's actions threatened to end Superpower-détente and also to unravel the laboriously constructed East German rapprochement with the FRG,

which the Honecker regime had come to rely on, especially economically, for the GDR's survival. Desperate not to let renewed East-West tensions affect German-German engagement, Honecker refused to have any part of Brezhnev's intervention in Afghanistan.

Compounding concerns was Brezhnev's handling of the *Solidarność* strikes in Poland in September 1980, which fuelled doubts about Moscow's overall leadership capacity. Honecker, fearing a spillover effect from a neighbouring socialist state, sought decisive ideological leadership and a determined stand from Moscow against the social unrest in the Polish shipyards. Brezhnev's slow, lethargic and uncoordinated reaction to the strikes unnerved Honecker. Honecker's petitions for Brezhnev to send in an armed force to squash the strikes fell on deaf ears in Moscow, further adding to his frustrations with the Soviet leadership.

The proverbial 'cherry on top' in terms of diverging interests between Moscow and East Berlin came with the drastic Soviet oil delivery reductions to the GDR in 1980/81. As growing economic difficulties in East Germany became evident, Honecker both resented and fought Moscow's cutbacks. However, repeated lobby attempts by East Berlin elicited little change in Moscow's position. Beset by its own economic woes, the Kremlin was intent to sell its oil at world market prices rather than delivering it at discounted rates to client states such as the GDR.

Amidst both increasing abandonment and diverging interests from Moscow, a gradual 'selfish' reorientation started to occur in East Berlin's foreign policy. Pankow was now more interested in serving its own needs rather than Moscow's. In terms of the GDR's China policy, this reorientation meant that Honecker, appreciating the significance that Deng's reformist stirrings had on China's foreign policy direction, saw a chance to engage a post-Mao China in order to probe for potential advantages for the GDR. With subtle cultural and diplomatic feelers, Honecker signalled to Beijing in 1980 that he was ready for reengagement. By that same year, Moscow's insistence that the GDR stick to its professed antagonism to China had lost all salience

in East Berlin, especially in light of Moscow's own moves to improve the Sino-Soviet relationship. The GDR and the PRC established cultural contacts in May 1980 and exchanged government delegations in August 1981. The resulting engagement between Beijing and East Berlin would spell the beginning of the end of almost two decades of animosity between the two states.

#### Between Moscow and Beijing: from "like-mindedness" to enmity, 1956-1976

Few could predict the far-reaching consequences of Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, CPSU, in 1956. Criticizing Stalin's cult of personality, he vowed to bring the Soviet Union on the right path of Leninism and under the rule of a collective leadership. Mao, clearly seeing parallels between himself and Stalin, criticized Khrushchev's initiated path and thereby sowed the seeds for the Sino-Soviet split. While the details of the split have been analyzed in great detail, the fallout for Soviet client states is relatively unknown.<sup>100</sup> Considering the founding history of the GDR as a Soviet satellite and that its foreign policy, at least initially, was conducted largely under the aegis of Moscow, it shouldn't be surprising that the deteriorating state of Sino-Soviet relations had an immediate detrimental impact on GDR-PRC relations.<sup>101</sup> Exactly how growing disagreements between Moscow and Beijing affected the Beijing-East Berlin relationship has been the subject of considerable research by German scholars, among them Joachim Krüger<sup>102</sup>, Werner Meissner + Anja Feege<sup>103</sup>, Uwe Fabritzek<sup>104</sup>, Nicole Stuber<sup>105</sup>, and Thomas Kampen<sup>106</sup>. What is surprising about their conclusions

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<sup>100</sup> See for example Lorenz Luethi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>101</sup> For example, the Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (MfAA) was established on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1949 under the approval of the USSR. Its first director, Lothar Bolz and personnel in the individual sections were approved in Moscow after suggestions had been put forward "for consideration" by the SED leadership and were personally approved by Stalin. Joachim Scholtyssek, *Die Aussenpolitik der DDR* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003), pp. 6-7.

<sup>102</sup> Joachim Krüger, *Das erste Jahrzehnt der Beziehungen in Joachim Krüger (eds.) Beiträge zur Geschichte der Beziehungen der DDR und der VR China*, (Münster: Lit, 2002).

<sup>103</sup> Werner Meissner (eds.) *Die DDR und China 1949 bis 1990: Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur: Eine Quellensammlung* (Berlin: Akademie, 1995).

<sup>104</sup> Uwe Fabritzek, "SED, Moskau und Peking", *Osteuropa*, 3 (1973), pp. 828-836.

is that they unanimously agree that GDR-PRC relations did not immediately sour after the onset of the first Sino-Soviet disagreements. Despite different interpretations of why East Berlin's relations with China were at first relatively unaffected, it is certain that Walter Ulbricht, himself a die-hard Stalinist, viewed Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign with suspicion.<sup>107</sup> Mao harboured similar feelings. Even though he disagreed with Stalin on many issues, the Chinese leader saw clear parallels between their respective personality cults. Thus, Mao watched Khrushchev's moves with unease.<sup>108</sup> This created common ground between two regimes that were equally disinclined to allow potentially destabilizing political reforms affect the continuity of their respective present courses. Against this backdrop, GDR-PRC relations actually carried on normally with Chinese-style "People's Communes" still operating in the East German countryside well into the late 1950s and East German officials voicing strong support for China during the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1958.<sup>109</sup> A telling sign of how much the GDR's and USSR's China policies differed can be inferred from their attitudes towards Sino-Indian border tensions in 1959-1960, with the former adopting a largely pro-Chinese line while the latter displayed indifference.<sup>110</sup> Among contemporary scholars, M. J. Esslin went as far as to speak of an emerging "Peking-Pankow Axis" in 1960.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Nicole Stuber, *Grundzüge der Beziehungen DDR-VR China 1956-1969* in Krüger (2002).

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Kampen, *Chinawissenschaften in der DDR* in Helmut Martin & Christinane Hammer (eds.) *Beiträge des Zweiten Internationalen Symposiums zur Geschichte der deutsch-chinesischen Beziehungen* (Berlin: K.G. Sauer, 1999), pp. 245-265.

<sup>107</sup> On Ulbricht dogmatic outlook see Norbert Podewin, *Walter Ulbricht. Eine neue Biographie*, (Berlin: Dietz, 1995); Herbert Graf, *Mein Leben. Mein Chef Ulbricht. Meine Sicht der Dinge*, (Berlin: edition ost, 2008).

<sup>108</sup> The main disagreement between Moscow and Beijing then quickly turned to different and rivaling interpretations of Marxism-Leninism. On the ideological roots of the Sino-Soviet alliance after Khrushchev's secret speech see: Lorenz Luethi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 219-235.

<sup>109</sup> Chinese-style work-education methods were prevalent in the GDR at the time, with generals encouraged to spend time as soldiers and factory-heads spending time as labourers. See Hermann Axen, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei* (Berlin: edition ost, 1998); Egon Winkelmann, *Moskau, das war's. Erinnerungen des DDR-Botschafters in der Sowjetunion 1981 bis 1987* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1997), 211. On East German attitude on Taiwan see Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives (CFMA) – 109-00846-03 - 驻民主德国使馆电告民德政府关于台湾海峡局势德声明及民德领导人就此问题德连读公开表态 – 25 September, 1958

<sup>110</sup> Various MfAA officials expressed to the Chinese embassy in Berlin their support for the Chinese position. CFMA – 109-01500-05(1) - 我驻民主德国使馆电告民德对中国同印度以及中国同缅甸关系德反应, '德对我 12 月 26 日致印照会反应' 1 January, 1960 & '别尔乌亲对周总理访印德反映' 3 March 1960.

<sup>111</sup> M.J. Esslin, "Peking-Pankow Axis?" *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 3 (Jul. – Sep. 1960), pp. 85-88.

By the early 1960s, however, a noticeable change occurred in the GDR's China policy as East Berlin increasingly fell into the Soviet line. Due to deepening Sino-Soviet tensions, Moscow actively restrained East Berlin from engaging China. Political, economic and cultural contacts decreased. As Walter Ulbricht made his pro-Soviet stance known at the VI. SED Party Congress in January 1963, heated scenes unfolded. The speech by the head of the CCP delegation Wu Xiuquan was met with foot stomping and whistles from the audience. The Chinese delegation duly left during the singing of the Internationale.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, the years between the initiation of the GDR-China split and renewed rapprochement in the early 1980s were marked by a general absence of relations. To coordinate the China policies of its close allies as Sino-Soviet tensions escalated, Moscow initiated shadowy 'Interkit' meetings in 1967. Convened almost annually, these meetings served as a forum where Moscow instructed the international departments of Soviet-bloc states to maintain an antagonistic attitude towards Beijing.<sup>113</sup> To enforce anti-Chinese conformity amongst East German citizens, even the state security apparatus got involved. Thus, the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (MfS, colloquially *Stasi*) repeatedly issued orders in the early 1970s to its operatives to "subvert any kind of Maoist activity...and to investigate all [East German citizens'] connections to Chinese nationals."<sup>114</sup> People who came under suspicion of having links to China were immediately investigated.<sup>115</sup> When encountering Chinese citizens and diplomats, *Stasi* agents and informants always made sure to reiterate that the GDR was a loyal ally

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<sup>112</sup> 吴修权, *王世沧桑: 吴修权同志回忆录*, Bd. 4, (北京: 中共党史资料), pp. 186-189.

<sup>113</sup> The first Interkit meeting, convened in Moscow on December 14, 1967, was attended by representatives of the International Departments of the communist parties of the Soviet Union, GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Mongolia. The meetings took place from 1967-1986, see James Hershberg, Sergey Radchenko, Peter Vamos, David Wolff, "The Interkit Story: A Window into the Final Decades of the Sino-Soviet Relationship" (CWIHP Working Paper 63, February 2011), p. 6.

<sup>114</sup> "Aufklärung und operative Kontrolle von Verbindungen aus dem Verantwortungsbereich nach China bzw. zu diplomatischen Einrichtungen und Gesellschaften der VR China im Ausland" (24 April 1973) Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, henceforth BStU, Ministerium fuer Staatssicherheit, henceforth MfS BV FfO KD Seelow Nr. 148, p. 341.

<sup>115</sup> Suspected recipients of Chinese propaganda material disseminated through the Chinese embassy in Poland were investigated for their "political views and behaviour" in June 1962. See "Aufklärung und operative Kontrolle von Verbindungen aus dem Verantwortungsbereich nach China bzw. zu diplomatischen Einrichtungen und Gesellschaften der VR China im Ausland" (1 June, 1973) BStU, MfS BV FfO KD Seelow Nr. 148, pp. 343-344.



of the Soviet Union.<sup>116</sup> The response from China was immediate and harsh. Chinese diplomats cut off all contacts with their East German counterparts and protested vociferously against Soviet policies at every opportunity.<sup>117</sup> Internal CCP estimations had also rightly guessed that Moscow was increasingly asserting its control over its East German ally.<sup>118</sup> A general diplomatic ice age subsequently set in between East Berlin and Beijing.

In the PRC, the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 meant that Chinese foreign policy was relegated behind the primacy of internal reform and stamping out ‘reactionary’ domestic elements. Foreign policy came to be regarded as a worthless, bourgeois and even reactionary activity as the entire country turned inwards.<sup>119</sup> As a consequence, China’s already brittle relations with the GDR soured even further. Red Guards, encouraged by Mao to fight foreign influences, vandalized the GDR Embassy in Beijing and damaged Ambassador Martin Bierbach’s car in August 1966. In retribution, unknown assailants defaced the Chinese Embassy in Berlin-Karlshorst.<sup>120</sup> The ultimate low-point came when four Chinese Embassy employees died as a result of a car accident on 27 June 1967 in Mecklenburg. Even though evidence tells us now that this accident was most likely a result of careless driving and bad road conditions, both the Chinese Foreign Ministry and Mao perceived it as a deliberate act against China.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> “Einschätzungen der gegen die DDR gerichteten Aktivitäten der Botschaften der Volksrepublik China und der Volksrepublik Albanien” (30 August, 1971) BStU, MfS HA XX 100 91 Teil II v. 2, p. 334.

<sup>117</sup> Meissner, pp. 103-105.

<sup>118</sup> By 1964, both countries were painfully aware that bilateral relations had declined due to the Sino-Soviet split. CFMA - 109-03919-03—邓小平副总理会见民主德国大使黑根谈话纪录介绍国内情况，谈双边关系，中苏分歧和国际共运等，14 January 1964.

<sup>119</sup> Melvin Gurtov, “The Foreign Ministry and Foreign Affairs during the Cultural Revolution”, *China Quarterly*, 1969 (40), pp. 65-102 & Ma Jisen, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).

<sup>120</sup> Fabritzek, p. 188.

<sup>121</sup> Meissner (eds.), 186; Rolf Berthold, at the time in the Far-Eastern section of the MfAA, saw evidence which showed that the car’s driver did not have a driver’s license and was therefore ill-equipped to deal with the wet, unpaved road they were driving on. After the accident, Chinese Foreign Ministry officials complained bitterly to the MfAA, implying foul play. Author’s interview with Rolf Berthold, 21 April 2011, Berlin.

## **From Maoism to Dengism: The effect of pragmatic domestic policy on Chinese foreign policy**

By the 1970s, with China still embroiled in the Cultural Revolution and East Berlin firmly in Moscow's ideological grip, few could have fathomed that GDR-PRC relations would improve against Moscow's explicit disapproval in little over ten years. So how exactly did East Berlin go about resetting its relations with a country that was anything but friendly with Moscow in the early 1980s? And how were the GDR's initiatives received in China?

To be sure, East German-Chinese rapprochement was first and foremost made possible by generational change in Beijing's leadership. As the Cultural Revolution ended with Mao's death in 1976, Deng's arrival was picked up in East Berlin as a positive development for the future of GDR-PRC relations.<sup>122</sup> A changing international environment also meant that China was able to act more freely on the international stage. While Beijing was focused on containing the Soviet menace in the late 1960s as border clashes threatened to boil over into all-out war, it had largely succeeded in isolating this threat by pursuing a policy of Sino-American rapprochement aimed at Moscow from the late 1960s on. With the Soviet threat ebbing and radical Maoist discourse declining, China's foreign policy focus started to shift to a more pragmatic attitude centered on economic revival and a return to the international stage under Deng's leadership.

This pragmatism also influenced Beijing's relations with Eastern European states as Deng sought to learn from their reform experiences in order to draw lessons for China. Politically, the time was also right for renewed engagement with the GDR. With the Soviet threat declining and border negotiations with Moscow in session, Beijing sought to use this atmosphere of relaxation to pursue closer relations with Eastern European states to which it had limited access to during the Sino-Soviet split.

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<sup>122</sup>Author's interview with Joachim Krüger, GDR Deputy Ambassador to China, 1980-83, 5 August 2011.

To be sure, all the right conditions were being created in Beijing for a new Eastern European policy. Deng Xiaoping's rise to power in 1978 marked the official end of the Cultural Revolution and the start of a new era of modernization. By ousting Mao's handpicked successor Hua Guofeng and the 'Gang of Four', Deng not only eliminated the last remnants of the Mao-era elite but also ushered in a new policy direction.<sup>123</sup> The new paramount leader immediately embarked on a path to shed the Maoist policies that, in his opinion, had placed China on a path to economic ruin.<sup>124</sup> He began work on the "Four Modernizations" of the industrial, agricultural, science & technology and national defence sectors, although stressing the continued dominance of the CCP in all political matters.<sup>125</sup> Deng's relationship with the CCP was thus more practical than ideological - not least because he had been ousted three times by Mao in his six decades in the Party and lived through numerous contradictory policies carried out in the name of communism.<sup>126</sup> He saw the Party as a tool to implement policy changes that would eventually provide the Chinese populace with improved living standards.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, in a much-heralded September 1980 interview with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci about China's future, Deng stressed that Mao's portrait would remain in Tiananmen Square, even while China sought to turn

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<sup>123</sup> Deng ardently defended his actions towards the gang of four in a May interview with Associated Press Shanghai Municipal Archives (SMA) – B1-0-116-3 — 上海市人民政府关于领导同志与外宾谈话的摘编（3）——邓小平副总理会见美联社驻京记者罗德里克德谈话情况； Also see Ezra Vogel, *Deng's Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of HUP, 2011), pp. 174-204.

<sup>124</sup> Much top-level discussion in Deng's first years in office surrounded economic matters on how to turn the country around. See for example a January 1980 discussion between Hua Guofeng, Li Xianian and Deng Xiaoping on how to turn diminish the role of the agriculture section on the Chinese economy. SMA – B1-9-114 – 花主席，邓副主席，李副主席在听取全国人民公社经营管理会议汇报时的讲话（根据记录整理，未经审阅，31 January 1980; To understand Deng Xiaoping's fluctuating career in the CCP, see: David Shambaugh, "Deng Xiaoping: The Politician", *China Quarterly* 1993 (135), 457-490. Also, it should be mentioned that Hua Guofeng did initiate some reforms after Mao's death and had a great role in re-instituting the party-state apparatus, whose power Deng was able to use to initiate his reforms. See Michael Y. M. Kau, Susan Marsh (eds.) *China in the era of Deng Xiaoping* (M.E. Sharpe, New York: 1993).

<sup>125</sup> Deng's instructions on the Four Modernizations were enthusiastically disseminated at the local level. SMA – B1-9-576 – 前十年的安排能不能同后十年的大发展衔接上? – 25 July 1982 ; Also see Hung-Yi Jan, *Deng Xiaoping's Line of Four Modernizations and Opening Up and Chinese Foreign Policy* Unpublished thesis, University of South Carolina, 1998.

<sup>126</sup> Deng's last ouster from the party was in April 1976, when he was sent to Guangdong by the Maoist dominated CCP Politburo following demonstrations honouring Zhou Enlai after the latter's death, see Goodman, p. 85.

<sup>127</sup> Virtually no economic decisions were made without his approval from his ascent to power in 1978 until his death in 1993, See Barry Noughton, "Deng Xiaoping: The Economist", *China Quarterly*, 1993 (135), p. 500.

away from previous “leftist” tendencies.<sup>128</sup>

In terms of foreign policy, Deng was eager to continue the Sino-American rapprochement. Yet whereas Mao revived relations with Washington primarily to counter the emerging Soviet military threat in light of border tensions along the Ussuri River and the Xinjiang frontier in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Deng intended to use improved relations with the west to procure technologies and expertise for his economic modernization plans.<sup>129</sup> This is not to say that Deng did not see the benefits of a closer relationship with Washington to deter the Soviet threat. Yet by 1980, the Soviet menace, from Beijing’s perspective, was nowhere near as dangerous as it had been in the late 1960s. Preliminary border negotiations had begun between Moscow and Beijing in 1979. Soviet border divisions had not moved during China’s campaign against Vietnam in February 1979, and while the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was denounced by Beijing as an incendiary and provocative Soviet aggression in Asia, it also meant that China had ceased to be a top military priority for Moscow.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, in a rarely publicized television interview in April 1980, Deng, while stressing that the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan was a threat to world peace, outlined that the danger was not directed at China but mainly at the Middle East, Europe and the Third World.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> SMA – B1-9-116-45-上海市人民政府关于领导同志与外宾谈话的摘编（14）— 邓小平同志会见意大利记者奥琳埃娜法拉奇的谈话情况 – 19 September 1980.

<sup>129</sup> A stance which accepted past mistakes and strove for more technological advancement was adopted in official rhetoric across all levels in the CCP. In Ye Jianying’s (Vice-Chair of the CC of the CCP) address at the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the PRC in 1979, he stressed the mistakes committed during the anti-rightist campaigns in 1957 and admitted that there was still a considerable technology gap between the industrialized countries and China. The remedy for this, Ye suggested, was the Four Modernizations. PAAA, C 6572 – Abteilung Ferner Osten – Rede von Ye Jianying anlässlich des Nationalfeiertages der VR China, 30 September 1979, pp. 31-73; 牛军, *中华人民共和国对外关系史概论, 1949-90* (北京: 北京大学出版社, 2010), p. 278.

<sup>130</sup> Deng estimated in a 1980 interview with a Belgian TV station that while the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan was a “very important problem for the international community” he saw the danger as mostly directed at other parts of the world, not China; For the perception of the Soviet threat in Beijing, see: Thomas P. Bernstein & Hua-Yu Li (eds.), *China learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present* (Lexington Books, New York, 2010), pp. 83-85.

<sup>131</sup> SMA – B1-9-16-19 – 领导同志与外宾谈话摘编（七）- 3 June 1980.

## Foreign policy as a means for reform: Renewed engagement with the GDR

In this light, Deng's well-received 'learning tours' to Japan and America in 1978 and early 1979, following Washington's official recognition of the PRC, only added to the feeling of security among the new pragmatic elite in Beijing. It is during this period that Deng's policies started to gain momentum.<sup>132</sup> In July 1979, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) passed legislation that authorized joint ventures with foreign firms and the establishment of 'Special Economic Zones' along the coast.<sup>133</sup> This economic opening-up was steeped in pragmatist thinking. In fact, Deng's foreign policy initiatives at the turn of the decade were almost wholly centered on securing foreign backing and experience for domestic economic reform and advancement.<sup>134</sup>

This policy direction had clear implications for China's relations with Eastern European states.<sup>135</sup> 'Differentiation' and luring away Soviet satellite states in order to destabilize the Soviet Union, as practiced by Beijing during the height of the Sino-Soviet Split, was no longer the sole intention behind pursuing contacts with Soviet allies.<sup>136</sup> China now had very practical reasons to seek engagement with Eastern Europe. Firstly, Deng was interested in how socialist states responded to reform. In this respect, Eastern European states, unlike Western European states, could be looked at as microcosms of what could be expected if widespread reforms were to take

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<sup>132</sup> Deng actively fostered these relationships in order to acquire know-how. During a visit by a high-ranking Japanese delegation in March 1980, he asked extensively about "Japanese production activities", thanking specifically for his tour of (指日产) automotive plant. SMA – B1-9-116-92 – 国家经济委员会关于邓小平副总理会见“日本高级经营这访华团”的谈话纪录材料 – 31 March 1980.

<sup>133</sup> Ying & Marsh, p. 11.

<sup>134</sup> Deng repeatedly emphasized China's desire to procure technologies to foreign visitors. See 冷享, 汪作玲, *邓小平年谱(1975-1997)* (北京: 中央文献出版社, 2007).

<sup>135</sup> Chinese scholars such as Niu Jun have also concluded that renewed relations with Western European countries were sought in part to counter the Soviet Union, see 牛军, *中华人民共和国对外关系史概论, 1949-90* (北京: 北京大学出版社, 2010), p. 278.

<sup>136</sup> To be sure, the 'differentiation' strategy remained a subtle part of Beijing's policy up until the late 1980s. Author's interview with Joachim Krüger, GDR Deputy Ambassador to China, 1980-83, August 5, 2011. This strategy was applied not only to the GDR but all Soviet-bloc states. Polish diplomat Czyrek noted from Beijing that China was trying to drive a wedge between Poland and the SU in December 1980- **Secret Telegram No. 3267/IV - From Beijing to Warsaw** Archive of Modern Records, Warsaw (AAN), KC PZPR, XIA/1273, Obtained from CWIHP Interkit Digital Archive.

place in a socialist country. In East Germany for example, Beijing was interested in the effects that Honecker's 1971 social and economic reforms had on the living standards and productivity of the GDR. Trade Minister Zheng Yishan led a sizeable trade delegation to East Germany in April 1980 to study exactly this.<sup>137</sup> Secondly, the economic aspects of cooperation were alluring to China. Beijing had clear ideas on how to benefit from Eastern European economies, especially in terms of scientific-technical cooperation.<sup>138</sup> As both sides were short of hard currency, it was hoped that Eastern European technology, industrial supplies and know-how could be exchanged for Chinese consumer goods.<sup>139</sup>

At the GDR Embassy in Beijing and in the Far Eastern Section of the MfAA in East Berlin, Deng's new economic course initiated a re-appraisal of the GDR's relations with China. Indeed, the Far Eastern section noted in October 1979 that the present course of China was changing and now solely revolves around the 'core' policy of the Four Modernizations.<sup>140</sup> Letters from the Far Eastern Section of the Foreign Ministry to Ambassador Helmut Liebermann in Beijing stressed the need to observe the "changing nature of China" rather than treat it as a constant Maoist enemy - a position that Liebermann had supported since 1977.<sup>141</sup> The MfAA's China section also concluded that renewed relations would yield economic and political benefits.<sup>142</sup> The GDR Embassy was not the only Soviet-Bloc post to pick up on Beijing's change in tone. For example, the Bulgarian Embassy in Beijing also noted subtle adjustments in Chinese attitudes towards Bulgaria in its annual report of 1978, as it was allowed more freedoms to

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<sup>137</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 21/87 – Beziehungen DDR-VR China (Allgemeine Einschätzung), 1-4, April, 1980

<sup>138</sup> Hershberg, Radchenko, Vamos & Wolff, 2011, pp. 29-30.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas R. Robinson, David Shambaugh (eds.) *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 279.

<sup>140</sup> In conjunction with a post-Mao pragmatist course, the GDR Embassy also noted a 'nuancing' of Mao's role in the party's history. At an exhibition about CCP history at the Beijing Revolution Museum, Zhou Enlai and Zhu De's role were played up in the revolutionary process. PAAA, C 6570 – 'Zu einigen Fragen der innen- und aussenpolitischen Entwicklung der VR China – Botschaft der DDR in der VR China – Peking, 30 October, 1979. pp. 133-140.

<sup>141</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2283/83 – Leiterbriefe an Peking – 1980-81.

<sup>142</sup> Author's interview with Rolf Berthold, Head of the Far Eastern Section of MfAA 1979-1982, GDR Ambassador to China, 1982-1990, Berlin, 12 April 2011; Author's interview with Joachim Krüger, GDR Deputy Ambassador to China, 1980-1983, Berlin, 5 August 2011.

arrange visits.<sup>143</sup> These developments were fervently discussed at regular Warsaw Pact Ambassador's meetings.<sup>144</sup>

### **The abandonment of Soviet China-policy – From total adherence to total disobedience**

East Berlin recognized Beijing's new course at a time when its own foreign policy was undergoing substantial shifts from a stance of total adherence to Moscow's line to a more independent stance. Indeed, even though East German attitudes had started to reappraise China in light of Deng's rise, as late as 1979 foreign policy coordination between Moscow and East Berlin still translated into the latter's absolute subordination to Moscow. Nowhere was this coordination displayed more clearly than in the GDR's reaction to China's border war with Vietnam. During the crisis, Honecker showed a total willingness to coordinate his policies with the Kremlin and even went out of his way to reiterate Soviet condemnations of Chinese aggression towards Vietnam. However, as events would tell, this would be the last time that the East German leader would submit to Soviet antagonisms towards China.

Indeed, by the late 1970s, Honecker was styling himself as a visionary re-inventor of the GDR. Having made significant inroads in legitimizing the GDR as a sovereign and recognized state, he celebrated the signing of the *Grundlagenvertrag* ("Basic Treaty") between Bonn and Berlin in December 1972 as the start of a new and independent East Germany. West Germany's de-facto recognition of the GDR meant first and foremost that East Berlin was able to establish relations with states that had hitherto refused to recognize its legitimacy, largely due to the international repercussions of the Hallstein Doctrine.<sup>145</sup> UN membership and the willingness of

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<sup>143</sup> Statements from Ambassador Doncho Donchev in Proceedings of ETH Conference in Xiaoyuan Liu and Vojtech Mastny, eds., *China and Eastern Europe, 1960s-1980s* (Zurich: Zürcher Beiträge, Nr. 72, 2004). 24-26 March 2004, p. 149.

<sup>144</sup> Author's interview with Rolf Berthold, Head of the Far Eastern Section of MfAA 1979-1982, GDR Ambassador to China, 1982-1990, Berlin, 12 April 2011.

<sup>145</sup> GDR foreign relations before the *Grundlagenvertrag* has been described as "a fight against international isolation"

non-socialist states to begin diplomatic relations with the GDR gave Honecker and the Politburo enhanced prestige.<sup>146</sup> For the East German leader, foreign policy served a dual purpose of legitimizing the GDR on the international stage as well as validating his own position in the SED leadership and within the Soviet Bloc.<sup>147</sup> “He enjoyed Foreign policy”, Günter Sieber, former Head of the International Department of the SED Central Committee once remarked, “...the relaxed nature in which he spoke to foreign delegates you rarely saw at domestic functions”.<sup>148</sup> The rising importance Honecker attached to foreign policy meant that he increasingly monopolized decision-making power. The Politburo became a rubberstamp mechanism to validate the General Secretary’s foreign policy decisions. SED-Politburo member Günter Schabowski recalled that by the late 1970s *no* foreign policy decision was made without the express consent of Honecker, especially those that could increase his international prestige and standing.<sup>149</sup>

Immediately after the conclusion of the Basic Treaty, Honecker began to see himself not only as a rising star on the international scene, but his growing confidence also reinforced his belief that he could perhaps use his newly gained visibility to underline his position as a key upholder of Soviet general interests, thereby solidifying the GDR as a policy-leader in the Soviet bloc.<sup>150</sup> Accordingly, he sought to pursue and widen the GDR’s influence in the third world. Remnants of this stance could be observed as late as 1979, when adherence to the Soviet anti-China line meant that East Berlin condemned Beijing’s punitive war against Vietnam. Thus, even though East Berlin appreciated that Deng’s economic policies represented a drastic departure from

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dictated by the Hallstein Doctrine, see Wilhelm Bruns, *Die Aussenpolitik der DDR*, (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1985), 22; On West Germany’s attempts to isolate East Germany, see William Glenn Gray, *Germany’s Cold War – The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>146</sup> After the signing of the Grundlagenvertrag on December 21, 1972, the GDR was able to establish diplomatic relations with an additional 96 states within 4 years. Bruns, pp. 27-28.

<sup>147</sup> Claus Montag et al. (eds.) *Die verschwundene Diplomatie* (Berlin: Berliner Debatte Wissenschaftsverlag, 2003), p. 29-32.

<sup>148</sup> Norbert F. Pötzl, *Erich Honecker* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002), p. 233.

<sup>149</sup> Günter Schabowski, *Das Politbüro* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1990), p. 21; Montag, p. 34.

<sup>150</sup> Honecker thus became a fervent conduit for Soviet positions to West European socialist parties. His efforts were rewarded as East Berlin was chosen as the site for a major conference of European communist parties in June 1976. The GDR also adopted Brezhnev’s views on East-West relations, combining praise for Soviet détente initiatives with remarks against Western aggression. See Michael K. Sodaro *Moscow, Germany and the West – From Khrushchev to Gorbachev* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), p. 158.



Mao, its own foreign policy still showed signs of continuity in early 1979. Indeed, East Berlin went to great lengths to repeatedly condemn Chinese aggression. During an extended tour of Africa from 15 to 22 February 1979, Honecker feverishly upheld the conclusions reached at the tenth Interkit in Havana, where, under Soviet behest, leaders from Soviet-bloc states vowed to expose Chinese “cooperation with imperialism” in light of Deng Xiaoping’s January visit to the U.S. and to especially condemn its aggressive stance against Vietnam, which had concluded a twenty-five year mutual defence treaty with the Soviet Union in November 1978.<sup>151</sup>

On his first stop in Libya from 15-17 February, Honecker pressed Muammar Gaddafi to sign a joint declaration to condemn Chinese aggression against Vietnam and express his solidarity with Hanoi, only to be rebuffed by Gaddafi. Extracting the positives out of the meeting and eager to have been successful in pushing forward Moscow’s line, the Politburo report of the visit stated that Gaddafi expressed in private meetings that he *did* condemn the aggressive actions of China but couldn’t do so openly because of fears that China would then overtly throw its military support behind regional rival Egypt. At the news that Chinese troops had crossed the border into Vietnam on 17 February, Honecker stepped up his rhetoric on his next stop in Angola.

Here, President Agostinho Neto was able to –with Honecker’s prodding– “overcome initial reservations to condemn the Chinese invasion”. Honecker encountered more support for his anti-Chinese stance in Mozambique. In Maputo, President Samora Moises Machel informed him that he condemned the Chinese aggression and had called for the immediate withdrawal of all Chinese troops from Vietnam. However, nowhere was the East German delegation’s enthusiasm for the Soviet-directed anti-China stance more evident than during Honecker’s stop in Zimbabwe. Throughout consultations, Robert Mugabe displayed a clear reluctance to make any strong

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<sup>151</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/2203 “Bericht über die 10. Interne China-Beratung der Vertreter der Zentralkomitees von acht Bruderparteien vom 11. bis 13. Dezember 1978 in Havana”, January 4, 1979. For more on Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation against China, see Donald Zagoria (eds.) *Soviet Policy in East Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

statements against China. Whilst Mugabe stated that the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) condemned aggression from one socialist state towards another, he recounted that China had always supported ZANU and that relations with Beijing rested on strong foundations. Unsatisfied with Mugabe's line, Hermann Axen, Head of the International Department of the SED Central Committee, went on the offensive. He declared that China's aggression against Vietnam was the most damning evidence that Beijing "was collaborating with imperialism against peaceful socialist advancement". Axen continued to press Mugabe to conclude a joint declaration against China, to which Mugabe only responded that internal consultations were still taking place on this and that he could only respond in a couple of days. Displaying clear disappointment at Mugabe's position, Axen openly criticized the fundamentally wrong stance (*grundlegend falsche Haltung*) of Mugabe and cancelled the joint press conference.<sup>152</sup>

Undoubtedly, the GDR's historically close relations with Vietnam played a role in East Berlin's adamant and angry responses to Chinese aggression in front of the African leaders. But, Honecker's Africa-tour and similar official visits, such as his January visit to India, where he stressed the GDR's 'unbreakable' bond with the USSR revealed the underlying dynamics in GDR foreign policy that rendered friendly GDR-PRC seemingly unlikely in the spring of 1979, making the start of a rapprochement a mere year later even more remarkable.<sup>153</sup>

When word had reached East Berlin that Chinese troops had begun their punitive war against Vietnam, the first point on a list of actions to be taken by the Politburo on 29 February

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<sup>152</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/2214 – Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch einer Partei- und Staatsdelegation der DDR unter Leitung des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genosse E. Honecker, in der SLAVJ vom 15. Bis 17. Februar 1979, in der VR Angola von 17. bis 20. Februar 1979, in der Republik Sambia vom 20. Bis 22. Februar 1979, in der VR Mocambique vom 22. Bis 24. Februar 1979 sowie über die Begegnung mit den Führern der SWAPO in Namibia, der Patriotischen Front von Simbabwe und des ANC von Südafrika. 27 February 1979.

<sup>153</sup> When meeting the General Secretary of the Indian Communist Party, C.R. Rao in September 1979, Honecker also outlandishly remarked that China "wants to have half of the USSR", BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/2205 – Bericht über den offiziellen Besuch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen E. Honecker, in der Republik Indien vom 8. Bis 12. Januar 1979– 9 January 1979.

1979 was “Consultations with the Soviet Union.”<sup>154</sup> Moscow’s response was to provide a thorough “official interpretation” of events in Vietnam to the GDR and other Soviet-bloc states in mid-March. It consisted of a background analysis of Beijing’s goals and aims and specific actions to be taken by respective East German government departments. To outline the anti-socialist nature of China’s campaign, the interpretation speculated that Deng Xiaoping had coordinated its war with American President Jimmy Carter during his January 1979 visit to Washington.<sup>155</sup> Using Moscow’s directive as a call to action, East German responses against China ranged from ordering the publication of press-items and TV programs that condemned the Chinese aggression, to protesting to the chargé d’affaires in East Berlin, Chen Tien Tsien, and barring Vice Trade-Minister Chen Jie from visiting the Leipzig Messe trade show.<sup>156</sup> These measures came after Le Thanh Nghi, member of the Vietnamese Politburo, was reassured of the GDR’s absolute support of Vietnam during his mid-March visit to Berlin.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, in line with Moscow’s emergency aid shipments to Vietnam, the GDR proposed delivering aid to the tune of 110 million Marks to Hanoi in early March 1979, including a detailed list of weaponry worth more than 37 million Marks.<sup>158</sup>

In its own internal analysis of the Vietnam problem of 22 March 1979, the Politburo added its own flavour to Soviet criticisms of China. Revealing its discomfort and insecurities around budding West German-Chinese relations and reiterating its observations at the tenth Interkit in Havana<sup>159</sup>, the Politburo strongly condemned China’s continued support for ‘revanchism’ in its

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<sup>154</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV/2/2/1766 – Aggression Chinas gegen die Sozialistische Republik Vietnam. 20 February 1979.

<sup>155</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ IV B 2/20/603 - Zu den Ergebnissen und Auswirkungen der Chinesischen Aggression gegen die SRV. 20 March 1979.

<sup>156</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ IV B 2/20/603 – DDR-China Beziehungen - 22 March, 1979; PAAA, MFAA ZR 21/87 – Beziehungen DDR-VR China (Allgemeine Einschätzung) – Zu den Beziehungen DDR-VR China, March 1981, p. 4.

<sup>157</sup> After dramatic observations of Chinese aggression from Le Thanh Nghi, Honecker responded with full support for the SRV, remarking “How can a country that calls itself socialist, attack another socialist country?”, BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2219, 15 March 1979.

<sup>158</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1768, 6 March 1979.

<sup>159</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/2203 – Zehnte interne China Beratung mit den Vertretern der Zentralkomitees der acht Bruderparteien von 11 bis 13 Dezember, 1978 in Havana– 4 January 1979.

relations with the FRG and asserted that Beijing should take note of the sovereign interests of the GDR.<sup>160</sup> The Politburo finally concluded that there was “no basis for the development of political relations between the PRC and GDR in the present situation”.<sup>161</sup>

Leaving nothing to chance, the Central Committee (CC) of the CPSU called together an internal meeting on March 30 in Moscow to further ensure a common line against China. Addressing party delegates from Bulgaria, Cuba, Mongolia, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Vietnam and the GDR, Konstantin Russakov, Secretary of the CPSU CC for International Affairs, observed that the overall tendencies in Chinese hostility indicated that Beijing was interested in using invasions like this as a springboard to dominate all of Southeast Asia. Almost to re-assure the delegates that Sino-Soviet relations were still hostile and that they could count on the continued leadership of the Soviet Union to lead an anti-China front, Russakov stressed the futility of ongoing Sino-Soviet border negotiations and outlined further retaliation in light of Beijing’s unilateral cancellation of the Sino-Soviet friendship treaty in February 1979.<sup>162</sup>

### **A changing tone – Inter-German relations’ effect on Soviet-GDR relations**

Far from responding with anger, Beijing took East German protestations against its war with Vietnam as a simple fact of life. It expected a loyal client state to defend the Soviet position when a close Soviet ally is attacked by Beijing. Certainly, few in Beijing or East Berlin, even

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<sup>160</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ IV B 2/20/603. Since diplomatic relations were established between the FRG and the PRC in 1972, political contacts were quickly established and trade bloomed from 874 million DM in 1974 to 2.7 billion DM in 1978. The PRC, in an attempt to foster better relations with the FRG, made clear that it supported an eventual German unification. See Mechthild Leutner, Wolfram Adolphi, and Peter Merker. *Deutschland und China: Politik, Militär, Wirtschaft, Kultur : Eine Quellensammlung*. Quellen Zur Geschichte Der Deutsch-Chinesischen Beziehungen 1897-1995. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), pp. 143-144.

<sup>161</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ IV B 2/20/603 – Zu den Beziehungen DDR-VR China, 22 March 1979.

<sup>162</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/2222, 30 March 1979; Informed by the regular Soviet briefings to respective Soviet-bloc ambassadors, the GDR Embassy in Berlin reported in 27 December 1979 that the Chinese government was delaying the negotiations, that the Chinese delegation was behaving brashly during the talks and that Beijing was disseminating new anti-Soviet propaganda. PAAA, C 6569 – Zu den Grundlagen der Aussenpolitik der VR China im Jahre 1979 und den 1980 zu erwartenden aussenpolitischen Aktivitäten, pp. 213-214.

though both sides had observed improving conditions for an re-engagement before the Sino-Vietnamese border war, now anticipated any significant improvements in Sino-GDR relations as the war raged.

However, from late 1979 onwards a series of unforeseeable events would drastically change the GDR's foreign policy calculus and, as a result, drastically alter how East Berlin viewed relations with China. Indeed, at the same time that Beijing was re-embracing foreign policy and changing its tone towards the GDR, the seeds were being sown for a dramatic recalibration of the Moscow-East Berlin, 'Centre-Satellite' relationship. First, Moscow's gradual reluctance in the early 1980s to provide East Germany with unparalleled access to cheap raw resources sparked the realization in East Berlin that it needed to rely more heavily on previously established trade relations with Bonn. Added to this, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the threat of imminent collapse of superpower détente –and by implication the possible collapse of inter-German cooperation- served to push East Berlin away from Moscow's international strategy. Soviet and GDR interests had started to diverge on the most basic level. East Berlin's desire and need to pursue its own agenda in the midst of changing economic and international factors pushed forward East Berlin's desire to pursue a more 'selfish' and independent economic and foreign policy. As a direct result, rather than blindly following Soviet policies, East Berlin was now more willing to assert its own agency in its foreign affair dealings to seek tangible benefits for itself, even at the cost of defying Moscow in doing so. It is out of this dramatic reorientation that East Berlin started to shed Soviet dictates to engage with China. And in the aftermath of the Sino-Vietnamese border war, declining Soviet raw material deliveries were a major catalyst in East Berlin's foreign policy recalibration.

To be sure, the gradual slowdown of the Soviet economy in the late 1970s had an immediate effect on Soviet-East German trade relations. In June 1979, during the GDR-USSR 10-year plan coordination meeting for the period of 1981 to 1990, the Soviet delegation from the

Soviet planning commission GOSPLAN showed a clear reluctance to be held down to rigid raw material delivery commitments to the GDR in the coming years, stressing that Moscow had no such clause in their plan coordination with other COMECON states. To the great distress of the GDR, the Soviet delegation finally rejected East German suggestions on “fixing the delivery-level by using 1980 as a basis-amount for the raw material deliveries until 1990”, explaining that the USSR could in no way hold such obligations for a time-span of 10 years.<sup>163</sup>

Moscow’s reluctance to provide the GDR with a steady supply of raw materials came at a point when the GDR economy was also showing clear signs of stress. Though explanations differ as to the exact cause and start of the downturn, one thing is certain: statistical yearbooks and national accounts were tampered with to give the impression that everything was in order, when the real picture was rather grim.<sup>164</sup> The GDR economy faced a steady decline as its manufactured goods could only be pushed to fellow COMECON countries while state-sponsored initiatives such as its heavy investment in microelectronics were failing to pay off.<sup>165</sup>

Ironically, the only thing that kept the East German economy afloat -aside from the Soviet Union’s subsidies and an (albeit diminishing) willingness to purchase second-rate manufactures from the GDR- was increasing trade and economic cooperation with West Germany. Between 1975 and 1980, imports from West Germany rose from 3.34 to 5.58 billion DM per annum while exports into the FRG rose from 3.92 to 5.29 billion DM in the same time period.<sup>166</sup> The FRG was

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<sup>163</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/2238, - Entwurf des Programms der Spezialisierung und Kooperation zwischen der DDR und der UdSSR für den Zeitraum 1981 bis 1990, 19 June 1979.

<sup>164</sup> While the SED Central Committee’s chief finance expert, Günter Ehrensberger, traces the start of East German economic decline from November 1973, when he was allegedly told by Honecker to keep quiet when informing the East German leader that foreign debt would rise from its still modest 2 billion Valuta Marks to 20 billion by 1980, the Head of the State Planning Commission, Gerhard Schürer blamed it on the conclusions of the VIII Party Congress in 1971, which enshrined into policy the notion that German communism must support a generous consumer society and welfare state, a policy that Günter Mittag, the man behind Germany’s planned economy, would uphold and defend as the party orthodoxy for the next decade and half . See BA-SAPMO, DY 30 IV 2/1/708, Dargestellung von Ehrensberger (statement during ninth meeting of the Central Committee), November 9, 1989, and Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution : The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 60-61.

<sup>165</sup> Olaf Klenke, “Globalisierung, Mikroelektronik und das Scheitern der DDR-Wirtschaft”, *Deutschland Archiv*, 35/3 (2002), pp. 421-424.

<sup>166</sup> Benno-Eide Siebs. *Die Aussenpolitik Der DDR 1976-1989 : Strategien Und Grenzen*, (Paderborn: Schöningh,

bankrolling a series of ambitious infrastructure projects, including the Hamburg-Berlin highway, the majority of which ran on East German soil. GDR economic historian Maria Haendcke-Hoppe Arndt has speculated that West German economic goodwill and inter-German trade was probably the single most important factor that kept the GDR economy above water at this time.<sup>167</sup>

Deepening inter-German economic relations caused great concern in Moscow, as the Kremlin feared that East Berlin would slip under Bonn's influence. In a March 1979 meeting in Moscow, Gromyko warned Fischer not to sacrifice too much for material advantages from the FRG and reminded him that "political questions and economic questions must be viewed in conjunction."<sup>168</sup> Despite the Soviet unease at German-German dialogue, as further displayed by Gromyko's message to Honecker in December 1979 that he and Brezhnev were against a planned meeting between Schmidt and Honecker, the GDR could hardly turn back on inter-German cooperation at this point, as transfer payments from the FRG presented the only alternative to economic ruin.<sup>169</sup> While Moscow sought to keep the GDR from politically slipping westwards, East Berlin remained determined to continue pursuing inter-German cooperation. After all, the GDR's economic survival depended on it.

### **Don't threaten our détente – East Berlin's intransigence towards Moscow's war in Afghanistan**

As Gromyko already sensed, East Berlin's priorities were shifting dangerously westwards

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1999), p. 176

<sup>167</sup> Maria Haendcke-Hoppe-Arndt, "Aussenwirtschaft und innerdeutscher Handel" in Eberhard Khrt, Hannsjoerg Buck & Gunter Holzweissig (eds.) *Die wirtschaftliche und ökologische Situation der DDR in den achtziger Jahren*. (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1996), p. 1556. Undoubtedly, the business contacts of Schalck-Golodkowski as well as the ransoms paid out by the FRG for political prisoners from the GDR did also add to the depleting GDR coffers, see Eide-Siebs, p. 176.

<sup>168</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/2217 –Bericht über den Besuch des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Genossen O. Fischer, vom 27. Februar bis 3. März 1979 in der UdSSR, 6 March 1979.

<sup>169</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2//2A/2305–Bericht über die Gespräche des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Genossen O. Fischer mit Genossen A.A. Gromyko, Minister für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der UdSSR, 4 December 1979.

due to its deepening economic interactions with Bonn. To the lament of Soviet leaders, divergences between Moscow and East Berlin didn't stop there. As Moscow sought to prop up the socialist regime in Afghanistan in 1979, East Berlin found itself once again ignored as it was left to deal with the potential international repercussions of Moscow's invasion. Indeed, East Berlin's reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 is more than telling. While the GDR Politburo convened an emergency meeting on December 28 to express support for the Soviet invasion, one can only imagine the distress that the SED leadership felt at the prospect of what the collapse of détente and renewed superpower confrontation could mean for the future of inter-German cooperation.<sup>170</sup> Holding fast to previous arrangements for a German-German summit between himself and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, Honecker adhered to the planned date of 27 February 1980, showing a strong reluctance to let rapidly worsening transatlantic relations affect his own détente with the FRG. Only Moscow's final order on 23 January 1980 that the German-German summit be cancelled prevented Schmidt's visit to East Germany from taking place.<sup>171</sup> Not only threatening its cooperation with West Germany, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan also threatened to unravel the GDR's laboriously constructed, and fragile, relations with African states. Third World suspicion of Moscow grew exponentially after the Red Army intervened in Kabul. Association with the USSR was becoming more detrimental than ever.<sup>172</sup>

East Berlin was not shy about showing its displeasure towards the Soviet intervention. From the outset of the invasion, Honecker sought to avoid having any part in Moscow's

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<sup>170</sup> This was obvious to many diplomats in East Berlin. A FCO cable back to London from 14 January 1980 remarked that a MfAA official "gave nothing away and rehearsed the pro-Soviet party line, Morris [British diplomat] derived the impression that the GDR government are uneasy about the general situation, in particular about possible western reactions", further mentioning that Honecker did not mention Afghanistan at a January 10 reception. The National Archives at Kew Gardens, henceforth as TNA – Foreign and Commonwealth Office, henceforth as FCO 37/2242; The fact that the initial decision to invade Afghanistan had not been communicated to East Berlin must have irked Honecker even further.

<sup>171</sup> BA-SAPMO DY 30/ J IV 2/2/1821 – Konsultationen zwischen Hermann Axen, M.A. Suslow und B.N. Ponomarjow am 23-24 January 1980 in Moscow, 28 December 1979.

<sup>172</sup> Gareth Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 187-89.



Afghanistan campaign. The second anniversary of the Afghan communist revolution in April 1980 only received scant mention in Politburo meetings. Aside from a couple of obligatory articles published in *Neues Deutschland* and *Horizont*, only four pages in the corresponding Politburo report were dedicated to this event, compared to the six pages that the relatively mundane visit to Belgium of Horst Sindermann, President of the Volkskammer, received.<sup>173</sup> Detecting East Berlin's disengagement, Moscow found it necessary in May 1980 to encourage the GDR leadership to show more support for its campaign to prop up Babrak Karmal's government.<sup>174</sup>

Honecker was desperate to not let Moscow's war damage inter-German relations and deprive East Berlin of its economic lifeline. Eager to bring this message across to Bonn, Honecker used Josip Tito's funeral in May to express to Chancellor Schmidt, who was among the many non-socialist leaders in attendance, that he was still very much interested in further FRG-GDR cooperation.<sup>175</sup> It didn't help matters that Brezhnev's repeated criticisms of Honecker's engagement with the FRG must have seemed somewhat hypocritical to the East German leader, especially considering that Moscow had planned to host the West German chancellor in June of the same year.<sup>176</sup>

Without a doubt, Afghanistan and its potential fallout for East German *Friedenspolitik* vis-à-vis Bonn was a watershed event. East Berlin now realized that strict adherence to the Soviet line, which had precipitated renewed East-West tensions, was an untenable way forward for the GDR. To East Berlin's dismay, this would not be the end to a series of emerging frictions between the Pankow regime and the Kremlin. As 1980 wore on, Moscow's seeming unwillingness and

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<sup>173</sup> It's also interesting to note that relatively low-ranking Werner Walde, candidate of the Politburo and first secretary of the regional leadership of the SED Cottbus and Wolfgang Bayreuther, State Secretary for work and salaries were dispatched to partake in the festivities. DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/2313, 15 April 1980.

<sup>174</sup> Eide-Siebs, p. 169.

<sup>175</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/2319 – Tito's Bestattung, 7-8 in Belgrad, 13 May 1980.

<sup>176</sup> Avril Pittmann, *From Ostpolitik to Reunification: West German-Soviet Political Relations since 1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 134-151.

inability to control Polish shipyard strikes added to a growing list of worries in East Berlin. After rolling out a counterproductive international strategy that threatened détente, was Moscow now also willing to let destabilizing influences rein free in its own backyard?

### **East German disillusionment and the Solidarność strikes**

When protests broke out in several Polish shipyards in September, the SED Politburo pondered their long-term causes and possible consequences in a series of detailed reports.<sup>177</sup> Out of a palpable fear that developments in neighboring Poland could spill westwards, East Berlin made it perfectly clear to outside observers that it would not tolerate any such unrest in its domain.<sup>178</sup> Following the Polish crisis in every detail, the Politburo lamented even the slightest retreat of the Polish communists and estimated in early September that the circumstances were graver than those surrounding the Hungarian crisis in 1956.<sup>179</sup> Moscow's solution of strengthening Polish leader Stanislaw Kania's hand in dealing with Solidarity didn't go far enough for Honecker, who advocated mass arrests and an internal clamp-down, even if this led to bloodshed.<sup>180</sup> Sending a message to any potential dissidents in East Germany and eager to show his foreign policy competence, he pushed for a Moscow meeting of Soviet Bloc party chiefs in early December.<sup>181</sup> At that meeting, Honecker's repeatedly criticised Kania's capitulations to *Solidarność* and demanded that an armed intervention force be assembled to crush the unrest. But Brezhnev's hesitated. The Soviet leader insisted that Kania be given another chance to deal with

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<sup>177</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/2351 – Analyse “Die Entwicklung der Volksrepublik Polen seit dem VI. Parteitag der PVAP” –, 30 September 1980.

<sup>178</sup> The Gera address on October 13, in which Honecker demanded that West Germany grant the GDR full ambassador status, recognize its citizenship, solve the Elbe boundary dispute as well as disband a monitoring station in Salzgitter which was used to record human-rights violations in the GDR was designed as an overt message to domestic as well as international audiences that the hard-line was alive and well in Berlin. A. James McAdams, *Germany Divided* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 139-140; Scholtyseck, p. 123.

<sup>179</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/2347 –Zur Lage in der Volksrepublik Polen, 8 September 1980.

<sup>180</sup> Honecker-Olszowski conversation, 20 November 1980, in Michael Kubina & Mandred Wilke, “*Hart und kompromisslos durchgreifen!*”: *Die SED contra Polen 1980/81* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), pp.101-114.

<sup>181</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2/1868 – Zur Lage in der Volksrepublik Polen, 28 November 1980.

the situation himself.<sup>182</sup> With Brezhnev's health deteriorating and the situation in Afghanistan getting more complicated by the week, Moscow's position on Poland was perhaps best privately expressed by Brezhnev's eventual successor, and the man behind the decision to invade Afghanistan, Yuri Andropov, in 1981: "We cannot risk it, even if Poland were to be ruled by *Solidarność*, so be it."<sup>183</sup>

Moscow's reluctance to intervene in Poland came as a tremendous shock to Honecker, who had looked to the Kremlin as the Warsaw Pact's resolute leader and had expected decisive armed action to bolster the hard-line in Warsaw. Fittingly, Honecker displayed the unyielding position that he had expected from Moscow. When Brezhnev asked Honecker in August 1981 in despair: "Respond to me please, Erich, on a delicate question: Can Kania master the situation? Do you personally have confidence in him?", Honecker resolutely and confidently responded with a clear plan to call for Kania's resignation and recommended that Stefan Olszowski, a former Polish Ambassador to East Germany and the Central Committee Secretary for Ideology and Media, succeed him as PZPR Secretary.<sup>184</sup>

Soviet inaction to the Polish unrest only added to the SED Politburo's conviction that Moscow's international stance was becoming increasingly incompatible with East Berlin's concerns. Matters were only going to get worse for East German-Soviet relations as Soviet economic troubles eventually revealed that on top of disagreements over Moscow's international strategy and doubts in its leadership capacity, the deteriorating state of the Soviet economy and resulting decline in oil deliveries to the GDR would add to a growing sense of abandonment in East Berlin.

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<sup>182</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/2368 – ,Bericht über das Treffen der führenden Repräsentanten der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages am 5. Dezember 1980 in Moskau, 9 December 1980; Vojtech Mastny, "The Soviet Non-Invasion of Poland in 1980/81 and the End of the Cold War", Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 23 September 1998, p. 8-15.

<sup>183</sup> CPSU Politburo minutes, 10 December 1981 in Mastny, p. 29.

<sup>184</sup> Mastny, p. 24.

## Soviet abandonment: Missing oil deliveries

That the GOSPLAN planners were reluctant to agree on a long-term oil subsidy plan with the GDR can be attributed to a general slow-down in the Soviet economy. Indeed, there is considerable evidence to suggest that in addition to food-shortages and GOSPLAN coordination errors in the so-called ‘Brezhnev stagnation’ period from the mid-1970s to Brezhnev’s death, Soviet oil production came to be severely affected by factors ranging from pipeline ruptures to ethnic violence in key oil-producing areas. As a result, annual gas production from Azerbaijan, Baku and the important Krasnodar and Stavropol regions plummeted in the early 1980s.<sup>185</sup> Of the already decreased amount of Soviet oil available, Moscow, rather than shipping subsidized oil to its satellites, decided to sell an increasing amount of its hydrocarbons at world-market prices to the West in an attempt to plug the holes in the Soviet economy.<sup>186</sup>

In light of these developments, no Soviet-bloc state was in danger of losing more than the GDR. Devoid of any natural resources, East Germany depended almost exclusively on subsidized Soviet raw materials.<sup>187</sup> Having already reneged on its promises for a long-term agreement in June 1979, Soviet officials approached the SED leadership to raise the price of oil on East Germany in January 1981, stating that the higher price would still be 55% of actual world market prices.<sup>188</sup> On 3 August 1981, Brezhnev went a step further by warning Honecker that the Soviet Union had to drastically reduce its oil deliveries to the GDR. Citing not only oil shortages but also a fallout from successive bad harvests, Brezhnev admitted that he doubted the USSR could fulfil its oil

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<sup>185</sup> Richard Kaufman & John Hardt (eds.) *The Former Soviet Union in Transition* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), pp. 463-464.

<sup>186</sup> Steiner, pp. 161-165.

<sup>187</sup> Former Soviet Ambassador to GDR, Pjotr Abrassimov, stated in a 1992 interview with the Russian newspaper *Iswetija* that the GDR ‘could have not lasted even one year without Soviet oil, gas and metal deliveries’. Cited in Fred Oldenbourg, “Eine endliche Geschichte. Zum Verhältnis DDR-UdSSR 1970 bis 1990” in Gisela Helwig (eds.), *Rückblicke auf die DDR – Festsschrift für Ilse Spittmann* (Köln: Edition Deutschland Archiv im Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1995), p. 163.

<sup>188</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/2376 –Festlegung der RGW-Vertragspreise fuer Erdöl, Erdgas und metallurgische Erzeugnisse im Handel mit der UdSSR für 1981– 13 January 1981.

delivery obligations to the GDR in the near future.<sup>189</sup> Repeated lobby attempts, in which a clearly distraught Honecker explained that any cutbacks would have dire consequences for the GDR, especially since East Berlin had devised its next five-year plan with subsidized Soviet oil in mind, fell on deaf ears.<sup>190</sup> Sensing abandonment, Honecker forcefully reminded Brezhnev that part of the GDR's oil quota went to supporting the sizable Soviet garrison and, to illustrate his absolute desperation, asked Konstantin Russakov whether it would be worth "destabilizing the GDR and shaking the confidence of our people in the party and state leaders for two million tons of oil."<sup>191</sup> In his memoirs, Honecker would write that he knew that the shortened annual volume of 17 million tons from a previous volume of 19 million tons would have devastating effects on the East German economy.<sup>192</sup> This, coupled with the unilateral cancellation of three to four million tons Soviet food aid in the form of agricultural products meant that the East German leader was forced to plug the gaps by buying from the West.<sup>193</sup>

Honecker's growing disenchantment with Moscow was perhaps best recounted by Egon Winkelmann, GDR Ambassador to Moscow from 1981 to 1987. Before Winkelmann was dispatched to Moscow in 1981, Honecker imparted on him that "when you are dealing with economic questions, the main consideration should first and foremost be the GDR... [in East Berlin] the Politburo decides, not the Soviet ambassador, nor Moscow...we are not puppets who dance for the Soviet foreign ministry."<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/ 2419 – Bericht über das Treffen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des Zentralkomitees der KPdSU und Vorsitzenden des Präsidiums des Obersten Sowjets der UdSSR, Genossen L. I. Breshnew, und dem Generalsekretär des Zentralkomitees der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, am 3. August 1981 auf der Krim, 3 August, 1981.

<sup>190</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1908 – Brief des Genossen L. I. Breshnew zu Fragen der Brennstoff- und Energieressourcen, 2 October 1981.

<sup>191</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1913 – Telegram von Honecker an Brezhnev, 2 October 1981.

<sup>192</sup> Erich Honecker, *Moabiter Notizen* (Berlin: edition ost, 1994), p. 58.

<sup>193</sup> In addition to the agricultural and oil curbs, Soviet deliveries of iron and steel were also cut back. Erich Honecker, *Moabiter Notizen* (Berlin: edition ost, 1994), pp. 57-59.

<sup>194</sup> Egon Winkelmann, *Moskau, das war's. Erinnerungen des DDR-Botschafters in der Sowjetunion 1981 bis 1987* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1997), pp. 32-34.

## Renewed contact between East Berlin and Beijing – 1980-1981

As illustrated, the nature of relations between the GDR and the Soviet Union changed drastically in the two-year period of 1979 to 1981. Need, in the form of East Berlin's increasing reliance on West German economic goodwill, and disillusionment stemming from both Soviet weakness during the Polish crisis and its renegeing of its oil delivery commitments, put doubts in Honecker's mind as to whether blindly following Moscow's foreign policy was a wise path for the future. This recalibration had a direct impact on the GDR's China-policy.

From East Berlin's perspective, a rapprochement with China made perfect sense. Not only were its ambassadors and leaders aware that Deng was a different kind of leader, but East Berlin also appreciated that continued Soviet denunciations of China as a revisionist, Maoist state were simply a continuation of out-dated policies adopted during the heyday of the Sino-Soviet split. In Honecker's mind, these descriptions no longer applied. Moreover, it was painfully obvious that normalization of relations between China and Western European states, as well as America, had resulted in trade relations that benefited China's new partners.<sup>195</sup> In the special economic zones, Chinese and West German firms had begun joint ventures amidst increasing dialogue between Bonn and Beijing.<sup>196</sup> Considering that the countries which recognized East Germany after the signing of the Basic Treaty had yet to deliver any tangible benefits to the GDR, China's draw as a potential market for East German finished goods must have seemed all the greater.<sup>197</sup>

For Honecker, the calculus to re-engage with China was straightforward. China could fulfil

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<sup>195</sup> PAAA, MFAA - C 6572 – Die Versuche der Konsolidierung der nachmaoistischen Führung und neue Elemente der Innen- und Aussenpolitik der VR China (Dezember 1977 – Anfang März 1978); Zur Entwicklung der Beziehungen VR China - USA, 118, 191. In a separate report, the GDR Embassy in Beijing noted that around 70% of China's trade is being developed with the 'imperialist states' to procure machines and industrial equipment. PAAA, MFAA - C 6569 – Zum gegenwärtigen Entwicklungsstand des antisowjetischen Zweckbündnisses zwischen China und den imperialistischen Hauptmächten, pp. 176-177.

<sup>196</sup> Especially regional governments on the forefront of Reform and Opening were interested in what Western Europe had to offer. Thus, the trade division of the municipal government of Shanghai often dispatched study delegations in the early 1980s to newly-established contacts in Western Europe. SMA – B1-4-4-84 – 关于组织出口专厂出国考察的同志, 15 October 1981.

<sup>197</sup> J. Kuppe, "Die DDR im Westen" *Deutschland Archiv*, 12 (1979), pp. 495-508.

two important needs. First, by engaging Beijing, Honecker could add an important conquest to his foreign policy portfolio, adding to his prestige as a capable operator on the international stage. Improved relations with a rising power such as China would also underscore the GDR's legitimacy as a sovereign state. In addition, China could become an important market for East German goods in a time of desperate need.

Keeping these considerations in mind, the GDR sent cultural feelers to test the waters in early 1980.<sup>198</sup> The MfAA actively supported and encouraged East German Professor Hans Marnette's guest-lectureship at Peking University in March 1980 and his return there in September 1981.<sup>199</sup> Soon after Marnette's first stint in Beijing, Peking University and Humboldt University signed an agreement on exchange-professorships (*Lektorenaustausch*) in February 1981 in the field of language and literature, initiating more frequent academic exchanges, such as Professor Zhang Weilian's stay in the GDR in July 1981.<sup>200</sup> Beijing, fully re-embracing Deng's re-opening to the world, especially with economically and industrially advanced states such as the GDR, was eager to reciprocate. The Director of the Institute for History at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences partook in discussions at Leipzig's Karl-Marx University in 1980 and agreed on a partnership where the East German side would send partner institutions in China material on research into fascism.<sup>201</sup> These cultural feelers were supplemented by a flurry of diplomatic engagement. In April 1980, the GDR Embassy noted the "relatively high-ranking attendance" of the Head of Beijing's Military district to the cocktail party of the GDR Military-Attaché at the occasion of the Nationale Volksarmee's anniversary, whereas the Chinese boycotted the reception

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<sup>198</sup> Interview with Rolf Berthold, Head of the Far Eastern Section of the MfAA in 1979, April 21, 2011

<sup>199</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2283/83 – Leiterbriefe – Berthold an Krüger, December 7, 1981. Prof. Hans Marnette delivered regular estimations of Chinese academics' views of China after Deng's ascent back to power as well as the general situation within PKU to the GDR Embassy in Beijing. PAAA, MFAA ZR 2283/83 Leiterbriefe – Liebermann an Krolikowski, 23 September 1981.

<sup>200</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 21/87 – Beziehungen DDR-VR China (Allgemeine Einschätzung) – Staatliche Beziehungen DDR-VR China, 1980/81, 2; PAAA, MFAA ZR 472/86 – Beziehungen wissenschaftliche Institutionen DDR- VR China- Bericht über den Aufenthalt von Prof. Zhang Weilian in der DDR vom 14 Juni bis 6 Juli 1981.

<sup>201</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 21/87 – Beziehungen DDR-VR China (Allgemeine Einschätzung) – Abteilung Ferner Osten, Für Sonderinformation 20 November 1981, p. 2.

put together for the founding anniversary of the Red Army at the Soviet embassy. Overall, the embassy noted that the Chinese colleagues were behaved warmly and avoided polemic and provoking remarks.<sup>202</sup>

In parallel to cultural overtures, East Berlin started to subtly probe for trade deals with Beijing. In the summer of 1980, right after Professor Marnette arrived in Beijing, East Berlin dispatched a fact-finding mission on a 12-day tour through various electronics factories in China to explore potential opportunities for cooperation after the conclusion of a tentative cooperation agreement between both electronics ministries covering the year 1980-81.<sup>203</sup> This is all the more remarkable considering that Moscow's own fresh steps towards Beijing in late 1979 were not yet yielding any concrete results.<sup>204</sup> In fact, during renewed Sino-Soviet negotiations, Soviet diplomats on the ground made an extra effort to ensure that Soviet-bloc states' relations with China did not improve out of line with the state of Sino-Soviet relations.<sup>205</sup> In this light, the relaxation in Sino-East German tensions during a time where Sino-Soviet relations were anything but rosy seems all the more remarkable.

Far from hiding his disagreement on Soviet China policy, Honecker made his stance known. The SED leadership sent explicit as well as implicit signals to Beijing that it no longer followed the Soviet anti-China line Moscow imposed on its satellites. For example, in 1981 Dietz Verlag, the official East German government publishing press, on the order of the SED Politburo, ceased publishing polemical material on China and even brought out an information brochure on Li Dazhao, one of the original founders of the CCP.<sup>206</sup> In an effort to signal that East Berlin was

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<sup>202</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 21/87 – Beziehungen DDR-VR China (Allgemeine Einschätzung) – Zu den Beziehungen DDR-VR China, April, 1980, p. 3.

<sup>203</sup> SMA – B103-4-1141-98 – 上海市仪表电讯工业局关于接待东德计算机和外部设备生产及应用考察组的报告 – January 1980.

<sup>204</sup> In early 1979, Deng stressed to Japanese visitors China's absolute dedication to an 'anti-Soviet hegemony' (反对苏联霸权主义) policy. SMA – B1-9-116-27 – 邓小平副总理会见一批日本外宾的谈话, 3 March 1979

<sup>205</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1821 – Konsultationen zwischen Hermann Axen, M.A. Suslow und B.N. Ponomarjow am 23-24 Januar 1980 in Moskau.

<sup>206</sup> W. Kirvzow, W. Krasnowa, *Li Dazhao – Vom Revolutionären Demokraten zum Marxist-Leninisten* (Berlin: Dietz



now ready for closer GDR-PRC relations, East Berlin also abolished an annual ‘solidarity week’ for Vietnam in the same year.<sup>207</sup> Considering the traditionally close relations between Vietnam and the GDR, East Berlin’s abandonment of Vietnam in favour of a Chinese leadership that it had condemned for its aggression against Hanoi just two years before was a telling indication of just how far the GDR was willing to go to promote relations with Beijing.

These and similar actions were noticed in Beijing, and to signal its positive reception to East German overtures Zhongnanhai started to warm its tone towards East Berlin. Thus, a September 1981 meeting to honour the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the famous Chinese writer Lu Xun at the Humboldt Universität was given an extensive, positively worded write-up by the *Xinhua* news agency.<sup>208</sup>

### **The waning importance of Soviet policy coordination**

These proactive East German cultural feelers towards Deng’s China were part of a dramatic East German recalibration towards Beijing. Indeed, after the first cultural feelers were exchanged, the political establishment was ready to follow with its own initiatives. Thus, the annual East German foreign policy plan for 1981 (*Aussenpolitische Orientierung des MfAA*) that was circulated to the Politburo shortly after the tenth SED Party congress in June 1981 stated that relations with China should be developed in all areas and that efforts should be made to stop the trend of declining trade in order to increase both imports from and exports to China.<sup>209</sup> Rhetoric turned into action on 7 May 1982, when Vice Trade Minister Eugen Kattner signed an extensive

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Verlag, 1981).

<sup>207</sup> Joachin Krüger in Crome, Franze, Kraemer (eds.) 2003, p. 134.

<sup>208</sup> “Lu Xun commemorated at meeting in GDR” in Wolfgang Bartke (eds.), *The Relations between the PRC and 1. FRG and 2. GDR in 1981 as seen by Xinhua News Agency* (Hamburg: Institute of Asian Affairs, 1982), 271. Prof. Pan Zhaomin & Prof. Fritz Gruner spoke at the event on September 10, 1981. PAAA, MFAA ZR 469/86 – Beziehungen Kunst und Kultur DDR-VR China – Einladung des Bereichleiter Ostasien der HU, Prof. Dr. se. Fritz Gruner.

<sup>209</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1898 – Die Hauptaufgaben im Bereich Aussenpolitik zur Realisierung der Schlussfolgerungen des X. Parteitagung der SED.

trade deal with Chinese Trade Minister Li Qiang.<sup>210</sup> This came after the GDR's trade with China had already increased around 21% from 407.5 to 483.7 million Valuta Marks between 1979 to 1980, as China slowly opened its markets to Eastern European countries.<sup>211</sup> Even though in overall terms, this represented a small portion of China's trade with other western trading partners, it clearly showed China's increasing interest in trade with East Berlin.<sup>212</sup> In September, Kattner vowed to strengthen bilateral trade relations and economic cooperation with China at a COMECON trade meeting aimed at coordinating a common Soviet-bloc trade policy towards China. To facilitate a smooth deepening of bilateral ties, the GDR was more than careful to take into account China's sensitivities. In this respect, Kattner stressed that the GDR would not establish official relations with Taiwan and that "trade with Taipei will be conducted at the non-state level only".<sup>213</sup> Considering Beijing's unwavering stance on this issue, East Berlin's clear position on Taiwan fulfilled a necessary condition for any substantial improvement in East German-Chinese relations. Only in terms of military cooperation was Berlin still reluctant to move forward, as doing so would have infuriated Moscow.<sup>214</sup>

As the first cultural feelers were exchanged and first interest was reciprocated between Beijing and East Berlin, Honecker initially remained careful to not deviate too far from the Soviet line, even despite repeated frictions with Moscow. At least in the early years of Sino-GDR engagement, Honecker and the MfAA were still mindful that the GDR's existence still very much depended on Soviet goodwill. Thus, East Berlin found it necessary to sometimes pay superficial lip service to Moscow's general anti-China line even while engaging with China. To keep

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<sup>210</sup> *China and GDR sign agreement on goods exchange and payments* in Bartke (eds.), p. 266.

<sup>211</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 21/87 – Beziehungen DDR-VR China (Allgemeine Einschätzung) – Zu den Beziehungen DDR-VR China, 26 April 1980.

<sup>212</sup> In comparison, China's trade with the USA was worth 4.811 billion U.S. Dollars in 1980. Calculating from 1980 average exchange rates of 1.8177 East German Marks per U.S. Dollar, the American trade volume in 1980 was already 9 times the size of East German-Chinese trade. See trade numbers in Wang Dong, "China's Trade Relations with the United States in Perspective", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 39, 3 (2010), p. 174; Exchange rates from University of British Columbia PACIFIC Exchange Rate Service (<http://fx.sauder.ubc.ca/etc/USDpages.pdf>); accessed 8 March 2014.

<sup>213</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1912 – COMECON Koordinierungstreffen – 29 September 1981.

<sup>214</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1912 – COMECON Koordinierungstreffen – 29 September 1981.

Moscow satisfied, Bruno Mahlow, the head of the International Department of the Central Committee, stressed Berlin's total adherence to Moscow's anti-China policy at the January 1980 Interkit meeting in Mierki, Poland. Basically repeating the presentation by the Soviet delegation that preceded his talk, Mahlow regretted that it was "the goal of Chinese foreign policy is cooperating with the US and Japan as well as the western European states." Adding his own flavour to the discussion, he blasted China for supporting FRG revanchism and the West German plan for reunification.<sup>215</sup>

The Soviet presentation highlighted Chinese involvement in training Afghan rebel fighters and argued that this further illustrated China's complicity with the imperialist powers. Going along with Moscow's warnings and uninterested in causing significant ripples at a coordination meeting where representatives of the International Departments of every Soviet-bloc country were present and, papering over the GDR's disinterest in getting involved in Afghanistan, Mahlow also feigned outrage at Chinese involvement against Soviet undertakings in Afghanistan.<sup>216</sup>

Considering that the MfAA was establishing cultural relations with China while Mahlow made these statements in the Interkit demonstrates that by 1980/81 East Berlin increasingly only uttered anti-China rhetoric to placate the Soviet leadership. By this time, most officials in the MfAA and the International Department of the Central Committee had in reality started to consider Soviet China-policy coordination to be outdated, contradictory and damaging. According to Rolf Berthold, Head of the Far Eastern Section of the MfAA, Interkit meetings, which were meant to enforce a strict anti-China line in the GDR, had become totally irrelevant as a source for China-policy by 1980 as East Berlin sought to take advantage of Deng's new opening towards

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<sup>215</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2/1821 – Treffen zwischen Hermann Axen und M.A. Suslow and B.N. Ponomarjow, 23-24 January 1980.

<sup>216</sup> Suslow and Ponomarjow gave a thorough report to Hermann Axen that China was providing Afghan rebels with guns, rocket-launchers and artillery in a January 1980 meeting, BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2/1821 – Konsultationen zwischen Hermann Axen, M.A. Suslow und B.N. Ponomarjow am 23-24 Januar 1980 in Moskau; BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ IV B 2/20/593 – Mierki Interkit, 11 June 1980.

East Germany to its full advantage.<sup>217</sup>

In spite of East Berlin's intermittent anti-China rhetoric, a gradual GDR-PRC rapprochement could nevertheless continue as Beijing fully appreciated the restrictions that East Germany's nature as a key Soviet client state placed upon her. The saying of “豺狼挡道，安穩狐狸” (“When the wolf is blocking the road, why pick on the fox”) had been applied since Mao's times when referring to the ‘differentiated’ approach that China must adopt in seeking relations with countries under the Soviet aegis.<sup>218</sup> Under this thinking rooted in the Sino-Soviet Split, Soviet satellite states' attacks on China were simply interpreted in Beijing as East European states being forced to adopt Moscow's line. With this in mind, understanding that both countries operated in a triangular system defined by Moscow's watchful eye, seemingly distasteful polemic attacks by both sides were seen as part of everyday life in the rapprochement process. Thus, a sort of unspoken mutual understanding to ignore these minor out-lashes was the basis for the renewed exchange of diplomatic contacts between 1980 and 1981. Appreciating these special circumstances, Chinese diplomats ploughed forward and used unofficial back-channels to reciprocate East Berlin's advances and explore opportunities for better relations. For example, in early 1980, at the Beijing Sports Forum swimming pool, consul Willy de Laar was approached by Chinese Foreign Ministry officials who, in view of recent GDR successes in swimming, asked for increased aquatic sports cooperation.<sup>219</sup> Three days later, invitations were handed over to GDR embassy staff for a dinner with Zhu Ze, head of the International Department of the CCP CC as well as other functionaries. At the dinner Zhu asked excitedly for the establishment of a trainer-exchange program.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Author's interview with Rolf Berthold, Head of the Far Eastern Section of MfAA 1979-1982, GDR Ambassador to China, 1982-1990, Berlin, 21 April 2011.

<sup>218</sup> ETH Conference, p. 176.

<sup>219</sup> Author's interview with Joachim Krüger, GDR Deputy Ambassador to China, 1980-83, 5 August 2011

<sup>220</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 42/87 – Beziehungen DDR-VR China (Sportsbeziehungen) – über ein Gespräch mit Mitarbeitern der Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen des Staatlichen Komitees für Körperkultur und Sport am 20. 11. 1980 in einem chinesischen Restaurant, 24 November 1980

Bilateral relations continued to flourish. In April 1981, the GDR embassy in Beijing arranged for an East German delegation led by Bruno Mahlow to meet with Yu Hongliang, the head of the Soviet/Eastern Europe section of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, as well as other Chinese officials in Beijing. After the meeting, the delegation vowed to use all possibilities for contacts and dialogue with Chinese representatives.<sup>221</sup> The Far Eastern Section of the MfAA noted in November 1981 that there had been an expansion of GDR-PRC official contacts as the GDR embassy in Beijing and PRC Embassy in East Berlin launched film-nights celebrating “The joys of the Chinese language” and vice versa, “The joys of the German language”.<sup>222</sup>

In August, Chen Dexing and Du Kening, Deputy Head of the Soviet/East European Section of the Chinese Foreign Ministry visited the GDR to conduct a series of meetings under the organization and invitation of the Chinese Embassy in East Berlin. During their stay the delegation displayed a clear interest both to expand relations and, in line with general Chinese curiosity at reform experiences in Eastern European countries, learn more about the GDR’s economic development experiences. Aside from its pragmatic purpose, the visit also had symbolic meaning - it was the first time that an official CCP delegation visited the GDR under official notification since the mid 1960s, ending over a decade and a half of diplomatic cold war between the countries.<sup>223</sup> A true turning point in Sino-East German relations had thus been reached.

In line with the improving bilateral ties, the January 1982 MfAA report on bilateral relations was the first one since the onset of the Sino-Soviet split to leave out any references to China’s ‘hegemonic’ and ‘imperialist’ strivings. It was also noted that the Chinese representatives

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<sup>221</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/20/139 – (Report about a stay of a delegation of the Section IV of the CC of the SED at the GDR Embassy in China)

<sup>222</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 21/87 – Beziehungen DDR-VR China (Allgemeine Einschätzung) – Abteilung Ferner Osten – Für Sonderinformation.

<sup>223</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/20/139 – Aufenthalt von zwei Funktionäre des Zentralkomitees der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas von 16 Juli bis 23 August 1981.

were showing more ‘flexibility and adaptability’.<sup>224</sup>

## **Soviet duplicity in China**

Moscow took notice of these developments and followed the budding GDR-PRC relations with unease. This became apparent during an August 1981 meeting between Brezhnev and Honecker in the Kremlin. Clearly detecting that Berlin was expanding relations with Beijing on its own, Brezhnev criticized Honecker for not publishing enough bad press on China, stating that “the mass media of the GDR is holding back on the principal criticisms of the PRC’s dangerous foreign policy”.<sup>225</sup> However, by early 1980, in light of Brezhnev’s own moves to seek closer relations with Beijing, Soviet anti-China rhetoric voiced to the GDR was beginning to lose credibility in East Berlin. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Sino-Vietnamese border war in 1979 dialogue had commenced between Moscow and Beijing to construct a framework on outstanding issues ranging from border demarcation to the limitation of frontier troop levels.<sup>226</sup> Even though in 1981 negotiations were stalled and were still severely affected by Chinese fury at the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, with Deng remarking in April 1980 that an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations in the near future was unlikely<sup>227</sup>, it was very apparent that the Soviet Union welcomed the opportunity to use the talks to alleviate tensions with China amidst Washington’s course of rapid military build-up in a post-détente political landscape.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Possibly due to pressure to show more adherence to the Soviet line, references to China’s ‘dangerous anti-Soviet’ tendencies were re-inserted in the April 1982 report. PAAA, MFAA ZR 21/87 – Beziehungen DDR-VR China (Allgemeine Einschätzung) – Zur Entwicklung der Beziehungen DDR-VR China, Jan 1982; Bilaterale Beziehungen DDR-VR China, April 1982.

<sup>225</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/2419 – Bericht über das Treffen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des Zentralkomitees der KPdSU und Vorsitzenden des Präsidiums des Obersten Sowjets der UdSSR, Genossen L. I. Breshnew, und dem Generalsekretär des Zentralkomitees der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, am 3. August 1981 auf der Krim, 3 August 1981.

<sup>226</sup> *Beijing Review*, 6 April 1979, 3-4, in Jonathan D. Pollack in “The Opening to America, “*The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 15 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>227</sup> (Deng: “在我看来, 中苏关系改善的前景并不乐观”) SMA – B1-9-16-19 – 领导同志与外宾谈话摘编 (七) – 3 June 1980.

<sup>228</sup> Peter Vamos, “*Only a handshake but No Embrace*”: *Sino-Soviet Normalization in the 1980s* in Thomas P. Bernstein and Hua-Yu Li (eds.) *China learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present* (Lanham: Lexington Books,

Seeking warming relations with China while propagating an anti-China line towards the GDR, Moscow led a duplicitous dual strategy that added to the GDR's growing list of annoyances. This, added to the previously mentioned Soviet-GDR disagreements on a variety of other issues meant that Soviet directives on China were increasingly only given a superficial nod while being largely ignored in principle.

Rather than having the intended effect of restraining East Berlin from engaging with Beijing, Soviet attempts to contain East Berlin's moves towards China had the adverse consequence of alienating Honecker even further. Indeed, during the first rounds of Sino-Soviet dialogue in 1980, Boris Ponomarev, Head of the International Department of the CPSU CC and Mikhail Suslov, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Supreme Soviet, repeatedly told SED Politburo member and coordinator for the GDR's relations with African and Asian states, Hermann Axen, that Sino-Soviet negotiations were in fact not progressing fruitfully and that the GDR should still be vigilant about Beijing's alignment with American imperialism and Chinese attempts to drive a wedge between Moscow and its socialist allies.<sup>229</sup> This two-faced Muscovite approach was also repeated on the ground in China.<sup>230</sup> In April 1981, Mikhail Kapitsa, the Head of the Far Eastern Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, urged the ambassadors of Soviet bloc states stationed in Beijing to "land blows against Deng Xiaoping and his followers in the 'pro-imperialist' faction".<sup>231</sup> Two months later, the Soviet Ambassador to China, I.S.

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2010), 81-84. Afghanistan is also mentioned after the CPSU's XXVI Party Congress as a major roadblock to improved Sino-Soviet relations in GDR estimations. PAAA, MFAA, ZR 451/86 - Einschätzungen der UdSSR zur VR China - Informationen der Botschaft der DDR in der UdSSR - Zur Initiative des XXVI. Parteitages über vertrauensbildende Massnahmen im Fernen Osten sowie zur Lage in dieser Region.

<sup>229</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1821 – Konsultationen zwischen Hermann Axen, M.A. Suslow und B.N. Ponomarjow am 23-24 January 1980 in Moskau.

<sup>230</sup> Moscow tried to press home its anti-China line wherever it could. As evidenced by the Soviet Foreign Ministry representative Winogradov's warnings against Chinese 'differentiation' to GDR Political Counsellor Hartmann in Belgrade in March, 1980, in PAAA, MFAA, ZR 36/87 – Beziehungen VR China-Warschau Vertrag – Weisung des Ausenministeriums der UdSSR zur verstärkten Verfolgung der Differenzierungspolitik Chinas gegenüber den sozialistischen Staaten, 17 March 1980.

<sup>231</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/112785 – Informationen von der Botschaft in China, Abteilung IV des Zentralkomitee (Presentation of M.S. Kapitsa to the club of Ambassadors of fraternal countries in China, 22 April, 1981. Kapitsa's views were also circulated through his 1980 book on China "PR China: 3 decades, 3 policies" in both the MfAA. In his report back to headquarters, attache W. Meister in the GDR embassy in Moscow noted that the main conclusion of

Shcherbakov, made forceful remarks to the GDR Embassy on China's turn away from true socialism and demanded that every effort should be made to combat the influences of Maoism.<sup>232</sup>

This continued well into 1982, with Kapitsa remarking in April of that year to Warsaw Pact Ambassadors in Beijing:

...the Chinese government is totally on the side of imperialism...In terms of Chinese foreign policy it has only changed its "paint colour". The Maoist postulates remain. The Chinese government is only formulating itself in a more clever way. The anti-Soviet stance has remained. In all basic questions the Chinese government is adopting a stance which is directly against the interests of socialist countries... China supports the armament of the U.S. and the stationing of nuclear weapons in Europe, has gone against the negotiations between the USSR and the US and has taken part in two wars [in Vietnam and Afghanistan].<sup>233</sup>

That East German-Chinese relations were well on their way towards normalization in 1982 was testament that East Berlin and, especially its diplomats on the ground, were ignoring Moscow's anti-China polemics<sup>234</sup> Honecker, while acknowledging and sometimes agreeing with Soviet antagonisms towards China, was at the same time pursuing his own foreign policy aimed at improving East German relations with the PRC. At incoming Ambassador Li Qianfen's accreditation ceremony in June 1982 Honecker stated that the foundations were there for further relations to be developed, and reminded that Beijing and Berlin were bound by a friendship that predated the founding of both countries.<sup>235</sup> This came after East German State Secretary Herbert Krolikowski also assured outgoing Chinese Ambassador Chen Tung that "Taiwan is an integral part of China" during Chen's farewell ceremony 1982.<sup>236</sup>

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the book was that China had 'gone from a rightful member of the peace-camp to an ally of imperialism". PAAA, MFAA, ZR 451/86 – Einschätzungen der UdSSR zur VR China.

<sup>232</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/112785

<sup>233</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/112785.

<sup>234</sup> Author's interview with Rolf Berthold, GDR Ambassador to China from 1982-1990), 21 April 2011; In November 1981, Liebermann noted the friendly gestures of the head of the Eastern Europe/Soviet Union section, Yu Hongliang (including taken out GDR representatives on a daytrip to tour Beijing and surrounding area). Liebermann invited Yu for a dinner as thanks. PAAA, MFAA ZR 2283/83 – Leitbriefe aus und nach Peking, Briefe von Liebermann an Berthold am 22.07.1981, 22 April 1981

<sup>235</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ 2436 – Büro Honecker – 21 June 1982.

<sup>236</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 21/87 – Über das Gespräch des des Staatssekretär Genossen Kralikowski, mit dem Botschafter



## **Conclusion**

In many ways, it was remarkable that by 1980, the Soviet Union's once-most loyal client state had started to defy Moscow's coordination efforts towards China. East Berlin's pursuit of an independent foreign policy towards Beijing was not only shaped by Honecker's desire to engage a post-Mao generation of leaders for potential economic and trade benefits but also out of the East German leader's desire to create legitimacy for himself and the GDR with major foreign policy achievements. As Honecker tentatively reappraised his relations with Beijing after Deng's rise, he appreciated the benefits that renewed engagement could bring the GDR. Only the Chinese invasion of Vietnam, a close GDR ally, in February 1979 temporarily halted a potential rapprochement. However, after the dust had settled along the Sino-Vietnamese border, a set of emerging frictions between the Pankow regime and Moscow, ranging from the threat to inter-German cooperation from worsening Superpower relations following Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan, Soviet inaction in the face of Polish workers' strikes to Soviet oil delivery cutbacks, precipitated a drastic East German re-evaluation of its relationship with Moscow. Amidst a trend of Soviet policies being detrimental rather than beneficial for East Berlin, Honecker was now more willing than ever to follow a foreign policy that benefitted his GDR, even if this meant defying Moscow. Thus, in light of Soviet-GDR frictions, Honecker started to ignore Soviet disapproval and independently moved forward to forge better relations with Deng's government. Soviet duplicity and highhanded attempts to restrain the GDR's rapprochement with the PRC only strengthened Honecker's resolve to engage with China.

In Beijing, Honecker's interest in rapprochement was eagerly reciprocated. Keen to shed the self-imposed diplomatic isolation that had resulted from the Cultural Revolution, Beijing flung its doors open to the outside world after Deng's rise to power in 1978. Having increased contacts

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der VR China in der DDR, Chen Tung, während dessen Abschiedsbesuches am 23.4.1982.

with America, Western European and Asian economic powerhouses, Beijing also cast a curious eye towards successful socialist economies. And in this sense, East Germany, as the most economically successful Soviet-bloc state, deserved special attention. This mutual interest translated into an ever-increasing number of exchanges between the two countries, commencing with cultural contacts in 1979 and 1980.

Relations would continue to develop. By 1982, GDR-PRC relations were on a clear path towards normalization. A deepening mutual interest in economic and trade cooperation enticed both states into even higher-level exchanges. Aside from these pragmatic interests, first signs were also emerging of an ideological like-mindedness between both regimes. Indeed, the Polish crisis also elicited fears in Beijing, for Zhongnanhai could clearly see parallels between the challenge to the Polish authorities and what could happen in China if workers were to organize. As Deng embarked on a reformist path that has not been trodden before in the socialist world, his sensitivities to unexpected consequences that similar unrests might occur in China were palpable. When Wojciech Jaruzelski eventually imposed martial law in 12 December 1981, Deng Xiaoping was one of the very few leaders to openly welcome it.<sup>237</sup> This would not be the end of a list of growing commonalities between Honecker and Deng.

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<sup>237</sup> Goodman, p. 97.

## Chapter Two - Defying Moscow - East German-Chinese relations during the Andropov-Chernenko power vacuum, 1983-84

### Introduction

Honecker's engagement with China gained even more momentum towards the middle of the decade. From East Berlin's perspective, the international environment from 1982 onward seemed to favour a bolder rapprochement policy towards China. By the spring of 1982, the ailing Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev had started to show a more conciliatory attitude towards the People's Republic. This change in attitude was best displayed by Brezhnev's Tashkent speech on March 24. In extending an olive branch towards Beijing, the Soviet leader included China in the ranks of socialist nations for the first time since the onset of the Sino-Soviet split and stated that he had never regarded the hostility between the two states as normal.<sup>238</sup> Moscow's new attitude was noted in Beijing where the Foreign Ministry convened a press conference to show Moscow that it had noticed its subtle change in direction.<sup>239</sup>

Even though Brezhnev died under 8 months later, Beijing hoped that Yuri Andropov would carry forward this conciliatory direction. However as time would tell, both Brezhnev's friendly attitude in his last days in office and Andropov's initial willingness to seek a new beginning with China represented a temporary reprieve in a still-uneasy Sino-Soviet relationship.

In terms of GDR-PRC relations, Brezhnev's new stance on China was taken as a positive signal in East Berlin as it validated Honecker's proactive China policy. However, as this chapter will show, there was a clear disconnect between what Brezhnev preached during his last days in the Kremlin and what the veteran Soviet China-hands dictated to the fraternal states during Interkit coordination meetings designed to keep Soviet clients in an anti-Chinese line. As Sino-

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<sup>238</sup> Michael B. Yahuda, "The Significance of Tripolarity in China's Policy Toward the United States since 1972" in Robert S. Ross (eds.) *China, the United States and the Soviet Union: Tripolarity and Policy making in the Cold War* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 25-26; The *Financial Times* described it as "the most emphatic conciliatory gesture since the dispute over the border between the two nations took them to the brink of war in 1969" Alan J. Day, *China and the Soviet Union, 1949-84* (Harlow: Longman, 1985), p. 175.

<sup>239</sup> Day, p. 176.

Soviet rapprochement talks repeatedly stumbled due to China's insistence that certain obstacles be resolved first, conservative elements in the Soviet leadership also sought to prevent its fraternal states from engaging with China. After all, it was argued, a key Soviet client state's relations with China should reflect the state of Sino-Soviet relations. Especially in regards to relations to non-socialist states, or states which were 'deviating' from socialism, the USSR was still insisting that Moscow, the centre for world socialism, should determine when and how Warsaw Pact states could start the process of re-engagement. However, by 1982 Honecker appreciated that Soviet anti-Chinese coordination were but desperate attempts by Soviet China-hands to hang on to an antiquated policy conditioned by the Sino-Soviet split. A policy, which in Honecker's mind was becoming irrelevant in light of Deng's new direction. This appreciation meant that Honecker was increasingly willing to rebel against any attempts by Moscow to meddle in his relations with Beijing. Refusing to sign the protocols of the 1982 and 1983 Interkits while issuing firm rebuttals to Soviet anti-China positions, Honecker and his diplomats were eager to stop skirting the issue to tell Moscow once and for all what it had known since 1980: The era for Soviet China policy-coordination was over.

With the groundwork already laid between the two countries after the conclusion of the Sino-Vietnamese border war, GDR-PRC relations flourished after 1982. Helped by a leadership vacuum in Moscow and pushed on by East Germany's willingness to pursue its own interests amidst continued frictions between Moscow and East Berlin, Honecker increasingly conducted his relations with China outside of Soviet influence. While the East German leader sought to engage with China both to increase his international prestige and out of a sincere conviction that China should be drawn into the global socialist camp and away from 'Western imperialism', economic interests also started to matter more to both sides. As Honecker sought a market for East German industrial goods, China looked to the GDR for potential economic lessons it could learn from the leading Eastern European industrial state. Thus, a precarious trade and study relationship started

to blossom. Indeed, up until the mid-1980s, the hope for bilateral economic advantages turned out to be one of the major push-factors for both East Berlin and Beijing.

### **“Die China-Mafia” – Death of the *Interkit***

While some saw the Tashkent Speech as Brezhnev’s late attempt to mend fences with China, he had little time left to make sure that this symbolic gesture was translated into action. On 10 November 1982, the Soviet General Secretary died in his sleep. All sources indicate that he was in no capacity to conduct state affairs for most of the latter half of 1982.<sup>240</sup> Hence, his conciliatory new line had little effect on the course of Sino-Soviet negotiations in 1982.<sup>241</sup> Although talks between the Soviet Union and China had resumed in August, first initiated by contacts between Deputy Foreign Ministers Yu Hongliang and Leonid Ilychev, China stuck to its conditions that Moscow (1) withdraw its troops from the Chinese border and Mongolia, (2) end its intervention in Afghanistan and (3) end its support for the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia.<sup>242</sup> Indeed, with both parties unwilling to compromise on these issues, the outlook for an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations in 1982 seemed bleak. Outside observers were also rather pessimistic at the chances of Sino-Soviet rapprochement. In May 1982, the CIA estimated that a “significant Sino-Soviet rapprochement is unlikely in the near future” because, among other factors, “the historical geopolitical rivalry is too long, too deep, and by now too institutionalized”.<sup>243</sup>

As Brezhnev extended an olive branch to Deng in his last months in office, powerful

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<sup>240</sup> Seweryn Bialer, *The Soviet Paradox – External Expansion & Internal Decline* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1986), p. 83.

<sup>241</sup> Brezhnev’s late conciliatory attitude can also be gathered from a 1982 speech where he renounced the first use of nuclear weapons as well as Ustinov’s public declaration that the Soviet Union “does not count on achieving victory in a nuclear war”. See Vadislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire – The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 272.

<sup>242</sup> Day, p. 177; Huang Hua, p. 500.

<sup>243</sup> National Records and Archives Administration – College Park, Maryland, henceforth NARA – CIA Crest Database, henceforth CIA-RDP85T00176R001400070001-4– “Prospects for Sino-Soviet Rapprochement (U)” – May 1982.

elements in the Kremlin questioned his move. They doubted that anything had really changed in China since Mao's death in 1976. Hardened officials who were conditioned by the polemic past of the Sino-Soviet Split such as Oleg Rakhmanin, First Deputy Director of the International Department for Relations with Fraternal Parties from 1968 to 1985, were keen to keep the fraternal states from engaging in closer relations with Beijing. In their view, Moscow's client states' relations had to reflect the state of Sino-Soviet affairs. And since no significant improvements had taken place since the 'Tashkent line' had been brought forward, no fraternal states should have friendly relations with China. However, unexpected by many in the Kremlin, Brezhnev's Tashkent speech had the effect of validating Honecker's adventurous China policy and reinforcing the GDR helmsman's belief that he was a pioneer in Soviet-bloc international affairs. After all, at the time of the conciliatory Tashkent speech, first contacts between the GDR and China had already been made and bilateral relations were improving. From East Berlin's view, Honecker's China-gamble had already begun to pay off by 1982 and Brezhnev appeared to be a late comer to the dance. Honecker had revalidated himself as a foreign policy operator who was, in many ways, ahead of Moscow.<sup>244</sup>

By 1982, Honecker's resistance to Soviet coordination towards China was hardly a secret anymore. He had, albeit subtly, already refused to heed earlier calls by Brezhnev at more restraint in establishing relations with China.<sup>245</sup> In 1982, Honecker was undoubtedly also emboldened by the fact that, due to factors ranging from Brezhnev's relatively weak physical state to Moscow's escalating engagement in Afghanistan, reining in East Berlin's adventurism towards China had become even less of a Kremlin priority. Honecker thus made his stance towards China absolutely clear two months after the Tashkent Speech at the XII Interkit meeting in Sofia. The SED delegation, headed by Bruno Mahlow, the Deputy Head of the International Department of the

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<sup>244</sup> Author's Interview with Joachim Krüger, GDR Deputy Ambassador to China, 1982-1984, 10 November 2011.

<sup>245</sup> For example, Brezhnev urged Honecker to "not relent in our opposition against China's policy which runs counter to the cause of peace and international security" in July 1979, Transcript of Honecker-Brezhnev meeting, Crimea, USSR, 27 July 1979 (excerpt), *CWIHP Bulletin* no. 8/9 (Winter 1996/1997), p. 124.

Central Committee, arrived in Bulgaria with an explicit goal to make a statement about the GDR's China-policy.<sup>246</sup>

Indeed, few suspected the dramatic events that would unfold in Sofia. According to convention, Oleg Rakhmanin started the meeting by reiterating the official Soviet stance towards China (the content of which was circulated before the meeting in a report entitled "China in the years 1981-82"). It urged the fraternal states to use caution when engaging with what remained a deeply reactionary regime in Beijing. Whereas the SED delegation had mostly held its tongue in previous meetings, it now broke rank and went on the offensive after Rakhmanin's speech.<sup>247</sup> In a very direct tone, Mahlow observed that, in light of the more conciliatory tone towards China that emerged from both the XXVII Party Congress of the CPSU, the tenth party congress of the SED, and especially after the recent Tashkent Speech by Brezhnev, the Interkit's stance towards Beijing was "not right" (*nicht richtig*).<sup>248</sup> Mahlow made it clear that the SED welcomed Brezhnev's Tashkent-line which called "for a principled rapprochement of the fraternal parties to develop long-term cooperation with China, as outlined at the XXVI. Party Congress of the CPSU."<sup>249</sup> A battle of words commenced. Rakhmanin, in a thinly veiled rebuttal, urged fraternal parties to act against the desire to take individual points of comrade Brezhnev's talk to justify their own diverging policies.<sup>250</sup> Rakhmanin further stressed that relations with China must be developed "in a coordinated manner". He emphasized that China was currently still trying to recruit allies in its anti-Soviet foreign policy and that its engagement with communist states was but an attempt to achieve a 'Romania-nization' (*Rumänisierung*) of more Soviet satellite states in order to isolate

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<sup>246</sup> The record of this meeting is composed in such a way to make no mistake about the proactive role that the SED delegation took in order to hammer home its points on the 'backwardness' of the Soviet China-policies. BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2484 – Bericht über die Teilnahme einer Delegation des ZK der SED an der XII. Internen Chinaberatung in Sofia vom 11. bis 12. Mai 1982.

<sup>247</sup> PAAA – MFAA ZR 22/87 – Interkit.

<sup>248</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2484, Rede des Leiters der Delegation der SED, Genossen Bruno Mahlow, auf der XII. Internen Chinaberatung am 12. 5. 1982 in Sofia, p. 4.

<sup>249</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2484, p. 3.

<sup>250</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2484, p. 5.

and differentiate between Moscow and its allies.<sup>251</sup> The SED delegation under Mahlow seemed immune to these warnings and issued continued protests against Rakhmanin's statements, demanding extensive changes in the wording of the protocol. Mahlow's requests were duly ignored by the Soviet delegation. In the end, the SED delegation refused to sign the final protocol of the meeting and simply stated that they would present the findings to the Party leadership.<sup>252</sup> In its own internal report, the delegation accurately observed that Rakhmanin was actively playing down the Tashkent speech.<sup>253</sup> Mahlow's explicit act of protest was nothing short of a mutiny. One can only imagine the shock that Rakhmanin and the other members of the Soviet delegation felt at the insubordination displayed by Moscow's once-loyal client state.

The East German delegation's vociferous stance is all the more remarkable when considering the setting in which they were made. With representatives of all the fraternal parties present, Bruno Mahlow was not only openly protesting against the CPSU's China policy, but was also showing his government's foreign policy confidence and audacity in front of the other Soviet Bloc states.<sup>254</sup> Mahlow must have been more than satisfied that representatives from the Hungarian, Polish and the Czechoslovak parties told him privately that they partly agreed with the SED's stance.<sup>255</sup>

This episode showed that the GDR realized and understood that what was reiterated in the forum was clearly not in line with Brezhnev's conciliatory China policy displayed at Tashkent. Indeed, East Berlin grew increasingly annoyed at the schizophrenic nature of Soviet directives on

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<sup>251</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2484, p. 8.

<sup>252</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2484, p. 3.

<sup>253</sup> The report stated *Es entstand der Eindruck, dass die Bedeutung dieser Initiative des Genossen L.I. Breshnew faktisch heruntergespielt werden sollte* - BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2484, 6, In fact, months before the Interkit in Sofia took place, the "Tashkent line" was widely adopted as a justification for further engagement with Beijing by Honecker and the MfAA. During an April 1982 meeting, Ambassador Liebermann stated to the Head of the Soviet Union/Eastern Europe section of the Chinese Foreign Ministry Yu Hongliang that "all socialist states supported the Tashkent line" in fostering bilateral relations. PAAA- MFAA ZR 2563/90 – Akkreditierung v. Missionschefs DDR in VR China (Liebermann) – Vermerk über den Abschiedsbesuch des Genossen Botschafter Liebermann bei dem Leiter der Hauptabteilung Sowjetunion/Osteuropa im Aussenministeriu der VR China, Yu Hongliang, am 7 April 1982.

<sup>254</sup> The meeting was attended by representatives of the Czechoslovak, Bulgarian, Cuban, Laotian, Mongolian, Polish, Vietnamese and Hungarian parties. BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2484, p. 2.

<sup>255</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2484, p. 9.



China, especially at a time when the GDR Embassy in Beijing had reported heightened Soviet diplomatic activity back to Berlin, including a note by the Soviet Foreign Ministry to its Chinese counterparts that it was ready to reengage in border negotiations on 3 February 1982. This was accompanied by an increase in Sino-Soviet trade activity in the spring.<sup>256</sup> Even though these feelers met unsympathetic audiences in Zhongnanhai as Deng still labelled the Soviet Union as “social imperialists” and held fast to his demands to first solve the three obstacles before any substantive conversations on Sino-Soviet normalization, these new feelers from Moscow certainly showed that Brezhnev was genuinely wishing for an improvement in bilateral relations.<sup>257</sup> In Beijing however, Soviet diplomats were still labelling the Chinese as imperialists and restraining GDR diplomats from engaging with China. GDR Ambassador Liebermann astutely noted in an April 1982 letter to East Berlin that Soviet representatives on the ground were still relaying anti-Chinese messages in direct contrast to the conciliatory attitude adopted by the Kremlin towards Beijing after Brezhnev’s Tashkent speech in 1982.<sup>258</sup> Overall, Rakhmanin’s claims at the Interkit that few Soviets efforts have been made to improve Sino-Soviet relations must have therefore seemed utterly disingenuous.<sup>259</sup>

Rakhmanin, reeling from a significant defeat at his beloved Interkit, came back to Moscow with the goal of rallying support and seeking confirmation for his position. He prepared a report for approval by the CPSU Politburo’s China Commission, a CPSU working group that included prominent policy makers such as Yuri Andropov. Beating back calls for restraint by Andropov and Ponomarev and vowing to keep Soviet China policy coordination alive, Rakhmanin forcefully

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<sup>256</sup> PAAA – MFAA ZR 698/89 – Beziehungen VR China – UdSSR, 1982-86 – Haltung und Beziehungen der VR China zur Sowjetunion (Fortschreibungsinformation).

<sup>257</sup> In March 1982, Deng sent out a detailed analysis (summarized from previous statements made by Deng) to provincial-level cadre on his estimation on a variety of subjects. Under “Sino-Soviet relations” he maintained that the “Soviet Union had not changed its character and was still a social imperialist country” and maintained that Moscow “must show concrete actions” before relations can improve. The same message was reiterated in September of the same year. SMA – B1-9-798 – 领导同志与外宾谈话摘编（七） – 关于中苏关系， 28 July, 1982; 邓小平同志谈我对外政策和国际问题 – 邓小平同志一九八二年九月二十八日在会见日本铃木受奖谈到中苏关系问题, 28 September 1982.

<sup>258</sup> PA-AA, MfAA ZR 450/86 – Beziehungen UdSSR-VR China – Dienstbrief von Botschafter Liebermann an Leiter der Abteilung Ferner Osten, Genossen Rolf Berthold, 7 April 1982.

<sup>259</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A 2484, p. 12.

pushed forward a 12-page document which was consequently adopted by the commission.<sup>260</sup> A pointed letter of criticism was duly drafted and sent to Honecker on 14 July 1982. Endeavouring to represent the entire CPSU Central Committee, Rakhmanin outlined several reasons why an East German rapprochement with China was unacceptable, arguing that even cultural and sports relations should be stopped.<sup>261</sup>

During all this, senior MfAA officials as well as GDR diplomats on the ground understood that the Interkit was increasingly becoming a one-man show.<sup>262</sup> While Brezhnev did want to keep the GDR in line, it was Rakhmanin and his clique of old China-hands who made it their personal mission to enforce strict conformity.<sup>263</sup> ‘Die China Mafia’ as GDR diplomats called Rakhmanin and, in lesser terms, Mikhail Kapitsa, and I.S. Shcherbakov, the Soviet Ambassador in Beijing, were in their correct estimations, trying to run Soviet China-policy as their own fiefdoms via the Interkit.<sup>264</sup> After all, who was to reel them in? By May 1982, Brezhnev, severely beset by a series of strokes found even everyday tasks challenging, and was in no capacity to exert his authority over the many forums and working groups of the CPSU.<sup>265</sup> Matters were no different under Andropov and subsequently, Chernenko who both had to deal with more pressing matters in their short terms in power.<sup>266</sup> From the safety of “The Department”, as Rakhmanin’s all-powerful Department for Relations with Socialist Countries in the Central Committee of the CPSU was known, Rakhmanin attempted to run China-policy as his own private domain.<sup>267</sup> As Anatoly

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<sup>260</sup> James Hershberg, Sergey Radchenko, Peter Vamos, David Wolff, *The Interkit Story: A Window into the Final Decades of the Sino-Soviet Relationship* (CWIHP Working Paper 63, February 2011), p. 27.

<sup>261</sup> Sergey Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 17-18.

<sup>262</sup> With an air of suspicion, Ambassador Liebermann noted in a April 1982 telegram back to Berlin that the Soviet Ambassador’s briefing on China in the ‘Club of Ambassadors of Fraternal States’ in China did not take into account the Tashkent Speech. PAAA, MFAA ZR 450/86 – Beziehungen UdSSR-VR China, 1980-83 – 7.4.1982 Liebermann an Berthold.

<sup>263</sup> Radchenko, p. 18.

<sup>264</sup> Author’s Interview with Joachim Krüger, GDR Deputy Ambassador to China, 1982-1984, November 10, 2011.

<sup>265</sup> By September 1982, Brezhnev mumbled his Politburo statements and was in no way to manage China policy towards Eastern Europe. See notes of Politburo meeting, 9 September 1982, reel 16, containers 23-24, Volkogonov papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>266</sup> While Brezhnev made sure to raise the China issue in his meetings with Honecker, the author has so far found no mention of China-coordination in correspondence between Honecker and Andropov and Chernenko.

<sup>267</sup> Radchenko, p. 19.

Chernyaev, later Gorbachev's top foreign policy advisor, noted in his diary in July 1982, Rakhmanin had been in charge for all things China in the Central Committee Socialist Countries Department for the last 15 years, putting out a wide array of anti-China brochures, dozens of articles and even books. Chernyaev observed that if Sino-Soviet relations improved, all of his literature "would go into the trash bin" and the man would become irrelevant. Undoubtedly realizing this and desperate to prevent a slide into obscurity and irrelevance, Rakhmanin was hell-bent on pushing forward his feverish anti-China line.<sup>268</sup>

Honecker often aired his disdain towards Soviet meddling during meetings with Chinese representatives. In April 1982 The East German General Secretary remarked to outgoing Chinese Ambassador Chen Tung "we all know why relations [between the GDR and China] were tarnished (*getrübt*). We all know, and we don't have to talk about this".<sup>269</sup> At incoming Ambassador Li Qianfen's welcome introduction in September 1982, Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer stressed to the Chinese diplomat that Berlin was more than willing to continue the positive path that had been embarked upon between both states. Ignoring Rakhmanin's instructions to not engage with China in any domain, Fischer further stated, "the GDR sees many possibilities to deepen the contacts between both states. This doesn't only relate to trade, but scientific-technical cooperation, cultural as well as athletic relations." Welcoming Fischer's words, Li affirmed that the GDR and the PRC were friendly states and that "even though the relations between both states had stagnated, there is a common wish to forget the past and look towards the future".<sup>270</sup> Perhaps most telling, East German officials did not shy away from relaying information on the Interkit and other Soviet

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<sup>268</sup> Anatoly Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi Iskhod. Dnevnik dvukh epokh. 1972-1991 gody*. (Moscow: Rosspen, 2010) pp. 488-9, 494-9, 503, 507. Translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko in James Hershberg, Sergey Radchenko, Peter Vamos, David Wolff, *The Interkit Story: A Window into the Final Decades of the Sino-Soviet Relationship* (CWIHP Working Paper 63, February 2011), p. 23.

<sup>269</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 46/87 – Abberatung Botschafter Chen Tung – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker mit dem Botschafter der Volksrepublik China in der DDR, Genossen Chen Tung, am 30.04.1982 bei seinem Abschiedsbesuch.

<sup>270</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 47/87 – Akkreditierung/Antrittsbesuche Li Qianfen – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Genosse Oskar Fischer, mit dem Botschafter der VR China in der DDR, Li Qianfen, am 18.9.1982 bei seinem Antrittsbesuch.

coordination moves to their Chinese colleagues. Thus, Liu Qibao, at the time Political Secretary in the Chinese Embassy in the GDR was given detailed information of Interkit happenings by MfAA contacts during the early 1980s.<sup>271</sup> Not only was the Soviet Union's key client state not listening to Moscow's directives but by 1982, it was also deliberately leaking information to the target of the Interkit's efforts.

### **Frictions and opportunities – Sino-GDR relations seen through Soviet-East German tensions**

After Brezhnev's death, the leadership vacuum in the Kremlin and Rakhmanin's duplicitous moves only emboldened the East German leadership to pursue its own interests towards China. Rather than an individual rebellious act against its Soviet masters, this was one of a trend of more independent manoeuvres that Honecker undertook to ensure that East German interests were best served, even if this went against the wishes of Moscow. Thus, Honecker's pursuit of an independent foreign policy towards China was brought about by (and must be viewed from) the East German General Secretary's general drive for 'emancipation' from Moscow.

For example, by 1981, Moscow's astute observers were fully aware that the GDR was continuing to ignore Soviet wishes for more restraint in engaging in German-German dialogue. Officially given the go-ahead from Moscow after Honecker's insistent pressing, the December 1981 meeting at the Werbellinsee hunting lodge between Honecker and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt gave the German leaders from the opposing sides of the iron curtain a chance to build on their budding relationship.<sup>272</sup> Both Honecker and Schmidt attempted to keep inter-

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<sup>271</sup> Author's interview with Liu Qibao, Political Secretary, PRC Embassy in Berlin 1979-1989. 13 March 2012.

<sup>272</sup> Benno-Eide Siebs. *Die Aussenpolitik Der DDR 1976-1989 : Strategien Und Grenzen*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1999), pp. 238-289.

German relations out of the influence of Superpower conflicts.<sup>273</sup> Schmidt's forthcoming attitude in proposing the formation of a common German credit institute (in which West German funds would necessarily play the bigger role) as well as the Chancellor's refusal to cut his visit short after the imposition of martial law in Poland on 13 December sent a strong message to the doubters of inter-German cooperation.<sup>274</sup>

The Kremlin showed understandable worry at the *Eigendynamik* that was developing in inter-German relations. Gromyko's 1979 reminder to East German leaders to remember that engagement with West Germany could have political consequences had been repeated again and again. But unbeknownst to Moscow, inter-German relations had become a matter of survival for the GDR rather than a question of choice as the East German economy became ever more dependent on West German credits. Indeed, to say that the GDR economy was treading water at the beginning of the 1980s would be a gross understatement. By some accounts, East German debt to COMECON states had already risen to almost 14 billion U.S. dollars in 1980, an almost four-time increase since 1975.<sup>275</sup> The *Milliardenkredite* which were secured through Bavarian Minister president Franz-Josef Strauss in June 1983 and June 1984, were much needed life-preservers for the GDR.<sup>276</sup> To raise even more money, East Berlin even found it necessary to lift some of the compulsory exchange requirements towards FRG citizens who were visiting the GDR (a law which had brought the GDR state coffers a substantial amount of money) in order to curry West German favour.<sup>277</sup> As the CIA noted in 1984, West Germany's government-guaranteed financial credits, such as one issued in 1984 with a 50-year maturity, helped ease East Germany's liquidity

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<sup>273</sup> A. James McAdams, *Germany Divided: From the Wall to Reunification* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 147.

<sup>274</sup> McAdams, p. 149.

<sup>275</sup> Vienna Institute for Comparative Economic Studies (eds.) *COMECON Data, 1989* (London: MacMillan, 1990), p. 379.

<sup>276</sup> Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 62.

<sup>277</sup> McAdams, 156. West German economic goodwill to the GDR were far-ranging. In 1987, it was estimated that the GDR derived a daily income of 1.44 million DM from West Germany. From transit fees for surface traffic between the two Germanies, road use fees for automobile travel into the GDR. Intershops, to prisoner ransoms, West German assistance had become crucial in the 1980s. See Jeffrey H. Michel, "Economic Exchanges Specific to the Two German States", *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 20:1 (1987), pp. 73-83.

problems. The CIA estimated that by doing so, Bonn was taking East Berlin under its ‘financial umbrella’ to encourage Western bankers to revive lending to East Berlin. These expanding financial linkages only re-emphasized the importance of inter-German relations to Honecker.<sup>278</sup>

Soviet leaders certainly made no secret of their disapproval for the continuation of what they saw as reckless inter-German cooperation. At their last meeting on 11 August 1982 at the Kremlin, Brezhnev, in addition to ignoring East Berlin’s pleas for increased raw material deliveries, reacted negatively to Honecker’s request to visit the FRG in order to take up Schmidt’s post-Werbellinsee invite.<sup>279</sup> By this time, as Hans-Hermann Hertle and Konrad Jarausch have observed, permanent ‘rifts’ had started to form in the ‘*Bruderbund*’ due to disagreements on inter-German relations.<sup>280</sup> Soviet attempts at restraining East Berlin continued throughout the decade.<sup>281</sup> As before, Honecker chose to ignore all advice from his Soviet patrons. If Egon Krenz, Honecker’s brief successor in 1989 and long-time lieutenant, is to be believed, then Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Dmitriy Ustinov even raised the possibility of removing Honecker during a recess of a COMECON summit in Moscow in June 1984. Krenz, at the time the clear number two in the SED leadership, was clearly taken aback. Surprised, he reacted diplomatically and answered that “Erich Honecker’s authority is substantial. I know nobody in the Politburo or in the Central Committee who would abuse his trust”.<sup>282</sup> Until its fateful demise, East Germany’s slide into economic dependency on the West was never successfully dealt with and, as Moscow had warned, its dependency on the West gradually eroded East Germany’s economic independence.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> NARA – CIA RDP85T00287R001100260001-3 – Eastern Europe: Financial Situation and Outlook in 1983-84.

<sup>279</sup> Siebs, p. 239.

<sup>280</sup> Hans-Hermann Hertle, Konrad H. Jarausch (eds.), *Risse im Bruderbund – Die Gespräche Honecker-Breshnev 1974 bis 1982* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2006), pp. 46-52.

<sup>281</sup> For example, Andrei Gromyko warned Honecker and Fischer from getting too close to China in October 1984 citing opposing positions on the three obstacles. DY 30/J IV 2/2A 2695 - Niederschrift des Gespräch des Genossen Erich Honecker mit Genossen Andrej Andrejewitsch Gromyko am 8. Oktober 1984 im Hause des Zentralkomitees der SED.

<sup>282</sup> Norbert Plötzl, *Erich Honecker* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002), p. 144.

<sup>283</sup> Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden:

In 1983, Honecker's frictions with Moscow became ever more visible. A notable example was Honecker's insistence to replace Soviet Ambassador Pyotr Abrasimov in June 1983. Abrasimov, who was put in place with the expressed purpose of keeping a close eye on East Berlin's dealings, installed in 1975 to replace Michail Jefremov because the Kremlin had regarded the latter as not being forceful enough in pushing forward Moscow's line. Accordingly, Abrasimov threw his weight around like no other Ambassador before him. The man who had actively taken part in Honecker's putsch against Ulbricht during his first tenure as Moscow's man in Berlin enthusiastically participated in Politburo meetings and served as a hardened conduit for Soviet policy. The '*Regierender Botschafter*' (reigning ambassador), as he was known in SED circles, was despised by Honecker. The East German General Secretary duly seized the opportunity to remove him after Brezhnev's death. The new man in the Kremlin conceded, naming the more moderate Vyacheslav Kotschemasov as Abrasimov's replacement.<sup>284</sup>

These episodes served to deepen Honecker's mistrust of Soviet intentions and confirmed his belief that a certain degree of autonomy and distance from Moscow was beneficial for the GDR. They also illustrate Honecker's increasing willingness to conduct state business in accordance to East German needs rather than to satisfy the genrontocrats in Moscow. Against the backdrop of increasing East-West tensions after the Soviet downing of Korean airliner KAL 007 in September 1983 and Bonn's agreement to station Pershing II missiles on 22 November of the same year, the preservation of peace so that the GDR could continue to derive economic benefits from the West became ever more of a priority for Honecker.<sup>285</sup> Thus, Honecker became even more adamant on his wish to keep the peace in Europe and continue his engagement with West Germany.

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Nomos, 1998), pp. 157-163.

<sup>284</sup> Siebs, p. 38.

<sup>285</sup> Honecker started pursuing a *Koalition der Vernunft* or "Coalition of Reason" with West Germany in order to keep intra-German relations from deteriorating amidst renewed superpower tensions. Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998), p. 160.

As Hannes Adomeit has observed, in a normally functioning empire, the dependencies are meant to provide benefits to the centre.<sup>286</sup> In stark contrast, in the 1980s the GDR not only ceased to yield political advantages for the Kremlin but had instead started to become a rebellious burden. Considering that Moscow supported the East German regime with, albeit diminished amounts, subsidized oil and gas, overpaid for its products relative to world market prices and accepted industrial products of inferior quality amidst its own economic troubles during the ‘harsh decade’ from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s, East German intransience left a bitter taste in the mouths of many in the Kremlin.<sup>287</sup> To make matters even more frustrating for Moscow, its hands were essentially tied. In an escalating Second Cold War environment, it could not risk a public rift in its most inner circle of client states at the risk of looking like the weaker, less coherent bloc. This atmosphere of mutual irritation would shape the East Berlin-Moscow relationship until the GDR’s eventual collapse in 1990.

### **Deepening Relations**

Honecker’s wish to pursue his own policies, the resulting frictions with the Kremlin and his knowledge that Moscow had little interest in risking public tensions with the GDR directly translated into his willingness to ignore any attempt by the Kremlin to meddle in his new relations with China. The East German leader had good reason for doing so. For Honecker, relations with China could serve the dual purpose of boosting the GDR’s prestige on the international stage as well as secure an alternative market for the GDR’s products, especially its industrial goods.<sup>288</sup> The changing tone could also be observed from the annual ‘plans’ that the MfAA put together for China-GDR relations. These served as a guideline in how relations should be developed in the

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<sup>286</sup> Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998), p. 145.

<sup>287</sup> Seweryn Bialer, “The Harsh Decade” in Bialer (eds.), *The Soviet Paradox: External Expansion, Internal Decline*, (New York: Random House, 1986), pp. 57-88.

<sup>288</sup> Author’s Interview with Joachim Krüger, GDR Deputy Ambassador to China, 1982-1984, Berlin, 10 November 2011.



following year. While the foreign policy orientation for 1981-85 (drafted in 1980) still called for coordination with Moscow in aspects of relations<sup>289</sup>, from 1981 on, the plans left little doubt about the general GDR foreign policy strategy towards China. In the 1982 plan, drafted in November 1981, it quoted Erich Honecker's statements at the X Party Congress in which the General Secretary had stated that

When it comes to the GDR, then it can be said that she is ready to seek relations to the PRC according to the principles of equality, the respect of sovereignty, territorial integrity as well as the non-involvement in internal affairs [of other states]. We are convinced that a policy of peace and normal relations would also be in the interest of the Chinese people.<sup>290</sup>

Indeed, having already laid the groundwork from the summer of 1979 on, contacts deepened significantly in 1982. At East Berlin's request Horst Siebeck and Helmut Ettinger, both members of the International Department of the SED CC, visited China on an extended study tour from 4 to 26 March 1982.<sup>291</sup> The delegation was able to, for the first time since the 1960s, engage in conversations with members of the CCP party school, the editorial board of *Renmin Ribao*, as well as with members of the Chinese 'unions' and youth groups. During the entire visit, Siebeck and Ettinger observed that their Chinese hosts were friendly and even comradely (*freundlich und freundschaftlich*).<sup>292</sup> The Chinese Foreign Ministry-chaperoned visit, which was officially organized and hosted by the GDR Embassy in Beijing, served as a major trust-building initiative where the GDR delegation frankly expressed its desire for the expansion of bilateral ties.<sup>293</sup> The improving state of relations between East Berlin and Beijing was certainly reflected in incoming

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<sup>289</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 656/89 – Konzeption Gestaltung Beziehungen DDR-VR China 1981-85 – Konzeption für die Gestaltung der Beziehungen DDR-VR China in Zeitraum von 1981-1985, pp. 1-3.

<sup>290</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 656/89 – Konzeption Gestaltung Beziehungen DDR-VR China 1981-85 – Orientierung für die Gestaltung der Beziehungen der DDR mit der VR China im Jahre 1982, 06.11.1981, p. 1.

<sup>291</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 464/86 – Studienaufenthalt Mitarbeiter Abt. IV/ ZK d. SED In VR China – Bericht über den Studienaufenthalt der Genossen Horst Siebeck und Helmut Ettinger von 4. Bis 26. 3. 1982 in der VR China.

<sup>292</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 464/86 – Studienaufenthalt Mitarbeiter Abt. IV/ ZK d. SED In VR China – Bericht über den Studienaufenthalt der Genossen Horst Siebeck und Helmut Ettinger von 4. Bis 26. 3. 1982 in der VR China.

<sup>293</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 464/86 – Studienaufenthalt Mitarbeiter Abt. IV/ ZK d. SED In VR China – Bericht über den Studienaufenthalt der Genossen Horst Siebeck und Helmut Ettinger von 4. Bis 26. 3. 1982 in der VR China.

Ambassador Rolf Berthold's introduction meetings in Beijing in August 1982. Foreign Minister Huang Hua told the incoming Ambassador that he wished to see an intensification of bilateral contacts in the areas of economics, culture, science and sports.<sup>294</sup> Regional contacts also expanded. In October 1982, GDR Embassy Counsellor Joachim Krüger met with the Deputy Premier of Jiangxi province Xi Qin to see what Deng's course meant for provincial policies.<sup>295</sup> In the same month, Krüger visited Hunan University in Changsha to learn how Chinese universities and colleges were readjusting their curriculum to reemphasize communist ideology in order to fight political liberalization during Deng's reform course.<sup>296</sup> That greater local-level contacts were now also possible clearly outlined to East German diplomats and policy makers that China was embracing a new foreign policy openness towards Eastern European states. Certainly, Zhao Ziyang's speech at the sixth National People's Congress one year later in June 1983 which stressed that China's relations between itself and socialist states of Eastern Europe should return as they were in the "amiable 1950s" created the right conditions for further engagement.<sup>297</sup>

1983 boasted some major milestones in GDR-PRC relations. Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer met Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian at the margins UN General Assembly to discuss bilateral matters. This marked the first time in almost twenty years that Foreign Ministers from both countries met. In December of that year, Deputy Foreign Minister Qian Qichen visited the GDR and was received by Oskar Fischer and Herbert Krolikowski to discuss development as well as foreign policy issues in the GDR.<sup>298</sup> As well as this, cooperation between both foreign ministries was intensified further. Klaus Zorn, the head of the Far Eastern Section of the MfAA visited China to consider further avenues for additional cooperation with both Qian Qichen and

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<sup>294</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 2432/90 – Leiterbriefe von AV u GK, 1981-1988 – Berthold an Krolikowski, 25 August 1982.

<sup>295</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 2565/90 – Besichtigungen CD (Reiseberichte), 1982-88 – Vermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem Stellvertretenden Gouverneur der Provinz Jiangxi, Xi Qin. 3.11.1982.

<sup>296</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 2565/90 – Besichtigungen CD (Reiseberichte), 1982-88 – Vermerk über einen Besuch an der Hunan-Universität in Changsha am 25.10.1982.

<sup>297</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 658/89 – Jahresbeziehungsberichte DDR-VR China – Jahresbeziehungsbericht 1983, p. 1.

<sup>298</sup> Qian Qichen made a point to stress to the GDR embassy after the meeting that the Chinese government is interested in expanding bilateral relations in 1984. PAAA MfAA ZR 2588/90 – Für Sonderinformation 13.12.1983.

Ma Xusheng, Head of the USSR/Eastern Europe section of the Chinese Foreign Ministry.<sup>299</sup>

Beijing welcomed this new momentum in bilateral relations and actively fostered it with its own initiatives. After protestations by various embassy staff in Beijing, Zhongnanhai attempted to ensure that all Chinese press outlets used the correct terminology when referring to their new friends.<sup>300</sup> The GDR was referred to less and less as “East Germany” or *Dongde* (东德) in the press and during official functions. It was now the “Democratic Republic of Germany” or *Minzhu Deguo* (民主德国) in accordance with its official name, rather than a geographical reference which denotes ‘the other Germany’. Proof for China’s changing attitude can be gleaned from the centre’s directions to the provinces. To “respect” and “take care” (*zhaogu*) of East Germany’s wishes, a foreign ministry directive went out to the local provincial governments on 10 October 1984 to ensure that their newspapers and reports referred to the East Germans as a *Volk* (*renmin*) rather than a *Bevölkerung* (*jumin*), with the former indicating a ‘people’ or national identity whereas the latter merely denotes ‘a population’.<sup>301</sup> For the meantime, China seemed willing to bite its tongue on its previous stance of favouring a German reunification.<sup>302</sup>

The Kremlin watched these developments with unease. In an October 1984 meeting with Honecker, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, albeit in a less polemic tone than Rakhmanin had

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<sup>299</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 658/89 – Jahresbeziehungsberichte DDR-VR China – Jahresbeziehungsbericht 1983, p. 4.

<sup>300</sup> In February of 1985, the third secretary of the GDR embassy Dietmar Schulze complained directly to Wang Yingxu of the *Renmin Ribao* about an article where West Berlin had been referred to be part of “Germany”. *Renmin Ribao* subsequently published a correction. PAAA MFAA ZR 2556/90 – Journalistische Beziehungen DDR-VR Ch – Vermerk über ein Gespräch in der Redaktion der “Renmin Ribao” am 14.2.1985; Similar efforts were taken by other members of the embassy - PAAA MFAA ZR 2556/90 – Journalistische Beziehungen DDR-VR Ch – Aktennotiz über unkorrekte Veröffentlichungen in den chinesischen Massenmedien zur DDR, BRD und Westberlin und dazu erfolgte Massnahmen der Botschaft; Deputy Ambassador Joachim Krüger reiterated the GDR’s wish to be referred to in a correct manner at his arrival in Beijing, whispering into Huang Hua’s ear that he was a “Representative of the German Democratic Republic” after he was introduced as being from *Dongde* by Huang Hua’s translator. Author’s interview with Joachim Krüger, GDR Deputy Ambassador to China, 1980-83, 5 August 2011

<sup>301</sup> Original text: “为照顾民主德国的意见，今后我翻译德意志民主共和国人民的“人民”一词时，德文应译为“Volk”（本义时“人民”），而不以为“Bevölkerung”（居民的意思），其他语种翻译中业青注意到这个问题。” Shandong Provincial Archives, henceforth SPA, A029-06-0721-028 — 外交部 — 关于对民主德国人民的“人民”一词德文一法的通知， 10 October 1984.

<sup>302</sup> Deng stressed in mid-June 1980 that just like the two Koreas should be reunited to bring its people together again, Taiwan should come back under Beijing’s jurisdiction. Elaborating further, he said that the question on the “two Germanies”（两个德国问题）will have to be “solved sooner or later”（迟早也要解决）. See SMA – B1-9-116-73 – 邓小平副总理谈朝鲜问题和台湾问题 — 17 June 1980.

used, went to great lengths to lecture the East German General Secretary on why relations between East Berlin and Beijing should be turned down a notch. In an atmosphere where Sino-Soviet normalization talks were still being held at ransom by Beijing's three obstacles, Gromyko used frank language to criticize China's stubborn resistance towards constructive dialogue and Beijing's continued publishing of critical material against the Soviet Union.<sup>303</sup> Faced with these strong reminders, Honecker could do nothing but duplicitously assure Gromyko that the GDR "shares the position of the Soviet Union in this question" and understands the existence of "obstacles for a normalization of relations with China".<sup>304</sup> Considering that Honecker had reiterated his interest in deeper relations with China in August 1984 when meeting President Li Xianian in Bucharest during the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Romanian revolution, the East German leader's statements to Gromyko were certainly but insincere words to appease the Soviet statesman.<sup>305</sup> Certainly, the Kremlin-enforced cancellation of Honecker's long-sought visit to West Germany in the same month only added to the East German leader's willingness to ignore Soviet dictates.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Gromyko was recounting a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian, where both disagreed on essentially every issue they discussed. For example, Wu expressed support for Japan's territorial claims over the Kurile Islands which was met by Gromyko's response that "if there were divergences *only* on this topic, normalization would be difficult." On the questions of Soviet troop withdrawal from Mongolia and the relinquishing of Soviet support for Vietnam, Gromyko concluded that 'no common language could be found' (keine gemeinsame Sprache war möglich). BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2678 – Niederschrift des Gespräch des Genossen Erich Honecker mit Genossen Andrej Andrejewitsch Gromyko am 8. Oktober 1984 im Hause des Zentralkomitees der SED.

<sup>304</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2678 – Niederschrift des Gespräch des Genossen Erich Honecker mit Genossen Andrej Andrejewitsch Gromyko am 8. Oktober 1984 im Hause des Zentralkomitees der SED.

<sup>305</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A 2679 – Vermerke über Gespräche des Generalsekretärs des ZK er SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit ausländischen Delegationsleiter anlässlich des 40. Jahrestages der antifachistischen und antiimperialistischen Revolution der nationalen und sozialien Befreiung des rumänischen Volkes.

<sup>306</sup> The official Politburo report states that the visit could not take place due to the FRG's stance on the GDR's sovereignty. The same file contains a draft of the presumptive positive results which would have been circulated if the visit had taken place. The report's predictive issuances of common guarantees for peace in Europe between Honecker and Kohl leave little doubt as to advanced the planning or this trip was and how much the East German leader sought this engagement with Bonn. BA-SAPMO, DY 30/ J IV 2/2A 2673 – Gemeinsame Erklärung über den Besuch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Erich Honecker, in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland vom ...bis...

## Expanding Trade Relations

As the first doors in bilateral relations were opened, both Beijing and East Berlin quickly started to realize that aside from the symbolic value, very practical advantages could be gained through bilateral exchanges. Indeed, a hitherto undiscussed factor is how important a mutual interest for economic advantages was in the development of East German-Chinese contacts in the early 1980s.<sup>307</sup> While East Berlin saw opportunities in the newly accessible Chinese market for its industrial goods, the Chinese were interested in procuring know-how on everything ranging from production techniques to economic management lessons for Deng's reform plans back at home.<sup>308</sup> From Beijing's perspective, Honecker's GDR presented a very interesting proposition. Far from what we now know about the East German economy, throughout the 1980s contemporary Chinese observers and diplomats alike thought of the GDR as a leading industrial state and wanted to learn from East Berlin's experiences.<sup>309</sup> Chinese trade officials were most curious on how East Germany was able to establish itself as a successful socialist economy. As Beijing's relations with Eastern European states improved, Zhongnanhai had already started to cast a curious eye on Hungary to learn from Budapest's reform experiences.<sup>310</sup> Indeed, within the framework of Deng's Reform and Opening, leading Eastern European states could provide China with a look at how

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<sup>307</sup> In the studies covering this topic, there is scant or no mention of the economic angle. See, Werner Meissner (eds.) *Die DDR und China 1949 bis 1990: Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur: Eine Quellensammlung* (Berlin: Akademie, 1995); Joachim Krüger, *Zu Gast in Peking, Die DDR und VR China in den 80er Jahren*, in *Weltrends* 1994b (2), 133-144. The findings in this article were also reproduced in a condensed form in Joachim Krüger, *Die Volksrepublik China in der ausserpolitischen Strategie der DDR (1949-1989)* in Kuo Heng-yü and Mechthild Leutner (eds.), *Deutschland und China – Beiträge des Zweiten Internationalen Symposiums zur Geschichte der deutsch-chinesischen Beziehungen Berlin 1991* (Munich: Minerva, 1991); Claudie Gardet, *Les Relations de la République populaire de Chine et de la République démocratique allemande (1949-1989)* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2000).

<sup>308</sup> Numerous delegations were despatched to study the East German economy in the 1980s, such as the one led by Liu Yujie, the head of the department for science and technology of the city of Beijing's economic commission in November 1982. PAAA MFAA ZR 466/86 – WTZ DDR-VR China, 1982 –Protokoll über den Studienaufenthalt einer Delegation der VR China in der DDR 5.11.1982.

<sup>309</sup> Evidence shows that East Berlin was very good at concealing its economic woes to the outside world. Thus, even Gorbachev admired East German economic and technological achievements and was ready to accept at face value Honecker's progress reports about the GDR's achievements in microelectronics, computer technology etc. See Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998), 12; In China, extremely positive reporting on East German 'efficiency' certainly added to the image that the GDR was a model to be emulated. See for example report in, "保证平衡经济发展– 民主德国影响", *工人日报*, 22 May 1985, the MfAA-invited reporter enthusiastically recounted the efficiency that "adherence to punctuality" has led to a 90% increase in labour productivity in 1984.

<sup>310</sup> "China/Eastern Europe: Improving Relations", *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief Service*, 1 September 1986.

socialist countries could conduct reform and responded to reform.<sup>311</sup> The GDR's know-how and experiences could be passed onto Chinese companies and enterprises. This is one of the main reasons that China sought relations with East Germany more than any other Eastern European state in the mid-1980s, because, according to former Commercial Secretary in the PRC Embassy in Berlin and former member of the Eastern European section of the Chinese Foreign Ministry Wu Deron, "amidst Eastern European countries, China stood to gain the most from the GDR."<sup>312</sup> Subsequently, a flurry of delegations were exchanged between both countries in order to ink new trade deals and seek opportunities for further exchange. Beijing sought consultations on a wide variety of topics ranging from the technology required for the production of vitamins to catalyzed cracking techniques of hydrocarbons (*Katalyse-Krackung-Reformierungs-Technik*).<sup>313</sup>

East Berlin was ecstatic at Beijing's interest to expand trade relations. The GDR's raw appetite for a new market for its industrial supplies was hard to hide. Amidst an atmosphere of general economic decline and stagnation in the Soviet bloc, China provided a welcome alternative as a buyer for its industrial goods.<sup>314</sup> Thus, while Deng's actual reform path elicited little interest from the GDR, there was a moment of hope for Honecker that trade with the People's Republic could help to alleviate the GDR's economic malaise.<sup>315</sup> Thus, in consultations with its Chinese

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<sup>311</sup> Leading Chinese diplomats stationed in the GDR only found out after the collapse of the GDR in what dire straits the GDR economy was in, giving testimony to the GDR's success in shrouding the true state of its economy - Interview with Wu Derong, Commercial Secretary in the PRC Embassy to the GDR, 1982-1989, Beijing, April 2, 2012, Interview with Liu Qibao, Political Secretary in the PRC Embassy to the GDR, 1979-1988, Beijing, 11 May 2012.

<sup>312</sup> Interview with Wu Derong, Commercial Secretary in the PRC Embassy to the GDR, 1982-1989, Beijing, 2 April 2012,

<sup>313</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 466/86 – WTZ DDR-VR China, 1982 – Übersicht der VR Anträge der VR China 1982-1983.

<sup>314</sup> PAAA MFAA, ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und WTZ DDR-China; To illustrate the exchange of inferior goods as well as the relative lethargy of trade amongst Eastern European countries, Hungarian economists had characterized inter-COMECON trade in the 1980s as "trading dead cats for dead dogs". Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998), p. 145.

<sup>315</sup> Honecker's negative assessment of Beijing's reforms were almost certainly informed by his men on the ground. As early as 1981, Ambassador Liebermann had described the aspirations of *Reform and Opening* as unrealistic. Attacking the central tenet of Deng's reforms, Liebermann noted that Beijing's present orientation to keep a relatively high development tempo in an atmosphere of economic regulation has proven "unrealistic" PAAA, MFAA ZR 2284/83 – Leiterbriefe aus Peking – 1980-81, Liebermann an Krolkowski, 10 Mar 1981 During an extended study tour of China in the spring of 1982, Horst Siebeck and Helmut Ettinger, both members of the International Department of the SED CC, reiterated similar observations. Both observed the lack of forthcoming solutions for the many development, population, housing and unemployment problems that China currently faces. Both also stressed

counterparts in Beijing in 1982, members of the East German Ministry of Science and Technology suggested far-ranging agreements which would see its exports (ranging from textile-machines to technology that would enhance the production of consumer goods and household-items) go to China for “Chinese recommendations for goods that they would like to export to the GDR”.<sup>316</sup> This and other such East Berlin-initiated proposals show that Honecker undoubtedly entertained the hope that trade with China could be part of a solution for East Germany’s economic woes.<sup>317</sup>

As high as Honecker’s hopes were, he and his MfAA subtly appreciated that East German goods could never surpass the importance that Western goods were gaining for Deng’s modernization drive.<sup>318</sup> Realizing the superior variety and quality of Western European, Japanese and American goods, China started to be less interested in East German products but rather the crucial reform lessons it thought it could still learn from Soviet Bloc countries.<sup>319</sup> Thus, as Honecker hatched grand plans for his new trade partners in Beijing, the annual negotiations in bilateral trade already revealed a very worrying trend for the Pankow regime: China was not interested in buying as many East German products as the GDR had hoped. During the 1982 bilateral trade negotiations, the representative of the Ministry of Trade from the PRC, Wang Runsheng told his counterpart Eugen Kattner that China could not fulfil East Berlin’s ambitious trade targets for Sino-GDR trade. A disappointed Kattner urged his superiors at the Ministry for

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that the ideological and political dangers of continued adoption of market-reforms and cooperation with the imperialist camp are being underestimated. PAAA MFAA ZR 464/86 – Studienaufenthalt Mitarbeiter Abt. IV/ ZK d. SED In VR China – Bericht über den Studienaufenthalt der Genossen Horst Siebeck und Helmut Ettinger von 4. bis 26. 3. 1982 in der VR China, p. 4.

<sup>316</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 466/86 – WTZ DDR-VR China, 1982- Direktive über die Beratung zur Vereinbarung der Theme für die wissenschaftlich-technischen Beziehungen der DDR und der VR China in den Jahren 1982-83, Peking, 17.-21. Mai 1982.

<sup>317</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 466/86 – WTZ DDR-VR China, 1982- Direktive über die Beratung zur Vereinbarung der Theme für die wissenschaftlich-technischen Beziehungen der DDR und der VR China in den Jahren 1982-83, Peking, 17.-21. Mai 1982.

<sup>318</sup> 牛军, 《中华人民共和国对外关系史概论,1949-90》(北京: 北京大学出版社, 2010), 278-9, In April 1984, Ambassador Rolf Berthold sent back a sobering assessment that only around 7% of China’s total trade is being done with socialist states. PAAA, MFAA ZR 2440/90 – Analysen der internationalen Lage und des inter. KV, 1983-88 – Rolle und Platz der VR China in der internationalen Auseinandersetzung

<sup>319</sup> Markus Taube, “Economic Relations between the PRC and the States of Europe”, *The China Quarterly*, 169 (March, 2002), pp. 78-107

Foreign Trade to “explore all channels to promote trade”.<sup>320</sup> From East Berlin’s perspective, this disappointing reality would only continue to plague its trade hopes. However, Honecker was not ready to give up. In the 1983 negotiations, China told the GDR delegation that 60% of the proposed GDR exports cannot be accepted because China currently has no need for these products.<sup>321</sup> As this affected GDR staple exports such as electronics and industrial supplies, the GDR delegation lobbied intensely to change the Chinese stance. The Chinese delegation, trying to reach an accommodation, suggested that the volume could possibly be increased if the GDR could increase its sale of chemical raw materials to the PRC. As desperate as Honecker was to expand trade ties with Beijing, there were just not enough surplus chemical products to fulfil requests. To make matters worse, GDR diplomats and officials in the MfAA knew that Sino-GDR trade volumes were mediocre compared to even other Eastern European countries.<sup>322</sup> The below graph shows East German estimations of Chinese trade with the socialist world in the years of 1982 and 1983, compiled by the trade section of the GDR Embassy in Beijing in June 1983. As the East German estimations at the time showed, East Berlin’s trade in 1983 was estimated to be only around 55% of the 1982 volume.

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<sup>320</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 558/88 – Aussenhandelsstruktur Ex-und Import DDR-VR China, 1981-85 – Abschlussbericht über die Verhandlungen zum Jahresabkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der VR China über den Warenaustausch und Zahlungsverkehr im Jahre 1982, 31 May 1982.

<sup>321</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 558/88 – Aussenhandelsstruktur Ex-und Import DDR-VR China, 1981-85 – Information über die Ergebnisse der Verhandlungen mit der Volksrepublik China zum Handels- und Zahlungsabkommen 1983.

<sup>322</sup> PAAA, MfAA ZR 2432/90 – Leiterbriefe von AV u GK, 1981-1988 - Berthold an Krolikowski, 25 August, 1982 – Berthold an Krolikowski, 11 April 1983.



<b>Trade between China and the socialist world (in CHF, millions)</b> <sup>323</sup>			
		<b>1982</b>	<b>1983</b>
<b>GDR</b>	Export	179	100
	Import	173	94
	Total	352	194
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Export	58.6	59.7
	Import	58.6	50
	Total	117.2	109.7
<b>Romania</b>	Export	54	93
	Import	46	93
	Total	100	186
<b>Cuba</b>	Export	301.2	312.8
	Import	280.6	280
	Total	581.8	592.8
<b>Mongolia</b>	Export	4.3	4.7
	Import	4.3	4.6
	Total	8.6	9.3
<b>Poland</b>	Export	101.4	208.8
	Import	154.2	194.9
	Total	255.6	403.7
<b>USSR</b>	Export	300.2	836
	Import	301.2	828
	Total	601.4	1664

While trade volumes were disappointing from the East German perspective, Beijing was getting out of these exchanges exactly what it sought – much desired access to some key industrial supplies and knowledge-transfer from the leading industrial socialist state. Even though Beijing had started to also cooperate with the arguably more industrially advanced West Germany across a variety of fields, enthusiasm for the East German economy came from all levels.<sup>324</sup> In October 1984, state news agency Xinhua queried the MfAA for more information on the “development of

<sup>323</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 2513/90 – Analyse Aussenhandel VR China, 1983-88 – Entwicklung der Aussenhandelsbeziehungen der sozialistischen Länder mit der VR China im Jahre 1982 sowie Einschätzung der Jahresabkommen 1983 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Export- und Importwarenstruktur.

<sup>324</sup> For example, in June 1982, the Shanghai municipal government despatched a study-delegation to West Germany to establish an extensive city-planning cooperation project. SMA – B1-4-803-119 – 赴西柏林参加城市管理讨论会和 在西德参观考察的报告, 19 October 1982.

and perfection of economic planning processes” in order to educate the Chinese masses on the East German model.<sup>325</sup> According to Wu Derong, Commercial Secretary in the PRC Embassy in the GDR from 1982-89, Beijing did value specific GDR industrial goods in the 1980s, some of which it deemed to be on par with those from Western sources, even though overall, China could not become the important export-market that the GDR had hoped for.<sup>326</sup> As an internal estimate by the PRC embassy about the East German economic situation in 1985 states: “The GDR is one of the ten major industrial powers of the world...in terms of machinery, chemical and electrical supplies, East Germany’s products is on world standards...In terms of living standards, it is the top in the Soviet bloc”<sup>327</sup> Officially, and certainly to the beholder in Beijing, the GDR was the most vigorous of the COMECON countries. While according to data available at the time, Poland’s net material product fell by 12 percent in 1981, and by 5.5 percent in 1982 and by 0.1 percent and 0.3 percent in Czechoslovakia, it *grew* in East Germany by 4.8 percent and 2.5 percent, with its economic performance being even better in 1983 and 1984.<sup>328</sup> Accordingly, Beijing turned an attentive eye towards what seemed to be an Eastern European economic powerhouse. In its trade dialogue with the GDR, Beijing submitted very specific “wish-lists” for industrial supplies which it “sought for reconstruction efforts”.<sup>329</sup> These ranged from equipment for the cement industry which would aid in China’s building boom to machines and equipment for laying asphalt in Beijing’s bid to connect the People’s Republic of tomorrow. All in all, Beijing was interested in procuring heavy machinery and equipment from the GDR – something East Berlin had built a reputation for.<sup>330</sup>

Indeed, in the framework of Deng’s modernization project, Beijing made no secret of its

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<sup>325</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2557/90 – AI-Arbeit in China (Analyse, Prognose, Planung), Xinhua an Abt. Journalsitische Beziehungen, 22 October 1984 .

<sup>326</sup> Author’s interview with Wu Derong, Beijing, 2 April 2012.

<sup>327</sup> “德意志民主共和国概况, 1985年6月“ (Internal Report by the PRC Embassy in the GDR, obtained by author from Wu Derong), p. 3.

<sup>328</sup> Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch*, p. 159.

<sup>329</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 658/89 – Jahresbeziehungsberichte DDR-VR China – Jahresbeziehungsbericht 1983, p. 6.

<sup>330</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 466/86 – WTZ DDR-VR China, 1982 –Vorschläge fuer mögliche Konsultationen von Spezialisten der VR China in der DDR (1983), 17 December 1982.

desire and willingness to learn from foreign examples.<sup>331</sup> As GDR-PRC relations improved, Deng and his deputies were also very eager to learn from Soviet Bloc economies. It was hoped that socialist Eastern European models could offer more applicable lessons for China. Thus, during the early 1980s, learning missions were not a rare sight in the Soviet Bloc.<sup>332</sup> According to Bai Shoumian, former Ambassador to Bulgaria, many inspection delegations were despatched to Eastern European countries and many lessons for Deng's Reform and Opening were derived out of Soviet Bloc states.<sup>333</sup> Especially experiences in the areas of advanced technology and economic planning were sought. As the industrial leader of the Soviet Bloc, East Germany deserved special attention.<sup>334</sup> Chinese delegations such as the one led by Lin Hong-Zhu, a member of the Ministry of Electronics Industry that visited East Germany in the spring of 1983, sought to absorb as much information as he could about the successes of the East German economic example. The explicit goal of the delegation was to "acquire information for the improvement of the technical standard in the production of electronic devices in the People's Republic."<sup>335</sup> Without beating around the bush, the delegation stressed to their hosts their "great interest in the transfer of GDR's technologies, for both the import of certain single pieces of machinery as well as the transfer of entire technological processes." Lin stressed China's wish "to make up for the gap in Chinese technological backwardness" and "to remedy the negative consequences of the Cultural

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<sup>331</sup> Deng made trailblazing trips to Japan in 1978 and the U.S. in 1979 to send home a loud and clear message that China should embrace foreign technologies and learn from foreign experiences. While touring car-maker Nissan's Zama plant in Japan, Deng marveled at assembly lines where robots replaced human hands. He immediately sent study missions to Japan to try to learn not only production techniques but also management philosophy. See Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of HUP, 2011), pp. 307-308.

<sup>332</sup> Polish Ambassador Burski recounted numerous learning missions visiting Poland in the early 1980s. Statements during "The Rise of the Multipolar World – China and Europe during the last decades of the Cold War, 1960-1980" Palermo, 30 June 2012.

<sup>333</sup> Statements from Ambassador Bai Shoumian in Proceedings of ETH Conference in Xiaoyuan Liu and Vojtech Mastny, eds., *China and Eastern Europe, 1960s-1980s* (Zurich: Zürcher Beiträge, Nr. 72, 2004). 24-26 March 2004, p. 157.

<sup>334</sup> Author's interview with Wu Derong, 2 April, 2012 in Beijing, Author's interview with Shen Guoliang, Deputy Military Attaché in the PRC Embassy in East Berlin from 1979-1982, Military Attaché from 1983-1988, 9 April 2012 in Beijing.

<sup>335</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 467/86 – WTZ DDR-VR China, 1983 – Betreuerbericht über den Besuch einer Delegation aus der VR China, 19.04-29.04.83.

Revolution.”<sup>336</sup> The frankness displayed by this and other similar delegations leave little doubt about their genuine Dengist modernization motivations.<sup>337</sup> In early July 1983, the Chinese Ambassador in Berlin, Li Qianfen, requested a meeting with H. Weiz, a representative of the East German Ministry of Trade and Technology, where Li brought forth his positive hopes for continued trade and stressed that China urgently needed technologies ranging from ship-building to scientific machinery. To show his appreciation and in an attempt to build a rapport with the Ministry of Science and Technology, Li also hosted a dinner for East German trade officials at the Embassy of the PRC.<sup>338</sup>

Less than a year later in January 1984, China showed the importance it attached to Eastern European know-how by sending eventual Premier Zhu Rongji (then the Vice Head of the State Economic Commission) on a whirlwind tour through Soviet bloc states. The delegation spent around five to six days each in Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland as well as the GDR.<sup>339</sup> Wu Derong, who travelled with the delegation, remembers that the delegation was most interested in the GDR. “We were all very curious at the inner workings of the East German economy, especially how the *Kombinate* (combines) operated and if they could be replicated in China.”<sup>340</sup> The delegation made their intentions perfectly clear in a preparatory meeting before the actual trip. Liu Zhishu, Head of the Ex- and Import section of the State Economic Commission, plainly summarized the mission’s goals as “to get to know the development level of the economies of the visited countries” and to “create a consensus for a number of reconstruction projects where

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<sup>336</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 467/86 – WTZ DDR-VR China, 1983 – Betreuerbericht über den Besuch einer Delegation aus der VR China, 19.04-29.04.83.

<sup>337</sup> This attitude is displayed by provincial study missions visiting the GDR as well. Shandong Provincial Archives, A056-10-1983-0404-045 – 中共山东省委组织部 – 同意 (木土) 秀明赴民主德国执行考察, 1983-02-11; Shandong Provincial Archives, A196-01-0160-001 – 国家医药管理局 – 关于接待民主德国考察组的通知, 4 April 1984.

<sup>338</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 467/86 – WTZ DDR-VR China, Information über ein Gespräch mit dem Botschafter der Volksrepublik China in der DDR, Li Qianfen, 6.7.1983.

<sup>339</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China, 1984 – Notiz über ein Informationsgespräch mit Vertretern der Staatlichen wirtschaftskommission am 24.01.1984, p. 1.

<sup>340</sup> Author’s interview with Wu Derong, Beijing, 2 April 2012.

bilateral cooperation is possible.”<sup>341</sup>

During their stay in the GDR, the delegation visited important state institutions such as the Ministry for Science and Technology, the State Planning Commission, the Ministry of Finance, as well as the VEB Elektroapparate-Werke and VEB Studioteknik Berlin combines. Zhu Rongji was especially impressed by the advanced state of technical research in the GDR and expressed the wish that further consultations take place so that China could learn from the experiences from the scientific-technical advancements of the GDR.<sup>342</sup> In a list of “questions which interested the Chinese delegation”, Zhu Rongji’s hosts noted that he was very curious about the role of the combines in advancing scientific research, the connection between party control and production as well as and the goals in science and research were laid down in economic plans.<sup>343</sup> Laying bare his basic question, Zhu reportedly asked his East German hosts: “How can China achieve superior performance using economic means?”<sup>344</sup>

It is clear that the delegation wasn’t just impressed by the combines but also, how the GDR managed this ‘model’ economic system. In this area, the GDR, unlike Western states, served as a more applicable, centrally-planned, socialist model to emulate. Indeed, before Zhu Rongji’s visit, a study delegation led by Xu Lizheng, Vice-Chair of the Research Centre for the Plan Economy of the PRC, had spent four weeks in the GDR to study this exact matter.<sup>345</sup> After being led around industrial facilities of the GDR by Gerhard Schürer, Head of the State Planning Commission of the GDR, Xu was further convinced of the “performance and superiority of the socialist plan economy”, stressing that the “successful development of the plan economy in the

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<sup>341</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China , 1984 – Notiz über ein Informationsgespräch mit Vertretern der Staatlichen wirtschaftskommission am 24.01.1984, p. 2.

<sup>342</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China , 1984 – Information, p. 2.

<sup>343</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China , 1984 – Fragen, für die sich die Delegation der VR China besonders interessierte., p. 1.

<sup>344</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China , 1984 – Fragen, für die sich die Delegation der VR China besonders interessierte., p. 1.

<sup>345</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China , 1984, Bericht über den Aufenthalt der Studiendelegation der Staatlichen Plankommission der VR China in der DDR, 3 September 1984, p. 1.

GDR gave him strong confidence [for the development of China under a planned economy].”<sup>346</sup> Xu also viewed combines favourably. His East German minders noted in their report that “a lot of attention of the Chinese delegation was dedicated to the working methods and development of the combines. They have apparently outlined this as a viable way to organize modern production.”<sup>347</sup> This wasn’t an exaggeration, as Xu found time to visit some eight combines during his time.<sup>348</sup> Thoroughly impressed, the Chinese saw opportunities to adopt working methods from East German experiences straight away. Judging from the forthcoming nature of the East German hosts, Chinese interest at the East German economy was certainly a welcome reaffirmation of the GDR’s industrial prowess for Honecker.

This trip came at a time when the tinkering around Deng’s Reform and Opening was reaching a fever pitch. The centre pushed Deng’s teaching onto provincial-level officials and, increasingly, words were being translated into action in the mid-1980s.<sup>349</sup> In February 1984, Deng had encouraged further experimentation and opening to the outside world to his central committee colleagues, noting that these zones should be a medium for introducing technology, management and knowledge.<sup>350</sup> In this context, Zhu’s April trip served as a vital study mission to gather information about outside experiences and came before Premier Zhao Ziyang made a similar trip

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<sup>346</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China , 1984, Bericht über den Aufenthalt der Studiendelegation der Staatlichen Plankommission der VR China in der DDR, 3 September 1984, p. 3.

<sup>347</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China , 1984, Bericht über den Aufenthalt der Studiendelegation der Staatlichen Plankommission der VR China in der DDR, 3 September 1984, p. 4.

<sup>348</sup> Xu visited the VEB Werkzeugmaschinenkombinat “Fritz Heckert” Karl-Marx Stadt, VEB Kombinat “Fortschritt” Landmaschinen Neustadt, VEB Kombinat EAW “Friedrich Ebert” Berlin, VEB Kombinat Baukema Leipzig, VEB Kombinat Rundfunk und Fernsehen Staufurt, VEB Kombinat Getreidewirtschaft Halle, VEB Wohnungsbaukombinat Berlin, VEB Kombinat Maschinenbauhandel Berlin, PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China , 1984, Bericht über den Aufenthalt der Studiendelegation der Staatlichen Plankommission der VR China in der DDR, 3 September 1984, Anlage 1.

<sup>349</sup> An official directive from the Shanghai Ministry for Agriculture not only outlined Deng’s texts but also urged officials to disseminate texts and ‘lead’ through the textx (先学一些, 学好一些, 在群众学习中起骨干带头作用). SMA – B45-6-324 – “关于学习《邓小平文选》的安排意见” – 中共上海市农业局党组, 15 August 1983

<sup>350</sup> Jussi Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War – A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Document 17.3 “The Chinese Capitalist Revolution” – Deng Xiaoping’s remarks to his Central Committee colleagues in February 1984.

to Western Europe a year later in July 1985 to promote trade links.<sup>351</sup> After the trip, Ambassador Berthold was told by Liu Suinan, a deputy in the State Planning Commission, that one of the major lessons learnt was that “qualified central planning and guidance of the economy would be the best method to bring out the advantages of socialist production conditions.”<sup>352</sup> Liu also repeatedly emphasized the fact that China is more than interested to continue cooperating on all levels, especially between the two economic planning bodies, making it plain and apparent that China wished to siphon East German central planning knowledge for its own use.<sup>353</sup> Also showing his interests in GDR technology, Zhu Rongji told his East German hosts after the trip that “further trade would be hinged on technology transfers” and that only the transfer of “competitive methods and products would result in a meaningful development of bilateral trade relations”.<sup>354</sup> Honecker would return the favour and send State Secretary Herbert Krolikowski to Beijing for an extended tour to further improve political and economic relations in April 1984.<sup>355</sup> Relations intensified by leaps and bounds after these initial high-level visits in 1984. By 1985, the PRC embassy in East Berlin reported back to Beijing that the political conditions were “better than ever” for fostering continued relations.<sup>356</sup>

To Honecker, China’s seeming appreciation for his economic model was both flattering and a vindication of his vision. Fancying himself as a great statesman who had put the GDR on

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<sup>351</sup> Although Zhao touched on strategic themes, his primary emphasis was on trade and technology issues during his visits to the United Kingdom, West Germany and the Netherlands. See NARA-CIARDP85T01058R000201690001-8 – “China: Premier Zhao’s Visit to Western Europe” – Report compiled on 23 July 1985.

<sup>352</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China, 1984, Notiz über ein Arbeitsgespräch mit Vertretern der Staatlichen Plankommission der VR China am 24.3.1984, p. 1-2.

<sup>353</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China, 1984 – Notiz über ein Arbeitsgespräch mit Vertretern der Staatlichen Plankommission der VR China am 24.3.1984.

<sup>354</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 556/88 – Wirtschaft und wissenschaftliche, technische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China, 1984 – Information über die Beratung mit einer Wirtschaftsdelegation der VR China, 18.4.1984

<sup>355</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Direktive für die Gespräche des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Genossen Dr. Herbert Krolikowski, im April 1984 in der Volksrepublik China, 3-7 A report by the GDR Embassy in Beijing also noted that in exchanges with Chinese government officials, they were mostly asked on the GDR experience on industrial combines and other related industrial experience, PAAA, MFAA, ZR 2557/90 – AJ-Arbeit in VR China (Analyse, Prognose, Planung), 1984-89 – Bericht über die auslandsinformativische Arbeit im Jahre 1986.

<sup>356</sup> “德意志民主共和国概况, 1985年6月” (Internal Report by the PRC Embassy in the GDR, obtained by author from Wu Derong), p. 7.

the map by signing the *Grundlagenvertrag* with the FRG in 1972 as well as having provided his people with a standard of living unrivalled in the Eastern Bloc thanks to his “Unity of Social and Economic Policy”, he was finally getting the credit he deserved from one of the up-and-coming powers in the world.

As East German-Chinese relations improved, tensions between the GDR and USSR persisted. In June 1984, Honecker complained bitterly to Soviet leader Chernenko about Soviet oil shortages. Just as he had done with Brezhnev, Honecker reminded the new Soviet leader that out of the lower 17 million tons of oil (down from 19 million tons), one million tons went to the Soviet garrison in the GDR. Audacious as ever, the East German leader stressed to Chernenko that the GDR had sacrificed significant resources in securing the situation in Poland and in an indirect attack, remarked that countries “should prove their internationalism with deeds.”<sup>357</sup> Chernenko lashed back with criticisms of Honecker’s relations with the FRG, openly questioning if the East German leader was adhering to the socialist line towards Bonn, at the same time beseeching the East German leader to maintain the façade of unity in the bloc.<sup>358</sup> On East Berlin’s relations with Beijing, Chernenko stressed that “the maximum coordination of our policies is of utmost importance, especially in light of the Chinese differentiation attempts towards the fraternal states.” Aware of East German intransience towards Soviet directives for its China-policy, the Soviet leader went on to remark “We have the impression that our German friends do not always pay attention to this. In the mass media of the GDR, the dangerous policies of China are being ignored.”<sup>359</sup> Far from restraining his engagement with Beijing, Honecker not only shrugged off Chernenko’s warnings but further intensified his relationship with China in 1985 and 1986, resulting in ever higher-ranking visits.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A 2660 – Niederschrift über das Treffen zwischen Genossen K.U. Tschernenko und Genossen E. Honecker am 14. Juni 1984 in Moskau.

<sup>358</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A 2660.

<sup>359</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A 2660.

<sup>360</sup> PAAA MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking -



## Conclusion

In March 1982, Brezhnev's Tashkent speech removed the last reservations Honecker might have had about engaging in an independent foreign policy towards China. However, even while Brezhnev adopted a more conciliatory tone towards China, elements in the Kremlin still tried to forbid the GDR from doing the same. Realizing this blatant Soviet duplicity, Honecker rebelled against the Interkit and all other attempts to hold back East German adventurism towards Beijing. In particular, Honecker was interested in using his new relationship with China to seek potential markets for his industrial goods as well as to increase his own prestige and that of the GDR. This economic interest was also reciprocated by Beijing. However, rather than East German finished goods, China was more interested in siphoning out its technological expertise and economic-planning experience in order to draw potential lessons for its modernization drive. While Beijing's main gaze was undoubtedly cast west for technology transfers, the GDR, as the leading industrial socialist state, had a special place in China's re-engagement with the 'fraternal states'.

Undoubtedly, Soviet-East German frictions contributed to Honecker's intransigence towards Soviet attempts to slow his engagement with China. The East German statesman was also adept at using the international environment for his gain. As Superpower tensions re-emerged during the Andropov-Chernenko years, Honecker was able to blaze his own path knowing that the Kremlin would think twice about causing a public rift between itself and a key part of the Soviet Bloc. GDR-PRC relations forged ahead despite the Kremlin's intermittent protestations. Indeed, by the time Gorbachev rose to power in 1985, the state of East German-Chinese normalization

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Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch des Generalsekretärs der ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, in der Volksrepublik China vom 21. Bis 26 Oktober 1986. Even in China, both Deng and provincial leaders were eager for Honecker to share his economic experiences. Jiangsu Provincial Archives, henceforth JPA – 0000-0000-001-190 – 接待德国中央总书记，民德主席昂纳克，简报，1986.

was light years ahead of Sino-Soviet normalization.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Gerard, 'Sino-Soviet Détente: The long and winding road', *Journal of Communist Studies*, 1:1 (1985), pp. 21-33.

## Chapter Three – Honecker meets Deng, 1985-86

### Introduction

As seen in the last chapter, both Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko's brief reigns in the Kremlin did not cause any significant shifts in the basic dynamics of Soviet-East German relations. Honecker remained intent on carving out whatever freedoms he could find in order to engage with China, even despite Moscow's frequent protestations. Things did not change with Gorbachev's ascent to the CPSU's top position in March 1985. Far from ushering in a reset in Soviet-East German relations, Gorbachev's assumption of the Kremlin reins gave rise to a set of newer, more intense frictions between Honecker and Moscow. The East German leader not only disagreed with Gorbachev's proposed reform path for the Soviet Union but also deeply resented what he deemed to be inappropriate attempts to encourage liberal attitudes in the entire Soviet bloc. If there was still a last ounce of hesitation in Honecker's mind in seeking an independent path for the GDR, they were most certainly cast aside amidst Gorbachev's initiation of his *Perestroika* and then *Glasnost* policies. While Beijing was initially optimistic that Moscow's reform path might trigger positive changes for the Soviet bloc, it also quickly started to disagree with Kremlin's proposed path. To Deng, questioning the Party was counterproductive, especially since his Reform and Opening project's implementation rested on the Party's ability to reallocate resources and establish infrastructure projects on a massive scale.

This chapter will begin with a thorough discussion of the dramatic effects that Gorbachev's rise had on East German and Chinese attitudes from 1985 to 1986. It will describe the intensification of disagreements between Moscow and East Berlin as Gorbachev increasingly came to see East Berlin as a backward, dogmatic relic while Honecker actively fought back against Moscow's calls for reforms in the Soviet bloc. These frictions between Moscow and East Berlin only encouraged East Berlin to further distance itself from Soviet prescriptions vis-à-vis

China. In Beijing, emerging disagreements for Gorbachev's proposed restructuring of the communist party also brought forth a new set of ideological frictions with the Kremlin. Thus, a budding like-mindedness formed which would strengthen as both countries sought to immunize themselves from the increasingly liberal rhetoric coming out of Moscow.

As Gorbachev continued on the East German policy of his predecessors and attempted to discourage Honecker from undermining Soviet directives by pursuing independent, Moscow-defying relations with Beijing, he was confronted with the fact that, considering East Berlin's disagreement with Gorbachev's reform path, Honecker was now more than ever willing to diverge from Moscow's dictates. Just like under Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko, the Kremlin's messages fell on deaf ears in Pankow. Far from restraining himself, Honecker was willing to push relations with China to a new level after he had expended considerable effort to lay the groundwork for a possible full normalization between the two states. Having received Zhu Rongji in East Berlin, Honecker sent Minister-President Herbert Krolikowski on a whirlwind tour of China in 1984 to test the waters for increasing trade and economic cooperation and also, to lay the groundwork for further high-level exchanges. Beijing enthusiastically received its East German guest and, still eager to exploit this bilateral relationship for economic lessons from what it perceived to be a successful socialist economy, encouraged further contacts between the two nations. Thus, Beijing reciprocated by sending Minister-President Li Peng to the GDR a year later.

To the annoyance of Moscow, the East German leader duly ignored all Soviet calls for restraint and embarked on a monumental state visit to China in October 1986. This visit was laden with symbolism. It was the first time that an Eastern European leader was granted a state visit by a Chinese leader since the onset of the Sino-Soviet Split. Also, it was an expression of Honecker's total and final rejection of Moscow's unrelenting efforts to restrain his engagement with Beijing.

As relations deepened from the initial reset in the early 1980s, East Berlin and Beijing

were still enticed by a hope that deepened relations could provide substantial benefits.

Zhongnanhai still displayed considerable interest in East German economic experiences while Honecker continued to hold out the hope that he might still be able to convince China to open its gates further for East German goods. Certainly, the East German leader enjoyed presenting the achievements of the GDR economy as well as the successes of his *Friedenspolitik* in Europe to a willing audience. Deng found Honecker's drive for peace especially salient considering that he also sought a peaceful environment in which to pursue his Reform and Opening.

Throughout his 1986 visit, Honecker impressed his Chinese hosts by presenting himself as a capable manager and an able statesman. Both sides were also eager to play on their commonalities, ranging from their similar distaste towards Gorbachev's *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* to their resentment at the Moscow-enforced ice age in Sino-GDR relations during the Sino-Soviet split. Overall, Honecker's visit was an unprecedented success. Sought-after trade deals were inked.<sup>362</sup> Although there was certainly a discrepancy between how much East Germany valued its engagement with Beijing and how China reciprocated these sentiments (with the former clearly being the more eager party), it was clear from Honecker's stay in China that a new, more intense, phase in bilateral relations had been reached.

Honecker's 1986 China-visit also reveals volumes about the two men behind the relationship. While Deng humbly sought practical advantages for China, Honecker very much intended to use his visit to China to further cement his personal standing in the Soviet bloc and the international diplomatic arena by engaging a previously inaccessible Soviet enemy. In an attempt to maximize the potential prestige gain for East Berlin, he even tried to play middle-man in expediting the Sino-Soviet normalization process. Though this turned out to be a drastic overestimation of his international stature, it is a revealing indicator of Honecker's imperatives.

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<sup>362</sup> This was in addition to the \$100 million contract that both countries signed for China's purchase of 300 railway coaches as well as another for the purchase of 1000 refrigerator cars from East Germany. See Christian Science Monitor, "East German leader can expect a warm welcome in Peking. Visit could show where Sino-Soviet ties headed" October 21, 1986 (<http://www.csmonitor.com/1986/1021/ohon.html>), accessed 17 March 2014.

Overall, the visit set the stage for an intensification of relations in the latter part of the decade where practical concerns over trade would increasingly be overshadowed by wider, more pressing common concerns over the effect that Gorbachev's reforms could have not only on its Eastern European allies but the socialist world as a whole.

### **Gorbachev from Pankow's perspective**

Gorbachev's ascent to power initiated drastic changes in the Kremlin. Barely 54 years old when he was selected to become the sixth General Secretary of the CPSU, he hailed from a new generation of Soviet intelligentsia who wanted to breathe life back into the Soviet system.<sup>363</sup> Indeed, to people like Gorbachev, Soviet economic and social decay had been evident in the Brezhnev era. Figures vary but the West's adjusted records indicate that Moscow's claims about its economic vitality were completely fictitious. While the Soviet Union flexed its muscle in the third world, oil production and the agricultural sector suffered a severe decline in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>364</sup> Inheriting a stifled economy, a military burden in Afghanistan and sizeable commitments in the third world, Gorbachev decided to first seek domestic improvements in the Soviet economy and to cut defence expenditure.<sup>365</sup> In addition, Gorbachev also inherited the tense transatlantic relations that had defined Andropov and Chernenko's brief reigns. Reagan's antagonistic rhetoric on Soviet actions in the third world irked Gorbachev. It seemed utterly hypocritical to the Kremlin that Washington could insist on Moscow's unilateral withdrawal from Afghanistan, Angola, and Ethiopia while refusing to discuss American hegemony in Central America.<sup>366</sup> Despite these differences, Gorbachev was adamant on reengaging the West, especially

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<sup>363</sup> Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 17.

<sup>364</sup> Saki Ruth Dockrill, *The End of the Cold War Era* (New York: Hodder Arnold, 2005), p. 18.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21.

<sup>366</sup> Vladislav Zubok, *A failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 283.

on arms control. Never a fan of nuclear weapons<sup>367</sup>, Gorbachev started corresponding with Reagan almost immediately after his ascent to power.<sup>368</sup> Washington seemed to view Gorbachev's potential seriously as initial American estimations of the new Soviet leader were marked by optimism. In a June 1985 CIA report where he was called "the new broom", Gorbachev was said to have demonstrated in his first 100 days "that he is the most aggressive and activist Soviet leader since Khrushchev" and that his "prospects for success should not be underestimated".<sup>369</sup>

In terms of foreign policy towards the Warsaw Pact, Gorbachev is remembered as having loosened his control of the client states. Gorbachev's "Sinatra Doctrine", as it is often referred to (a reference to the legendary American singer's song *My Way*), had encouraged Eastern European states to choose their own way and had vowed to never use Soviet troops to prop up regimes in the fraternal states, thus presenting a total abandonment of the Brezhnev doctrine.<sup>370</sup> While Gorbachev has maintained with hindsight that he sought greater liberalization for Eastern Europe as early as 1985, evidence suggests that the first few years of the Gorbachev-era were marked by continuity rather than change in Soviet Eastern Europe policy.<sup>371</sup> In fact, far from proposing more freedoms for Soviet-bloc states, Gorbachev met with all the Eastern European Communist Party Secretaries for Ideology in his role as the CPSU Secretary for Ideology in Moscow on 6 March 1985 - five days before he became General Secretary - to urge greater unity in the bloc. During the meeting, he called on them to "intensify [their] ideological vigilance" and to strive for "much tighter

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<sup>367</sup> Gorbachev reportedly refused to even press the nuclear button during a secret strategic game simulating the Soviet response to a nuclear attack – Mikhail Gorbachev in an interview with Yuri Smirnov, 23 August 1994, Moscow in *Science and Society: History of the Soviet Atomic Project*, quoted in Vadislav Zubok, *A failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 284.

<sup>368</sup> Vadislav Zubok, *A failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 284.

<sup>369</sup> NARA-CIARDP85T01058R000507710001-6 – "Gorbachev, the new broom" – June 1985.

<sup>370</sup> Vadislav Zubok, *A failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), pp. 294-302.

<sup>371</sup> Gorbachev has claimed that he told Eastern European leaders at Chernenko's funeral in March 1985 that henceforth Soviet military power will not be used to keep them in power. Gorbachev, *Ponyat' perestrojku...pochemu eto vazhno seychas*. (Moscow: Al'pina Biznes Buks, 2006), p. 70 quoted in Archie Brown, "Perestroika and the End of the Cold War", *Cold War History*, 7:1 (2007), pp. 1-17, p. 3.

cohesion in all spheres of the socialist commonwealth”.<sup>372</sup> This stance was continued in the subsequent months, during which he repeatedly called for greater economic integration within the COMECON and the expansion of political-military cooperation among the members of the Warsaw Pact. In fact, between 1985 and 1988, the Soviet leader never hinted that Moscow would not do everything to quell external or internal subversive threats to Warsaw Pact states. In Mark Kramer’s words, “...at no time during his initial years in office did he [Gorbachev] disavow the Brezhnev doctrine or display the slightest inclination to accept the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.”<sup>373</sup>

In East Berlin, Gorbachev’s call for tighter military coordination within the Warsaw Pact was a welcome change from the hands-off attitude displayed during the Polish labour strikes of 1982. However, it was Gorbachev’s simultaneous domestic policy of restructuring and reform within the CPSU that started cause considerable worry in East Berlin. As Gorbachev gave momentum to his *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* in the spring of 1986 at the XXVII Party Congress of the CPSU, East Germans waited with abated breath on Honecker’s response two months later at the XI Party Congress of the SED (17-21 April 1986). Many in the party and state apparatus at the time actually wondered if domestic and political problems would be addressed more openly after the Soviet impulses.<sup>374</sup> However, any indications that the SED might change its conservative outlook did not occur. In fact, in Honecker’s opinion, the XXVII CPSU Party Congress had been too “spontaneous” and hasty.<sup>375</sup> Thus, Gorbachev, who was the first General Secretary of the CPSU since 1971 to attend an SED Party conference, was not treated to resounding support for his *Perestroika* but only received token support for his disarmament policies.<sup>376</sup> Indications of SED delineation can also be gleaned from the protocol of the conference. In it, the “goal-oriented

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<sup>372</sup> Mark Kramer, ‘The Demise of the Soviet Bloc’ *The Journal of Modern History* 83 (December 2011), p. 791.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 792.

<sup>374</sup> Eide-Siebs,, p. 312.

<sup>375</sup> Werner Eberlein, SED Politburo member and Party Secretary of Magdeburg cited in Fred Oldenburg, *Das Dreieck Moskau-Ost Berlin-Bonn, 1975-1989. Aus den Akten des SED-Archivs* (Köln: Bundesinstitut für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien, 1994), pp. 41-43.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.



expansion of the *Bruderbund* with the Soviet Union” fell to second place in the rank of importance, behind “overcoming of confrontation through the cooperation of states”.<sup>377</sup> While Honecker assured Gorbachev of his continued allegiance to Moscow, subtle indications of his emerging scepticism of Gorbachev’s reform path were beginning to surface.

Rather than the drastic changes that the Soviet leader promoted, Honecker bet on continuity. Yet, the East German leader ought to have seen every reason to reform. 1986 had been another ruinous year for the East German economy. The drastically sinking oil prices in 1985/86 had hit the GDR especially hard. As East Germany had expanded its export of oil-products to the West in the years prior, it lost around 1.5 billion dollars of income in 1986.<sup>378</sup> Desperate attempts were made to plug the hole with additional exports in order to gain foreign currency. However, weak demand for GDR finished goods and an accompanying sinking dollar meant that export income sank to new lows, bringing about a new wave of indebtedness to the West.<sup>379</sup> Economic reliance on the West, in the form of transfer payments and state credits, became even more important to East Berlin in the late 1980s as Honecker actively fostered his economic relations with the other Germany against Soviet wishes to maintain a façade of solidarity.<sup>380</sup>

However, overall, it seems Honecker put on a set of self-imposed blinders or simply did not judge these economic problems to be as severe as we now know them to be with hindsight.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Protokoll der Verhandlungen des XI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1986), p. 43.

<sup>378</sup> The East Germans refined 75 percent of their oil imports from the Soviet Union and sold it on for income as refined gasoline, diesel and heating oil to the West. In 1985 East Berlin had earned 2.5 billion valuta marks from the nonsocialist world this way. The declining oil prices meant that this declined to about 1 billion in 1986 and 900 million in 1987. Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 66; This process of ‘re-exportation’ had been in wide use since the late 1970s. See Andre Steiner, *The Plans that Failed – An economic history of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), p. 163.

<sup>379</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30 J IV 2/2A 2882 – “Vorschläge für Massnahmen zur ökonomischen Stärkung der DDR unter Berücksichtigung der veränderten Preise für Erdölprodukte und für den Fünfjahrplan 1986-1990”.

<sup>380</sup> Joachim Scholtyssek, *Die Aussenpolitik der DDR* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003), pp. 125-150.

<sup>381</sup> Honecker often shied away from taking decisive action to deal with the escalating economic crisis. There are indications that the large implications of East German economic malaise might have been beyond Honecker’s grasp. Instead of dealing with inherent economic problems, he often “muddled” through and rebuked subordinated who brought the grave state of the economy to his attention. See on this Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 70-72 Also see Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina

At the XI. Party Conference he praised the superior economic performance of the GDR and its “high growth rates”. He laid out a ten point economic plan until the year 2000 which was supposed to guarantee the “unassailable” position of his GDR.<sup>382</sup>

Indeed, the last thing on Honecker’s mind was restructuring. If the East German leader at least tried to shroud his disdain for *Perestroika*, he was sure to let the world know how he felt about *Glasnost*. According to Günter Sieber, Head of the International Department of the SED Politburo and member of the Central Committee, Honecker “knew that the GDR could not survive [freedom of the press]”.<sup>383</sup> Though Honecker resented Gorbachev’s calls for liberalization, his disdain was not shared by the average GDR citizen living in Leipzig or Potsdam. Indeed, much to the regret of the SED-elite, Moscow’s calls for *Glasnost* found resonance among the East German populace. Long-suppressed resentment of the Honecker regime started to find expression. Groups such as the ‘Initiative for Peace and Human Rights’ (Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte) found legitimacy and momentum in the reform winds that were blowing west from Moscow.<sup>384</sup> Witnessing these trends, Honecker started to actively fight back against the spread of Soviet liberal influences. He labelled Soviet liberal thinkers such as poet and novelist Yevgeny Yevtushenko as “counter-revolutionary” and complained personally to Gorbachev after Yevtushenko had given an October 1986 interview to the West German TV channel *ZDF* in which he talked positively about authors working on a “unified German literature” and the reunification of Germany. Certainly, Gorbachev’s defence, that these writers were in principle “not bad people”, must have irked Honecker even further.<sup>385</sup>

Thus, far from bringing fresh wind into East German-Soviet relations, Gorbachev’s ascent

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Press, 1997).

<sup>382</sup> Protokoll der Verhandlungen des XI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, (Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1986), p. 67.

<sup>383</sup> Interview with Günter Sieber, March 19, 1997, Berlin, quoted in Eide-Siebs, p. 321

<sup>384</sup> Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Bonn: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998), p. 320.

<sup>385</sup> Daniel Küchenmeister (eds.) *Honecker-Gorbatschow. Vieraugengespräche* (Berlin: Dietz, 1993), p. 39.

to power actually had the net effect of worsening bilateral dynamics. Not only were Moscow and East Berlin confronted with divergences in their respective foreign policy strategies but with the new man in the Kremlin, both leaders found that their most basic visions for the future of socialism were becoming increasingly incompatible.

Feeling abandoned by Moscow, East Berlin was now more willing than ever to pursue a self-serving, adventurous foreign policy. Certainly, Soviet calls for more coordination in the foreign policy sphere carried even less weight than before in East German eyes. To be sure, Gorbachev's initial wish for a tighter cohesion in the Warsaw Pact's foreign affairs translated into a continuation rather than shift of Moscow's policy towards its client states. Thus, Moscow under Gorbachev was still more than willing to flex its muscles to dictate the foreign policy activities of its allies. With Reagan and Gorbachev unable to come to an agreement on nuclear disarmament and Second Cold War tensions intensifying, Moscow now needed the loyalty of its client states more than ever.

However, if the Kremlin thought that East Berlin would toe an antagonistic line towards the Western Bloc amidst an emerging war of words across the Atlantic, it would be mistaken. On the contrary, Honecker made no secret that he was desperate to keep Europe from plunging into another diplomatic ice-age. As outlined in his previous meetings with West German leaders, it was Honecker's central goal to create his own personal *détente* in Europe so that the GDR could continue to benefit economically from engagement with Western Europe.<sup>386</sup> Already in 1983, Honecker was eager to follow Swedish Minister-President Palme's suggestion of creating a nuclear weapons-free zone in Europe.<sup>387</sup> Even despite Bonn's decision to station American missiles in West Germany, the East German General Secretary still sought to limit the damage by engaging Helmut Kohl to pursue a "*Koalition der Vernunft*" or a "coalition of reason". This

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<sup>386</sup> Eide-Siebs, pp. 261.

<sup>387</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30 J IV 2/2A 2540 SED Politbüro Beschluss zum Palme Plan, 25 January 1983.

seemed to work with some success as the West German chancellor talked of a “community of responsibility” (*Verantwortungsgemeinschaft*) in East-West relations. Due to Honecker and Schmidt’s efforts, inter-German relations improved considerably despite Moscow’s wish to punish Bonn for agreeing to station Pershing II missiles.<sup>388</sup> The decline of economic aid from the Soviet Union due to its overstretched commitments around the world on top of an increasing ideological divergence would have been enough reason for the Pankow regime to keep its linkages alive to Bonn.<sup>389</sup> In addition, the self-perceived prestige that successful inter-German contacts garnered Honecker only added further impetus for him to continue on his path of détente with Bonn, even despite strong criticisms of policy-divergence from Gorbachev.

### **China and Gorbachev: Gaige Kaifang above *Perestroika* and *Glasnost***

In China, Gorbachev’s reforms triggered a similar reaction as in the GDR. With Beijing formulating its own path towards modernity, it deemed political liberalization à la *Glasnost* a non-starter in the People’s Republic. To be sure, by the mid-1980s, Deng’s Reform and Opening policies were more or less on course to bring China out of the economic stagnation that had accompanied the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. Chinese economic growth had hit double digits by 1983, and the GDP had almost quadrupled over the course of the decade. Special Economic Zones were attracting external investment as foreign companies were granted duty-free privileges and favourable tax rates.<sup>390</sup>

Increased cooperation with the West during this initial modernization phase meant that its relationship with America and Western European states improved drastically. Aside from a few

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<sup>388</sup> Eide-Siebs. 265.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., p. 273; The appetite for economic aid to East Germany further decreased after the Politburo found out in the fall of 1986 that defense expenditures were swallowing up to 40 percent of the Soviet budget and that far-flung engagements such as its support of Vietnam was costing Moscow 40 billion rubles per year while Cuba cost 25 billion rubles and Syria 6 billion rubles per year respectively, Vadislav Zubok, *A failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 299.

<sup>390</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750* (London: Bodley Head, 2012), pp. 377-378.

inevitable bumps in the road relating to the Taiwan issue, China was able to reap the diplomatic benefits of its new market-oriented reform path. In the environment of Soviet-American tensions arising from issues ranging from Afghanistan, nuclear disarmament and Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, China had come to be seen in Washington as an increasingly important counterweight against Moscow. Indeed, during most of the 1980s, the U.S. treated China as a de-facto ally, sharing sensitive intelligence information and providing technology to China that was sometimes unavailable to others outside of the United States.<sup>391</sup>

Washington was not the only superpower courting Beijing in the mid 1980s. Threatened by an improving Sino-American relationship and potential strategic isolation, Gorbachev too sought to bring about significant change in Sino-Soviet relations, something which his immediate predecessors in the Kremlin were unable to achieve.<sup>392</sup> The new man at the top took matters into his own hands when he made his desire to normalize relations absolutely clear at a speech in Vladivostok on July 28, 1986.<sup>393</sup> In it, Gorbachev announced that six Soviet regiments would soon be withdrawn from Afghanistan, that some troops might be pulled out of Mongolia, and that he was prepared to discuss a reduction of force levels along the remainder of the Sino-Soviet border.<sup>394</sup> These actions were intended to tell Beijing that Moscow was willing to submit to some of the "Three Conditions" that Chinese leaders had put forward as a precondition towards Sino-Soviet normalization.<sup>395</sup>

With both Washington and Moscow courting China, Beijing judged the international

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., pp. 374-375.

<sup>392</sup> The last one to seriously attempt reconciliation was Yuri Andropov as he attempted to set the wheels in motion during Brezhnev's funeral. See 黄华, *亲历与见闻—黄华回忆录* (北京: 世界知识出版社, 2007) pp. 223-255.

<sup>393</sup> See Herbert J. Ellison, "Soviet-Chinese Relations: The Experience of Two Decades" in Robert S. Ross (eds.) *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: Tripolarity and policy making in the Cold War* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), p. 103.

<sup>394</sup> In addition, Gorbachev offered to accept the main navigation channel on the Amur river as the border line as well as offering Soviet support for construction of the Urumqi-Kazakhstan railroad. Herbert J. Ellison, "Soviet-Chinese Relations: The Experience of Two Decades" in Robert S. Ross (eds.) *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: Tripolarity and policy making in the Cold War* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), p. 103.

<sup>395</sup> See 钱其琛, *外交十记* (北京: 世界知识出版社, 2003), pp 1-40.

environment favourable to accelerate its economic reforms.<sup>396</sup> And in early 1986, with Premier Zhao Ziyang and Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang leading the way and with the blessing of Deng, price controls were dropped from a range of manufactured goods, bold experimentation with labour-incentive systems was again encouraged, rural production was delegated to family contracting units and collective enterprises were leased to individual entrepreneurs or groups of workers.<sup>397</sup> After sporadic backlashes against the corrupting societal influences that modernization brought to China had subsided, by 1986 China was sailing full steam towards further market-oriented reforms.<sup>398</sup> And indeed, first results were beginning to show. Average living standards in the cities improved. For the first time, Chinese consumers were bringing home one of the ‘eight bigs’ (television, refrigerator, stereo, camera, motorcycle, furniture set, washing machine, and electric fan). By all measures, Deng could cautiously proclaim that his reform path had borne China its first fruits.<sup>399</sup>

Having achieved substantial improvements to China’s economic situation with his own brand of domestic reforms, unsurprisingly Deng, like Honecker half a world away, was no fan of Gorbachev’s calls for an alternate path to reform via his *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. Without a doubt, Gorbachev’s reforms were watched closely in China. Specialty journals such as *苏联东欧问题* (Issues in Soviet and Eastern Europe) cast a curious, yet sceptical eye towards Moscow.<sup>400</sup> For a brief moment, Chinese leaders and government bodies were relatively split on how to view Gorbachev’s reforms. In the Foreign Ministry for example, opinions were divided on whether this was a welcome development out of the Brezhnev-Andropov-Chernenko stagnation or simply a capitulation to Western calls for more political reform. Whereas economic reform was welcomed,

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<sup>396</sup> Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of HUP, 2011), p. 570.

<sup>397</sup> Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), p. 704.

<sup>398</sup> For example, directives from the centre directed Hebei to push forward Reform and Opening in November 1986. Hebei Provincial Archives, henceforth HPA, -106531210 - 适应改革开放要求努力做好设计工作 (全国设计会议典型经验介绍材料) - 21 November 1986.

<sup>399</sup> Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), p. 788.

<sup>400</sup> Gilbert Rozman, “China’s concurrent debate and the Gorbachev era” in Thomas P. Bernstein and Hua Yu Li (eds.), *China learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), pp. 449-476.

older Soviet Union-hands in the Foreign Ministry such as the Head of the Soviet/Eastern European department Yu Hongliang were sceptical that sudden, wholesale economic reforms like those proposed by Moscow could work.<sup>401</sup> It did not take long for private criticisms of the Soviet path to grow as it became clearer that Gorbachev also had political reforms on his agenda, something which was fervently opposed in Beijing. Vice-Premier Li Peng, a strongman in the conservative faction of the CCP, penned in his diary: "...Gorbachev shouts a lot and does little". Others thought that Gorbachev's reforms had created leadership rifts in the Kremlin, while Deng had been able to bring Zhongnanhai together.<sup>402</sup>

Another criticism of Gorbachev centered around what Beijing deemed Gorbachev's capitulations to Western standards of governance. In Beijing's view, Washington was using Gorbachev's liberal stance to weaken socialist regimes through 'peaceful evolution', that is, by destabilizing communist regimes through peacefully promoting pluralist elements which erode central authoritarian powers. Since John Foster Dulles first mentioned this method as a potential strategy to weaken China, Chinese leaders have been extremely sensitive to any perceived threats of Western subversion.<sup>403</sup> For this reason Beijing's leaders have always been very suspicious of other nations' ulterior motives in dealing with communist states, often suspecting that foreign demands to change the internal status quo are ultimately tied to efforts to erode sovereignty.<sup>404</sup>

Thus, while Deng was willing to liberalize China's economy and invite further foreign investment, he certainly was not ready to allow the kind of political liberalization that *Glasnost* foresaw. Albeit Deng did expend some effort in learning about potential paths towards political reform in the mid 1980s, even setting up a Central Committee Small Group on Political Systems

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<sup>401</sup> Author's interview with Liu Qibao, Deputy Ambassador in the Chinese Embassy to the GDR, 1984-1990, Beijing, 23 November 2012.

<sup>402</sup> 李鹏, *和平, 发展, 合作 - 李鹏外事日记* (北京: 新华, 2008), p. 233.

<sup>403</sup> David Shambaugh, "Peking's Foreign Policy Conundrum since Tiananmen: Peaceful Coexistence vs. Peaceful Evolution," *Issues and Studies* 28 (1992), pp. 65-85.

<sup>404</sup> David Shambaugh, "Containment or Engagement of China?: Calculating Beijing's Responses", *International Security*, (21:2). Fall 1996; pp. 180-209, p. 194.

Reform (中央政治体制改革研讨小组) in mid-September 1986, his main concern was still firmly centered on getting China into economic modernity.<sup>405</sup> While clearly a proponent for economic flexibility in shaping China's development path, famously arguing that it did not matter if it was a black cat or a white cat that caught the mouse, Deng was not ready prepared to apply the same kind of flexibility to the political sphere.<sup>406</sup>

### **Laying the groundwork – Sino-East German summitry leading up to Honecker's state visit**

Both the GDR and China found no favour in Gorbachev's reform path and were more than willing to ignore Moscow's prescriptions. This created the curious net effect in which East Berlin and Beijing were increasingly bound together through their common suspicions of the Kremlin's reform efforts. During bilateral exchanges, disagreements with the Kremlin's new path started to be discussed openly. During Honecker's visit to Beijing in 1986, the East German leader, to the satisfaction of his Chinese hosts, would repeatedly stress that the GDR had in fact undergone 15 years of reforms in order to become an advanced socialist society since the SED VIII Party Congress in 1971 and thus had no need for further reforms as called for by the Soviet Union.<sup>407</sup> Chinese leaders reciprocated this sentiment. Unsurprisingly, Honecker's independent foreign policy stance didn't just find expression in his dogged pursuit to save détente in Europe but also translated into the continuation of an independent stance towards China. The GDR not

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<sup>405</sup> On June 28, 1986, at a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, Deng directed that in preparation for the 13th Party Congress, the party Secretariat should draw up a plan for a year-long study of political system reform and then suggest a program for action. Any concrete action in this regard was effectively stopped by the backlash after the 1986 student protests which saw the removal of Hu Yaobang and a conservative backlash. See Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of HUP, 2011), p. 573.

<sup>406</sup> The roots of Dengist pragmatism have been traced as far back as 1962, where he famously said 'No matter if it is a white cat or a black cat' as long as it can catch mice, it is a good cat' (不管黑猫白猫，抓到老鼠就是好猫) during a meeting of the CCP Secretariat. See 不管黑猫白猫，抓到老鼠就是好猫, Xinhua News Agency, 13 October 2008; 冷落, 汪作玲 (主编) 邓小平年谱 (下, 1975-1997) (北京: 中央文献出版社, 2004) pp. 900-904; 中央文献研究室科研部图书馆 (编) 邓小平人生纪实 (北京: 凤凰出版传媒集团, 凤凰出版社, 2011), p. 201.

<sup>407</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, pp. 5-6.



only displayed the same flexibility and independence towards China that had been characteristic of Pankow's foreign policy during the latter Brezhnev years and the short reigns of Andropov and Chernenko, but now motivated by Moscow's seeming continued abandonment accentuated in light of its new reform path, Honecker was willing to put his engagement with China into a new gear. As a result, Sino-GDR contacts started to gain in frequency and the relationship blossomed.<sup>408</sup>

To be sure, after Honecker had seized the initiative in the aftermath of Brezhnev's 1982 Tashkent speech, relations seemed to be improving month by month. In this sense, a solid groundwork had already been laid to push forward the bilateral relationship during the Gorbachev years. Whereas earlier contacts had been largely made up of learning delegations and relatively low-ranking diplomats, the middle of the decade brought about a series of high-profile visits by relatively senior leaders on both sides. Thus, East German State Secretary and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Herbert Krolikowski's visit to Beijing in April 1984 served as a vital milestone to expanding relations. Beijing reciprocated by dispatching Foreign Trade Minister Chen Muhua as well as the Head of the State Economic Commission, Zhang Jingfu, to East Germany as soon as possible to show Zhongnanhai's equalled determination to foster ties.<sup>409</sup>

Krolikowski came to China with a specific mission – to try to pry the Chinese market open for more East German exports. During his visit, the State Secretary hinted to Wu Xueqian that “the GDR was a developed industrial country and China possesses over great natural resources and a huge market”.<sup>410</sup> These oft-repeated sentiments illustrate that the GDR, despite having witnessed disappointing trade figures in the early 1980s, had not lost hope in establishing a market for their export goods. To the satisfaction of Krolikowski, Beijing on more than one occasion,

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<sup>408</sup> Especially local-local contacts thrived after bilateral relations had started to warm from 1982 on. PAAA, MFAA ZR 2565/90 – Besichtigungen CD (Reiseberichte) – 1982-88.

<sup>409</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Direktive für die Gespräche des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Genossen Dr. Herbert Krolikowski, im April 1984 in der Volksrepublik China, p. 5.

<sup>410</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreters des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Herbert Krolikowski, mit dem Staatskommissar und Aussenminister der VR China, Wu Xueqian, am. 10. Mai 1984 in Peking, p. 3.

showed its appreciation for continued economic cooperation. During Krolikowski's visit, Zhang Jingfu made a point of thanking the East German statesman for the warm welcome that Zhu Rongji had received during his study tour of the GDR. Zhang stated his enthusiasm after reading Zhu's reports and congratulated Krolikowski on the GDR's great industrial achievements. Zhang expressed his confidence that agreements and contracts that were to be discussed during Zhu's Spring 1984 visit to the GDR would soon be signed.<sup>411</sup> To outline Beijing's continued interest in learning from one of the leading socialist economies of the world, Zhang made it absolutely clear that many in the Chinese leadership were interested in "expanding economic, scientific-technical and trade relations with the GDR", stressing that this "opening to the outside" would be crucial in the People's Republic's two main goals of "establishing 100 key industrial programs" and the reconstruction of certain industries, reiterating that "China is interested in modern technology".<sup>412</sup> To entice GDR technology transfers, Zhang was not shy to dangle the alluring prize of increased Sino-GDR trade in front of Krolikowski. Thus, he intimated to Krowlikowski that "technology transfers could only have the effect of increasing trade between both countries" and that "friendly countries", i.e. the GDR, should cooperate with Beijing to create a more open Chinese market.<sup>413</sup> As if to probe if East Berlin was ready to continue assisting China in its modernization efforts, Zhang remarked that the "GDR had already helped China during the first 5-year plan, China assumes that the GDR is still ready to help in China's reconstruction" and welcomed the planned visit by the Minister for Heavy Industries, Kersten as "trade can be better developed through a

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<sup>411</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Herbert Krolikowski, mit dem Staatskommissar und Vorsitzenden der Staatlichen Wirtschaftskommission VR China, Zhang Jingfu, am 7. Mai 1984 in Peking, p. 2.

<sup>412</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Herbert Krolikowski, mit dem Staatskommissar und Vorsitzenden der Staatlichen Wirtschaftskommission VR China, Zhang Jingfu, am 7. Mai 1984 in Peking, p. 2.

<sup>413</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Herbert Krolikowski, mit dem Staatskommissar und Vorsitzenden der Staatlichen Wirtschaftskommission VR China, Zhang Jingfu, am 7. Mai 1984 in Peking, p. 3.

deeper understanding of the [trade] partner.<sup>414</sup> Krolikowski was only too glad to agree wholeheartedly at the prospect of improving bilateral trade relations and the possibility of exploring the Chinese market. The East German statesman invited Zhang Jingfu to visit the GDR to “make his own impression about East German developments”.<sup>415</sup> More than its practical nature, Krolikowski’s visit was a very important trust-building exercise for both countries. The East German statesman was invited to the Peking Institute for the Research into International Questions, the first time that a Warsaw Pact leader was extended an invitation in 20 years.<sup>416</sup>

To impress Krolikowski, the Chinese were also eager to share their experiences of Beijing’s implementation of “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” by giving him a tour of the Special Economic Zones, where Deng was attracting foreign investment with the implementation of more liberal economic policies.<sup>417</sup> Beijing was proud to report that economic growth within the last five years had been the most dynamic since the founding of China and these developments were only achieved with selected decentralization of single production facilities. His Chinese hosts told Krolikowski that these Special Economic Zones would eventually form the basis for Chinese modernization efforts and would be instrumental in the collection of reform experiences to be adopted across the country.<sup>418</sup> Krolikowski held back on explicit compliments on the Special

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<sup>414</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Herbert Krolikowski, mit dem Staatskommissar und Vorsitzenden der Staatlichen Wirtschaftskommission VR China, Zhang Jingfu, am 7. Mai 1984 in Peking, p. 4.

<sup>415</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Herbert Krolikowski, mit dem Staatskommissar und Vorsitzenden der Staatlichen Wirtschaftskommission VR China, Zhang Jingfu, am 7. Mai 1984 in Peking, p. 5.

<sup>416</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Direktive für die Gespräche des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Genossen Dr. Herbert Krolikowski, im April 1984 in der Volksrepublik China, p. 6.

<sup>417</sup> JPA – 无锡 – 0000 – 0000 – 004 – 0221 – 苏州为接待民德部长会议夫付主席和比利时首相计划, 简报; JPA – 无锡 – 0000 – 1985 – 002 – 2813 – 苏州外为接待民德部长会议夫付主席及和比利时首相计划, 简报; PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Direktive für die Gespräche des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Genossen Dr. Herbert Krolikowski, im April 1984 in der Volksrepublik China, p. 5.

<sup>418</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Direktive für die Gespräche des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Genossen Dr. Herbert Krolikowski, im April 1984 in der Volksrepublik China, p. 6.

Economic Zones. Having already embarked on its own brand of reform, most GDR diplomats and leadership alike regarded the Chinese model of reform as ill-informed.<sup>419</sup>

All in all, the visit was a resounding success and had the desired effect of deepening bilateral relations. Contacts were established between the East German *Volkskammer* and the National People's Congress and both countries vowed to continue political dialogue at the 39<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly in the Fall of 1984. In addition, plans were made for the conclusion of a consular treaty, the preparation of a long-term scientific-technical exchange agreement, reciprocal visits of the respective heads of the state economic planning commissions as well as the inking of a long-term trade treaty for the years 1986-90.<sup>420</sup>

Krolikowski's whirlwind tour of China had done a great deal to cast aside any remaining suspicions between the two countries. Encouraged by the trip, the second in charge of the Far Eastern section of the MfAA, former Ambassador to China and noted Sinophile Helmut Liebermann, called together the ambassadors of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary in a secret meeting in Beijing to tell them of the successes of the trip and make to stress to fellow Warsaw Pact states that the GDR would continue to pursue independent, Moscow-defying relations with China. After having led an open revolt in the 1982 Interkit and now fancying its role as a bloc leader when it came to China affairs, East Berlin was now staging its own 'anti-Interkit Interkit' by encouraging Moscow's close allies to enter into more amicable relations with China against the Soviet line.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> In January 1983 Ambassador Berthold wrote to State Secretary Herbert Krolikowski that while Deng's reform project was indeed having an effect in dissolving local state-owned enterprises, he predicted widespread profit-seeking behavior and social differences to emerge. PAAA, MFAA ZR 2432/90 – Leiterbriefe von AV u. GK, 1981-88 – Berthold an Krolikowski, 13.1.1983.

<sup>420</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Direktive für die Gespräche des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Genossen Dr. Herbert Krolikowski, im April 1984 in der Volksrepublik China, 93

<sup>421</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Genossen Helmut Liebermann, Stellvertreter des Leiters der Abteilung FO, mit dem Botschaftsräten der Botschaften Bulgariens, des CSSR, Polens und Ungarns in der DDR am 28.Mai.1984 in der MfAA.

That the Pankow leadership knew full well that it was embarking on a controversial policy of subversion within the Soviet bloc can be told from its intentionally contradictory statements allies about Krolikowski's tour of China. Tellingly, Krolikowski presented a very different version of events to close Soviet allies Mongolia and Vietnam during a separate meeting in Berlin. Far from gloating about his successes in China in establishing friendly contacts with a multitude of ministries and Chinese leaders, the East German State Security made a point to play down his China visit, leaving no doubt that East Berlin did not want to emphasize its burgeoning relations with China to states that feared China's rise in the international system. As such, Krolikowski told the Vietnamese and Mongolian Ambassador that contacts were only made at the lowest levels and that trade negotiations were not progressing as desired.<sup>422</sup> Predictably, Krolikowski duplicitously told Soviet Ambassador through Soviet diplomat V.A. Koptelzew that he had stuck to the agreed Soviet line during his meetings in China.<sup>423</sup>

### **Beijing's interests**

From Beijing's perspective, Honecker's GDR still presented an enticing proposition in the mid-1980s. Zhongnanhai continued to hope that East Germany could provide China with a look at how socialist economies could become "world class".<sup>424</sup> Its know-how and lessons could then be potentially passed on to Chinese companies and local governments. It is for this reason that

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<sup>422</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Vermerk über die Information des Staatssekretärs, Genossen Dr. Krolikowski, fuer die Botschafter der SRV, der VDRL, der VRK und dem Geschäftsträger der MVR in der DDR über die Konsultationen des Genossen Dr. Krolikowski in Peking am 17. Mai. 1984 im MfAA.

<sup>423</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 663/89 – Reise Staatssekretär und 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers, Gen Krolikowski nach China – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreters des Ministers fuer die Auswärtige Angelegenheiten Genossen Dr. Krolikowski, mit dem Gesandten der Botschafter der UdSSR in der DDR, Genosse V.A. Koptelzew am 21. Mai, 1984.

<sup>424</sup> Leading Chinese diplomats stationed in the GDR only found out after the collapse of the GDR in what dire straits the GDR economy was in, giving testimony to the GDR's success in shrouding the true state of its economy - Interview with Wu Derong, Commercial Secretary in the PRC Embassy to the GDR, 1982-1989, Beijing, 2 April 2012, Interview with Liu Qibao, Political Secretary in the PRC Embassy to the GDR, 1979-1988, Beijing, 11 May 2012.

Beijing took the initiative to send Minister-President (later Premier) Li Peng in April 1985 to East Berlin to foster even deeper relations with East Germany.<sup>425</sup> In preparation for his visit, the PRC embassy stressed to its East German contacts that China was more than eager to learn about “the construction of socialism” in the GDR and how East Berlin had been so successful in planning its economy, as “[these lessons] would have profound implications for the enactment of reforms in China”.<sup>426</sup> To play on the heart-strings of East Berlin, the embassy informed that Li Peng would be interested in discussing a long term trade agreement while he was in the GDR.<sup>427</sup> Certainly, the possibility of reversing the declining trade trend from the beginning of the decade must have been music to Honecker’s ears

During his talks with Honecker, Li, in line with China’s focus on economic matters according to the priorities set forth by Deng, outlined four main topics that he wanted to address, with “the implementation of economic reforms” at the top of the list, followed by other reform-oriented topics such as “the fulfilment of the next five year plan”, “the leadership of industry at different levels” and “the opening of the PRC”.<sup>428</sup> While asking for East German help to establish key Chinese industries, Li was quick to emphasize that China, because of its special characteristics due to its large population and relatively backward economy, will have to pursue a special path.<sup>429</sup> As Gorbachev’s calls for *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* became more prominent, this

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<sup>425</sup> From the beginning Beijing pushed for meetings with high-level policy-makers in the GDR through its representatives in the GDR. PAAA, MFAA ZR 61/89 – Besuch Stellv. Ministerpräsident des Staatsrates VR China, Li Peng in der DDR - Vermerk ein Gespräch des stellvertretenden Leiters der Abteilung Ferner Osten, Genossen Liebermann, mit dem Gesandten der Botschaft der VR China in der DDR, Yang Chengxu, am 4.4.1985.

<sup>426</sup> PAAA – MFAA ZR 61/89 – Besuch Stellv. Ministerpräsident des Staatsrates VR China, Li Peng in der DDR – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreters des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, Genossen Dr. Herbert Krolikowski, mit dem Botschafter der VR China in der DDR, Genossen Ma Xusheng, am 22 April 1985.

<sup>427</sup> PAAA – MFAA ZR 61/89 – Besuch Stellv. Ministerpräsident des Staatsrates VR China, Li Peng in der DDR – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreters des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, Genossen Dr. Herbert Krolikowski, mit dem Botschafter der VR China in der DDR, Genossen Ma Xusheng, am 22 April 1985.

<sup>428</sup> PAAA – MFAA ZR 61/89 – Besuch Stellv. Ministerpräsident des Staatsrates VR China, Li Peng in der DDR – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem stellvertretenden Vorsitzenden des Ministerrates der Volksrepublik China, Genossen Li Peng, am 20.5.1985, p. 1.

<sup>429</sup> PAAA – MFAA ZR 61/89 – Besuch Stellv. Ministerpräsident des Staatsrates VR China, Li Peng in der DDR –

line would repeatedly be used by Beijing to differentiate between Chinese reforms and those in the Soviet Union. Overall, Li Peng's visit was another milestone in GDR-PRC relations. Both countries had shown that they were more than interested in building a meaningful relationship.

As relations forged ahead, Beijing made sure that the provinces also sought renewed economic engagement with the GDR in order to learn from what was considered an East European powerhouse. To be sure, far-ranging cooperation agreements had already been initiated at the provincial level. For example, in 1984, the Shandong Medical Department started cooperating with GDR experts in order to establish advanced facilities with X Rays and respirators in Shandong province.<sup>430</sup> In July 1984, the Jiangsu provincial electrical cooperation, in accordance with directives from the centre, dispatched a study-delegation to learn from the East German electrical industry.<sup>431</sup> In November of the same year, Beijing asked provincial governments in Liaoning, Hubei, Jiangsu, Shandong, Shanxi, Hebei, Tianjin and Guilin to send their representatives to the Beijing agricultural show in November 1984 so that they may seek out cooperation methods with TEXTIMA, a leading East German textiles company.<sup>432</sup> In August 1985, Beijing was proud to report to the provinces that a National People's Congress delegation had visited Poland and the GDR to further build on China's blossoming relations with Eastern European countries. In the GDR, the delegation noted that they were not supposed to be received by Honecker, as such an honour was usually reserved for state guests. It was therefore to the great surprise of the delegation that the East German General Secretary, clearly showing the importance he placed on bettering trade relations, spent around two hours with the delegation.<sup>433</sup>

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Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem stellvertretenden Vorsitzenden des Ministerrates der Volksrepublik China, Genossen Li Peng, am 20.5.1985, p. 5.

<sup>430</sup> SPA-A196-01-0160-001- 国家医药管理局, 关于接待民主德国考察组的通知, 1984-04-04.

<sup>431</sup> JPA-0000-1984-002-0021- 电子工业部-省电子厅金文安等五人赴民德考察, 1984-07-27.

<sup>432</sup> SPA-A174-02-0554-045- 中华人民共和国纺织工业部-民主德国在京举办纺织机械展贸会事, 1984-11-08.

<sup>433</sup> SPA-A195-02-0243-016- 六届全国人大太常委会 [ (第十二次会议文件 (十五)) ] - 访问波兰, 民主德国

## Setting the stage for a meeting

It was clear by the mid-1980s that both countries knew what advantages they could derive from one another and sought to expand its relations accordingly. On top of the practical advantages that could be harvested, Honecker also encouraged these more frequent delegation exchanges as groundwork for a potentially groundbreaking meeting between himself and Deng Xiaoping. While the possibility of a visit was discussed by both sides, it was Wu Xueqian who formally extended an invitation to Honecker in April 1986 on his tour of the GDR, stating that “comrade Hu Yaobang and comrade Li Xiannian would very much welcome it, if comrade Honecker were to visit the People’s Republic of China soon.”<sup>434</sup>

Beijing was more than enthusiastic about the chance to host not only the leader of a previously inaccessible close Soviet ally but also what it deemed an economically vigorous socialist state. In the months prior to the summit, preparations for the visit went into high gear. Beijing asked provincial governments to suggest specific areas where they would like to see further cooperation with East Germany.<sup>435</sup> In accordance, bilateral exchanges picked up another gear and started to get more frequent not only on the state level but also on the provincial level.<sup>436</sup> In the western press, this was erroneously taken as a sign that East Germany was now moving forward with the consensus of Moscow to mend fences between the two communist giants. As a September 3 a New York Times article suspected:

East Germany appears to have the cautious blessing of the Soviet Union, according to scholars and Bonn officials. Since 1982, when the Soviet Union made its first overtures to China, East Germany has been

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德情况报告，1985—08—12.

<sup>434</sup> PAAA, MFAA, 2497/90 – Besuch chinesischer Aussenminister Wu Xueqian, 1986 – Bericht über den offiziellen Besuch des Mitglieds des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees der KP Chinas, Staatskommissars und Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der VR China in der DDR

<sup>435</sup> JPA—0000—1984—004—0650—接待民德外宾计划，简报，August 1986

<sup>436</sup> JPA—0000—1986—001—0392—接待民德总书记昂纳克先遣组的计划，简报，August 1986.



quietly mending the relations that were ruptured two decades earlier in the course of the ideological conflict between Moscow and Peking. The visit to China in the latter half of October by the East German leader, Erich Honecker, 74 years old, is expected to consolidate relations and possibly open the way for other Eastern European Communist chiefs to follow...<sup>437</sup>

Indeed, as the article correctly hints at, being the first Eastern European bloc leader to be invited to China, Honecker's visit further reinforced his own image of himself as a trailblazer in Eastern Bloc foreign relations. The New York Times article was proudly circulated in the Politburo.<sup>438</sup> What the author of the article, and indeed common perception, failed to appreciate is that East Berlin did not have the "cautious blessing" of Moscow but rather completely defied the Kremlin in staging the visit.

Even though Gorbachev appreciated that East Berlin had ceased dancing to its tune, especially when it came to foreign policy, he still made every effort to restrain the GDR. Fervently against any expansion of Sino-GDR relations ahead of any improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, Gorbachev desperately tried to prevent a potential visit from taking place. While himself seeking a normalization with China, he, like the men in the Kremlin before him was adamant that Soviet satellite states should not step out of line when seeking a rapprochement with Beijing. As it became apparent that the planning for Honecker's visit was in its final phase and the East German leader had no intention of postponing or cancelling it, the Soviet leader had made his disapproval perfectly clear in a series of meetings with East German officials prior to the proposed date of Honecker's visit. Thus, when Planning Chief and Deputy Prime Minister Gerhard Schürer issued Gorbachev an overly positive report about the potential for Sino-East German relations from his July 1985 trip to China, Gorbachev issued Schürer a stern rebuttal and reminder that China was still not a friend of the Soviet Union. As Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko had done before

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<sup>437</sup> "East Germany Steps up Contacts with China", *New York Times*, 3 September 1986.

<sup>438</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/2436 – Büro Erich Honecker, p. 292.

him, Gorbachev implicitly accused Honecker of being gullible and naïve when it came to his China policy. Noting that Deng Xiaoping was still labelling the Soviet Union as an enemy and that Beijing was still calling for the Warsaw Pact and COMECON to be weakened, Gorbachev stressed that it was more than inappropriate for East Berlin to pursue an improvement of relations with China.<sup>439</sup>

Honecker ploughed ahead undeterred by Moscow's niggling protests and overt attempts to sabotage his plans. In East Berlin's view, Honecker's visit was not only to validate his hard work in fostering GDR-PRC relations in fierce opposition to the Soviet Union but it was also the initiation of a 'second phase' of foreign relations between the two states. After the initial reset between the two countries had yielded substantial symbolic and some material results via cultural and economic exchanges, both countries were eager to take their relations to a new level. Thus, the SED Politburo's preparatory report estimated that the visit "will start a new stage in bilateral relations between both parties, states and people" and will "build a new basis for the expansion of political, economic and scientific-technical relations".<sup>440</sup> Accordingly, Honecker aimed to broaden the GDR's engagement with China on every level and sought to weave the individual strands of bilateral contacts that had been won since reengaging Beijing in the early 1980s into a single tapestry of lasting relations. For this purpose, contacts were sought at every level. Thus, during the East German delegation's time in China, Secretary of the Economy Günter Mittag planned to seek out Li Peng, member of the CCP Politburo and a Vice Minister-President of the state council of China. Head of the Politburo's International Relations Department Günter Sieber was to meet Zhu Liang, the Head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CCP. While Minister for Trade Gerhard Beil planned to foster his contacts with Zhen Tuobin, Minister of

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<sup>439</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A 2787 – Information über ein Brief des Generalsekretärs des ZK der KPdSU, Genossen M. Gorbatschow, pp. 10-12.

<sup>440</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking - Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch des Generalsekretärs der ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, in der Volksrepublik China vom 21. Bis 26 Oktober 1986, p. 1.

Foreign Trade.<sup>441</sup>

In a last-ditch attempt to keep his client states in a coordinated goose-step, Gorbachev was willing to use all the tools at his disposal to spoil the visit. Among East German leaders, Egon Krenz recalls Gorbachev's express disapproval of the visit.<sup>442</sup> According to the memories of GDR diplomats serving in China at the time, the Kremlin even made Polish leader Jaruzelski take a detour to stop over in Beijing on his way to Pyongyang right before Honecker's visit with the explicit goal to spoil Honecker's prestige-grabbing attempt to be the *first* Eastern European state visitor to China. Jaruzelski's brief stopover was designed by the Kremlin as a last-ditch attempt to send a message of disapproval to Honecker.<sup>443</sup> This sent a wave of general panic through all echelons of the East German foreign policy establishment. Rolf Berthold, East German Ambassador in Beijing at the time of the visit recalled that little sleep was had during those weeks to ensure that Jaruzelski's layover would be classed as a 'working level visit' rather than a 'state visit' so as to not deprive Honecker and the GDR of the symbolic importance of the East German leader's trip to Beijing.<sup>444</sup> These quiet manoeuvres show that there was little love lost between Moscow and East Berlin when it came to China-affairs.

### **Honecker's visit**

Honecker, having single-mindedly embarked on this path of rapprochement with China, was not to be deterred by Gorbachev's protestations, especially in light of Moscow's ideological

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<sup>441</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking - Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch des Generalsekretärs der ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, in der Volksrepublik China vom 21. Bis 26 Oktober 1986, p. 3.

<sup>442</sup> Among many defiant East German moves in regards to its China policy, according to Egon Krenz, Honecker's 1986 state occurred against the express resistance of Moscow. Egon Krenz, Presentation at the Beijing Conference "The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its ramifications." April 22, 2011 in Bernd Schäfer, "Die DDR und die 'chinesische Lösung' – Gewalt in der Volksrepublik China im Sommer 1989" in Martin Sabrow (eds.) *1989 und die Rolle der Gewalt* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012), pp. 162-172.

<sup>443</sup> Author's interview with Rolf Berthold, GDR Ambassador to China, 1982-1989, Berlin, 21 April 2011.

<sup>444</sup> Author's interview with Rolf Berthold, GDR Ambassador to China, 1982-1989, Berlin, 21 April 2011.

abandonment of East Berlin amidst the initiation of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*.<sup>445</sup> Honecker soon claimed the ultimate prize for his unrelenting persistence by embarking on a monumental state visit to China in October 1986. Received by a 21-gun salute and numerous positive write-ups in the Chinese press, the East German leader was feted and celebrated in Beijing.<sup>446</sup> In Honecker's grand 'red carpet diplomacy' strategy, China was certainly a big feather in the cap. Although the East German leader had visited Italy and Greece in 1985 and Sweden in 1986, his visit to China had a special symbolic place for Honecker. He was to be the first Soviet-bloc leader to step foot in the Chinese capital with all the pomp and ceremony of a state visitor, the ultimate validation for the great statesman that Honecker saw himself as. To the East German leader, the fact that Sino-Soviet relations were still more than shaky served testament to the truth that he was not only a more competent foreign policy operator than the men in the Kremlin but also, that he did not necessarily need Moscow's approval or support anymore to be successful on the international stage.

Interspersed in bilateral efforts to seek practical advantages, both parties were eager to use the summit to send a subtle, yet clear message to Moscow in light of their common disagreement with Gorbachev's reform path – that this relationship was not to be affected by Soviet meddling anymore. A powerful tool that Honecker sought to use to define this relationship as independent and free of third state influences was to reawaken the amicable relations that both states enjoyed *before* the onset of the Sino-Soviet split. By emphasizing the historic connection between the two states, the East German leader hoped to place the root of their relationship on historical bilateral ties rather than a synthetic one defined by belonging to the same socialist bloc. Therefore,

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<sup>445</sup> Showing its steadfastness for a positive China-policy and sending more warm signals to Beijing, *Neues Deutschland* published numerous articles in August 1986 that praised China's role in Africa, therefore wholly abandoning its antagonistic attitude from the 1970s which had discouraged African states to subscribe to Beijing's generous economic assistance programs. Gareth Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 195.

<sup>446</sup> According to *Der Spiegel*, all Chinese newspapers carried Honecker on the front page on 21 October. "Blick nach Oben – Pragmatisch und auf wirtschaftliche Erfolge orientiert – so gefiel in Peking SED-Chef Erich Honecker", *Der Spiegel*, 44/1986, 22 October 1986.

throughout his visit, Honecker consciously and actively reiterated the message that the Chinese Communist Party and the Socialist Unity Party had enjoyed ‘unbroken’ relations since 1949. This also had the added convenience that party-relations, always a touchy subject in socialist countries, would not need to be mended. In his talks with Hu Yaobang and Deng Xiaoping about bilateral relations both sides were eager to state that party-ties were never broken and thus would not need to be ‘normalized’.<sup>447</sup> Wooing his Chinese hosts and evoking pleasant memories of the fraternal past, Honecker reminded Hu Yaobang of their historic bond by presenting him with a photo that showed the Chinese CC General Secretary posing and discussing with members of the FDJ during his time in the World Congress of the Democratic Youth.<sup>448</sup> Similarly, during Honecker’s talks with Li Xianian in Nanjing on 21 October, the East German leader emphasized that he had known Chinese leaders like Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian for more than 30 years, since their days in their respective youth organizations. For Honecker, who valued old patronage networks at home in East Berlin and had composed his Politburo out of comrades he had known from FDJ times, this was a high praise indeed.<sup>449</sup> The East German leader was more than keen to emphasize the ‘special’ friendship that both states shared due to their founding in the same month of the same year.<sup>450</sup> Deng Xiaoping immediately picked up on this theme of friendship as he told Honecker that he “agreed [with Honecker] that relations were never broken, hence one cannot talk of a

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<sup>447</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, p. 4.

<sup>448</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, p. 1

<sup>449</sup> Honecker’s lieutenants and close aids almost all shared a background with the General Secretary. Whether it was through the FDJ, leftist survivors of the concentration camps or the Brandenburg-Görden prison, where he had been locked up himself for leftist activity, Honecker more often than not showed a special ‘loyalty’ to old friends. Thus, sentimentality was one of the reasons Honecker found it hard to get rid of Alfred Neumann, (who he knew from his time at Brandenburg-Görden) even when Neumann showed reluctance to support Honecker’s accession to the pinnacle of the Politburo. See Norbert Plötzl, *Erich Honecker* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002), p. 138.

<sup>450</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Vermerk über das Gespräch zwischen dem GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Mitglied des Ständigen Ausschusses des Politbüros des ZK der KP Chinas und Präsidenten der VR China, Genossen Li Xianian am 21. Oktober 1986 im Palast des Nationalen Volkskongresses, p. 1.

rapprochement”. Deng went on to remind Honecker of his 1925 trip to Germany where he was well taken care of by a *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* family, who, according to Deng were “true internationalists” and “true communists”.<sup>451</sup> Only too glad to reciprocate Deng’s warm messages, Honecker replied that the “feelings of camaraderie of our people are very strong for the Chinese people as we strive to hold high the banner of mutual solidarity”.<sup>452</sup>

Without a doubt, by casting the Sino-GDR relationship in historic context and giving it an ‘exclusive’ feel by not mentioning the Soviet Union even once during the initial exchanges, both countries sought to define their unique relationship outside of the confines of Soviet influence.

### **Honecker’s lessons**

To make this ‘second’ stage of intensified bilateral contact attractive to Beijing, Honecker not only sought to outline the ‘special’ historic connections between both states but also went out of his way to present his GDR as a successful socialist state worth emulating. This made sense for both prestige and economic reasons. By doing so, Honecker hoped to reverse the worrying trend that had been plaguing bilateral trade relations by appealing to the eager reformists surrounding Deng. In addition, it would give the East German General Secretary a chance to highlight his successes in managing a leading communist state. Thus, during his meeting with Deng, Honecker informed his Chinese host East Germany was still successfully pursuing its policy of Unity of Economic and Social Policy (*Einheit von Wirtschaft und Sozialpolitik*) which it adopted in 1971

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<sup>451</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über eine Begegnung des GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Beraterkommission der KP Chinas, Genossen Deng Xiaoping, am 23.10.1986 im Gebäude des NVK der VR China.

<sup>452</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über eine Begegnung des GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Beraterkommission der KP Chinas, Genossen Deng Xiaoping, am 23.10.1986 im Gebäude des NVK der VR China, 6

and which Honecker ultimately attributed East Germany's economic successes. Almost lecturing, Honecker told Deng that socialism can only be constructed when "considerable political and social work had been done, the economy has been developed and a generous social welfare program exists". "Only this", Honecker added, "has allowed the GDR to join the ranks of the ten leading industrialist states in the world".<sup>453</sup> Of course, Honecker neglected to mention the precarious state that the East German economy found itself partly due to the excessive spending attributed to this welfare policy.<sup>454</sup> That his Chinese hosts followed his every word with great interest must have been incredibly pleasing for Honecker, who positively thrived on the international recognition that foreign visits and compliments garnered him.

Throughout Honecker's time in China, the East German leader was eager to uphold the image that the GDR was an advanced industrialist state from which China could learn. Not mincing words when he met General Secretary Hu Yaobang, he stated at the beginning of their conversation that the GDR has achieved "a dynamic development of the economy, and has reached a top standard with which we can compete in the world market".<sup>455</sup> Trying to impress his hosts, Honecker went on to brag that the

...national income presently is 4.3% higher than the same time-span in the year before and will climb further. These increases were only possible with a 90% increase in labour productivity... The successes of the economy are connected with the increased performance in the social aspects of life. The income of the population is increasing at 4% annually... it should be noted that the prices of 80% of the goods have stayed constant for decades (outlining the increased purchasing power of the GDR population).<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking - Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch des Generalsekretärs der ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, in der Volksrepublik China vom 21. Bis 26 Oktober 1986, p. 4.

<sup>454</sup> See Andre Steiner, *The Plans that Failed – An economic history of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), pp. 172-189.

<sup>455</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, p. 6.

<sup>456</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking –

With the benefit of hindsight into the GDR economy, we know that these policies did their part to deplete the GDR's state coffers, but at the time Honecker's ability to provide his people with ever more purchasing power was a point of pride for the East German leader, especially considering that the Chinese government was trying to achieve the same for its people.<sup>457</sup> Thus, Honecker's further description of his extensive apartment building projects, as well as the solution of the food question (*Ernährungsfrage*) with successful harvest techniques, served as a real point of pride in front of a Beijing regime that was trying to provide the Chinese population with what Honecker seemingly had already given his own population.<sup>458</sup> The East German leader went on to talk at length about his development of the high technology sector (microelectronics, optoelectronics and sensor technology), a pet project that he had always derived extreme pride from.<sup>459</sup> Speaking of his 'successes' in this area, the Honecker proudly stated that some machines that the GDR produced "are only made of robots" and that "laser technology is used even in our textile industry", concluding grandly that the "microelectronics industry has led to a triumphing of the GDR economy".<sup>460</sup> In doing so, Honecker even implied the GDR microelectronics industry's

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Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, p. 7.

<sup>457</sup> On China's tireless efforts to alleviate countryside-poverty see 冷溶, 汪作玲 (主编) 邓小平年谱(下, 1975-1997) (北京: 中央文献出版社, 2004) 900-904, Ezra Vogel, *Deng's Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of HUP, 2011), pp. 294-348.

<sup>458</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, pp. 7-8.

<sup>459</sup> Olaf Klenke, *Globalisierung, Mikroelektronik und das Scheitern der DDR-Wirtschaft* Deutschland Archiv, 35: 3, (May-June 2002), pp. 421-424.

<sup>460</sup> With the benefit of hindsight we now know that the real picture was rather grim. The East German microelectronics industry was grossly uncompetitive and its wares compared to western goods and could only be pushed to fellow COMECON countries. See Olaf Klenke, *Globalisierung, Mikroelektronik und das Scheitern der DDR-Wirtschaft* Deutschland Archiv, 35, 3, (May-June 2002), pp. 421-424; The same line was also reiterated during Honecker's conversations with Li Xianian's in Nanjing on October 21, 1986, where the East German leader stressed that only hard work and a generous social programme ensured that the GDR was among the 10 strongest industrial nations in the world. In PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Vermerk das Gespräch zwischen dem GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Mitglied des Ständigen Ausschusses des Politbüros des ZK der KP Chinas und Präsidenten der VR China, Genossen Li Xianian am 21. Oktober 1986 im Palast des Nationalen Volkskongresses, p. 8.



superior ingenuity in comparison with its West German counterparts, remarking that while the GDR's microelectronics industry was homegrown, the FRG's was simply operating with American ideas.<sup>461</sup> Deng's answer that "you are a model of emulation in this area" and that "[the GDR] is far more developed" certainly only gave Honecker affirmation of the GDR's worth to China.

Building on his Chinese hosts' interest in East German industrial combines, an area where Beijing had shown considerable interest in the earlier part of the decade, Honecker also made a point to outline his successes there.<sup>462</sup> The East German leader pronounced that "while different socialist countries have tried different things, we think that we did not make a mistake to rely on combines". Stressing that combines have all the "benefits of a capitalist entity, except not being capitalist", Honecker struck a deep chord with his Chinese hosts.<sup>463</sup> It was exactly the benefits of capitalist development under central authority that Zhongnanhai sought. Certainly, Honecker's intimations that, "it is best to stay with democratic centralism and to encourage regional initiatives" found a welcome audience in Beijing circles as it echoed the basic ideology behind the special economic zones. Thus, Honecker's thorough description of his 127 *Kombinate* was followed with great interest by Hu Yaobang. Similarly, during his meeting with Zhao Ziyang, Honecker confidently boasted that the West not only "looks up" to East German *Kombinate* but that two East German microelectronics *Kombinate* were already at American and Japanese levels in terms of technology. Zhao Ziyang's reply that he especially wished to learn more about the

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<sup>461</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über eine Begegnung des GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Beraterkommission der KP Chinas, Genossen Deng Xiaoping, am 23.10.1986 im Gebäude des NVK der VR China, p. 9.

<sup>462</sup> The Chinese Commercial Secretary to the GDR of the time explained the numerous learning missions: "We were all very interested in the inner working of the East German economy, especially how the *Kombinate* (Combines) operated and if they could be replicated in China." Author's interview with Wu Derong, 2 April 2012 in Beijing.

<sup>463</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, p. 10.

work of the combines must have been music to Honecker's ears.<sup>464</sup> That China had turned some of the lessons acquired during their early learning missions into operating facilities also served as a confirmation that Beijing wasn't just feigning interest. Indeed, the East German leader happily and half-braggingly talked at length about a steel combine near Beijing which had been built with GDR help.<sup>465</sup> With East German technical experts having been instrumental in setting up key industrial facilities such as the Joint Electronics Components Factory 718 in Beijing (now an art district called "798") during the early days of friendship in the 1960s, the foundation was certainly there for further technical cooperation.

Throughout the visit, the East German leader was not afraid to make bold claims about the overall state of the GDR economy. When Honecker was asked later by Li Xianian on which socialist country enjoyed the highest standard of living, Honecker proudly answered without hesitation "The GDR!".<sup>466</sup> Although the East German General Secretary's statement that his economic advances had left the GDR population better off than the people of the FRG must have raised some suspicious eyebrows in the leadership circle, there can be absolutely no doubt that Chinese leaders believed the general picture of economic vigour painted by the East German helmsman.<sup>467</sup> After Honecker's thorough presentation of the East German economy, Hu

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<sup>464</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über das Gespräch Erich Honeckers mit dem Mitglied des Ständigen Ausschusses des Politbüros des ZK der KP Chinas und Ministerpräsidenten der VR China, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, am 22.10.1986, 15.00 Uhr, pp. 25-27.

<sup>465</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über eine Begegnung des GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Beraterkommission der KP Chinas, Genossen Deng Xiaoping, am 23.10.1986 im Gebäude des NVK der VR China, p. 7.

<sup>466</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Gespräche zwischen den Genossen Erich Honecker und Li Xianian während des Staatsbanketts zu Ehren des Genossen Honecker am 21.10.1986, p. 2.

<sup>467</sup> Honecker proudly stated to Hu: "Das Volk der DDR lebt im Schnitt besser als dir BRD, obwohl die BRD über ein hohes wissenschaftlich-technisches Niveau verfügt" [On average, the people of the GDR is living better than the people of the FRG, even though the FRG possesses over a higher level of scientific-technical knowledge] PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, 11; Until the last day, most in the PRC leadership believed the GDR to be a socialist economy worth emulating, Interview with Liu Qibao, Political Secretary in the PRC Embassy to the GDR, 1979-1988, Beijing, 11 May 2012.

enthusiastically stated that “he was happy to learn about East German successes” and he was of the opinion that there is a big potential for further cooperation between the two states, *especially* for economic cooperation.<sup>468</sup> Indeed, a similar ‘humble’ attitude was displayed by Chinese leaders throughout Honecker’s visit, with Li Xianian conceding to the GDR leader during their meeting on October 21 Beijing’s desire to bring China out of poverty, lamenting that “the Cultural Revolution has meant that we have lost ten years of development...the world has developed further and China has stayed behind.”<sup>469</sup> In a similar fashion, Deng stated during his meeting with Honecker that “[the GDR’s] political and economic situation were very stable. You can surely help us as you have a very advanced society”. Indeed, this was totally in line with the “eager student” attitude displayed through most of the early days of the Reform and Opening process.<sup>470</sup>

One can only imagine the sense of validation that Honecker must have felt when Deng vowed to send more study delegations to the GDR as, according to the Chinese leader, China “was not receiving everything it needed from the US and Japan”.<sup>471</sup> Günter Mittag, also present during the meeting, promised to exchange know-how with China as this was “a meaningful undertaking for the effectiveness of the economies of both countries”.<sup>472</sup> As if this praise was not already enough to send Honecker’s pride for the GDR into overdrive, Deng’s thanks to GDR trainers in

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<sup>468</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, p. 16.

<sup>469</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Vermerk über das Gespräch zwischen dem GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Mitglied des Ständigen Ausschusses des Politbüros des ZK der KP Chinas und Präsidenten der VR China, Genossen Li Xianian am 21. Oktober 1986 im Palast des Nationalen Volkskongresses, p. 6.

<sup>470</sup> This attitude was certainly pioneered by Deng, who with his landmark trips to Japan and the U.S. showed that learning from the other more advanced countries was ok and indeed, desired. See Ezra Vogel, *Deng’s Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of HUP, 2011), pp. 294-348.

<sup>471</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über eine Begegnung des GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Beraterkommission der KP Chinas, Genossen Deng Xiaoping, am 23.10.1986 im Gebäude des NVK der VR China, p. 16.

<sup>472</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über eine Begegnung des GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Beraterkommission der KP Chinas, Genossen Deng Xiaoping, am 23.10.1986 im Gebäude des NVK der VR China, p. 18.

helping China secure medals at the Asian games only added icing on top of what the East German leader already regarded as a very successful visit. It gave the chance for Honecker to boast that the GDR's athletes were far superior to that of the FRG, noting that "during the Munich Olympics, the *Bundeswehr* had to play the GDR anthem 20 times. It was said that they didn't need the notes for it after a while".<sup>473</sup> The GDR would continue its commitment to cooperate with China in sports matters as a trainer delegation under Roland Mathes, the most successful backstroke swimmer of all time, was despatched to China for a 6-month stint in May of the following year.<sup>474</sup>

### **Tangible results**

The Chinese leadership, interested in East German technological know-how rather than its products, jumped at the chance of further cooperation. At the presence of Honecker and Li Xianan, Günter Mittag and Li Peng met to discuss the long-term development of the scientific-technical cooperation between the GDR and the PRC.<sup>475</sup> To further entice East German interest, Zhao Ziyang also stated that individual Chinese provinces would be given their own autonomy to engage with the GDR, thereby potentially opening up the entire country for East German goods.<sup>476</sup> Extensive negotiations took place on October 22 between Günter Mittag and Li Peng on the details of economic and trade cooperation. From the beginning, Mittag displayed a very eager attitude, expressing his desire to cooperate more closely and conveying East Berlin's willingness to provide know-how as well as its help in reconstructing production facilities. Like Zhao Ziyang,

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<sup>473</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift eine Begegnung des GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Beraterkommission der KP Chinas, Genossen Deng Xiaoping, am 23.10.1986 im Gebäude des NVK der VR China, pp. 18-19.

<sup>474</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2490/90 – Chronik Quartalsberichte Beziehungen DDR-VR China – Quartalsbeziehungsbericht DDR –VR China II. Quartal 1987, 2 July 1987.

<sup>475</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch des Generalsekretärs der ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, in der Volksrepublik China vom 21. Bis 26 Oktober 1986, p. 3.

<sup>476</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über das Gespräch Erich Honeckers mit dem Mitglied des Ständigen Ausschusses des Politbüros des ZK der KP Chinas und Minister Präsidenten der VR China, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, am 22.10.1986, 15.00 Uhr, p. 21.

Mittag also expressed his hope for inter-regional cooperation between the provinces and the *Bezirke*. Concrete Chinese interests for the East German *Kombinat* model was also displayed by Li Peng who suggested that both countries cooperate to establish a carbochemical industrial complex in Wuhai in inner Mongolia as “the GDR possesses over corresponding experiences, especially in establishing the *Kombinat Schwarze Pumpe* and *Buna*.” Clearly having analyzed Wuhai as an especially good place to have such a combine, Li Peng went into great detail on the abundance of labour, coal and energy sources which would make this project a success. Li further expressed hopes that this project could be done through a joint venture. These hopes soon turned to reality. With East German help, the Inner Mongolia Wuhai Chemical Industry Corporation, a coal mining and processing facility that is still in operation today, received a vital injection of foreign expertise as two months after Honecker’s visit, a special delegation from the East German Ministry for Coal Industry was dispatched from the GDR to China.<sup>477</sup> Considering that most other joint ventures in China had been set up with Western European, American or Asian partners, this project was a real coup for Honecker.<sup>478</sup> Overall, Li Peng’s desire to push forward GDR-PRC cooperation in all respects was palpable. To drive home his point, the Chinese statesman intimated to Honecker that it was high time that the GDR and PRC have deeper economic contacts, considering that such cooperation already exists between capitalist states and China.<sup>479</sup> The Chinese premier expressed hope to Honecker that, pending Moscow’s approval of the use of their airspace, a direct flight connection should be set up between Beijing and East Berlin as soon as

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<sup>477</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2490/90 – Chronik Quartalsberichte Beziehungen DDR-VR China, 1987-89 – Quartalsbericht DDR-VR China I. Quartal 1987; “Chinesische Kohleindustrie wird DDR-Verfahren nutzen – Zusammenarbeit zwischen beiden Völkern enger gestaltet” *Neues Deutschland*, 6. 7. June 1987 The GDR drew on this project from previous cooperation with Mongolian coal companies. “Kohleförderung in der Mongolei: Ein gottverlassener Ort – aber es riecht nach Geld”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 28 July 2011.

<sup>478</sup> To be sure, the MfAA paid close attention to the numerous joint venture activities in China, circulating an internal report of all the joint ventures in different cities (documenting on how they were set up, how much foreign capital was involved and who the Chinese partners were) as well as regular updates from the GDR Embassy in Beijing. PAAA, MFAA ZR 2517/90 – Wirtschaftliche u. ind. Kooperation VRCh mit Ausland (Joint Ventures), 1985-1987 – Information über die Gründung weiterer Betriebe mit ausländischer Beteiligung im Jahre 1986, 05.02.1987.

<sup>479</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Vermerk über die Verhandlungen des Mitgliedes des Politbüros und Sekretär des ZK der SED und Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates, Genossen Günter Mittag, mit dem mitglied des Politbüros und des Sekretariats des ZK der KP China und Stellvertretenden Ministerpräsidenten des Staatsrates der VR China, Genossen Li Peng, am 22.10.1986, pp. 4-5.

possible to foster further social and economic contact between the countries. The meeting ended with Li and Mittag celebrating the 31 contracts that were signed to aid in China's reconstruction efforts outlining further scientific-technical cooperation until the year 2000.<sup>480</sup> On both sides, the enthusiasm of top-ranking officials such as Qin Zhongda, Minister for the Chinese chemical industry, Lu Xueqian, the Chinese Vice-Minister for foreign trade and economics, Gerhard Beil, East German Minister for Foreign Trade, showed that mutual interest in cooperation was not feigned.<sup>481</sup> Thus, while trade would continue on a disappointing trend from the East German perspective, with the GDR Embassy noting in November 1987 that Beijing's suggested bilateral trade volume for 1987 of 450 million CHF was far lower than the envisaged 610 million CHF that East Berlin had proposed, technical exchanges increased.<sup>482</sup> Three months after Honecker's visit, a deal was signed between the chemical products combine Grimma and a gas production facility in Harbin for the delivery of specialized gas processing equipment and expertise. In the same month, a delegation of the Chinese Academy of Sciences visited the GDR.<sup>483</sup> Chinese cities and provinces were also eager to cast their eyes on East Germany for expertise and lessons. Reflecting Beijing's interests, Shanghai's Commission for Science and Technology dispatched a delegation on a ten-day study tour of the GDR to visit combines and to establish regional contacts for further technological knowledge transfers.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Vermerk über die Verhandlungen des Mitgliedes des Politbüros und Sekretär des ZK der SED und Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates, Genossen Günter Mittag, mit dem Mitglied des Politbüros und des Sekretariats des ZK der KP China und Stellvertretenden Ministerpräsidenten des Staatsrates der VR China, Genossen Li Peng, am 22.10.1986, p. 10.

<sup>481</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Teilnehmer an den Verhandlungen des Mitgliedes des Politbüros und Sekretär des ZK der SED und Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates, Genossen Günter Mittag, mit dem Mitglied des Politbüros und des Sekretariats der ZK der KP Chinas und stellvertretenden Ministerpräsidenten des Staatsrates der VR China, Genossen Li Peng, am 22. Oktober 1986, p. 15.

<sup>482</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2521/90 – Aussenhandel (Umfassende Fragen) – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Stellvertreters des Ministers, Genossen Jochen Steyer, mit dem Botschafter der VR China in der DDR, Ma Xusheng, am 19.11.1987.

<sup>483</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2490/90 – Chronik Quartalsberichte Beziehungen DDR-VR China, 1987-89 – Quartalsbericht DDR-VR China I. Quartal 1987.

<sup>484</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2490/90 – Chronik Quartalsberichte Beziehungen DDR-VR China, 1987-89 – Quartalsbericht DDR-VR China II. Quartal 1987

While Chinese interest in Eastern European economic know-how and technology remained a substantial *raison d'être* for continuing relations with the GDR, it should be noted that China would never be as enthusiastic about bilateral relations as Honecker was. The reason is simple. Whereas Honecker used foreign relations to gain international legitimacy and kudos from Eastern European states as well as to secure an additional market for East German export goods, the GDR offered far less for the Chinese side. As much as China was interested in East German technology and practical lessons on how to successfully plan its own economy, it was also engaging a variety of other states for the same purpose. Zhao Ziyang made this point absolutely clear during his meeting with Honecker on 22 October 1986. Even though he reiterated that “[Beijing’s] door is open to [the GDR]”, he also told Honecker that China was simultaneously receiving technological assistance from other countries.<sup>485</sup> However, even though Beijing’s relationship with the GDR was perhaps not as important as it was from East Berlin’s perspective, Zhongnanhai was still very enthusiastic to explore further contacts in order to siphon technological know-how from East Germany. All things considered, this was one of the main reasons that Honecker was invited to Beijing as the first Eastern European state visitor.

Another point of potential friction came from China’s engagement with Bonn.<sup>486</sup> Even though the GDR more than understood that Beijing, driven mostly by economic interests, was intent on fostering a close relationship with the FRG, it still found time to remind the Chinese leadership of the inherently anti-socialist nature of the Bonn government in the hopes of doing whatever it could to prevent China from getting too close to Bonn at East Berlin’s cost. This was especially pertinent considering the drastic expansion of trade relations between Bonn and Beijing. With West German-Chinese trade totalling 9 billion DM in 1986, almost 12 times the

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<sup>485</sup> 冷溶，汪作玲（主编）《邓小平年谱（下，1975-1997）》（北京：中央文献出版社，2004），815；PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift das Gespräch Erich Honeckers mit dem Mitglied des Ständigen Ausschusses des Politbüros des ZK der KP Chinas und Minister-Präsidenten der VR China, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, am 22.10.1986, 15.00 Uhr, p. 21

<sup>486</sup> See Martin Albers, “Business with Beijing, détente with Moscow: West Germany’s China policy in a global context, 1969-1982, *Cold War History* 2:14 (2014), pp. 237-257.

volume of GDR-Chinese trade, Honecker was intent on outlining the ideological divergences between Bonn and the socialist world.<sup>487</sup> Intimating that it was a “hard ideological fight to have three TV stations and over twenty-five radio stations broadcasting imperialist ideology which are in German and which every apartment can receive”, Honecker attempted to make sure that Hu Yaobang understood the extent of the FRG’s subversion against the GDR during their meeting in October 1986.<sup>488</sup> Without a doubt, Beijing was aware of these challenges as Chinese study delegations to West Germany were inevitably always asked to support the West German stance of a potential reunification of the country.<sup>489</sup> Trying to remind Beijing further which Germany it should engage with, Honecker stated that even though he had met with Chancellor Helmut Kohl and ex-Chancellor Schmidt on several occasions, it was clear to him that “the imperialists cannot get rid of their appetite for conquest...After the Second World War, they were happy that they got half of Germany, now they want the rest. They won’t be successful.”<sup>490</sup> Overall, this fight was only waged half-heartedly. While East German diplomats and policy-makers knew full well that they were probably the most important Eastern European state that China was engaging with, they also appreciated that they could not fully compete with the overall economic importance that its western counterpart had gained in Beijing’s economic agenda.<sup>491</sup> However, at least in the short term, the MfAA was pretty confident that its continued protestations had translated into Beijing’s

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<sup>487</sup> FRG-China trade in 1986: 9 billion DM, GDR-China trade in 1986: 750 million DM. Der Spiegel, “Blick nach Oben – Pragmatisch und auf wirtschaftliche Erfolge orientiert – so gefiel in Peking SED-Chef Erich Honecker” 44/1986, 27 October 1986.

<sup>488</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, p. 6.

<sup>489</sup> For example, this hope was expressed to a Chinese delegation in 1982 who had gone to the FRG to learn about city-planning. During their trip, they were repeatedly told of the pains of separation [from East Germany] and asked to support West Germany’s wish to reunify Berlin and Germany. As per instructions from the Foreign Ministry, the delegation replied in neutral gratitude. (在谈话中强调一个城市，一个国家分裂的痛苦，希望我们在柏林问题和德国和平统一问题上予以支持) SMA – B1-4-803-119 – 赴西柏林参加城市管理讨论会和在西德参观考察的报告, 19 October 1982.

<sup>490</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, p. 14.

<sup>491</sup> Mechtild Leutner (eds.), *Bundesrepublik und China 1949 bis 1995* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), pp. 134-138.



acceptance and adoption of the existence of two Germanies.<sup>492</sup>

### **Honecker the statesman**

Far more than securing merely additional economic benefits for the GDR, Honecker intended to use this grand stage of diplomacy to the fullest. His visit was to both put another exclamation mark on his achievements as a great statesman as well as to further underline the legitimacy and prestige of the GDR as a sovereign and independent state. Thus, on top of presenting himself as a capable economic manager, the East German leader also wanted to outline his own initiatives to show the importance that East German foreign policy's had gained under him. Thus, Honecker's *Friendenspolitik* permeated his messages in China. The East German leader stressed that the SED's XI Party Congress in April 1986 had concentrated a substantial part of its discussions on the upholding and continuation of his policy to promote peace and non-proliferation in Europe.<sup>493</sup> Fancying himself as a knowledgeable voice of reason in international affairs, Honecker also tried to push China towards the same goal. Honecker welcomed China's efforts at the maintenance of world peace at the UN and stressed that China must also make itself heard on issues such as the American SDI initiative. It is after all, Honecker stressed, "the responsibility of all communist and peaceful states [to maintain peace]."<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> In a November 1987 report based on careful analysis of statements made by Wu Xueqian, Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang on the two-state issue, the MfAA concluded that Beijing respected the existence of two independent and sovereign German states as well as the fact that West Berlin was an integral part of the GDR. PAAA, MFAA ZR 2487/90 – Haltung VR China zu beiden deutschen Staaten, 1980-87 – Haltung der VR China zu den beiden deutschen Staaten, November 1987.

<sup>493</sup> Gorbachev's "new thinking" in Global Affairs was not diminished by the failure of Reykjavik. He soon started to disagree with hardline Politburo colleagues. Most certainly, Honecker also viewed this thinking with great worry but was more than willing to use Reykjavik's message to promote better Sino-Soviet relations. See Vadislav Zubok, *A failed Empire – The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 194; PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking - Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch des Generalsekretärs der ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, in der Volksrepublik China vom 21. Bis 26 Oktober 1986, p. 5.

<sup>494</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking - Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch des Generalsekretärs der ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, in der Volksrepublik China vom 21. Bis 26 Oktober 1986, p. 6.

Continuing from his theme of *détente* and *Friedenspolitik*, Honecker welcomed the meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev in Reykjavik, where Moscow and Washington had tried to come to an agreement two weeks earlier (11-12 October, 1986) to reduce strategic nuclear weapons by 50%. To Hu, the East German leader passionately stated that “self-criticism, as was done after the Second World War isn’t going to be possible after a third world war... [therefore] we connect our fight to strengthen socialism with the defence of peace. We will do everything that will lead into this direction.”<sup>495</sup> The same message was put forward by Honecker during a state banquet in his honour on 23 October. He called for the elimination of all nuclear weapons, especially with “the lessons that Chernobyl has taught us”.<sup>496</sup> His statement that “for the first time in history there are nuclear missiles stationed in the FRG as well as the GDR” and that Berlin was “interested that these weapons disappear again” found receptive ears in Beijing.<sup>497</sup>

Within this peace theme, Honecker also wished to be instrumental in mending fences between Moscow and Beijing. Not only did he want to use his visit to promote his own standing as a capable statesman (certainly the most capable in the Eastern Bloc) but he endeavoured to utilize his position to be the conduit between Moscow and Beijing. Rather than doing a great service to the communist world and Moscow, this was motivated by Honecker’s own selfish calculations. If successful, it would be *he* who would do what Soviet leaders failed to do and be the one to bring China back into the socialist camp. It would be *he* who would end the Sino-Soviet conflict. Indeed, Honecker’s interactions with Chinese leaders leave little doubt as to his view of

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<sup>495</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über die offiziellen Verhandlungen zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, und dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 21.10.1986 im Zhongnanhai, p. 13.

<sup>496</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über eine Begegnung des GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Beraterkommission der KP Chinas, Genossen Deng Xiaoping, am 23.10.1986 im Gebäude des NVK der VR China, p. 11.

<sup>497</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über eine Begegnung des GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Beraterkommission der KP Chinas, Genossen Deng Xiaoping, am 23.10.1986 im Gebäude des NVK der VR China, p. 12.

himself as both a capable leader who was managing a successful socialist economy as well as a capable diplomat, relaying messages between world leaders and engaging with hitherto ‘forbidden’ countries. This confident attitude was on full display at the XI. SED Party congress from 17-21 April in East Berlin, just 6 months before his eventual visit to Beijing. With Gorbachev and delegates from 140 communist parties present, Honecker had gone to great lengths to describe the successes of his foreign policy successes and to describe a “gratifying improvement of relations between the GDR and China.”<sup>498</sup>

However, Honecker’s belief that he could be a Sino-Soviet bridge builder turned out to be a total overestimation of his role and influence in interstate relations. It also seems that Honecker grossly underestimated the importance that China attached to the Vietnam issue.<sup>499</sup> During Honecker’s visit to Nanjing on 24 October, the confident East German leader held extensive talks with Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of the CC of the CCP Politburo member, about the state of Sino-Soviet relations. When meeting Honecker, Hu was adamant to state that Sino-Soviet relations could only improve if the Soviet Union would stop supporting Vietnamese adventurism towards Cambodia. Beijing had sent a message to this effect through the Romanians to Moscow to drive home this message.<sup>500</sup> With this issue unsolved, the subsequent ninth round of Vice-Foreign Minister level meetings between Moscow and Beijing had not made any substantial progress. Hu stressed that “No meeting is to take place at the highest levels without a solution of the Cambodia problem.”<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> Protokoll der Verhandlungen des XI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1986), p. 39.

<sup>499</sup> After Gorbachev’s Vladivostok speech, Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian immediately noted to the Soviet Charge d’affaires in Beijing, Vladimir Fedotov that the new Soviet leader had not mentioned the Cambodian question. See Sergey Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries – The Soviet Failure in Asia at the end of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 136-142.

<sup>500</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über ein Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker mit dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 24.10.1986 im Hotel “Jing Ling” in Nanjing, pp. 1-3.

<sup>501</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über ein Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR,

Honecker was not deterred by these negative Chinese assessments of Sino-Soviet relations. Driven by both a desire to drive forward a global version of his *Friedenspolitik* as well as surely spurred on by the glory and applause a positive change in Sino-Soviet relations initiated by him would garner him, Honecker went on to attempt to play the Sino-Soviet middleman. As if he hadn't heard Hu's clear Cambodian precondition, Honecker expressed his hope for a meeting at the highest levels between the Soviet Union and China, saying that this would be a "monumental and historical occasion".<sup>502</sup> Expressing that he sincerely wished for an improvement of Sino-GDR relations, he assured that he expressed these wishes as a representative of the SED and not Gorbachev.<sup>503</sup> Honecker persisted further, even claiming to have received hints from Vietnamese representatives in Berlin that they were willing to negotiate.<sup>504</sup>

In the end, these initiatives were met with a negative response with Hu acknowledging that Honecker meant well but that Beijing could only negotiate if Vietnam pulled back its troops first. Honecker's last desperate attempt in saying that he had already heard rumours that Vietnam had started to withdraw its troops was met by Hu's steely response that these rumours were merely propaganda.<sup>505</sup> In the end, Honecker's hopeful initiative to restart the momentum in Sino-Soviet talks ran against Beijing's unrelenting stance that the three conditions must be first eliminated before any kind of improvement in Sino-Soviet relations can take place. But what did Honecker

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Genossen Erich Honecker mit dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 24.10.1986 im Hotel "Jing Ling" in Nanjing, p. 6.

<sup>502</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über ein Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker mit dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 24.10.1986 im Hotel "Jing Ling" in Nanjing, p. 10.

<sup>503</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über ein Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker mit dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 24.10.1986 im Hotel "Jing Ling" in Nanjing, p. 10.

<sup>504</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über ein Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker mit dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 24.10.1986 im Hotel "Jing Ling" in Nanjing, p. 13-14.

<sup>505</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Niederschrift über ein Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker mit dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Hu Yaobang, am 24.10.1986 im Hotel "Jing Ling" in Nanjing, p. 17.

have to lose? If he was successful, he would have significantly added to his credos as a force on the international scene. If he wasn't, he would have at the very least presented himself to Beijing as a well-connected middleman who had sway in the communist bloc.

Throughout all this, Beijing also subtly tested the limits of GDR-Soviet divergence. Already appreciating that the GDR was probably acting out of line with Moscow by coming to China on a state visit, China probed further.<sup>506</sup> Certainly, Zhu Liang's statements that "every party decides on their own and no party has the right to be the leading party" during his meeting with Günter Sieber must have found resounding support by the East German delegation in light of the Pankow regime's disagreements with Gorbachev.<sup>507</sup> Setting an example by stressing that China's relations with the GDR would not be affected by third states, Zhu mentioned that Beijing's relations with FRG were not going to be detrimental to the GDR.<sup>508</sup> Its message that the People's Republic was capable of not letting the relations with third states affect Sino-GDR relations was not only steeped in a traditional Chinese non-interventionist foreign policy stance but in this instance it can also be understood to contrast against what it considered to be the 'backward' interdependencies of the Soviet Bloc. In a clear reference to East Berlin's adherence to Moscow during the Sino-Soviet split, Deng stated to Honecker during their 23 October meeting that "many mistakes had been made in the past" and that we should "let the wind sweep away the past and look into the future"<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Liu Qibao revealed to me that all echelons in Beijing knew that Honecker was probably pushing forward his relations with China somewhat in defiance of Moscow. Author's interview with Liu Qibao, Political Secretary, PRC Embassy in Berlin 1979-1989. 13 March 2012.

<sup>507</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Mitglieds des ZK und Leiter der Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen des ZK der SED, Genossen Günter Sieber mit dem Mitglied des ZK und Leiter der Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen des ZK der KP Chinas, Genosse Zhu Liang, im Gästehaus der Abteilung IV des ZK der KP Chinas, am 22.10.1986, p. 4.

<sup>508</sup> For example, Zhu Liang made a point of mentioning that China's relations with the SPD will "never be done at the cost of its relations with the GDR". PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Vermerk ein Gespräch des Mitglieds des ZK und Leiter der Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen des ZK der SED, Genossen Günter Sieber mit dem Mitglied des ZK und Leiter der Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen des ZK der KP Chinas, Genosse Zhu Liang, im Gästehaus der Abteilung IV des ZK der KP Chinas, am 22.10.1986, p. 6.

<sup>509</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking –

While the Sino-Soviet conflict could not, despite the East German General Secretary's desperate attempts, be solved by Honecker in one fell swoop, both countries could add to their common economic and diplomatic interests important commonalities in the ideological sphere. Indeed, throughout the Sino-GDR exchanges in October 1986 a certain hard-lined like-mindedness came to the fore. Especially in their attitude towards potential reformist tendencies in the communist bloc, both East Germany and China displayed a steadfast adherence to the status quo. For example, Honecker and the Chinese leadership certainly saw eye to eye on the Polish problem, with both parties condemning *Solidarnosc* and conceding that the situation should have been dealt with swifter measures.<sup>510</sup> Certainly, Beijing had been watching the *Solidarnosc* movement very closely. It had been quick to condemn the strikes and had welcomed Jaruzelski's imposition of martial law. With cases of labour unrest having also gripped China in 1980-81 in the Anshan steelworks in Manchuria and having spread to Shanghai, Kunming, Wuhan, Taiyuan as well as to Hubei and Shanxi provinces, Beijing had feared a similar situation erupting from its own industrial centres at the beginning of the decade.<sup>511</sup> Predictably, Beijing was quick to dismantle labour organizations and condemn the unrest. A Polish-style standoff could have the potential to derail Deng's Reform and Opening. This led to introspection and a further backlash against liberal tendencies in Beijing.<sup>512</sup> Thus, Honecker's likeminded attitude only endeared him to Chinese leaders. As relations developed further, it would be this emerging ideological convergence which would become a major force in bilateral ties.

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Niederschrift über eine Begegnung des GS des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Beraterkommission der KP Chinas, Genossen Deng Xiaoping, am 23.10.1986 im Gebäude des NVK der VR China, pp. 2-5.

<sup>510</sup> Central criticism from Beijing was also dispatched to the provinces. SPA – A033-05-0229-023

中共山东省委组织部 一关于同意迟范民同志赴民主德国, 捷克, 波兰落实引进项目的报告 PAAA, MFAA ZR 2492/90 – Besuch GS ZK SED, Vorsitzender Staatsrats DDR, Erich Honecker in Peking – Gespräche zwischen den Genossen Erich Honecker und Li Xianian während des Staatsbanketts zu Ehren des Genossen Honecker am 21.10.1986.

<sup>511</sup> Jeanne L. Wilson, "The Polish Lesson:" China and Poland 1980-1990," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. XXIII, 3:4 s(1990), 259-279, p. 266.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 259-279, 266.

## Conclusion

East Berlin's improving relations with Beijing were not lost on the general populus. On 25 June 1986, a group of students at the Technical University in Dresden wrote to the Foreign Ministry to ask if they could be helpful in light of warming relations. "We assume that due to the size of China and her low level of industrial development, there must be a big Chinese interest to engage with foreign engineers", the students wrote. The training engineers offered to learn Chinese in order to facilitate these exchanges. Keen to build on this enthusiasm, the MfAA answered a month later on 24 July 1986 and advised them to contact the Ministry for Higher and Vocational Education (*Ministerium für Hoch- und Fachschulwesen*) of the GDR in order to be put in contact with Chinese counterparts.<sup>513</sup>

Among large swathes of the East German population, Honecker's visit initiated a new phase of interest by the general public to 'get in touch' with the PRC.<sup>514</sup> The MfAA started to receive a variety of letters ranging from ski-clubs and engineering associations who were eager to engage the GDR's new friend. Almost all of the letters mention Honecker visit as having brought about a new phase in bilateral relations.<sup>515</sup> Even though private exchanges between citizens were still quite limited, with new engagement fostered by education and state institutions, a new interest in China emerged in the GDR.<sup>516</sup> Honecker's visit not only heralded a new phase in bilateral

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<sup>513</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2436/90 – Eingaben der Bürger - Jung und Kempe an MfAA, 25.05.1986.; Karl an Jung 24.07.1986.

<sup>514</sup> A student at the Humboldt University in Berlin at the time, Professor Stefan Wolle remembers that warming relations at the end of the decade led to more student-level exchanges. Interview with Stefan Wolle, 2 September 2011

<sup>515</sup> For example, Oskar Fischer issued an encouraging answer to a letter by Dr. Volker Krause, who had suggested establishing ties between in the field of mountaineering between the two countries. PAAA, MFAA ZR 2436/90 – Eingaben der Bürger –Fischer an Krause.

<sup>516</sup> In the latter part of the decade, official newspapers greatly increased their coverage of China. Titles such as "DDR und VR China sind auf vielfältige Weise verbunden" [The GDR and China are connected on many levels] *Neues Deutschland*, 12 June 1987 were not uncommon. On June 26, 1987 *Berliner Zeitung* published a multi-page report on Beijing to acquaint the general populus with the GDR's new friend. "Metropole im Wandel der Jahrtausende – Peking – seit 1949 Hauptstadt des neuen China. Heute leben hier fast zehn Millionen Menschen" *Berliner Zeitung*, 26 June 1987.

relations but had also piqued the interest of the East German population.<sup>517</sup>

From the East German perspective, Honecker's state visit was a resounding success. While outlining the GDR as a leading industrial state, Honecker had also 'sold' its expertise and select economic models to China, adding to his belief that he was doing things right at home. For Deng, Honecker presented an interesting proposition. He could gain from East Germany a window into what economic models had made East German a leading socialist industrial state as well as the chance to procure select industrial products. Moreover, Deng had gained the trust of what was hitherto an inaccessible Soviet ally, outlining that Eastern Europe was not strictly a Soviet sphere anymore. Thus, both countries pursued rigorous talks both during and after Honecker's visit to further intensify relations, ranging from cooperation in the area of trade to sport. Indeed, the rigorous exchange between Chinese and East German leaders in October 1986 clearly shows that mutual interest was anything but feigned. As Honecker's visit brought about an even more intense phase of bilateral relations, the two countries would soon find a new area of commonality. Whereas hopes for trade and technical cooperation as well as a common willingness to resist Moscow had been a binding factor, an ideological conservatism in the face of Gorbachev's reform plans drove the two regimes even closer. As both countries sought to resist Gorbachev's *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*, an unlikely understanding was forged between East Berlin and Beijing that the Soviet development path was not the only way forward. Even though East Berlin and Beijing had very different visions for the future of their countries, they both agreed that the authority of the communist party must never be put in question.

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<sup>517</sup> Oskar Fischer informed a GDR citizen of this in October 1987. PAAA, MFAA ZR 2436/90 – Eingaben der Bürger – Fischer an Voigt, Zorn an Zorn.



## Chapter Four: Friends in the time of turmoil, 1987-88

### Introduction

For Honecker, his 1986 state visit to Beijing came as a crowning moment. It was the ultimate reward for his tireless work to engage with China despite persistent Soviet protestations. The fact that Beijing granted him a state visit as the first Eastern European leader served to validate his China-policy.

As discussed in the last chapter, Gorbachev's elevation to the position of General Secretary in 1985 was first accompanied in East Berlin with the hope that the same duplicity that had been displayed by Gorbachev's predecessors would end, giving the two countries a chance to work out a coordinated China policy. Yet, Gorbachev's rise to power only reinforced the same Soviet attitude towards Sino-East German relations. While a message of restraint was being preached to East Berlin, Moscow would unabatedly, and duplicitously from East Berlin's perspective, seek some kind of rapprochement with China. That Gorbachev seemed to expend more effort than his predecessors on Sino-Soviet normalization while still maintaining that East Germany should restrain itself from Beijing only estranged Honecker further from Soviet China policy.

Added to Moscow's duplicity in its China-policy, Gorbachev's seeming intransigence towards the 'German question' irked Honecker. While ignoring East German requests to build its relations with Bonn and giving little attention to Honecker's wish to delineate from the other Germany, Gorbachev seemed to expend considerable effort in seeking his own rapprochement with Bonn while discouraging East Berlin from doing the same. As will be shown, East German dissatisfaction and anger stemming from continuous frictions caused by Honecker's insistence to visit Bonn in 1987, and Gorbachev's attempt to dissuade him from such a visit, fed directly into the East German leader's continued readiness to ignore Soviet directives.

In Beijing, Chinese leaders secretly welcomed Honecker's rejection of the Kremlin's political reform path and, as was discussed in the last chapter, were not shy to make this known during Honecker's 1986 visit. While the seeds for a Sino-East German ideological like-mindedness were sown as soon as Gorbachev announced his *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* in 1986, this bond would grow due to what both governments perceived to be an imminent threat to the centrality of the party. As Beijing dealt with liberal tendencies in 1986 resulting from students' desires for more political freedoms to accompany the economic reforms, East Berlin, plagued by its own concerns about its increasingly vociferous population, watched on curiously to see how Zhongnanhai would react.<sup>518</sup> China's subsequent decisive quelling of the 1986 protest movement and accompanying conservative backlash was welcomed in East Berlin and further deepened the conservative ideological commonality between the two regimes. For East Berlin, Beijing was increasingly becoming the dogmatic reference point that it had lost in Moscow.

This chapter will show that continued frictions on the German question, Gorbachev's two-faced messages on his China policy as well as a common disagreement which Beijing and East Berlin shared on Gorbachev's proposed reform path would drive relations forward. Cultural, political and, on a lesser level, economic relations continued to flourish. Despite the nagging knowledge in East Berlin that Beijing was tilting in Bonn's favour when looking for technological cooperation, Deng and Honecker moved to deepen party ties and increasingly saw eye to eye in their dogmatic response to Moscow's liberalization path.

### **Soviet-East German relations: A growing sense of abandonment**

As Honecker celebrated his much-anticipated and highly successful China-visit in

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<sup>518</sup> The MfS regularly issued information to the SED centre on Chinese responses to protest. "Aussenpolitische Tagesinformation", Nr. 5 (8 January 1987), BStU, MfS – HA II Nr. 29665; Although Gorbachev had mentioned that the Soviet Union needed *perestroika* as early as April 1985 at a Party Plenum, concrete plans discernable to outside observers would only be implemented as events such as the Chernobyl nuclear accident in April 1986 gave the Soviet leader more impetus. See Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 279-299.

October 1986, he did so knowing that his erstwhile ideological role models in the Kremlin had become political liabilities rather than allies. As expected in East Berlin, this visit only had the effect of estranging Moscow even further. Gorbachev had reluctantly watched as Honecker paraded himself around China, riddled with a sense of personal affront. The East German visit was especially disrespectful in Gorbachev's eyes since he had made his disapproval of a visit perfectly clear in the months prior to Honecker's October 1986 trip to Beijing.<sup>519</sup>

As Gorbachev's initial reactions to Sino-East German relations would indicate, the same nagging frictions persisted and worsened under the new man in the Kremlin. Almost right away, any faint hopes that Gorbachev's rise would reset Soviet-East German relations were quickly dashed when the SED-elite realized, among many worrying trends, that the Kremlin's European policies would be centered around its own 'selfish' pursuits rather than concerning itself with the worries of its Eastern European allies. Especially in terms of inter-German relations, Honecker and the SED-elite were sometimes left scratching its head as to whose side Moscow was really on.

To be sure, ideological tensions persisted. Honecker's disagreement with Soviet calls for more transparency and accountability in government were increasingly finding their way from the privacy of negotiating rooms into the public eye. The clear ideological 'break' with Moscow came in late January 1987. As Gorbachev announced in a January plenum of the CPSU CC his intentions to carry out secret ballots and intimated to his leadership circle that "we need democracy like we need air", East Berlin shook in fear and anger.<sup>520</sup> Gorbachev's momentous talk was only printed in an abbreviated version in *Neues Deutschland*. In fact, after Gorbachev's speech, the SED Politburo vowed to only publish speeches from comrades in the CPSU in short and "summarized" versions in the future.<sup>521</sup> It was by now plain to

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<sup>519</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A 2787 – Information über ein Brief des Generalsekretärs des ZK der KPdSU, Genossen M. Gorbatschow, pp. 10-12.

<sup>520</sup> Honecker lamented the hasty decisions taken by Gorbachev and maintained in 1992 that it would have been wrong and dangerous to adopt the Soviet reform path. Erich Honecker, *Moabiter Notizen* (Berlin: edition ost, 1994), p. 59.

<sup>521</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30 J IV 2/2 – 2244 – Zu Fragen der marxistische-leninistischen Theorie und Praxis.

see that the SED sought a clear differentiation from the path embarked on by the CPSU. Not only were Moscow's calls for political reform despised in East Berlin, but the Honecker regime also had to witness how Soviet liberal thinkers such as former journalist and Gorbachev's foreign policy advisor Nikolai Portugalev were continuing to be granted a platform by the Kremlin to express their opinions. Thus, when Portugalev, a candidate member of the Central Committee no less, wrote an article in *Moskoyskiye novosti* in February 1987 which implied that East and West Germans belonged to one German nation, it sent shocks of horror through East Berlin.<sup>522</sup> Accordingly, the East German state press started to selectively print the opinions of Soviet hard-liners such as Ligachev and made a concerted effort to suppress those of reformers such as Portugalev, Head of Propaganda Department Alexander Yakovlev and Moscow Mayor Boris Yeltsin.<sup>523</sup>

For Honecker, who had made it his life's work to win the GDR more legitimacy and sovereignty, Moscow's intransigence to the GDR's position on the German question was more than just annoying slights. Considering that the presence of a hostile Cold War environment and the existence of a class-enemy across the border was one of the main *raison d'être*s for the existence of East Germany, talk in the USSR of a 'reunification' were dangerous and careless from Honecker's perspective. As Joachim Scholtyseck has pointed out, on the German question, it was a paradox that East Germany sought more coordination and ideological protection from Gorbachev in inter-German relations so as to not jeopardize the legitimacy of the GDR, while at the same time demanding more independence from Moscow in other areas of foreign policy.<sup>524</sup>

The severity of these insults was compounded by the fact that they were coming from the supposed ideological and administrative centre of the socialist camp, condoned by Gorbachev. To Honecker, this only further confirmed that Moscow could no longer be relied on to be the socialist world leader it once was. Rather, Honecker had started to determine that Soviet policies

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<sup>522</sup> "Moskau spricht von einer deutschen Nation", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 February 1987; "Neue Töne aus Moskau", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23 February 1987; Adomeit, pp. 271-277.

<sup>523</sup> *Neues Deutschland*, 2/3 April 1988.

<sup>524</sup> Joachim Scholtyseck, *Die Aussenpolitik der DDR* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003), p. 43.

were wholly incompatible with East Berlin's vision of its own future.<sup>525</sup> This realization only added to the disdain by the SED leadership towards Moscow. Egon Krenz would later recall that during the late 1980s, "More energy was expended in Politburo meetings discussing Gorbachev's errors than on our own tasks at hand".<sup>526</sup>

### **Soviet-FRG relations from Pankow's view: Why can you and we can't?**

Tensions with Gorbachev only strengthened East Berlin's resolve to disregard all foreign policy directives from Moscow. Especially in its complicated ties with the other Germany, East Berlin was now ready to be more adventurous. As in the beginning of the decade, frictions between Moscow and East Berlin on how to engage with Bonn continued to have direct implications on East Berlin's further willingness to ignore Soviet directives to deepen its engagement with China.

Indeed, things did not add up for Honecker from the beginning. Although Moscow openly maintained to East German leaders that it sought to punish Bonn for its positive stance towards the deployment of Intermediate-Range Nuclear Missiles on its territory, it engaged West Germany in areas of trade and economic cooperation. Honecker saw that on one hand, the new man in the Kremlin wooed West German leaders for Soviet economic advantages while with the other hand, the same man restrained East Berlin from doing the same. Honecker was not content with watching from the sidelines as relations between Bonn and Moscow warmed from the frosty chill of the early 1980s.<sup>527</sup> Especially considering that the men in the Kremlin had made Honecker toe the line and cancel repeated attempts to visit Bonn, Gorbachev's concurrent engagement with

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<sup>525</sup> Erich Honecker, *Moabiter Notizen*, (Berlin: edition ost, 1994), pp. 58-59.

<sup>526</sup> 'Krenz: "Die Karre steckte tief im Dreck"', *Der Spiegel*, 4 February 1991.

<sup>527</sup> When Kohl visited Moscow in October 1988, a warm personal relationship had even emerged between the Gorbachev and the German leader. Document No. 30: Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding a Meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, 28 October 1988 in Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, Vladislav Zubok (eds.), *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), pp. 265-267.

West Germany from 1985 onwards seemed both duplicitous and suspicious.<sup>528</sup>

As before, Honecker was encouraged by Moscow to further postpone his planned visit to West Germany in 1987, something which Honecker had been repeatedly pushed to do since his Werbellinsee meeting with Helmut Schmidt in December 1981. The fact that the Kremlin did so while holding fast to a visit by West German President Richard von Weizsäcker to Moscow in July of the same year only added to the mutual distrust.<sup>529</sup> This was exactly the same Soviet attitude that East Berlin was experiencing in its dealing with Moscows vis-à-vis China: Gorbachev insisted that the Soviet Union first initiate relations with West Germany before its client states did so. To East Berlin's lament, Gorbachev stuck to his line. Inheriting the realistic worry from the Soviet leaders before him that further inter-German interaction would result in East Berlin's increased economic dependency on Bonn, Gorbachev sternly warned East Berlin of the ramifications of greater indebtedness to the West.<sup>530</sup> Much to the distress of Gorbachev, these warnings fell on deaf ears as the East German leader answered his disdain for Soviet meddling by sticking with his planned visit to Bonn. To make matters worse, Soviet-East German tensions were compounded by an emerging personality conflict between Honecker and the new Soviet leader. According to Hannes Adomeit, "Gorbachev's flair, his spontaneously outgoing, radiant, optimistic, often unconventional attitude and sense of humour contrasted sharply with Honecker's prim and proper appearance..."<sup>531</sup> After all, Honecker must have thought, what could an upstart

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<sup>528</sup> Toeing the Soviet line, Honecker threatened with "a new ice age" in relations between the GDR and the FRG if INF deployments went ahead in an October 1984 letter to Kohl and co-drafted a joint communique after the Gromyko-Honecker summit two weeks later which threatened "serious losses" for West Germany's Ostpolitik. NARA – CIA-RDP86M00886R001000010017-5 – Memorandum for: Director of Central Intelligence William Case – "The East German question revisited", 11 September 1984.

<sup>529</sup> Members of the CPSU CC International Department told their East German colleagues that they placed a lot of importance in Weizsäcker's visit as it will "continue the broad dialogue" between the two countries. PAAA, MFAA ZR 3936/90 – Information über eine Konsultation der Abteilung für Internationale Politik und Wirtschaft des ZK der SED mit der Internationalen Abteilung des ZK der KPdSU in Moskau – 24.4.1987.

<sup>530</sup> Werner Krolikowski, a Politburo member, Central Committee Secretary for Economic Affairs and later State Secretary later confessed that Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and Gorbachev warned of the greater danger of indebtedness to the West at every meeting with Honecker. See Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991), p. 327.

<sup>531</sup> Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998), p. 221.

like Gorbachev tell an experienced leader like himself on how to reform and govern a socialist country? The East German leader reportedly complained that “the young man had been making policy for a year, and already he finds it necessary to take on more than he can handle”.<sup>532</sup>

Showing his complete disregard for Soviet wishes, as he had already done with his China visit in 1986, Honecker held steadfast to his travel plans and he ventured across the German-German border to pay a visit to Bonn in September 1987. Although, in diplomatic parlance, it was only a working visit, due to Helmut Kohl’s reluctance to recognize Honecker as a state visitor, the two German leaders spent almost nine hours together.<sup>533</sup> For Honecker, improved FRG-GDR relations were not only lucrative because it would yield substantial economic advantages, something that it came to increasingly depend on, but the visit would also underline the existence of two German states. In fact, Honecker’s visit to Bonn was in many ways one of the pinnacles of his political work. It was, according to Benno Eide-Siebs “Die Krönung seines Lebenswerkes”, the epitome of international recognition for the GDR.<sup>534</sup> As Honecker himself would recount:

The reception in Bonn in September 1987 was friendly. For the first time, the national hymn of the GDR played in Bonn and the state flag of the GDR was shown the honour rightful to her.<sup>535</sup>

Even though Kohl would stress his wishes for a reunified Germany during his meetings with Honecker, the latter must have been more than satisfied that the common communiqué outlined that it was “in the sense of the Basic Treaty” to maintain normal and good neighbourly relations with each other...<sup>536</sup> As Gorbachev continued to tolerate and even encouraged Soviet liberal

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<sup>532</sup> Günter Schabowki’s recollections in Günter Schabowki, *Das Politbüro: Ende eines Mythos, eine Befragung* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1990), p. 140.

<sup>533</sup> See David H. Shumaker, *Gorbachev and the German Question – Soviet-West German Relations 1985-1990* (Westport: Praeger, 1995), pp. 41-52.

<sup>534</sup> Eide-Siebs, pp. 356-359.

<sup>535</sup> Erich Honecker, *Moabiter Notizen*, (Berlin: edition ost, 1994), p. 47.

<sup>536</sup> Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen (eds.), *Der Besuch von Generalsekretär Honecker in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Dokumentation zum Arbeitsbesuch des Generalsekretärs der SED und*

thinkers to voice their opinions on the “German question”, this was also Honecker’s direct answer to Gorbachev that the GDR was here to stay.<sup>537</sup>

As the decade progressed Honecker was getting increasingly bolder in his disregard of Soviet directives.<sup>538</sup> Undoubtedly emboldened by his belief that he was a more experienced foreign policy operator than Gorbachev, Honecker now mercilessly pushed forward his own foreign policy agenda. Like Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko before him, Gorbachev was confronted with the reality that East German goals in foreign affairs were in many ways irreconcilable and incompatible with Moscow’s wishes.

### **Looking East – Soviet East Asian policy**

Just like his predecessors, Gorbachev seemed intent to continue Moscow’s duplicitous stance towards East Berlin in terms of its German and China policies. While Moscow’s inconsistent attitude towards Beijing had been on display at the beginning of the decade, East Berlin would soon find out that Soviet inconsistency would reach new levels under Gorbachev. The new Soviet leader seemed not only to continue his predecessors’ urging of restraint from engaging with East Berlin but was now also spending considerable effort in seeking a reset in relations with China. Indeed, while Brezhnev, Chernenko and Andropov had been relatively lethargic when it came to Sino-Soviet normalization, Gorbachev went ahead full-steam in an attempt to effect profound change in bilateral relations.<sup>539</sup> Keeping Gorbachev’s fresh push

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*Staatsratsvorsitzenden der DDR, Erich Honecker, in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland im September 1987* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, 1988).

<sup>537</sup> Scholtyseck, p. 45.

<sup>538</sup> In 1984, the *Wall Street Journal* carried a piece which described East German-Soviet frictions. It suggested that the East German leader may enjoy “some marginal room for maneuver toward the West”. See “East Germany’s Deceptive Détente”, *Wall Street Journal*, 17 August 1984.

<sup>539</sup> While the motivations for Gorbachev’s interest in a speedy Sino-Soviet normalization have been speculated as being derived from a desire to counter against increased Sino-American cooperation during Deng’s reign, it is safe to say that Gorbachev’s actions in East Asia, much like his policies in Europe, were instinctive and gradualist, rather than being derived out of a coherent grand strategy. See CIA estimation of Moscow wanting to create their own “China card” to balance out triangular relations in NARA – CIA-RDP04T00447R000302340001-2 – China-USSR:



towards the East in mind, Moscow's meddling in Eastern German-Chinese affairs seemed both traitorous and disingenuous, and it gave the East German leader all the more reason to ignore Soviet directives in all foreign affairs matters.

To date, Gorbachev's considerable foreign policy advances in East Asia have only received scant attention, with Sergey Radchenko's recent book the only major work dealing with this issue.<sup>540</sup> While Radchenko draws our attention to Gorbachev's considerable efforts to end the Cambodia quagmire and to improve relations with Japan in addition to driving forward the Sino-Soviet normalization process, Gorbachev's first focus, as Vladislav Zubok convincingly observes, was firmly set on Western Europe and across the Atlantic.<sup>541</sup> This was partly due to the world that the Soviet leader inherited from the men in the Kremlin before him.<sup>542</sup> With Soviet-American relations highly strained due to issues ranging from Afghanistan to SDI, Gorbachev spent much of his attention in his first years in power trying to limit the damage done to superpower relations through a series of summits with his American counterparts.<sup>543</sup>

This is not to say that Gorbachev did not have a clear vision for a more vigorous Asia policy. On the contrary, even though his attention was required in mending fences with the West, a more activist Soviet Asian policy arose from the Kremlin after he took over the top job in Moscow. In terms of Moscow's rapprochement with China, the new leader in the Kremlin sought

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Maneuvering in the Triangle: 20 December 1985; Also see Vladislav Zubok, "Gorbachev's policy towards East Asia" in Tsuyoshi Hasegawa (eds.) *The Cold War in East Asia 1945-1991* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2011), pp. 265-268.

<sup>540</sup> Sergey Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>541</sup> Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, pp. 51-159; After Gorbachev's first 100 days in the Kremlin, Washington noted no changes in Gorbachev's Asian foreign policy but a profound increase in effort to engage with American leaders and establishing a "community of interest" with Western Europe. NARA – CIA-RDP85T01058R000507710001-6 – Directorate of Intelligence – "Gorbachev, the new Broom", June 1985; Vladislav Zubok, "Gorbachev's policy towards East Asia" in Tsuyoshi Hasegawa (eds.) *The Cold War in East Asia 1945-1991* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2011), pp. 265-268.

<sup>542</sup> Both Andropov and Chernenko viewed Reagan with great suspicion, and in light of insults such as the "evil empire" speech, considered the American President's talk about nuclear disarmament disingenuous. See Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 272-275.

<sup>543</sup> Saki Ruth Dockrill, *The End of the Cold War Era*, see specifically Chapter 5 "Reagan, Gorbachev and the Politics of Nuclear Security", pp. 99-119; See also Gorbachev's consumption with SDI and his effort to develop possible counter measures in Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 284-287; Also see Adomeit, pp. 252-255.

to revive the normalization process that had not seen any significant progress since Leonid Brezhnev tried to breathe new life into Sino-Soviet dialogue in 1982. During his Vladivostok speech on 28 July 1986, the Soviet leader indicated that he was willing to concede on some aspects of China's three conditions for rapprochement, for example by pulling out troops from the Sino-Soviet frontier. The General Secretary stated, full of hope:

Speaking in a city that is but a step from the People's Republic of China, I would like to dwell on the most important issue in our relations. These relations are extremely important for several reasons, starting from the fact that we are neighbours, that we share the world's longest land border and that we, our children and our grandchildren are destined to live near each other 'forever and ever'. A noticeable improvement has occurred in our relations in recent years. I would like to affirm that the Soviet Union is prepared – any time, at any level – to discuss with China questions of additional measures for creating an atmosphere of good-neighbourliness...<sup>544</sup>

His adjoining statement that there was a urgent need for a “radical break with many of the conventional approaches to foreign policy, a break with the traditions of political thinking” seemed to indicate that he was also very serious about breaking with the past and affecting profound changes in Soviet East Asian policy.<sup>545</sup>

Indeed, Gorbachev had already started to breathe new life into Soviet East Asian policy well before his Vladivostok speech. Soon after coming to power in 1985, the new man in the Kremlin had undertaken a major foreign policy overhaul that affected nearly every institutional level. Old-timer Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's replacement with more pragmatic and controllable Eduard Shevardnadze was indicative of Gorbachev's new direction. The new Soviet General Secretary sought to bring in a new group of reform-minded individuals who, like him, wanted to shed the polemic past that tainted the Soviet Union's relations with many of its adversaries. This was also reflected in his re-shuffle of his China-team. Dogmatic, Brezhnev-era

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<sup>544</sup> “Excerpts from Gorbachev's Speech” – *New York Times*, 29 July 1986.

<sup>545</sup> Dimitri K. Simes, “Gorbachev: A new Foreign Policy?”, *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 65, No. 3 (1986), pp. 477-500.

holdovers were quickly removed. And the first person on the chopping block would be the man behind the *Interkit* himself: Oleg Rakhmanin. While the *Interkit* had fizzled out after 1982, it was Gorbachev who finally pulled the chair from under the conservative apparatchik by demoting him in 1985 and finally removing him from his position as First Deputy Head of the Central Committee Socialist Countries Department in 1987.<sup>546</sup> In March 1986 Gorbachev sent Brezhnev's former personal assistant, Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, another Brezhnev-era relic, into retirement and in early 1987, Mikhail Kapitsa, Deputy Foreign Minister and another inflexible hardliner on China, was downgraded to a position at the Institute of Oriental Studies.<sup>547</sup> In their stead, Gorbachev brought in a new generation of foreign policy thinkers who embraced *Glasnost* in Moscow's foreign relations. In August 1986, Gorbachev elevated experienced and liberal China-hand Igor Rogachev to the position of Deputy Foreign Minister responsible for oversight of the entire Asia/Pacific region. In the same vein, Anatolii Cherniaev, Gorbachev's new foreign policy assistant, was a friend of many liberal Moscow think-tankers and welcomed Gorbachev's new path. To signal to Beijing that he was serious about change, he sent Oleg Troianovsky, former Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations and one of the most experienced and trusted Soviet diplomats to take up the ambassadorship in Beijing in May 1986. This was part of a general renewed initiative to improve Soviet relations with its East Asian neighbours. Thus, Gorbachev also dispatched Nikolai N. Soloviev, a trained Japanologist, to become the new Ambassador in Tokyo to overcome the Kremlin's often tense relations with Japan, with mixed success.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Rakhmanin had published an article in *Pravda* on 21 June 21 1985, in which he attempted to undermine Gorbachev's new policy towards the allies and criticized independent developments in those countries as nationalist. See Anatoly S. Chernyaev, "The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev, 1987" (Translated by Anna Melykova & edited by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archives), p. 2.

([http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB250/Chernyaev\\_Diary\\_1987.pdf](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB250/Chernyaev_Diary_1987.pdf)), accessed 16 June 2013.

<sup>547</sup> Stephen M. Young, "Gorbachev's Asian Policy: Balancing the New and the Old" *Asian Survey*, 28:3, (1988), pp. 327-339, p. 334.

<sup>548</sup> Sergey Radchenko has shown that while the Soviet Union was willing to at give in to some of Tokyo's territorial demands on the Kurile Islands, Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone was held at ransom by a 'all-or-nothing' mentality of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, thereby rendering a solution almost impossible See Sergey Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 51-87; Vadislav Zubok, "Gorbachev's policy towards East Asia" in Tsuyoshi Hasegawa (eds.) *The Cold War in East Asia 1945-1991* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson

Contemporary commentators noticed this change in direction. In 1988, Stephen Young, a former Soviet Asian policy analyst in the American embassy in Moscow noted the increased exchanges occurring between China and the Soviet Union. He noted that a series of prominent delegations, including ones headed by Supreme Soviet Deputy Lev Tolkunov (October 1985), Deputy Premier and candidate Politburo member Nikolai Talyzin (March 1986) and Central Committee Secretary Georgiy Razumovskiy (July 1987) visited China.<sup>549</sup> The tenth and eleventh rounds of political normalization talks were held in April and August of 1987. In a move that was both a positive externality of a renewed détente between the US and the Soviet Union and motivated by Moscow's desire to fulfil some of the aspects of China's three demands, Moscow decided to scrap all 100 medium-range SS-20 missiles in Asia as part of the 'global double-zero option' package in addition to withdrawing a motorized division from Mongolia.<sup>550</sup> The Soviets seemed to pull out all the stops. To the chagrin of Washington, the CIA even received information that Georgy Arbatov, long-time foreign policy advisor to Soviet General Secretaries and the founder of the Institute for U.S. and Canadian studies, was sent to Beijing in late 1986 to reassure the Chinese of the unlikelihood of a breakthrough in US-Soviet ties and to convince China to "stop blaming the superpowers equally for the world's tensions in order to join the USSR and its allies against the 'imperialist camp'".<sup>551</sup>

### **Holding back East Berlin**

Soviet advances in East Asia initially received a mixed reaction from East Berlin. East German diplomats in Beijing first welcomed Gorbachev's renewed push for normalization with China, as positive reflections on expanding cultural and political dialogue between the two

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Centre Press, 2011), p. 268.

<sup>549</sup> Young, pp. 317-399.

<sup>550</sup> Stanley Rosen, "China in 1987 – The year of the thirteenth Party Congress, *Asian Survey*, 28:1, A Survey of Asia in 1987: Part I (Jan. 1988), pp. 35-51, p. 47.

<sup>551</sup> NARA – CIA-RDP04T00447R000302340001-2 – China-USSR: Maneuvering in the Triangle – 20 December 1986.

countries were sent back from the East German embassy in Moscow in July 1985.<sup>552</sup> However, any sense of joy and jubilation that Moscow had finally seen the light and was ‘following in Honecker’s footsteps’ in seriously re-engaging with China were quickly snuffed out by what was perceived in East Berlin as the Soviet Union’s continued duplicity in its message for East German-Chinese relations.

In Beijing, officials became increasingly aware of disagreements between the Soviet Union and East Berlin and in a carefully calculated move to show understanding, Chinese leaders and diplomats exuded compassion towards East Berlin’s dilemma. In a private meeting in July 1987 between Chinese diplomats and MfS agents, the Political Secretary in the Chinese Embassy in the GDR, Liu Qibao, intimated that the deteriorating relations between the USSR and East Germany were a “cause for concern” but reassured the interlocutor that Beijing viewed relations with the GDR and the USSR separately. In a thinly veiled encouragement for the GDR to take an even more independent stance, the Chinese Ambassador in East Berlin Ma Xusheng told the MfS contact that he welcomed the “increasing independence and political weight” that Eastern European states were gaining and promised to “encourage [independent] tendencies” in these states.<sup>553</sup>

These remarks should also be viewed as a Chinese response to Moscow’s courting of Vietnam, a state that Beijing deemed in its sphere of influence, into an anti-Chinese direction. Indeed in 1987 Beijing viewed Moscow’s stubborn continued support of Vietnam as a major hindrance to the normalization process. Even despite Gorbachev’s conciliatory measures in scaling back the Soviet troop presence in Asia, there was little movement in the Kremlin on the Vietnam issue, raising doubt in Beijing if Moscow was sincerely seeking normalization.<sup>554</sup> Thus,

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<sup>552</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 698/89 – Beziehungen VR China-UdSSR, 1982-86 – Vermerk über eine Konsultation im MID der UdSSR zu aktuellen Fragen der sowjetisch-chinesischen Beziehungen – 24.7.1985.

<sup>553</sup> BStU, MfS – HVA Nr. 40 “Information über aktuelle Aspekte der Haltung der VR China gegenüber der UdSSR und der DDR” (1987)”, p. 160.

<sup>554</sup> Lowell Dittmer, *Sino-Soviet Normalization and its International Implications* (Seattle: University of Washington

China had little reservation in subversively courting a close Soviet ally and, having already signalled to East Berlin that it valued the relationship by inviting Honecker to Beijing in 1986, continued to push forward relations in 1987.

Improving relations had effects on every aspect of bilateral affairs. For example, the MfS had already noted in the aftermath of the Honecker visit in 1986 that the five known agents of the Chinese security services (*Guojia Anquanbu*) stationed in the GDR were not conducting as much subversive activity as before and that this was definitely influenced by “the continued expansion of bilateral relations with the PRC in different areas...”.<sup>555</sup> This is in stark contrast to a 1983 report which still outlined a threat from “special services which were operating out of the Albanian and Chinese embassies”.<sup>556</sup> Far from enmity, inofficial agent “Kern” (a professor), who had kept up exchanges with Chinese Embassy contacts since the 1970s was granted a trip to China as guest of the Culture Ministry in August 1988. Given his regular contacts and his inquisitive questions on China, it is safe to say that the Chinese probably knew of his true identity and activities.<sup>557</sup>

For China, East Germany also became a partner in a time when many socialist countries remained sceptical about Beijing’s drastic domestic reform path. Even previously trusted friends started to make their disagreements known. In the case of Romania, once China’s trusted middleman between itself and Moscow, disputes over Deng’s economic reform course meant that bilateral relations started to cool off significantly in 1988. Chinese Embassy staff in Bucharest informed their East German colleagues in the spring of 1988 that relations had suffered because there was a lack of willingness on the Romanian side to “seek progressive change in their internal

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Press, 1993).

<sup>555</sup> “Einschätzung der Angriffe von Geheimdiensten (ausser BRD, USA, Grossbritannien und Frankreich) gegen die DDR im Zeitraum von 1983-1986” (1986), BStU, MfS – HA II Nr. 34741, p. 63.

<sup>556</sup> “Planorientierung 1984 für die Abteilungen II der BV” (15 September, 1983), BStU, MfS – HA II/10 Nr. 61, p. 4.

<sup>557</sup> “China-Reise vom 17.6 bis 8.7.1988” (21 July, 1988), BStU, MfS – AIM 48/91, Teil 2, Bd. 6, p. 201.

politics”.<sup>558</sup>

In light of these developments in Sino-GDR affairs, Soviet duplicity continued. Thus, when Honecker went to Moscow on an extended working-level visit in September 1988, any hope that the Soviet Union would be more encouraging on Honecker’s China policy were quickly extinguished. Aside from Gorbachev’s stern reminder that China was still not in the socialist family, the meeting was called by Moscow to “work out suggestions for overcoming obstacles in bilateral relations” between the SED and CPSU leaderships.<sup>559</sup> In detailed discussions, the same nagging frictions came to the fore that would continue to serve as further catalysts for Honecker’s independent foreign policy. During their private meeting, Honecker, in view of Kohl’s impending visit to Moscow in October of the same year, stressed the importance that Moscow support East Berlin’s stance on its territorial sovereignty and impart on West German leaders “the unassailable position of the borders and the unconditional respect of the existing territorial and political realities”.<sup>560</sup> Gorbachev’s noncommittal and steely response to hold increased dialogue on the matter certainly elicited little confidence from Honecker.<sup>561</sup> To add insult to injury, Honecker’s hopeful request to increase raw material deliveries in the time span from 1991-1995 were met with Gorbachev’s similar cold response that “this is currently not possible”.<sup>562</sup> In a post-meeting estimation, the GDR’s Ambassador in Moscow wrote to the Head of the International Department of the SED CC that “it would take prolonged efforts to remove the frictions [between East Berlin

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<sup>558</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 539/03 – Fortschreibungsinformation zu den Beziehungen SR Rumänien – VR China (Januar – April 1988).

<sup>559</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2349/90 – Besuch E. Honeckers in der UdSSR – König an Sieber, 18.10.1988.

<sup>560</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2349/90 – Besuch E. Honeckers in der UdSSR – Empfehlungen für das 4-Augen-Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Generalsekretär des Zentralkomitees der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion, Genossen Michail Sergejewitsch Gorbatschow am 28. September 1988 in Moskau.

<sup>561</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2349/90 – Besuch E. Honeckers in der UdSSR – Bericht über das Arbeitstreffen des Genossen Erich Honecker, Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrates der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, mit dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KPdSU, Michail Gorbatschow, am 28. und 29. September 1988 in Moskau.

<sup>562</sup> Especially this point was also reiterated by Chairman of the CPSU CC Economic Commission to the SED CC Secretary of the Economy Günter Mittag – PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2349/90 – Besuch E. Honeckers in der UdSSR – Bericht über das Gespräch zwischen Genossen Günter Mittag und Genossen Nikolai Sljunktov

and Moscow].<sup>563</sup>

These episodes of continued disagreement between Moscow and East Berlin became the rule rather than the exception in the latter part of the decade. Especially in 1988, when Gorbachev, unlike his predecessors, was spending considerable time to court China's favour, Moscow's directives on China went in Honecker's one ear and out the other. In the MfAA plan on how to expand relations in 1988, East Germany vowed to continue to establish contacts in the cultural, political as well as the scientific areas with Beijing.<sup>564</sup>

### **China: Reform at a price**

While Deng frantically expanded his foreign contacts in order to funnel in technology and experience for his modernization project, a series of domestic challenges emerged in the mid 1980s which almost derailed the entire reform project. In 1986, after half a decade of reform, Zhongnanhai was confronted with the first wave of popular dissatisfaction at what protestors deemed an incongruent disconnection between political and economic reforms. Beijing's conservative backlash in quelling the popular liberal challenges to party rule in late 1986 and early 1987 opened up a new channel of mutual understanding hitherto unexplored between East Germany and China. Honecker and Deng saw eye-to-eye in dogmatic defiance of political reform as propagated by Moscow.

In many ways, the ordinary citizen in China had good reason to be dissatisfied with Deng's reforms. Not only did the average Chinese not derive any tangible benefits from the boom on the coasts but new wealth had also introduced previously unknown vices to China. In the Special Economic Zones, a laissez-faire attitude spawned a widespread wave of smuggling,

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<sup>563</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2349/90 – Besuch E. Honeckers in der UdSSR – König an Sieber, 18.10.1988.

<sup>564</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2434/90 – Jahresorientierung Beziehungen DDR-VR China – Orientierung für die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VR China im Jahre 1988.



profiteering and speculation. Especially local officials, who were able to use their networks and positions of power to take advantage of China's more liberal atmosphere, did so.<sup>565</sup> In this new environment where traditional communist principles were seemingly readily abandoned, many struggled to grasp what ideology meant in a newly liberalized China driven not by doctrine but by profit-seeking.

As early as December 1984, *Renmin Ribao* published an article which asked if Marx's teachings were still relevant 101 years after his death, prompting foreign observers to speculate that Marxism was being abandoned in China.<sup>566</sup> The July 1985 ousting of the Party propaganda chief Deng Liqun seemed to indicate that further liberalization was at hand. Testing the waters, it was not long before Chinese students started to agitate for more freedoms to accompany the country's staggering economic advances. The reasons were simple. The newfound coastal wealth did not find its way onto the campuses. Students were still living in relative squalor in their dormitories and on stipends which amounted to 22 Renminbi a month, even then a measly sum.<sup>567</sup> In Hefei, progressive professors such as Astrophysicist Fang Lizhi started to openly call for greater independence in university administration and called for the emulation of western examples.<sup>568</sup>

In December 1986, student unrest quickly spread from the University of Science and Technology in Hefei province to renowned institutions such as Peking University and Shanghai Jiaotong University. Student leaders and their allies called for political reforms to accompany the economic ones called out by Deng.<sup>569</sup> Conservative elements within the CCP placed the blame squarely on General Secretary Hu Yaobang and the reformist faction. In their opinion, Hu had

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<sup>565</sup> Richard Baum, "The Road to Tiananmen: Chinese Politics in the 1980s" in Roderick MacFarquar (eds.), *The Politics of China* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 365.

<sup>566</sup> "Did Marx fall or was he pushed?", *The Economist*, 15 December 1984.

<sup>567</sup> Baum, p. 380.

<sup>568</sup> Julia Kwong, "The 1986 Student Demonstrations in China: A Democratic Movement?", *Asian Survey*, 28:9 (1988), pp. 970-985, p. 976.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 970.

neglected to reinforce the importance of a binding ideology. On 27 December, a delegation of seven conservative leaders centered around Chen Yun and Hu Qiaomu visited Deng to demand Hu Yaobang's demotion. With conservative pressure mounting, Deng consented and the demonstrators were criticized as expressions of "bourgeois liberalization" and disbanded.<sup>570</sup> Zhao Ziyang replaced Hu as General Secretary and the conservative Li Peng rose to Zhao's former position of Prime Minister.<sup>571</sup>

This episode taught the Chinese leadership that it would have to keep in mind the social ramifications of Reform and Opening. How was it going to keep the people satisfied who were benefitting so little from China's economic growth? The immediate answer was found in a conservative backlash and re-education program aimed at the student population who were so often the sparks of domestic unrest. In September 1987, military training was once more emphasized in schools and during spring and summer vacations, some university students were sent to work on farms or in factories. A media monitoring office was created by Zhongnanhai to monitor China's 1500-odd newspapers and 5000 and so periodicals to limit discussion on sensitive issues such as political reform. From March to September 1986, 594 newspaper and journals were shut down.<sup>572</sup> Mindful to not let these conservative tendencies go out of hand, Deng spent much of the following months softening these leftist trends so that they would not interrupt his economic reforms. Through this episode Deng learnt that a vital ingredient to the continuation of his policies would lay in a stable, acquiescent population, and the perfect tool to achieve this was a re-emphasis, at least temporarily, on Marxist doctrine.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> *Renmin Ribao*, 6 January 1987.

<sup>571</sup> While Li Peng's rise was a victory for the conservative faction, moderate Zhao Ziyang's simultaneous ascent effectively served as a counterweight in the Standing Committee of the CCP Politburo. See Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), pp. 444-445.

<sup>572</sup> Stanley Rosen, "China in 1987 – The year of the thirteenth Party Congress, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 1, A Survey of Asia in 1987: Part I (Jan. 1988), pp. 38-39.

<sup>573</sup> China found itself in a continuous cycle of liberalization and conservative backlash in the 1980s. A period of reform would be ultimately reined in by a conservative response when reforms seemed to get out of control. This *fang* (letting go) and *shou* (reining in) cycle is described in Richard Baum, "The Road to Tiananmen: Chinese Politics in the 1980s" in Roderick MacFarquar (eds.), *The Politics of China* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.

## **A budding ideological relationship**

In a drastically changing socialist world, where the Soviet leader now frequently called for political reform and openness, China's conservative backlash seemed to go against the trend.<sup>574</sup> And it was in this area that East Germany and China found even more commonalities. Having already defected wholesale from Moscow's general China policy, East Berlin started to realize that it had a lot more to agree with in the ideological arena with their newly-found friends in Beijing than with its former 'big brother' in Moscow. After party-to-party relations, a highly symbolic yet important barometer in relations between socialist states, had been normalized during Honecker's visit, the two countries would find that their views on the unassailability of the leading role of the party in both states would form a lasting bond between the two states.<sup>575</sup> And as ideological commonalities started to be underlined, inter-party relations, began to flourish.<sup>576</sup>

By June 1987, this budding bilateral ideological convergence was solidified with Premier Zhao Ziyang's much-anticipated visit to East Berlin.<sup>577</sup> It did not take Honecker and Zhao long to get down to their most pressing concerns. Considering both regimes' disdain for Gorbachev's reform policies, both leaders went to great lengths to stress that the leading role of their respective parties would never be put in question. Indeed much of the conversation at the meeting revolved around questions of the future of communist ideology in East Germany and China. Here, commonalities abounded. Zhao, undoubtedly confident that he would elicit

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338-340.

<sup>574</sup> Instead of imposing dogmatism and an reemphasis on ideology on its population, Gorbachev made an effort to apologize for Soviet intervention in popular movements. Thus, in April 1987, the Soviet General Secretary condemned the Soviet intervention in Prague in the Czechoslovak capital. Adomeit, pp. 281.

<sup>575</sup> The American intelligence service noted with interest that Beijing had authorized officials to refer to Eastern European party members as "comrades" in 1982 and had allowed officials to refer to Eastern European countries as "socialist" in 1983-1984, NARA – CIA-RDP85T01058R000201930001-1 – China-Eastern Europe: Beijing courts Moscow's Allies, 23 October 1985.

<sup>576</sup> During Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer's visit to Beijing in December 1987, the East German statesman welcomed the continued deepening of party relations. PAAA, MFAA ZR 2498/90 – Besuch Aussenminister Oskar Fischer in VR China - Vermerk über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, am 3. Dezember 1987 in Zhongnanhai mit Genossen Oskar Fischer.

<sup>577</sup> Hans Modrow, *In Historischer Mission* (Berlin: edition ost, 2007), pp. 198-9.

agreement from his East German hosts, first informed to Honecker that the fall of Hu Yaobang was due to the former Chinese leader having become “too relaxed” in combating “a few intellectuals who were spreading liberalism among the people”. To put it beyond doubt that he would do everything necessary to make sure to quell domestic challenges to party rule, Zhao stressed that even when developing “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, it was important to fight against “pollutions” in the area of ideology.<sup>578</sup>

Describing the students’ demands for more liberalism and a “westernizing” of society as a result of Hu’s faulty leadership, Zhao told Honecker that the Party had now decided to start a campaign against citizen’s liberties, with a goal of strengthening education programs to bolster ideological orthodoxy. Beijing’s struggles against liberalization found an understanding audience in East Berlin. Agreeing with Beijing’s conservative path, Honecker resonated that “the leadership of socialist construction through the party, through both the CCP and the SED, demands that we must dedicate special attention to the fight against liberalization”, adding “we are ourselves leading a very hard fight to solidify (*verankern*) socialism and her ideology in our people.”<sup>579</sup> These words gain an even deeper meaning considering that Honecker had to fight “ideological pollution” coming from the West but also now from Moscow. Indeed, to make it absolutely clear that East Berlin was seeking a different course than Moscow, Honecker told Zhao that he wished the Soviet Union every success with their “proposed path”. “But”, he went on, “we also say that we live under different conditions.”<sup>580</sup> Thus, Sino-GDR relations were continuously improving at

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<sup>578</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2493/90 – Besuch amt. GS ZK KP Chinas, Ministerpräs. Des Staatsrats der VR China, Zhao Ziyang – Niederschrift über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees des SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrats der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem amtierenden Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas und Ministerpräsidenten des Staatsrates der VR China, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, am 8. Juni 1987 im Hause des Zentralkomitees.

<sup>579</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2493/90 – Besuch amt. GS ZK KP Chinas, Ministerpräs. Des Staatsrats der VR China, Zhao Ziyang – Niederschrift über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees des SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrats der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem amtierenden Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas und Ministerpräsidenten des Staatsrates der VR China, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, am 8. Juni 1987 im Hause des Zentralkomitees.

<sup>580</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2493/90 – Besuch amt. GS ZK KP Chinas, Ministerpräs. Des Staatsrats der VR China, Zhao Ziyang – Niederschrift über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees des SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrats der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem amtierenden Generalsekretär des ZK der KP Chinas und

a time when a freeze had set in in Sino-Soviet normalization talks. In Dresden, Zhao intimated to Hans Modrow on the state of Moscow-Beijing relations:

When a small ship wants to dock with a big ship on the ocean, it is a relatively easy manoeuvre. However, when two enormous ships want to do so, it is a very difficult undertaking and it is to be done with great caution.<sup>581</sup>

After Zhao's visit, inter-party relations between the CCP and the SED took on a new dynamic. Exchanges gained in frequency. In November 1987, a study delegation dispatched by the Central Committee of the SED arrived in China for an 11-day tour to collaborate on party affairs. Throughout their time in China the delegation was received "very warmly". In line with Zhao and Honecker's discussion, officials such as Zhu Liang, Head of the International Department of the CCP Central Committee emphasized that socialism in both countries should be constructed while taking into account the special characteristics of each country, a clear rebuttal against Moscow's liberal messages. Even though Deng was already pushing for a return to the reform path after the protests had temporarily derailed his momentum before the planned 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in October 1987, Zhu emphasized that Beijing would pay more attention to "strengthen the leading role of the party" and to fulfil this task the government would have to "strengthen ideological work..."<sup>582</sup> Thus, perhaps it comes as no surprise that Chinese protests at American objections over the treatment of Fang Lizhi and the 1986 protestors received a willing audience in East Berlin.<sup>583</sup>

China's conservative response to the 1986 anti-government protests struck a chord with

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Ministerpräsidenten des Staatsrates der VR China, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, am 8. Juni 1987 im Hause des Zentralkomitees.

<sup>581</sup> Hans Modrow, *In Historischer Mission* (Berlin: edition ost, 2007), p. 198.

<sup>582</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2507/90 – Internationale Beziehungen SED-KP Chinas – Bericht der Studiendelegation des ZK der SED unter der Leitung des Genossen Helmut Koziolk über die Ergebnisse ihrer Reise in die Volksrepublik China vom 13. bis 27.11.1987.

<sup>583</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2499/90 – Konsultationen MfAA, DDR-VR China – Bericht über Konsultationen zwischen Gen. Prof. Dr. Süß, Leiter der HA rechts- und Vertragswesen im MfAA der DDR, und Gen. Prof. Wang Houli, Leiter der Rechtsabteilung des MfAA der VR China.

East Berlin especially because it had its own concerns with popular discontent to deal with. Indeed, the East German population was not as submissive as some in hindsight have suggested and these problems were manifesting themselves with gathering pace in the late 1980s.<sup>584</sup> The rise of a peace movement incubated by a resurgent church was only one of the regime's problems as the population seemed to grow bolder in its rejection of SED policies.<sup>585</sup> Dissatisfaction against the regime had already reared its head in the early part of the decade. In February 1982, for example, Reiner Eppelmann, an East Berlin church minister, was taken into custody after he had amassed more than 2000 signatures for the removal of the Soviet occupation forces from East Germany. Episodes like these increased in frequency as officially sanctioned channels of complaint were no longer sufficient for the populous to voice their anger.<sup>586</sup> While Honecker's judgment of the severity of these disturbances is under debate, there is no doubt that the East German leader knew that the population was far from docile.<sup>587</sup> According to Jan Palmowski, the average citizen learned to 'play the rules' of the political system, forcing the party to respond and sometimes even concede to the petitioners' demands.<sup>588</sup> It is therefore not surprising that the East German state-apparatus kept a tight tab on its population, especially in the Honecker years.<sup>589</sup> In an era where Honecker continued to disagree with Moscow on a variety of issues, China was quickly becoming a likeminded and willing partner in the ideological arena. As Gorbachev seemed intent on undertaking a thorough restructuring of the socialist state model, East Berlin was glad to find in Beijing a friend who was also suspicious of major political change. This fact served as the

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<sup>584</sup> Sigrid Meuschell, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft: Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR 1945-89* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992).

<sup>585</sup> Bernd Schäfer, *The East German State and the Catholic Church* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), pp. 23-25.

<sup>586</sup> See Roger Woods, *Opposition in the GDR under Honecker, 1971-85* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); On the East German *Meckerkultur* and officially sanctioned avenues of complaint see Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State – East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), especially chapter 13 "The people's own voices? The culture of complaint and the privatisation of protest", pp. 269-288.

<sup>587</sup> For an interesting account of the surprising freedoms enjoyed 'between the assembly line and the bread queue' in the Honecker era, see Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism – Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>588</sup> To combat dissent, Palmowski has also shown that Honecker sought to tackle discontent by 'inventing' a bonding East German national consciousness, See Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 9.

<sup>589</sup> On the Stasi as a system and tool to enforce conformity during the Honecker years, see Gary Bruce, *The Firm – the Inside Story of the Stasi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

foundation for bilateral relations until the end of the decade.

Political and cultural bilateral exchanges increased in pace and frequency at every level. For example, whereas there were only a handful of bilateral meetings in any given year before Honecker's visit, 33 bilateral events took place in January 1987 alone.<sup>590</sup> Relations were developed on all levels. In May 1987, the establishment of a direct Interflug route between East Berlin and Beijing was celebrated as a "bridge of friendship" in *Neues Deutschland*.<sup>591</sup> During the same time, *Renmin Ribao* emphasized in June 1987 that the "friendship of both people have grown in the fight for revolution".<sup>592</sup> In May 1988, Hans Modrow took up Zhao Ziyang's personal invitation and flew on the newly established Interflug-route on an Illyushin IL-62 machine from Berlin-Schönefeld to Beijing for a one-week tour of the coastal provinces. In Guangzhou Modrow was led through the "East Wind" TV-production facility, which was able to produce 410,000 TVs a year, with a view of upping production to 600,000 the next year. To demonstrate China's new reform path, Modrow was given a tour of Shenzhen, the entrepot of Guangdong province and centre of Deng's *Gaige Kaifang*. His Chinese guides proudly proclaimed that the Reform and Opening path had turned this little village, which only had 4,500 inhabitants in 1959, into a thriving metropolis of 600,000.<sup>593</sup>

What Modrow must have also appreciated is that Chinese firms were increasingly relying more on American as well as Western European sources for technological cooperation. However, Honecker still desperately maintained his push for more trade relations. Despite lacking Chinese interest, East Berlin continued to expend considerable effort to try to pry out whatever opportunities it could in the area of trade. Encouraged by central directives, delegations were sent out to seek out opportunities in China. For example, in January 1988, a sizeable East German delegation visited Nanjing in search for cooperation opportunities between East German and

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<sup>590</sup> PAAA, MFAA – 2490/90 – Chronik Quartalsberichte Bezieh. DDR-VR China – 1987-1989.

<sup>591</sup> "Im Nonstop-Flug eine Brücke der Freundschaft geschlagen" *Neues Deutschland*, 18 May 1987.

<sup>592</sup> 人民日报, 5 June 1987.

<sup>593</sup> Hans Modrow, *In Historischer Mission* (Berlin: edition ost, 2007), p. 199.

Chinese electrical utility companies. While these overtures continued until the GDR's eventual demise, one does not have to look far to see the rank of importance that trade contacts with East Germany had become in 1988. In the same file in the Jiangsu provincial archives, countless pages also describe local engagement with French, Belgian, West German as well as Hungarian and Polish trade delegations.<sup>594</sup> As trade relations dipped with the GDR, the emerging conservative ideological like-mindedness between the two states gained even more in importance and slowly became the sole binding point between the two states in the late 1980s.

This budding ideological relationship was further cemented at the highest level. In June 1988, Oskar Fischer again met his counterpart Qian Qichen in New York at the margins of the third United Nations special session on disarmament. Both Foreign Ministers adamantly conveyed their wish to expand relations and cited the numerous high-level delegations exchanged between both countries as proof that relations are on the right path.<sup>595</sup>

## **Conclusion**

By ignoring Gorbachev and continuing on his Moscow-defying relationship with Beijing, Honecker was sending a clear message to the new Soviet leader that he, like the men before him in the Kremlin, would not be able to dictate East German China-policy. To Honecker, relations with China represented what he wanted the future of East German foreign relations to look like – successful and independent of Moscow. Seeking a separate legitimacy for East Germany became ever more of a goal, especially in light of Moscow's nonchalant stance on East German sovereignty. This was clearly evidenced by Honecker's continued pursuit of an improved

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<sup>594</sup> JPA – 0000-0000-009-0107 – 关于接待法国, 比利时, 联邦德国, 民德, 波兰, 匈牙利代表团计划 Jan-March 1988; JPA – 0000-0000-009-0070 – 接待美, 英, 加, 荷, 日, 瑞典, 西德, 民德讲学外宾计划, 简报, March-Sept 1988.

<sup>595</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2489/90 – Gesprächsvermerke aussenpolitische Zusammenarbeit DDR-VR China – Vermerk über die Begegnung des Aussenministers der DDR, Genossen Oskar Fischer, mit dem Aussenminister der Volksrepublik China, Qian Qichen, am Rande der 3. UN-Sondertagung zu Fragen der Abrüstung am 1 Juni 1988.



prestige-grabbing relationship with China. In fact, in trying to secure more legitimacy for the statehood of East Germany, Honecker was not even shy of engaging ‘imperialist enemies’, let alone ones that it had independently inducted back into the socialist rank of nations. Thus, Honecker even sent a congratulatory telegram in 1985 to the newly re-elected Ronald Reagan, which was subsequently published in *Neues Deutschland*. As if to take a page from Gorbachev’s book, Honecker stated in the telegram that relations on the principles of peaceful co-existence can only be beneficial for the strengthening of world peace.<sup>596</sup>

According to former East German Deputy Ambassador in Beijing Joachim Krüger, knowing that the Soviet Union was disapproving of its relationship with China, Honecker was nevertheless willing to gamble by expanding his ties to Beijing.<sup>597</sup> This was at times a dangerous gamble. At least in terms of the German question, Honecker and his diplomats had to witness that Beijing sometimes played a duplicitous game. To East German officials, like Zhao Ziyang did to Oskar Fischer in December 1987, Chinese leaders always emphasized that China regarded the two German states as completely separate.<sup>598</sup> When Wu Xueqian visited the GDR in June of 1986, the Chinese Foreign Minister didn’t mince words in stressing that China accepted the fact that there are two German states, promising that China “respects this historical fact and respects the politics of the GDR in this question.”<sup>599</sup> But as the Chinese appetite for western technology increased, Chinese leaders would play a different tune to West German partners, often wanting to de-ideologize relations and offering Zhongnanhai’s support for a speedy German reunification.<sup>600</sup> East German diplomats were made painfully aware of the preferential status that Bonn enjoyed in

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<sup>596</sup> Norbert Plötzl, *Erich Honecker* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002), p. 235.

<sup>597</sup> Author’s Interview with Joachim Krüger, GDR Deputy Ambassador to China, 1982-1984. Berlin, 10 November 2011.

<sup>598</sup> Zhao was quoted as saying that Erich Honecker’s 1986 visit to the GDR had demonstrated, that “two sovereign German states had existed for some time”. See <sup>598</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2498/90 – Besuch Aussenminister Oskar Fischer in VR China – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, am 3. Dezember 1987 im Zhongnanhai mit Genossen Oskar Fischer.

<sup>599</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/2897 – Bericht über den offiziellen Besuch des Mitglieds des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees der KP Chinas, Staatskommissar und Minister für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der VR China in der DDR.

<sup>600</sup> Metchthild Leutner & Tim Trampedach, *Bundesrepublik Deutschland und China – 1949 bis 1995* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), p. 179.

China. In a meeting between Mei Zhaorong, the head of the Western Europe section of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, and East German Ambassador Rolf Berthold, Mei told Berthold with honesty that the relations between the FRG and China were developing at a fast pace and that West Germany had become the most important and biggest European trade partner for China.<sup>601</sup> Indeed, when Chancellor Kohl visited China in July of 1986, Deng Xiaoping told Kohl that theirs would be a lasting relationship, that cooperation should be built “not only with view of this century but also the next century.”<sup>602</sup>

What is telling is that Honecker was more than willing to turn a blind eye to this. The East German leader seemed content at reminding his counterparts in Beijing now and again that East Berlin did not appreciate any talk of a reunified Germany but did not let Beijing’s stance become a significant obstacle in relations. Seemingly appreciative of Deng’s pragmatism in engaging Bonn for its technological know-how, Honecker focused instead on a budding conservative ideological bond. For both countries, this bond gained more in importance as a series of external events challenged the authority of both regimes.

From 1987 onwards, Gorbachev’s attitude towards his Eastern European allies became ever clearer. Increasingly seeing the fraternal states as economic and political liabilities, with the Soviet leader remarking in a CPSU CC Politburo session in March 1988 that “we cannot remain a provider of cheap resources [for Soviet allies] forever”, Gorbachev had started to seek more distance rather than cooperation with his erstwhile clients.<sup>603</sup> From the Soviet perspective, none was a more troublesome ally than East Germany. Rebellious, disloyal and imposing huge costs on the Soviet empire while yielding little political benefits, Honecker’s East Germany

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<sup>601</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 526/20 – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Botschafters, Gen. Rolf Berthold, mit dem Leiter der Westeuropa-Abteilung des chinesischen MfAA, Mei Zhaorong, am 27.4.1987 zu Fragen der Beziehungen zwischen der VR China und den westeuropäischen Staaten.

<sup>602</sup> 中共中央文献研究室（编），邓小平年谱（1975—1997）（下）（北京：中央文献出版社，2004），pp. 1200-1201.

<sup>603</sup> Document No. 19: Notes of CC CPSU Politburo Session, March 10, 1988 in Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, Vladislav Zubok (eds.), *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), pp. 265-267.

started to embody everything that the Soviet leader thought was wrong with the Soviet bloc. As frictions mounted, Honecker was intent on staying on his dogmatic path in defiance of what he judged to be a misinformed reform stance propagated by Moscow. However, as the reformist winds swept across Eastern Europe, East Germany was not spared and East Berlin soon found out that the biggest challenge to its legitimacy would come from its own population. As similar popular unrest arose in China to demand for more political freedoms, both governments found themselves fighting to hang on to the political status quo. This common desire to suppress popular demands rather than acquiescing to them would only serve to solidify the Sino-East German ideological bond.

## Chapter Five: Ideological Allies: Tiananmen and the Fall of the Wall, 1988-1990

### Introduction

Beijing. 4 June 1989. Tanks from the 27<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> armies of the People's Liberation Army descend onto Tiananmen Square to disperse the student protestors who for months had demanded far-sweeping political reforms from Deng Xiaoping's government. While numbers vary on the human costs, it is almost certain that at least a thousand students and civilians perished during the crack-down.<sup>604</sup> The episode colloquially known in China as "Liu Si" (六四)<sup>605</sup> had dramatic consequences for the Chinese leadership. Domestically, it pitted reformers against conservatives and briefly put into question whether Deng's path of economic liberalization was sustainable for a communist system.<sup>606</sup> The immediate international fallout was severe. Despite efforts by U.S. President George H.W. Bush to protect Sino-U.S. relations, both Houses of Congress in Washington decided, with veto-proof majorities, to impose sanctions on China, some of which are still in place today.<sup>607</sup> Fifty-seven other governments, including the European Communities and Japan, introduced sanctions. Public opinion of China in the West reached unprecedented lows. In fact, whereas a two-third of Americans had viewed China positively directly before the Tiananmen Square incident, less than a third did so in 1990.<sup>608</sup>

A major newspaper headline from 5 June read: "Counter-revolutionary unrest in China put

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<sup>604</sup> Journalist Nicholas D. Kristof estimates around 400-800 victims, whereas the Chinese Red Cross estimated 2600 killed and 7000 wounded. Nicholas D. Kristof, "A Reassessment of how Many Died In the Military Crackdown in Beijing", *New York Times*, 21 June 1989; James Miles, "Tiananmen killings: Were the media right?" BBC, June 2, 2009 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/8057762.stm>), accessed October 15, 2012; Red Cross estimate in Mark Kramer "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 2)" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 6:4 (2004), pp. 3-64.

<sup>605</sup> "六四" or "Six-Four" simply refers to the date of the crack-down, 4 June 1989.

<sup>606</sup> To be sure, the reform path was soon back on track as even local leaders were adamant to push reforms which had benefited their own provinces. For example, in September 1989, Hebei Governor Yue Qifeng called for "unshaken determination" to push forward reform and opening despite "setbacks", an obvious reference to Tiananmen. HPA - 413001-2-33-4 - 河北体改简讯第 35 期坚订不移地推进改革开放 (省长岳岐锋) - 29 September 1989.

<sup>607</sup> Randolph Kluver, "Rhetorical Trajectories of Tiananmen Square," *Diplomatic History*, 34:1, (2010). pp. 71-94.

<sup>608</sup> Robert Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: Politics of U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 87 quoted in Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World since 1970* (London: Bodley Head, 2012), p. 393, also see pp. 381-383.

down by the People's Liberation Army". However, this was not one of the self-justifying slogans put forth by CCP-mouthpiece *Renmin Ribao*, but rather appeared in print some 7000 kilometers away in East Berlin.<sup>609</sup> Amidst the increasing international isolationism that resulted from Tiananmen, East Berlin was among a handful of reform-resistant regimes that supported Beijing's actions. The head of the Stasi, Erich Mielke, ordered special protection for the Chinese embassy and condemned the counter-revolutionary violence.<sup>610</sup> Indeed, as this chapter will reveal, a continued common ideological conservatism combined with a dogged intolerance towards political liberalization brought East Berlin and Beijing even closer together in common defiance against the winds of change blowing out of Moscow.

While Gorbachev's reforms and apparent abandonment of the Brezhnev doctrine set forth a domino effect that gave hope to reform movements across Eastern Europe, it also had the consequence of drawing anti-reform regimes together. After having established a common dogmatic bond in the aftermath of Honecker's 1986 visit, East Germany and China built on this like-mindedness in an atmosphere of uncertain political liberalization in the communist world. Both regimes came to be deeply suspicious of Gorbachev's reform agenda and repeatedly voiced their concerns at bilateral meetings, especially as the Soviet leader gave more momentum to his policies in the late 1980s. This Sino-GDR ideological convergence resulted in an intensification of relations towards the end of the decade. Both vowed to stay firm in their conservative, anti-political reform outlooks. To be sure, the visions that both regimes had for the future of their own countries were very different. Whereas the GDR sought a long-term solution to its economic problems while maintaining a political status quo, Beijing was eager to push forward a far more drastic reform plan for its economy. What brought them together were common criticisms of calls from Soviet leaders for increasing transparency and political freedoms in communist states.

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<sup>609</sup> "Konterrevolutionärer Aufruhr in China wurde durch Volksbefreiungsarmee niedergeschlagen", *Neues Deutschland*, 5 June 1989.

<sup>610</sup> Erich Mielke's order of 10 June 1989, published in the *Cold War International Project Bulletin* 12-13 (Fall-Winter 2001), p. 209.

Although under Deng, China had defected wholesale from socialist economic models, it still adhered to a similar belief held in East Berlin, that under no circumstances should the leadership of the party ever put into question or jeopardy. Political ideological affinity alone drew the two regimes together, as trade ties continued to disappoint. From East Berlin's perspective seeking trade with Beijing was firmly relegated behind ideological reasons for expanding relations with the People's Republic.

As bilateral relations developed after at the end of the decade, Beijing was also able to learn useful lessons from events taking place in Eastern Europe. While Chinese leaders concluded that they had to deal with domestic unrest as soon as possible if they were to avoid the destabilization taking place in the spring of 1989 across Eastern Europe, they also sought to encourage their East German ally to hold fast to its ideologically conservative roots until the very end. Beijing's lessons from witnessing the speedy unravelling of communism in Poland and Hungary had direct consequences on Beijing's decision-making process on 4 June 1989. Beijing's actions also had unintended and unforeseeable consequences for its allies. The international backlash from Tiananmen decreased the appetite for violent repression elsewhere in the communist world, especially in Moscow, thereby depriving the GDR of a measure of last resort in its own effort to deal with domestic unrest.

This chapter will first analyze how the acceleration of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* served to expedite a likeminded orthodoxy between East Berlin and Beijing from 1987 onward. It will argue that both governments thought that they had the 'right' version of socialism since both fought against Gorbachev's efforts to restructure the system by reforming the central party structure. This 'bond' was only tightened during the increasing unrest that swept across Eastern Europe and eventually, China in 1988 and 1989. Finally, in an uncertain environment, these two hard-line regimes clung to each other in ideological uniformity until the GDR eventually crumbled under popular pressure, leaving Beijing to retreat into a period of introspection and insecurity.

## “Socialism in the Colour of the GDR” meets “Socialism with Chinese characteristics”

As Gorbachev added further momentum to his political reforms during the XIX All-Union CPSU Party Conference in June 1988, tensions between East Berlin and Moscow intensified. More and more, frictions found expression not only behind closed doors between top leaders but were now played out in the popular press for everyone to observe. Liberal Soviet newspapers such as *Sputnik*, which had dared to shed an unfavourable light on Stalin’s actions during the Second World War and also put forth doubts about the Comintern and KPD’s (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, one of the predecessors of the SED) commitment to stop Hitler’s rise, were banned in the GDR. The war of words did not stop there.<sup>611</sup> The Kremlin told SED chief-ideologue Kurt Hager in December 1988 that one should not censor authors and that the prohibition of *Sputnik* was not right (*angemessen*).<sup>612</sup> This was a clear retaliation against the same person who had, in an overt attempt to draw a line to differentiate between the GDR and Soviet reform paths, forcefully posed a question if there would be a “a need to change the tapestry of your apartment, if your neighbour did so” during an interview with West German magazine *Stern* in April 1987.<sup>613</sup> Perhaps then it was not surprising that after repeated spats with Gorbachev over the Soviet leader’s reform stance, Honecker had declared on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the KPD on 29 December 1988 that the GDR would pursue “Socialism in the colour of the GDR” (*Sozialismus in den Farben der DDR*).<sup>614</sup> Soviet-East German relations had entered a new nadir and Honecker blamed the Kremlin for forcing his hand.<sup>615</sup>

Beijing continued to share East Berlin’s disagreements with Moscow’s reform path. While Deng pressed on with his engagement with Gorbachev in pursuit of Sino-Soviet normalization,

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<sup>611</sup> Helga Koenigsdorf, *Adieu DDR*, (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993), p. 118.

<sup>612</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30 J IV 2/2A – 3185 – Bericht über den Aufenthalt der Delegation des ZK der SED unter Leitung von Kurt Hager vom 27. Bis 28. 12. 1988 in Moskau.

<sup>613</sup> *Stern*, 9 April 1987, *Neues Deutschland*, 10 April 1987.

<sup>614</sup> *Neues Deutschland*, 30 December 1988.

<sup>615</sup> Honecker maintained his critical stance after the GDR’s collapse. The former East German leader questioned in 1992 why East German intellectuals were so quick to flock to *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* in the late 1980s. Erich Honecker, *Moabiter Notizen* (Berlin: edition ost, 1994), p. 56.

there is little doubt about what the Chinese leader thought about the potential for success of Gorbachev's reform. Deng stressed to numerous Eastern European visitors that China was to follow its own road towards modernization. For example, on 12 June 1987 Deng told Yugoslav Politburo Secretary Stefan Korosec that "every socialist country's reform experiences will be different. Their history is different, experiences are different, the situations are different, hence reform cannot be the same."<sup>616</sup>

Considering the scepticisms both Beijing and East Berlin felt towards Gorbachev, a common ideological enmity towards the Soviet leader's vision for the future served as a crucial binding point between both regimes after Honecker's 1986 state visit. Relations seemed, as the East German leader hoped, to be entering a 'second' more intense stage.<sup>617</sup> Chinese leaders started to pay ever-closer attention to the development of relations with East Germany, not least because closer relations with a 'rebellious' Soviet bloc state was a tool to bring the Soviets to respect its demands in the Sino-Soviet normalization process.<sup>618</sup> While Zhao Ziyang's visit in 1987 had confirmed Beijing's interest in expanding relations with East Berlin, Honecker sought to reciprocate Zhao's visit as swiftly as he could in order to further outline his interest in the expansion of relations with a conservative ally. Thus, Honecker once again dispatched Krolkowski to China in May 1988 on a mission to build on their likeminded stance. Deputy Foreign Minister Zhou Nan's congratulations to Krolkowski on the "successes in the construction of socialism in the GDR" were reciprocated during Krolkowski's toast at a dinner given in his honour.<sup>619</sup> In the same month, SED Politburo Central Committee member Günter Schabowski was

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<sup>616</sup> 中共中央文献研究室（编），邓小平年谱（1975—1997）（下）（北京：中央文献出版社，2004），pp. 1193-1195.

<sup>617</sup> This was also the view of the Chinese Foreign Ministry at the time. Author's interview with Liu Qibao, Deputy Ambassador in the Chinese Embassy to the GDR, 1984-1990, Beijing, 23 November 2012.

<sup>618</sup> The Party Centre started to take over foreign policy decision-making process for both Germanies from the mid 1980s on. Author's interview with Liu Qibao, Deputy Ambassador in the Chinese Embassy to the GDR, 1984-1990, Beijing, 23 November 2012.

<sup>619</sup> PAAA, MFAA – 2500/90 – Reise Staatssekretär u. 1. Stellvertreters, Dr. H. Krolkowski, 1988 – Information über die offiziellen Konsultationen des Staatssekretärs und 1. Stellvertreters des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, Genossen Herbert Krolkowski, in der Volksrepublik China vom 3. Bis 6. Mai 1988.



treated to a warm welcome by Zhao Ziyang in Beijing. Again, bilateral agreements on ideology took center stage as Zhao Ziyang stressed that China was “maintaining the leadership of the party in all areas of life” and “strengthening the role of the party and placing emphasis on the political-ideological work of the party.”<sup>620</sup>

As a result of these meetings, a common ideological affinity between both regimes continued to develop. Tellingly, expressions of camaraderie were also often made between the youth organizations of the parties, which were considered the vanguard of ideological purity in both states. For example, in July 1987, a year before Krolkowski’s eventual visit, CCP Central Committee member Chen Peixian told the Central Commission of the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ) that the “blossoming time of relations between both of our countries is coming again”, stressing that “after both our parties have expended mutual effort, we are fraternal parties again”. Eager to forget the difficult time in relations when bilateral contacts were severely curtailed during Sino-Soviet disagreements, Chen emphasized “what happened in the past, we already forgot or want to forget - it is history”.<sup>621</sup> The FDJ delegation noted that their hosts in the Chinese communist youth organization 共产主义青年团 (Gongchanzhuyi Qingniantuan, short Gongqingtuan, GQT) “went to significant efforts” to express their desire to deepen relations between both organizations, remarking that among the five fraternal states, the GQT’s relations with the FDJ was the “most developed”.<sup>622</sup>

Indeed, East German-Chinese engagement in this era was driven almost solely out of an emerging ideological like-mindedness. In terms of trade, for example, hopes for a fruitful

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<sup>620</sup> PAAA, MFAA – 2494/90 – Aufenthalt Mitgl. PB, Sekretär ZK SED, 1. Sekretär SED-BL Berlin, G. Schabowski, 1988 - Niederschrift über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, mit Genossen Guenter Schabowski in Peking am 6. Mai 1988.

<sup>621</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2510/90 – Internationale Beziehungen FDJ-KJV China, 1986-1989 -Vermerk über das Gespräch mit Genossen Chen Peixin, Sekretär des ZK der KP Chinas und Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden des Ständigen Ausschusses des Nationalen Volkskongresses der Volksrepublik China am 15. Juli 1987 in Shanghai.

<sup>622</sup> PAAA, MFAA ZR 2510/90 – Internationale Beziehungen FDJ-KJV China, 1986-1989 – Information über den Aufenthalt einer Delegation des Zentralrates der FDJ vom 9. Bis 17. Juli 1987 in der Volksrepublik China – Zentralrat der FDJ.

relationship continued to fade despite desperate East German attempts to keep it alive. While Honecker's ongoing interest to develop China as a trading partner found more impetus after his 1986 trip, his initial hope of making China into an important East German export market fell on frozen ground.<sup>623</sup> Even though a long-term relationship was inked by Günter Mittag and Li Peng during Honecker's visit, trade volumes remained disappointing, with import and export dipping to 50% of 1986 levels.<sup>624</sup> However, considering the GDR's continued economic stagnation, even more hope was placed on China. While preparing to negotiate the trade agreement between the two countries to 1990, the East German Ministry of Trade stubbornly reminded the MfAA as late as September 1989 that "a stagnation [in bilateral trade] can, due to economic and political reasons, not be allowed (*zugelassen werden*)."<sup>625</sup> The benefits were clear to the East German Ministry of Trade. In a September 1989 estimation of the trade relationship, it remarked that 80% of exports in 1989 to the PRC were industrial finished goods, adding that, "Among socialist states, this kind of beneficial export structure is only achieved with China." Additionally, East Berlin was gaining from China "imports it could otherwise only gain out of the non-socialist West (NSW)", such as soybeans, cotton and rice.<sup>626</sup>

The Chinese attitude towards East Germany was clear and remained the same: While it was interested in potential lessons arising out of East German experiences of economic development that it might be able to apply to the Reform and Opening process at home, its taste

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<sup>623</sup> Even Zhao Ziyang raised hopes during his 1987 visit that China was interested in more trade. However, little action followed these words. PAAA, MFAA – 2493/90 – Besuch amt. GS ZK KP Chinas, Ministerpraes. Des Staatsrats der VR China, Zhao Ziyang - Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch des amtierenden Generalsekretäers des ZK der KP Chinas und Ministerpraesidenten des Staatsrates der VR China, Genossen Zhao Ziyang, in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 8. Bis 11 Juni 1987.

<sup>624</sup> According to East German estimates, the agreement was the "first such trade agreement to be concluded between China and any other state". PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2521/90 – Aussenhandel (Umfassende Frage), 1986-1989 – Information zum Stand der Wirtschafts- und Aussenhandelsbeziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VR China – Ministerium für Aussenhandel, 14.09.1989.

<sup>625</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2521/90 – Aussenhandel (Umfassende Frage), 1986-1989 – Information zum Stand der Wirtschafts- und Aussenhandelsbeziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VR China – Ministerium für Aussenhandel, 14.09.1989.

<sup>626</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2521/90 – Aussenhandel (Umfassende Frage), 1986-1989 – Information zum Stand der Wirtschafts- und Aussenhandelsbeziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VR China – Ministerium für Aussenhandel, 14.09.1989.

for East German goods diminished towards the end of the decade.<sup>627</sup> Chinese Ambassador to the GDR Ma Xusheng repeatedly stressed this stance to his East German counterparts.<sup>628</sup> Undeterred, and disturbed by declining trends in bilateral trade, East German Trade Ministry official Jochen Steyer reminded Ambassador Ma Xusheng in November 1987 about stagnating trade from 1987 to 1988, outlining East Berlin's "urgent interest" (*dringende Interesse*) for a balanced development of trade with China.<sup>629</sup> The GDR tried to foster ties with regular trade missions to Chinese provinces in an attempt to utilize the relative autonomy that local officials were gaining during Reform and Opening.<sup>630</sup> This was coordinated with petitions at the top. In October 1988, Head of the Trade Ministry, Gerhard Beil wrote an impassionate letter to the new incoming Ambassador Zhang Dake to increase trade volume and economic cooperation between both states, finally signing off with: "Dear comrade Zhang Dake, I ask again, that you support these suggestions."<sup>631</sup> The Commercial Secretary in the PRC Embassy in East Berlin, Jin Shanglin, replied in December 1988 that delays were caused by "acute problems in the economic development of the PRC" as well as the problem that "the products offered by the GDR were under low demand in China". However, Jin was quick to add that Beijing was "strongly impressed by the technical height and performance of the GDR economy" as "circa 100 delegations of technicians and specialists visited the GDR", highlighting China's continued interest in East

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<sup>627</sup> Author's interview with Wu Derong, Economic Secretary in the PRC Embassy in East Berlin, 1982-89, 2 April 2012 in Beijing.

<sup>628</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2540/90 – Interesse VR China an RGW, 1985-88 – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Genossen Girndt, Leiter der AG RGW, mit Genossen Ma Xusheng, Botschafter der VR China in der DDR, am 4. April 1986 im MFAA – Abteilung Ferner Osten, 07.04.1986; Beijing's curiosities continued throughout the decade. For example, in October 1987, Xin Futan, First Secretary in the East Berlin Embassy asked thorough questions on inter-Eastern European joint ventures and inter-COMECON trade. PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2540/90 – Interesse VR China an RGW, 1985-88 – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Rates der Botschaft der Volksrepublik China, Genossen Xin Futan mit dem Leiter der AG RGW, Genossen Girndt am 21.10.1987 im MFAA.

<sup>629</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2521/90 – Aussenhandel (Umfassende Frage), 1986-1989 – Information zum Stand der Wirtschafts- und Aussenhandelsbeziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VR China – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Stellvertreters des Ministers, Genossen Jochen Steyer, mit dem Botschafter der VR China in der DDR, Ma Xusheng, am 19.11.1987.

<sup>630</sup> Shandong Provincial Archives (SPA) - A119-06-0301-005 - 山东省农业厅 – 关于接待民主德国块茎作物机械化考察组的函 – 16 August 1988.

<sup>631</sup> PAAA, MFAA – ZR 2521/90 – Aussenhandel (Umfassende Frage), 1986-1989 – Information zum Stand der Wirtschafts- und Aussenhandelsbeziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VR China – Beil an Zhang, 4.10.1988.

German economic knowledge.<sup>632</sup> Overall however, trade officials on both sides realized that trade was not going to be a driving force in bilateral relations, even though on the East German side, a stubborn hope remained that someday a beneficial trade relationship might still materialize.

## Unrest

As East Berlin and Beijing's trade relationship diminished, both increasingly found common ground in terms of their likeminded *Weltanschauung*, especially as the bilateral relationship was soon faced with a series of external shocks arising from popular unrest in both countries. In East Germany, liberal influences from Moscow and the seeming abandonment of the Brezhnev doctrine lit the protest fires across the country. Previously dormant dissent movements now found the courage to come to the surface.<sup>633</sup> In China, widespread corruption and a young generation that yearned for political reforms to accompany the economic changes found resurgence again in 1989 to ask the same questions they had asked in 1986 before they were disbanded and driven underground. As reform-minded mass movements formed on Chinese campuses as well as in East German churches and adopted Moscow's messages for more transparency and liberalization, distrust in both East Berlin and Beijing of Gorbachev's reform path grew.

Indeed, as in many Eastern European countries, while most East German citizens lived a perfectly a "normal" life, individual strands of political dissatisfaction brewed just beneath the

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<sup>632</sup> PAAA, MfAA – ZR 2521/90 – Aussenhandel (Umfassende Frage), 1986-1989 – Vermerk über ein Gespräch des stellvertretenden Vorsitzenden der SPK der Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden der DDR-Sektion des Wirtschaftsausschusses DDR/VR China, Genossen H. Rost, mit dem Handelsrat der VR China in der DDR, Genossen Jin Shanglin, am 6.12.1988 – Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden der Staatlichen Plankommission für Planungssystem und EDV, Berlin, 9.12.1988.

<sup>633</sup> Markus Meckel and Hermann Weber (eds.), *Die Partei hat immer recht – Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur* (Essen: Klatext, 1994), 110-112; Moreover, on the foreign policy-related causes for the collapse of the GDR, see Václav Zubok, "New Evidence on the "Soviet Factor" in the Peaceful Revolutions of 1989, CWIHP Bulletin 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001), Washington D.C., 2001, 5-23; For an analysis of economic factors see Oskar Schwarzer, *Sozialistische Zentralplanwirtschaft in der SBZ/DDR. Ergebnisse eines ordnungspolitischen Experiments, 1945-1989* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999).

surface for as long as the GDR existed.<sup>634</sup> From 1987 on, dissident activity in the GDR, encouraged in part by Moscow's reformist messages, became more organized and were marked by increasing polarization from their conservative government. Even though at the start only a minority of the East German population participated in various protest movements in asking the SED to move towards a more reformed version of socialism, the progressive coherence of this subset of the population would prove instrumental in the GDR's eventual collapse.<sup>635</sup> Peace movements, which sought a stable global environment amidst the international tensions associated with the Second Cold War, and human rights movements, which dealt with the burning issue of East Germans wanting to leave for the West, grew in scope during the mid-1980s, with some even producing anti-government samizdat publications.<sup>636</sup> Public unrest only grew after a botched Stasi raid on an environmentalist group in November 1987. In January 1988, during the annual Luxemburg-Liebkecht march, the banned Rosa Luxemburg quote of "Freedom is always the freedom to think differently" appeared on dissident banners, causing a massive response from the Stasi and other state authorities. This was, according to GDR historian Mary Fulbrook, "the beginning of the end".<sup>637</sup>

After a decade of economic reform, popular unrest was also brewing in China. Along with the economic boom came new, grotesque forms of corruption. As early as 1985, a group of CCP officials conspired to exploit the "enterprise zone" characteristics of China's economic growth. Using funds that had been raised as development loans from Beijing banks, the Hainan

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<sup>634</sup> Even though Mary Fulbrook has argued that most GDR citizens lived "a perfectly normal life" i.e. free of dissent towards the regime, this author finds it convincing that strands of dissent never fully disappeared since the 1953 unrest and certainly gained more voice after Gorbachev's ascent. On normalcy in everyday GDR life, see Mary Fulbrook & Karl Nicolai, *Ein ganz normales Leben – Alltag und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Darmstadt: Primus, 2008); Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) pp. 10-15. Mary Fulbrook's work is in direct contrast to Armin Mitter & Stefan Wolle's work, who argued that the GDR was an artificial construct kept intact by 'Russian bayonets'. See Armin Mitter & Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1993).

<sup>635</sup> For a thorough discussion of human factor see Konrad Jaraush, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) & Markus Meckel & Hermann Weber (eds.), *Die Partei hat immer recht – Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur* (Essen: Klartext, 1994).

<sup>636</sup> For a thorough and intriguing discussion of political activism (and the dynamics between church, activism and the state) in the last years of the GDR, see Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 201-242, 246-257.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

officials bought overseas products and then sold them to buyers all over China. It was estimated that their fraudulent schemes between January 1984 and March 1985 amounted to sums in excess of \$1.5 billion.<sup>638</sup> As the decade progressed, episodes like these caused the population to grow defiant and restless. To compound the problem, millions of Chinese students, university graduates and unemployed youths were starting to pose the same questions they asked in 1986, but remained unanswered: How was the new economic system going to benefit them? Sporadic unrest grew, with the 1986 protests only representing the (at the time) worst instance of social strife. By blaming Hu Yaobang, removing him from the position of CCP General Secretary and imposing an emphasis on ideological education, Beijing thought that it had found an effective way to tackle the problem. However, as events would show, societal tensions were not removed but simply swept under the rug. These tensions were again brought to the surface by Hu Yaobang's passing on 15 April 1989. Students across the country were quick to condemn Hu's ouster in 1987 and commemorated the former General Secretary as a liberal martyr who had to live his last years cast aside by a party he had given so much to. Student-led mourning soon led to massive protests across the country in the spring of 1989. In Beijing, numbers reached 300,000 on 13 May, paralyzing the city.<sup>639</sup>

To the extreme annoyance of East Berlin and Beijing, Gorbachev was a beacon of hope for the protestors in both countries. For reform-craving movements in both states, Gorbachev represented something that their leaders were not - a seeming democrat, a reformer, and a force for economic and political transformation. In East Germany, "Gorbi" became a symbol for hope and change by 1988. And to the extreme annoyance of Honecker, some of the protest movements gained a sense of authority and legitimacy by adopting Gorbachev as their patron saint. East German youths started wearing Perestroika T-Shirts and Gorbi stickers to provoke authorities,

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<sup>638</sup> Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), p. 715

<sup>639</sup> For economic and social reasons ranging from rampant inflation to a lack of opportunities for university graduates in causing the Tiananmen protests, see Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of HUP, 2011), pp. 599-601.

who in turn had a hard time forbidding such activity. Gorbachev became a weapon of East German popular movements, with the discontented now enrolling in record numbers in Russian classes so that they might use the reformist messages in *Pravda* to force authorities against the wall.<sup>640</sup>

In 1989, China witnessed similar scenes. As Gorbachev was due to visit Beijing from 15-18 May to formally normalize Sino-Soviet relations, students sent a petition of six thousand signatures was delivered to the Soviet Embassy in Beijing on May 13 which praised Gorbachev's "amazing courage and intelligence" and called on him to share with the students his "valuable experience of conducting socialist reform".<sup>641</sup> In Tiananmen Square a banner read: "We salute the Ambassador of Democracy".<sup>642</sup> Even though this caused extreme annoyance for Chinese leaders, Gorbachev was also someone Beijing could do business with. And even if Deng was absolutely against Gorbachev's calls for more political freedom, he still appreciated the opportunity to normalize Sino-Soviet relations that Gorbachev presented him. This was a prize that had eluded all of his predecessors and had the potential to become a great personal triumph for Deng.<sup>643</sup> However, the timing could not have been worse. With a throng of prominent correspondents (including American TV anchorman Dan Rather, who rarely travelled) in town to cover the historic normalization of relations between both countries, protestors seized the chance to get their message heard across the world.<sup>644</sup> Knowing that Deng's hands would be tied, the students started a hunger strike two days before the Soviet leader was due to arrive. Deng had no choice but to cancel the planned welcoming ceremonies in the square, greeting the Soviet leader instead at a

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<sup>640</sup> Stean Wolle, *DDR – Eine Kurze Geschichte* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2011), p. 79.

<sup>641</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn' I Reformy*, Vol. 2, p. 448, cited in Sergey Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, p. 162.

<sup>642</sup> James R. Lilley, *China Hands – Nine Decades of Adventure, Espionage and Diplomacy* (New York PublicAffairs, 2004), p. 301.

<sup>643</sup> Deng had started to work in earnest for a Sino-Soviet solution in 1982, when he notified provinces to be more careful in their reporting of the Soviet Union, urging them to "avoid hurting Soviet feelings" SPA - A057-05-0097-087 — 中共中央宣传部 — 关于苏联国内问题（绝密） — 2 July 1982

<sup>644</sup> "Springtime in Tiananmen, 1989" *The Atlantic*, 29 May 2014.

small ceremony held at the heavily guarded airport.<sup>645</sup> This was most embarrassing to the Chinese leadership, who had always placed high value on protocol and ‘saving face’. The student movement had spoiled Deng’s party and left a bitter taste in the Chinese leader’s mouth. As events would tell, this would not be the only factor gradually eroding his tolerance for the student movement.

## **Tiananmen**

As reformist movements across Eastern Europe gained momentum and legitimacy in 1989, Beijing watched with intense trepidation. Things seemed to move at an incredible pace. On 7 April 1989, roundtable agreements were signed in Warsaw which recognized the trade union *Solidarnosc* as a legitimate political force. When the results of the Polish roundtable were made public in Hungary, the opposition parties made it known that they would accept nothing less than a genuinely competitive political system and free elections.<sup>646</sup> Unrest stirred all across Eastern Europe and East Berlin was certainly not spared as protest movements gained in intensity, fuelled by developments in neighbouring states. Beijing’s reaction to this destabilization was to encourage Eastern European leaders to stay ideologically steadfast to the status quo. This message was repeated especially vociferously to its most ardent and like-minded Eastern European ally, East Berlin.

What is almost beyond doubt is that events in Eastern Europe had a profound effect on leaders in Beijing, especially on how they responded to popular protest movements at home. Consider the scene from Zhongnanhai’s perspective: Popular movements in Hungary and Poland had extracted significant concessions from their governments and in the process destabilized the ruling communist party. The objective now was to prevent this contagion from spreading into

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<sup>645</sup> Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 612.

<sup>646</sup> Jacques Levesque, “The East European Revolutions of 1989” in Odd Arne Westad, Melvyn Leffler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 311-332.



China at any cost.<sup>647</sup> In the first half of 1989, Beijing was learning that, unlike in 1986, where unrest in China had been limited in scale, the Chinese student movement in 1989 seemed to be part of a general tide of pro-democratization movements in the wider communist world.<sup>648</sup>

Indeed, history is dotted with instances where China adopted its domestic strategy according to lessons learnt from Eastern Europe. One only has to remember that part of the reason Mao launched the anti-rightist campaign in 1957 was due to concerns that China might experience the same kind of unrest that East Germany and Poland went through in 1953.<sup>649</sup> Similarly, it is clear that the Hungarian Crisis of 1956 had a profound effect on the launching of the Great Leap Forward.<sup>650</sup> And at the beginning of the 1980s, China had tightened its control of factories after *Solidarnosc*-style protests sporadically emerged in the country's interior.<sup>651</sup> In the same light, in 1988 and 1989, Beijing was paying close attention to events in Eastern Europe in forming their response to the escalating protests in China.

As the Soviet bloc came under pressure from within, Beijing repeatedly urged Eastern European leaders to stay steadfast and not be tempted to give into Gorbachev's calls for reform. Indeed, as early as 1988, when Polish coal miners staged systemized strikes across the country, Deng Xiaoping was quick to advise caution to his Eastern European counterparts. At a meeting with Polish Prime Minister Zbigniew Messner on 7 June 1988, Deng repeated to him what he had told his Yugoslav colleague a year earlier - reforms should be conducted according to "the domestic conditions" of every country and that "independent thinking" (独力思考) should prevail rather than following models of other countries, concluding that the questions to be answered are

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<sup>647</sup> M.E. Sarotte, "China's Fear of Contagion: Tiananmen Square and the Power of the European Example" *International Security*, 37:2 (2012), pp.156-182.

<sup>648</sup> David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party*, pp. 41-53.

<sup>649</sup> Roderick MacFarquar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. 1: *Contradictions among the People, 1956-1957* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974) in M.E. Sarotte, "China's Fear of Contagion: Tiananmen Square and the Power of the European Example" *International Security* Vol. 37, No. 2 (Fall 2012), p. 167.

<sup>650</sup> Zhu Dandan, "The Hungarian revolution and the origins of China's Great Leap Forward", *Cold War History*, 12:2, (2012), pp. 451-472.

<sup>651</sup> Jeanne Wilson, "The Polish Lesson: China and Poland 1980-1990", *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 23 (3/4) Autumn/Winter 1990, pp. 259-279.

not the same if the situations in each country are not the same.<sup>652</sup> The same message was reiterated to Romanian leader and old Chinese friend Nicolae Ceausescu on 17 October of the same year. Considering the situation in Eastern Europe where communist leaderships seemed to emulate each other in conceding to popular movements after the first domino was tipped in Poland, Deng emphasized in the summer of 1989 that “One shouldn't change just because others are changing. This will have no future.”<sup>653</sup>

The same message was repeated throughout the time leading up to the Tiananmen Square incident. As the situation for communist regimes further deteriorated in Europe, Deng was presented with a picture of the nightmare that he desperately wanted to avoid. While the student protests grew in scope and intensity in Tiananmen Square, the Chinese leadership was confronted with a difficult choice. In Zhongnanhai's view, it needed stability to further pursue Reform and Opening and thus it could not tolerate, let alone negotiate with a reform movement which threatened to derail Deng's entire modernization project. With splits within the leadership, the hard-line faction around Premier Li Peng eventually prevailed over reformers like Zhao Ziyang and on 4 June 1989, tanks were sent in to disperse the student protestors who, like their counterparts in Eastern Europe, had for months demanded far-sweeping political reforms.<sup>654</sup> By doing so, Deng hoped to avoid the fate that had befallen communist regimes there. And as the course of action was decided in Beijing, Deng was eager to back those who stood with him against political destabilization and reform. Thus, by shunning reformist tendencies and sticking to an unchanged path in 1988 and 1989 in the face of popular unrest, East Germany became even more of a like-minded stalwart defender of the status quo.

Certainly, East Berlin's response to Tiananmen endeared the GDR leadership to Beijing.

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<sup>652</sup> 中共中央文献研究室（编），邓小平年谱（1975—1997）（下）（北京：中央文献出版社，2004），pp. 1236-1237.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid, pp. 1254-1255.

<sup>654</sup> For a look of the Tiananmen internal decision-making process, see Zhao Ziyang (Translated by Bao Pu, Renee Chiang and Adi Ignatius), *Prisoner of the State* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

After the crack-down, East Germany was quick to defend its steadfast anti-political reform ally. The SED Politburo banned news outlets from disseminating images of Tiananmen and even ordered them to proclaim that existing images were faked.<sup>655</sup> East German leaders openly called the protestors “counter-revolutionaries” while most of the world openly condemned the crackdown. East Berlin was duly rewarded for its loyalty. Hans Modrow, who had been invited to visit China in June, was personally re-invited by the Chinese Ambassador after Tiananmen. With three other colleagues, he toured Beijing, Xi’an, Nanjing and Xiamen from 28 June to 13 July, barely three weeks after the crackdown. In China, Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian reaffirmed to Modrow China’s negative view of western-style reforms towards a parliamentary democracy and further denounced the student protestors as counter-revolutionaries.<sup>656</sup> If that was not enough, on 13 July Berlin SED-Party Chief Günter Schabowski flew on a chartered flight to Beijing to further reaffirm East Berlin’s allegiance to China. According to Modrow, this was also an attempt by Schabowski, who some considered to be a possible Honecker-successor, to secure the continued support of a socialist power for the GDR.<sup>657</sup>

As fate would have it, these displays of solidarity only added to the feeling of anger among the East German populace, most of whom condemned the Tiananmen Incident. This anger in turn served as a further catalyst for further undermining the SED’s legitimacy. From all levels of society, people collected signatures and petitions and forwarded them to a variety of government bodies. On June 6, a Dr. Jens Furkert from Schildow wrote an impassioned letter to Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer, calling on him to take a stand against the “inhumanities” in China and to protect the “basis of socialist order”. Unbudged, the GDR leadership stuck to its stance. In a rare response on June 28, Oskar Fischer urged Furkert not to trust the “anti-socialist” western

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<sup>655</sup> M.E. Sarotte, “China’s Fear of Contagion: Tiananmen Square and the Power of the European Example” *International Security*, 37:2 (Fall 2012), p. 167.

<sup>656</sup> Hans Modrow has in hindsight claimed that he was hesitant to go to China so soon after the crackdown, as he did not want to condone China’s actions. Though, the fact remains that his visit right after the crackdown was certainly used as a reaffirmation of ideological commonalities by both sides. Hans Modrow, *In Historischer Mission* (Berlin: edition ost, 2007), pp. 204-205.

<sup>657</sup> Hans Modrow, *In Historischer Mission* (Berlin: edition ost, 2007), p. 206.

media.<sup>658</sup> Beijing was sure to continue to reward its steadfast ally for its loyalty. For example, members of the Stasi were treated to an extremely hospitable tour of China in September 1989.<sup>659</sup>

After visits by Hans Modrow and Günter Schabowski, the East German public's unease with their government's stance towards the crackdown was only further exacerbated by SED second-in-command Egon Krenz's visit to China from late September to early October as part of the East German delegation to the PRC's fortieth anniversary celebrations, especially considering that the East German leader was one of the most vociferous supporters of Beijing's crackdown among the SED-elite. After all, according to Krenz, the tanks had been attacked by the students and they were thus only defending themselves and by doing so, they had only "re-established order".<sup>660</sup>

It is therefore no surprise that many in the East German protest movement wondered what Krenz was doing in China from 25 September to 2 October. Was he gathering information for Honecker and the rest of the SED leadership from the hardliners in Beijing on how to deal with popular unrest? Was he seeking counsel for a potential "Chinesische Lösung" in the GDR? As recent research by Bernd Schäfer has shown, this was probably not the case. To be sure, Krenz's visit was full of declarations of solidarity between the two countries. During his conversation with Party-chief Jiang Zeming, Egon Krenz agreed with the Chinese leaders' remarks that the "counterrevolutionary unrest" had been a "bad thing" for the population and offered his own understanding sympathy.<sup>661</sup> There are no indications, however, that Krenz was there to learn about tactics to quash a potential revolution. Indeed, from East Berlin's perspective, the protest movement in the GDR in September and early October did not seem like it would ever reach

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<sup>658</sup> PAAA, MfAA ZR 2436/90 – Eingaben der Bürger 1978-1988 (Juni-Ereignisse) – Brief an Oskar Fischer von Dr. Jens Furkert, 6.6.1989.

<sup>659</sup> M.E. Sarotte, "China's Fear of Contagion: Tiananmen Square and the Power of the European Example" *International Security* Vol. 37, No. 2 (Fall 2012), pp. 167-168.

<sup>660</sup> These statements were reprinted in *Neues Deutschland* on September 6, 1989, quoted in Bernd Schäfer, "Die DDR und die 'chinesische Lösung' – Gewalt in der Volksrepublik China im Sommer 1989" in Martin Sabrow (eds) *1989 und die Rolle der Gewalt* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012), pp. 162-172.

<sup>661</sup> BA-SAPMO, DY 30 J IV 2/2A3247 – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der KP Chinas, Genossen Jiang Zemin, mit Genossen Egon Krenz am 26. September 1989 in Peking.

Tiananmen proportions. Even though Krenz must have pondered the future of East Germany as machinations for the Honecker-Krenz power transition were under way, the SED leadership did not yet see the need to contemplate Tiananmen style measures. Thus, Krenz appears to have believed that he had no reason to learn anything from the Chinese. Quite on the contrary, Krenz was happy to present the GDR as a beacon for stability to different Chinese leaders during meetings.<sup>662</sup> What these high-profile visits by Modrow, Schabowski and Krenz show is that East Berlin very much wanted to reassure China of its solidarity after the Tiananmen incident. What's more, the fact that all three were candidates for Honecker's throne suggests that the potential next generation of SED leaders saw relations with China as an important feature in the future of East German foreign policy. It is not a stretch of the imagination to say that all three envisioned that the future would see, in light of Gorbachev's liberalizing line, a recalibration of Moscow's influence on East Berlin in favour of an even tighter cooperation with Beijing. This is not to say that this sort of a recalibration would have been politically or economically possible (or geographically feasible given that the Soviet Union lay between the GDR and China), but at least in 1989, it seemed to East Berlin that in the future, it might need to seek tighter cooperation with Beijing as both governments were increasingly marooned on an ideologically dogmatic island with Beijing and that it would have to stick to its Chinese partners to fight off the assaulting liberal waves.

While events in Eastern Europe seem to have influenced Chinese action on 4 June 1989, Eastern European and Soviet observations of the international backlash against Beijing due to the Tiananmen crackdown certainly decreased the appetite in Moscow for any kind of armed

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<sup>662</sup> For an extended discussion on why the GDR most likely never considered a "*Chinesische Lösung*", see Bernd Schäfer, "Die DDR und die 'chinesische Lösung' – Gewalt in der Volksrepublik China im Sommer 1989", pp. 162-172.

<sup>662</sup> The Party Centre started to take over the decision-making process on East Germany from the mid 1980s, Author's interview with Liu Qibao, Deputy Ambassador in the Chinese Embassy to the GDR, 1984-1990, Beijing, November 23, 2012.

action against domestic protest movements.<sup>663</sup> Thus, while Gorbachev had reluctantly agreed to an armed solution in Tiflis in February 1989, this became less of an option for him after Tiananmen.<sup>664</sup> Indeed, it would have been hard to imagine someone who was pushing for a more liberalized version of socialism (and his international image as a peaceful reformer) now embarking on a path of armed intervention to keep the conservative status quo. This had far-reaching implications for entire bloc, as a threat of violent, Moscow-led repressions against protests movements, which had existed the entirety of the Cold War, suddenly dissipated.<sup>665</sup> Once Gorbachev decided to keep his troops in their barracks, the GDR's fate was essentially sealed. A solitary intervention by the *Nationale Volksarmee* was out of the question logistically and pragmatically because of considerations that any armed action would sever East Berlin from its vital economic life-line in the West. According to Politburo member Günter Schabowski, this was a serious thought as everyone in the SED leadership appreciated that any continued survival of their GDR was hinged on an amicable relationship with the FRG.<sup>666</sup> Thus, ironically, although East Berlin went out of its way to prove its ideological loyalty to Beijing, the consequences of China's actions would eventually deprive the GDR of a measure of last resort to keep the regime afloat.

### **“Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben”**

While Krenz did not let his domestic worries show during his late September visit to China, events started to gather momentum after his return. On 6 October 1989, three months after his

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<sup>663</sup> Chen Jian, “Tiananmen and the Fall of the Berlin Wall: China's Path toward 1989 and Beyond” in Jefferey A. Engel (eds.), *The Fall of the Berlin Wall – The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 96-131.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid., p. 96-101; While Soviet troops were sent in to appease an Lithuanian uprising in Vilnius in January 1991, there has been some debate over Gorbachev's complicity for the troops' eventual resort to arms. See Alfred Erich Senn, *Gorbachev's Failure in Lithuania*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995); pp. 34-56.

<sup>665</sup> Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 16-22; See also Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted* (Oxford: Oxford Univesity Press, 2001).

<sup>666</sup> “Jiang Zemin wollte ‘Tiananmen’ gegenüber dem Ausland herunterspielen”, *Epoch Times Deutschland*, 3 June 2009. (<http://www.epochtimes.de/articles/2009/06/03/452971.html>), accessed 1 May 2014.

visit to Beijing, Gorbachev was greeted with the same enthusiasm he received in the Chinese capital by demonstrating crowds (but also from local FDJ youth). A day later, Honecker and Gorbachev sat through what was to be the last parade of the Nationale Volksarmee. The tension must have been palpable. Gorbachev had already started to regard Honecker as a reactionary relic since early 1987 and for Honecker, Gorbachev had long become a reformist nuisance rather than a stalwart ally.<sup>667</sup> In addition to his calls for political reforms, Gorbachev's unabated engagement with the West and his new concept of a "common European home" threatened to rob the GDR of its very *raison d'être*.<sup>668</sup> While some have speculated that by 1989 Gorbachev had lost his will and interest to keep the fraternal states together in a common bloc,<sup>669</sup> it is also safe to say that his Eastern European allies saw the Soviet leaders' policies towards the bloc in the final phase as "enigmatic".<sup>670</sup> Indeed, developments in Eastern Europe in the crucial summer months of 1989 were met by an eerie silence from the Kremlin, resulting on one hand in dramatic changes in reformist states but also, as in Honecker's case, significant trepidation as to whether the Kremlin would, despite all its liberal rhetoric, guarantee the bloc's integrity.<sup>671</sup>

Considering these circumstances, one can understand why Gorbachev's October 1989 visit to East Berlin was both awkward and tense. While on the outside, Honecker and Gorbachev embraced and professed their wishes to continue cooperation, the two leaders' visions for the future of communism could not have been more different. Whereas Gorbachev sought a true reformation of the Marxist-Leninist ideological construct, Honecker refused to consider far-

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<sup>667</sup> Vadislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p. 325.

<sup>668</sup> Joachim Scholtyseck, *Die Aussenpolitik der DDR* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003), p. 127.

<sup>669</sup> Anatoli Tschernajew, *Die letzten Jahre einer Weltmacht. Der Kreml von innen* (Stuttgart: Deutscher Verlags-Anstalt, 1993), p. 266.

<sup>670</sup> Jacques Levesque, *The Enigma of 1989. The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 272.

<sup>671</sup> For example - On March 3, 1989, Hungary informed Gorbachev of the decision "to completely remove the electronic and technological protection from the Western and Southern borders of Hungary." The response from the Kremlin was: "We have a strict regime on our borders, but we are also becoming more open." The same ambiguous line was kept when Hungary opened its borders to East German refugees as a gateway to the FRG in September. See Vadislav Zubok, *A failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 323.

sweeping changes in either the everyday-politics or the ideology of the SED. As East Germans left in droves through the newly opened borders in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, Gorbachev, through his spokesperson Genadi Gerassimov, in a last-ditch effort to nudge Honecker into the direction of introducing political and economic reforms, is said to have uttered to Honecker: “Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben”, roughly translated “Life punishes those who come too late”.<sup>672</sup> Having felt increasingly abandoned due to factors such as missing oil deliveries, Soviet intransigence towards the German problem as well as Soviet insistences on stopping a Sino-GDR rapprochement, one can only imagine Honecker’s reaction to these remarks.

During these desperate times, Beijing stuck to its ally. Indeed, a significantly friendlier encounter occurred between Honecker and the Chinese representative Vice Premier Yao Yilin at the very same celebrations. Appreciating Beijing’s worries about the tumultuous situation in Eastern Europe, Honecker remarked that “many changes are taking place in the socialist world today, it is important that each country now to follow their own path according to its domestic and historic conditions”, reassuring that the GDR would “never give up the leading roles of the working class and of the communist party.”<sup>673</sup> Clearly appreciating the commitment of their steady ally, Yao Yilin thanked Honecker for his support during the “June-incidences” (*Juni-Ereignisse*), assuring that China also “stood fast at the side of the GDR and will dedicate significant attention to the further development of bilateral relations.” Yao Yilin commented that China viewed the GDR as “the most important frontier of socialism in the west”. This must have been music to Honecker’s self-righteous ears. However, one wonders how the East German

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<sup>672</sup> The overall message had been a diplomatic one, relating that the Soviet Union experienced similar problems. See a break-down of this episode in “15 Jahre Danach: Wer zu spaet kommt, bestraft das Leben” *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, (<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/15-jahre-danach-wer-zu-spaet-kommt-den-bestraft-das-leben-1191290.html>), accessed 14 November 2012.

<sup>673</sup> PAAA, MfAA – 2495/90 – Besuch Mitgl. St. A. PB ZK KP Chinas, Stellv. Ministerpraes. VR Ch, Yao Yilin, in DDR – 1989 – Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch und die Teilnahme an den Feierlichkeiten anlässlich des 40. Jahrestages der Gründung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik einer Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der Volksrepublik China unter Leitung des Mitglieds des Ständigen Ausschusses des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas und stellvertretenden Ministerpräsidenten des Staatsrates der Volksrepublik China, Genossen Yao Yilin, in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 2. Bis 9. Oktober 1989.



leadership felt that Yao Yilin now accused Zhao Ziyang of allowing liberalism to flow into the country while being responsible for the “causes of the counter-revolutionary uprising”, the same accusation that Zhao had brought upon Hu some two years ago.<sup>674</sup>

Amidst the assaulting waves of liberalization coming from both outside and within the communist world, two seemingly backward allies clung to each other in a desperate fight against uncertainty. While Yao Yilin vowed to further develop relations between the two countries during his 1989 trip, events soon took a turn for the worse for Beijing’s erstwhile stalwart ally. As many in the Kremlin had predicted (Gorbachev told the Politburo after his trip to East Berlin back in Moscow that Honecker had completely lost touch), the Honecker-era came to an abrupt end on 1 November, bringing Egon Krenz to power.<sup>675</sup>

Events then gathered pace and despite desperate attempts to reshuffle its leadership, the SED’s days were now numbered. As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, popular pressure prevailed. The Berlin Wall effectively ceased to exist on 9 November 1989 and with it, the iron curtain came tumbling down.<sup>676</sup> Beijing kept an eerie silence. As Liu Qibao, former Chinese Deputy Ambassador to the GDR confessed, Beijing hoped until the very last moment that the SED regime would continue to survive. Thus, it still sent out a special observer mission to the Volkskammer elections in March 1990 to gauge the situation. Liu remembered that “while we had to adopt the official stance of ‘respecting the people’s decisions in Eastern Europe’, we all secretly hoped that

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<sup>674</sup> PAAA, MfAA – 2495/90 – Besuch Mitgl. St. A. PB ZK KP Chinas, Stellv. Ministerpraes. VR Ch, Yao Yilin, in DDR – 1989 – Bericht über den offiziellen Freundschaftsbesuch und die Teilnahme an den Feierlichkeiten anlässlich des 40. Jahrestages der Gründung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik einer Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der Volksrepublik China unter Leitung des Mitglieds des Ständigen Ausschusses des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas und stellvertretenden Ministerpräsidenten des Staatsrates der Volksrepublik China, Genossen Yao Yilin, in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 2. Bis 9. Oktober 1989.

<sup>675</sup> Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p. 326.

<sup>676</sup> On a thorough discussion of the root causes and political factors which eventually tumbled the wall, see Frederick Taylor, *The Berlin Wall: A World Divided, 1961-1989* (London: Harper, 2006) pp. 380-428; William Buckley, *The Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2004), pp. 136-178; Hans-Hermann Hertle, Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan (eds.) *Das Ende der SED* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2012), pp. 59-61, 74-76.

the SED would somehow prevail in the East German elections.”<sup>677</sup> Having supported its conservative ally until the last second, one can only imagine the feeling of insecurity felt in Beijing after the *Allianz für Deutschland*, led by the conservative CDU, won a majority of the seats, and the reconstituted PDS (formerly SED) only came in a mere third place.<sup>678</sup>

The assessment in Beijing placed the blame squarely on Moscow’s shoulders. To the leaders in Zhongnanhai, Gorbachev was at fault for putting the entire socialist camp at risk. Having laid the responsibility for the demise of likeminded allies such as the GDR on the Kremlin, Beijing adamantly accused Gorbachev of being solely responsible for the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. On 23 December 1989, four months before the fateful Volkskammer elections, the head of the CPSU’s International Department Valentin Falin was given the Chinese position on a trip to Beijing. Much of the dialogue revolved around Eastern Europe, with CCP Secretary General Jiang Zemin remarking to Falin that “China is a socialist country and naturally, we cannot but be concerned over the developments in other socialist countries.”<sup>679</sup> Early in December 1989, the CCP Central Committee even circulated internal documents which blamed the events in Eastern Europe on five interrelated factors, with the emphasis being placed on the existence of non-communist parties and that the communist parties of Eastern Europe “were heavily influenced by the Soviet Union.”<sup>680</sup> A good barometer of the mood in Zhongnanhai can be gauged from an internal party document in early 1990 which accused Gorbachev of having “completely betrayed the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism...”<sup>681</sup>

What is almost certain is that its doomed support of the embattled East German regime

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<sup>677</sup> Author’s interview with Liu Qibao, Deputy Ambassador in the Chinese Embassy to the GDR, 1984-1990, Beijing, 23 November 2012.

<sup>678</sup> “Amtliches Endergebnis der Wahlen zur Volkskammer am 18. März 1990”, *Neues Deutschland*, 24 March, 1990; See also Daniel Hough, *The fall and rise of the PDS in Eastern Germany* (Birmingham, University of Birmingham Press, 2001), pp. 23-43; Daniel Hough, “Die PDS: ein Zeichen ostdeutscher andersartigkeit”, *Deutschland Archiv*, 34:2 (2001), pp. 284-287.

<sup>679</sup> Xinhua, 28 December 1989, in *FBIS-CHI*, December 29, 1989, p. 12 in John Garver, “The Chinese Communist Party and the Collapse of Soviet Communism” *The China Quarterly*, 133 (1993), pp. 1-26; p. 3.

<sup>680</sup> John Garver, “The Chinese Communist Party and the Collapse of Soviet Communism” *The China Quarterly* No. 133, March 1993, pp. 1-26. p. 4.

<sup>681</sup> “Zhonggong yifen zhongyao jimi wenjian quanwen” No. 151 (1 May 1990), pp. 8-10 in *Ibid.*, p. 4.

further solidified China's adherence to its own principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries to avoid being on the wrong side of history again. Thus, for example, even though Beijing initially rejoiced at Gorbachev's arrest during the August 1991 hard-line coup in Moscow, it kept silent for as long as it could in an attempt to not pick the wrong side.<sup>682</sup> Deng even made a point of issuing inner-party directives urging caution and forbidding party members from publicly airing opinions on the situation in the Soviet Union.<sup>683</sup>

The unravelling of socialist rule in Eastern Europe started a process of frantic soul-searching for Zhongnanhai's leaders. Having witnessed the demise of Communist rule in Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria and East Germany, Beijing became even more ardent in its belief that Gorbachev was to blame for the demise of socialism in Europe. Immediately following the collapse, a series of post-mortems were conducted by a variety of CCP departments. The general assessment was aptly summarized in a report by an analyst in the CCP Organization Department who blamed "advocacy of pluralist ideology" and "advocacy of political pluralism via constitutional amendment" as the main reasons for Soviet and Eastern European destabilization.<sup>684</sup> Another report stated that by applying these principles, this new thinking undermined Eastern European regimes by emboldening antiparty elements, fractured the solidarity of the Warsaw Pact, gave scope for the West's 'peaceful evolution' policies to make further inroads and represented a complete capitulation to the West.<sup>685</sup>

The demise of its likeminded ally in East Berlin through people power (and Moscow's reluctance to intervene against this popular pressure) reaffirmed Beijing's belief that it had acted rightly in suppressing the Tiananmen protestors. Without a doubt, the collapse of communism in

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<sup>682</sup> Ibid., p. 2-5.

<sup>683</sup> He Boshi, "CCP Issues Successive Emergency Circulars Ordering Entire Party to Guard against Changes," *Dangdai*, September 15, 1991, in FBIS-CHI, 24 September 1991.

<sup>684</sup> Party Building Research Institute of the CCP Organization Department, *Dangjian Yanjiu Zong-Heng Tan* (1994) (Beijing: Dangjian duwu chubanshe, 1995, *neibu*), 250-251 quoted in David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party – Atrophy and Adaptation* (Washington DC: Wilson Centre Press, 2008), p. 69.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

Eastern Europe led to considerable introspection among the CCP rank and file. Moreover, the leaders in Beijing learnt through the example of Eastern Europe that, like in 1987, it needed to place renewed emphasis on political education, this time with an explicit goal of creating a binding ideology. As research by Rana Mitter, and more recently by Zheng Wang, have shown, Zhongnanhai has since harnessed memories of national humiliation to create a nationalist ideology to fill this void.<sup>686</sup> Eager to discourage public discourse and debates on contentious issues such as Tiananmen, Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng and subsequent leaders have sought to glorify the CCP's exaggerated achievements in driving out the Japanese during the Second World War and unifying the country 1949. This strategy, coupled with Beijing's continued ability to provide Chinese citizens with rising living standards, has so far averted a similar fate that East Germany experienced in 1989.

## Conclusion

Certainly from Beijing's perspective, the Soviet bloc's collapse was largely brought about by the Kremlin's new direction under Gorbachev.<sup>687</sup> In the specific case of the GDR, Moscow's effective renunciation of the GDR, as its erstwhile most loyal client state diverged ever more from Gorbachev's reform path, spelled the beginning of the end for the SED regime. This was of course combined with Soviet domestic and economic constraints which led Soviet leaders to conclude that hegemony over the Eastern European states could not and should not be sustained, nudged forward by the Soviet military brass' conclusion that a military presence in Eastern Europe reduced rather than enhanced Soviet security.<sup>688</sup> What Gorbachev perhaps did not anticipate was

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<sup>686</sup> Rana Mitter, "Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Nationalism, History and Memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987-1997", *The China Quarterly*, 161 (2000), pp. 279-294; Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation – Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>687</sup> Jacques Levesque, "The East European Revolutions of 1989" in Odd Arne Westad, Melvyn Leffler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 311.

<sup>688</sup> Martin McCauley, "Gorbachev, the GDR and Germany", in G.J. Glaessner and Ian Wallace (eds.), *The German*

that there would be a ‘reverse-spillover’ effect, in that the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe might eventually have a devastating destabilizing effect on the Soviet Union.<sup>689</sup>

In addition to weakening the Soviet bloc, Gorbachev’s calls for reform also had the effect of bringing together two unlikely partners. Both Beijing and East Berlin, with Chinese leaders seeking their own brand of reform communism and East Berlin fighting calls for more transparency from Moscow, sought to clearly delineate themselves from Gorbachev’s *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. Thus, ideological agreements against far-sweeping political reforms brought them together in the last years of the Cold War. Bilateral meetings after Gorbachev’s ascent to power in Moscow show that a common conservative outlook united both regimes in their absolute rejection of any change to their respective status quo.

As political unrest enveloped Eastern Europe and China, both regimes placed the blame squarely on Gorbachev’s political reforms. This in turn served to deepen East Berlin and Beijing’s common understanding that their respective political status quo could only be kept alive by limiting Gorbachev’s influences. Beijing’s violent suppression of the student protests on 4 June 1989 was a direct result of this consideration. By sending in the tanks, Beijing sent a clear message that it would not go down the path of Moscow-influenced Eastern European communist regimes who, according to the non-intervention principles espoused by Gorbachev, had let people power erode away state power.

After Tiananmen, Beijing was adamant to support the GDR’s attempts to stay afloat by encouraging it to continue down its hard-line stance. However, the dramatic international backlash from Tiananmen only further ruled out Moscow’s support for any East German armed intervention against protestors, as Soviet and East German leaders feared the political and

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*Revolution of 1989: Causes and Consequences* (Oxford: Berg, 1992), 164; Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship – Inside the GDR, 1949-1989*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 245.

<sup>689</sup> Mark Kramer, “The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union.” Pts. 1 and 2. *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5:4, 2003, pp. 178-256 & 6:4, 2004, pp. 3-64

economic consequences of a crackdown in the GDR and without Soviet consent, East Berlin was in no capacity to act alone. Beijing's actions deprived the GDR leadership of a crucial lifeline. Thus, while Beijing was able to prevent the spread of the contagion from Eastern Europe, East Berlin ultimately fell victim to its inability to both insulate itself from external pressures as well as its powerlessness to independently act against internal popular pressures.

## Conclusion

“Berlin, nun freue Dich” (Berlin, rejoice). These words, yelled into the crowd by the reigning West Berlin mayor Walter Momper, encapsulated the raw emotions of both East and West Germans on 22 December 1989. West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl ceremonially re-opened the Brandenburg Gate and with it the symbolic barrier which had defined the iron curtain. One would be tempted to say that this was the final nail in the coffin of the dying GDR. But at this point, the coffin containing any aspirations that the remaining East German leaders had for the survival of the GDR into the 1990s was well below the ground, with six feet of dirt firmly packed above it.

Scenes of jubilation and seemingly ecstatic joy were not only confined to the once impermeable inter-German border but were also echoed across the Soviet bloc. From Bucharest to Warsaw, walls came tumbling down and borders opened. Of course, this joy was not shared by all. The old guard retreated, sometimes being hunted out of office.<sup>690</sup> Cheering crowds in Potsdam and Leipzig must have shocked the SED-elite. If Honecker had been asked in 1979 on the fate of the GDR’s existence, he undoubtedly would have never pictured its demise in a mere ten years. Certainly, with his engagement with China, he was doing his part in securing the GDR’s future.

To Honecker, his independent engagement with China was in many ways a success story. He was able to impose his priorities on the GDR’s powerful Soviet patrons in order to chase his own foreign policy wishes. During this process of Sino-GDR engagement Honecker would find out that the East Berlin and Beijing converged and discovered commonalities in three major areas. When reengagement became possible, early interest on both sides was first driven by a desire to

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<sup>690</sup> Incidentally, on the day that the Brandenburg Gate was opened, Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu began his ill-fated flight from revolutionaries. See Pavel Campeanu, *Ceausescu: The Countdown* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

construct an economically beneficial relationship amidst Deng's economic modernization process. This initial economic rationale was then replaced by an ideological bond as both governments rebuffed Gorbachev's reform path. Throughout it all, both sides were also driven by a profound desire to usher in more prestige for both countries. And most certainly, this was reflected in bilateral dealings where East Berlin and Beijing sought to use engagement with a previously inaccessible partner to gain international standing. Let us deal with each of these themes in turn.

## **Economics**

When discussing the GDR's history, one would be hard-pressed to avoid discussions on the state of the East German economy as a contributing factor to East Germany's eventual collapse. Even though economic historians have been quick to point the finger at the GDR's sagging economic performance in the 1980s, it is clear now that East Berlin's financial difficulties were a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the GDR's demise.<sup>691</sup> That being said, it is also apparent that the GDR's economic malaises were recognized by Honecker and his lieutenants.<sup>692</sup>

By desperately attempting to establish a beneficial trade relationship with China, Honecker attempted to bolster the GDR's economy and stop worrying East German trade trends. Throughout his engagement with China, but especially in the middle of the 1980s, when bilateral relations entered new heights surrounding his state visit to Beijing in 1986, Honecker repeatedly tried to increase disappointing trade volumes between the two states. Stemming from the realization that inter-COMECON trade was not going to be sufficient in securing the GDR's future, it is not a stretch to say that by the 1980s, East Berlin had long stopped looking eastward for economic help and trade. Amidst decreasing Soviet raw material deliveries and slowdowns in

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<sup>691</sup> The GDR had weathered many economic crises before and nothing suggests that the economic problems were so acute as to cause the GDR to fall on itself like a house of cards. Joachim Scholtyseck, *Die Aussenpolitik der DDR* (Munich: Oldenburg, 2003), p. 129.

<sup>692</sup> Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution : The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 60-61.



the entire bloc, East Germany first oriented its economic feelers West towards the once-hated West Germany and then, as this thesis shows, to anyone else who also presented a viable alternative to its old trade partners. Thus, as Deng gradually opened China's market to the rest of the world, cultivating ties to Beijing made perfect sense for Honecker.

In an era of Reform and Opening, China was more than interested in funnelling in as much expertise and knowledge as possible for its own modernization drive. And who better to engage with than the industrial leader of the socialist world? To Beijing, engaging with an advanced socialist industrialist country for economic know-how made perfect sense. Aside from the benefit of perhaps being able to directly apply entire systems and processes which had already been adapted to a socialist system, Beijing could also use its engagement with East Germany to undermine the rival Soviet Bloc. Of course, Deng was also faced with the luxury that he did not have to choose. With the capitalist West willingly throwing open its doors to him, he was also more than happy to cast a curious eye towards Eastern European countries to gauge their economic experiences and source their expertise. In other words, he, unlike Honecker, did not have to consider any negative externalities that might result from deepening relations with East Berlin.

For East Germany, the inevitable side-effect of engaging with a Soviet enemy was Soviet condemnation and disapproval. What is perhaps most telling is that East Germany did not seem to, aside from token statements for 'bloc-solidarity', give much attention to Moscow's displeasure. On the contrary, during the latter Brezhnev years as well as the Andropov-Chernenko interregnum, Honecker used the power vacuum in Moscow to push forward his engagement with Beijing. East Berlin made its stance towards Deng's stance perfectly clear by rebelling against Soviet coordination mechanisms such as the *Interkit*, which were specifically designed to keep its client states in line. In observing the forcefulness and the confidence in which rebuttals against Moscow's attempts at restraint were made, one appreciates that for Honecker, intransigence

towards Moscow's China policy did not arise out of this issue alone but were rather based on a history of general frictions with Moscow. Thus, this thesis has tried to frame Honecker's disagreement with the Kremlin on China using a broader interpretation. It showed that GDR-Soviet tensions on China were not solely based on mutual distrust on the GDR's adventurist China policy but were rather also the result of repeated East Berlin-Moscow collisions on other issues. To name a few, the Soviet Union's 1979 incursion into Afghanistan to prop up Babrak Karmal's regime there threatened détente, the economic benefits of which East Berlin had become increasingly reliant on. Soviet inaction during the Solidarnosc strikes in Poland in 1980 and 1981 coupled with Brezhnev's physical weakness only seemed to reinforce the notion in East Berlin that the Kremlin was unfit to lead the Soviet bloc. Added to this, Moscow's inability and unwillingness to provide East Germany with cheap, subsidized oil only exacerbated tensions.

### **A question of prestige**

Indeed, disagreements with Moscow and a desire to add a potentially important trade partner were decisive factors in pushing forward East Berlin's wish to engage a reformist China under Deng. And certainly, they were a large part of Honecker's vision of what the future of the GDR should look like – politically independent and economically successful. Thus, Honecker's renewed engagement with China was fundamentally rooted in the East German wish to seek not only practical advantages for his GDR but also to 'put East Germany on the map' once and for all. Having experienced repeated crises of legitimacy in the GDR's early days under Walter Ulbricht, always remembering that only a small pool of eleven communist countries had recognized East Germany at its founding in 1949, the question of East German existence was never far from Honecker's mind.<sup>693</sup> Honecker had scored a major victory by concluding the 'Basic Treaty' with

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<sup>693</sup> The issue of 'recognition' was a central theme of East German foreign policy from its founding to its demise. On the international effort to spoil East Germany's pursuit to become a recognized, sovereign state, and arising

Bonn in 1972. East Germany's subsequent induction into the United Nations and recognition by international organizations and governments who previously had refused to associate themselves with the Pankow regime gave the GDR legitimacy and more importantly perhaps, sovereignty from the other Germany. Honecker actively courted his new relationships and spent much of his tenure visiting foreign capitals. In the process, he fashioned himself as an able statesman and his GDR as economically vigorous and politically important.

Honecker welcomed the spotlight and he enjoyed the new recognition foreign relations garnered him. Thus, an element of prestige also played into his eagerness to engage with China. He knew that while the potential practical advantages from fostering relations with Beijing were very real, it also carried the added benefit of validating the GDR's sovereignty in the eyes of a new, powerful friend. And for this, he was willing to risk alienating old friends who had decreased to benefit the GDR. Honecker never shied away from telling his Chinese partners of the successes of East German engineering, the above-average living standard of the East German citizen or of his standing in the Soviet bloc. That Beijing not only seemed to take these statements at face value but also started to pay special attention to him and his GDR, epitomized by granting him the first post-Sino-Soviet split state visit by a Soviet bloc leader to Beijing in 1986, cemented his belief that he was conducting an even more successful China-policy than his Soviet patrons. This attention only whetted Honecker's appetite for broader recognition, and deeper engagement. To Honecker, this was killing two birds with one stone. If he was successful in creating a beneficial relationship for East Germany, he was one step closer to his goal of, to paraphrase James McAdams, creating "a model of socialist well-being and abundance", while also re-validating the GDR's sovereignty.<sup>694</sup>

The curious anomaly is that Honecker's pride in his GDR would also cause him to be

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insecurities in East Berlin see William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War – the Global campaign to isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>694</sup> A. James McAdams, *Germany Divided* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 8.

‘blind’ for any lessons he might have learned from his engagement with China. Thinking his version of reform and socialism to be superior, he was never open to learning from Beijing’s reform path. Rather, he revelled in a sense of accomplishment that he derived from selling the superiority of his socialist experiment to his new Chinese friends. Indeed, throughout the 1980s, there is no evidence that Honecker took China’s reforms as a serious and note-worthy project.

To add to the irony, Honecker’s drive for recognition and prestige also served as one of the major friction points between himself and the Soviet Union. The basic fact was that priorities were drastically different in Moscow and East Berlin. In many ways, this was natural. To Moscow, the task of managing the empire and a truly international strategy overrode any niggling concerns that client states might have had. Thus, the question of East German legitimacy, a priority for Ulbricht and Honecker, was never accorded the weight that East Berlin wanted Moscow to allot it. This trend was by no means new in the 1980s. For example, as Mary Elise Sarotte has forcefully argued, the CPSU micro-managed East Berlin through inter-German talks in the détente era and sacrificed core East German interests with the goal of averting international tensions.<sup>695</sup> But whereas Sarotte’s analysis of how East Berlin dealt with Ostpolitik posited that “the desire of the SED to gain more authority for itself vis-à-vis Moscow seems to have existed, there is not enough evidence of it to make any decisive statements”, this thesis argues that in East Germany’s dealings with Deng’s China, this tendency for more independence from Moscow was clearly visible.<sup>696</sup>

## **Ideology**

While economic concerns and Honecker’s relentless pursuit for prestige were important motivating factors in pushing forward his courting of Beijing, an ideological dimension also emerged in the late 1980s. And without a doubt, this was the strangest and most unexpected

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<sup>695</sup> See on this, Mary Elise Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, & Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 165.

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

feature of Sino-GDR relations. After all, what would an East German state founded under Soviet auspices have in common with a country which broke from the Soviet Union to pursue its own version of agrarian socialism? Yet, in the 1980s commonalities abounded. Both Deng and Honecker were trying to steer their states towards greater economic success. East Berlin did this by attempting to secure an additional export market for its goods in China while sourcing loans and transfer-payments from West Germany. China did this by opening its markets to the outside world. And both states desperately sought legitimacy. Beijing's emergence out of the Cultural Revolution and its renewed engagement, first with America in the early 1970s and subsequently with the rest of the world, was also done with the goal of reasserting itself on the international stage as a rising power in mind. But perhaps most importantly, both Deng and Honecker believed economic and political advancement was only possible under the guidance of an unassailable, omnipotent Party. Marxist-Leninist ideology was made to conform to local imperatives and utilized fully to justify foreign and domestic policies.<sup>697</sup>

This common adherence to the centrality of the Party would be put to the test in the late 1980s. As turmoil brewed in Eastern Europe in 1989, both countries feared that political unrest stemming from reformist movements would derail their simultaneous pursuits of legitimacy and economic vitality by threatening the role of the Party. Both leaders fearfully watched as strict central control was diluted in a series of formerly orthodox socialist states. This common trepidation towards political destabilization served as a powerful uniting bond between Beijing and East Berlin. Government officials on both sides repeatedly voiced their concerns over the deteriorating situation in the Soviet bloc and vowed to support each other in these times of uncertainty. Thus, at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the GDR, it was China who ardently voiced its backing for the continued non-reformist course of its Eastern European ally while

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<sup>697</sup> On a discussion on how communist governments used their ideas to justify a number of divergent programs see David Priestland, *The Red Flag – Communism and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), pp. xvii-xix.

Moscow urged it to seek a drastic reform course.

Fatefully, it was this stubborn adherence to a hard-line ideology which would cost East Germany dearly in the end. After all, the two states operated within very different parameters. While Beijing could resort to the use of force to maintain the continuity of the party by dispelling challengers, East Berlin was left with no such option. Having to consider West German reaction as well as Muscovite disapproval for a military intervention, the *Nationale Volksarmee* stayed in their barracks and with it, East Germany surrendered its last means of keeping the regime afloat. Through these last months, Moscow stayed remarkably silent. The GDR's Soviet brothers, while not entirely abandoning the East German project, had certainly grown increasingly tired of it. Under Gorbachev, scientific experts at the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs had submitted numerous memos in 1987 questioning the sustainability of the East German state, asking if the synthetic division of the German people could be anything but a temporary solution.<sup>698</sup>

During the dying months of the GDR, none was perhaps as steadfast in their unwavering support as Beijing. Zhongnanhai desperately sought to prevent further destabilization in the socialist bloc, fearing what consequences it might have for its own future. In the end, geography as well as the political conditions in the two countries played a major role in the eventual outcomes in both states. East Berlin's fate was taken out of its own hands. Former allies such as Czechoslovakia and Hungary opened its borders to the West and the Honecker regime was forced to watch as droves of its own citizens haemorrhaged westward. Meanwhile, those who stayed behind demanded drastic reforms and the ouster of the old SED guard. Being surrounded by socialist allies where reformist movements were gaining ground, East German leaders were unable to insulate the country from outside events. Added to this of course was the specifically East German problem of having a direct comparison with the economically wealthier West

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<sup>698</sup> Vyacheslav Danichev, a scientific expert of the MFA submitted a memo to the Ministry's division for European socialist countries in which labeled the division of Germany "rigid" and "abnormal" See Vladislav Zubok, "In the Conditions of Retreat? – Soviet Demise and German Unification", LSE Cold War History Seminar Working Paper, October 30, 2013, cited with permission.

Germany. The ‘world-leading’ GDR was not able to survive the unrest created by the basic yearning from many of its citizens to have the same freedoms and standard of living as their cousins in the West.

Of course things were very different in China. Without a doubt, the student protests in Tiananmen Square were also motivated by simultaneous liberalization movements in Eastern Europe and Gorbachev’s calls for a more reform-minded version of communism. However, whereas geography dictated that East Germany was unable to prevent events in surrounding countries in drastically altering its course in history, Beijing had the luxury of being able to insulate itself after the drastic Tiananmen intervention from the outside world. Mass-arrests against student leaders were made and communication was cut off from the rest of the world. Briefly, the hard-line faction surrounding Premier Li Peng steered China towards a more conservative, dogmatic path, abandoning many of the central tenets associated with the original Reform and Opening mantra preached by Deng Xiaoping.

Seeing East Berlin’s last-ditch attempts at averting total collapse fail, Beijing sunk deeper into a period of introspection. Without a doubt, socialism’s demise in Eastern Europe had a profound effect on Zhongnanhai. Already, reeling from the realization that large tracts of the population did not agree with the course of the government, the sudden and unexpected sinking of half of the socialist world confronted Beijing with the reality that it had never faced before – that not only the ideas of socialism were at risk but that the party-centric socialist governance model was perhaps unsustainable. Blaming everything on a senior official (in this case Zhao Ziyang) was no longer a sufficient strategy to secure the continuity of communist China. More needed to be done to ensure the continuity of the party and the subscription of the population.

Significant efforts were spent on reining in some of the entrepreneurial and liberal spirit

that Deng had inadvertently created among the populace.<sup>699</sup> Deng was briefly outmanoeuvred by leftists surrounding Li Peng and Jiang Zemin. This did not last for long. As Deng has repeatedly shown throughout his career, he was amazingly adept at manoeuvring back into power. While he formally retired as the Chairman of the Central Military Commission in 1989, he staged a quasi-comeback in 1992 when he undertook a 'southern tour' of Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai provinces in order to further lend his energy and support to the Special Economic Zones. While the centre under Jiang Zemin showed little support, the public fully embraced Deng's energy for continued reforms, eventually forcing China back onto a reform path.

With the example of Eastern Europe fresh in his memory, Deng Xiaoping knew that the only way for China to retain stability under the CCP would be to combine China's economic reform drive with a binding nationalist ideology. Indeed, one is left to wonder whether Deng felt a sense of accomplishment and relief as he visited joint ventures and viewed state-sponsored infrastructure projects along the coast. He had, for the time being at least, averted East Berlin's fate.

### **Of 'big ships' and 'small ships'**

Whereas Zhao Ziyang had likened the difficulty of the Sino-Soviet normalization process as two big ships attempting to dock, the process of Sino-GDR rapprochement was not necessarily less cumbersome.<sup>700</sup> Even though a relatively 'smaller' ship than the two socialist behemoths, the GDR's docking with China was nevertheless made challenging by Moscow's insistence to steer East Berlin's course in every aspect of its foreign policy. Only Honecker's dogged resolve to follow his own path to seek economic and political advantages by engaging with Beijing eventually resulted in the GDR's speedy rapprochement with China. Rather than displaying

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<sup>699</sup> The Chinese intelligentsia became spell-bound by 'Economic fevers' and 'English-learning crazes' in the mid-1980s. See Ruth Cherrington, *Deng's Generation: Young Intellectuals in 1980s China* (London: MacMillan, 1997).

<sup>700</sup> Hans Modrow, *In Historischer Mission* (Berlin: edition ost, 2007), p. 198.



absolute loyalty to its economic and political guarantors, Soviet client states often diverged from the 'common good' to pursue their own interests and policies.<sup>701</sup> This was no different in the last decade of the Cold War. Rather than being content at obediently functioning in a bipolar structure, superpower allies on both sides of the iron curtain pulled and tugged their patrons into a more multipolar construct to satisfy domestic yearnings and needs.<sup>702</sup> These tendencies during the last years of the Cold War amongst Soviet allies are as of yet undocumented in the current available literature.

In addition, this study questions the commonly held assumption that Eastern-European-Chinese rapprochement were a mere appendix of the Sino-Soviet normalization process. East Berlin did not wait for Moscow's relations with Beijing to improve before aggressively seeking to ameliorate its ties with the People's Republic. In doing so, it rid itself of its previous blind subscription to Soviet tensions with Beijing. After all, issues, such as the Soviet troop presence in Vietnam, the Sino-Soviet frontier as well as Afghanistan, which for Beijing had made Sino-Soviet normalization so difficult, were not direct factors in Sino-GDR relations. Once East Berlin chose to ignore the construct imposed on the Soviet client states by the Sino-Soviet Split, the rapprochement process would be infinitely easier to navigate than the Sino-Soviet one. Unlike Moscow, East Berlin had never engaged in bitter ideological as well as physical altercations with Beijing. And to be sure, it also held different aspirations than its Soviet patrons. Rather than being a rival for the leadership of the socialist camp, East Germany 'merely' sought to diversify its foreign policy portfolio as well as seeking out potentially beneficial trade relationships. Certainly, only East Berlin's willingness to turn a blind eye to Sino-Soviet tensions as well as its less threatening nature to Beijing made the East German ship's docking with Beijing's far easier than the Sino-Soviet encounter. Thus, before Deng would shake Gorbachev's hands in Beijing in 1989,

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<sup>701</sup> Lorenz M. Luethi, "The People's Republic of China and the Warsaw Pact Organization, 1955-63" *Cold War History* 7:4, pp. 479-494.

<sup>702</sup> On Western European states' engagement of China before Nixon's 1972 rapprochement with Beijing, see Martin Albers, "The Policies of Britain, France and West Germany towards the People's Republic of China, 1969-82" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2014).

he had welcomed Honecker in a grand state visit some three years earlier, illustrating that in many ways, East German-Chinese relations were ‘ahead’ of the Sino-Soviet normalization process during much of the decade.

This thesis has also shown that the final decade of the Cold War was defined by an increasing economic multipolarity towards China, especially after Deng’s initiation of his Reform and Opening process in the early 1980s. Drawn in by the potential of the Chinese market, countries of all sizes and shapes flocked to China in order to take advantage of the opening of a sizeable export market. Struggling with economic problems at home, East Berlin also wanted to come to the dance. Its tireless pursuit of a beneficial trade relationship with China shows Honecker’s sincere wish to use China to address some of the GDR’s economic malaises. The draw of this market was also one of the main reasons that East Berlin ignored Soviet calls for restraint. Knowing that the Soviet Union was not able to furnish it with the economic support it needed, Honecker sought to diversify its portfolio by looking towards China. Overall, China’s appeal as a market and re-emerging ‘third’ economic power drastically changed the international environment. Bloc solidarity on both sides were abandoned for the more pressing draw of this potentially vast market. Thus, like Western European countries, select Eastern European countries had started to engage with Deng without much coordination with Moscow in the 1980s. Globalization had started to chisel away at the rigid bipolar Cold War construct.

Finally, the course of East German-Chinese relations in the 1980s adds further evidence that seemingly ‘rigid’ communist states supposedly built on the absolute adherence on socialist ideological tenets are capable of incredible doctrinal malleability when faced with internal or external challenges. In China, economic necessity after the Cultural Revolution combined with Deng’s vision of a more prosperous and modern China led Beijing to reconfigure ‘Chinese communism’ to include elements of the free market – certainly something that was never originally envisioned in Mao Zedong-thought. In East Berlin, political frictions with Moscow as

well as a desire to engage with Deng's China led Honecker to abandon his oath to blindly follow the Soviet leadership through thick and thin. In hindsight, East Berlin's willingness to seek out an independent policy towards China at the cost of worsening its ties to the Soviet Union seems to have been a massive miscalculation. Honecker's engagement with China, coupled with his incessant push to seek economic ties with West Germany, estranged the East German regime further and further from Muscovite approval as the decade entered its nadir. These moves antagonized the only regime that could have possibly delayed its eventual demise in 1989. Though of course it would have been hard to imagine Gorbachev sending in troops to prop up East Berlin, perhaps some kind of coordinated message of solidarity from Gorbachev and Honecker on reforms in late 1988 and early 1989 to reassure the restive East German population might have at least delayed East Berlin's fate. However, having watched East Berlin abandon its China-strategy as well as repeatedly snubbing its directives on a variety of other issues, Moscow watched from the sidelines as events took their turn across the GDR. Certainly, declarations of solidarity until the last minute from Beijing mattered little in the end as Honecker's adventurist foreign policy seemed to catch up with him as Walter Momper addressed the crowds in December 1989.

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