

Soviet Foreign Policy in the Early 1980s: A View from Chinese Sovietology

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This chapter will examine the analyses of Chinese Soviet-watchers of Soviet foreign policy against the larger context of China's political setting in the early 1980s, before the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, and investigate how those Chinese scholars placed post-Mao Chinese official agendas centrally in their research. It is going to demonstrate that in the early 1980s, Chinese research on Soviet hegemonism (*baquan zhuyi*), Soviet-Yugoslavian conflicts, and Soviet-Third World relations all reflected Beijing's ambitions of challenging the orthodox Soviet model of economic development in the socialist world, competing with the Kremlin for leadership in developing countries, and projecting a fair and benevolent image of Chinese socialism vis-à-vis Moscow. In short, Chinese research of Soviet foreign policy in the early 1980s had primarily been to trace problems of Chinese socialism as experienced by scholars at the time of their research; this was done in order to legitimise state agendas, rather than to seek truth about the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

With respect to primary sources, it should be mentioned here that this research is based predominantly on the 'national core journals' (*Guojiaji hexin qikan*) published in the People's Republic of China (PRC), such as those dealing with problems of socialism or communism in the world, and the ones concentrating on questions and issues relating to the former Soviet Union. Moreover, the research intends to examine the thinking of Chinese Sovietologists against the backdrop of political changes in early 1980s China. Therefore, China's Party newspapers and journals, and the writings and speeches of contemporary Chinese leaders were also consulted.

The use of the term 'Sovietologists' (or Soviet-watchers) in this paper for those who study and research the state of the USSR is based on Christopher Xenakis' definition. Xenakis defines US Sovietologists broadly, to include 'political scientists, economists, sociologists, historians, diplomats and policy makers'. He uses the terms 'Sovietologists', 'Soviet experts', 'foreign policy analysts', 'Cold War theorists', and 'political scientists' interchangeably, citing the examples of George Kennan, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Pipes, and Strobe Talbott. These individuals are both Soviet-specialists and policy makers, while Hedrick Smith and Robert Kaiser are also Soviet-watchers and journalists simultaneously (Xenakis 2002, 4).

In terms of this elastic definition of the field and the diversity of scholars' backgrounds, the situation in China is generally similar to the situation in the US as described by Xenakis. For example, as we shall see, although some Chinese scholars specialise in either Soviet or world communism, most of those mentioned and quoted in this paper are generalists rather than specialists in Soviet studies. Their articles often express more political zeal than scholarly expertise or analytical insight. Generally speaking, the descriptions by Xenakis of US Sovietologists could also be applied to the Chinese situation. Although the academic training of Chinese Soviet-watchers is in different disciplines and by no means confined to Soviet studies, their research and publications are relevant to Sovietology in one way or another.

Perceptions of Soviet Hegemonism

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In the early 1980s, when Sino-Soviet relations were in estrangement and the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had exacerbated bilateral relations, the Chinese communist regime called for the state-wide denunciation of so-called Soviet hegemonism. After that, Chinese Soviet-watchers became preoccupied with criticising Soviet hegemonism in their writings. As we will see, both the real Soviet military threat along the PRC border after Moscow's incursion into Afghanistan, and the historical memory of the past Russian invasion of China played key roles in intensifying the hostility of Chinese scholars towards the USSR in the early 1980s.

Deng Xiaoping, who was already the preeminent leader of China after the passing of Mao Zedong, understood the gravity of the Soviet military threat to Chinese security. In a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee meeting in 1980, he claimed that 'opposing hegemonism will be on our daily agenda', and 'the struggle against hegemonism is a grave task constantly confronting our country' (Deng 1995, vol 2, 241). Deng once defined 'hegemonism' as denoting the situation when a country 'becomes arrogant' and 'acts like an overlord and gives orders to the world' (Deng 1995, vol 2, 123).

David Shambaugh in his book on Chinese scholarly perceptions of America has devoted several pages to ascertaining the Chinese concept of hegemony. A Chinese scholar at Renmin University defined the term in the following words during an interview he gave to the author:

When we use this term in China, we mean big countries that try to control or interfere in smaller countries. Many scholars mix up imperialism and hegemony. We do not know if it is a system or a policy. Before the 1980s we thought it was a system, like Soviet social-imperialism. We now define hegemony as a policy. For example, in the past when we called the United States imperialist we meant the system; today we use hegemony to describe its foreign policy (Shambaugh 1991, 79).

Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, accusations of so-called Soviet hegemonism had carried weight within Soviet studies in China. In the first issue of *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (Contemporary International Relations) published by Beijing University in 1981, the editor stated clearly that the journal was committed to 'opposing hegemony, safeguarding world peace, and striving for a favourable international environment' (Editor 1981, 64). In January 1981, in the first issue of *Sulian dongou wenti* (Matters of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe) published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the journal editor Liu Keming criticised the Soviet leadership for causing the first socialist country to degenerate into 'a social imperialist state', and making the USSR become 'the principal source of turmoil in the international society' (Liu 1981, 1). He argued:

In order to safeguard world peace, it is essential to do research on policies, theories, and origins of Soviet hegemonism, reveal the true face of it, and make people realise its nature and danger. This is an important mission of our studies of Soviet problems (Liu 1981, 1).

The application of the term hegemonism throughout the history of the PRC has been quite evolutionary. In the early days of the regime, the use of the term was in the context of confrontations between the 'two camps' during the Cold War. It was limited to describing the capitalist US and its allies only (Mao 1993, vol 8, 354). During the early days of Sino-Soviet discord in the late 1950s, China started to criticise Moscow's policy of peaceful coexistence with the West and its intention to control Beijing via the construction of long-wave radio stations in Chinese territory (Chen and Yang 1998, 270). In the early 1960s, when Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated, the PRC intensified its attack on the USSR, accusing Moscow of promoting its own values and institutions abroad in a way that resembled 19th century colonialism (Friedman 2015, 40).

According to Shambaugh, the turning point occurred in 1968, when the term 'hegemonism' was employed by the Chinese to denounce Soviet aggression in Czechoslovakia and the 'Brezhnev Doctrine' (Shambaugh 1991, 78). This is because the Brezhnev statement justifying the Soviet invasion had provided a basis for possible future intervention in other socialist states. China immediately felt the danger of such logic and responded vociferously to Moscow (Boyle 1993, 161). The occasion stood as the major component in the escalation of Sino-Soviet tensions and the Kremlin was thereafter equated with hegemonism in China. By the early 1970s, Chinese scholars had begun to fuse 'social-imperialism' together with 'hegemonism' when referring to the Soviet Union, which was being described as

Soviet Foreign Policy in the Early 1980s: A View from Chinese Sovietology

Written by Jie Li

'socialist in word, imperialist in deed'. In their point of view, 'Imperialism refers to capitalist countries while hegemonism refers to countries regardless of system' (Shambaugh 1991, 78-79).

After the passing of Mao, many Chinese scholars were still locked in Maoist rhetoric in the early 1980s. In 1981, CASS Vice-President Qian Junrui demanded that Chinese scholars use 'Mao Zedong Thought' to 'guide our research on the present questions of international relations'. He emphasised that Mao's 'Three Worlds' concept was still 'our theoretical basis and strategic framework', which guided 'the country's cooperation with the Third and Second World, and resistance to the superpowers and Soviet hegemonism in particular' (Qian 1981, 1).[1] To take an example, CASS scholar Xu Kui used the words 'hegemonism', 'global expansionism', and 'socialist imperialism' more than ten times to depict Soviet activities in the world in his 1981 five-page article (Xu 1981, 10-14).

Chinese scholars may define hegemonism by the West as the oppressiveness of capitalism and colonisation. In the case of the Soviet Union, they used the term to refer not only to the Soviet Union's violation of others' sovereignties, but also Moscow's poking its nose into other countries' affairs, as well as its unequal treatment of the socialist member states by subjecting them to the Soviet model. It was a term used by the Chinese to target Moscow's paternalism in the socialist camp of which China was a member. Up to the early 1980s, using the language of hegemonism to portray the Soviets in the PRC reflected China's ambition of competing with the Kremlin for leadership in the Third World and the socialist camp. The term, as used by the Chinese, attempted to emphasise that China was a true socialist country while the USSR was not, and to emphasise that the faults of Sino-Soviet conflicts were on the side of the aggressive Moscow.

Chinese criticism of Soviet hegemonism is not only the legacy of the Mao era. The Chinese have long had vivid memories of Tsarist Russia as one of the Western intruders who conspired to take over China over the centuries. In their research on the history of Russian invasions of China and its killing of Chinese inhabitants during the Boxer Uprising and Russo-Japanese War in the early 20th century, Chinese scholars in the early 1980s always equated Tsarist behaviours with contemporary Soviet chauvinism (Liu 1980, 167-168; Zhou 1983, 92-96). In the eyes of the Chinese, Moscow's present search for global supremacy was no more than a Tsarist tradition, 'disguised by the cover of socialism' (Li 1981, 25). Besides, some Chinese scholars in the early 1980s tended to fault the present Soviet regime for being reluctant to abrogate the unequal treaties that the Tsarist government had signed with imperial China. In their writings, they demanded the return of the lost territories that had resulted from those treaties (Zhou and Shi 1980, 104-112; Chen 1981, 45-46). By presenting the history of Soviet hegemonism and aggression in China in this way, these scholars hoped to mobilise support for China's stand in the Sino-Soviet border negotiation taking place then.[2]

Moreover, at the time Sino-Soviet relations were still in a stalemate, aggravated by the long-time shadow of Tsarist intrusions and Sino-Soviet conflicts since the 1960s. It is thus no surprise that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, a country neighbouring China, would produce a grave perceived threat to the PRC in the early 1980s. In January 1980, an anonymous commentary with a sinister tone appeared in the CCP mouthpiece *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily):

Once the Soviet Union has pushed its military force into the Persian Gulf and Indian subcontinent, it sends a dangerous signal. It shows that the USSR will continue its attack on Iran, Pakistan, and other countries. People should not assume that Moscow would target Afghanistan only. There is an urgent question before us: which country will become the next Afghanistan (*Remin ribao* 1980, 3)?

Chinese scholars not only were critical of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but also felt suspicious of Moscow's desire in advancing on China. CASS scholar Yu Sui warned, 'Both the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its support of Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia would pose a grievous threat to the security of Asia and China' (Yu 1983, 5). Xing Shugang, another CASS specialist in Soviet foreign relations, pointed out that 'Soviet troops stationing in Asia is nothing other than encircling the PRC, sowing discord between China and its neighbouring countries, and obstructing the progress of China's modernisation' (Xing 1981, 4). It seems that Chinese accusations of Soviet hegemony were not merely politically motivated. The Chinese did not want to see Moscow's expansionism becoming rampant in the world, as China would likely suffer from this situation. Chinese denunciation of Soviet hegemonism indicated not only

Soviet Foreign Policy in the Early 1980s: A View from Chinese Sovietology

Written by Jie Li

China's long memories of Russian humiliation, but also its feeling of being uncomfortable and insecure when Moscow extended its large military presence on the Chinese border.

Treatment of Soviet Relations with Yugoslavia and the Third World

With regard to Soviet foreign relations with other countries in the early 1980s, the analysis of Chinese scholars corresponded closely with the tone of post-Mao China's state policies. They attempted to respond to and legitimise China's official agendas through their research. There is one particularly significant example of the Chinese treatment of the Soviet-Yugoslavian relations. Although Mao Zedong once branded Yugoslavia as 'revisionist' (Mao 1974, 189), a derogatory term used to stigmatise any socialist countries opting for capitalist reforms, in the 1980s Yugoslavia became the centre of attention in the PRC. Under Deng, China's foreign policy resembled Yugoslavia's stance of being non-aligned and non-confrontational (*Remin ribao* 1984, 2).[3] Chinese leaders greatly admired Belgrade's spirit in defiance of what was seen as Moscow's overlordship, evidenced by Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang's 1983 high appraisal of 'Josip Tito's principles of independence and equality among all communist parties, and of opposing imperialism, colonialism, and hegemonism' (Liu 1983, 3).

Some articles by Chinese scholars in the early 1980s shared the official claims to promote the case of Yugoslavia in their research. Jiang Qi, a professor of international relations at East China Normal University, regarded Moscow's expelling Belgrade from the socialist camp in 1948 as owing to the latter's uncompromising attitude. He remarked, 'It was the origin of anti-hegemony struggle in Eastern Europe' (Jiang 1983, 7). Cai Kang, another scholar at East China Normal University, wrote, 'The non-aligned policy has evolved from a strategy of Yugoslavia to an international movement', and 'it has broken through the shadow of the Soviet-type foreign policy model for the first time in socialist history' (Cai 1984, 43).

Apart from its non-aligned foreign policy, Yugoslavia's economic model (which had shaken the dominant position of Soviet-style socialism) also became an important reason to gather the Chinese support of Belgrade's struggle against the Soviet rivalry. When ailing President Josip Tito's health condition deteriorated, the event became a paramount concern of *Renmin ribao* in the first half of 1980. At the time, the official organ of the CCP carried day-to-day reports from Belgrade, wishing for Tito's recovery and glorifying his contributions. After Tito's death, during the memorial ceremony held in the Yugoslavian Embassy in Beijing, the first CASS President and CCP ideologue Hu Qiaomu paid the following tribute to Tito and Yugoslavian inspiration:

Comrade Tito's greatest contribution to the contemporary communist movement was that he was the first one to recognise that socialism should not be confined to one model. He initiated a new way of building socialism suited to the concrete conditions of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia did not follow the over-centralised economic pattern introduced by the Soviet Union. Led by Tito, the Yugoslav people have broken away from the conventional Soviet methods which were formerly considered inviolable, and have blazed a new trail to develop a socialist economy. The Yugoslavian example provided valuable experience for other countries to choose their own road of socialist construction according to their specific conditions (Qi 1980, 1).

In the wake of the Maoist decades, China found that the Soviet model disguised by Maoism had made China poor and backward. China under Deng was eager to find a new way to make China a prosperous and strong socialist country. Yugoslavia's reform experience initiated by Tito, which included the mixing of central planning and market mechanisms and took a distinctive approach to socialism by disregarding the orthodox Soviet methods, struck a chord with the Chinese. Such a distinctive model is exactly the direction of post-Mao China's reforms. Many academic articles in the early 1980s expressed their approval of Yugoslavian socialism in preference to the dogmatic Soviet orthodoxy, and showed a strong desire to learn from Belgrade (Jiang 1982, 58; Wang 1984, 26-32; Zhao 1984, 77).

As such, Chinese scholars' open advocacy of Yugoslavia's position in its conflicts with Moscow was due to not only China's similar stance in non-aligned policy and anti-Soviet hegemony, but also to China's receptivity to Yugoslavia's unique reform experience. After the PRC became economically successful in the early 1980s, Chinese scholars would sometimes speak of Yugoslavia as a sort of maverick, as a countervailing weight to the Soviet brand of

Soviet Foreign Policy in the Early 1980s: A View from Chinese Sovietology

Written by Jie Li

socialism. This in turn would validate the exception of the Chinese way of practicing socialism. The treatment of Yugoslavia, in particular, reflects the increasing confidence of Chinese scholars. They were arguing that Moscow should accept a less centralised and more diverse socialist world.[4] Chinese scholars' clear-cut stand on supporting the post-Mao CCP policy of integrating Marxism with China's concrete circumstances and heralding the vision of the rise of Chinese-style socialism, could be reflected in their analysis of Soviet-Yugoslavian troubled relations.

In the early 1980s China did not fail to notice the rise of the Third World, which would play a crucial role in international relations and become a partner with China to contain the superpowers – at least in the CCP's strategic worldview. During his 1982 talk with Javier Perez de Cuellar, secretary-general of the United Nation, Deng Xiaoping remarked that the international influence of the Third World 'has increased considerably', and 'cannot be overlooked'. He stated that the foundation of China's foreign policy was 'opposing hegemonism and safeguarding world peace', which was also 'the position and immediate interests of the Third World'. Therefore, it would be essential for China and the region to 'strengthen unity and cooperation' (Deng 1995, vol 2, 407–408).

Concomitant with this strategic perspective, Chinese scholars attempted to use post-Mao China's Third World policy as their theoretical framework for analysis. Chinese scholars in the early 1980s seemed to view Soviet relations with the Third World through the prism of Sino-Soviet friction. Their arguments on the subject look more like explaining and demonstrating China's different treatment of the Third World, rather than genuine research of the Soviet policy in the region. In their articles, Chinese scholars strenuously promoted and defended the case of the Third World. Their arguments indirectly symbolised China's stance in challenging the Soviet authority, appealed for the redress of past historical wrongdoings on China done by Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, and promoted the moral superiority of Chinese socialism over that of the USSR.

During Mao's later period, China did not receive much goodwill from the Third World, mainly owing to Mao's excessive obsession with bringing Chinese-based socialism to the poor nations. Such a strategy of exporting revolutions had caused resentment in numerous countries, particularly those in Southeast Asia, where it led to a widespread anti-China sentiment (Bolt 2000, 43-47). Before Mao's death in 1976, the PRC was crippled not only by economic stagnation but also international isolation. In the wake of Maoist decades, the new leader Deng Xiaoping expected PRC foreign policy to detach from the radical determinant of Maoism and return to the realities of modern international politics (Deng 1995, vol 2, 248–249). The post-Mao leadership envisioned that China would become a progressive anti-colonial Asian power symbolised by its break with the Kremlin and the Maoist burden, and a true friend of the underdeveloped world (Wang 1985, 42).

In tune with the official view, some Chinese scholars portrayed Moscow as having taken advantage of numerous conflicts to interfere in the Third World, subjecting others to its beck and call (Xing 1981, 8–9; Zhang 1982, 19; Xie 1984, 45). These articles tend to exaggerate the gravity of Soviet hostility and Moscow's ability to dominate the world, although such radical views began to trail off after Gorbachev's accession. Most of the writings presented above seem to conclude that the Soviet Union had achieved complete failure in its relations with underdeveloped countries, become the only troublemaker and common enemy of the world, and ended up in having no friend in the global society.

Meanwhile, Chinese official organs attempted to foster a new image of China. They posited that the country was far from being isolated in the international community after the death of Mao; rather, it had joined the whole world to contain the advance of the superpowers (Mao 1980, 5; Cui 1981, 25). In 1981, Foreign Minister Huang Hua suggested to his Canadian colleague Mark MacGuigan, that China and the West should establish close ties on the basis of containing Soviet aggressive behaviour in the Third World (Li 1981, 1). On another occasion, he remarked that by carrying the banner of anti-hegemony, China would be able to increase its influence in the Third World, which would be conducive to its global status and open-door policy (Ma 1981, 3).

In 1982, CASS scholar Zhang Jinglin claimed that, along with a broad base of the Third World countries, 'An international anti-Soviet camp consisting of China and the West has developed rapidly' (Zhang 1982, 3). Two years later, both Li Jingjie (a CASS researcher) and Zhou Jirong (a professor of political science at Beijing University) agreed that after becoming stabilised and stronger, China would play a larger role in international affairs, namely by

Soviet Foreign Policy in the Early 1980s: A View from Chinese Sovietology

Written by Jie Li

halting the war and safeguarding peace (Li 1984, 19; Zhou 1984, 23). These authors seemingly made use of their subject study to argue that China after Mao was far from being separated from the world. Instead, China under Deng was re-engaging the world and earning respect from international society by joining the global campaign against the Soviet advance. As a result of such sharp Chinese denunciations of Moscow's expansionism, the West became eager for Chinese cooperation and sought to aid Chinese reforms, in order to ally with China in resisting the USSR (Lukin 2003, 216).

There are three other reasons for why Chinese scholars had a strong bias towards the Third World and sympathised with those countries involved when it came to Soviet-Third World relations. The first one may be historical. In the eyes of the CCP, both China and other underdeveloped countries shared the common experience of falling prey to imperialist encroachment in the past (Xu 1983, 3), and China, in particular, had been invaded by Tsars since the early modern period and treated unfairly by the Soviet regime after 1949 (Deng 1995, vol 3, 285–287). This historical background of complicated Sino-Soviet Russian relations was deeply rooted in the collective Chinese mind, and inevitably affected the writings of Chinese scholars (Li 2012, 37). Several articles in the early 1980s evidenced a strong grudge against the unequal relations between Moscow and the Third World. They condemned the forced Soviet model of socialism as a kind of neo-colonisation, which did not benefit the Third World, but instead made them backward and isolated (Zhang 1982, 6; Yu 1983, 4; Hong 1983, 49).

Moreover, in the early 1980s some Chinese writings voiced criticism of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as being contradictory to the first Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin's principle of internationalism (Lenin 1967, 26–29). On the other hand, they portrayed China as having wholeheartedly supported the Afghan resistance and the emancipation of other Third World nations, while never meddling in their affairs. According to those writings, China was the true disciple of Lenin's teachings, while Moscow's behaviour was incompatible with Leninist internationalism (Fang 1982, 35; Lu 1983, 17; Shen 1983, 9–10). This picture of the PRC as enlightened and committed to fulfilling its internationalist responsibility to the Third World is not a contemporary invention. Mao Zedong once put forth that CCP members should 'build China into a great and powerful socialist country and help the broad masses of the oppressed and exploited throughout the world in fulfilment of our great internationalist duty' (Mao 1993, vol 8, 320). In the 1980s, Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang said that the aid work to the Third World was China's 'compelling internationalist obligation' (Feng 1983, 2).

Thus, we can see that post-Mao China was aspiring to gain the upper hand over the Soviet Union in the name of the struggle against hegemonism, and more importantly, in the fight for moral leadership over the Third World. By using Lenin's internationalism to accuse Moscow of being chauvinistic, self-serving, and exploitative in its relations with the underdeveloped countries, Chinese scholars instead would project a fair, humble, and benevolent image of Beijing, enabling it to assume the moral high ground vis-à-vis Moscow.

Last, from the early 1980s onwards the post-Mao reforms led to substantial expansion of Chinese national power and a notable growth in its international prestige and influence, while the Soviet Union was in the grip of economic difficulties. Chinese scholars shared a growing pride in what China had accomplished so far vis-à-vis what they saw as the demoralised USSR. Yang Zhangming, a professor at Tongji University in Shanghai, said that many Third World states had been influenced by China and Yugoslavia to develop socialism according to their own conditions, while distancing themselves from 'some socialist states that would offer aid, but with aid, came interference' (Yang 1984, 84). Du Xiaoqiang, a scholar at Qinghua University, suggested that after China's success in reforms, its distinctive style of socialism might 'weaken the impact of the Soviet model on the Third World' (Du 1984, 6).

Chinese scholars at this stage lost no time in seizing the opportunity to portray China as the beacon of the Third World, by professing its respect to other countries' sovereignties and institutions, publicising its divergence with the Kremlin, and promoting the friendship and brotherhood between China and the developing nations. This was done in the hope that Chinese-style socialism would have greater appeal than the Soviet model and take root in not only the poor countries but the wider global society as well

Conclusion

Soviet Foreign Policy in the Early 1980s: A View from Chinese Sovietology

Written by Jie Li

In the early 1980s, Chinese discussions on Soviet foreign relations with other countries corresponded closely to the PRC's real security concerns on its border, its historical memories of the wrongdoings done by Tsarist Russia and the USSR, and the principle of post-Mao China's Soviet policy. As such, seen from the early 1980s Chinese criticisms of Soviet foreign policy, Chinese Soviet-watchers endeavoured to propagandise and justify PRC's post-Mao domestic and international agendas through their subject study.

As has been demonstrated, Chinese Soviet-watchers did not present many vicissitudes of Soviet international manoeuvres in their writings; instead, through research on the formation and evolution of Soviet foreign policy, they attempted to adjust their analyses to align with China's vision of itself and the world. While not a determinant in China's foreign policy making, Chinese Sovietology is not able to remain outside the confines of Chinese politics. The Party guidepost always transcends the academic norm. Seen from the article, Chinese Sovietology, by providing both principles and tactics, had been making assessments and proposing solutions on economic and political aspects of contemporary China, friendships and struggles in PRC's international relations. Through the interplay of politics and scholarship, scholars attempted to legitimise the CCP rule and the Chinese way of practicing socialism, as well as projected and envisioned the future of China in the reform era.

Notes

[1] On Mao Zedong's 'Three Worlds' theory, see Mao 1993, vol. 8, 441.

[2] On the Sino-Soviet border talk in the early 1980s, see Li 1981, 2.

[3] The Editorial stated that both 'China and Yugoslavia are pursuing independent and self-reliant foreign policies, and regarding world peace and human progress as major goals of our common international agendas'.

[4] The Soviet Union in the early 1980s was still unwilling to recognise that China's post-Mao reforms are genuinely socialist in nature. See Marsh 2005, 131-132.

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Soviet Foreign Policy in the Early 1980s: A View from Chinese Sovietology

Written by Jie Li

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Soviet Foreign Policy in the Early 1980s: A View from Chinese Sovietology

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