

Beyond Moscow-Centric Interpretation: An Examination of the China Connection in Eastern Europe and North Vietnam during the Era of De-Stalinization

YINGHONG CHENG
Delaware State University

THE YEARS 1956 and 1957 marked the first serious crisis in global communism during the Cold War with many significant events. Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1956 revealing Stalin's crimes shocked the communist world and initiated a course of de-Stalinization, which soon led to challenges to the communist system itself, as the revolts in Poland and Hungary in October and November 1956 demonstrated. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, although violent eruption of political protest was largely absent, inner party debates and intellectual dissent were common, accompanied by sporadic strikes of workers and students. In Asian communist countries, the intellectual dissent and criticism of the party became conspicuous in China, especially in the spring of 1957, during the Double-Hundred movement and the Rectification period, with a few cases of workers' strikes and student protests. In North Vietnam the intellectuals directly challenged the party during the so-called *Nhan Van/Giai Pham* (the names of two journals critical of the party) period in the fall of 1956, coupled with the peasant rebellion in Nghe-An Province and turbulence in the cities. The Hungarian revolution was suppressed in November 1956, and the entire atmosphere of the Soviet

Union and Eastern Europe underwent dramatic change. As Chinese intellectuals were still encouraged to criticize the party in the spring of 1957, however, Vietnamese intellectuals resumed their criticism of the regime as well. In June 1957, however, China launched the anti-Rightist campaign and ended the so-called "liberalization," and so did Vietnam after the new year of 1958. Thus a cross-communist world crisis was overcome.

In narrating and analyzing the above events, historians have most commonly relied on a Moscow-centric framework of interpretation. Most historians treat Moscow—the CPSU's Twentieth Congress in particular—as the center of political change while putting other communist countries on the periphery. These peripheral states initially responded to Moscow with shock and confusion, but soon many of them began to exploit this opportunity to assert their reformist thinking, which might otherwise have been difficult to justify. This Moscow-centric framework of interpretation largely reflects historical truth, given the influence and the leading role of the USSR in world communism of the time and the basic chronological order of events. But it is necessary, however, in applying any broad interpretational framework to history, to remain on alert against its blind spots. The main problem of the Moscow-centric framework is the tendency to ignore and underestimate sources of political change other than those initiated in Moscow and those connections and interactions not necessarily centered in Moscow. This in some cases leads to oversimplification of a complicated historical situation and misinterpreting the connections and interactions among communist countries.

This article examines the process of de-Stalinization, or liberalization, from a perspective based on the China connection in Eastern Europe and Vietnam, which has been either underestimated or left out in many Moscow-centric narratives.¹ The term "China connection" means either a direct Chinese influence or parallels between these

¹ For example, Richard H. Hudelson's *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (New York: Westview, 1993), Willie Thompson's *The Communist Movement Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), Geoffrey Swain and Nigel Swain's *Eastern Europe Since 1945* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), and Ben Fowkes's *The Rise and Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993) did not mention China's role in de-Stalinization and the handling of the Polish-Hungarian crisis while following a pattern of Moscow-centric interpretation. Vietnam is even more beyond the vision of the Moscow-centric framework, and many communist historians were simply unaware of the Vietnamese case in de-Stalinization. One author states that "Certainly none of the parties of southern or south-eastern Asia suffered major convulsions over it [de-Stalinization], possibly because their perspectives, as largely peasant-based organizations and not involved in the Cominform, were less intimately bound up than the Eastern European's with the standing of the Soviet Union or

countries and China. The article presents and connects two cases. The first is the Chinese influence in some Eastern European countries, and even the Soviet Union as well, from 1955 to 1958. The second is Vietnamese intellectuals' challenge to the regime and the regime's response, both of which show interesting parallels between the two countries. The China connection in both the Eastern European and the Vietnamese cases clearly indicates a different source contributing to de-Stalinization and even suggests an expanded time frame of such turbulence from as early as 1955 (before Khrushchev's secret report) to as late as 1958 (one year after the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian uprising), thus enriching our understanding of the global communist crisis with broader sources and longer duration.

THE EASTERN EUROPEAN CASE

For most historians, China's significant influence in Eastern Europe after Stalin's death began with its role in solving political crises there in October and November 1956.² Briefly speaking, when Moscow decided to put down the Polish workers' uprising in mid-October 1956 by using force, Beijing opposed the decision on the grounds that the Polish problem was caused mainly by "big-power chauvinism" (referring to Moscow's arrogance and interference in the domestic affairs of other countries) instead of Western antisocialist conspiracy. On the contrary, when Moscow was wavering between using force and a hands-off policy in face of the Hungarian crisis at the very end of October, Beijing urged Moscow to send its troops into Budapest. According to some Chinese sources made available in the late 1990s, from 19 to 31 October 1956, a time in which the Polish-Hungarian crisis reached its peak, communication and discussion between Moscow and Beijing were unusually constant and intense.

On 19 October, after the Polish party elected Wladislaw Gomulka, whose attitude toward Moscow was considered to be very dubious by

the significance of Stalin's memory . . ." This statement clearly excludes Vietnam from the crisis in the communist world in 1956–1957 simply because the revolution was peasant-based and less directly influenced by Moscow. Willie Thompson, *The Communist Movement Since 1945*, p. 77.

² An example of early works of such a point of view was G. F. Hudson's "China and the Communist 'Thaw.'" The article was an epilogue for Roderick Macfarquhar's *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals* (New York: Praeger, 1960), p. 299. A recent example of this point of view was Jian Chen's *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 145.

the Kremlin, as its new leader, Pavel Yudin, the Soviet ambassador to China, informed Beijing of the grave situation in Warsaw, implying the strong possibility that the Soviet military would intervene in Poland. Mao Zedong immediately convened an enlarged politburo meeting and decided not to endorse any military intervention led by Moscow. The next day Mao summoned Yudin and asked him to convey the decision of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to Moscow immediately and "word by word." On 21 October Mao again summoned the Soviet ambassador, expressed the same concern, and also voiced his discontent with Khrushchev's attack on Stalin, which the Chinese had attributed to the crisis. In the meantime, the situation in Hungary became more strained and Moscow no longer thought that the ambassador channel was efficient and authoritative enough. At Moscow's request, therefore, a Chinese delegation led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping went to Moscow on 23 October and stayed there until 31 October, when Russian tanks entered Budapest. During the stay the Chinese delegation was informed of developments in Hungary and was consulted by Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders on a daily basis. Members even attended the emergency meetings of the presidium of the CPSU on 24 and 26 October.

The most critical moments came on 29 and 30 October. On the evening of 29 October, Khrushchev and other Russian leaders met the Chinese in their residence and told them both Poland and Hungary were asking Moscow to withdraw its army from their countries. While insisting Moscow should change its "big-power chauvinism" attitude toward other communist countries, Liu Shaoqi said that under current circumstances it would be better for the Soviet army to remain and combat the antirevolutionaries. During the conversation the Chinese delegation received a call from Mao, whose suggestion was different from Liu's. Mao said that it was the time for Moscow to withdraw its army from the two countries and let them be independent. Liu accepted Mao's suggestion and conveyed it to Khrushchev. The next day, however, the Chinese delegation received a situation report from the Soviet leadership. The report was written by Anastas Mikoyan, the Soviet first deputy premier and skillful communicator between Moscow and other communist states, who had been sent to Hungary before the Chinese delegation arrived in Moscow. The report stated that since 29 October, with the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Budapest and dissolution of the Hungarian security force, the Hungarian capital and many other parts of the country had been in chaos, and antirevolutionaries were killing communists. The Chinese delegation was taken by surprise. After a whole day of discussion, they

concluded that the nature of the Hungarian development was different from that of the Polish, so the Soviet army needed to reenter the capital and crush the antirevolutionaries. Then in the evening Liu Shaoqi called Mao. Mao changed his earlier stand that the Russians should leave and agreed with the delegation's conclusion, because, in addition to Liu's report, he had been receiving daily situation reports from Hungary written by Ho Deqing, the Chinese ambassador, and Hu Jibang, chief correspondent of the *People's Daily* in Budapest. But he said it would be better if the Russians would wait a while to let more antirevolutionaries expose themselves—a typical Maoist tactic later on used to smoke out China's Rightists. After calling Mao, the Chinese requested an emergency meeting with the Russians. In the meeting, Liu Shaoqi, vice chairman of the CCP's central committee, strongly suggested that Khrushchev not "give up" in Hungary but make more efforts to save the situation, while Deng Xiaoping, the general secretary of the CCP, explicitly urged that the Russian army return to the capital and seize the government. But Khrushchev was hesitant. He told the Chinese that since the situation had changed considerably in Hungary, the return of the Russian army would mean an occupation of the country and the Russians would be regarded as conquerors. Therefore Soviet leadership, Khrushchev told the Chinese, had decided not to send its troops back. Since the Russians had made the decision, the Chinese did not go further to assert their opinions. Instead Liu said to the Russians, jokingly, that yesterday we tried to pursue you to withdraw but you did not agree; today you came and tried to pursue us to agree with your decision to withdraw. All people in the meeting laughed. Then Liu told the Russians that the Chinese delegation would return to Beijing the next evening. But the next evening, 31 October, the Chinese delegation received a call from the Kremlin just before departure for the airport. The Russian leaders asked the Chinese to arrive the airport one hour earlier than scheduled to have an emergency meeting. At the airport, the Chinese met Khrushchev and other Russian leaders. Khrushchev told them the Russian leadership had changed its mind overnight and decided to send troops back to Budapest. Excited, Liu Shaoqi said that the Chinese were glad that now the Russian leadership had taken a stand to defend socialism. In fact, before the airport meeting, the Russian army had already moved back toward the Hungarian capital.³

³ The above Chinese account is largely based on Shi Zhe, "The Polish/Hungarian Incident and Liu Shaoqi's Visit to the Soviet Union," *Bai Nian Chao* 2 (1997): 11–17. Shi

Moscow's vacillation, reflected in the Chinese account, in solving the Hungarian crisis may be confirmed by Khrushchev's own statement: "I don't know how many times [we changed our minds] about whether to get out of Hungary or 'crush the mutiny.'"⁴ It is difficult to decide exactly to what extent Beijing influenced Moscow in making decisions, but as the above Chinese account shows, the Chinese did play some role in the process and the Russians did take China's attitude seriously. On 3 November 1956, three days after Russian tanks rumbled into Budapest, China's *People's Daily* was one of the earliest communist papers worldwide to hail the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian revolt. China further endorsed the political change in Hungary by sending Zhou Enlai, its premier, to the still-smoldering Budapest in mid-January 1957, where Zhou's residence (although he stayed there for only one day) had to be guarded by Soviet tanks.

In the history of Chinese diplomacy, the Chinese influence in the Polish-Hungarian crisis was the first time China exerted its power in Europe, "a development the Soviets would later regret," as Joseph L. Nogee and Robert H. Donaldson pointed out.⁵ Although the details of the Chinese hard line on the Hungarian crisis were not known until the late 1990s, China's public endorsement of the crushing of the Hungarian revolt—represented by the presence of the Chinese delegation in Moscow during the time, the prompt official statements, and Zhou Enlai's timely visit to Budapest—would be taken as a clue to China's stand in that crisis during next four decades.

But China's stand on the Hungarian crisis, no matter how tough and impressive, showed only one side of China's policy and influence during the era of de-Stalinization or liberalization. China's criticism of Russian "big-power chauvinism," its rejection of Russian interference in the Polish crisis, and Mao's suggestion that Russian troops withdraw from Poland and Hungary before the situation became worse suggest a more complicated Chinese stand. If we extend our vision to the entire era of de-Stalinization and reexamine some less noticed facts before and after the Polish-Hungarian crisis, we will certainly find a different

Zhe was Mao's secretary and Russian translator in the late 1940s and 1950s. He worked as a translator for the CCP's delegation to Moscow in October 1956. For a more detailed account of the subject, Jian Chen's *Mao's China and the Cold War* (chap. 6, "Beijing and the Polish and Hungarian Crises of 1956") provides a more comprehensive description by using a number of Chinese sources. There are some minor differences in Shi Zhe's account and Chen's synthesis.

⁴ N. S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: 1970), p. 418.

⁵ Joseph L. Nogee and Robert H. Donaldson, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984), p. 219.

China, whose liberal-oriented stand, judged from a strict Stalinist point of view and regardless of its intention, was echoed among the Eastern European reformists or anti-Stalinists as early as 1955 and lasted as late as the summer of 1957, more than half a year after the crushing of the Hungarian revolt.

There was evidence showing that China began to attract attention from some Eastern European countries during the time when, shortly after Stalin's death, the Soviet leadership began to show a certain willingness to allow policy changes, named the "New Course," initiated by Georgi Molotov (as early as spring 1953 with the assistance of Lavrentii Beria, according to Geoffrey and Nigel Swain⁶), the immediate successor of Stalin later replaced by Khrushchev. Domestically the New Course included modification of the Stalinist emphasis on heavy industry, accordingly paying more attention to agriculture and light industry by loosening control over the prices of food and clothing, and relaxation of political terror. Internationally, the New Course involved the rehabilitation of Yugoslavia's Tito—who had been expelled from the communist world by Stalin in 1948—by Khrushchev's sudden visit to Belgrade in May 1955. Compared with the storm brought about by the CPSU's Twentieth Congress later on, this New Course was like a breeze, but it did "thaw" the soil frozen during the rigid Stalinist regime. The Eastern European parties responded to Moscow—to some extent encouraged by the Kremlin—by introducing the same changes in economic, social, and party affairs.

In order to obtain more autonomy from Moscow, some Eastern European countries turned to Beijing for inspiration under the pretext that China was in the stage of socialist transition (from the "New Democracy" to socialism) similar to that of Eastern Europe, whereas the Soviet Union had entered a much higher stage of socialist construction. For example, in East Germany, which was the first one to take some New Course policies in Eastern Europe as early as 1953, the Twenty-fifth Plenum of the Socialist Unity Party of East Germany (SED) passed a resolution (1 November 1955) adopting the Chinese method of nationalizing the remaining large private enterprises by offering 50 percent compensation to the former owners of the business.⁷ To buy rather than confiscate means of production and allow the former owners to participate in management was a Maoist policy to

⁶ Geoffrey Swain and Nigel Swain, *Eastern Europe Since 1945*, pp. 71–72.

⁷ William E. Griffith, ed, *Communism in Europe: Continuity, Change, and the Sino-Soviet Dispute*, vol. 2 (Boston: MIT Press, 1966), p. 101.

smooth the transition that was quite different from the Soviet model of socialist nationalization. The East German interest in the more moderate Chinese method of nationalization continued to grow in 1956 and was reflected in articles and reports in newspapers and party magazines. *Neu Zeit*, a party organ, for example, reprinted an article on 13 June 1956 under the title "Why We Capitalists Welcome Socialism," written by the chairman of the All-Chinese Industrial and Trade Society and originally published in *People's China*, a Chinese foreign propaganda organ, as a response to inquiries from owners of private enterprises in East Germany. In the September edition of the SED's theoretical periodical *Einheit*, a Chinese article titled "New Stage in the Transformation of Capitalist Industry and Capitalist Trade in China" was published. When Walter Ulbricht, the general secretary of the SED, reported to his party on his trip to Beijing for Eighth Congress of the CCP in September 1956, he emphasized the alliance of the Chinese Communists with the so-called "national bourgeoisie."⁸

In Hungary, the Chinese influence was reflected in the ideology of emerging Hungarian nationalist communists, particularly in Imre Nagy's admiration of China's Five Principles of coexistence. Nagy, who was purged during Stalin's later years, rehabilitated during the New Course, and appointed as Hungarian premier from late 1953 to 1955, proposed his reformist line that included easing the tempo of industrialization, allowing peasants to leave collective farms, and relaxing police terror. For this he was ousted in March 1955 by Hungarian Stalinists led by Matyas Rakosi. In his forced retirement, however, Nagy sensed the coming political storm and wrote a lengthy thesis titled "In Defense of the New Course" in late 1955 and early 1956. The paper was later published as a book in the West under the title *On Communism*, in which four major issues were addressed: industry, agriculture, political terror, and foreign policy. In the foreign policy chapter, China's Five Principles of coexistence became the pillars for his theoretical framework defending Hungarian national sovereignty and independence from the Soviet Union. The Five Principles of coexistence included mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, nonaggression, noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.⁹ China

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Robert V. Daniels, ed., *A Documentary History of Communism* (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 346–349.

first proclaimed these principles in a communiqué with India in 1954. Then in 1955 at the Bandung (Indonesia) Conference of Asian and African states, Zhou Enlai formally proposed them to all non-Western countries as the principles of international affairs as opposed to colonialism. The official Chinese statements referring to these principles often came with a restrictive phrase, “between states of different social systems,” which was made to allay the noncommunist Asian countries’ fear about revolutions exported by China, but left unclear whether they could apply to “states of the same social system.” The title of the foreign policy chapter in Nagy’s paper was “The Five Basic Principles of International Relations and the Question of Our Foreign Policy.” Not only were the Five Principles used as the overarching thesis in the chapter, but also it was announced that they “must extend to the relations between the countries within the democratic and socialist camps.”¹⁰ Nagy’s paper was circulated among dissident Hungarian communists, and in the spring of 1956 Nagy delivered one copy of his paper to the party’s central committee and another to Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, the Russian ambassador in Budapest.¹¹ It was a tragic irony that in less than one year Nagy’s wishful thinking of the application of the Five Principles to the Hungarian-Russian relations and his illusion about China’s sympathy for the Hungarians would evaporate when Beijing urged Moscow to intervene and the *People’s Daily* was one the first communist papers to praise the suppression.¹²

Fully aware of the attractions of its own policies and the tensions between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, China observed the difficulties of Stalinist leaders in Eastern Europe with great interest and in some cases maintained active contacts with emerging reformists. For example, according to Janos Radvanyi, a high-ranking official in the Hungarian Foreign Ministry in charge of Asian affairs who had

¹⁰ Imre Nagy, *On Communism* (New York: Praeger, 1957), p. 23.

¹¹ Janos Radvanyi, “The Hundred Flowers Movement and the Hungarian Revolution,” in his *Hungary and Superpowers* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 23. The article was originally published in *China Quarterly* 43 (July–September 1970): 121–129, under the title “The Hungarian Revolution and the Hundred Flowers Campaign,” but some revisions and additions were made before inclusion in the book. The author was a senior diplomatic official in the Hungarian Foreign Ministry in the mid-1950s and the head of the Asian Department of the Ministry in 1958–1959.

¹² On 1 November 1956, the commentary of the *People’s Daily* said that relations between socialist countries should be established on the basis of the Five Principles. But three days later the paper hailed the Soviet crush of Hungarian revolt.

close ties with Hao Deqing, the Chinese ambassador in Budapest, the Chinese embassy established a very effective information network within the Hungarian Communist Party and government. The embassy even gained the reputation of “the best informed foreign post” in the capital. Through this network, Hao learned Nagy was working on the paper, and when the paper was delivered to the party’s central committee, Hao obtained a copy through a Hungarian friend serving in the secretariat at the party’s headquarters. In contrast to the Soviet embassy’s invitations to Hungarian Stakhanovists (model workers celebrated in Stalinist regime), Hao was more interested in entertaining leading Hungarian writers, artists, economists, and journalists—some of them were not regarded as trustworthy by the government—with fine Chinese food in the embassy. Hao also traveled widely in the country and obtained firsthand information about the changing atmosphere in the wake of Stalin’s death from local cadres. China’s cultural attaché, who spoke fluent Hungarian, also maintained close connections with Hungarian intellectuals, while the reporters of the Xinhua News Agency and Chinese exchange students reported to the embassy on the activities of the famous Petofi Circle, the center of dissidence.

After the CPSU’s Twentieth Congress, with the discrediting of Stalinist policies coming into air, China became more attractive in Eastern Europe, and China’s activities promoting its influence became more aggressive. Marked by the publication of “Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom, Let One Hundred Schools of Thought Contend,” a policy report made by Lu Dingyi, the head of the propaganda department of the CCP, in May 1956 and published by *People’s Daily* on 13 June, China initiated an intellectual liberalization aimed at releasing accumulated internal pressures in the short run, with a long-run purpose of allowing some flexibility and criticism within the regime in order to win popular support and detect mistakes. The Double-Hundred policy soon became a new focus of the Chinese attractiveness in Eastern Europe. In September the CCP’s Eighth Congress opened, and all Eastern European communist parties sent delegations to Beijing. The event was used by Beijing at that critical moment to introduce its own road toward socialism and to build up relations with the post-Stalinist generation among Eastern European leaders. For example, Janos Kadar, the head of the Hungarian delegation, who was purged during Stalin’s years but rehabilitated in 1954, was very popular in the Hungarian party for his anti-Stalinist stand. Chinese leaders were very interested in this emerging new leader, and Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and Zhou Enlai all had long conversations with him. On

1 October Kadar once again represented the Hungarian party at the celebration of China's National Day in Beijing.¹³

One point that has not received adequate attention on the Double-Hundred policy is that the metaphoric expression (directly from Mao himself and characteristic of his style) created a false impression of tolerating various—if not all—ideological opinions, especially among those who were unfamiliar with the CCP's ideologically oppressive past, such as the Yanan Rectification in the 1940s and the Thought Reform Campaign in the early 1950s. This was particularly the case when the Double-Hundred policy aroused widespread pro-Chinese sympathy in Eastern Europe, where people were excited by the slogan itself but did not have adequate knowledge about the CCP's history and had no chance to scrutinize the specific contents of the Chinese materials introducing the new policy. In Hungary the Chinese ambassador took the opportunity to enhance pro-Chinese sentiment by providing more information to Hungarian intellectuals and students, and he even made a special effort to publicize the CCP's Eighth Congress, which opened in September and confirmed the Double-Hundred policy, by supplying abundant information to Hungarian press and radio. As a result, the CCP's Eighth Congress was given a great deal of publicity by Hungarian media, which further nourished the pro-Chinese sentiment. Many dissenting Hungarian intellectuals came to believe that the Double-Hundred policy truly reflected the intention of the Chinese communists. In the meantime, with Nagy's rehabilitation and reappointment as premier, China's Five Principles of coexistence were used against Soviet "big-power chauvinism"—a term also coined by the Chinese. The Hungarian illusion of China lasted until the last minute, when *Irodalmi Ujsag* (Literary gazette; the organ of the revolutionary writers) declared on 2 November (two days after China urged Khrushchev to crush the Hungarian revolt) that "The West and the East are on our side. America has proclaimed her faith in our cause as clearly as have powerful nations like China and India."¹⁴

It is noteworthy that after the Hungarian revolt was put down, China's role in relaxation of control and tolerance of dissent became even more prominent among Eastern European reformists. In contrast to the general atmosphere in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in

¹³ Janos Radvanyi, "The Hundred Flowers Movement and the Hungarian Revolution," pp. 23–24.

¹⁴ Griffith, ed., *Communism in Europe*, 1: 242.

the wake of the Hungarian incident, China continued its own liberal-oriented practice initiated in May 1956. The Double-Hundred policy was not interrupted, and in February 1957 Mao added to it by making the famous speech "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions within People," which acknowledged the existence of contradictions in socialist society and thus legitimized a certain degree of discontent or even nonantagonistic opposition against specific policies of the government. In April the CCP intensified its efforts to solicit criticism by launching a "rectification" campaign, which continued until early summer, when the CCP waged a counterattack against critical intellectuals with the sweeping anti-Rightist campaign. The question when Mao decided to use the Double-Hundred and Rectification campaigns as baits to "lure snakes out of their nests" is yet an unanswered question, although some have suggested it could have been as early as anytime after the Hungarian crisis.¹⁵ Whatever Mao's real intention was, for the Eastern European intellectuals who felt chilled to the bone while out in the cold following the Hungarian suppression, the Chinese persistence in liberalization was a beacon in the darkness and the only hope for them to retain the freedom they obtained after the CPSU's Twentieth Congress. The Maoist concepts of Double-Hundred and nonantagonistic contradictions within people were music to their ears, because they implied critique of labeling all criticism as "bourgeois," "capitalist," or "imperialist" and thus not only questioned the legitimacy of silencing all dissenting voices, but also attributed aggravation of domestic crises to government policies and foreign interference. They were not completely misreading the Chinese message. As a matter of fact, the Polish-Hungarian crisis was taken by the Chinese as a textbook example of problems caused by the suppression of dissenting voices, particularly in the first half of 1957, when they were fully confident about their own regime's popular support.¹⁶

¹⁵ Li Shenzi, "Mao zhuxi shi shimu shihou jue ding ying she chu dong de?" (When did Chairman Mao decide to allure snakes to come out of their nests?), *Yenhuang chunqiu*, January 1999, pp. 5–14. Li was an advisor on international affairs for the central committee of the CCP in the 1950s and 1960s, and in the late 1990s was the leading figure among Chinese liberal intellectuals. His point of view on Mao's decision of anti-Rightist campaign was very influential.

¹⁶ For example, in a meeting with party's provincial secretaries on January 27, Mao said that the oppressive policies of Rakosi (such as allowing no strikes, no petition, no criticism, etc.) caused the Hungarian crisis. Mao Zedong, *Mao zedong xuanjie* (Collective works) (Beijing: People's Publisher, 1980), 5: 354. Two months later, in a conference held by the department of propaganda of the CCP, Lu Dingyi, the head of the department, mentioned

It was against this background that many Eastern European anti-Stalinists “were much intended to see in Peking a mecca of revisionism” (meaning anti-Stalinism).¹⁷ In East Germany, the reformist communists, led by Karl Schirdewan (a member of Polish party’s secretariat and politburo), Paul Wandel (a member of the party’s secretariat in charge of education), and Jürgen Kuczynski (an influential Marxist economist), among others, praised China for its exemplary work seeking harmony between party and people through distinguishing “antagonistic” contradictions from “nonantagonistic” contradictions and thus encouraging criticism. Schirdewan said China had understood how to use the CPSU’s Twentieth Congress in a “creative” way. Wandel singled out China as the only socialist country where the priority of the party had been given to “the indivisible relationship between party and masses.” Kuczynski openly advocated China’s Double-Hundred policy: “Let the flowers bloom: each in its own way—for all flowers adorn the world with their thousand-fold colors, scents, and shapes. That is the true progressive attitude toward scientists, writers, and artists.”¹⁸ Their activities and speeches forced the conservative clique, represented by Ulbricht (although he himself once showed great interest in China’s moderate socialist nationalization practice), to engage in months of discussion with them in 1957. One response Ulbricht made in February to the advocacy of the Double-Hundred policy was “our main problem is not ‘to tell all flowers to bloom’ but rather to find the right selections of flowers, and to grow what is truly new and useful, without tolerating the growth of noxious weeds under the pretext that they are flowers.”¹⁹

In Poland, W. Gomulka, the party’s first secretary, who tried to maintain a neutral stand between Stalinist and reformist lines, said that his party watched China “with profound sympathy.”²⁰ He praised the CCP for its “greatest boldness” in contributing to “the creative teachings of Marxism-Leninism” by the introduction of “new methods in solving nonantagonistic contradictions” and “the hundred blossoming flowers,” which was “so far unknown in the practice of social-

Gero, the secretary of the Hungarian party in 1956, as an example of aggravating domestic situations by suppressing different opinions. Lu Dingyi, *Lu Ding yi wen xuan* (The anthology of Lu Dingyi) (Beijing: People’s Publisher, 1992), p. 556.

¹⁷ Griffith, *Communism in Europe*, 1: 103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1: 104.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ S. L. Shneiderman’s *The Warsaw Heresy* (New York: Horizon Press, 1959) is an illustrative description about Gomulka’s tightrope policy in the wake of the Polish-Hungarian October Crisis.

ist construction in other countries.” Gomulka’s pro-Chinese remarks were made on 15 May, when he was addressing his party’s ninth plenum. One week before, a Polish party journal published an article saying, “The contradictions within the people—in spite of the specific difference between the countries—also appear in our country. To overcome them through persuasion and discussion requires a decided struggle against bureaucracy, an improvement of the state machinery and an elastic policy toward political and class allies.” The article also appealed for transplanting “the Chinese flowers.”²¹

Similar appeals for imitating China, transplanting China’s “flowers” in particular, were heard in other Eastern European countries in the late spring of 1957, when the “rectification” campaign reached its peak in China. In response to this appeal, a Hungarian party magazine cautioned on 26 May:

Of Chinese movements in recent months that which has spread in the field of literature, art and science, i.e., “let every flower bloom,” is the most widely spread in Hungary. . . . In its first stage it was attacked for leading to the liberalization of intellectual life and the repression of Marxism. . . . Comrade Mao Tse-tung, who is familiar with the Chinese intelligentsia and knows that its majority is loyal to socialism, defended the slogan of “a hundred flowers” . . . after the sad experience of the past it is perhaps just as well to guard ourselves against the idea of realizing Chinese methods in Hungary.²²

From the very beginning of China’s tolerance of different “flowers,” Moscow watched with doubt, disapproval, and even anxiety, especially after the Hungarian revolt. According to Chinese sources recently made available, when the CCP decided to announce the Double-Hundred policy, they sent Lu Dingyi, who would be the first to speak of the policy, to inform Pavel Yudin, the Soviet ambassador in Beijing. The CCP did this in accordance with a customary practice that Moscow and Beijing should inform each other of important policy changes in advance—although Moscow failed to follow this practice in the case of Khrushchev’s secret report, resulting in Beijing’s resentment. After Lu Dingyi explained the policy to Yudin, the Soviet ambassador responded by providing Lu with a copy of one of Lenin’s articles relevant to the subject but against tolerance. On the way back from the

²¹ G. F. Hudson, “China and the Communist ‘Thaw,’” p. 30.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 304.

embassy, Lu sighed to Yu Guangyuan, his secretary, “So entrenched is their [Russian’s] dogmatism!”²³ After the Polish-Hungarian crisis, the Chinese persistence in liberalization intensified Moscow’s uneasiness. In April 1957 Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov, chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, visited China. According to Li Yueran, who was the Russian interpreter for the CCP’s central committee from 1949 to 1964, Voroshilov expressed his concerns and worries about the Double-Hundred policy directly to Mao at least twice. Voroshilov said that he did not understand why all of those anti-socialist, anti-communist party opinions had been allowed to be published in newspapers. He warned Mao of the danger of such a liberalization, citing the Hungarian revolt as example. Mao assured him that China was not Hungary and that Chinese communists did not want to be “flowers and grasses in the greenhouse.” He was fully confident, he told Voroshilov, that if the hidden enemies wanted to take advantage of this tolerance to overthrow the CCP, they would only end up “exposing themselves.”²⁴

The typical Soviet attitude toward the Chinese policies of liberalization, and toward the fanfare in Chinese newspapers about the Double-Hundred policies in particular, was reflected in Khrushchev’s words. Khrushchev was deeply disturbed by the fact that the Chinese “are good at coming up with catchy phrases” and that they “know how to introduce the right slogan at the right time.”²⁵ Recalling the confusions in the Soviet Union created by the Chinese slogan, he said:

Our own propagandists asked me how we should respond. “Our people are reading in the newspapers about this new campaign in China,” they told me, “This Hundred Flowers talk is already creeping into Soviet society.” We instructed our newspaper editors and propagandists to drop the subject of the Chinese campaign and not to touch it again. Our position was that the Hundred Flowers was a Chinese slogan for internal consumption only, and that it did not apply in the USSR. We avoided any direct criticism of the campaign but we also refrained from supporting it . . . Any peasant knows that certain flowers ought to be cultivated but others should be cut down. Some plants bear fruit which is bitter to the taste or damaging to the

²³ Chen Qingquan, “Lu Ding yi tui xin shuang bai fang zheng shi mu?” (How did Lu Dingyi advocate the “Double-Hundred” policy?), *Yenhuang chunqiu*, September 2000, p. 6.

²⁴ Li Yueran, *The Leaders of the New China on the Stage of Foreign Affairs* (Beijing: People’s Liberation Army Press, 1990), pp. 127–128.

²⁵ Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 275.

health—while others grow uncontrollably and choke the roots of the crops around them.²⁶

Khrushchev had already been in trouble because of his de-Stalinization campaign, therefore he could not afford any more liberalization policies, although he understood that Mao “wanted to goad people into expressing their innermost thoughts” in order to catch those he considered “harmful.”

Khrushchev also rejected Mao’s thesis concerning contradictions among people in socialist countries, which was also echoed sympathetically in Eastern Europe. On 2 June 1957, at the peak of the Chinese rectification campaign and on the eve of the anti-Rightist campaign, he was interviewed by the correspondent of America’s CBS Television and Radio in Moscow. When he was asked about his attitude toward Beijing’s recent statement that in socialist countries “there can exist contradictions between the masses and the leader,” Khrushchev gave the American correspondent a blunt answer: “We believe that we have no contradictions of that matter.”²⁷

All of these episodes clearly indicate a strong Chinese influence on liberalization in Eastern Europe and even in the Soviet Union in 1957. Moscow’s disapproval of and warning to China and its stopping the spread of such a liberalization in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself revealed two major concerns. The first was apparently the apprehension about the political stability in the newly pacified Soviet satellite states; the second was the Soviet vigilance against the Chinese challenge to Moscow’s leading role in the communist bloc, given the fact that Moscow’s position had been seriously weakened by de-Stalinization and the Polish-Hungarian crisis.

Finally and ironically, China’s influence was also reflected from the opposite direction. When Mao signaled the anti-Rightist campaign in early June 1957, the conservatives in Eastern Europe felt relieved. Some of them made quick responses and even similar actions. For example, in East Germany the correspondent of *Neues Deutschland*, the party’s magazine, reported on 12 July from Beijing, “The main thrust is [now] aimed against the ‘right.’ . . . Now the advocates of the ‘right’ are being publicly exposed.”²⁸ A few months later, in the early 1958, Ulbricht launched a campaign against “revisionists” in his party

²⁶ Ibid., p. 271.

²⁷ Hudson, “China and the Communist ‘Thaw,’” p. 307.

²⁸ Griffith, *Communism in Europe*, 1: 78–79, 105.

with the purge of Karl Schirdewan (member of the politburo), Fred Oelssner (member of politburo and the long-time party ideologist), Ernst Wollweber (the second minister of state security), and Paul Wandel (an influential Marxist economist). They had been sympathetic to China and had advocated application of Chinese policies, the Double-Hundred policy in particular. This East German campaign also inflicted punishment upon many intellectuals who misread messages from China and thus exposed themselves as did those Chinese Rightists who took the bait prepared by Mao.

THE VIETNAMESE CASE

Chinese influence in the Vietnamese case should be considered in a totally different light. If the Chinese influence in Eastern Europe came late (after Stalin's death) and was limited compared with the Soviet influence in the area, then the close connection—promoted by traditional and cultural links between the two nations—between Chinese and Vietnamese communists was much deeper and can be traced back to the 1920s. Many Vietnamese communists, Ho Chi Minh himself included, were once engaged in the Chinese communist movement and took refuge in China during the 1930s and early 1940s. The triumph of the Chinese revolution in 1949 not only furnished cross-border support in the forms of advisory and material assistance to the Vietnamese revolution, but also provided a model for emulation. In March 1951, at the Second Congress of the Vietnamese communist party, Mao's thought was to parallel Marxism and Leninism as the party's guidelines for the new constitution. Mao's picture was displayed along with the pictures of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin.²⁹

Within this historical context, Vietnamese developments in the era of de-Stalinization had more connections with China than with the USSR. Unlike Eastern European countries, whose most imminent problems at the time resulted from transplanting the Stalinist model, including overemphasis of heavy industry, lack of everyday necessities, grievances from previous purges, police terror, and, on top of that, political control from Moscow, North Vietnam's most acute problems

²⁹ Hoan Van Hoan, *My Memoir* (Beijing: People's Liberation Army Press, 1987), p. 277. Hoan was one of the former North Vietnamese leaders. In the late 1970s, when Sino-Vietnamese relations became strained, he deserted to Beijing owing to his pro-Chinese stance.

resulted from their imitation of the Chinese model. Among the borrowed Chinese practices, three in particular were causing widespread discontent. The first was land reform, in which any better-off peasant could be labeled a “landlord,” sent to “people’s court,” and publicly executed without any legal process, with sympathizers facing severe punishment. The second was thought reform, in which intellectuals—even those who had proved their commitment to the revolution by participating in it—were rounded up and sent to special schools or study sessions to be reeducated and forced to confess. The third was control over intellectuals by a military regime. This was because until February 1955, North Vietnam did not have a ministry of culture, and most intellectuals who participated in the Anti-French War—artists in particular—were enrolled in the communist army and were thus under the grip of the army’s General Political Bureau, which was modeled after that of the Soviet Union and, more directly, China. Many political officers were trained in China and instructed the intellectuals’ activities, public and private, through military discipline: they had to get a pass, for example, to leave the barracks where they lived, like soldiers.

After Stalin’s death, like elsewhere in communist world, the dissenting voice also began to be heard among North Vietnamese intellectuals as early as 1955. In February, about thirty writers and artists in the army drafted a resolution to the party’s central committee “demanding the abolition of the [army’s] General Political Bureau’s leadership over arts and letters in the army.” Accompanying this resolution was an “Outline Policy for Arts and Letters,” which included three demands: “1) hand over the leadership of arts and letters to the artists and writers; 2) establish an arts and letters association within the structure of army organization; 3) abolish the existing military regime insofar as it affects the artists and writers serving in the armed forces.”³⁰ The leading figure of this dissenting group was Tran Dan, a poet popular for his lyrics for the Vietnamese national anthem. In the same month, Tran Dan led about twenty writers and artists to speak to General Nyuan Chi Thanh, the head of army’s General Political Department. They proposed three requests, based on the above statement, centered on creative freedom for writers and artists. This political petition was declined by the general and he chided these army intellectuals, saying their action “shows that capitalist ideology

³⁰ Nhu Phong, “Intellectuals, Writers and Artists,” in *North Vietnam Today*, ed. P. J. Honey (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 81.

has begun to attack all of you comrades.”³¹ The failure of this petition significantly frustrated the intellectuals, who naively believed that their contribution to the revolution had won the party’s trust, and thus prepared the ground for the intellectuals’ more radical challenge to the party the following year.

In a broader vision, Tran Dan and his group constituted part of the Literary Thaw movement in the communist world in the mid-1950s, driven by writers and artists and targeted at the Stalinist doctrine of “socialist realism” (meaning only positive descriptions of socialist life and the communist party were acceptable) and party control of intellectuals.³² But Tran Dan’s case also suggests a Chinese connection. He was in China in 1954 when Hu Feng’s affair took place. Hu, a literary critic and longtime member of the CCP, sent a lengthy letter to the party’s central committee in July 1954 that criticized the domination of the party’s literary authority figures, whose enforcement of socialist realism allowed no freedom for creative work and whose bossy attitude toward writers and intellectuals was even more annoying. Although he had no intention of challenging party authority, Hu’s action reflected grievances of a wide range of intellectuals and artists and was taken as evidence of the earliest cleavage between the party and intellectuals after the formation of the PRC. In late 1954, however, the literary authority of the party launched a counterattack and forced Hu to make self-criticism, and by May 1955 the orchestrated “Anti-Hu Feng’s Counter-Revolutionary Clique” campaign was in full swing. Hu was arrested in June 1955 and imprisoned until the end of the Cultural Revolution.

There is no doubt that Tran Dan was exposed to the materials related to Hu Feng’s letter: he was in China at the time the letter created a great deal of sensation and stimulated discussions among Chinese intellectuals. There is also no doubt that Tran Dan was sympathetic to Hu, because he himself was in conflict with the same type of literary authority figures Hu was attacking. Tran Dan was sent to China to finish the narrative for a film describing the victory in Dien Bien Phu (a North Vietnamese military accomplishment with the assistance of the Chinese advice and ammunition in their Anti-French War in 1954). As a customary practice, he was accompanied by an

³¹ Kim N. B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam 1945–1965* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp. 130–131.

³² For a detailed description of one of the examples of such a “thaw” in Eastern Europe, see Magnus J. Krynske, “Poland’s Literary ‘Thaw’: Dialectical Phase or Genuine Freedom?” in *The Polish Review*, Autumn 1956, pp. 8–21.

army's political cadre with whom he later was in conflict because of the latter's excessive interference with his artistic work. Tran Dan also abhorred the same dogmatic application of "socialist realism" Hu was criticizing. At the same time he was initiating discussion with General Nyuan Chi Thanh, Tran Dan published articles that vehemently criticized *Viet Bac*, a collection of poems praising socialist life and communist heroes written by Tu Huu. Tu Huu was a member of the party's central committee, in charge of literary and intellectual activities, and his book was expected to set an example of socialist realism by portraying model heroes, although it could not be measured by any aesthetic values. When attacking "socialist realism" of Tu Huu's type, Tran Dan asserted, "Realism encourages a hundred schools to thrive both in substance and in form." This led Boudarel to suggest that "as early as February 1955, a Let-a-Hundred-Flowers-Bloom campaign was brewing in the cultural department of the North Vietnamese armed force. It was over a year before the movement to bear such a name really started in China, and nearly two years before it was put into effect."³³ However, the phrase "a hundred schools" actually derives from ancient Chinese history, referring to the intellectually and philosophically contentious atmosphere during the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period (eighth to third centuries B.C.E.). Given the fact of Chinese cultural influence in Vietnam, it would not be groundless to assume that Tran Dan used the phrase but was unaware of its origin. Furthermore, the first time the phrase "let a hundred flowers bloom" entered China's cultural life was in 1951, when Mao was asked by Mei Lanfang, the most well-known actor of traditional opera, to issue a directive for the newly created Chinese Academy of Traditional Opera. Mao's directive was "Let a hundred flowers bloom and let the new genres replace the old."³⁴ As for the phrase "let one hundred schools contend," it was Mao's response to a debate between Guo Moruo and Fan Wenlan, two prominent historians, regarding how to apply Marxist theory to divide Chinese ancient history. It was in this context that Mao was asked by Chen Boda, his secretary and the director of the Research Committee of Chinese History (an organization led by the propaganda department of the CCP's

³³ Georges Boudarel, "Intellectual Dissidence in the 1950s: The Nhan-Van Giai-Pham Affair," in *The Vietnam Forum*, ed. O. W. Wolters (New Heaven, Conn.: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 1990), 13: 158.

³⁴ Gong Yuzhi, *Mao Zedong's Reading Life* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publisher, 1997), p. 493.

Central Committee) to give a directive.³⁵ Therefore, both “hundred flowers” and “hundred schools” had been used in China since 1953 for theatrical and academic work, although they were proposed separately, spread within certain circles, and were not endowed with profound political meaning until spring 1956 in the context of de-Stalinization.

Vietnamese intellectuals’ discontent with the regime did not begin with Tran Dan’s conflict with the party but rather could be traced back to the late 1940s, according to Kim N. B. Ninh.³⁶ Therefore the Chinese connection in Tran Dan’s case may be considered an inspiration that encouraged him to air his (and many others’) built-up grievances. Tran Dan’s friends later acknowledged the connection between Hu Feng and Tran Dan in a cartoon published in *Nhan Van*, the most influential Vietnamese dissident magazine, in its issue of 30 September (Figure 1). The party was even more aware of the connection, and it should not be a surprise that when Tran Dan was purged and arrested in February 1956—six months after Hu Feng was imprisoned—the rationale for some cadres involved in the arrest was “China has Hu Feng, perhaps we also have a Hu Feng.”³⁷ As Ninh pointed out, “Apparently the fierce campaign against Hu Feng in China had heightened the sense of vigilance in Vietnam” and consequently Tran Dan became the victim of such vigilance.³⁸

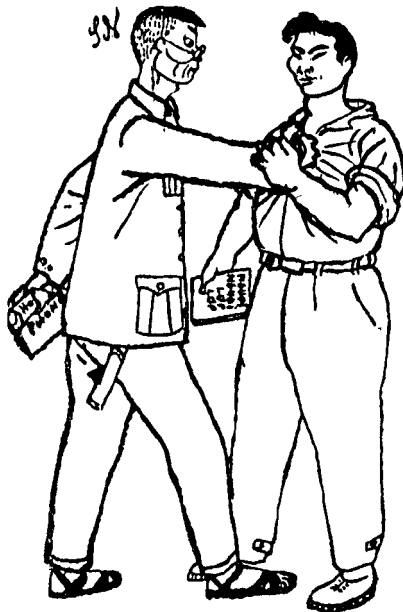
Shortly after Tran Dan was arrested, however, the international circumstances turned favorable to the intellectuals. The CPSU held its Twentieth Congress in February and the CCP announced its Double-Hundred policy in May, both of which had immediate impact upon the relationship between Vietnamese intellectuals and the party. In order to introduce the new Soviet line, Anastas Mikoyan, the Soviet first deputy premier, went to Beijing and Hanoi in April. In the same month Tran Dan was released from prison, ostensibly because his arrest was made without the authorization of the top leadership of the party, but the change in international atmosphere certainly played a role in his release as well. Lu Dingyi’s speech of late May advocating the Double-Hundred policy quickly found zealous readers among Vietnamese intellectuals. Tran Duc Thao, the famous philosopher and dean of the faculty of history at the national university (established in the same

³⁵ Lu Dingyi, “A Historical Review of the ‘Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom and One Hundred Schools Contend,’” *Guangming Daily*, 7 May 1986.

³⁶ See Ninh, *A World Transformed*, chap. 4, pp. 121–161, on intellectual dissent.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

³⁸ *Ibid.* Boudarel’s article “The Nanh-Van Giai-Pham Affair” also contains materials and analysis on the connection between Ho Feng and Tran Dan.



HOÀI THANH: Help, folks! Here's Hu Feng himself!

TRẦN DÂN: Dear comrade, department director, I swear that my name is Trần Dân. If you don't believe me, check my birth certificate.

(Trần Dân was holding in his hand his novel about the battle of Điện Biên Phủ.)

Cartoon by Sĩ Ngọc, Nhân Văn,
No. 2, September 30, 1956

year, with Thao as one of the founders), quickly found someone to translate it in July.³⁹

According to Bernard B. Fall, North Vietnam at first tried paying no heed to the sudden liberalization in China, but “the ‘hundred flowers’ could not be ignored very long” because the Chinese slogan was embraced by many of the best writers who remained in the north. For them, the Chinese slogan echoed the ideas left with them by the French liberal education they received many years before.⁴⁰ Two important meetings in the summer became rallying points of dissent. One was the Hanoi Municipal Congress from the end of July to early August, where attendees were extremely critical of many policies of the party, from food shortages to taxation. The other was a conference of North Vietnam’s Association of Art and Literature (1–18 August), with about three hundred attendees, designed to study the CPSU’s Twentieth Congress and China’s new cultural policy. The meeting

³⁹ Shawn McHale, “Vietnamese Marxism, Dissent, and the Politics of Postcolonial Memory: Tran Duc Thao, 1946–1993,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 61.1 (2002): 14.

⁴⁰ Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Vietnams—A Political and Military Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 188.

made five demands, including the immediate translation and publication of Mao's Hundred Flowers policy.⁴¹

Pushed by all of these developments and, more generally, the atmosphere of de-Stalinization and liberalization in the communist world, the Vietnamese party set forth its new policy toward intellectuals at the end of August, emphasizing unity, trust, and cooperation with the intellectuals instead of reform.⁴² Following the customary practice of learning from Chinese experience, the party's central committee sent representatives to China to observe the Double-Hundred movement.⁴³ In October, when the Polish-Hungarian crisis was gathering momentum, the Vietnamese party's reexamination of its policies moved to a new and more political stage. The party's Tenth Plenary Session had been in session since early September, and it lasted until late October, obviously due to the gravity of the issues under discussion and division in the party. Finally, on 29 October the party announced a communiqué that openly admitted the serious mistakes made in the land reform campaign and some other fields. Truong Chinh, the general secretary since 1941 and the second figure next to Ho Chi Minh, took the responsibility personally and resigned his post (Ho Chi Minh himself briefly took over the post), along with the deputy minister of agriculture. A Rectification campaign was launched subsequently to relieve the pains the peasants suffered in the land reform campaign.⁴⁴ Hanoi Radio reported on 30 October regarding the Tenth Plenary Ses-

⁴¹ P. J. Honey, "Ho Chi Minh and the Intellectuals," in *Vietnam: Anatomy of a Conflict*, ed. R. Fishel Wesley (Itasca, Ill.: Peacock Publishers, 1968), p. 160.

⁴² These new policies were: "1) To broadly unite the intellectuals and to mobilize all the forces of the intellectuals to fulfill the revolutionary tasks in the new stage; 2) to use the intellectuals according to their abilities and entrust them with appropriate work on the principle of functions and powers according to talents and virtues; 3) to ensure for the intellectuals necessary means for work, reciprocate their contributions approximately and in accordance with the potentialities of the nation; 4) to help the old generations of intellectuals acquire the revolutionary ideology, train new generations of intellectuals, ceaselessly raise the intellectuals' knowledge, and broaden their ranks." Robert F. Turner, *Vietnamese Communism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 152.

⁴³ Edward Friedman, "The Revolution in Hungary and the Hundred Flowers Period in China," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 35.1 (1965): 122.

⁴⁴ The Vietnamese "rectification" of land reform also indicated a Chinese influence. According to Hoan Van Hoan, the Vietnamese ambassador to China and the member of the Vietnamese party's politburo, Zhou Enlai was very concerned about the roles the Chinese advisors played in Vietnam's land reform. After Hoan finished the Tenth Plenary Session and went back to Beijing, Zhou Enlai summoned him and asked about how much the Chinese advisors should be responsible for the mistakes made in Vietnam's land reform. Hoan told him that the Chinese experiences were good, and all excessive measures taken in the Vietnamese practices were decided by the Vietnamese cadres, which is obviously not true for historians. Hoan, *My Memoir*, p. 285.

sion that democratization and improvement of living conditions were now the party's first two priorities, while reunification of the nation, which was usually the first priority, was moved to third place.⁴⁵

All these dramatic changes in their own country and the general atmosphere in China and Eastern Europe enabled the Vietnamese intellectuals to celebrate their *Nhan Van/Giai Pham* period, a unique time of intellectual liberalization from August to November 1956. The liberalization was represented by a number of suddenly emerging private publications that rallied dissenting intellectuals and flooded newsstands. Among these publications, two journals were most influential, and the period was named after them. The first was *Giai Pham Mua Xuan* (Masterpieces of spring) and *Giai Pham Mua Thu* (Masterpieces of autumn), which were series containing literary pieces with political content. The second was *Nhan Van*, an openly political weekly. *Nhan Van* literally means "humanism," but in the Vietnamese context it is also a classic term reflecting a Confucian idea of becoming a civilized human through learning literature and philosophy. The political discussions generated in these publications covered a wide range of topics, from the party's cultural and intellectual policies to land reform practices to bureaucratic oppression, government corruption, and incompetence, and ultimately the legitimacy of the "party-governed regime," as university students called the government.⁴⁶ Such discussions were not limited to the articles and letters from the readers, but spread to universities, schools, and even meetings of the Hanoi People's Congress and the Fatherland Front Organization.⁴⁷

The Chinese connection reflected in this Vietnamese liberalization was obvious. All of these dissenting magazines or newspapers looked upon China as their inspiration. As Ninh pointed out, "In fact, *Nhan Van* closely followed events in China and Eastern Europe, supporting China's Hundred Flowers campaign and the liberalization tendencies in Poland and Hungary. . . . The *Nhan Van* writers clearly felt that they were participating in a larger international movement . . ." ⁴⁸ In addition, the names of some periodicals suggest a direct Chinese influence. For example, *Tram Hoa*, also a major dissenting magazine, literally means "hundred flowers" in Vietnamese, while *Dat Moi*, a university-student dissenting magazine that referred to the government as the

⁴⁵ Ang Cheng Guan, *Vietnamese Communists' Relations with China and the Second Indo-Chinese Conflict* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 1997), p. 36.

⁴⁶ Ninh, *A World Transformed*, p. 146.

⁴⁷ Honey, "Ho Chi Minh and the Intellectuals," p. 161.

⁴⁸ Ninh, *A World Transformed*, p. 144.

“party-governed regime,” means “new land,” implying the fresh soil for the newly introduced flowers.

Personal connections between dissenting intellectuals and China were conspicuous as well. For example, at the peak of the liberalization movement, Phan Khoi, the editor of *Nhan Van* and the most famous figure of the movement, was in China representing Vietnamese intellectuals at the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the death of Lu Xun.⁴⁹ Lu Xun was the most celebrated revolutionary author in China, and influential among Vietnamese intellectuals as well, largely for his uncompromising attitude toward arbitrary and oppressive authorities—the “Lu Xun spirit,” as it is often called. The selection of Phan Khoi as the representative from Vietnam can hardly be interpreted as a random pick, given the fact that the occasion was made to honor a historical person known for his intellectual independence and that Phan Khoi enjoyed prestige as an independent opinion leader. One incident made Phan Khoi’s representation in China for the occasion even more meaningful. One year before, when Phan Khoi was asked by the government to deliver a lecture on the same subject (the anniversary of Lu Xun’s death), he had to submit the draft to an official in the Writers and Artists Association and revise it based on the comments sent back to him. One year later, at approximately the same time he made his way to China for a more important anniversary of Lu Xun, Phan Khoi wrote an article for *Nhan Van* complaining about the lack of creative freedom in North Vietnam by using this episode, along with other similar stories of arbitrary government interference, and asking, “How could I create? How could I be myself?”⁵⁰

But the Chinese connection in the Vietnamese case may also be examined from another perspective, based on the peculiarity of the course of Vietnamese liberalization. Vietnamese liberalization was peculiar because it went through a saddlelike course and at some points corresponded to the circumstances in China. In order to understand this, a brief description of the course of Vietnamese liberalization is necessary.

⁴⁹ Phan Khoi’s prestige came in part from his family background. His father was the governor of Hanoi who committed suicide in face of the French occupation in 1883. Phan Khoi himself survived the 1907 scholar’s anti-French movement and became the leading figure among the intellectuals. He supported the Vietnamese communist movement for its nationalist and democratic appeals in the late 1940s and early 1950s. His son also joined the communist revolution and was appointed as the editor of a newspaper for the Fatherland Front, controlled by the communists, but committed suicide in 1958, after the liberalization was suppressed and Phan Khoi himself died.

⁵⁰ Turner, *Vietnamese Communism*, p. 153.

From August to November 1956, the movement experienced its golden age, the *Nhan Van/Giai Pham* period. Then, immediately after the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt, the Vietnamese government began to strike back against the intellectuals by publishing editorials and commentaries and even "letters from audiences" to condemn antisocialist elements. As an editorial in *Nhan Dan* (People), the party's daily newspaper, published five days after the crackdown said, "We should not permit anyone to take advantage of democratic freedoms and freedom of expression to divide the people from the party, to slander our regime, to create confusion among the people, or to spread bad, reactionary thoughts."⁵¹ After more than a month of such propagandist preparation, on 18 December, following a presidential decree, the Hanoi Administrative Committee suspended the publication of *Nhan Van* and *Giai Pham*; closed Minh Duc, the publishing house; confiscated the copies of previous issues; and warned anyone who still possessed and circulated the biweekly. A press campaign was quickly launched to discredit the two publications and their authors.

The banning of the two publications and the press campaign against them were a serious setback for the intellectuals, but the political storm that gathered in December 1956 passed by surprisingly quickly. Only two months later, *Nhan Dan* stopped its anti-*Nhan Van/Giai Pham* campaign, and all those targeted in this campaign rode out the storm with no one arrested or fired, suffering only self-criticism and a few demotions in the workplace. As a matter of fact, as Ninh pointed out, the intellectuals "continue to hold state jobs and, in some instances, leadership positions within the state publishing houses and even on the Executive Committee of the Association of Arts and Literature itself."⁵² In February the National Association of Arts and Literature held its Second Congress, and the resolution did not mention the *Nhan Van/Giai Pham* affair, although it noted the necessity of fighting against "incorrect tendencies." In May, a new literary weekly, *Van* (meaning "literature") appeared as the organ of the newly formed Writers' Association. Under the banner of *Van* the authors for *Nhan Van* and *Giai Pham* quickly rallied. As Honey pointed out, "Whatever education had been given to them soon proved to be ineffective, for they quickly resumed their attacks on the Arts and Letters Association, the Party, the regime, and all their previous targets."⁵³

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁵³ Honey, "Ho Chi Minh and the Intellectuals," p. 163.

In other words, the cultural atmosphere in North Vietnam for most of 1957 was mild and tolerant at least. *Van*, the new literary journal, was indeed criticized by party newspapers for some of its contents almost from the very beginning, but such criticism never led to an orchestrated press campaign or forced the writers to be silent. Hirohide Kurihara, in his study on the North Vietnamese cultural policies between 1956 and 1958, noted that there were two “flexible” lines guiding intellectual affairs in 1957. One was “oriented toward respecting the initiative of writers and intellectuals . . . no concrete measures were taken to force writers to engage in political study or take part in productive activities”; the other was “the moderate approach taken toward accomplishing policy objectives, an approach that emphasized arriving at a consensus through persuasion and patient discussion.” In implementing this policy of consensus, “those in charge of the policy were warned against acting impatiently.”⁵⁴

This resumed liberalization lasted for about half a year and was finally ended in early 1958. On 6 January the politburo of the party issued the “Politburo Resolution on Literary Affairs,” demanding the expulsion of all “subversive elements” from literary organizations and requiring the education of intellectuals with Marxism-Leninism and physical labor.⁵⁵ This resolution was followed by suspension of the publication of *Van* indefinitely and marked the beginning of a full-scale and enduring campaign aimed at eliminating all dissenting voices and elements among intellectuals once and for all. A number of intellectuals were arrested and five of them, all associated with *Nhan Van/Giai Pham* affair and represented by Phan Khoi, were put on a public trial and sentenced for their “psychological-warfare activities under the cover of the *Nhan Van/Giai Pham* group.” In the meantime, most intellectuals, regardless of their political activities during the *Nhan Van/Giai Pham* period, had to be reeducated in the countryside and factories through intensive political education and heavy labor—a practice borrowed from China.

Therefore, the Vietnamese liberalization had two flourishing periods: from August to November 1956 and from May 1957 to January 1958. For historians, the natural questions are: Why didn’t the Vietnamese government take advantage of the Hungarian incident to put

⁵⁴ Hirohide Kurihara, “Changes in the Literary Policy of the Vietnamese Workers’ Party, 1956–1958,” in *Indochina in the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. Takashi Shiraiishi and Motoo Furuta (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 180.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

down the dissenting voices in their own society by pushing through the suppression starting with the banning of *Nhan Van* and *Giai Pham* in December 1956? Why did it allow the intellectuals to resume their attacks on the regime in the summer of 1957?

What makes these questions even more intriguing is another event that may have created a more favorable atmosphere for the government to adopt a heavy-handed approach to the intellectuals at the time it banned *Nhan Van* and *Giai Pham*. The event was the Vietnamese peasant rebellion in Nghe-An Province against government land reform policy. The peasants' grievances against land reform had accumulated for years, and the party's public admission of grave mistakes in the campaign, announced by Truong Chinh, who resigned the post of the party's general secretary to mitigate the discontent, only provided an outlet for peasants' anger. The revolt began on 5 November and involved more than twenty thousand peasants. It lasted for about one week and was crushed by an elite unit of the North Vietnamese army. This event shook the foundation of the regime's confidence in ruling the countryside—particularly because Nghe-An Province was Ho Chi Minh's native province and the first base of the Vietnamese revolution—and was a very bloody incident in the era of de-Stalinization, probably next only to the Polish and Hungarian revolts. But, unfortunately, it has not received adequate attention in the studies of de-Stalinization from a global perspective. Given the threat this rebellion posed to the regime, it would not be a surprise if the government had tightened its overall domestic policies to stifle any sparks of rebellious trends in its population in the wake of this suppression. But what happened was that the suppression of the intellectuals—after the suppression of the peasants—was short and mild and even followed by a resurgence of liberalization.

While not trying to exclude all possible explanations for this sadlelike course of Vietnamese liberalization, a consideration of the Chinese connection may provide some clues. Given the heavy Chinese influence in Vietnam and the intimate relationship between the two parties, and given the fact that Vietnamese liberalization was inspired by the Chinese model, it would be inconceivable to assume that the Vietnamese leadership halted the suppression in early 1957 autonomously, without observing China's attitude. In the spring of 1957, when the atmosphere in Vietnam became once again in favor of liberalization, it was time for the Chinese leadership to launch a full-scale "rectification" campaign to solicit open criticism of the party from the intellectuals. Vietnamese intellectuals resumed their attack on the

regime in the early summer, precisely at the time the Chinese Rectification movement reached its peak and most of the Rightists were exposing themselves by explicitly criticizing the party and demanding reforms.

On 8 July 1957, however, the anti-Rightist campaign started in China. On the same day, accidentally or not, Ho Chi Minh arrived in Beijing on his way to North Korea, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe. On his way back to Vietnam, in late August, Ho once again passed through China and met with the Chinese leaders who had been busy with the anti-Rightist campaign. On Ho's public agenda, China's support for his call for a consultative conference to discuss national unification through free and general elections was the priority.⁵⁶ But what else was discussed behind the door? Did they talk about China's ongoing campaign and the challenges posed to Ho's party by the Vietnamese intellectuals? Although no sources so far can provide further clues, one thing is for certain: the Chinese campaign and Mao's real intention and strategy of prompting the enemies to expose themselves must have left a deep impression on Ho. Ho was fluent in Chinese (he was the interpreter between the Soviet envoys and the Chinese communists in the 1920s) and was able to read Chinese newspapers for himself. The Chinese newspapers were full of anti-Rightist materials and the various methods used to subdue the Rightists, so how could one assume all of these escaped his attention?⁵⁷ Evidence of Chinese influence is that Ho, under the pseudonym Tran Luc, published an article in *Nhan Dan* on 16 September (about two weeks after he returned from China) titled "Smashing the Right." According to Boudarel, the article apparently echoed China's ongoing anti-Rightist campaign. The way Ho addressed the issue is also similar to Maoist metaphoric expression. As he put it, "The right is a poisonous weed. Let us root out the weed and turn it into fertilizer to improve the soil of our rice field."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ang Cheng Guan, *Vietnamese Communists' Relations with China, the Second Indo-Chinese Conflict* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 1997), p. 58.

⁵⁷ One incident, although taking place much later, may serve as an example of Ho's familiarity of Chinese and his use of this ability to become informed about Chinese politics. In May 1966, when Ho was in China, he met Mao in Hang Zhou and took Mao's suggestion to go to Zhejiang University and read the "big-character posters" to learn about the ongoing Cultural Revolution. Wen Zhuang, "Mao Ze Dong he hu zhi min de san ci hui mian, 1965-66" (Three meetings between Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh, 1965-1966), *Zhong Heng*, August 2003, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁸ Boudarel, "The Nhan-Van Giai-Pham Affair," pp. 170-171.

It is noteworthy that few authors have paid adequate attention to the international influences on Vietnamese history in the period 1957–1958, in terms of linking domestic changes to specific developments in international communism. One exception, however, is Kurihara. Kurihara emphasized the changes brought about by the Moscow Conference of World Communist Parties in November 1957, in which China played a big role in cooperating with the Soviet Union to condemn “revisionist tendencies,” as the declaration of the conference put it, meaning the danger from the right. Therefore, for the North Vietnamese, the international situation in late 1957 and early 1958 was much different from that of earlier times. As Kurihara pointed out, “Both the Soviet Union, which had inspired the *NV* and the *GP* [*Nhan Van* and *Giai Pham*] by its denunciation of Stalin, and China, which had done the same by its ‘hundred flowers’ policy, had signed the Declaration, thus expressing their support of the antirevisionist struggle. What is more, the ‘hundred flowers’ policy had turned into an anti-Rightist campaign in China.”⁵⁹

When *Nhan Van* and *Giai Pham* were banned, some Western observers speculated that their publications were “trial balloons, launched with the government’s tacit approval,” and that “the experiment seems, in any case, to be drawing to a close.”⁶⁰ If that was true, Ho Chi Minh must have felt relieved when he was in China witnessing the fierce anti-Rightist campaign and admiring Mao’s tactics. Four months later, Ho resumed attacks on intellectuals by following the Chinese model he must have reviewed during his stay in China: exposing their anti-party, antisocialist thoughts by publishing their “confessions” in newspapers, holding mass meetings in which the accused were forced to criticize or condemn themselves, firing and imprisoning many, expelling many from professional associations, and sending hundreds and thousands to the countryside and factories to be reeducated through heavy labor.

All these episodes and parallels, when pieced together, clearly suggest strong Chinese influence in the Vietnamese liberalization movement from as early as 1955 to as late as 1958. As in Eastern Europe, the Chinese connection inspired the intellectuals at first and sustained them in the aftermath of the Soviet suppression of Hungarian revolu-

⁵⁹ Kurihara, “Changes in the Literary Policy,” p. 189.

⁶⁰ “In China’s Shadow: The Ho Chi Minh Way,” *The Economist*, 5 January 1957, p. 41. The article was written by the journal’s special reporter.

tion. But finally the Chinese connection became the last, unexpected, and probably the heaviest blow to the liberalization movement.

CONCLUSIONS

The de-Stalinization and liberalization movement of the mid-1950s was a phenomenon of global communism and ought to be examined from a global perspective. This perspective should allow inspection of different sources from various parts of world communism that contributed to the phenomenon and complicated interactions that entangled the countries involved in the situation, instead of taking a single Moscow-centric perspective.

As one example of such a global perspective, the Chinese connections shown in the Eastern European and Vietnamese cases can expand our vision by placing de-Stalinization in a larger context. First, far from being in a peripheral position and being a passive responder, China contributed to political change with its own initiatives and acted as a source independent from Moscow before the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, and continued to exert influence after the Hungarian revolt was suppressed when the atmosphere in Eastern Europe was obviously not in favor of such influence. Chinese influence not only was echoed among Eastern European reformists, but also even had some unsettling effects in Moscow, as Khrushchev himself confessed. Second, linking the Vietnamese case to China, one may suggest the existence of another pattern of dissent and protest in the era of de-Stalinization—an Asian one, represented mainly by intellectuals' verbal protests instead of mass street protest or even revolt, although Vietnam did have a short-lived regional peasant rebellion and China had some sporadic worker and student strikes. This Asian pattern of protest and dissent was apparently different from the Polish-Hungarian pattern in which intellectuals' protest was originally important but ultimately overshadowed by the violent mass action. Third, the Chinese connection and Chinese influence on de-Stalinization was twofold. On the one hand, China endorsed—wittingly or not—liberalization in Eastern Europe and Vietnam, and this endorsement constituted an essential part of de-Stalinization initiated by Moscow. On the other hand, however, in contrast to what many Eastern European and Vietnamese reformers and intellectuals naïvely believed, Mao and the Chinese leadership were never sincerely committed to democracy and liberty. They revealed their intolerance of challenge to communist rule with-

out any hesitation in the Hungarian case, but it took another year for many in Eastern Europe, Vietnam, and China to recognize it. Whatever the Chinese communists' original intention was (when they advocated the Double-Hundred policy and Rectification), they finally concluded the once-thriving liberalization movement by using a method different from the one used by the Soviet Union in putting down the Hungarian revolution, but more calculated and perhaps more devastating.⁶¹ Therefore, if China contributed to the liberalization movement and influenced other communist countries in its own way, it also contributed to the suppression of liberalization with its own characteristics.

⁶¹ One example in some Eastern European countries, Poland and Hungary in particular, is that the post-1956 leadership made some concessions to economic reform appeals with Moscow's acquiescence. The intellectuals' treatment was in general improved. But in China and Vietnam, the 1957–1958 suppression rooted out reformists and the economic reforms did not return until early 1980s, and the intellectuals suffered even more than in the 1950s during China's Cultural Revolution.