Introduction

The idea of Europe as the central battlefield of the Cold War as that face-off took shape between the two great powers has to be revised to take account of the emergence into international prominence of events in Asia in the early 1950s.\(^1\) The Asian region, as an “other side” or front of the Cold War, has now started to enter into historiography with the end of the conflict and declassification of Chinese state documents, whose scrutiny promises to cast cold war history in a new light both globally and regionally. The development of the study of Communist China’s Cold War history has more than any other historiographical development begun to contribute to a more integral and truly global Cold War history.\(^2\)


\(^2\) See the back cover of Gaddis, We Now Know. On the recent trends for Chinese scholars to write on the Cold War history on the basis of Chinese and other Eastern and Western sources, see Xia Yafeng, “The Study of Cold War Inter-
In Mao Zedong’s words, 1956 was a year of “big events,” both at home and abroad. The “secret speech” delivered by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union’s (CPSU) Twentieth Congress had, according to Mao, “opened the lid” on the repressiveness of the immediate postwar Soviet regimes, thereby “making a mess” in ideologically inspiring a wave of de-Stalinization marked by massive demonstrations in Poland and Hungary. These mass movements demanded from their governments the improvement of their countries’ living standards and the safeguarding of national independence and political rights in the teeth of the Soviet Union. The Hungarian events, in particular, were more complicated than either a populist antisocialist protest or a form of anti-Soviet agitation, and the Chinese leaders exerted great effort in trying to apply the lessons of Hungary to their own domestic situation.

The purpose of this volume is to make sense of the inner connection between China’s political and diplomatic involvement in the Hungarian crisis and the influence this crisis had on China’s domestic policy from late 1956 to 1957. In this short but very crucial period of time, Chinese domestic politics changed dramatically from the rhetorically inclusive and pluralistic “rectification” and

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4. Wu Lengxi, Shiniyan lunzhan, 1956–1966: ZhongSu guanxi huixiyu [Ten-year polemical debate, 1956–1966: A memoir on Sino–Soviet relations] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1999), 6. Wu Lengxi was then director of the New China News Agency and editor-in-chief of People’s Daily, and he attended several Politburo Standing Committee meetings discussing the de-Stalinization issue. Mao repeated the same claim later on several occasions. Also see Chen, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 64.

“hundred flowers” (HF) campaigns to the repressive and authoritarian Anti-Rightist Campaign, changes in which Chairman Mao's interpretation of the Hungarian crisis of 1956 played an essential role.\(^6\)

This book takes advantage of the wealth of newly available archival material in opting for a domestic-centered method in studying the relations between China and the Hungarian crisis of 1956. Its particular focus lies with how the crisis prompted Mao to adopt a more aggressive agenda in promoting the socialist revolution and [effort of] reconstruction at home, at the same time emphasizing the necessity to keep hierarchical order within the communist camp against the background of the Cold War. This attention, while centrally devoted to China, nevertheless captures an international dimension of the Hungarian crisis to which insufficient attention has as yet been paid.\(^7\)


\(^7\) Up to the 1990s, the books and articles on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 written by either the Hungarian scholars or Western researchers rarely touched upon Chinese diplomatic and political involvement in the process of the events, let alone seeking to assess the impact of the October Revolution on the Chinese domestic scene throughout late 1956 to late 1957. János Radványi, a senior official in the Hungarian diplomatic service in 1956, published an article in 1970 recollecting his observation of the Chinese role in the 1956 Hungarian crisis. Radványi provides us with important information on the Chinese embassy’s role—that of ambassador Hao Deqing, in particular—in Beijing’s final judgment of the nature of the Hungarian events, as may now be confirmed by newly declassified Chinese Foreign Ministry archive. See Radványi, “The Hungarian Revolution and the Hundred Flowers Campaign,” China Quarterly, 43 (July–September 1970): 127–29. Fortunately, several Chinese and foreign scholars have applied themselves to this topic, after the 1990s, gradually unveiling some of the interconnections between China and the Hungarian crisis of 1956; see Chen, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 145–62, which is based on a paper with the same title delivered at the international conference “Cold War and Sino–Soviet Relations” in Beijing in 1997. As far as this author knows, Chen is the first Chinese-American scholar to write on the relation between China and the Hungarian October events. Hu Bo in the final chapter of his PhD dissertation dealing with the Hungarian revolt and the Cold War concludes less promisingly that China’s role in the Hungarian events was "secondary." See his “Lengzhan yinying xia de Xiongyali shijian” (The Hungarian Crisis
with these considerations playing to current attempts to redefine Cold War history more inclusively, pulling into focus interactions between the great powers and local politics. In Hungary, the majority of archival sources on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution are now available to scholarship, joining the post-90s declassification of many other depositories around the globe. In 1989–1990, an institute for the history of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was established, aiming to draw the attention of local and international historians. Similarly, a number of Polish, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav archival documents have been discovered and released. Even some Soviet sources, which are of the utmost importance in understanding Soviet decision-making and action during the crisis, have gradually been opened to scrutiny. As a result of declassification trends in East-Central Europe, as well as the release of numerous Western sources on 1956 during the latter part of the 1980s, historians have

8. In Hungary, most archival sources on 1956 can be found in Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL) [the Hungarian National Archive]. Besides the Hungarian National Archive and archives in Russia, Cold War historians can also find useful materials on the Hungarian crisis of 1956 in documents preserved in the Czech Republic, Poland, former East Germany, and the United States: for example, the Military History Archive and Central National Archives of the Czech Republic; der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMDB) [Eastern Germany Communist Archive] in Berlin and the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C. For a collection of documents translated into English on 1956 Hungary whose historical materials derive mainly from Russia, Hungary, and Western democratic countries, see Csaba Békés and Malcolm Byrne, The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2002). Making extensive use of archival source materials, scholars have made significant efforts in writing the history of Soviet bloc states during the Cold War, on their relations with the former Soviet Union, and on their foreign policies; see, for example, Gyorgy Gyarmati and Janos M Rainer, A Captive Nation in the Soviet Empire, 1944–1989 (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2008); Tibor Valuch and Gyorgy Gyarmati, Hungary under Soviet Domination: 1944–1989 (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2010); László Borhi, Hungary in the Cold War, 1945–1956: Between the United States and the Soviet Union (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004); a complete history of Poland under Communism during the Cold War, see Anthony Kemp-Welch, Poland under Communism: A Cold War History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

already produced books and articles presenting hitherto unknown data, important evidence, and various interpretations.\footnote{10}

In the introductory essay to his authoritative translation and annotation of the so-called Malin Notes of key Kremlin meetings during the crises, Mark Kramer of Harvard University examines how the Soviet leadership responded to the implicit threat of the dissolution of the communist empire during the 1956 crises.\footnote{11} In his analysis of the Soviet decision-making processes before and during the October crises, Kramer found that although the Soviets had made advance preparations in military terms to maintain, defend, or even restore the socialist order in the Eastern European states, the Kremlin leadership became more and more reluctant to use armed force without the utmost certainty that such a course was necessary.\footnote{12} In fact, it was Moscow’s hesitation over using military


11. V. N. Malin, head of the CPSU General Department, attended the Soviet Presidium meetings in the fall of 1956 taking notes, which “constitute [….] the only known contemporaneous record of the key sessions of late October and early November at which Kremlin leaders went back and forth over whether to pull out from Hungary or reintroduce new troops,” \textit{Bulletin} 8–9 (1996/1997): 356; for the notes, see V. N. Malin, “Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC Presidium on 26 October 1956,” \textit{Bulletin} 8–9 (1996/1997): 389–92. The Malin Notes were also published in English in Békés and Byrne, \textit{The 1956 Hungarian Revolution}. For another collection of multinational historical documents on the Hungarian 1956 events, see Békés et al., eds., \textit{The Hidden History of Hungary 1956: A Compendium of Declassified Documents} (Budapest—Washington, DC: the National Security Archive, 1996).

means in Hungary that gave Beijing the chance to maneuver the Kremlin leadership into admitting the inequality in Soviet–satellite relations. In doing so, the Chinese side aimed to dent Soviet prestige and power inside the bloc and thus to enhance its own authority and influence internationally.

A range of new findings and interpretations of Hungarian scholars of the 1956 incident can be found in two essay collections published in the late 1990s.\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956} discloses valuable new material on the organization, command, strategy, and tactics of the Soviet armed forces that invaded Hungary in 1956. On the basis of study of the former Soviet archives, this book has, among other points, helped explain the scale of military operations, precisely documenting the irrationally large size of the forces. Csaba Békés, in his article “The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics,” has attempted to reexamine the reaction of the big powers to the Hungarian crisis, prising open newly accessible West European and former Soviet archives to illuminate their high-level decision-making processes, especially as these bore on considerations of international diplomacy.\textsuperscript{14} In his recent biography of János Kádár, Huszár Tibor has reinterpreted the Hungarian crisis of 1956 from 23 October to 4 November by emphasizing Kádár’s personal role in the Kremlin’s reorientations of view with regard to the riots in Hungary. Tibor’s book was enabled by interviews with former diplomats, and the memoirs of diplomats and top party officials, which taken together recontextualize the 1956 revolution through focusing on the influence of a particular Hungarian leader.\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Cox, \textit{Hungary 1956}; Györkei and Horváth, \textit{Soviet Military Intervention}.
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ian Revolution and in the Cold War International History Project Bulletin.\textsuperscript{16}

Exploiting previously unavailable primary source material from multiple Eastern Bloc countries and new evidence from U.S. sources, Johanna Granville in her latest volume paints a complex picture of the interaction of internal and external factors in shaping the Hungarian Revolution as it played out beyond the confines of Hungary and the Soviet Bloc. As she points out in the foreword of her book, the Hungarian Revolution was the first large-scale rebellion opposing the Soviet Union within its own communist camp: “the first war” between socialist states and “the first domino” in a process that resulted ultimately in the Soviet Union’s loss of hegemony over East Europe in 1989. Granville argues that the Khru-
shchev leadership was by no means a rational actor in regard to its decision-making during the crisis. In addition, despite the dominant position of the Soviet Union, the East European communist states to some extent and at various times were able to manipulate or influence their boss in the Kremlin.\textsuperscript{17} After Poznan, the Polish leadership took the initiative of seeking to forge closer political contacts with the Chinese, soliciting Beijing’s support for the Polish leadership’s efforts to wrest a greater measure of national self-
determination in domestic affairs from the Soviet Union. Before the Chinese leadership came to the conclusion by the end of October that the nature of the Hungarian Revolution was “counter-
revolutionary,” Mao and his colleagues had identified Poland and Hungary’s requirements for internal autonomy as a good opportu-


nity to contest the Soviets’ unquestionable authority in the Eastern Bloc.

However thoughtful and resourceful much historiographic work on the Hungarian crisis since the end of the Cold War, few studies from the present period have dealt with the inner connection between China’s political and diplomatic involvement in the crisis and the crisis’s knock-on effects on Chinese Communist Party (CCP) domestic policy thereafter. This deficiency is doubtless due to the extremely rigid criteria governing the release of party and state documents in China. Moreover, most Chinese scholars and historians seem reluctant to touch upon the Polish–Hungarian crises, the latter in particular, with discussions of the subject in relation to Chinese domestic politics remaining virtually taboo even in the 1990s.18

To begin to get a sense of work in this field, in his essay “Beijing and the Hungarian Crisis of 1956” delivered during the 1997 Beijing conference on the Cold War and Sino–Soviet relations (later revised as a chapter of his influential book Mao’s China and the Cold War), Chen Jian makes the tantalizing suggestion that the crisis of 1956, and Beijing and Moscow’s handling of it, exposed profound contradictions between communism as a set of utopian ideals and as practical human experience. The momentum of international communism faltered after Budapest, against Mao’s deepest-held beliefs, which had been to advocate and defend Soviet military intervention.19 Shen Zhihua’s essay, “China’s Role and Influence in the Revolts in Poland and Hungary in 1956,” draws primarily on Soviet archival sources together with the author’s interviews with the former Chinese diplomats to Hungary and East European states in the 1950s, to illuminate Chinese involvement in the Hungarian crisis in October 1956 from the inside, as it were. Shen reaches the view that

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18. The official Chinese definition of the Hungarian Revolution during Mao’s era was that the episode represented a “counterrevolutionary” event. For the limited amount of materials or studies on Hungary in history studies in China, see Shen, “1956 nian shiyue weiji,” 119–22.

“China played a dominant role in both pulling the Soviet troops out of Budapest and subsequently bringing them back.”

As Chen Jian has indicated, as far as China’s domestic situation was concerned, Beijing’s attitude toward the Hungarian crisis reflected Mao’s persistent belief that “class struggle continued to exist in a socialist country.” In other words, the establishment of a socialist state did not extinguish such struggle, which demanded a ceaseless effort of engagement and structural transformation, or “continuous revolution,” on the party as it worked in the fields of politics and ideology. Chen further suggests that the crises in Poland and Hungary also enhanced Mao’s and the CCP leadership’s consciousness of China as a global exemplar of a large-scale proletarian revolution that had been actually carried through, unlike the apparently incomplete projects in Europe. Promoting a self-defined concept of equality with other nations and polities, Beijing sought to displace Moscow from its central position as embodying the archetypal proletarian revolution.

As far as China’s diplomatic and political involvement in the Hungarian crisis goes, Shen’s essay views China’s involvement in the Soviet decision to “suppress the reactionary elements in Hungary,” as the CCP leaders so cast them, as highly significant, even decisive. By “decisive,” Shen means less that China tipped the USSR’s hand in directing its intervention than that the CCP was able to use the Polish and Hungarian crises as bargaining chips in return for Soviet acknowledgment that the preeminent state had blundered in the past in its conduct of Soviet–East European relations. Once the Chinese formed the view that there was a real danger of Hungary renouncing socialism and withdrawing from the communist camp, Mao and his colleagues swung behind the Soviet military incursion and helped the Kremlin restore hierarchical bloc unity.

While duly examining China’s involvement in the Soviet leadership’s final decision to suppress the Hungarian Revolt, my analysis

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22. Ibid., 148, 161–62.
in this study is more concerned with offering a critical evaluation of Maoist China’s interbloc policies in the period from the fall of 1956 to the end of 1957. My argument is that Beijing’s advocacy of equality and internal autonomy against Soviet “big power chauvinism” in the communist camp and its call for a movement away from a pattern of Stalinist dependency in interstate relations, represent strategic expedients on the part of Chairman Mao to weaken the USSR’s prestige and ultimately accede to the leadership of world communism himself. The apparent desire of the Hungarian people to break free from Stalinist rule led the Chinese most immediately to support the Soviets’ military intervention. Chinese efforts to help the Soviets restore bloc unity after the Hungarian crisis demonstrate Mao’s perception that communist camp integrity had to be guaranteed by relations of dominance, with the strongest state framing definitions of communism and providing a general pattern of development, which would remain Stalinist in essence. It is conceivable that Mao saw China in the place of this preeminent country. There is no evidence, meanwhile, that the Chairman ever seriously considered that equal interstate relationships were applicable to the communist world. On the contrary, as Mao understood it, the splintering effect the Hungarian revolt had on bloc unity reaffirmed the essential truth that some kind of Stalinist interstate system was a necessity inside the camp.

Chinese domestic politics from late 1956 to the end of 1957 was a period of extreme ideological turmoil in which the CCP’s policy underwent changes of direction with a frequency unknown in the late forties and early fifties. The motives for Mao’s many changes in policy over these two years can be hard to make out. Some have accused the leader of “a kind of despotic capriciousness and arbitrariness” in seeking to open up the CCP to new influences, judging that Mao was mostly playing a power game involving the balancing of various factions.24 In this study, I shall argue that Mao’s private

analysis of Hungary, whatever his internal factioneering, was highly critical of the Hungarian state, and particularly of Mátyás Rákosi’s, its previous leader, inflexible tactics of using coercive means to solve domestic “contradictions” after Hungary’s transition to state socialism. Mao further judged that this error arose naturally in the context of any Stalinist state–party governance. Looking back to the Chinese Communist strategies of bringing together a majority to secure certain political goals formulated in the Yan’an era, Mao opted for soft methods, such as party rectification and HF, as putative solutions to domestic problems. With all due respect to Mao’s foresight, there is no evidence that he anticipated the undesirable consequences of the Hungarian Revolution, that it would in effect induce leading Chinese statesmen and intellectuals, together with students, to consider the reform of Maoist policies of suppression against certain social groups in the form of mass campaigns, going as far as proposing the overhaul of the means of governance and political system. It turned out that the Chairman could barely tolerate such internal views or their external sources. The way was thus clear for Mao to give up his previous plan of building a socialism with Chinese characteristics through cooperation with the intelligentsia, instead turning to the more doctrinaire and technical production plans of the Great Leap Forward and to long-term campaigns to “remold thought,” placing any potential dissident intellectual firmly under the thumb of the communist regime.25

This study was made possible by the study of materials from

25. The CCP’s contradictory policy toward the intellectuals had been present since the Yan’an rectification campaign in the early 1940s; see Gao Hua, *Hongtaiyang shi zenyang shengqide* [How did the sun rise over Yan’an? A history of the rectification movement] (hereinafter *Hongtaiyang*) (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000), 313–427. For an analysis of the party’s contradictory approach to the intellectuals, see Merle Goldman, “The Party and the Intellectuals,” 218–58. If Gao Hua’s *Hongtaiyang* focuses on the “human drama” of “the rise of Mao Zedong” in the process of Yan’an rectification, then Franz Shurmann’s writing provides extensive details on the “systematic structures” constituted by the CCP, or on “the New China” constructed with Maoism, the party, and the cadre; see Franz Shurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966). Also see Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 31–54.
several countries and archives, China in particular, including party
documents and personal collections, Chinese Foreign Ministry ar-
chives (CFMA), leaders’ papers, contemporary newspapers, and
interviews with Chinese diplomats to Eastern Europe in the 1950s
and 1960s. From 2004 until the present, the Chinese foreign minis-
try (CFM) has declassified more than 65,000 items from its dip-
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26. Shen Zhihua, ed., Sulian lishi dang’an xuanbian [Selected Historical So-
viet Archives] (hereinafter as SHSA), 34 vols. (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian,
2002); also see Shen Zhihua and Li Danhui, eds., ZhongSu guanxi: Eguo dang’an
fuyinjian huibian (weikan) [Sino–Soviet Relations: Collected Copies of Russian
Archives: unpublished version] (Center of Cold War History Studies, China East
Normal University, 2002).

This volume consists of four chapters, together with an intro-
duction and conclusion. In Chapter 1, I examine how a socialist
China had been established in the late 1940s and early 1950s under
Mao’s leadership largely following the pattern of Stalinist socialism
in the Soviet Union and corresponding Eastern European processes
of economic Stalinization. The chapter describes in detail certain
events in the early phase of the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC’s)
transplanting of the Stalinist model to Chinese society, analyzing
how Mao made full use of his politically and ideologically domi-
nant status inside the CCP to push forward a radical program of
state reconstruction, which largely defied Stalin’s own moderate ad-
vice based on acknowledging the dominance of the paradigm of people's democracy in the period following World War II. Attention also is given to Chinese policies vis-à-vis the Eastern Bloc during Stalin’s final years and after; although the Chinese regime wanted to learn from the socialist transformation in the Eastern European states, Chairman Mao also wished to keep the Soviet Bloc at some sort of arm’s length both politically and institutionally, preventing outside events from disrupting Chinese socialist transformation. But China’s self-imposed distance from the Soviet Bloc also, ironically, signaled Mao’s view of his country as a future leader of world revolution. Therefore, after years of efforts to catch up with the people’s democracies and the USSR in domestic reconstruction, the basic completion of the socialist form of the state based on a Soviet model by late 1955 meant that, for Mao, the time was ripe for a strengthened China to involve itself more deeply in inner-bloc matters.

Chapter 2 addresses the different effects that Khrushchev’s secret speech had on the Eastern Bloc on the one hand, and on Mao’s Communist China on the other, reviewing the domestic instabilities in Hungary and Poland before and after the CPSU Twentieth Congress, and weighing the forces and circumstances that gave rise to a new program emphasizing a socialism with distinctively Chinese characteristics after February 1956 (however much it may also have been marked with Chinese limitations). This section begins to consider the domestic political dynamics of China’s growing involvement in Eastern Bloc affairs in the post–CPSU Twentieth Congress atmosphere. In taking the temperature of the unexpected (and, to the CCP, unwelcome) consequences of the anti-Stalinist and nationalist foment incited by the CPSU Twentieth Congress in both Hungary and Poland, it provides a detailed analysis of the Hungarian leadership’s moves to solve the domestic problems through calling in Soviet power, in strong contrast to the Poles’ efforts to keep a hand on the tiller themselves, which consigned the country to a state of disorder and uncertainty that incubated insurrection. On the Chinese side, meanwhile, given the considerable
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degree of ideological and political autonomy the CCP enjoyed from the Soviet Union, the CCP leadership did not feel personally threatened by the Stalin episode but rather saw it as a good opportunity to strike out for a distinctive Chinese socialism aiming to surpass the achievements of the Soviets and to introduce the Maoist experience to the broader international communist community.

Chapter 3 takes up the story from the Chinese diplomatic and political intervention in the Polish and then Hungarian crises in the second half of October, advancing the view that Mao and his colleagues sought to parlay the events into an opportunity to secure a greater measure of equality with the Soviet Union. The events precipitated a series of unexpected policy changes not only on the Soviet side but also on the part of the Chinese largely due to the pace and complexity of domestic developments in Hungary. These investigations assess the special role played by the Chinese in the Soviet decision to pull out its troops from Hungary, asking how and why Beijing shifted its diplomatic policy from opposing “big-state chauvinism” to advocating a Soviet Bloc unity in such short order in late October 1956. The chapter next explores why it became so important for Mao to emphasize the ultimate value of the Stalinist pattern of interbloc relations as the perception, in Moscow and Beijing, of the potential unruliness of the bloc’s ideological and institutional diversity without a proper framework of management brought the two major communist powers closer together.

Chapter 4 turns to the influence of the Hungarian Revolution on the development of Communist China from late 1956 to the end of 1957, a crucial prelude to the famous 1958 “Great Leap Forward” campaign. It examines the domestic circumstances in which Mao gradually become aware of the potential dangers involved in the call for reforms in both economic and political realms even as the Chairman was vigorously advocating for political relaxations, like the HF, with which he most likely harbored serious misgivings at a time of disquiet among the intellectuals over the Hungarian events. In pursuing these issues I examine the party officials’ misinterpretation of Mao’s purposes in continuing the HF policy and the in-
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tellectuals’ and students’ idealistic hopes of the center’s top-down reform. Mao justified his speedy truncation of the permission extended to outsiders to criticize party work with the excuse that some counterrevolutionary elements had conspired to provoke Hungarian-style revolts in China, though it is more plausible that the key element was Mao’s own concern that the legitimacy of the unlimited power and ideological correctness of his leadership would start to be called into question.

In the conclusion, I review the main findings of this thesis, arguing that the idea that China sought to reform the Stalinist pattern of interbloc relationships after Khrushchev’s denunciation of him is seriously misconceived and fails to square with the actual conduct of Chinese foreign policy in relation to Hungary, as well as with the evolution of Chinese domestic politics between 1956 and 1957. Despite the fact that China’s status inside the Soviet Bloc had been significantly enhanced with no diminution in the strength of the Sino–Soviet alliance in the immediate aftermath of Hungary, the radical policies adopted by Mao at home and on the international front after the failure of HF provoked a double crisis in China’s relationship with the Soviet-led bloc and in China’s domestic path of development. There seems little alternative to the depressing summary observation that the Hungarian events taught the Chairman and his successors that any attempt at political reform was only likely to prompt a collapse of the communist regime.