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The Unfathomable Foe. Constructing the Enemy in the Sino-Soviet Borderlands, ca. 1969–1982

At first glance, the Sino-Soviet rift of the 1960s and 1970s seems thoroughly researched.¹ Yet there remain a number of open questions that have nothing directly to do with the sabre-rattling that emanated from Beijing or Moscow or geostrategic power shifts within the Cold War Moscow–Washington–Beijing triad. These questions are also not directly related to any military minutiae of the border conflict that escalated in March 1969 with an incident on the insignificant island of Damanskii (Zhenbao)² on the Ussuri River,³ which forms the border between Russia and China. One reason for this is the unsatisfactory working conditions for historians in both countries. However, it is still worth shifting our focus away from the centres of Moscow and Beijing to examine the borderlands where the two communist empires, armed to the teeth, confronted one another in order to explore how the rivalry was echoed.

By the time of the Sino-Soviet split, the border between the two countries was about 7500 kilometres long, or more than 12.000 kilometres long if we include the border between China and Mongolia. This was the longest land border in the world, extending from the Ussuri, Amur and Argun rivers in the east via the steppes and deserts along the border between Outer and Inner Mongolia, to the peaks of the Altai and Tianshan mountains in the west. Alongside the military confrontation with China at the border, ideological warfare played a key role in the conflict between China and the Soviet Union, since military protection of the border was just

1 L. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split. Cold War in the Communist World*, Princeton/NJ 2008, which focuses more on the Chinese side, and S. Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens. The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962–1967*, Washington, D.C. 2009, which focuses more on the Soviet side.

2 For an overview of the views of Russian and Chinese researchers on the causes and people responsible for the conflict on Damanskii, see L. J. Goldstein, «Return to Zhenbao Island: Who

Started Shooting and Why It Matters», in: *The China Quarterly* 168 (2001), 985–997, 985–986. For a sound account, based predominantly on Chinese sources, see K. Yang, «The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement», in: *Cold War History* 1 (2000) 1, 21–52.

3 For the sake of clarity, the names of rivers and islands in the Russian-Chinese border regions are given here in their Russian form.

one among several concerns for the Soviets. What the Kremlin also feared was the crisis of ideological legitimisation provoked by Beijing, and its possible impacts at home and abroad.⁴ The study of propaganda is thus as important for the understanding of the conflict as the study of its military history. How closed was the border in terms of information flows? Was it completely impenetrable? How were the border and the «Other» represented?

In this article I try to shed light on the presentation of the border and the Sino-Soviet conflict in the regional Soviet media and nationwide publishing, as well as on the construction of the enemy and the image of China on the Soviet side. The present analysis thus concentrates on the Soviet perspective, for which more sources are available. In what follows, I draw comparisons with China where possible and whenever it seems helpful to do so. Although it was decided in the capitals how propaganda should be conducted, I take a regional perspective. To answer the questions raised it seems essential to study the local arrangements and to analyse the presentation of the border and the image of the «Other» to the people in the borderlands. The focus is on the border area of the Chita region – in other words, eastern Transbaikalia on the Soviet side and, to some extent, the region of Hulunbei'er in Inner Mongolia on the Chinese side. The Sino-Russian border in the area under study was already demarcated – almost along its present course – more than three hundred years ago in the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689).⁵ By the time of the Sino-Soviet conflict, however, there was no longer any significant difference between the Chita region and other regions neighbouring China. There were still few negative reports about China in the USSR, and there was no enemy construction by the Soviets before the clashes on the Ussuri. I focus therefore mainly on 1969 and the years that followed, with a short reference to the end of enmity in the 1980s.

1. Construction and Representation: The Enemy across the Border

During the 1950s, everywhere along the Sino-Soviet border, everywhere between Kaliningrad and Guangzhou, a rhetoric of friendship was to be heard. The Amur was officially considered the «River of Friendship». This was the rhetoric of the 1950s, that of «eternal fraternity».⁶ The first signs of a new mood could be seen by the end of that decade. They were also harbingers of a rhetoric that represents a different phase in the two countries' relations.

4 Some New Cold War Historians have argued that ideology is not sufficient to explain the collapse of the alliance. See O.A. Westad (ed.), *Brothers in Arms. The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945–1963*, Washington, D.C. 1998, 4. According to Radchenko, for instance, Khrushchev never believed that ideology was a major obstacle undermining the alliance. Radchenko,

Suns, chapter 2. Other recent studies, however, support the disruptive role of ideology in Sino-Soviet relations: Lüthi, *Split*, passim, 8–12.

5 M. Mancall, *Russia and China. Their Diplomatic Relations to 1728*, Cambridge/Mass. 1971, 280–283.

6 For the alliance period see Westad, *Brothers*.

But how do you get a people that officially loved another country as an «eternal brother» just some years earlier to regard it as a threat and the people across the border as enemies? For those living in the border regions of the Soviet Union, there was no need to come up with a new concept of China as an enemy, as the old one could merely be reactivated. In the late 1920s, Soviet popular literature and the Soviet press had already tried to turn the people in the Soviet borderlands and beyond against the national government in Nanjing and against the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin.⁷ Therefore, anti-Chinese sentiments were not uncommon among those living near the border. Following Japan's occupation of Manchuria in 1931–1932, the border became the front, and the fear of war pervaded the heavily militarised border region for many years and limited cross-border contacts.⁸ The «golden decade» following the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949 – until the first ruptures appeared in the alliance between Moscow and Beijing – was in fact a fleeting moment of peace. While peace did indeed reign along the border during this period, references to a «border of peace» were largely rhetorical, as the neighbouring country remained closed to most border residents. While the threat of a war scenario with Japan no longer existed along the border shared with China many policies that reflected this threat continued.⁹ Thus, long before the bloody border clashes in March 1969, the border had become a social fact or, to use Michiel Baud's and Willem van Schendel's «life cycle» metaphor of borderlands here, it was an «adult borderland». Contacts across the border were cut off, and the border re-emerged in an ideological context with new meaning and new legitimacy.¹⁰

Propaganda played a key role in the conflict between China and the Soviet Union in the borderlands and beyond. There was a long history of agitation against the enemy among the home population and behind enemy lines. Both the Soviet Union and China were masters in the deployment of propaganda, which became increasingly effective as a result of technological innovations. The transformation of the technological means of mass communication led to a greater diversity of media. Almost every major organisation, and almost every district town in the Soviet Union now had its own newspaper. Radio became increasingly important in both countries, and television arrived in Soviet living rooms as well. But the significant news and «messages» remained the same. People informed themselves of the truth, if possible, through foreign broadcasters or acquaintances. China and the Soviet

7 See for example N. Kostarev, *Granitsa na zamke*, Moskva 1930.

8 See for example the TASS press reports on border violations by Manchukuo troops from 1936 in «Provokatsii iaponskoi voenshchiny na sovetskikh granitsakh. Perekhod roty manchzhurskikh soldat na sovetskuiu territoriiu», in: *Tikhii Okean. Politiko-sotsial'no-ekonomicheskii zhurnal* 7 (1936) 1, 226–231.

9 A. Frolov, *Razvitie sovetsko-kitaiskikh prigranichnykh otnoshenii na Dal'nem Vostoke SSSR (1949–1969 gg.)*, Khabarovsk 2007.

10 M. Baud / W. van Schendel, «Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands», in: *Journal of World History* 8 (1997) 2, 211–242, 223–225.

Union, two totalitarian states, both of which had a monopoly on news, instrumentalised newspapers, radio, television and other channels to indoctrinate their own and the enemy population, and to erect or reactivate mental walls. But what was the function of the media in the conflict of the 1960s and 1970s? What strategies did each side use in its reporting? To what extent can we describe their methods of propaganda as «modern», meaning innovative in content and form? How was the antagonist's propaganda undermined? How did each country stage itself, and what images of the «Other» were produced?

2. The Propaganda War

Beginning on 2 March 1969, after an elite Chinese unit had attacked a Soviet patrol on Damanskii Island, Soviet newspapers' and broadcasters' anti-Maoist line intensified to unprecedented levels. Their colleagues in Beijing mimicked their tone. Both sides used the events on the Ussuri to appeal to their people's patriotism. Within no more than twenty-four hours of the incident, propaganda strategists in Beijing had begun to disseminate the catchy slogan «Down with the new tsars!» (*dadao xin shahuang*), which they subsequently used to agitate against the Soviet leadership at home and abroad.¹¹ While the Kremlin, by contrast did not produce any catchy slogans, the centrally controlled Soviet propaganda machine also quickly gained momentum. On 14 March the Central Committee of the CPSU adopted with immediate effect a propaganda plan for the press and for radio and TV broadcasting with the aim of «exposing the treacherous actions and hazardous course of the Maoist group». This set out the topics to be reported in *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, *Sel'kaia Zhizn'*, *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, *Trud*, *Kommunist*, *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, *Agitator*, *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn'* and other key print media. In the case of *Pravda*, the central organ of the CPSU, the plan provided for coverage of the «struggle against Maoism – the struggle for a united world communist movement», «the foreign policy approach of the Chinese leadership» and three other main topics.¹² But overall the propaganda of the People's Republic was initially more effective in the mobilisation of the masses.¹³

The printed and audio expressions of the Soviet-Chinese media war probably bored Western observers. The structure of programmes – whether intended for the enemy or the public at home – fit with the long-standing format familiar to Soviet and Chinese listeners and readers: controversial information on political events, admission of national failures and weaknesses or thwarted expectations were out of the question, while reports on policy disputes or statements on as yet unresolved political issues outside of the «socialist camp» were to be read, if at all, only between

11 K. Mehnert, «Die Schüsse am Ussuri und ihr Echo», in: *Osteuropa* (1969) 8, 549–559, 550.

12 Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI), f. 5 (*Fond apparata TsK KPSS*, 1935–1991), op. 61, d. 27, ll. 50–54, quotation l. 50.

13 Mehnert, «Schüsse», 552; E. Wishnick, *Mending Fences. The Evolution of Moscow's China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin*, Seattle 2001, 34.

the lines. The structure and construction of Soviet and Chinese political broadcasts were in principle interchangeable. Moscow broadcasted half-hourly news and comment programmes, whose reports were punctuated with supposed listeners' requests: mainly Chinese folk songs and melodies from Chinese operas that were banned from the airwaves in China itself. Beijing's acoustic bombardment of the enemy was conceived in much the same way. But there was one major difference: the programmes broadcast from Moscow lacked the proclamation «Long live our great Chairman Mao!» (*Mao zhuxi wansui*) and the obligatory quotation from Mao at the beginning of every broadcast.

What distinguished the Soviet and Chinese acoustic bombardment of the enemy from printed and audio material for the people at home was perhaps the smaller dose of crude polemic. In most of the broadcasts intended for those living on the other side of the border, the key aim was to favourably portray events and conditions at home through reports and announcements to create the image of an internationally respected and loved country, a flourishing nation on the rise.¹⁴

China and the Soviet Union cultivated a positive image at home as well. Alongside broadcasts on life in the Soviet Union and its inexorable progress in all fields, such as *People and Society* (*Chelovek i obshchestvo*) on television and *I am a Soviet* (*Ia chelovek sovetskii*) on the radio, there were also radio programmes intended to refute China's propaganda and inform people of the outrages committed by the «Maoists and other imperialist forces on our planet».¹⁵ Throughout the country, but especially in the Soviet border regions, films also reached a broad audience. Perhaps the two best-known anti-Maoist documentary films, directed by Aleksandr Medvedkin, were *Letter to a Chinese Friend* (*Pis'mo kitaiskomu drugu* from 1969) and *Night over China* (*Noch' nad Kitaem*, 1971). The content is apparent in the titles. In *Night over China*, Medvedkin shows how the «Red Guards» (*Hongweibing*) drive an old, once respected cadre through the streets of Beijing like a performing bear, knocking out his teeth, putting a fool's cap on his head and, after all this humiliation, forcing him to do backbreaking work in the fields. In 1973 alone, the film was screened 1200 times, reaching 145,000 viewers in the Chita region – around twelve per cent of the region's population.¹⁶ The message of the documentary *The Maoists' Disastrous Course* (*Pagubnyi kurs maoistov*) reached those unable to receive it via the central TV channels in 1969 through film critics in Soviet newspapers: «Mao's rise to power rests on political provocations, betrayal and countless victims.»¹⁷ In criticising the detrimental course on which the People's Republic had embarked, the Soviet agitators were always keen to urge political vigilance (*politicheskaiia bditel'nost'*) on the part of

14 H. König, «Der sowjetisch-chinesische Rundfunkkrieg», in: *Osteuropa* (1969) 8, 560–574, 563–565.

15 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Chitinskoi oblasti (GACHO),

f. P-3 (*Chitinskii obkom KPSS*), op. 27, d. 51, l. 83.

16 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, ll. 17–18.

17 *Zabaikal'ets*, 19 August 1969.

the people at home and to warn them of the dangerous path taken by the large neighbouring state. The message was clear: patriotism and readiness to defend the fatherland at all times. The impact on addressees is in contrast very hard to assess.¹⁸

3. A New Hero

One key motif of Soviet propaganda during the Sino-Soviet rift was the heroic myth of the border guard, a myth that had existed before the March events. The 28th of May had been declared the Day of the Border Guard in the Soviet Union as early as 1918. The institutionalised hero was first propagated on a massive scale in the 1930s. Faced with the threat of war against Japan's puppet state of Manchukuo, the *pogranichnik* had been stylised as a hero of the people.¹⁹

How were heroes made or «reanimated»? Alongside reprints from *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, as well as TASS news agency articles on the border skirmishes delivered from the centre, the regional, district and local newspapers of the border regions devoted much space to the events of March in the form of «readers'» letters to the border guards, reports on the border guards, illustrations of border soldiers or collections of poems dedicated to the combatants, such as that by poet R. Filippov, «For Our Enemies, Every Route to Us is Barred» (*Dlia vragov dorogi k nam zakryty*).²⁰ In locally produced stories, the roles were also clearly divided: the «Chinese bandits» were confronted by Soviet «heroes of the island of Damanskii», who demonstrated «bravery and heroism» in the defensive battle against the enemy.²¹ Their deployment was staged as part of an ongoing historical mission to protect the border:

Those serving at the border posts are the sons of those men who defeated the Japanese Samurai [*iaponskich samuraev*] and defended the fronts in the Great Patriotic War. The echo of the shots fired on Damanskii can be heard all along the border. Redoubled vigilance is the only answer for our boys on guard.²²

Those sons who had fallen in the March battles were acclaimed as martyrs for the security and happiness of the fatherland. It was the fate of those living «next door» with which the people were now to sympathise. Anatolii Kovalev, just nineteen years of age, was one of the soldiers who lost his life in the second battle in mid-March. The *Transbaikal Worker* (*Zabaikal'skii Rabochii*), the organ of the regional party administration, wrote:

Following the Chinese provocation on 2 March on the island of Damanskii, [Anatolii's] mother listened closely to the radio every morning, asked [...] eve-

18 For a detailed look at the ideas and themes emanating from Moscow and Beijing, see König, «Rundfunkkrieg», 566–574.

19 S. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, Oxford 1999, 71–75.

20 *Na Boevom Postu*, 3 April 1969.

21 *Zabaikal'skaia Magistral'*, 20 March 1969.

22 *Zabaikal'skaia Magistral'*, 29 March 1969.

ryone for news and hurried to the village soviet every day to wait for letters. And they came [...]. «You're probably worried because of all the things that have been going on. What can I say? What is done is done. But you don't have to worry. Everything will be fine.» [His mother] was on the way home when the sad news of Anatolii Kovalev's death reached the village of Bal'za. The whole village mourned the border guard who had been a local boy. Everyone, young and old, gathered for the funeral service in the village club to remember those who «loved their lives and their Fatherland. They died in the name of life, in the name of our beloved homeland, for our happiness», stated teacher A. L. Andreev. [...] Things will be peaceful along the border, for it is reliably guarded. The heroes of Damanskii have proved as much.²³

The same newspaper had published a similar article three days earlier, which as ever took up one or more pages: «Addressee: Chita 2, Dachnaia 17, Gladyshev, Viktor Semenovich. Message: Your son Sergei has died the death of the brave while protecting the national border ...», the telegrapher [...] read the telegram once again. What is to be done? How on earth I am to tell his mother this terrible news, when her heart is already so weak?»²⁴ The fate of this soldier was taken up by almost every newspaper in the region, including *On Guard* (*Na Boevom Postu*), the organ of the Transbaikalian military district. The reporter had talked to those close to Sergei and reported that the deceased was considered an «active Komsomol member», someone who liked to read, travel and play basketball, the son of «a normal working-class family».²⁵ On 3 April, in a special issue of the same newspaper devoted to the March events, the headmistress of the 29th secondary school of Chita praised former pupil Sergei.²⁶ In October, the fallen son was posthumously decorated with the medal for bravery, which his mother, the head of a nursery school, received on his behalf in an official ceremony.²⁷

Chita grieved for Sergei Gladyshev. Ulan Ude grieved for Nikolai Petrov, son of Maria Petrova, who set out from her little flat in the suburbs to work in the train repair works day in and day out for a quarter of a century. Maria received letters from her son with equal regularity, until her Nikolai «died on the ice of the Ussuri on 2 March».²⁸ In short: a normal Soviet biography. Every town got its heroes from «next door». Their lost sons were acclaimed as heroes. Their martyr's death, embellished by the media, helped to further emotionalise the conflict.

The myth of the hero of the Ussuri River had a long half-life. It cast a bright shaft of light that began to wane only many years later. Most citizens of the Soviet Union learned of the background of the Sino-Soviet border conflict under Perestroika or afterwards. The events of March 1969 in particular long remained in obscurity.

23 *Zabaikal'skii Rabochii*, 26 March 1969.

24 *Zabaikal'skii Rabochii*, 23 March 1969.

25 *Na Boevom Postu*, 23 March 1969.

26 *Na Boevom Postu*, 3 April 1969.

27 *Zabaikal'skii Rabochii*, 4 October 1969.

28 *Na Boevom Postu*, 22 March 1969.

Some of the myths of that time live on to this day. Aleksandr Tarasov, a local historian from Chita, experienced the events on the Ussuri as a pupil at a Chinese language school in Chita. This man, who worked right on the front line as a customs official in the 1980s, recalls how anti-Chinese propaganda and the Damanskii myth informed his youth. As early as March 1969, the pupils were led through a hastily erected exhibition at the military museum of the Transbaikal military district in Chita. According to Tarasov, «an entire room was dedicated to the March events: outsize photographs showing the bodies of Soviet border guards. Death on their faces and the bodies uncovered – so that we could see their injuries and the clotted blood more clearly.» For Tarasov, the battle over this island is a lesson for the present:

The Damanskii myth, to the extent that it exists, is the key to us ourselves, torn between the desire to feel uplifted by the heroes of childhood and the empty feeling of knowing how the authorities deceived us. We still fall into the psychological trap that lies between loyalty to one's own state and the quest to come up with a rational view of these events of just under forty years ago.²⁹

4. The Frosted Glass Border

What image of the neighbouring country was imparted to citizens of the USSR living directly on the border? Which newspapers did they read? Railway employees may have read the *Transbaikal Magistral* (*Zabaikal'skaia Magistral'*), while customs officers and border guards read the *Na Boevom Postu* newspaper. Some party cadres or teachers may have even subscribed to the regional newspaper, the *Zabaikal'skii Rabochii*. The majority though, if they read anything at all, would have reached for the district newspaper. The party administration of the district of Zabaikal'sk, established on 1 January 1967 in the course of local government reorganisation, printed its own newspaper, *The Transbaikalian* (*Zabaikal'ets*), starting in the summer of 1967. Four pages long, it appeared three times a week beginning on 27 June 1967. Previously, the residents of Zabaikal'sk and the surrounding villages in the Soviet borderland could read *Lenin's Way* (*Leninskii put'*), a newspaper first published in 1930 and produced by the district administration of Borzia, to which Zabaikal'sk belonged until 1966. The reports in both newspapers were informed chiefly by life in the country. Now and then texts were also delivered by TASS on the successful development of the fraternal socialist countries. And China?

The reader in the borderland learned little about China. On 1 October 1959, a report appeared in the *Leninskii put'* on the railway workers of the border stations of Zabaikal'sk and Manzhouli that illustrates the peculiar friendship between the two

29 Author's interview with Aleksandr Tarasov on 16 August 2008 in Chita.

peoples. Raisa Kuznetsova is the protagonist in this report with the telling title «Russian and Chinese – Brothers Forever». Journalist S. Leshenok described the everyday working life of the Soviet duty officers of the border railway trading post. Kuznetsova worked together with her Chinese colleague in the office for eight years. In the beginning, she could communicate with him only through an interpreter. «Now they converse in simple sentences, and when the words run out, they make use of gestures and sketches. [...] Over the years the friendship between the two railway station veterans has grown and strengthened.» The text comes to an emotive close:

In many divisions of Zabaikal'sk Russians and Chinese work shoulder to shoulder. All are united by the strong friendship and one goal – to move more rapidly into the bright future [*svetloe budushchee*]. The workers of this border station often visit their friends on the other side of the border. They discuss and agree on forthcoming work, exchange their experiences, learn all that is useful from one another. This good friendship, hard as steel, unites the railway workers of both border stations.³⁰

These words no doubt sounded stereotypical and crude. At best, they were only partially true. Yet these were astonishingly specific, vivid accounts. One can almost see oneself next to the tracks. The people in the story had names. The places had names. The reader knew the places, and perhaps even some of the people. It was to be the last report dealing explicitly with the people on both sides of the border. It was the last text to make any mention of Manzhouli – the name of the town across the border – for many years. Though the two towns lay just nine kilometres apart and could be seen across the border from the peaks of the steppe hills, the Soviet regional press was to keep quiet about Manzhouli and other places in the Chinese border region for twenty-six years.

Only after more than a quarter of a century, beginning in the summer of 1986, did China appear once again in a positive light in the regional publications of the Soviet borderlands: first in general reports on the friendship societies resuming their work and the exchange of delegations,³¹ then in reports on Chinese musicians' participation in the Moscow Chaikovskii competition,³² and finally, in late August 1986, in reports about the visit by a four-person delegation of the Manzhouli Sino-Soviet friendship society to the district of Zabaikal'sk. The report was brief, and the language still matter-of-fact, but the editors had given a photo of the joint Soviet-Chinese delegation a prominent position. «During the three-day visit, the delegation stopped by an agricultural repair workshop, the mechanical feed processing plant of the state farm «Stepnoi», the nursery school in Zabaikal'sk and the family of a working class railwayman. They were provided with a programme of cultural events.»³³

³⁰ *Leninskii put'*, 1 October 1959.

³¹ *Zabaikal'ets*, 26 July 1986.

³² *Zabaikal'ets*, 12 August 1986.

³³ *Zabaikal'ets*, 13 September 1986.

There was as yet no sign of a return to the typically effusive style used twenty-six years earlier by journalist Leshenok in *Leninskii put'*, who sang the praises of the friendship between the two peoples, but the trend was clear. It took another four years for the first multi-part report on the neighbouring town of Manzhouli to appear in August and September 1990 under the title «Seven Days in China». The reader could feel the journalist's enthusiasm; evidently, he could hardly believe his eyes.³⁴ These reports meant the end of the «frosted glass» border, behind which the «Other» beyond the steppe hills was for decades merely a blurred outline. This was the rehabilitation of the concrete «Other», the return of people and places.

What was the nature of the reports on the border conflict of 1969? For the most part, the regional newspapers reprinted reports from other newspapers on the clashes on Damanskii Island with a delay of one week. The front page of the *Zabaikal'ets* included TASS articles on the funeral of the fallen Soviet soldiers and the content of a press conference at the Soviet foreign ministry. On the same page, in a prominent position in the upper left column, under the heading «With full voice», the paper reported on a gathering of the residents of the Soviet border town, to which the party leadership had invited them one week after the exchange of fire on the Ussuri. Half the village had gathered in the railway station and was sworn to the new situation. Nasak Iudinov, the first secretary of the district committee, opened the meeting. Leading employees of the local rail operations then gave speeches, but there were also contributions by simple workers and railwaymen on the protection of the «sacred borders» (*sviashchennye rubezhi*). To the extent that we can believe the printed quotations, a shunter, Michael Voitkov, rose to deliver a stirring speech:

Through the border violation, the Chinese provocateurs have shown their true colours. So it is our duty to protect the border like the pupil of our eye. The Chinese leadership has gone from provocations on the ideological front to armed struggle. We Soviets now bear the stigma of shame because of the Chinese provocateurs. We mourn with the mothers of the fallen border guards.³⁵

Over the following weeks and months, the journalists of the district newspaper reported on organised assemblies, such as a meeting of the Agricultural Technology Association (*Sel'khoztekhnika*) on 16 July. The participants emphasised the pacifist character of the Soviet people, and they discussed and «approved» (*odobriali*) a message from the Soviet government of 13 July on the Chinese question.³⁶ The most important gathering of this kind in the border town of Zabaikal'sk was held on another July evening in the square behind the railwaymen's club. Journalist A. Banushev wrote an in-depth piece on the «Meeting with the Heroes of Damanskii», as the title put it. Pupils, workers, senior citizens – half the town came together there

34 *Zabaikal'ets*, 28 August 1990, 11 September 1990 and 25 September 1990.

35 *Zabaikal'ets*, 11 March 1969.

36 *Zabaikal'ets*, 19 June 1969.

to listen to the speeches of the border guards, some of whom had fought right on the front line. They told not only of the Chinese provocations on Damanskii, but also of incidents from the preceding period and their heroic defence of the homeland, eliciting «thunderous applause» from their listeners. Towards the end of his report, Banushev allowed himself to be carried away on a wave of nationalism, expressing sentiments so characteristic of that particular summer:

One listens to these stories and satisfies oneself – indeed one is left in no doubt – as to the Soviet youth's loyalty to the Communist Party and the ideals of Leninism and how much they love their Soviet homeland. These young people never provoke such wars, but when push comes to shove they even put their own lives on the line. They do not let their native land down. This is how it has always been, and this is how it will always be.³⁷

In 1969, alongside these exclusive reports from the region, the district newspaper published texts of a trans-regional character: often statements, several pages long by the Soviet government on China,³⁸ interviews with the «Heroes of the Island of Damanskii», reports on the Soviet retaliation of 15 March,³⁹ and TASS photo reports on the border guards on the Ussuri⁴⁰ and on soldiers and border guards from the region of Chita who were involved in the clashes, some of them posthumously decorated.⁴¹ Through an eyewitness report, the newspaper recalled the Sino-Soviet conflict of 1929, highlighting the Red Army's heroic struggles in the conflict over the Chinese Eastern Railway, the heaviest clashes occurring in and around Manzhouli exactly four decades earlier.⁴²

Another central component of the regional coverage of China in 1969 were reprints drawn from national newspapers and TASS articles on the crimes perpetrated against the Chinese people by the «Mao clique», a number of which appeared during the summer months. They denounced the ideological clashes during the Cultural Revolution as well as their consequences, the sending of urban youths to rural areas, mass troop deployments, smear campaigns, public humiliation and other repressive acts committed by the Red Guards as well as the entanglement of American politics in the revolutionary events in the People's Republic.⁴³ The travel report by «foreign journalist» Zhong Ping was especially vivid. His journey of more than one thousand kilometres from Wuhan to Beijing made him an eye- and earwitness to a country beset by hunger and madness, and he produced astonishingly vivid accounts of the suffering of the Chinese people, arousing feelings of sympathy among Soviet readers.⁴⁴ These reports were supplemented with news of

37 *Zabaikal'ets*, 24 July 1969.

38 *Zabaikal'ets*, 20 March 1969 and 17 June 1969.

39 Both in *Zabaikal'ets*, 22 March 1969.

40 *Zabaikal'ets*, 3 April 1969.

41 *Zabaikal'ets*, 17 April 1969.

42 *Zabaikal'ets*, 30 October 1969.

43 *Zabaikal'ets*, 3 June 1969, 7 June 1969, 12 June 1969 and 29 July 1969.

44 *Zabaikal'ets*, 23 September 1969.

incidents on the border with China that occurred in places other than Damanskii in the summer of 1969. These could not be kept from the people or were not intended to be kept from them so as to further stoke resentment against the neighbouring country.⁴⁵ The Soviet intention was to exert psychological pressure on the Chinese, something it also did through war preparations. The Chinese indeed feared a Soviet (nuclear) attack. Articles calling on all citizens in the Soviet borderlands to contribute to civil defence and cooperate with the army demonstrate that there was still a risk of war in the autumn.⁴⁶

From 1970 on, China was to appear in the local newspaper only sporadically, when Moscow anticipated new acts of aggression along the border emanating from Beijing,⁴⁷ when it became aware of new anti-Soviet sentiments in China,⁴⁸ or reported on China's domestic political difficulties and the suffering of the people.⁴⁹ But the intensity of the reports had diminished markedly.

While the Damanskii hero was given a specific face, the enemy in China and the Middle Kingdom remained abstract to the Soviet reader. During the quarter of a century between the 1959 report «Russian and Chinese – Brothers Forever», the account of Chinese and Soviet railway employees working together amicably, and the report from 1986 on the delegation from Manzhouli, when rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing had begun and cross-border trade was resumed, there was no coverage at all of the region just over the border. The Soviet regional newspapers in Transbaikalia were silent about China's border regions. For a quarter of a century, the border was a hazy wall. The country on the other side of the border, once so familiar, was erased from the collective memory. Geographical names from the Chinese border region vanished behind a veil of propaganda. And the enemy that lurked behind the border with this increasingly alien country was just as diffuse, anonymous and – perhaps for this very reason – feared.

5. «War Over the Airwaves»

The border region was also the front line of propaganda in the «war over the airwaves». The shorthand text of the «Regional Conference on the Chinese Question» of 3 and 4 July 1974 in Chita reveals how this area was to be protected from enemy attacks. The list of speakers attending this meeting of regional leaders is another illustration of how seriously Soviet decision makers in the area took the problem of the nearly one thousand kilometre-long border connecting the region of Chita with China. The conference was a get-together of border experts at the regional level. Though M. Matafonov, the first secretary of the regional committee of the CPSU, gave assurances in his opening words that this was no more than a «regular meet-

45 See the protest note from the Soviet Foreign Ministry to the Chinese Embassy in Moscow printed in the newspaper. *Zabaikal'ets*, 15 July 1969.

46 *Zabaikal'ets*, 25 September 1969.

47 *Zabaikal'ets*, 11 September 1973.

48 *Zabaikal'ets*, 5 March 1974.

49 *Zabaikal'ets*, 30 March 1976.

ing and has not [been convened] in response to any new or special situation with respect to the Chinese question», the lists of guests and speakers convey a different picture.⁵⁰ The fifteen speakers were the key figures in border control in the region. Aside from Matafonov the speakers included comrades S. Begunov, the first secretary of the CPSU of the district committee of Priargunsk in the eastern part of the Chita region; V. Lomakov, the KGB representative in the USSR Council of Ministers for the region of Chita; G. Truchin, the master of the border station of Zabaikal'sk; A. Biks, the chief of the political section of the Transbaikal military district; I. Skotnikov, the head of the political section of the Transbaikal border district; E. Malikov, the chair of the regional television and radio broadcasting committee; A. Puzanov, the editor of the regional newspaper *Zabaikal'skii Rabochii*; and V. Sadovnikov, the secretary of the CPSU's town committee for Chita, to mention just a few. Of the 450 invited guests, V. Shkliabin and A. Tsukanov, two China specialists on the Central Committee of the CPSU, travelled from Moscow to attend. The autonomous region of Altai, also bordering the People's Republic of China, sent its own party delegation.⁵¹ The aim of the conference was to take stock of border protection on all levels. More than five years after the exchange of fire on the island of Damanskii on the Ussuri River, Malikov told the guests at the conference:

On the Chinese side, attempts continue to be made to exert an ideological influence on the Soviet people and especially the border guards through special organs and special units. In the Chinese villages near our border radio broadcasts of an anti-Soviet character are constantly being transmitted from powerful loudspeakers on Chinese territory, and slogans and banners with anti-Soviet themes are regularly put up across from Soviet settlements.⁵²

Though the inhabitants of the border regions within and beyond immediate sight and earshot of the border remained the main target of the agitation practised by both states – simply because the goodwill of the border residents was seen as particularly important – the two countries also waged a propaganda war of greater territorial scope.

From as early as 1929, the Soviet Union was broadcasting radio programmes in foreign languages across the world. Forty years later, Moscow's radio programmes were being transmitted in eighty-two languages and dialects. When the Soviet Union entered the Second World War, it began to broadcast programmes in Chinese, though they did not exceed ten hours a day until 1965. Once the Cultural

50 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, l. 1. Moreover, in 1974 bilateral negotiations on the border issue broke down [once more]. The pessimistic outlook might explain why the conference was organised at this very moment. T. Robinson, «China Confronts the Soviet Union: Warfare and Diplomacy on China's

Inner Asian frontiers», in: *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 15, part 2, Cambridge 1991, 218–301, 287–291.

51 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, ll. 1–3.

52 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, l. 9.

Revolution was underway, however, the broadcasting time of Chinese programmes increased rapidly. Total broadcasting time in standard Chinese (*putonghua*) from all of Moscow's international broadcasting stations amounted to 168 hours a week towards the end of 1967 – in other words, twenty-four hours a day. There were also broadcasts in Cantonese (for southern China), the Shanghai dialect, and Mongolian and Uigur, the latter transmitted by Radio Tashkent.⁵³

In Chita, thirty-five hours of radio broadcasts were produced for an international audience each week in 1974. Most of these programmes originated in Moscow, and were aired in four different Chinese dialects. Chita itself even had an editorial office producing a limited number of broadcasts for China in Mandarin with a focus on the neighbouring Chinese regions. Among other things, the broadcasts presented the lives of the people of Transbaikalia and the work of the Communist Party. The number of broadcasts was limited partly because of the lack of personnel qualified to produce such programmes. Aside from the radio bombardment of China, journalists cooperated with their colleagues in the People's Republic of Mongolia. These programmes underlined – partly to bring out the contrast with China – the friendship between the peoples of the Soviet Union and Mongolia.⁵⁴

With broadcasts in forty-one languages in 1969, the People's Republic was in second place within the communist world behind the USSR with regard to international broadcasting. Though China began transmitting radio programmes in Russian only in 1962, Beijing soon overtook Moscow in terms of broadcasting time. Up until late 1968, Chinese radio stations transmitted a total of 421 hours in Russian per week – more than sixty hours a day and more than twice the broadcast time of all Chinese language output from the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ There appears to have been a total of forty-eight broadcasting stations in the territory of the People's Republic transmitting anti-Soviet propaganda. They were located in Beijing and in many areas near the border, transmitting on varying wavelengths so they could be received throughout the territory of the USSR.⁵⁶

The Kremlin had recognised the weak spots in its own provision of radio in its eastern regions before Beijing went on the air in the Soviet Union. As early as 12 August 1960, a secret report for the Central Committee of the CPSU by M. Egorov, the head of technical administration at the radio and television broadcasting service at the USSR Council of Ministers, stated that the provision of radio news in the morning and evening was unsatisfactory for those living between Chita and the Volga region. At the time, the last news broadcast in Chita was transmitted at 8.00 p.m. local time, though this provided listeners only with regional information from Transbaikalia. The Moscow-based evening programme *Latest News* (*Poslednie izvestiia*), transmitted in the capital at 7.00 p.m., reached the sleeping inhabitants of

53 König, «Rundfunkkrieg», 560–561.

54 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, ll. 82–84.

55 König, «Rundfunkkrieg», 560–561.

56 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, l. 10.

Chita at one o'clock in the morning. Voice of America meanwhile, provided a more listener-friendly service in Chita, broadcasting its last news at 10:00 p.m. local time.⁵⁷ The Kremlin responded by establishing a fourth radio channel, which was subsequently dedicated to providing the regions between Sverdlovsk (Ekaterinburg) and Chita with evening news.⁵⁸

As early as December 1962, shortly after Radio Beijing had begun to transmit radio broadcasts in Russian, Moscow followed its anti-Soviet content with concern and resolved to «actively [...] spread propaganda from our perspective on key issues of the day in order to expose the dogmatic views and public appearances of the leftist sects and other Chinese and Albanian stooges» in Russian-language programmes broadcast in Albania and the People's Republic of China. At the time, Moscow was still hesitating to establish expensive jamming stations of limited efficacy and hoped to prompt Beijing to back down through effective counterpropaganda.⁵⁹ It quickly became apparent that such hopes were in vain. In 1969, listeners in the Soviet Union could receive propaganda broadcasts from the People's Republic day and night on no less than ten radio frequencies. This was of course not in Moscow's interest, and Russian-language broadcasts in the Soviet Union from Radio Beijing were being jammed as early as August to October 1963. Starting in mid-1964, the Lighthouse (*Maiak*) Moscow broadcaster tuned its Far Eastern and Central Asian transmitters to those frequencies that Radio Beijing used for its Russian broadcasts in order to disrupt them. The same thing happened later with half a dozen medium wave transmitters.⁶⁰ It was not until many years later that the Soviet Union succeeded in «soundproofing» large parts of the country. In the mid-1980s, thirteen wide-range and eighty-one regional jamming stations shielded one third of Soviet territory and more than one hundred million citizens from hostile radio bombardment.⁶¹

It was not long, however, before Chinese radio experts showed just how resourceful they could be. They responded with constant attempts to transmit on the Soviet radio stations' frequencies during their intermissions. Malikov, the chair of the regional broadcasting committee, said: «After nabbing our wavelengths, they are trying to transmit gross and crude remarks, provocative proclamations, etc. Such attempts were also part of our own strategy in the past. And I know that things were no different in other districts near the border.» Malikov saw this as a state of affairs that urgently had to be put right. In order to deal with these silent zones, the intermissions between two programmes were reduced to less than a minute. But broadcasting operations still suffered from a certain number of silent zones and technical glitches.⁶²

57 RGANI, f. 89 (*Kollektsiia rassekrechennykh dokumentov, 1919–1992*), op. 46, d. 14, ll. 1–3.

58 RGANI, f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, l. 8.

59 RGANI, f. 5, op. 55, d. 20, ll. 23–26, quotation l. 23.

60 König, «Rundfunkkrieg», 561–562.

61 RGANI, f. 89, op. 18, d. 105, l. 1.

62 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, ll. 85–86, quotation l. 85.

One key technological means of protecting broadcasting operations from deliberate interference by the enemy was the rapid development of the cable radio network in certain provinces of the People's Republic and across much of the Soviet Union. The choice of programmes was in the hands of a local functionary; all that was left to the listener was to adjust the volume. But by no means did all citizens enjoy reception free from enemy propaganda. In 1974, the district of Zabaikal'sk, with its 26,169 inhabitants and 6218 households had a total of 2078 cable radio connections in homes (*radiotochka*), of which merely 1528 were operational. In Matsievskaiia, in Bogdanovka, in the coal-mining village of Abagaitui and in a number of other settlements in the district, there was no cable radio at all; the homes were not connected to the network. Those who wished to listen had to turn on the traditional wireless. Though the district was designated priority for connection, the work was delayed.⁶³

Beijing made skilful use of these deficiencies. News programmes, press reviews and reports on life and the «colossal» progress in China arrived over the Chinese airwaves in the Soviet borderlands.⁶⁴ Matafonov, the first secretary of the Chita regional committee of the CPSU, however, detected a shift away from crude criticism of the Soviet Union towards logical arguments, towards conclusions backed up by «facts» that were twisted as required. Hetherfore warned: «This shows that the Maoists' propaganda organs are gaining experience, are being made by better qualified specialists and that the propaganda of Radio Beijing is therefore becoming more dangerous.»⁶⁵

His concerns turned out to be justified. Matafonov had been informed that a significant number of people, particularly the steppe herdsmen, listened at least occasionally to Chinese radio broadcasts. While it was believed that the vast majority of the population put little faith in what they heard from Beijing, it was naive to believe «that everyone is endowed with sufficient immunity to anti-Soviet propaganda». That Chinese propaganda resonated with some Soviet citizens was evident in «panic-fuelled rumours», particularly in the 1968–1970 period, «in the form of declarations of sympathy for Maoist policies and word-of-mouth propaganda based on radio broadcasts from Beijing».⁶⁶ S. Begunov, the first secretary of the CPSU of the Priargunsk district committee, criticised what he saw as the inaccurate assessment of events in China by some sections of the populace, «the indifference towards the Chinese as an opponent that cannot be taken seriously and underestimation of the danger inherent in the course taken by the present Chinese leadership».⁶⁷

63 GACHO, f. P-6748 (*Zabaikal'skii raikom KPSS, 1967–1991*), op. 7, d. 9, l. 31; and König, «Rundfunkkrieg», 562.

64 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, l. 85.

65 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, ll. 11–12.

66 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, ll. 13–14, quotations l. 14.

67 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, l. 33–34.

Begunov also complained that the reception of radio broadcasts from China was better in the Priargunsk area than those from Chita. But the radio was not the only problem: While television played practically no role for people living in the border regions of China,⁶⁸ the Soviet Union was catching up in its television services. The Ostankino television tower in Moscow was already broadcasting in November 1967, the news programme *Time (Vremia)* went on air in 1968, and by the end of the 1960s around twenty-five million households had television in the USSR. In the early 1970s, when the «Orbita» radio antenna in Krasnokamensk was brought into service, most of the settlements in the border region could receive TV broadcasts. But even at the end of the decade, households with a television in the border region were still in a minority.⁶⁹ The medium was of secondary importance in the production of the Enemy. And the privileged minority of families with a TV already sitting in their living rooms did not necessarily receive the Moscow channels, but might secretly watch «Eastern TV».⁷⁰ Thus, the construction of a modern technological infrastructure and the popularisation of mass media did not necessarily mean greater control over the thoughts of the home population.

6. Journalism

The war over the island of Damanskii was also a historiographical war. Alongside up-to-the-minute media coverage in newspapers, radio and television, it was a conflict that extended to other spheres of life and information. Because the Soviet leadership feared the spread of a «historically false» picture of the «unequal» imperial treaties between China and Russia,⁷¹ in 1969 Moscow began to rename those towns and rivers in the Far East whose names implied that they had once belonged to China. Science and literature also formed part of this ideological warfare. We should not underestimate the work done by the publishing houses of both countries regarding the border question in particular and the Sino-Soviet conflict in general. The world of Soviet publishing, also centrally controlled from Moscow, saw a sudden change of course, initiated by those at the top, soon after the events of March. (Pseudo-)scientific literature, textbooks and novels were published with the aim of condemning Chinese and Western views on this subject.

In a report from 29 April 1969, the chair of the press committee at the Soviet Council of Ministers identified the weak points of Soviet publishing and journalism. Overall, not enough China-related popular science and fiction was being published

68 On the history of television in China, see J. Lull, *China Turned On. Television, Reform, and Resistance*, London 1991.

69 On the spread of television and television culture in the Soviet Union, see K. Roth-Ey, «Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950–1970», in: *Slavic Review* 66 (2007) 2, 278–306, 281–282;

S. Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted. The Soviet Collapse 1970–2000*, Oxford 2008, 41–42.

70 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, ll. 32–33; GACHO, f. P-3, op. 32, d. 10, l. 13.

71 S.C.M. Paine, *Imperial Rivals. China, Russia, and Their Disputed Frontier*, New York 1996.

for the home market. The committee also suggested that foreign language publishers at least double their output. In the case of fiction, there was a call for new editions of Nikolai Zadornov's *Old Man Amur* (*Amur – batiushka*), *Battle for the Ocean* (*Voina za okean*) and *Captain Nevel'skoi* (*Kapitan Nevel'skoi*) and other novels that enjoyed a wide readership and provided «good propaganda material for the unspoiled state of our territory in the Soviet Far East». The report also criticised the academic world, centred around the Sinologists at the Institute of the Far East: the scholars, it was stated, concentrated too much on the past and failed to appreciate the need for scholarly literature with a present-day focus. The authors of this dossier called for the publication of more books critical of Mao Zedong's anti-Soviet course.⁷²

The academic world responded with its characteristic time lag. One text that rose to prominence was Prochorov's 1975 book on the history of the Sino-Soviet border, which included an appendix in which important border treaties were presented through a doctored selection of excerpted paragraphs.⁷³ Another example is the anthology *Denying Documents. Against False Histories of Russian-Chinese Relations* by Sergei Tikhvinskii, a historian and diplomat who did much to shape Soviet policy on China at the time. His essays showed the Russian Empire's China policy from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century in a pacifist light and exposed the rhetoric and methodology of «Maoist historiography», its anti-Russian and anti-Soviet propaganda – albeit with dubious methods.⁷⁴ A large portion of scholarly publications was later translated into other languages.⁷⁵

Publishers oriented towards a general readership responded more quickly than the academic world. Editorial departments took on extra translators to cope with the translation of large amounts of text into and from Chinese. Efforts were also made to translate and distribute relevant books and journals abroad, particularly in the countries of Africa and Asia.⁷⁶ At home, the publishing house Mysl' printed a series of five leaflets in the summer of 1969, including T. Rachimov's *Nationalism and Chauvinism – the Basic Political Elements of the Maoist Grouping* and M. Altaiskii and V. Georgiev's pamphlet *The Anti-Marxist Essence of Mao Zedong's Philosophical Views*, which were extensively reviewed in the Soviet press and composed with the aim of informing people in the Soviet Union «about the current situation in China».⁷⁷ In

72 RGANI, f. 5, op. 61, d. 41, ll. 109–117, quotation on l. 113.

73 A. Prokhorov, *K voprosu o sovetsko-kitaiskoi granitse*, Moskva 1975, appendix 246–272.

74 S. Tikhvinskii, «Vstupitel'naia stat'ia», in: idem (ed.), *Dokumenty oprovergaiut. Protiv fal'sifikatsii istorii russko-kitaiskikh otnoshenii*, Moskva 1982, 3–17.

75 For example: A. Krutschinin / W. Olgin, *Die terri-*

torialen Ansprüche Mao Tse-tungs. Geschichte und Wirklichkeit, Moskva 1971 (first published in Russian: A. Kruchinin / W. Olgin, *Territorial'nii «reestr» Mao Tsze-duna*, Moskva 1970).

76 RGANI, f. 5, op. 61, d. 41, ll. 118–120 and ll. 225–226.

77 RGANI, f. 5, op. 61, d. 41, ll. 152–154, quotation l. 154.

Doloi novykh tsarei! Antikitskie zloдеяnia sovetskogo revizionizma na rekakh Kheiluntzian i Usulitszian, Beijing 1969.

«All reactionaries are paper tigers» – Chinese border guards laughing about a captured Soviet helmet.

both the Soviet Union and China there was a veritable flood of little books, pamphlets, photographic volumes and other printed matter. These were widely distributed in the national language, the language of the enemy and in English to propagate historiographical truths: namely, the responsibility of the «other side» for the military escalation of the conflict.

Of the Chinese pamphlets, *Down With the New Tsars* (*Doloi novykh tsarei* or *Dadao xin shahuang*), which appeared in 1969 and was translated into Russian, English and other languages, became famous in China and abroad. In the Russian-language version, Mao's foreword and a leading article from the *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*) of 4 March 1969, which focused mainly on the historical roots of the conflict, were followed by a kind of photographic novel (see fig. 1) divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, entitled «For centuries, the industrious and courageous Chinese people have lived on the banks of the Ussuri and Heilongjiang [Amur]», the reader gets to know the peace-loving and hard-working Chinese living along the border. Photos of people studying Mao's *Little Red Book* and laughing fishermen reinforce the message. «No-one should be allowed to undermine the friendship between the Chinese and Soviet people», was the motto of the second chapter, in which «Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Co.» are accused of having trans-

formed the Soviet Union into a «sinister fascist dictatorship of the bourgeoisie», which was now collaborating with the «American imperialists». In chapter four («The clique of the Soviet revisionist monarchs are the new tsars in the truest sense of the term and unadulterated social imperialists») «hearings of the evidence» provided confirmation of Soviet provocations targeting Chinese fishermen and the peace-loving border dwellers, dangerous manoeuvres by Soviet patrol boats and tanks, skirmishes on the border provoked by Soviet soldiers, and there were even photos of murdered Chinese civilians.⁷⁸ This «Goebbels-like propaganda» (*gebel'sovskaia propaganda*) was more difficult to transmit than airwaves. It reached Soviet readers via numerous grey channels. In the 1970s, on the international train that ran between Beijing and Moscow, Soviet customs often discovered discreetly displayed propaganda leaflets.⁷⁹ Several thousand propaganda leaflets had already reached many republics of the USSR by the mid-1960s. Addressed to private Soviet citizens and sent by supposed private senders in the People's Republic, the delicate documents were concealed in works of fiction, children's books and scientific publications or between postcards.⁸⁰

Defamatory Soviet pamphlets took much the same form as their Chinese counterparts. Here again, however, there is a striking difference, also evident in press and radio propaganda. While even the titles of the Chinese pamphlets defamed the Soviet Union, the Soviet publications emphasised Soviet heroism. One of the most popular Soviet propaganda leaflets was entitled «Hero of Damanskii Island» (*Geroi ostrova Damanskii*). Similar to its Chinese counterpart publication, but with far fewer photographs, the text began with reprints from newspapers and agencies on the March events. Then came eyewitness accounts by the likes of Vasilii Smirnov. In «Guard Duty on the Sacred Borders», the Baltic shipyard worker from Leningrad recalled his own service as a border guard and philosophised about the March events and the noble-mindedness of the Soviet armed forces: «Their bravery and valour, their cool heads and heroism are a source of delight to us now. Our heads bowed, we think of those who died the death of the bold and have remained for ever on patrol on the distant borders of our homeland.» The text is illustrated with a photo showing a Soviet border guard in front of a binocular telescope on the banks of the Ussuri. The young man gazes into the distance towards China. There is a thoughtful look on his face, as if he is asking: Why?⁸¹

Alongside these writings devoted specifically to the conflict with China, a number of publications appeared in the USSR dealing with the topic of the border in a broader sense. These cultivated the myth of the noble Soviet border guard. An-

78 *Doloi novykh tsarei! Antikitskies zlodeianiia sovetskogo revizionizma na rekakh Kheiluntszian i Usulitszian*, Beijing 1969, no page numbers. See also the similar pamphlet in English, *Down with the New Tsars*, Beijing 1969.

79 GACHO, f. P-3, op. 27, d. 51, ll. 70–71, quotation l. 71.

80 RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 462, ll. 47–48.

81 *Geroi ostrova Damanskii*, Moskva 1969, 132–137, quotation 132.

thologies of stories and poems about the borders of the homeland were particularly popular, such as the book *Border (Granitsa)*, first published by the Leningrad-based Lenizdat in 1963. Though this book achieved a wide circulation before the escalation of the conflict, and there was no discussion of China, there was a veritable flood of publications in this genre after 1969.⁸² Everywhere in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, whether in Moscow, Ukraine or the Far East, publishers printed texts according to the same plan, sometimes with a regional flavour, but always with much the same content and identical messages – usually tens of thousands of copies at a time.⁸³

7. The Last Chapter of the Unfathomable Enmity

The countrywide propaganda war between Moscow and Beijing persisted until the mid-1980s. While this war was subsequently waged with less intensity and a milder tone, the fighting on the propaganda front only petered out entirely with Gorbachev's assumption of power and the reorientation of Soviet policies on China. As late as December 1980, the Central Committee of the CPSU deliberated on the production of a television film that would once again expose the big neighbour's shady activities in the border region. The suggestion for this documentary film project came from the KGB. According to its own statement, it had «gathered a significant amount of material on the espionage and sabotage carried out by the Chinese secret services against the Soviet Union and on the infiltration of agents on our territory» over the preceding years. The script was to revolve around statements by unmasked Chinese spies, recorded on video by the Soviet secret service, on how spies were recruited on the territory of the USSR and on their infiltration activities. The film could then, the statement goes on, «be broadcast at a politically favourable moment within the Union and in third countries with the aim [...] of achieving a favourable opinion of our country in the societies of the international community».⁸⁴

Only after the April plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1985 and the 27th Party Congress in 1986 did the government begin to rethink its approach and move towards *glasnost'* and objectivity in reporting, which in turn led to a decline in the importance of broadcasting from foreign radio stations. In late September 1986, the Central Committee of the CPSU resolved to stop jamming broadcasts from Radio Beijing, which continued to transmit material «hostile [to the USSR] but largely ineffective because of its primitive nature», as well as broadcasts by the BBC,

82 The first 1963 edition, put together by Leningrad-based poets and writers, was published in an initial print run of 115,000 copies. *Granitsa. Literaturno-khudozhestvennyi sbornik*, vol. 1, Leningrad 1963. The third volume achieved a similarly high circulation of 100,000 books. *Granitsa. Liter-*

aturno-khudozhestvennyi sbornik, vol. 3, Leningrad 1974.

83 To mention just one more publication with a print run of 115,000: *Gratsia est' gratsia*, L'vov 1975.

84 RGANI, f. 89, op. 43, d. 27, l. 2.

Voice of America and other enemy stations.⁸⁵ The echo of the Sino-Soviet rift slowly faded away.

Just as the friendship between the two nations was «unfathomable», a friendship that had already passed its peak by the late 1950s, the period of rift of the 1960s and 1970s was one of «unfathomable» enmity for the public of both countries. Diplomatic and military developments played an important role in changing the concepts of the Enemy created by Moscow and Beijing for their own population and that of the enemy nation. The staged «peace border» was eventually replaced with an (almost exclusively) rhetorical front. Alongside the military protection of its eastern periphery, the crisis of ideological legitimisation provoked by Beijing was the greatest threat emanating from the east, to which Moscow reacted quite helplessly. The threat of war with the People's Republic of China was important, but it was clear for the Soviet military planners that the Chinese army could not match the Soviet power in any aspect. The Kremlin did not want to sharpen the conflict because it did not want to let the Chinese leadership depart from the socialist camp. Partly out of fear of a further loss of credibility as the pacifist leader of the communist camp, Moscow tried to the very last to maintain the illusion of the «peace border», of friendship between the two peoples and oscillated between the rhetoric of friendship and enmity. This attitude explains the initially subdued reaction from Moscow to the challenges from Beijing. During the mid-1960s, the Soviet media were for some time almost entirely silent about China, until the massive production of new concepts of the Enemy suddenly began in earnest with the border conflict of March 1969. Thus, only when the political leaders in Moscow realised that the Chinese had become crazed and could not be kept under control any more, they launched a propaganda campaign over the media through lectures, exhibitions, film screenings and through various other channels. Ideological warfare became central to the conflict between the two countries. Its main task was to create a positive image of one's own country and to expose the opponent's disastrous domestic and international policies as well as the decline of the enemy power system at home and abroad. Soviet propagandists initially struggled to come up with pithy slogans, but eventually found their pace and zeroed in on «Maoist clique». In China, meanwhile the Soviet Union was now placed on the same level as the United States as a «sinister fascist dictatorship of the bourgeoisie». Beijing also fired all the guns of propaganda: newspapers, radio and television were the most important media. Huge rallies and secret agitation in the enemy state were also key instruments.⁸⁶

The concept of the enemy produced by each side was an abstract one of «new tsars» and the «Maoist clique». It may be that the experience of history shows that this type of approach is particularly effective, but it shows no sign of innovation.

⁸⁵ RGANI, f. 89, op. 18, d. 105, l. 2.

⁸⁶ On the anti-Soviet rallies and campaigns during

the Cultural Revolution, see Robinson, «China», 234.

Many of the Soviet themes were simply adopted from propaganda material used during the confrontation along the border with China and Manchukuo in the 1920s and 1930s. In Nikolai Kostarev's book *Border Behind Bars* (*Granitsa na zamke*), which dealt with the Sino-Soviet conflict over the Chinese Eastern Railway of 1929, there were «Mongolian heroes» (from a country already allied with the Soviet Union) and «friendly Red Army soldiers» sharing their food with hungry Chinese deserters.⁸⁷ These were hoary old motifs, in other words.

Though certain technological innovations such as radio and (to a far lesser degree) television – or rather their popularisation – may have enhanced the efficacy of propaganda, its content continued to show little inventiveness. Particularly against the background of the «fifth industrial revolution», the spread of computers, and the incipient age of communication in the West, it is evident how devoid of innovation – both technologically and in terms of content – and how antiquated this war of words and images was. And if Mao really did attack the Soviet Union on a small island in order to unite his people against the new external enemy, then in retrospect, the confrontation in the Sino-Soviet borderlands appears to have been a conflict between two helpless protagonists whose ideas and programmes had long since run out of steam.

87 Kostarev, *Granitsa*, 31–32, 38–53.

The Unfathomable Foe.

Constructing the Enemy in the Sino-Soviet Borderlands, ca. 1969–1982

This paper examines the impact of the hostilities between the Soviet Union and China during the period of the bitterest disagreement between the two great socialist powers on the local and regional level at the border between the two states. The article focuses on the region of Chita (Eastern Transbaikalian region) and Hulunbuir (Inner Mongolia). An analysis of the Soviet propaganda reveals that the conflict produced only very few innovations in technology and content. Instead, propaganda material had rather been dug out of the «relic box». Enemy concepts dating back to a former phase of the conflict were rekindled and remained stereotypical and abstract. Because of isolation, the local population perceived the people on the other side of the border as through frosted glass».

ABSTRACTS

Der unergründliche Gegner. Die Konstruktion des Feindes im chinesisch-sowjetischen Grenzland (ca. 1969–1982)

Der Beitrag untersucht, wie sich die Feindschaft zwischen der Sowjetunion und China in der Phase des größten Zerwürfnisses der beiden sozialistischen Großmächte auf der regionalen und lokalen Ebene an der Grenze zwischen den beiden Staaten auswirkte. Im Fokus steht dabei die Region der Gebiete Tschita (östliches Transbaikalien) und Hulunbei'er (Innere Mongolei). Eine Analyse der sowjetischen Propaganda ergibt, dass der Konflikt kaum technologische und inhaltliche Innovationen hervorbrachte, sondern die Propagandaelemente aus der «Mottenkiste» stammten. Feindbilder blieben stereotyp und abstrakt und wurden aus einer früheren Konfliktphase wieder aufgewärmt. Für die Bevölkerung vor Ort bedeutete die Abschottung, dass sie die Menschen auf der anderen Seite der Grenze nur noch wie durch eine «Milchglasscheibe» sehen konnten.

L'inconcevable adversaire. La construction de l'ennemi dans la zone frontalière sino-soviétique, environ 1969 à 1982

L'article examine l'impact des hostilités entre l'Union soviétique et la Chine pendant la période du pire désaccord entre les deux grandes puissances socialistes à l'échelon local et régional à la frontière entre les deux États. La contribution porte sur la région de Tchita (Transbaïkalie de l'Est) et Hulunbuir (Mongolie-Intérieure). Une analyse de la propagande soviétique révèle que le conflit n'engendra que très peu d'innovations en matière de contenu et dans le domaine de la technologie. Les éléments de propagande furent plutôt ressortis de la «boîte à vieilleries». Les concepts d'ennemi datant d'une précédente période du conflit, furent réchauffés et restèrent stéréotypés et abstraits. En raison de l'isolation, la population locale perçut les personnes de l'autre côté de la frontière comme à travers une «vitre dépolie».

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