

Debating the Sino-Soviet split

The history of the foreign relations of the PRC is another field in which our knowledge has been vastly increased by growing access to primary source material. This has been most valuable and enlightening in respect to the history of the Sino-Soviet split. Ever since the split first became apparent to the West in the 1960s, there has been an effort to understand how and why it took place. The problem initially, however, was that in the absence of archival sources the only documents available were the polemics issued by each side, decrying the other for past and present mistakes and provocations. Based largely on these polemics, the orthodox view, epitomized by writers such as John Gittings (1968) and Donald Zagoria (1962), was that the split began with Khrushchev's secret speech of February 1956 and that it was caused largely by his adoption of the policy of 'peaceful co-existence' with the West. Building on this foundation, the common assumption was that the split represented a classical example of divergent security concerns leading to the end of an alliance. However, not all scholars accepted this realist approach; some, such as Stuart Schram (1989), continued to emphasize the importance of ideology as an influence on the PRC's foreign policy.

The newly available documents on the formulation of Chinese and Soviet foreign policy during the period of the alliance have opened up the study of this area enormously. A number of works, including most notably the essays in Odd Arne Westad (ed.), *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945–1963* (Stanford, CA, 1998), Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, 2008) and Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962–1967* (Washington DC, 2009), have attempted to draw conclusions from this material. The consensus that has emerged has been that the split came later than previously assumed and that 1958 was the crucial turning point. Moreover, in line with Schram's reading of events, great emphasis has been put on the significance of ideological divisions in causing Sino-Soviet alienation. The documents have thus led us to a far more nuanced interpretation of the reasons for the split, which also adds considerably to our understanding of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s.