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THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS OF INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP AND COMMON ENEMIES: IMAGES OF SINO–SOVIET RELATIONS IN CHINESE AND SOVIET POLITICAL CARTOONS OF THE 1950S[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Sino–Soviet relations in the 1950s through the medium of political cartoons in *Manhua* and *Krokodil*, satire magazines published in the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. Images of friendship and enmity produced an intricate narrative about world affairs and the paths of socialism and capitalism. By comparing the stories and visual representations in *Krokodil* and *Manhua*, this study underscores the similarities and contradictions existing between the Soviet Union and China in the years before their split. This approach provides an example of two ideological machines working to reflect unexpected shifts in alliances while maintaining a claim on the teleological coherence of socialist development. It also exemplifies the mechanics of visual propaganda under the stress of contradictory policies and purposes.

Keywords: political cartoons; *Krokodil*; *Manhua*; Sino–Soviet friendship; visual propaganda

Introduction

Relations between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC) after the latter's foundation in 1949 are often described in terms of close friendship and mutual support. The first decade of the PRC's existence or, more narrowly, the period between 1953, when Joseph Stalin died and Nikita Khrushchev came to power, and 1956, when the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was held, is frequently called "the honeymoon" period in the two countries' relations. This name seems apt in light of the great number of Soviet specialists sent to China in those years, the scale of other technical and economic support measures offered by the USSR to China (Shen Zhihua 2003, 176, 197), and China's readiness to follow the Soviet example at that time. Towards the end of the 1950s, criticism of Stalin's personality cult in the CPSU, Khrushchev's and Mao Zedong's 毛泽东 grievances with each other, ideological differences between the Soviet and Chinese Communist parties, and disagreements over

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domestic and international affairs wrought irreparable damage on bilateral relations and led to the Sino–Soviet split, which lasted until the 1980s. Even today Russian–Chinese relations are nowhere near as intimate as they were in the "honeymoon" years. However, even the 1950s were not as unclouded as they sometimes appear in comparison to the chill and outright enmity of later decades. From the PRC's founding, there were lingering diplomatic issues: the Beijing 北京 government unwillingly accepted the existence of an independent Mongolia (supported by the USSR),[2] ownership of the Chinese Changchun Railway[3] took a while to be settled, and the Soviet military presence in Port Arthur (today's Lüshun 旅顺) raised questions on different levels. Even border issues between the two countries remained unresolved, which led to military clashes in 1969. Negotiations about the volume and type of Soviet aid to China dragged on for years while Stalin was alive, and, when Khrushchev came to power, nuclear weapons became a prominent issue. Moscow's and Beijing's positions in the socialist camp played a complicating role at times. There were also a number of less easily observable issues, such as various hitches in administrative and bureaucratic procedures, and, importantly, the mutually ambivalent perceptions of Soviet and Chinese people.

Yet both the USSR and the PRC, being ideological states that relied heavily on indoctrination in governance, needed to maintain finely tuned domestic propaganda about relations with each other, with other socialist countries, and with the rest of the world. Such propaganda had to reflect current events and to place them into a frame of reference that was familiar to the readers. It also had to adjust the evaluations of trends and representations of domestic and foreign actors quickly when any changes occurred. Therefore, the various complications of inter-government and inter-party relations were reflected in the mass media, which tried to weave them into a teleological narrative of building socialism and achieving Communism.

Political cartoons were an important part of the large propaganda toolbox available to both the Soviet and Chinese governments in the 1950s. Both countries had an established tradition of utilizing propaganda posters, murals, and newsprint cartoons as visual means of informing and mobilizing the population even before the establishment of nation-wide Communist regimes. The Russian Civil War (1917–22) gave birth to the "ROSTA satire window" phenomenon,[4] whereas in China, during both the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) and the Chinese Civil War between Communists and Nationalists (1946–49),

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[2] The Republic of China had recognized independent Mongolia in January 1946, but when the PRC was founded three and a half years later Mao Zedong expected Mongolia to "return" to China; thus, although diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of Mongolia and the PRC were established on 16 October 1949, Sino-Mongolian relations remained apprehensive and worsened after the Sino–Soviet split (Rossabi 2013, 174–5).

[3] Chinese Changchun Railway (Zhongguo Changchun tielu 中国长春铁路) was the name of the Chinese Eastern Railway, including South Manchuria Railway, between 1945, when Japan capitulated and returned the railway to the USSR, and 1952, when the Soviet government passed all property and management rights over the railway to the PRC.

[4] They were simplistic propaganda placards placed in the windows of abandoned shops in Moscow, Petrograd, and other cities under the aegis of the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA). The drawings were made crudely but with great pathos and conviction; some of the posters became legendary. Probably the most famous person to participate in the production of these images was the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), but he was by far not the only one. See Mayakovsky 1938. The practice was reintroduced during World War II. Some examples are available at https://archive.artic.edu/tass/ (accessed 11 April 2021).

political caricature became more pointed.[5] In the 1950s, both the USSR and the PRC published regular cartoon magazines, supplying readers with images of trending domestic and foreign events. The Soviet *Krokodil* (Crocodile) was established in 1922, and by the 1950s it was issued three times a month; the magazine outlived the USSR and was intermittently published until as late as 2008.[6] The Chinese *Manhua* 漫画 (Cartoon)[7] first appeared in 1950, was initially published monthly and later fortnightly, and was closed down in 1960.

Both magazines were part of the wider state-directed mass media system. From the 1930s onwards *Krokodil* was produced by Pravda Publishing House, which meant that it was under the supervision of the Communist Party's Central Committee and Department of Propaganda and Agitation. *Manhua* was originally affiliated with the Shanghai branch of the Chinese Artists Association and the Cultural Bureau of the municipal administration. Later it was transferred under the supervision of the East China Military Government Committee's News and Publishing Office, before finally being published by the People's Art Press and, thus, coming under the control of the Ministry of Culture's Arts Bureau (Altehenger 2013, 86–89). The degree of such control and supervision in case of both magazines should not be taken for granted: John Etty emphasizes that Soviet satire was created by multiple forces not limited to the party (2019, 101–23). Vladimir Pechatnov has demonstrated that in the early years of the Cold War even the Soviet government itself felt frustrated with its propaganda machine.[8] During Khrushchev's "thaw" years, liberalization and de-Stalinization brought some changes: as Etty (2019) writes, at that time satire was used in the USSR "to re-view the Soviet 'self' and the 'other' that existed in Soviet society" (pp. 11). In China, the creation of *Manhua* was also a complicated process not unequivocally directed by the party; both Jennifer Altehenger (2013) and John Crespi (2020) demonstrate that *Manhua* artists produced works which went beyond the narrow confines of controlled propaganda. Yet both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* were certainly among the most important state media outlets for conveying party and government policies. Cartoonists from both magazines were repressed and criticized by the state, which indicates that their works were sometimes deemed too dangerous or unfit for political purposes and that satire functioned as an important part of mass media. Both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* echoed the central newspapers – *Pravda* (Truth) and *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报 (People's Daily), respectively – quoted party leaders, and followed the guidelines that the propaganda departments of the ruling parties provided to the editorial boards. Moreover, being part of the socialist camp press, these magazines were included in a transnational network of coordinated (although not very efficiently) news flow, with

[5] Some of the illustrated newspapers and magazines from the period are available at http://www.modernhistory.org.cn/index.htm (accessed 4 April 2021).

[6] By that time, the magazine had little to do with the Soviet original, as the creative team, the contents, and the print runs had changed.

[7] The magazine was also known as *Manhua Yuekan* 漫画月刊 (Cartoon Monthly) and *Manhua Banyuekan* 漫画半月刊 (Cartoon Fortnightly) depending on its publication frequency, which changed from the former to the latter in July 1956. In this paper I call it *Manhua* for the sake of brevity and because that was the title on the cover.

[8] Pechatnov writes about mass media for foreign audiences in the late 1940s (2001), but multiple "voices" were present in the domestic central press in the preceding decades as well (Lenoe 2004, 23–26) – even though, as Lenoe underscores, they were very much in line with what the party wanted to appear in the press.

the Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformburo) giving some directions and providing material for quotation.

Cartoons published in these magazines were essential for visual propaganda in the pre-television era.[9] Unlike photography, cartoons created fantastical, grotesque, and metaphorical images consisting of intentionally placed elements. In addition, newspaper photography at the time was black-and-white and often of poor quality, whereas many cartoons were published in full colour. Illustrated magazines were produced much faster than propaganda films and thus could respond more quickly to current events; they also did not require special equipment like mobile cinemas for transmission. Importantly, cartoon and satire magazines placed different events into a single news flow, collocating various "positive" and "negative" images and thus drawing a broader picture than individual posters or murals. Analysing magazine cartoons, therefore, shows the complicated interactions between individual events and their dynamics through satirical interpretation. The nature of satire meant that such interpretations simplified events and magnified some of their aspects as if reflecting them in a distorting mirror. This paper looks at such distortions to reconstruct the visual images of Sino–Soviet relations in the 1950s as they were presented to the readers of satire magazines in the Soviet Union and China, reflecting the alliances and contradictions of the Cold War.

Sino–Soviet relations per se have been an object of close academic scrutiny.[10] Growing attention has been paid to Chinese propaganda posters (albeit mostly those from the Great Cultural Revolution), as well as to some other types of visuals.[11] Soviet cartooning has also attracted its share of scrutiny, although when it comes to matters of international affairs, researchers seem to be more interested in depictions of enemies (Golubev 2018; McKenna 2001). However, no attempts have been made to look at Sino–Soviet relations and related matters through the prism of magazine cartoons, especially by comparing works printed in *Krokodil* and *Manhua*.

The corpus of cartoons assembled for this study[12] can be divided into three large groups, which also determine the structure of this paper:

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[9] It is necessary to remark here on the use of the word *cartoon*. It covers the phenomena described by the words *karikatura* in Russian and *manhua* 漫画 in Chinese. Strictly speaking, some of the images in *Krokodil* were called "friendly jests" (*druzheskij sharzh*), theoretically separate from the genre of cartoon (or caricature), but such "friendly jests" seldom dealt with international affairs, so they are mostly not included in the corpus for this study. Additionally, *Krokodil* published photo collages (as did *Manhua*), which were chiefly satirical, so they are treated as part of the corpus here. In the Chinese practice, both "eulogizing" (*gesonghua* 歌颂画) and "satirizing" (*fengcihua* 讽刺画) images were considered part of the *manhua* genre. Apart from these incongruities, quite a few cartoons in both magazines combined positive and negative depictions in multi-panel drawings juxtaposing socialist and capitalist practices, making distinguishing genres unfeasible. Therefore, in this article the term *cartoon* is used in a very broad sense, covering any drawing, photomontage, or visual image using other techniques published in *Krokodil* or *Manhua*.

[10] See, e.g., Bagdasarian et al. 2018; Bazhanov 2013; Jersild 2014; Lüthi 2008; Westad 1998; Shen Zhihua 2007; Sun Qiming 2002.

[11] A very useful collection of propaganda posters is available online at https://chineseposters.net/ (accessed 15 April 2021), see also Min et al. 2015. Chinese posters and other printed visuals have been attracting increasing attention from researchers; see, e.g., Crespi 2020; Ginsberg 2013; Samoylov 2020.

[12] Due to current restrictions, I have access to only 129 issues of *Manhua* out of the total 164 produced during its existence: issue no. 7 from 1950, issue no. 37 from 1953, and issue nos. 38–164 (1954–60). For this reason the quantitative data in this paper is provided for the issues published between 1954

– depictions of Sino–Soviet friendship and unity between countries of the socialist camp in general;
– depictions of international friendship and solidarity with national liberation, anti-colonial, and labour movements across the globe; and
– depictions of the USSR's and the PRC's interactions with capitalist countries.

Friendship and Unity

Surprisingly, *Krokodil* and *Manhua* published relatively few cartoons visualizing the bilateral friendship as such: slightly more than ten pieces in *Krokodil* and around thirty in *Manhua*. The cartoons in *Krokodil* praised the bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance (signed in 1950), lauded Soviet aid to Chinese peasants and engineers, extolled the great harvests in both countries in 1955, emphasized the strength of Sino–Soviet ties in 1957–58, and drew parallels between the USSR and the young Communist China, both of which received gloomy "prognostications" from "spiteful Western critics" in the early years of their existences.[13] *Manhua* also featured cartoons about Soviet aid and friendly support, as well as about joint socialist construction projects, cultural exchanges, and cooperation in facing the capitalist-imperialist enemy.[14] Such friendship and cooperation were frequently embodied visually in the figures of two people (mostly men, rarely women) shaking hands or engaging in work together. A typical example is the front cover of *Manhua* no. 76, where a Soviet and a Chinese engineer ride a "black dragon", whose jaws resemble a hydroelectric dam – a reference to Soviet aid in building powerplants along the Heilongjiang 黑龙江 River, literally the "black dragon river" (Miao Yintang 1956). This cartoon was reproduced in *Krokodil* four months later (although not on the front cover; Miao Yintang 1957). Also similarly to each other, the two magazines depicted state friendship through the metaphor of mutual support in the ascension of snowy peaks (Goriaev 1958; Wu Yun 1955). One such cartoon commemorated a real climbing expedition, stressing the alpinists' courage and the power of friendship (Xiewasiyangjienuofu 1956).[15] Humans personifying their nations were prominently marked by state flags or emblems. A frequent symbolic visualization of bilateral friendship in Chinese cartoons during the last years of the decade depicted two osculating circles with a hammer-and-sickle emblem on the left and five stars on the right, with a dove in between (Jiang Yousheng 1958a; Jiang Yousheng 1960; Tie Yi 1960; Zhang Leping 1959; Fig. 1). Sometimes Chinese cartoonists positioned the Kremlin and Tiananmen 天安门 close to each other to demonstrate the ideological and political

and 1960; *Krokodil* issues are fully available online, but are also limited here to the same period for the sake of comparability.

[13] For some examples, see Brodaty 1950; Goriaev 1958; Mi Gu 1957a; Miao Yintang 1957; Wu Yuan 1955; Yefimov 1950; Yefimov 1956c.

[14] For some examples, see Jiang Fan 1960; Jiang Yousheng and Gao Made 1953; Jiang Yousheng 1958a; Miao Yintang 1956; Miao Di 1957; Wu Yun 1955; Xiewasiyangjienuofu 1956; Ye Miao 1954; Zhao Yannian 1954; Zhou Lushi 1954.

[15] That was a joint Sino–Soviet ascent of the peak of Muztagh Ata (Mushitageshan 慕士塔格山) in 1956. Characteristically, in 1960 a similar cartoon in *Manhua* showed only the Chinese climbers and flag on top of a snowy mountain titled "The High Peak of the World" (Hua Junwu 1960).

proximity of the two countries and nations.[16] Interestingly, such representations did not appear in *Krokodil*, possibly because the magazine opted to depict more specific achievements and commemorations.

On the surface, *Manhua* and *Krokodil* seem to heap praise on both countries' achievements. First, the magazines portrayed the Soviet Union's present as China's future: Chinese women looked with admiration at Soviet heroines – female pilots and scientists – saying, "This is our future!" (Goriaev 1950), and Chinese peasants dreamt of the "happy life" of their Soviet peers when looking at propaganda posters (Zhang Wenyuan 1954).[17] *Krokodil* even reported in 1952 that a *kolkhoz* (possibly meaning a mutual-aid team, *huzhuzu* 互助组, or a cooperative, *hezuoshe* 合作社) with the name "Sino–Soviet Friendship" was established in Shanxi province, simultaneously emulating the Soviet model of collective farming and reinforcing amicable relations (Goriaev 1952). Only a few years later, during the Great Leap Forward (GLF), *Krokodil* would be far more reserved about the people's commune movement in China.

Second, *Manhua* went out of its way to honour the Soviet launch of *Sputnik* on 4 October 1957. The USSR's ability to send an object into outer space, together with claims of successful trials of intercontinental ballistic missiles, inspired the Chinese ruling party to firmly believe that the "imperialist nuclear blackmail" plan has been foiled (Lüthi 2008, 77). Images of Sputnik in the sky and of Soviet rockets meeting the immortal Chang'e 嫦娥 on the Moon or taking the place of old gods among the stars became some of *Manhua*'s highlights in late 1957 and throughout 1958,[18] emphatically contrasted to the USA's rockets falling ingloriously. Additionally, Chinese cartoonists connected the Soviet seven-year plan (1959–65) with images of technical advancements and wove them into the narrative of the PRC's own economic campaigns.

However, the GLF was taking place when Sino–Soviet relations on the highest level were already showing cracks. Mao's 1958 claim that China would surpass the UK in steel production in fifteen years, quickly shortened to three years, and other economic and diplomatic decisions (especially related to the Taiwan Crisis of August 1958, which Mao initiated without first consulting with Khrushchev) were perceived as rash and even wrong in Moscow (Lüthi 2008, 113). Soviet specialists working in China at the time of the GLF found that their advice remained unheeded or was even dismissed as "conservative", "dogmatic", or "opposing the general line" (Shen Zhihua 2003, 358–59). It is not surprising, therefore, that very few cartoons in *Krokodil* extolled China's grand economic plans: two drawings (one reproduced from *Manhua*, another made by Chinese cartoonist Jiang Yousheng 江有生 for *Krokodil*) published in 1958 and one double-page comment on the occasion of the PRC's ten-year anniversary in October 1959.[19] People's communes were omitted from the pages of *Krokodil*, although there might have been one excep-

[16] For example, see Mi Gu 1958; Jiang Fan 1960.

[17] It is noticeable how this and the previously quoted cartoon both employed the "image inside an image" trope, showing Chinese people looking with a sense of awe and admiration at posters in the cartoons. These were at once instructions for how to look at propaganda materials, how to get inspired by them, and how to feel about the country's future.

[18] For example, see Jiang Yousheng 1957; Jiang Yousheng 1959a; Li Cunsong 1958.

[19] The two-page spread is filled with texts and depictions of China's progress, as well as quotes from Chinese cartoonists (*Krokodil* 27 (1959), pp. 2–3). The other two works mentioned here are Jiang Yousheng 1958b and Wu Yun 1958.

tion: a reprint of a cartoon from *Manhua* that depicts a heavy palanquin, upon which an anthropomorphic harvest sack is seated, carried by eight men (Zhang Benshan and Gu Pu 1959). The caption, translated into Russian, explains that the eight carriers were soil improvement, fertilizer, irrigation, better seed strains, close planting, plant protection, better farm implements, and field management (the elements of China's Eight-Point Charter for Agriculture proclaimed in 1958). The sack was inscribed with the phrase "1959, rich harvest" translated into Russian. Not translated, however, either in the caption or in the cartoon, were the four characters reading "*renmin gongshe* 人民公社" (people's commune) written on the gates to which the sack was being taken. Therefore, in the only cartoon vaguely referring to the commune movement in China, *Krokodil* avoided actually showing or even mentioning communes to its Soviet readers, almost none of whom could read Chinese.

When it came to depicting the unity of the socialist camp, *Manhua* and *Krokodil* often chose the metaphor of flags placed in rows to visualize solidarity.[20] Socialist unanimity was reflected not only in depictions of a common will and collective action, but also in physical unity – where, for example, the whole socialist camp (or some of its member countries) was portrayed as a single body, a muscular arm, or a rising sun. Another metaphoric representation was a display of marching people, sometimes also carrying flags or wearing national costumes. In both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* personifications of the USSR usually wear simple Western-style suits, and figures representing China are dressed in a Sun Yat-sen-style jacket, whereas other countries are portrayed as men and women in traditional embroidered folk costumes (e.g., Ye Miao 1958).

Two outstanding multi-panel cartoons praising the integrity of the socialist camp were published in *Manhua*. Both take up two pages of the magazine, are in full colour, and depict twelve countries: the USSR, the PRC, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the German Democratic Republic, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Mongolian People's Republic, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. They are portrayed in this order in both cartoons. The earlier one, from February 1959, shows twelve horse riders – six men and six women (Ying Tao and Miao Di 1959). The Soviet panel is considerably larger than the rest, but otherwise the countries appear equally prosperous and their personifications eagerly leap forward on their multicoloured steeds (a clear reference to a jumping horse as a metaphor of the GLF[21]), happily pursuing the common path of socialism. A year later, in January 1960, the composition remained the same, with the Soviet panel larger than the others, but instead of employing the equestrian metaphor, the countries were visualized as dancers (Wu Yun 1960; Fig. 2). The Soviet ballet starts at the Kremlin's towers and finishes on the Moon, with stars shaped into the years of the seven-year plan. The Chinese perform a dragon dance, another metaphor for the GLF. Other countries also demonstrate their great achievements in agriculture and industry through the movements or attributes of their national dances. The key theme here remained rapid economic development and faster fulfilment of production quotas to

[20] Some examples include Anon. 1953; Bi Keguan 1958; Liang Hong 1950; Semenov 1957; Ye Xueqian 1959; Zelenskiy 1952; Zhang Quan 1950.

[21] By placing the Soviet rider with a symbolic text about the seven-year plan near the Chinese one, with a GLF slogan, *Manhua* implied that the Soviet government enthusiastically supported China's economic programme – which at the time was not the case.

smoothly follow the socialist path laid down by Soviet Russia after the October Revolution. *Krokodil* abstained from such straightforward depictions of rapid, orchestrated development and even from over-emphasizing the unity of socialist countries.

Yugoslavia was inevitably absent from such collective depictions, whereas Poland and Hungary were included among the "fraternal countries". It is worth pointing out that, since neither Khrushchev nor Mao wanted to allow any hint of "cracks" inside the socialist camp to permeate into the news available to the masses, the political upheaval in Poland of October 1956 was omitted in political satire both in China and the USSR, while the nearly simultaneous events in Hungary were presented as the result of enemy infiltration. Both magazines handled the Polish issue in a similar way, but for different political reasons. Because the USSR opted to withdraw its armed forces from Poland and accept Władysław Gomułka as the country's leader, Soviet propaganda avoided making allegations of "imperialist" or "Fascist" involvement. *Manhua*'s silence on the matter reflected Mao's disapproval of the Soviet attempt to use force against Poland and his support for Gomułka (Lüthi 2008, 54, 64). In case of the attempted Hungarian revolution of 1956, both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* depicted it as a failed operation launched by former fascists supported by American imperialists. Whereas *Krokodil* ran a campaign along these lines in November 1956 (publishing at least one cartoon on this matter in each issue between nos. 32 and 36 in 1956), *Manhua* was a little slower on the uptake, starting to address the situation in Hungary only in December 1956 but then joining in no less vocally. Chinese satirists pointed out not only the imperialists' failures in Hungary, but also their retreat in the contemporaneous Suez Crisis and the firmness of Sino–Soviet friendship and, generally, of ties between socialist countries (e.g., Shen Tongheng 1957).

In a similar attempt to show the grim reality through rose-coloured spectacles, as ever more conflicts emerged between Soviet and Chinese leaders in the late 1950s, the two countries' propaganda machines put increasingly greater efforts into presenting rumours about such discord to be slanderous lies. As early as 1957 *Krokodil* reprinted a cartoon by Mi Gu 米谷 in which the Voice of America radio station's musings over Sino–Soviet clashes were dismissed as utter falsehoods (Mi Gu 1957a). *Manhua* published several cartoons (one of them on the front cover) satirizing the West's eagerness to find "cracks" between the USSR and the PRC (e.g., Fang Cheng 1960; Jiang Yousheng 1959b).

The mutual reproduction of cartoons was another useful method for demonstrating the unity of the socialist camp and "fraternal" nations. I have already mentioned some examples, but there are countless others. Satire magazines existed in all twelve socialist countries, as well as in many of the Soviet republics, so there were plenty of ideologically reliable sources to quote. More than half of all *Krokodil* and *Manhua* issues contained various reprints, either as whole-page collections of "satire abroad" and "friendly visits" from specified countries, magazines, or artists, or as individual cartoons. Occasionally, even Western cartoonists were given space (but they were either pro-socialist authors, such as Herluf Bidstrup, or cartoonists of the past, such as Honoré Daumier). In addition to giving some fresh perspective and introducing local readers to foreign humour, such sections also showed the solidarity of views and the presence of common tasks facing the peoples of the world. Additionally, Soviet and Chinese cartoonists were sometimes dispatched on exchange or observation trips, bringing back "eyewitness evidence" of the benefits of socialism and the evils of capitalism.

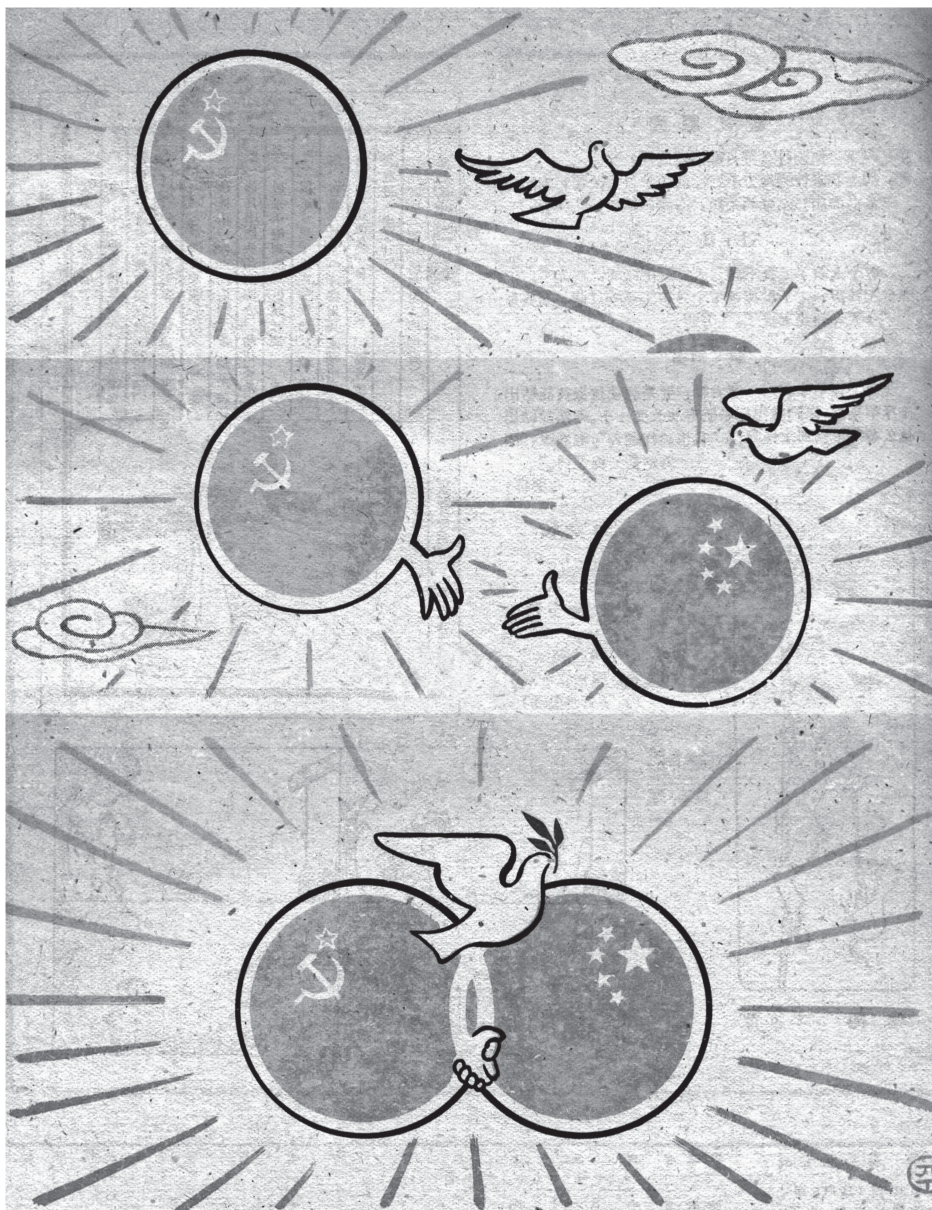

Figure 1: Zhang Leping 张乐平 (1959). "Xu ri gao sheng" 旭日高升 [The Sun is Rising High]. *Manhua* 147, 20.

Figure 2: Wu Yun 吴耘 (1960). "Dong feng deyi ying chunnian" 东风得意迎春年 [The East Wind Proudly Greets Spring Years). *Manhua* 152, 10–11.

International Solidarity across the Globe

These images of close-knit friendships both on the bilateral level and within the "fraternity" of socialist countries resonated with the narratives of wider international amity and peace-loving intentions, along with portrayals of national liberation, anti-colonial, and labour movements spreading across the globe at the time. Developments in Vietnam, North Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, which would affect not only the peoples involved but the whole planet, attracted considerable attention from Soviet and Chinese cartoonists. Whereas cartoons about Sino–Soviet friendship and the unity of the socialist camp amount to about 40 and 30, respectively, in both magazines, cartoons dealing with the national liberation, anti-colonial, labour, and anti-war movements are hard to count. If only the images explicitly depicting "anti-imperialist" forces (in the form of resisting people, raised fists, advancing columns of animals symbolizing countries or nations, such as elephants, etc.) are counted, there are about 160 cartoons nearly equally distributed between *Krokodil* and *Manhua*. It is interesting to note the changing frequency of such cartoons in both publications over time (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of cartoons showing active anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, national liberation, labour, and anti-war movements in *Krokodil* and *Manhua*.

	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960
Krokodil	3	18	19	21	11	1	5
Manhua	1	3	12	4	11	26	24

By the end of the 1950s *Manhua* dedicated increasing space to anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, while *Krokodil* on the contrary published fewer cartoons on these topics in 1959 and 1960. This disparity reflects a very important difference between the Soviet and Chinese foreign policies of the late 1950s. While Khrushchev was attempting to negotiate with the capitalist world under the slogan of "peaceful coexistence", Mao Zedong, confirming China's commitment to this slogan, adhered to the idea of anti-imperialist revolution and an inevitable war against the "hostile camp". On a rhetorical level this was possible thanks to the Bandung Conference of 1955, where the notion of peaceful coexistence was used as the basis of what would become the Non-Aligned Movement and to prevent imperialist intervention. This was a different idea than the "peaceful coexistence" proposed by Khrushchev: the former was a challenge to the bipolar system and aimed to promote the independence of former colonies, whereas the latter was aimed at negotiations between the socialist and capitalist camps (Jersild 2014, 157). The Soviet leadership, facing difficulties with the country's economy and understanding that it could not maintain the arms race, wanted to ease Cold War tensions. The Chinese Communist Party considered such appeasement of imperialists unacceptable, a message it conveyed to its Soviet counterpart after the International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties in November 1957 in Moscow – primarily due to the Taiwan issue (Lüthi 2008, 76), but also in view of the generally more radical ideological stand taken by Mao.

The Bandung Conference itself was quite closely reported on in both *Pravda* and *Renmin Ribao*. For Beijing "the Bandung meeting presented a forum through which China could state its peaceful intentions and overcome a sense of isolation within the international community" (Lee 2010, 12). However, neither *Krokodil* nor *Manhua* made many references to this meeting. For *Krokodil* the conference without Soviet participation was probably not a top priority, although the magazine did publish a cartoon depicting Africans and Asians "speaking the language of friendship" to the disappointment of "American imperialists" (Goriaev 1955; Fig. 3). *Manhua* produced one cartoon directly referring to Bandung, also satirizing the attempts of "Wall Street bosses" to create provocations at the meeting (Liu Lude 1955; Fig. 4). Both magazines resorted to more generalized depictions of labourers' hands joined so tightly together that no colonialist force could separate them and the like.

The USSR's attempts at negotiating with the West did not mean that Soviet leadership and, therefore, *Krokodil*, did not support the national liberation and anti-colonial movements. On the contrary, both the technological achievements of the USSR and the growing threat to the colonial order were wielded as weapons of pressure against the West in Khrushchev's negotiations. Under such circumstances, *Krokodil* in the mid-1950s was very active in demonstrating solidarity with Africans, Arabs, Asians, South Americans, and whoever else appeared to be struggling against colonial exploitation and imperialism in the opinion of Soviet propagandists. Quite often, representations of such struggle were placed in a fairly generalized "Oriental" setting, featuring palm trees, jungles, mosques, elephants, camels, and other attributes of "exotic" lands. In some cases, the cartoonists used this geographical vagueness intentionally to create a sense of the omnipresent and pervasive nature of anti-colonial movements (Yefimov 1956a). *Manhua* covered the same geographical range, paying attention to the spread of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist

movements across the globe. Chinese cartoons tended to be a little more specific in assigning nationalities to the depicted figures – the magazine even published a "manual" on how to portray Arabs, their costumes, customs, and architecture (Anon. 1958),[22] but at times it also applied general "Orientalist" depictions.

Understandably, the first big wave of *Krokodil* and *Manhua* cartoons about the anti-colonialist struggle was produced in response to the Suez Crisis of 1956. *Krokodil* published no less than seven cartoons demonstrating the might of the Egyptian people's will to control their own country; *Manhua* produced at least eight, including a separate leaflet as an appendix to issue no. 76. These cartoons again reflect the differences in the diplomatic courses taken by the USSR and the PRC in the second half of the 1950s. Soviet cartoonists showed the Egyptian people as rightfully governing the Suez Canal, having taken control over it, and, importantly, succeeding in mastering its navigation. The canal in *Krokodil*'s cartoons is clear blue, functioning as smoothly as under its previous owners – who are ridiculed in a relatively benign manner as plump moneybags regretting their lost profits and helplessly shaking their fists (e.g., Ganf 1957; Leo 1956; Yefimov 1956b; Fig. 5). Chinese cartoons were noticeably more "militant", depicting muscular arms, clenched fists, and "the dark waters and high waves of resistance" that wrecked the ships of colonialism (Fang Cheng 1956; Mi Gu 1956; Wu Yun 1956; Fig. 6). Chinese artists also used images of the Sphinx and the pyramids more actively than Soviet cartoonists, although I cannot discern any underlying political implications.

Middle Eastern conflicts were also embraced by cartoonists in both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* with regard to the Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Eisenhower Doctrine (1957),[23] tensions in Lebanon in 1957–58, the Iraqi revolution and the establishment of the United Arab Republic (both in 1958), the potential deposition of the monarchy in Jordan in the same period, and various other tendencies in the region, where the anti-colonial movement clashed with the West's attempts to prevent the spread of Communism. These tensions and conflicts were included in the wider narrative of similar trends in Africa and anti-American sentiments in Latin America. Cartoonists working for *Manhua* frequently chose to envisage such phenomena in the form of maps upon which liberated figures stand, dropping their chains.[24] *Krokodil*'s authors were more inclined to visualize the whole planet, not just individual continents.[25] It also appears that Chinese cartoonists used animalistic and objectifying metaphors[26] more readily than their Soviet counter-

[22] Similar manuals on broader topics were published as brochures meant as aids for amateur cartoonists, and hence the manual on Arabic customs was not unique.

[23] It is not surprising that both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* depicted American economic aid to other countries as the purchasing of their sovereignty, and the negotiation and signing of the American–Japanese Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security (signed in 1960) as a threat to regional stability. Soviet aid to China and any collective security treaties within the socialist camp were portrayed in the very opposite light as promoting peace and development. The socialist and capitalist worlds were completely antagonistic, but the magazines' cartoonists did not imply any irony in the parallels within this dichotomized universe.

[24] Some examples are Anon. 1960; Fang Cheng 1959; Ye Qianyu 1959; Zhang Shixiang 1959.

[25] Such representations can be found in Krylov 1960; Rotov 1957; Yefimov 1955; Yefimov 1960; Fig. 7.

[26] I do not mean that Chinese cartoonists had the explicit intention of dehumanizing the representatives of liberation movements; quite the contrary, the cartoonists' aim was to show the liberation forces as coming from the very nature of the land – in the form of local animals, plants, and famous landmarks. This representation supposedly served to show the might of the people's struggle, while also helping readers to recognize foreign lands.

parts: in *Manhua*, Africa is represented as an ostrich and as a lion (Mi Gu 1957b; Liu Yongfei 1959), Latin American resistance is depicted as fist-shaped cactuses (You Yunchang 1959), and Cuba is embodied by a whale (Wei Qimei 1960) – all this in addition to the aforementioned Egyptian pyramids and the Sphinx. *Krokodil* did use the image of an Arabian horse (Kukryniksy 1957),[27] but it seems evident that Soviet cartoonists went out of their way to emphasize the human nature of international friendship, possibly also fearing accusations of an imperialistic attitude towards Third World nations. Thus, in most *Krokodil* cartoons the positive forces of the anti-colonial movement were represented by humans, while animalistic metaphors were reserved primarily for aggressors. Naturally, Chinese cartoonists did not abstain from such depictions either, featuring an assortment of "paper tigers" and the like throughout *Manhua*'s ten-year existence.

The notion of "liberation" in *Manhua* was, of course, widely applied not only to international movements, but also to the Chinese people's liberation (both as *jiefang* 解放 and as *fanshen* 翻身). However, not every fight for freedom was "righteous". The Tibetan Uprising of 1959 and the ensuing conflict between China and India forced *Manhua* to engage in a campaign demonstrating Tibetans' happiness achieved through liberation after becoming part of the PRC – though, naturally, not their attempt to free themselves from it in 1959 (Anon. 1959b; Yue Xiaoying 1959). The uprising itself was not directly referred to, with the implication that there was no uprising and Tibetans lived happy lives. The "Tibetan question" was mentioned only to show that the USA tried to force more lies on the United Nations' agenda (e.g., Tian Ma 1959). Additionally, *Manhua*, which had previously quoted the Indian cartoonist Revindren on a number of occasions, quickly shifted gears and accused Indian cartoonists in general of following the "British" (in other words, colonial) style, because they satirized China's military involvement in Tibet in 1959 (Anon. 1959c). *Krokodil* remained completely silent about the whole Tibetan issue. The Soviet government disapproved of both Beijing's hard-line response to the Tibetan Uprising and the damage to Sino–Indian relations it caused (Lüthi 2008, 115), but this disapproval was not actively conveyed in the Soviet mass media.

Krokodil's silence about Tibet differed from its response to the bombing of Kinmen (Jinmen 金门) in 1958. Then, even though Moscow was dissatisfied with Mao for not consulting Khrushchev before engaging in the military operation, *Krokodil* did support China in its opposition to Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石), who by then was one of the most recognizable enemies for the magazine's readers. When *Krokodil* published two issues with covers related to the struggle and courage of the Chinese people in the fight against the American "occupants" of Taiwan and their "puppet" Chiang, there was no clear mention of the bombing, but support and justification of the PRC's actions were clear nonetheless (Kukryniksy 1958; Semenov and Abramov 1958). In contrast, the Tibetan Uprising of 1959 and the Sino–Indian clash were not visualized because that would imply assigning blame. Even *Pravda* treaded with utmost care, mostly quoting Zhou Enlai 周恩来 and Jawaharlal Nehru but avoiding explicit condemnation of either side (e.g., see *Pravda* issues from September 12, October 29, and November 10).

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[27] There was also a cartoon by a German author reprinted in *Krokodil* showing an elephant as a representation of India (Dittrich 1956).

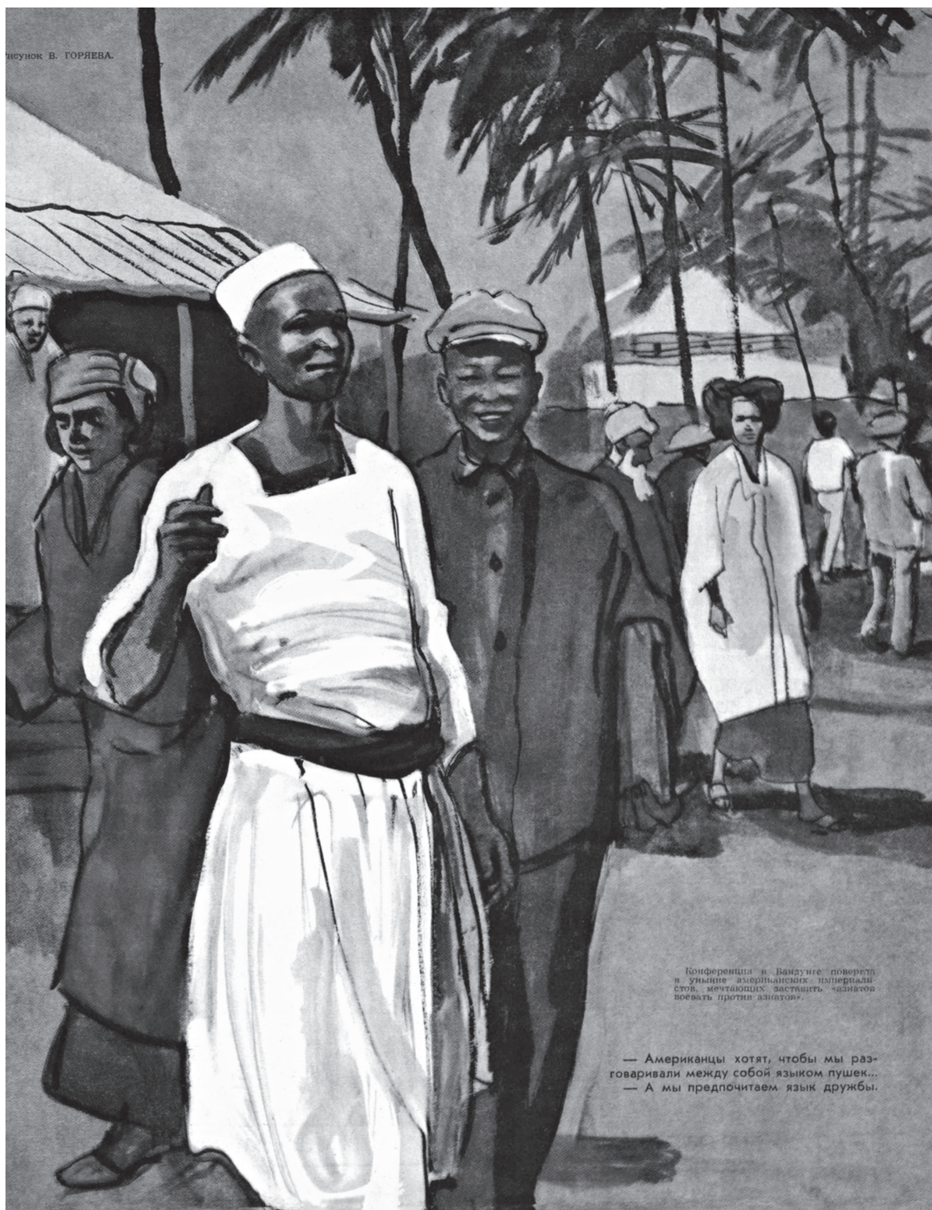

Figure 3: Vitaliy Goriaev (1955). Untitled. *Krokodil* 14, 7.

Figure 4: Liu Lude 刘路得 (1955). “Shibai de jingtou” 失败的镜头 [Defeated Lens]. *Manhua* 54, 3.

Figure 5: Boris Yefimov (1956b). "Smena flaga nad Suetskim kanalom" [Change of Flag over the Suez Canal]. *Krokodil* 24, 16.

Figure 6: Miao Di 苗地 (1956). "Qinlüe zhe gun chu qu!" 侵略者滚出去！ [Aggressors, Get Out!]. *Manhua* 77, 1.

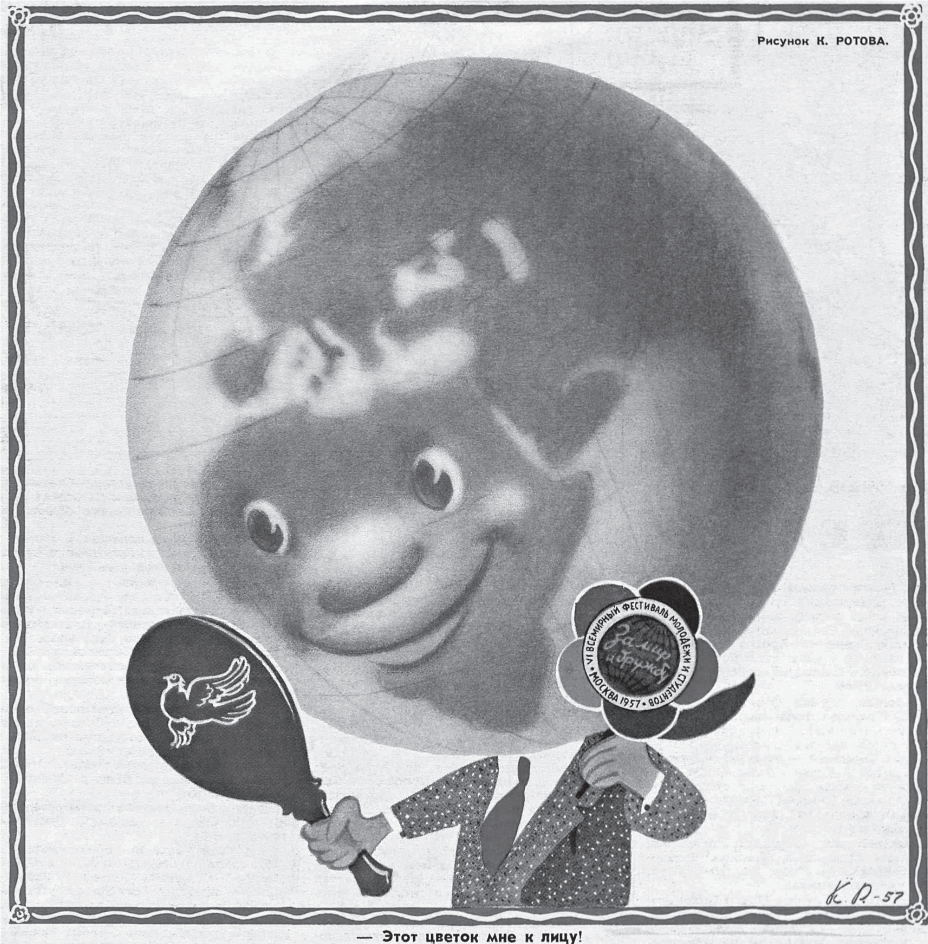

Figure 7: Konstantin Rotov (1957). Untitled. *Krokodil* 12, 3.

Interactions with the Capitalist World

The numbers in Table 1 show that by the late 1950s *Krokodil* had severely cut down its coverage of anti-imperialist resistance. This was largely a reflection of Khrushchev's ongoing negotiations with US president Dwight Eisenhower over disarmament and peaceful coexistence. I have already mentioned that Mao objected to such an approach to socialist–capitalist interactions. The Soviet and Chinese Communist parties' disagreement over the ideology and practice of international relations was mirrored both in the number of cartoons on relations with the capitalist world and in the metaphors they used: *Manhua* cartoons were increasingly harsh in their criticism of "imperialist aggressors", depicting anti-American sentiment overwhelming the planet and peoples' hearts and

arms joined in the fight against capitalism. *Krokodil* claimed that the West was trouble ridden, that racial discrimination and unemployment caused political and economic woes, and so forth. However, in light of Vice President Richard Nixon's visit to the USSR (summer 1959) and Khrushchev's visit to the USA (autumn 1959), Soviet propaganda aimed to create a view of world affairs that was quite different from the Chinese "proletarian revolution". In the months before, during, and after these two visits, *Krokodil* published no fewer than eighteen cartoons depicting Soviet and American flags next to each other.[28] In many of these cases, the emphasis was on friendship between peoples – sport competitions, theatrical exchanges, cartoonists' trips, and so on. *Manhua* avoided depicting Khrushchev's visit to the USA and references to Soviet and American attempts at rapprochement. Even an ironic cartoon from *Krokodil* mocking some American visitors' reactions to the Soviet exhibition in New York was reprinted in *Manhua* with a very telling omission: the central part of the composition showing the pavilion with Soviet and American flags on the façade disappeared from the Chinese reproduction (Lisogorskiy 1959; Lisuoge'ersiji 1959; Figs. 8, 9).

Manhua repeatedly visualized the dogmatic claim that the "East Wind prevails over the West Wind", even placing relevant two-panel cartoons on the front and back covers of issues (Zhang Ding 1958; Zhang Guangyu 1959; Fig. 10). The Soviet Union was emphatically portrayed as the source of peaceful intentions, but the underlying idea remained that the West's collapse was imminent, so peace would be achieved through victory over capitalism. However, this does not mean that *Manhua* tried to show socialism as an aggressive force. Both the Chinese magazine and *Krokodil* strived to demonstrate that the West's fears of the "red menace" were ridiculous because socialist countries were peace-loving. For *Krokodil* the theme of international friendship was constant. This is especially visible in the issues from 1957, when Moscow was the stage for the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students. The April–August 1957 issues of *Krokodil* contain at least fourteen cartoons praising joyful meetings between young people from different countries, continents, and races. *Manhua* did not echo these cartoons,[29] although there were some visual responses to another youth festival (held in Vienna in 1959), to which China sent a delegation. These cartoons demonstrated how Chinese performances attracted great attention despite capitalist machinations and how the young people of the world wanted to communicate but unnamed authorities created various obstacles (Chi Xing 1959). These reproaches for censorship targeting China are interesting in light of the moderately friendly cultural contacts between China and Austria at that time, as demonstrated by Graf and Mueller (2019, 26). The Chinese magazine also referred to China's peaceful intentions in trade, economic cooperation (especially to show US sanctions were failing because the world wanted free trade with China), and cultural exchanges with the West, but these motifs disappeared after the mid-1950s (Fang Cheng 1955; Su Guang 1955; Wang Mi 1956; Ye Qianyu 1955; Zhang Ding 1956).

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[28] Notably, three cartoons were placed on the magazine's front cover (Val'k 1959; Semenov 1959; Anon. 1959a).

[29] With the exception of a cartoon claiming that imperialists were preparing provocateurs to be sent to the festival (Cai Zhenhua 1957).

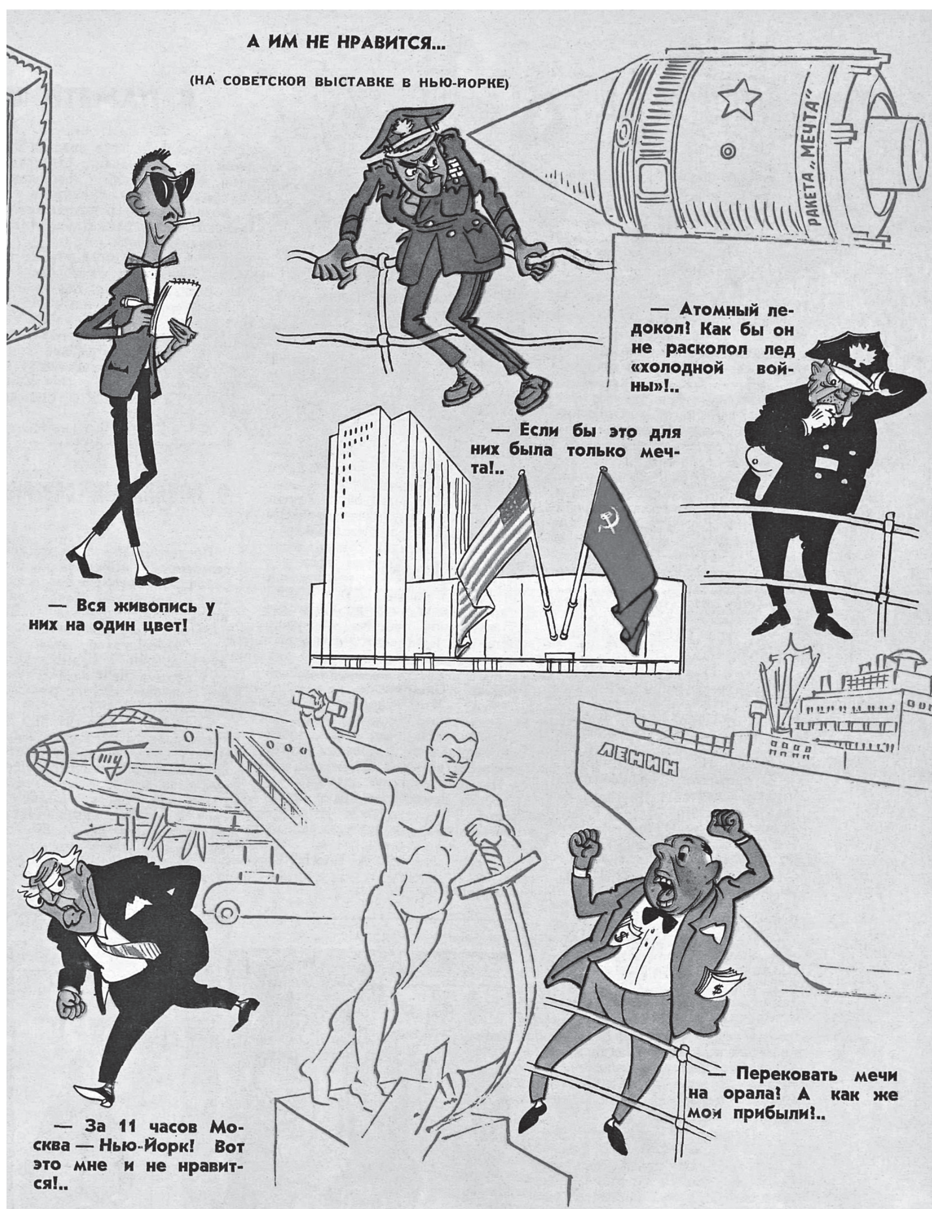

Figure 8: Lisogorskiy, Naum (1959). "A im ne nravitsja…" [And They Don't Like It…]. *Krokodil* 21, 5.

Figure 9: Lisuoge'ersiji 李素戈尔斯基 (Naum Lisogorskiy) (1959). "Mou xie Meiguoren zai Niuyue Sulian zhanlanhui" 某些美国人在纽约苏联展览会 [Some Americans at the Soviet Exhibition in New York]. *Manhua* 147, 5.

Figure 10: Zhang Guangyu 张光宇 (1959). Untitled. *Manhua* 129, 1, 20.

Conclusion

It would probably be an overstatement to say that a person reading both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* in the 1950s would easily notice the discrepancies and distortions in depictions of events in the two magazines or anticipate the future ideological and political rift between the USSR and the PRC. Such a hypothetical reader would probably find that in general the images in the two magazines were quite similar indeed: the Soviets supported the PRC's development, China celebrated the Soviet Union's achievements, and both countries strove to achieve peace on the planet and condemned the arms race, which was presented as imposed solely by the West. They equally denounced capitalism and imperialism and greeted with joy the national liberation and labour movements across the globe. In this sense Soviet and Chinese satire, viewed together, worked not only as a mirror that distorted events at large but, chiefly, hid away the growing differences between the two ruling parties. However, as these differences became more prominent, the finer details of cartoons began to reveal the divergence. Although both *Krokodil* and *Manhua* worked hard to support an image of unity, the very fact that they published pictures denying any "cracks" in Sino–Soviet friendship worked to prove the opposite. The Soviet government's doubts about GLF policies rendered this topic peripheral in *Krokodil*, while being the major focus of attention in *Manhua*. The Chinese magazine (together with other mass media outlets) tried to cover up this silence on the Soviets' part by alluding to Moscow's support, even though Khrushchev was very unwilling to grant his approval to communes (Shen Zhihua 2003, 351–53) and so Chinese cartoonists had

Figure 11: Mi Gu 米谷 (1960). Untitled. *Manhua* 164, 1.

to resort to far-fetched allusions. Rhetoric concerning socialist–capitalist relations in *Krokodil* and *Manhua* also significantly diverged towards the end of the 1950s. The outright antagonism of socialist and capitalist systems was a fixed point of departure for Chinese artists, whereas their Soviet counterparts had to soften confrontational metaphors, even if only for a short while. The same was true of how the struggle for peace was presented: the Chinese reader was encouraged to feel part of the mighty and powerful world proletariat ready to engage in battle, while the Soviet audience observed dancing youths and a smiling anthropomorphic planet (Figs. 7, 11).

In short, the two satire magazines placed Sino–Soviet friendship and world affairs in the 1950s into slightly different frames of reference. Khrushchev's "thaw", Soviet achievements in reaching outer space (and the related economic strain), and disarmament propaganda created the need to show international relations in a milder tone. Enemies were still present in *Krokodil*, many of whom were common to the USSR and the PRC, but the goal of peaceful coexistence seemed to dominate the visual images of them as well. On the contrary, China, having recently established itself on the international stage and growing more assured of its economic and diplomatic powers, aimed to demonstrate its strength and readiness to defend itself and smaller countries, especially those with which it claimed to share a colonial past. Mao was still supportive of the unity of the socialist camp, so *Manhua* stressed that the Soviet Union was the centre and the "elder brother" on the revolutionary path, but this perception was about to waver because the Chinese Communist Party was already challenging it, at least among its own ranks. The panorama of intimate friendship, shared goals, and common enemies lasted on the pages of *Krokodil* and *Manhua* throughout the decade, but distortions in the satirical reflections of the two countries' policies eventually became increasingly pronounced, not least in the attempts to cover up the actual differences.

Such discrepancies between the two magazines and the dynamics in the interactions between them require further attention, because they speak not only of the diplomatic trends between the USSR and the PRC or the two countries' Communist parties, but also of the wider tendencies in the socialist camp. The similarities between and reproduction of cartoons demonstrate that there was a high degree of uniformity and coordination within the socialist camp's press: Chinese magazine clearly followed the Soviet model, borrowing many tropes, themes, and styles of cartooning. However, the differences and distortions were also very distinct, revealing that the magazines had multiple sources of guidance at different levels. This at times allowed cartoonists a degree of creative freedom or forced them into searching for less obvious means of conveying contradictory messages. These dynamics comprise a large subject matter for analysis in their own right, promising insights into Sino–Soviet relations beyond the inter-governmental or inter-party level.

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