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Elizabeth Wishnick. *Mending Fences: The Evolution of Moscow's China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin.* Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001. xiv + 306 pp. $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98128-4.

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Geopolitical Myths of the Red and Non-Red Eurasian Monolith: TumblingRussian Bear and the Awakening of Chinese Dragon?

The history of Russo-Chinese relations has attracted generations of Western historians. Especially during the Cold War Western politicians were eager to stimulate the image of a "Red Peril" that would endanger the democracy and freedom of Western societies. In this one-sided conception "Red Russia" and "Red China" were viewed as the true antipodes of the Western world. When in October 1949 China became a communist power that exported revolutionary tactics into Asian countries and other parts of the so-called Third World that were shaking off Western colonial rule, Western observers feared that Lenin's prophesy of world revolution would now become true, thirty years after the October Revolution. And, indeed, the Chinese Revolution had no less far-reaching consequences for the world than the October Revolution. According to the right-wing press in the West, millions of "Red Russians" and even more millions of "Red Chinese" would unhinge the world order that the United States and their allies had installed.[1] It was pure, overheated anticommunism that threw dust in western observers' eyes. The myth of the "Red Monolith" was a popular label of anticommunist policy, but it also permeated by contemporary historiography.

From the very beginning, the creation of the "Red Alliance" was a tough job for Stalin and Mao who were extremely suspicious of each other. The main thing that contributed to this atmosphere was that during the Chinese Civil War (1945-49) Stalin played a double game on the Chinese scene. In occupied Manchuria he supported the Communists, whilst he was negotiating with Nationalist Chiang Kai-shek about a "Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance" that was finally signed on August 14, 1945, and that granted the Soviet Union a thirty- year lease on Manchurian ice-free harbors (Dairen and Port Arthur) as well as joint ownership of the Chinese Eastern Railway. After protracted negotiations with Mao, in 1950 Stalin was willing to return the concessions by 1952.

This diplomatic tug-of-war shows that the "Red Alliance" had no firm basis. In the first place it had a great propaganda effect born in the era of Cold War. Recent scholarly works on the formative 1945-53 period have pointed out that to portray the Cold War as an ideological clash between the USA and the USSR is superficial and needs reinterpretation. Instead, the Cold War was characterized by a diversity of viewpoints and tactics within the two blocs. Due to different geographical environments, Americans, Germans, but also Russians and Chinese had different views on world politics. Categories of strategic partnership and deterrence were no invention of the Cold War; instead they were molded in the international diplomacy of the nineteenth century, which had seen similar imperial rivalries. Deep-rooted cultural suspicions that emerged from the Russian imperialistic engagement in China in the nineteenth century had a long tradition and made Soviet-Chinese relations very unstable.

Although Stalin and Mao were committed to the idea of "Proletarian world communism," their political careers began in countries with very different cultures and mentalities, despite their long common border. In their history, Russians were oriented toward Western Europe, whereas the Middle Kingdom laid claim to leadership in East Asia. Neither Stalin nor Mao could throw the historical heritage overboard. Therefore no Chinese government, whether imperial, nationalist, or communist, could accept Russian geopolitical aims in East Asia or the Pacific Rim. This was also the reason why, shortly after his victory in Chinese Civil War (1949/1950) and the proclamation of the People's Republic of China, Mao demanded an annulment of all Soviet concessions.[2]

The work of Odd Arne Westad and my own research have shown on the basis of archival sources that after the victory over Japan in 1945 Stalin not only followed in

the tsar's footsteps in the Pacific but also drew his own lines far beyond tsarist imperialistic policies. The dictator's double game with Chiang Kai-shek and Mao, the occupation of Manchuria and North Korea, his suggestions for a partition of Japan (analoguous to Germany) with a Soviet occupational zone on Hokkaido, all indicate that Stalin wanted to integrate large parts of East Asia into the Soviet sphere.

In the 1950s the Soviet Union sent a large number of experts to China to give advice on how to build socialist agriculture and industry. But the influence of these experts in a large country with a completely different culture and mentality remained superficial. Later, in 1956, Mao openly put it: "If I had always followed Stalin's advice, I would have been dead."[3] This background, which explains why Soviet leaders took up a strained inheritance after Stalin's death in 1953, is not provided by Wishnick in her introduction (Chapter One).

After her introductory remarks Wishnick discusses Moscow's China policy from Brezhnev until Yeltsin. She does not make clear in which way Soviet strategy from 1960s onward differs from the preceding periods. The main question of how Soviet strategists did evaluate strategic concepts since 1945 under changing global conditions remains open. Indeed, Wishnick delivers a more political than broadly historical study.

Soviet strategy after Stalin aimed at a containment of the Communist neighbor. After the Ussuri clashes (March 2, 1969), Moscow pushed a massive military buildup in the Far East that followed strategic motives. The Soviet Union deployed thirty-seven to forty-two divisions (370,000 men) to eastern Siberia and the Soviet Far East. It is therefore quite questionable if Marxist-Leninist ideology really served as a rationale for Moscow's policy as Wishnick argues in her introduction (p. 8).

Later the author makes a stronger argument. Wishnick gives an interesting hint that in the late 1960s the image of the "Yellow Peril" was widespread in the east and even among sinologists in Moscow, but she does not make use of the rich source of press reports that would provide a more detailed insight into Russian mentality toward Communist China (p. 30). According to Wishnick, the Cultural Revolution intensified Russian fears of a Chinese invasion into Siberia and between 1974 and 1978 Siberia become an important field in Moscow's China policy. In 1974, the Baikal-Amur highway was built in order to transfer Soviet troops to the Far East, and four years later Brezhnev made a demonstrative tour to Soviet forward positions in the Far East like Khabarovsk and Vladivostok (p.43). Wishnick is right in her assertion that sinologists were a tool in the hand of Soviet policy makers. To me, after the Ussuri clashes the notion of a "Yellow Peril" became a stronger factor in Soviet policy than Marxist-Leninist ideology and reveals the persistant continuity of the "Yellow Peril" as a nationalist attitude in Russia's foreign policy.

The strength of Chapter Three is that it gives us a greater understanding of the changing geopolitical situation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Wishnick debunks the myth of a bipolar world as "independent-minded China undermined Soviet leadership of the Communist movement" (p.50). She confirms the thesis, made in 1998 by prominent sinologist Lev Deliusin, that "the Soviet-Chinese conflict represented above all the expression of the crisis of socialist ideology, the defeat of Marxism-Leninism as a universal truth, capable of unifying the working masses of all countries around the common goal of building communism"(p.51).[4]

The rise of China as a leading Communist power in Asia and in the Third World, the awakening of Eurocommunism in Western Europe, and the independent courses of Yugoslavia and Romania proved the monolithic socialist community to be a myth. This lets us conclude that long before the peaceful breakdown of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and of the Soviet Union in 1991, two decades ago the basis of Communism had eroded–a fact that did not come to the attention of the central policymakers in Moscow in the 1970s and 1980s. As in domestic policy, the Soviet attitude toward China and the Communist world was characterized by stagnation. In Chapter Four and Five Wishnick hits the nail on the head in arguing that the majority of the Soviet foreign policy elite and sinologists did not understand the Deng reforms and the opening of Communist China for world trade. Instead the Old Guard stubbornly held on to the thesis that nothing had changed in China, that China pursued the policy of the "Maoism of Mao" (p.85).

Chapters Six and Seven describe the fresh wind of Soviet-Chinese detente that Gorbachev brought in the late 1980s. Gorbachev threw Stalinist dogma overboard and understood well the connections between domestic reforms and a flexible foreign policy. Wishnick reveals that perestroika resulted in an increasing interest in China's economic reforms and a revival of border trade. However, as Wishnick shows, Gorbachev's domestic policy had a deep impact on Chinese intellectuals who pushed for political reform in China. Despite shaking hands at the Sino-Soviet summit in Beijing in May 1989, there was much distrust between Gorbachev and

Deng Xiaoping as the Chinese leadership preferred a free economy without political freedom.

Chapters Eight and Nine are devoted to Sino-Russian relations in the Yeltsin era. In 1996 Russian foreign policy coined the slogan of the "Eurasian partnership" with China. A half decade after the end of the Soviet Union, Russia was seeking a new orientation in a multipolar world. The disappearance of Marxist ideology in Russian foreign policy had left a mental vaccum that was filled up by the renaissance of old Eurasian concepts that–as Wishnick describes–have not only political, but also economic implications. For example, Gazprom suggested a plan to build a gas pipeline from Krasnoiarsk Krai and the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Region to Shanghai, a project envisaged to take thirty years starting in 2004 (p.135). However, it is worth mentioning that the independent Central Asian republics joined the "Eurasian economic cooperation" between Russia and China.

Nevertheless, "Eurasian partnership" as a typical geopolitical catchword is quite misleading, as under the surface there is much mutual distrust between Russia, Central Asia, and China. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Siberia, and the Russian Far East complained about the influx of illegal immigrants (p.138). I would add from my own observations in Central Asia, Siberia, and the Russian Far East, however, that Chinese are a welcomed cheap labor force. The "Yellow Peril" is a quite questionable matter. For example, the modernization of many cities in eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East depends on Chinese labor. Wishnick mentions that Chinese farmers in the Russian Far East deliver fresh products for the Russian market (p.167).

To sum up, Russo-Chinese relations in the twentieth century were characterized by much tension, mutual suspicion, and prejudices. Geopolitical catchwords like "the Moscow-Peking Axis", the "Red Peril" in the 1950s and 1960s, or "Eurasian partnership" in the 1990s are nothing more than myths. This, of course, confirms that myths and mentalities have a great impact on foreign policy. However, there are some shortcomings in her study. Whereas the author emphasizes the role of ideology, the more relevant importance of different mentalities in policy- making is completely absent. Wishnick focuses on supreme leaders like Brezhnev, Andropov, Gorbachev, Yeltsin; instead, the reader would wish a more detailed insight into the networks in the foreign ministry and the impact of ambassadors on foreign policy, although this is a difficult task in light of limited access to archival sources. Wishnick mentions interviews with Soviet officials and scholars who were aware in the 1970s and 1980s of the failure of Soviet containment policy, but these sources remain anonymous.

Despite some shortcomings in the first chapters (concerning the historical background), parts II and III gave a solid and fascinating analysis of Moscow's China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin. However, the indisputable strength of *Mending Fences* is Wishnick's argument on the broader context of world communism and its sweeping erosion since the 1970s. Indeed, as the author has convincingly elaborated, Soviet-Chinese relations in the 1970s-1990s period were not simply a bilateral play between two neighbor countries; moreover, the strategic game was embedded in a complex multipolar world. From its political discussion, *Mending Fences* opens a new and important perspective on Soviet-Chinese relations in the 1970s-1990s, a period that has seldom attracted historians' attention.

Notes:

[1] Eva-Maria Stolberg, *Geschichte Russlands und der Sowjetunion: Sowjetisch-chinesische Beziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Hagen, 1999).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Odd Arne Westad, *Brothers in Arms. The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance 1945-1963* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), p. 15. See also my dissertation, published as *Stalin und die chinesischen Kommunisten 1945-1953. Eine Studie zur Entstehungsgeschichte der sowjetisch-chinesischen Allianz vor dem Hintergrund des Kalten Krieges* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1997).

[4] See Lev Deliusin, "Nekotorye razmyshleniia o nachale sovetsko-kitaiskogo konflikta," *Rossiia i sovremennyi mir*, no. 2 (1998): pp. 233-234.

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