

Chinese Perspectives on Sino-Yugoslav Relations, 1977–1981
An Episode of Enthusiastic Engagement with an Alternative Socialist Model

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Zusammenfassung

Umfang und Begründung

Diese Dissertation untersucht die Intensivierung der chinesisch-jugoslawischen Beziehungen zwischen 1977 und 1981, einer kurzen, aber bemerkenswerten Periode, in der zwei ideologisch unterschiedliche sozialistische Staaten, die sich jeweils in Opposition zur sowjetischen Orthodoxie definieren, gemeinsame Sache machten. Nach dem Abbruch der Beziehungen zwischen 1958 und 1969 nahmen China und Jugoslawien 1970 wieder diplomatische Beziehungen auf, die jedoch eher freundschaftlich als eng waren. Der plötzliche Anstieg der bilateralen Aktivitäten nach 1977 bedarf daher einer Erklärung: Warum begrüßte Peking, das Belgrad einst als „modernen Revisionisten“ denunziert hatte, Jugoslawien als sozialistische Erfolgsgeschichte, und warum erreichte dieser Enthusiasmus so schnell seinen Höhepunkt, bevor er Anfang der 1980er Jahre abflaute?

Um diese Fragen zu beantworten, stützt sich die Studie auf drei bisher wenig genutzte Quellen aus China:

1. Offizielle Medien, vor allem die *Renmin Ribao* „Chinesische Volkszeitung“, um Veränderungen im Diskurs der Eliten nachzuzeichnen.
2. Lokale Archivquellen, vor allem mehr als 200 interne Berichte im Stadtarchiv von Shanghai, um Interaktionen auf zwischenmenschlicher und kommunaler Ebene zu erfassen.
3. Die Schriften reformorientierter chinesischer Wirtschaftswissenschaftler, von denen einige um die Zeit ihrer Studienreise nach Jugoslawien im Jahr 1978 und danach zu großer Bekanntheit gelangten.

Zusammengenommen ermöglichen diese Quellen eine vielschichtige Rekonstruktion der Art und Weise, wie Jugoslawien im chinesischen Parteistaat thematisiert, debattiert und erlebt wurde.

Forschungsfragen

1. Handeln und Entscheidungsfindung: Wurde der Wandel in der Jugoslawienpolitik Ende der 1970er Jahre in erster Linie von Hua Guofengs persönlicher Diplomatie vorangetrieben, oder entstand er aus einem breiteren Konsens innerhalb der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas (KPCh)?
2. Die Tiefe des Lernens: Wurde das proklamierte Bemühen, von Jugoslawien zu lernen, in ein konkretes institutionelles Engagement umgesetzt oder blieb es weitgehend rhetorisch?

Belege und Ergebnisse

1. Der Diskurs der *Renmin Ribao* (Kapitel 2)

Eine systematische Lektüre der Berichterstattung der *Renmin Ribao* zwischen 1975 und 1980 zeigt, dass sich das Image Jugoslawiens von dem eines freundlichen antihegemonialen Partners zu dem eines inspirierenden sozialistischen Innovators entwickelte. Titos Besuch im Jahr 1977 stellt eine Zäsur dar: Davor konzentrierte sich die chinesische Darstellung Jugoslawiens auf seine Verteidigung und seine diplomatischen Bemühungen, dem Hegemonismus der Supermächte entgegenzutreten; danach verlagerte sich die Berichterstattung auf ausführlichere Erörterungen der wirtschaftlichen Modernisierung der Nachkriegszeit und zunehmend auf den Sozialismus der Selbstverwaltung. Die Berichterstattung über den industriellen Aufschwung Jugoslawiens und das rasche Wirtschaftswachstum wurde bald durch die Betonung systematischer Merkmale wie Marktmechanismen und gesellschaftliches Eigentum ergänzt. Dieser Wandel deutet darauf hin, dass die Elite zunehmend bereit ist, verschiedene sozialistische Wege anzuerkennen.

2. Engagement auf lokaler Ebene (Kapitel 3)

Interne Shanghai-Berichte zeigen einen lebhaften, oft offenen Austausch mit jugoslawischen Delegationen. Die Berichte zeigten, dass die Begeisterung für

Jugoslawien weit über den zentralen Propagandaapparat hinausging. Die chinesischen Gastgeber der jugoslawischen Delegationen vor Ort waren nicht nur passive Empfänger von Anweisungen von oben, sondern beteiligten sich tatkräftig, indem sie gezielte Fragen zum Theatermanagement, zur Organisation des Tourismus in einem wettbewerbsorientierten Umfeld und zur Finanzierung der Agrarforschung stellten. Delegierte aus der chinesischen Leder-, Maschinen- und Theaterbranche kamen mit langen Memoranden zurück, in denen sie die jugoslawische Praxis mit den chinesischen Bedürfnissen verglichen. Während die ideologische Solidarität stets zur Schau gestellt wurde, zeigen die lokalen Aufzeichnungen einen Hunger nach pragmatischem Know-how.

3. Die Debatten der Ökonomen (Kapitel 4)

Chinesische Reformökonomen - Yu Guangyuan, Luo Yuanzheng, Su Shaozhi und andere - spielten eine Schlüsselrolle bei der Verbreitung von Wissen über Jugoslawien durch ihre Schriften, Vorträge und Konferenzen und durch ihre Hilfe bei der Gründung von Institutionen wie der Gesellschaft zum Studium der jugoslawischen Wirtschaft. Ihre Aufsätze, die zwischen 1978 und 1980 in wichtigen Fachzeitschriften veröffentlicht wurden, befassten sich mit dem jugoslawischen Selbstverwaltungssystem und vielen Detailfragen wie dem gesellschaftlichen Eigentum, dem Verhältnis zwischen Marktmechanismen und Planung, der Bewirtschaftung der Landwirtschaft und der Aufrechterhaltung des Gleichgewichts zwischen Akkumulation und Konsum. Das Interesse an diesen Themen war in den Jahren 1978 und 1979 besonders groß. Nach 1980 ließ der Enthusiasmus zwar nach, doch lässt sich dies als Folge des wachsenden Bewusstseins für die strukturellen Herausforderungen der jugoslawischen Wirtschaft zusammenfassen.

Synthese der Beweise

Das Querlesen der drei Quellengrundlagen klärt die erste Forschungsfrage der Dissertation. Ein oberflächlicher Blick in die *Renmin Ribao* könnte nahelegen, dass

Hua Guofengs Einladung an Tito der Auslöser für die gesamte Intensivierung war. Die Schriften der Wirtschaftswissenschaftler und die Protokolle der lokalen Archive deuten jedoch auf einen iterativen Entscheidungsprozess hin. Der Beschluss des Politbüros der KPCh vom August 1977, die Beziehungen zwischen den Parteien wiederherzustellen, scheint funktional und begrenzt gewesen zu sein, während die ideologische Annäherung im Juni 1978 auf den ausführlichen Bericht der Studiendelegation vom März folgte. Der Politikwechsel ist also Ausdruck kollektiver Überlegungen und nicht einseitiger Weisungen.

Auch die zweite Frage lässt sich anhand der Fakten beantworten: Das chinesische Interesse an Jugoslawien war unbestreitbar substantiell. Studienreisen waren langwierig und methodisch; Übersetzer und Wirtschaftswissenschaftler beeilten sich, Serbokroatisch zu lernen, und lokale Kader debattierten darüber, wie man die Lektionen an die chinesischen Bedingungen anpassen könnte. Das Phänomen erreichte in den Jahren 1978-79 seinen Höhepunkt und rechtfertigte die Bezeichnung „Jugomanie“.

Niedergang und Nachwirkungen

Nach 1981 begann die Begeisterung zu schwinden. Ein zunehmendes Ungleichgewicht zwischen rhetorischer Bewunderung und konkreter Zusammenarbeit wurde deutlich: China konzentrierte sich weiterhin auf Beobachtungsstudien, während Jugoslawien zunehmend Handel und Investitionen anstrebte. Chinesische Delegierte, die einst begierig darauf waren, Wissen zu absorbieren, begannen, den Ehrgeiz zu bekunden, die jugoslawischen Maßstäbe zu übertreffen, was eine Verschiebung der Lehrer-Schüler-Dynamik signalisierte. In der Zwischenzeit untergrub die sich verschärfende innere Krise Jugoslawiens, die durch wirtschaftliche Turbulenzen und politische Zersplitterung gekennzeichnet war, seinen Nutzen als Modell. Mitte der 1980er Jahre hatte das chinesische Interesse nachgelassen, und der Austausch wurde technischer und oberflächlicher.

Dennoch blieb das Erbe der Intensivierung von 1977-81 bestehen. Die kulturelle Erinnerung an diese Zeit blieb vor allem durch die Popularität des jugoslawischen Films

Valter brani Sarajevo erhalten. Im diplomatischen Diskurs wurde das intellektuelle Engagement der 1970er Jahre jedoch allmählich von späteren Erzählungen über die gemeinsame Opferrolle verdrängt, insbesondere nach dem NATO-Bombardement der chinesischen Botschaft in Belgrad 1999. Verweise auf die Zeit, in der China eifrig nach Lehren aus Jugoslawien suchte, sind heute selten, obwohl ihr Einfluss auf subtile Weise fortbesteht.

Letztlich war die chinesisch-jugoslawische Begegnung von 1977-81 ein Dialog zwischen verschiedenen Stadien der sozialistischen Zeit: Jugoslawien in der Abenddämmerung, China in der Morgendämmerung. Indem sie diese flüchtige Annäherung festhält, verdeutlicht diese Dissertation, wie Ideen reisen, wie Modelle inspirieren und wie sowohl Enthusiasmus als auch Desillusionierung das Streben nach sozialistischer Modernität prägen.

Abstract

Scope and Rationale

This dissertation investigates the intensification of Sino-Yugoslav relations between 1977 and 1981, a brief but remarkable period when two ideologically distinct socialist states, each defining itself in opposition to Soviet orthodoxy, found common cause. After the breakdown of relations from 1958 to 1969, China and Yugoslavia restored diplomatic ties in 1970, yet they remained cordial rather than close. A sudden surge of bilateral activity after 1977 therefore demands explanation: why did Beijing, which had once denounced Belgrade as “modern revisionist,” come to hail Yugoslavia as a fellow socialist success story, and why did this enthusiasm peak so quickly before ebbing in the early 1980s?

To answer these questions, the study draws on three under-exploited bodies of evidence from China:

1. Official media, above all the *People's Daily*, to trace changes in elite discourse.
2. Local archival sources, principally more than 200 internal reports in the Shanghai Municipal Archives, to capture interactions at the interpersonal and municipal levels.
3. The writings of reform-oriented Chinese economists, some of whom were propelled to prominence around the time of and after their 1978 study trip to Yugoslavia.

Together these sources allow a multi-layered reconstruction of how Yugoslavia was framed, debated, and experienced across the Chinese Party-state.

Research Questions

1. Agency and decision-making: Was the late-1970s policy shift towards Yugoslavia primarily driven by Hua Guofeng's personal diplomacy, or did it

- emerge from a wider consensus within the Communist Party of China (CPC)?
2. Depth of learning: Did the proclaimed effort to learn from Yugoslavia translate into substantive institutional engagement, or remain largely rhetorical?

Evidence and Findings

1. People's Daily Discourse (Chapter 2)

A systematic reading of *People's Daily* coverage between 1975 and 1980 shows that Yugoslavia's image evolved from that of a friendly anti-hegemonic partner to an inspiring socialist innovator. Tito's 1977 visit occupies a watershed: before it, Chinese portrayals of Yugoslavia focused on its defence and diplomatic efforts in countering the hegemonism of the superpowers; thereafter, reporting shifted to more detailed discussions of post-war economic modernisation and, increasingly, self-management socialism. The coverage on Yugoslav industrial recovery and rapid economic growth was soon supplemented by an emphasis on systematic features such as market mechanisms and social ownership. This change indicates growing elite comfort with acknowledging diverse socialist paths.

2. Local-level Engagement (Chapter 3)

Internal Shanghai reports reveal vibrant, often candid exchanges with Yugoslav delegations. The reports demonstrated that the enthusiasm for Yugoslavia extended well beyond the central propaganda apparatus. Chinese local hosts of Yugoslav delegations were not merely passive receivers of instructions from above; they participated energetically, posing targeted questions about theatre management, about how tourism was organised in a competitive environment, and how agricultural research was funded. Delegates from Chinese leather, machinery, and performing sectors returned with lengthy memoranda that compared Yugoslav practice with Chinese needs. While ideological solidarity was always on display, the local records show a hunger for pragmatic know-how.

3. Economists' Debates (Chapter 4)

Chinese reform economists—Yu Guangyuan, Luo Yuanzheng, Su Shaozhi, and others—played a key role in disseminating knowledge about Yugoslavia through their writings, lectures, and conferences, and by helping to establish institutions such as the Society for Studying Yugoslav Economy. Their essays, published in important journals between 1978 and 1980, explored Yugoslavia's self-management system and many detailed issues such as social ownership, the relationship between market mechanisms and planning, agriculture management, and maintaining balance between accumulation and consumption. Interest in these issues was especially intense between 1978 and 1979. While a decline in enthusiasm began after 1980, this can be summarised as a result of growing awareness of the Yugoslav economy's structural challenges.

Synthesising the Evidence

Cross-reading the three source bases clarifies the dissertation's first research question. A surface glance at *People's Daily* might suggest that Hua Guofeng's invitation to Tito triggered the entire intensification. However, economists' writings and local archival minutes point to a more iterative decision-making process. The CPC Politburo's August 1977 decision to restore Party-to-Party ties appears to have been functional and limited, whereas the June 1978 ideological rapprochement followed the March study delegation's detailed report. Thus, the policy shift reflects collective deliberation, not unilateral directive.

The evidence likewise resolves the second question: Chinese interest in Yugoslavia was undeniably substantive. Study tours were lengthy and methodical; translators and economists rushed to learn Serbo-Croatian; and local cadres debated how to adapt lessons to Chinese conditions. The phenomenon reached its apex in 1978–79, justifying the descriptor “Yugomania.”

Decline and Aftermath

Enthusiasm began to fade after 1981. A growing imbalance between rhetorical admiration and tangible cooperation became apparent: China remained focused on observational study, while Yugoslavia increasingly sought trade and investment. Chinese delegates, once eager to absorb knowledge, began expressing ambitions to exceed Yugoslav benchmarks, signalling a shift in the teacher-student dynamic. Meanwhile, Yugoslavia's deepening internal crisis, marked by economic turbulence and political fragmentation, undermined its utility as a model. By the mid-1980s, Chinese interest had waned, and exchanges became more technical and perfunctory.

Nevertheless, the legacy of the 1977–81 intensification endured. The cultural memory of the period persisted most visibly in the popularity of the Yugoslav film *Valter brani Sarajevo*. In diplomatic discourse, however, the intellectual engagement of the 1970s was gradually eclipsed by later narratives of shared victimhood, especially following the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. References to the moment when China eagerly sought lessons from Yugoslavia are now rare, though their influence subtly endures.

Ultimately, the Sino-Yugoslav encounter of 1977–81 was a dialogue between different stages of socialist time: Yugoslavia approaching dusk, China at dawn. In capturing that fleeting alignment, this dissertation clarifies how ideas travel, how models inspire, and how both enthusiasm and disillusionment shape the quest for socialist modernity.

Abbreviations

ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
AJ	Archives of Yugoslavia
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPY	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
CYL	Communist Youth League
DAMSPS	Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia
FAB	foreign affairs briefing
FRY	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
ILD	International Liaison Department
IWEP	Institute of World Economics and Politics
LCY	League of Communists of Yugoslavia
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
PRC	People's Republic of China
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SFTU	Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions
SMA	Shanghai Municipal Archives
SSJ	Confederation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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0 Introduction

0.1 A Time of Remarkable Blossoming: Sino-Yugoslav Relations, 1977–1981

In 1977, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY, 1945–1992)¹ stood as two self-declared socialist states outside the Soviet-led Socialist Bloc. Yet, beyond this superficial similarity, the two countries differed markedly in almost every other respect. China, having refused to fully abandon Stalinist ideology after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956, positioned itself in stark ideological opposition to the Soviet Union, which was a major factor in the Sino-Soviet split. It continued to adhere to a form of orthodox Stalinism well into the 1970s. In contrast, it was Yugoslavia's own 1948 break with Stalin that propelled the country to develop its distinct model of socialism based on workers' self-management. On the global stage, Yugoslavia held a respected position between the Cold War's two opposing blocs, emerging as a key leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). China, by comparison, remained diplomatically isolated in 1977, with strained relations with the Socialist Camp, fraught ties with several neighbouring states, and notable yet still tentative improvements in its contacts with the West. It was precisely in 1977 that a major milestone marked a new chapter in Sino-Yugoslav relations.

While bilateral relations had previously undergone a decade of severe rupture, they had recently entered a more cordial phase. The two countries had restored full

¹ From 1945 to 1963, the country was officially named the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY), before being renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The FPRY/SFRY represented the second of three states to bear the name "Yugoslavia." The first was the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (officially the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes from 1918 to 1929), which existed from 1918 until its dissolution in 1941. The third was the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), a reduced federation comprising only Serbia and Montenegro, which lasted from 1992 to 2003, when it was reconstituted as the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro before its final dissolution in 2006. Unless otherwise indicated, this dissertation uses "Yugoslavia" to refer to the FPRY/SFRY.

diplomatic relations in 1970, and Yugoslav Prime Minister Džemal Bijedić paid an official visit to China in 1975. Yet, during Mao Zedong's lifetime, neither he nor Josip Broz Tito, founders and top leaders of their respective countries, ever visited the other's land. Moreover, relations between the two ruling communist parties, the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), had been broken since 1958 and remained unrepaired. Meanwhile, following Mao's death in 1976, the then Premier Hua Guofeng moved swiftly to consolidate power: the arrest of the Gang of Four, the official end of the Cultural Revolution, and Hua's ascent to the position of paramount leader all set the stage for a shift in China's foreign relations.

The post-Mao leadership ultimately decided to invite Tito in 1977, and he arrived in Beijing on 30 August of that year. He was received warmly by Hua Guofeng. In a gesture of exceptional symbolic significance, Tito became the first foreign head of state to visit Mao's mausoleum, even before it had officially been opened to the public. In a notable departure from the previous pattern of non-reciprocity², Hua Guofeng undertook a return state visit to Yugoslavia, beginning on 21 August 1978, almost exactly one year from Tito's journey to China.³ Warming of bilateral relations was further reflected in the restoration of party-to-party ties: in June 1978, the CPC sent an official greeting message to the Eleventh Congress of the LCY, thereby formally reestablishing inter-party relations.⁴

Between 1977 and 1981, this new phase of engagement witnessed a flurry of high-level exchanges, including numerous governmental and party delegations. Cultural diplomacy also played a significant role in fostering mutual goodwill. Yugoslav films such as *Walter Defends Sarajevo* (*Valter brani Sarajevo*) and *The Bridge* (*Most*)

² See Subchapter 1.2.

³ Zhu Liang, who worked at the International Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party at the time and later became its head, wrote about Tito and Hua's mutual visits in (朱良 [Zhu Liang] 2008).

⁴ The full text of the greeting message can be found in "Greeting 11th Congress of Yugoslav League of Communists," *Peking Review*, no. 25 (June 23, 1978).

achieved extraordinary popularity among Chinese audiences. Following Tito's death on 4 May 1980, Hua Guofeng once again travelled to Yugoslavia, this time to attend the funeral of his counterpart, underscoring the deepening political and personal ties between the two countries in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

When viewed against the broader backdrop of diplomatic history and the international standing of the two countries, the sudden blossoming of Sino-Yugoslav relations in the late 1970s emerges as a truly extraordinary development. Yugoslavia had managed to escape complete isolation from the socialist bloc following the 1948 Tito–Stalin split by turning to the West for economic and diplomatic support. Although the reconciliation with the Soviet Union between 1954 and 1956 eased tensions and lessened Yugoslavia's dependence on Western assistance, it did not lead to a full reintegration into the Soviet-led bloc. Instead, Yugoslavia deliberately positioned itself in a space “between” the two Cold War poles, skilfully navigating its foreign policy to extract maximum benefit from both East and West. One of the most distinctive and innovative elements of Yugoslav foreign policy was its engagement with what was then widely referred to as the Third World, a term commonly used during the Cold War to describe nations across Asia, Africa, and Latin America that were not formally aligned with either the Western or the Eastern bloc. (The term "Global South", although prevalent in contemporary discourse, had not yet entered mainstream usage at the time.) As a founding member and one of the most active leaders of the NAM, Yugoslavia cultivated strong political, economic, and cultural ties with a vast array of developing countries. Under Tito's leadership, the country projected its influence globally; Tito himself conducted official visits to at least seventy countries during his tenure, reinforcing Yugoslavia's reputation as a bridge-builder between blocs and continents. Notably, however, China did not feature among these destinations until relatively late, more than two decades after Tito had assumed power.

By contrast, the People's Republic of China was significantly more isolated on the international stage during the 1960s and 1970s. Following the Sino-Soviet split, China

was effectively ostracised by the Soviet bloc, with the sole exception of Romania. Its only ally among the European socialist states was Albania, though this alliance began to deteriorate in 1972 and broke off completely in 1978, after the landmark visit of US President Richard Nixon to China and particularly after the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. While China's gradual pivot toward the West in the early 1970s, marked by Nixon's historic trip in 1972, began to open new diplomatic channels and trade opportunities, formal diplomatic relations with the United States would not be established until 1979. Although China, like Yugoslavia, was active in cultivating relations with the Third World, its foreign policy during Mao's time was heavily shaped by revolutionary ideology. This approach often alienated potential partners and limited the country's ability to form durable alliances. Unlike Tito, whose extensive travels embodied Yugoslavia's international outreach, Chairman Mao left China only twice in his lifetime, both times to visit the Soviet Union. Against this backdrop, Hua Guofeng's decision to visit Yugoslavia (alongside Romania and Iran) in 1978 on his second ever international trip following his succession of Mao was a move of considerable symbolic and political significance. His second visit to Belgrade in 1980 was equally notable: it remains the only occasion on which a paramount leader of the People's Republic of China attended the funeral of a foreign head of state.

The period from 1977 to 1981 was also critical for the internal development of both Yugoslavia and China. In the years following its exclusion from the socialist bloc, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia was compelled to articulate an alternative ideological framework to Stalinism. This gave rise to a distinct model of socialism—self-management socialism, characterised by debureaucratisation, decentralisation, and a degree of political democratisation.⁵ The reforms associated with this model introduced elements of a market economy and fostered limited pluralism within the Yugoslav political landscape. Accompanying processes of industrialisation and

⁵ (Calic 2019, 179).

urbanisation brought measurable improvements in living standards, and by the late 1970s, many Yugoslav citizens had become accustomed to relative prosperity, international cultural exchange, and foreign travel, including leisure trips abroad.⁶ However, this period of stability masked growing structural problems. Yugoslavia was increasingly confronted by rising regional inequalities, persistent unemployment, and deepening inter-republic tensions. Those challenges would escalate into full-blown crises during the 1980s and contributed to the violent break-up of the country at the start of the 1990s.

Meanwhile, China in 1977 was undergoing a momentous transition. The death of Mao Zedong and the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution marked the end of an era. The Chinese political and economic system, though severely disrupted by the events of the previous decade, remained highly centralised, illiberal, hostile to market mechanisms, and largely closed to the outside world. Yet China stood on the threshold of a transformative period of reform. The policy of Reform and Opening-up (Chinese: *改革开放*), initiated in 1978, introduced elements of marketisation, privatisation, and decentralisation. These reforms paved the way for sustained economic growth in the subsequent decades and ultimately contributed to China's emergence as the world's largest economy by GDP by 2016.

This dissertation seeks to investigate Sino-Yugoslav relations during this pivotal period. Although bilateral ties had been generally amicable from 1970 to 1976, the sudden and pronounced intensification from 1977 onwards calls for closer scrutiny. In particular, the dissertation wishes to understand what factors contributed to the remarkable deepening of Sino-Yugoslav relations between 1977 and 1981. While the primary focus lies in explaining this transformation, the analysis may also offer insight into a related issue, namely, whether and to what extent Sino-Yugoslav relations played a role in shaping the early stages of China's Reform and Opening-up.

⁶ (Calic 2019, 266).

0.2 Existing Research on Sino-Yugoslav Relations

The study of PRC-SFRY and CPC-LCY relations remains a relatively young area within Cold War scholarship. Zhang Mianli's 2006 article, *The Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and Yugoslavia: A Comprehensive Historical Account* represents one of the earliest serious historical investigations into the formation of Sino-Yugoslav diplomatic ties.⁷ A major breakthrough came with the work of Jovan Čavoški, whose 2009 monograph, *Yugoslavia and Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959-1962*, and his 2014 doctoral dissertation, *Between Afro-Asianism and Non-Alignment: China, Yugoslavia and the Struggle Inside the Third World (1954-1965)*, alongside a substantial number of related articles, played a pioneering role in placing Sino-Yugoslav relations firmly on the academic agenda, especially in relation to their interplay with the Third World and the NAM.⁸ Zvonimir Stopić's 2018 doctoral dissertation *Sino-Yugoslavian Cooperation and Divergences in the Cold War Context: Mutual Relations within the Communist Bloc, The Third World and the United Nations, 1948-1971*, and his subsequent 2022 monograph *Revolutionaries, Revisionists, Dogmatists, Dogs and Madmen: China and Yugoslavia from 1948 until 1971*, provide the most comprehensive treatment to date of the bilateral relations in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹ Like Čavoški, Stopić devotes considerable attention to Yugoslavia's and China's engagement with postcolonial Asia, Africa, and Latin America; however, his innovative analysis of the role of the Non-Aligned countries in shaping the outcome of the United Nations vote on the restoration of the PRC's seat represents a particularly original contribution to the field. Sanja Radović's 2021 doctoral dissertation *China's Opening-up Policy and Yugoslavia: (1969-1980)*, is a voluminous 454-page study that draws extensively on Yugoslav archival sources to examine Sino-Yugoslav relations in

⁷ (张勉励 [Zhang Mianli] 2006).

⁸ (Čavoški 2009). (Čavoški 2014).

⁹ (Stopić 2018). (Stopić 2022).

the 1970s, offering a formidably detailed account primarily from the perspective of the Yugoslav leadership.¹⁰

In recent years, the study of Sino-Yugoslav relations has undergone a notable expansion, marked most significantly by the publication of two edited volumes. The 2023 collection *China, Yugoslavia, and Socialist Worldmaking: Convergences and Divergences* brought together many of the leading scholars currently engaged in this field, including Čavoški, Stopić, Radović, and the author of this dissertation.¹¹ A highlight of the volume is the prominent Slovene–Italian historian Jože Pirjevec’s contribution, which offers a vivid and engaging account of the major vicissitudes in CPC-LCY relations, while also shedding light on several previously overlooked details, such as the possibility that Tito first learned about China through his Comintern comrade Ivan Karaivanov, or the Slovene journalist Mitja Gorjup’s perceptive observations of political shifts in China in 1977.¹² Among other contributions, the two chapters by Radović and Ivica Bakota are particularly relevant to this dissertation, as they focus exclusively on the 1970s and draw extensively on Yugoslav archival sources, offering insights into Yugoslav diplomatic decision-makers’ understanding of the international situation and the Sino-Yugoslav dynamics.¹³ The forthcoming book *Yugoslavia and China: Histories, Legacies, Afterlives* represents a unique interdisciplinary contribution.¹⁴ The volume combines chapters of historical research on Cold War-era PRC-SFRY relations with chapters analysing contemporary relations between China and the successor states of the SFRY, drawing on a range of disciplines including political science and media studies.

Two recent articles published in Chinese academic journals are also relevant to the

¹⁰ (Radović 2021).

¹¹ (Stopić, Ramšak, et al. 2023).

¹² (Pirjevec 2023).

¹³ (Radović 2023). (Bakota 2023).

¹⁴ (Vangeli and Pavličević Forthcoming 2026).

scope of this dissertation. Xiang Zuotao and Xiang Kangqi's article, based exclusively on Yugoslav archival materials, outlines a seemingly straightforward chronology of the normalisation process in Sino-Yugoslav relations from 1969 to 1978.¹⁵ Xu Tao's study offers a meticulous comparative analysis of Yugoslav diplomatic archives and Chinese-language sources, leading to the significant conclusion that the purported 1975 invitation from Mao to Tito to visit China is an unfounded claim unsupported by archival evidence.¹⁶

Scholarship on the foreign relations of both Yugoslavia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) during the Cold War is extensive and well-established. Among the most prominent works on Yugoslav diplomatic history are Tvrtko Jakovina's *The Third Side of the Cold War* (2011), Darko Bekić's *Yugoslavia in the Cold War: Relations with the Great Powers 1949–1955* (1988), Ivo Banac's *With Stalin Against Tito: Conformist Split in Yugoslav Communism* (1988), Shen Zhihua's *Stalin and Tito: The Origins and Outcome of the Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict* (2002), Dragan Bogetić's *The New Strategy of Yugoslav Foreign Policy 1956–1961* (2006) and *Yugoslavia-United States relations, 1961–1971* (2012), and Hrvoje Klasić's *Yugoslavia and the World in 1968* (2012).¹⁷ In the case of the PRC, key contributions to the study of its Cold War-era foreign policy include Chen Jian's *Mao's China and the Cold War* (2001), Li Danhui and Shen Zhihua's *After Learning to One Side* (2011), Odd Arne Westad's *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750* (2012), Niu Jun's *The Cold War and the Origin of Diplomacy of New China, 1949–1955* (2013) and *The Cold War and China's Foreign Policy Decision-making* (2013), Huang Qing and Wang Qiaorong's *The Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China, 1949-2012* (2016), John W. Garver's *China's Quest:*

¹⁵ (项佐涛 向康祺 [Xiang Zuotao & Xiang Kangqi] 2021).

¹⁶ (徐涛 [Xu Tao] 2024).

¹⁷ (Jakovina 2010). (Bekić 1988). (Banac 1988). (沈志华 [Shen Zhihua], 斯大林与铁托：苏南冲突的起因及其结果 [Stalin and Tito: The Origins and Outcome of the Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict] 2002). (Bogetić 2006). (Bogetić 2012). (Klasić 2012).

The History of Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China (2016).¹⁸ A distinct and growing subfield within this literature is the study of Sino–Eastern European relations during the Cold War. Major contributions in this area include Lorenz M. Lüthi's *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (2008), Sergey Radchenko's *Two Suns in Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy* (2009), and Shen Zhihua's *A Short History of Sino-Soviet Relations 1917-1991* (2007), Elidor Mëhilli's *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World* (2017).¹⁹

The most directly relevant scholarly works for this dissertation include Radović (2021, 2023), Bakota (2023), Xiang and Xiang (2021), and Xu (2024). Among these, Xu's study stands out for its focus on a specific and ultimately unsubstantiated event from 1975. Xu demonstrates that by 1977, the Chinese leadership's attitude toward furthering relations with Yugoslavia had shifted so markedly that it had to retrospectively construct the narrative in which Mao, before his death, had decided to invite Tito to visit China, an invitation that archival evidence shows never existed.

The other three studies all cover, to varying degrees, the period of intensifying Sino-Yugoslav relations between 1977 and 1981. Radović argues that the principal Yugoslav policy aim towards China the 1970s was to keep open channels with all three countries of the China-Soviet Union-United States triangle and to avoid antagonisms. Both Radović and Bakota show that Beijing attempted to use its relations with Yugoslavia to antagonise Moscow and to limit Soviet influence in the Balkans. However, both of those structural considerations were relatively consistent throughout the decade and therefore do not in themselves explain the dramatic acceleration of bilateral relations in 1977.

All three authors point to the leadership change in China and the emergence of

¹⁸ (Chen 2001). (Li and Shen 2011). (Westad 2012). (牛军 [Niu Jun], 冷战与新中国外交的缘起 (1949 – 55) [The Cold War and the Origin of Diplomacy of New China, 1949 – 1955] 2013). (牛军 [Niu Jun], 冷战与中国外交决策 [The Cold War and China's Foreign Policy Decision - making] 2013). (黄庆 王巧荣 [Huang Qing & Wang Qiaorong] 2016). (Garver 2016).

¹⁹ (Lüthi 2008). (Radchenko 2009). (沈志华 [Shen Zhihua] 2007). (Mëhilli 2017).

Hua Guofeng as paramount leader as a significant turning point. They concur that Hua's personal interest in Yugoslavia likely played an important role in the marked intensification of bilateral ties, and they note that this period saw an evident Chinese effort to draw lessons from the Yugoslav model. Yet these observations remain largely undeveloped in their analyses. For instance, Radović (2023) cites a document from the LCY Central Committee stating that "the final decision on establishing relations with the LCY was made by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on August 26, 1977," but offers little insight into why the CPC did not immediately communicate that decision to the LCY and why formal party-to-party relations were only restored nearly a year later.²⁰ These authors' works are unable to answer those questions because they rely almost exclusively on Yugoslav sources. The absence of a more detailed treatment of China's internal dynamics in the existing literature leaves significant gaps in our understanding of this bilateral relationship.

This dissertation addresses those gaps through two central **research questions**. First, was the shift in Chinese policy towards Yugoslavia in the late 1970s primarily driven by Hua Guofeng's personal initiative, or did it reflect a more deliberative and collective decision-making process within the Communist Party of China? Second, did the proclaimed effort to learn from Yugoslavia remain confined to rhetorical expressions and propaganda, or did it result in a substantive, system-wide attempt to engage with Yugoslav models and experiences? To answer these questions, the dissertation draws extensively on Chinese sources that have thus far been underutilised in scholarship on Sino-Yugoslav relations.

²⁰ (Radović 2023, 155). The document is found in Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ), 507 CK SKJ IX, 60/I-77, Izveštaj o boravku prve studijske delegacije Komunističke partije Kine u Socijalističkoj Federativnoj Republici Jugoslaviji [Report on the stay of the first study delegation of the CPC in SFRY], p. 8.

0.3 The Art of Studying Chinese Diplomatic Relations without Chinese Diplomatic Archives

The Yugoslav archival sources most relevant to the study of Sino-Yugoslav relations are housed in the Archives of Yugoslavia (*Arhiv Jugoslavije*, AJ) and the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia (*Diplomatski arhiv Ministarstva spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije*, DAMSPS). The fonds of the Office of President Tito and the Central Committee of the LCY (both held in the former), as well as those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia (in the latter), contain a vast array of letters, telegrams, stenographic records of internal and external meetings, analyses, reports, treaties and agreements related to China, all accessible to researchers (or, in the case of the latter, to those who endured several months' wait to obtain permission to access the Diplomatic Archives).

In contrast, access to Chinese archival material remains extremely limited. The Central Archives of China remained closed to the public until the 2010s, and even after partial opening, only a minuscule selection of documents was declassified, carefully vetted to ensure political innocuousness, and unfortunately contains almost no material on foreign affairs, let alone on Sino-Yugoslav relations. The Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China is theoretically the primary repository for documents concerning Sino-Yugoslav relations, yet only the archival material up to 1965 is declassified, and even among that, the number of accessible documents is similarly minimal. During fieldwork for this dissertation, the author conducted a targeted search for "Yugoslavia" (with a variety of renditions in Chinese) in the latter archive's catalogue of declassified documents, which yielded approximately fifty results. However, these documents either mentioned Yugoslavia only in passing or consisted solely of internal bureaucratic records, offering very limited insight into the actual state of bilateral relations and making it impossible to place them meaningfully in historical context.

Since Chinese central state and party archives remain largely inaccessible to the public and researchers, alternative sources must be employed to explore the Chinese perspective on Sino-Yugoslav relations. First, Chinese official media serve as a vital resource for tracing shifts in the CPC policies and stances. During the 1970s and 1980s, newspapers were the primary form of printed media, widely circulated and more permanent in nature than radio or the then-rare television broadcasts. Among Chinese newspapers, the *People's Daily* (人民日报) is especially authoritative due to its status as the official organ of the Central Committee of the CPC and its broad national circulation. It is therefore used here as the key source for analysis.

Second, local archives in China represent an underutilised yet invaluable repository of internal documents pertinent to Sino-Yugoslav relations. While the majority of foreign policy documents were produced at the central state or party level and remain housed within two principal archives that are largely inaccessible to researchers, numerous bilateral interactions, particularly mutual delegation visits, were conducted at the local level. Consequently, records generated by these activities are preserved within provincial and, in some cases, municipal archives. The degree of accessibility to such local archives varies considerably across regions and institutions. Notably, the Shanghai Municipal Archives (SMA), situated in China's largest metropolis and the twinned city of Zagreb, then the second largest city of Yugoslavia, are comparatively open to scholarly inquiry. This dissertation draws extensively on more than two hundred reports from institutions directly involved in Sino-Yugoslav exchanges, archived there and spanning the period from 1977 to 1981. To the best of the author's knowledge, this constitutes the first systematic engagement with local archival materials in the study of Sino-Yugoslav relations, thereby providing novel insights into the quotidian operations and practical dimensions of bilateral cooperation from the Chinese perspective. In addition to the Shanghai case, a trawl through various small local archives eventually led to a remarkable find in the obscure northern city of Tongliao: a study report compiled by a delegation of Party Workers of the Communist

Party of China that visited Yugoslavia in March 1978.²¹ This easily overlooked gem offered key insights into a pivotal moment in Sino-Yugoslav relations. These local documents critically supplement the gap left by the restricted access to two central archives, affording a more nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of the bilateral relationship. Moreover, they illuminate the implementation of policies and exchanges that are often absent from higher-level official records, enriching the historiography with perspectives closely aligned with the lived realities of participants in these diplomatic endeavours.

The writings of Chinese economists form a crucial third category of sources. From the late Cultural Revolution period through the late 1980s, several economists, most prominently Yu Guangyuan (于光远), held considerable influence in shaping China's Reform and Opening-up policies. Starting from 1978, there was a notable surge in scholarly research and publications on Yugoslavia. The prominence of these works reflects the degree of interest Yugoslavia commanded among intellectuals and policymakers who were close to the centres of power. As party and governmental archives remain inaccessible, the analysis of economic literature offers an important indirect gauge of how Yugoslav models and experiences were perceived, debated, and potentially incorporated into China's evolving policy frameworks.

None of these three sources can, on their own, provide a comprehensive understanding of Sino-Yugoslav relations. In particular, state media must be approached with caution, as they primarily functioned as vehicles for promoting the Party's official narratives and political agendas. Critical or dissenting perspectives that might undermine the portrayal of Sino-Yugoslav camaraderie were rarely, if ever, reported. Therefore, to build a well-rounded picture of the Chinese perspective of Sino-Yugoslav relations in the absence of Chinese central state and party archives, it is essential to

²¹ Although this Tongliao document was discovered during the broader exploration of local archives, given its thematic relevance, it is analysed in Chapter Four, which focuses on reformist economists' writings on Yugoslavia, rather than Chapter Three's examination of local-level exchanges.

integrate these three main types of sources: official media, local archival documents, and the writings of Chinese economists. Official media provide insight into the Party's public narrative, local archives offer detailed yet context-limited data, and economists' publications reflect evolving policy thinking, especially in relation to the Reform and Opening-up. Together, these sources form a more nuanced and complete picture than any single one could provide individually.

0.4 Overview of the Dissertation Structure

The remainder of the dissertation is structured into five chapters.

Chapter One provides a historical prelude to the study, tracing connections between China and Yugoslavia, or the territories that would later form Yugoslavia. It explores early encounters, both real and symbolic, ranging from Jesuit missionaries and diplomats to speculative links such as the contested Croatian origin of Marco Polo. The chapter then outlines the shifting relationship between the CPC and the LCY from wartime solidarity to ideological rupture and eventual rapprochement, setting the stage for the flourishing of ties from 1977 onward.

Chapter Two analyses the portrayal of Yugoslavia in the *People's Daily* from Bijedić's visit to China in 1975 until Hua Guofeng's attendance at Tito's funeral in 1980. It examines the shift from an already cordial relationship to a period of intensely celebrated comradeship. The primary analytical focus lies in assessing how the Chinese leadership's perception of Yugoslavia evolved during this period, particularly in terms of whether Yugoslavia came to be seen not merely as a genuinely socialist country, but as a relevant reference point whose reform experiences offered useful inspiration for China's own trajectory. The assessment proved to be a decisive factor in the intensification of bilateral ties.

Chapter Three, based primarily on internal reports preserved in the Shanghai Municipal Archives, investigates Sino-Yugoslav interactions at the local and interpersonal level during the period of intensified cooperation. It focuses on the

individuals involved in visits, study delegations, and exchange programmes between the two countries. The chapter seeks to identify recurring patterns in these interactions and to determine whether the enthusiasm for Yugoslav socialism expressed in official media was mirrored in practice at the local level.

Chapter Four explores the writings of Chinese reformist economists on Yugoslavia from 1978 to 1982. It begins with the landmark visit of a delegation of Party Workers of the CPC, which included several prominent economists, to Yugoslavia in March 1978. The chapter traces the remarkable surge in interest in Yugoslavia among reform-oriented economists who were close to the political leadership and influential in shaping China's economic reform agenda. It also analyses the gradual decline in this interest beginning in 1980.

Chapter Five synthesises the findings of the preceding chapters and addresses the two main research questions posed in Subchapter 0.2. It then provides an overview of the stagnation in Sino-Yugoslav relations from 1981 until the dissolution of the SFRY in 1991–1992. In conclusion, the chapter reflects on the legacy of Sino-Yugoslav relations during the peak years of 1977 to 1981 and considers whether and how this legacy continues to be relevant in contemporary relations between China and the successor states of the SFRY.

1 Historical Preludes to a Booming Reconnection: From (Allegedly) Marco Polo to (Almost) Mao and Tito

1.1 Jesuit Journeyman, Ragusan Russophile, and Wandering Wordsmith: Tracing Pre-Socialist Connections Between China and the Balkans

Marco Polo, the Venetian merchant whose journey to China and other parts of Asia between 1271 and 1295 was chronicled in the *Book of the Marvels of the World* (Italian: *Il Milione*; more commonly known in English as *The Travels of Marco Polo*), is arguably the most renowned European visitor to China in recorded history. He is widely regarded by both Chinese and European traditions as a symbolic figure of early Sino-European engagement: “a central figure who symbolises the dialogue between the East and the West.” Scholarly consensus identifies Venice as his place of origin, and as such, Marco Polo is frequently seen as someone who “reflect[s] the depth of cultural exchange between Italy and China.”²²

Less well known, however, is an alternative theory suggesting that Marco Polo was not born in Venice, but rather on the island of Korčula, in present-day Croatia. Although this theory has not been scientifically verified and has been studied as an example of an invented tradition, it continues to enjoy popularity within Croatia.²³ Croatian public discourse occasionally embraces this belief, with some officials even asserting that “Croatia and China cherish a friendship that can be dated back 700 years to the birth of Marco Polo.”²⁴

²² (CGTN 2024).

²³ (Orlić 2013).

²⁴ (Ministarstvo turizma i sporta Republike Hrvatske 2018).

Even setting aside the speculative theory regarding Marco Polo's Croatian origins, direct connections between China and the territories that would later constitute the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia can be traced back at least to the seventeenth century. Ivan Vreman (Chinese: 鄔若望), born in Split under Venetian rule, arrived in Nanchang as a Jesuit missionary in 1619 before dying there the following year. Scholars currently considers him to be the "first Croatian to arrive in China."²⁵ Another Jesuit, Ferdinand Avguštin Haller von Hallerstein (Chinese: 劉松齡), who was born in Habsburg-ruled Ljubljana, travelled to China in 1739 and remained there until his death in 1774. He served for 35 years as the head of the Imperial Astronomical Bureau under the Qianlong Emperor, playing a prominent role at the Qing court.²⁶

Historical contacts between the Balkans and China were by no means limited to Catholic missionaries. Sava Vladislavich Raguzinsky, an Orthodox nobleman with roots in Ottoman-ruled Herzegovina and a citizen of the Republic of Ragusa (modern-day Dubrovnik), served as a diplomat for Tsar Peter the Great of Russia and played a key role in negotiating the Treaty of Kiakhta with China in 1689.²⁷ In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, officers and sailors from the territory of modern-day Slovenia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were present in China, particularly during the Boxer Uprising (1900–1901), in which they participated as part of the Austro-Hungarian naval forces.²⁸

These journeys and, in some cases, extended stays in China were important precursors to the more structured bilateral relations between China and Yugoslavia that would emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century. However, the concept of "Yugoslavia" would have been entirely anachronistic for these early travellers. They operated under the banners of pre-modern empires, such as the Russian and Austro-

²⁵ (Peng 2024).

²⁶ (Saje 2009).

²⁷ (Pušić 2006, 15-22).

²⁸ (Marinac 2018).

Hungarian Empires, or within ecclesiastical frameworks such as the Jesuit order. In the case of Vladislavich Raguzinsky, the complexity of his background allows several modern states, including Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia as well as Russia, to lay claim to his legacy.

From the Chinese side, the isolationist policies of the Ming and Qing dynasties limited opportunities for Chinese nationals to travel to Europe until the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, one significant early instance occurred on 21 July 1908, when Kang Youwei, a leading political thinker known for his role in the failed Hundred Days' Reform a decade earlier, became the first known Chinese visitor to Belgrade.²⁹

Although the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Republic of China (which governed mainland China from 1912 until 1949, before retreating to Taiwan following the Chinese Civil War) did not maintain formal diplomatic relations, several Yugoslav figures visited China and left significant marks in both literature and practical fields. A number of Serbian officers and soldiers stranded by the Russian Civil War were forced to return home via China and later documented their journeys in travelogues.³⁰ The Slovenian writer and globetrotter Alma Karlin travelled to China in the 1920s and produced several literary works inspired by her experiences.³¹ Perhaps the most enduring legacy, however, was made by two Croatian specialists in social medicine, Andrija Štampar and Berislav Borčić, who played a crucial role in helping China develop its public health system.³²

²⁹ (CRI 国际在线 [China Radio International] 2016).

³⁰ (Pušić 2006, 55-57).

³¹ (MMC RTV SLO, Radio Slovenija 2020).

³² (米罗斯拉夫·克尔莱扎辞书编纂研究院 [The Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography] 2024).

1.2 From “Modern Revisionists” to Tito the Ironman: Tumultuous Sino-Yugoslav Communist Relations until 1976

Diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and China were formally established only after the communist parties had seized power in both countries. However, the ties between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and the Communist Party of China predated their ascension to government, as both were engaged in intense struggles against fascist forces during World War II. When Josip Broz Tito, leader of the CPY, launched the partisan resistance against Axis occupation in 1941, he drew significant inspiration from the CPC’s earlier experiences, particularly the Long March³³. The Yugoslav Partisans embarked on their own “Long March” in 1942, retreating from Montenegro and eastern Herzegovina to western Bosnia. During this period, Yugoslav communist leaders also observed that in both countries, socialist revolution unfolded within the framework of national liberation struggles, with a central role played by the rural countryside.³⁴

Following the end of World War II, the CPY consolidated control over Yugoslavia, while the CPC was engaged in a bitter civil war with the Kuomintang starting from 1946. In 1947, the CPC sent a delegation headed by Liu Ningyi, a senior party official, to Yugoslavia, marking the first formal contact between the two communist parties.³⁵ However, this budding relationship was soon complicated by the Soviet-Yugoslav split, which culminated in the Bucharest Resolution that expelled Yugoslavia from the Cominform on 28 June 1948. The Chinese communists endorsed this decision and

³³ From 1934 to 1936, the CPC and the Chinese Red Army retreated from its encircled headquarters and marched about 10,000 kilometres to Yan'an. The Long March saved the CPC from being crushed and CPC eventual came to power in 1949 after defeating Kuomintang in the Chinese Civil War.

³⁴ (Pirjevec 2023, 22-24).

³⁵ (Čavoški, *Overstepping the Balkan boundaries: The lesser known history of Yugoslavia’s early relations with Asian countries (new evidence from Yugoslav/Serbian archives)* 2011, 564-565). (Pirjevec 2023, 25).

condemned the CPY. The CPC found itself with little alternative, given that it could not risk antagonising the Soviet Union during the most pivotal and decisive phase of the Chinese Civil War. Despite the antagonism from the Chinese communists, Yugoslavia was among the first countries to recognise the People's Republic of China upon its proclamation by the CPC on 1 October 1949. Nevertheless, China did not immediately reciprocate this gesture.³⁶

The death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in 1953 marked a significant shift in Moscow's foreign policy. Nikita Khrushchev, having emerged victorious in the power struggle to succeed Stalin, sought to normalise and restore relations with Yugoslavia. This Soviet rapprochement with Yugoslavia created a conducive environment for the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Yugoslavia in January 1955.³⁷ From the outset, the bilateral relationship was characterised by a notably friendly atmosphere: the two countries swiftly signed a trade agreement, exchanged political and cultural delegations, and Yugoslavia even sent football and basketball teams to China for friendly sporting matches.³⁸ The Chinese response to the past and evolving Yugoslav-Soviet relations was complex. On one hand, CPC leaders expressed understanding and even appreciation of Tito's courage in confronting Stalin.³⁹ On the other hand, following the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, the Chinese communists endeavoured to persuade the Yugoslav party, which had been renamed the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in 1952, to reintegrate into the so-called "socialist family" lead by Moscow. This effort ultimately failed, particularly after Tito declined to participate in the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties held in Moscow in November 1957, upon discovering that the gathering was intended to serve

³⁶ (Stopić 2022, 22-23). (Pirjevec 2023, 28-29).

³⁷ (Stopić 2022, 30). (Pirjevec 2023, 35-36).

³⁸ “南斯拉夫青年足球队同‘八一’足球队举行友谊赛 [The Yugoslav Youth Football Team Plays a Friendly Match with the ‘August First’ Football Team].” *People's Daily*, 3 February 1956, p. 1.

³⁹ (Pirjevec 2023, 38).

as a demonstration of socialist unity firmly under Soviet leadership.⁴⁰

The seventh Congress of the LCY in April 1958 served as the pivotal moment that triggered the subsequent breakdown in relations between Yugoslavia and China. The new party programme adopted at this congress called for the abolition of the two opposing military-political blocs: the Warsaw Pact and NATO. This declaration provoked significant outrage among other communist parties, especially the CPC. Subsequently, Chinese state media launched a vigorous campaign condemning the Yugoslav model of socialism as “modern revisionism” and branded Yugoslav leaders as “agents of imperialism.”⁴¹ Chen Boda, a prominent political theorist within the CPC, articulated the Chinese position with particular vividness, colourfully declaring: “Judas betrayed only one Jesus, whereas Tito betrayed the entire Yugoslav nation.”⁴² In response, Edvard Kardelj, the close colleague of Tito, denounced the CPC’s approach as “ultra-leftist pseudo-revolutionary radicalism.”⁴³ This intensifying ideological antagonism culminated in a complete rupture of relations between the CPC and the LCY. On the interstate level, both countries withdrew their ambassadors, signalling a deep diplomatic freeze, though the embassies were never closed and the formal diplomatic ties were never entirely severed.⁴⁴

The deterioration of Sino-Yugoslav relations was further aggravated by a series of international incidents. These included the Sino-Indian Border Conflict in 1959, during which Yugoslavia aligned with New Delhi; China’s establishment of a close alliance with Albania in 1960, a state considered a significant adversary of Yugoslavia; and the Cuban Missile Crisis, where China publicly criticised Tito’s call for moderation.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ (Stopić 2022, 32-35). (Pirjevec 2023, 39-43).

⁴¹ (Stopić 2022, 36-37).

⁴² 陈伯达 [Chen Boda]. “美帝国主义在南斯拉夫的赌注 [The U.S. Imperialist Stake in Yugoslavia],” 红旗 (Red Flag), no. 2 (1958): 17-19.

⁴³ (Pirjevec 2023, 49).

⁴⁴ (Stopić 2022, 38).

⁴⁵ (Pirjevec 2023, 51-52).

Interestingly, while the CPC and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) initially aligned in their disapproval of the LCY's rejection of the bipolar bloc structure, ideological tensions between Moscow and Beijing soon escalated. In fact, Yugoslavia became a key point of contention in the emerging Sino-Soviet split. Prior to the public revelation of these Sino-Soviet disputes, the Chinese leadership strategically exploited its condemnation of Yugoslavia to challenge Nikita Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence between the two blocs. As relations between China and the Soviet Union deteriorated irreparably in the early 1960s, Mao Zedong authored the renowned "Nine Letters," a series of polemical texts attacking Khrushchev and every aspect of the Soviet Union's policies. The third letter, titled *Is Yugoslavia a Socialist Country?*, offered a thorough critique of Yugoslavia's political and economic system, as well as its foreign policy, accusing it of being "swamped by capitalism" and effectively "a dependency of US imperialism." Despite the harsh rhetoric directed at the LCY and its leader Tito, Mao's principal target in these scathing critiques had shifted to the Soviet leadership, whom he accused of tolerating the "renegade Tito clique."⁴⁶

The Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 marked a significant turning point in Sino-Yugoslav relations. A shared opposition to Moscow's military intervention created the political space for rapprochement between the two countries. Hostile rhetoric and mutual ideological critiques came to a halt, and in 1970, the PRC and the SFRY restored diplomatic relations at the highest level. Over the following five years, a succession of Yugoslav functionaries visited China, including Foreign Minister Mirko Tepavac in 1971 and Peko Dapčević, Vice President of the Federal Assembly, in 1974.⁴⁷ The most high-ranking official to visit until the mid-1970s was Prime Minister Džemal Bijedić, who travelled to Beijing in 1975 and held a meeting with Mao Zedong. During their exchange, Mao praised Tito for being "like iron and not afraid of Soviet

⁴⁶ 毛泽东 [Mao Zedong]. "南斯拉夫是社会主义国家吗? [Is Yugoslavia a Socialist Country?]" 红旗 [Red Flag], no. 19 (1963): 5–26.

⁴⁷ (Pirjevec 2023, 62–64).

pressure,” making a linguistic play on the Chinese rendering of Tito’s name—*Tie tuo*, with *tie* meaning "iron" in Chinese.⁴⁸

Despite the symbolic value of these visits and an increase in trade and cultural exchanges, the improved relations between the PRC and the SFRY in the first half of the 1970s remained confined to the interstate level. The interparty relations between the CPC and the LCY were not reestablished, as the CPC continued to reject the LCY’s claim to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy and questioned Yugoslavia’s legitimacy as a genuinely socialist state. Further tensions stemmed from a perceived lack of reciprocity in high-level diplomacy. Yugoslavia’s leaders were frustrated that a reciprocal visit by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai never materialised, nor did China under Mao’s leadership extend an invitation for President Tito to visit. The complex Chinese internal political situation during the Cultural Revolution and the poor health of Mao and Zhou contributed to the unfulfillment of the two major wishes of Yugoslavia.⁴⁹ Ultimately, both Chinese leaders died in 1976, without ever meeting Tito in person. However, a new period of blossoming interaction was already on the horizon, one that would manifest most vividly in the pages of the press.

⁴⁸ (Radović 2021, 168).

⁴⁹ (徐涛 [Xu Tao] 2024).

2 Changing discourse about Yugoslavia from 1975 to 1980 in the *People's Daily*

2.1 Introduction

When Yugoslav Prime Minister Džemal Bijedić visited China in October 1975, the *People's Daily*, the official organ of the CPC Central Committee, welcomed him with the honours befitting a high-ranking statesman from a friendly state: photographs, editorials, and front-page headlines. But even at the height of his visit, with handshakes with Zhou Enlai and an audience with Mao Zedong, Bijedić still had to share the front page with stories such as the opening of a coal mine in southwest China and reports of workers in a Shanghai factory diligently studying the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The placement and content of such coverage offer an illustrative entry point into how Yugoslavia was represented in the Chinese press in the 1970s.⁵⁰

This chapter examines how the *People's Daily* portrayed Sino-Yugoslav relations during the second half of the 1970s, in order to trace changes in the Chinese Party-state's perception of Yugoslavia. As discussed briefly in the introductory chapter, in the absence of accessible archives from the central Party and state institutions, the official press serves as the closest available proxy for understanding shifts in policy and ideological orientation. Printed newspapers, such as the *People's Daily*, were widely disseminated and required reading for all levels of party organs, government administrations, public institutions, and state-owned enterprises. This broad distribution made them the primary channel through which party cadres and the

⁵⁰ “在毛主席的无产阶级革命路线指引下 我国建成又一重要煤炭基地—宝鼎矿区 对于改变我国煤炭工业布局，促进西南地区国民经济发展具有重大意义 [Guided by Chairman Mao's Proletarian Revolutionary Line, Our Country Has Built Another Coal Base – Baoding Mine; Highly Significant for Changing Our Coal Industry Plan and Promoting the Development of the Southwestern Region's National Economy]”, *People's Daily*, 6 October 1975, p. 1. “推动理论学习深入的一支重要力量——记上海自动化仪表一厂的工人理论队伍 [An Important Force of Promoting In-depth Theoretical Studies — The Workers' Theoretical Team at the Shanghai Automation Instrumentation First Factory]”, *People's Daily*, 8 October 1975, p. 1.

intelligentsia became acquainted with official policies and positions. Due to strict state control, Chinese newspapers did not operate according to market demands, and their coverage of international and national news was highly uniform. Consequently, the *People's Daily* is selected as a representative newspaper for analysis.

As an instrument of propaganda, the newspaper was not a neutral observer. It often distorted or simplified complex realities and may not always have reflected the internal deliberations of the leadership. Yet, the messages it projected were no less significant: they formed the image of the world that the leadership wished to convey, especially to the Party cadres and intellectual elite. The tension between this projected image and the known political reality can itself serve as a window into the strategic priorities and ideological inclinations of the Party leadership.

The press coverage of Yugoslavia in this period is particularly revealing. Changes in tone, emphasis, and framing may point to deeper shifts in China's foreign policy orientation and internal ideological recalibration. Three key interpretative principles guide this analysis:

1. The *tone* of coverage was rarely neutral. Different tones were applied in reporting on different subjects, whether they were individuals, political parties, or states. Propaganda rarely adopted a tone of neutrality or impartiality; rather, it tended to assign clearly defined “positive” or “negative” roles to its subjects.⁵¹ This approval or disapproval was most commonly conveyed through the use of specific adjectives: for example, “heroic” for those regarded as allies or role models, and “treacherous” or “reactionary” for those viewed as adversaries. Shifts in tone and language can therefore offer useful clues about broader political and ideological changes.

2. The *mention* of previously ambiguous or taboo ideological issues in Party media could signal a shift in their political status. When such issues began to appear in the

⁵¹ (Conway, Grabe and Grieves 2007).

press, it typically meant that they were no longer treated as taboos and had entered the space of legitimate discussion. In some cases, the press even served as a platform for testing or preparing the ground for policy shifts. For instance, the 1978 debate on the “criterion of truth” was introduced as a theoretical discussion, but in effect helped clear the way for the launch of Reform and Opening-up.⁵²

3. The *amount* of coverage devoted to a subject, as well as the *placement* of related articles within the newspaper, also indicated the level of importance the Party attached to particular issues. In the early 1970s, international news was rarely featured on the front page, which was overwhelmingly reserved for domestic political developments. However, after the beginning of the reform period, news related to economic development and foreign relations increasingly appeared on the front page and took up significantly more space. These changes in placement and prominence reflected a reordering of the Party’s political and strategic priorities.

The selection of 1975 as the starting point of this analysis deserves further explanation. One might expect 1977, when Tito visited China and a clear revitalisation of bilateral relations began, to mark the beginning. However, 1975 is equally significant. Yugoslav Prime Minister Džemal Bijedić’s visit to China that year laid indirect groundwork for Tito’s later visit and the flourishing of Sino-Yugoslav ties. More importantly, his visit provides a point of comparison: as we see below, although the *People’s Daily* was already friendly toward Yugoslavia in 1975, the nature and content of that friendliness was qualitatively different from what followed in 1977 and 1978. Starting the analysis in 1975 allows us to better track the evolution of discourse: before, during, and after the diplomatic breakthrough.

This chapter examines *People’s Daily* coverage of Yugoslavia from 1975 to 1980, guided by the following questions:

⁵² (蔡美华 [Cai Meihua] 2009).

1. **How was Yugoslavia, and the LCY, categorised in the coverage?** Were they recognised as a socialist state and a Marxist-Leninist party? How were Yugoslav leaders titled?
2. **Which aspects of Yugoslavia received the most coverage?** Was the focus on ideological positions, economic development, ethnic relations, or foreign policy?
3. **How were these representations shaped by China's own political context and priorities?** What can these portrayals reveal about domestic political concerns and foreign policy intentions?

2.2 October 1975 – August 1977: Belgrade as a Fellow Struggler Against Hegemonism

News on Bijedić's visit to China in October 1975 occupied the front pages from 6 to 10 October while Bijedić was visiting Beijing and met Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong, but lost the privilege of the first page left Beijing for Nanjing and Guangzhou. As we see at the start of this chapter, Bijedić still had to share the front pages with the news of a new coal mine and diligent Shanghai workers. The editorial on Bijedić's arrival introduced Yugoslavia to the readers with an emphasis on the supposed national character of Yugoslavia: "Yugoslav people have a glorious revolutionary tradition. They love independence and freedom, hate aggression and interference." It praised the foreign policy of Yugoslavia: "Yugoslavia pursues the non-alignment policy, and supports righteous struggle of people of all countries and liberation movements of the oppressed peoples. [Yugoslavia's] policy is making a positive contribution to the cause of solidarity and anti-hegemony of peoples of the world." With such history and current politics as background, the editorial claimed that "China and Yugoslavia are separated by thousands of mountains and tens of thousands of rivers, but our two peoples have deep friendship. In the past anti-fascist struggle and current anti-imperialist and anti-hegemonic struggle, our two peoples have always sympathised and supported each

other.” It concluded with the expectation of the visit: “It will surely enhance the friendship and solidarity between China and Yugoslavia and between the two peoples. The friendly cooperative relations between the two countries will develop further.”⁵³

Those texts presented Yugoslavia and China as friendly nations, based on common positions against imperialism and hegemony. Nowhere was the word *socialist* used for Yugoslavia, except in the context of stating the full name of the country. The Yugoslav delegation was described as “honoured guests”, and Bijedić was referred to as the “chairman (of the Federal Executive Council)”. The guests were not addressed as “comrades”, unlike the treatment of the leaders of Romania or Vietnam, since the CPC maintained relations with the communist parties of those two countries.⁵⁴ In contrast, Tito had addressed the Chinese ambassador and Mao as “comrades” as early as 1971.⁵⁵ At the time, the term “honoured guests” was widely used on occasions of visits of foreign heads of state or other high-ranking leaders, and therefore not implying a special status for the Yugoslav delegation.⁵⁶

The reports about Bijedić’s visit set the tone for the coverage in the following two years. The period from October 1975 to August 1977 saw momentous changes in Chinese politics: the deaths of three most important Chinese leaders (Mao Zedong,

⁵³ “社论 热烈欢迎南斯拉夫贵宾 [Editorial: A Warm Welcome to the Distinguished Guests from Yugoslavia]”, *People’s Daily*, 6 October 1975, p. 1.

⁵⁴ “毛泽东同志会见黎笋同志率领的越南党政代表团 [Comrade Mao Zedong Meets the Vietnam Party and Government Delegation Led by Comrade Lê Duẩn]”, *People’s Daily*, 25 September 1975, p. 1.

⁵⁵ (Stopić 2018, 88). (王泰平 [Wang Taiping] 1999, 275).

⁵⁶ Including politicians from non-socialist countries, such as the Chancellor of West Germany, Helmut Schmidt, as well as the First Lady of Mali, Mariam Sissoko. Cf.: “应我国政府邀请前来进行正式访问 施密特总理到京受到热烈欢迎 邓副总理主持以周总理名义举行的盛大宴会欢迎贵宾 [In a Formal Visit to Our Country at the Invitation of Our Government, Chancellor Schmidt Arrives in Beijing and Receives Warm Welcome]”, *People’s Daily*, 30 October 1975, p. 1; “应我国政府邀请前来进行友好访问 马里国家元首特拉奥雷的夫人到京 李先念副总理等和首都群众两千多人到机场欢迎 [In a Goodwill Visit to Our Country at the Invitation of Our Government, the Wife of the Head of State of Mali Traore arrives in Beijing]”, *People’s Daily*, 17 October 1975, p. 1.

Zhou Enlai and Zhu De), the fall of the Gang of Four, and Hua Guofeng's rise to power. Despite these tumultuous events, the coverage of Yugoslavia had a consistent pattern.

National defence was the most frequent topic among the Yugoslavia-related reports. Many articles reported news on Yugoslav's national defence efforts in various fields, including self-reliant production of weapons, plans for construction of tunnels for "long-term intention", military exercises, and a trade fair of defence industry products.⁵⁷ The doctrine of Total People's Defence (*opće narodne odbrane*) was mentioned several times.⁵⁸ Another type of articles consisted solely of speeches by Yugoslav leaders, usually Tito (sometimes as President, but occasionally referred to as "the supreme commander of the Yugoslav armed forces") or the Minister of Defence, Nikola Ljubičić.⁵⁹ All these reports put an emphasis on the dangerous threat of war and aggression.

Reports on Yugoslavia's foreign relations also revolved around the theme of peace being threatened. As expected from Yugoslavia's prominent role in Asia and Africa, most reports were about Yugoslavia's participation in the NAM and cooperation with countries of the Third World. Reports were often citing the Yugoslav press, quoting

⁵⁷ "南斯拉夫将实现武器装备基本自给 [Yugoslavia Will Achieve Basic Self-Sufficiency of Arms and Equipment]", *People's Daily*, 16 December 1975, p. 6. "南斯拉夫国防部长强调要有计划地修建地道 [Yugoslav Minister of Defence Emphasised the Need to Build Tunnels in a Planned Manner]", *People's Daily*, 24 September 1976, p. 6. "南斯拉夫不断加强国防力量 铁托总统赞扬国防工业取得成就 [Yugoslavia Continuously Strengthens Defence Forces; President Tito Praises Achievements in the Defence Industry]", *People's Daily*, 10 November 1976, p. 6.

⁵⁸ "进一步加强全民防御 南斯拉夫大学生积极参加军训 [Further Strengthening Total People's Defence, Yugoslav Students Actively Participate in Military Trainings]", *People's Daily*, 7 September 1976, 6. "加强全民防御作好反侵略准备 南斯拉夫举行军事演习 [Strengthening Total People's Defence and Preparing to Counter Aggression, Yugoslavia Conducts Military Exercises]", *People's Daily*, 25 September 1976, p. 6.

⁵⁹ "铁托元帅赞扬国防工作成就 南国防部长强调要进一步加强国防保卫边界对付战争危险 [Marshal Tito Praises Achievements in National Defence; Yugoslav Defence Minister Stresses on the Need to Further Strengthen National Defence, Defend Borders and Counter the Danger of War]", *People's Daily*, 10 October 1975, 6. "铁托总统再次谴责国内外敌人的狂妄野心 南斯拉夫下定决心依靠人民保卫国家 [President Tito Again Condemns the Unscrupulous Ambitions of Enemies Home and Abroad; Yugoslavia is Determined to Rely on the People to Defend the Country]", *People's Daily*, 2 November 1975, p. 6.

Yugoslav leaders about the importance of the unity of NAM countries and the attempt from “certain big countries” to subvert the movement.⁶⁰ One report quoted the Yugoslav Foreign Minister Miloš Minić that the international situation was “full of contradictions and dangers.”⁶¹ Yugoslavia’s condemnation of the “Sonnenfeldt Doctrine” was reported in detail.⁶² *People’s Daily* also cited the Yugoslav press’ criticism of the Soviet “distorted” reporting on the NAM summit in Colombo in August 1976.⁶³ In general, though, Yugoslavia’s voice was not singled out, but was only included as one of the countries that stood up against the two hegemonic superpowers. Bilateral relations with western countries were sometimes reported, but usually with little detail and comments. The one exception was when Yugoslavia and Italy reached agreement over their borders in 1975. Even here the emphasis was on alleged “third-country interference”: despite it was only mentioned once as a quote from the Belgrade newspaper *Politika*, the phrase was put in the title of the *People’s Daily* article.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ “不结盟国家加强团结捍卫独立反对霸权主义 [Non-Aligned Countries Strengthen Solidarity, Safeguard Independence and Oppose Hegemonism]”, *People’s Daily*, 2 June 1976, 5. “铁托总统谈不结盟国家首脑会议 不结盟运动在斗争中不断壮大 非洲国家舆论呼吁不结盟国家加强团结反帝反殖反霸 [President Tito Talks about the Non-Aligned Movement Summit Conference; NAM is Growing Steadily in Struggle; African Countries Call for Non-Aligned Countries to Strengthen Solidarity and Oppose Imperialism, Colonialism and Hegemonism]”, *People’s Daily*, 26 August 1976, p. 6.

⁶¹ “南斯拉夫领导人分别访问亚非国家强调 不结盟国家应阻挡军备竞赛危险倾向 [Yugoslav Leaders in Separate Visits to Asian and African Countries, Urging That Non-Aligned Countries Should Prevent Dangerous Tendency of Arms Race]”, *People’s Daily*, 11 May 1976, p. 6.

⁶² “铁托总统和南报刊登重申坚持独立和不结盟政策 南斯拉夫决不会被“索南费尔特主义”吓倒 [President Tito and Yugoslav Press Reaffirm Adherence to Independence and Policy of Non-Alignment; Yugoslavia Will Never Be Intimidated by ‘Sonnenfeldt Doctrine’]”, *People’s Daily*, 20 April 1976, p. 6. “南报刊登继续发表文章谴责“索南费尔特主义” 南斯拉夫决不允许被纳入任何“势力范围” [Yugoslav Press Continues to Condemn ‘Sonnenfeldt Doctrine’; Yugoslavia Will Never Allow Itself to Be Incorporated into Any ‘Sphere of Influence’]”, *People’s Daily*, 28 April 1976, p. 6. “南联邦执委会副主席强调决不接受索南费尔特主义 南斯拉夫有能力抵御任何人的侵犯 [Yugoslav Federal Executive Council’s Vice Chairman Stresses that It Will Never Accept the ‘Sonnenfeldt Doctrine’; Yugoslavia is Able to Defend against Aggression from Anyone]”, *People’s Daily*, 29 June 1976, p. 6.

⁶³ “南斯拉夫领导人和报刊接连发表谈话和文章 谴责有人企图控制不结盟运动 揭露苏联报纸对不结盟国家首脑会议进行歪曲报道 [Yugoslavia Leaders and Press Consecutively Publish Speeches and Articles, Condemning that Someone is Attempting to Control the Non-Aligned Movement, Exposing the Distorted Coverage of the Non-Aligned Movement Summit by Soviet Newspapers]”, *People’s Daily*, 6 September 1976, p. 6.

⁶⁴ “加强地中海和巴尔干国家关系反对外来势力插手 南斯拉夫和意大利就边界问题达成协议

Compared to these news reports based on the Yugoslav press, *People's Daily's* own commentaries were even sharper. One commentary on Tito's anti-foreign-intervention speeches pointed out: "One of the superpowers can hardly wait to open the route to the Mediterranean Sea through the Balkans, therefore it has taken all kinds of measures to exert pressure and to bring Yugoslavia into its sphere of influence".⁶⁵ There could be no doubt about which superpower was being alluded to here, as another article made it clear. It was ostensibly an overview of Russia's historical hegemony over the Balkans, but readers could easily understand it as an allegory for the current affairs between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The history article included a questionable claim that "in 1876, fanatic pan-slavists took the opportunity of the anti-Turkish uprising in Serbia to carry out despicable adventures, in order to make Serbia a province of Russia."⁶⁶ It then quoted from an article written by Vladimir Lenin in 1908 in condemnation of Tsarist Russia's involvement in the Balkans.⁶⁷

Using report as propaganda against the Soviet Union was not the unique feature of reporting on Yugoslavia. Thematically related reports on different countries appeared side by side on one page, which sometimes meant that the "news" report was of events that happened days or weeks ago. The above-mentioned report on the agreement between Yugoslavia and Italy (approved in Italian parliament by 9 October) was only published in the 17 October edition, on the same page with news about Soviet

[Strengthening Mediterranean and Balkan Countries' Relations, Opposing Interference from Outside Forces, Yugoslavia and Italy Reached Agreement over Border Issues]", *People's Daily*, 17 October 1975, p. 6.

⁶⁵ "反对外来干涉的坚定决心 [Firm Determination to Oppose Interference from Outside Forces]", *People's Daily*, 5 June 1976, p. 6.

⁶⁶ "老沙皇对巴尔干的侵略和扩张 [Old Tsars' Aggression and Expansion against the Balkans]", *People's Daily*, 3 February 1976, p. 5.

⁶⁷ The quote was: "[T]here can be nothing more reactionary than the solicitude of the Austrians on the one hand, and the Russian Black Hundreds on the other, for their 'Slav brothers'. This 'solicitude' is being used to screen the vile intrigues that have long won Russia notoriety in the Balkans. This 'solicitude' always boils down to encroachments on genuine democracy in one Balkan country or another." (Lenin 1973). Interestingly, the part regarding the Austrians was omitted in the quote by the *People's Daily*.

reconnaissance planes violating Japanese airspace. A report about a Total People's Defence exercise in Croatia on 24-25 April appeared on as late as 4 May, alongside two other reports about Soviet threat to international peace.⁶⁸

Domestic politics of Yugoslavia were rarely reported, and when they were reported, it was again about hegemonic threat from the Soviet Union. One article collected various Yugoslav leaders' speeches and press articles from the previous two months, which warned that "all hostile groups in the country are connected to Yugoslavia's enemies abroad."⁶⁹ The news of the sentencing of the "head of the pro-Soviet clique" Vladimir Dapčević was also duly reported in the Chinese newspaper.⁷⁰ When Yugoslavia celebrated Fighter's Day on 4 July 1976, a Chinese correspondent visited western Serbia and wrote about the history of resistance in this area. Halfway through the text, the correspondent suddenly started the condemnation: "Soviet socialist imperialism on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the victory of Fascism distorted history by playing down and neglecting the contribution of the Yugoslav people in the anti-fascist war."⁷¹

Notably, coverage of Yugoslavia's economic affairs in the Chinese press was remarkably sparse. One article, without further commentary, quoted from a communiqué highlighting Yugoslavia's and Guinea-Bissau's joint advocacy for a fair

⁶⁸ "南斯拉夫依靠自己力量加强防务 克罗地亚举行大规模全民防御演习 [Yugoslavia Relies on Its Own Forces to Strengthen Defence; Croatia Conducts Large-scale Total People's Defence Exercises]", *People's Daily*, 4 May 1976, p. 6.

⁶⁹ "加强团结提高警惕 坚决反抗外来压力 南斯拉夫打击有外国背景的国内敌对势力 铁托总统强调南各族人民决心保卫自己的自由, 不害怕任何人 [Strengthening Solidarity, Increasing Vigilance, Steadfastly Resisting Outside Pressure, Yugoslavia Cracks Down on Domestic Hostile Cliques with Foreign Background; President Tito Stresses That All Ethnic Groups of Yugoslavia Are Determined to Defend Their Freedom and Are Not Intimidated by Anyone]", *People's Daily*, 23 November 1975, p. 6.

⁷⁰ "南斯拉夫一些领导人发表讲话 加强全民防御维护独立主权 贝尔格莱德地方法院判处亲苏敌对集团头目徒刑 [Yugoslav Leaders Made Speeches on Strengthening Total People's Defence and Safeguarding Independence and Sovereignty; Belgrade Local Court Sentences Head of Pro-Soviet Hostile Clique to Imprisonment]", *People's Daily*, 9 July 1976, p. 6.

⁷¹ "发扬斗争传统 警惕外来入侵 [Carry Forward the Tradition of Struggle, Be Vigilant of Foreign Invasion]", *People's Daily*, 8 July 1976, p. 5.

international economic order as the only way to overcome existing difficulties and to establish equal relations in the world economy.⁷² Two other reports conveyed Yugoslavia's dissatisfaction with trade arrangements with the Soviet Union, with one going so far as to accuse the USSR of "imperialist exploitation."⁷³ This critical tone, however, was not exclusive to the reportage of Yugoslavia; similar concerns were reported from COMECON countries experiencing difficulties with Soviet economic dominance.⁷⁴ Reports on Yugoslavia's domestic economic achievements were typically brief and factual, offering little beyond basic information.⁷⁵ This muted treatment stood in stark contrast to the glowing reports on Albania and Romania, whose economic successes were frequently celebrated in the Chinese press through uncritical reproductions of local propaganda, complete with praise for their people's hardworking ethos and revolutionary spirit of "struggling against heaven and earth" (战天斗地的革命精神).⁷⁶ Even an article reporting the Iron Gate Hydropower Station, jointly

⁷² "努力保证不结盟国家首脑会议取得成功 [Strive to Ensure the Success of Non-Aligned Movement Summit]", *People's Daily*, 4 June 1976, p. 6.

⁷³ "充分利用本国资源 摆脱帝国主义剥削 南斯拉夫努力发展炼铝工业取得显著成就 开始生产镀锌板, 将能满足国内需要 [Making Full Use of Domestic Resources, Getting Rid of Imperialist Exploitation, Yugoslavia's Effort to Develop Aluminium Industry Has Significant Achievements; Production of Galvanised Strips has Started and Will Satisfy Domestic Needs]", *People's Daily*, 5 March 1976, p. 6. "南报不满苏修压低购买轮船价格 [Yugoslavia Newspaper Expresses Grievances over Soviet Revisionists Depressing Buying Price of Ships]", *People's Daily*, 10 May 1976, p. 6.

⁷⁴ "加强罗马尼亚和南斯拉夫两国政治经济合作 齐奥塞斯库总统到南斯拉夫访问 罗《社会主义时代》批驳为侵略政策效劳的“有限主权论” [Strengthening Romania and Yugoslavia's Political and Economic Cooperation, President Ceaușescu Visits Yugoslavia; Romanian Magazine *Socialist Time* Criticises 'Doctrine of Limited Sovereignty' in Service of Policy of Aggression]", *People's Daily*, 10 September 1976, p. 6.

⁷⁵ "南斯拉夫最大的炼焦炉正式投产 [Largest Coke Furnace in Yugoslavia Starts Operation]", *People's Daily*, 14 February 1976, p. 6. "南斯拉夫一座新拖拉机厂投产 匈南经济合作委员会举行会谈 [One New Tractor Factory in Yugoslavia Starts Production; Hungarian-Yugoslav Economic Cooperation Commission Holds Meeting]", *People's Daily*, 1 April 1976, p. 6.

⁷⁶ "克米什塔伊农业社在前进 [Këmishtaj Agricultural Cooperative is Moving Forward]", *People's Daily*, 19 December 1975, 5. "齐奥塞斯库总统在庆祝收获节集会上讲话 罗马尼亚工农业生产取得重要成就 [President Ceaușescu Speaks at Harvest Festival Rally: Major Achievements in Romanian Industrial and Agricultural Production]", *People's Daily*, 3 November 1975, p. 5. "布加勒斯特市提前半年完成五年计划 齐奥塞斯库同志表示热烈祝贺 [Bucharest Completes Five-Year Plan Six Months Ahead of Schedule; Comrade Ceaușescu Expresses Warm Congratulations]", *People's Daily*, 7 July 1975, p. 5.

constructed by Yugoslavia and Romania, was framed from the Romanian viewpoint, applauding the project's ability to "recoup the [Romanian] state investment costs."⁷⁷ Perhaps most tellingly, the official inauguration of the Belgrade-Bar railway, one of the largest infrastructure projects undertaken in Yugoslavia at the time, was not framed as an economic achievement. Instead, the report chose to quote only a single line from Tito's speech, emphasising that the railway was "very important for our national defence."⁷⁸

2.3 August 1977 – July 1978: Economy as the New Focus

Tito's visit to China in August–September 1977 filled the entire front page of the *People's Daily* for several consecutive days. Even after his departure for Shanghai, reports on his visit continued to appear on the front page. One editorial, similar to previous coverage of Yugoslavia, placed strong emphasis on the country's World War II history, portraying it as "a country with a history of heroic struggles." Its active participation in international affairs and its opposition to hegemonism continued to be praised. Moreover, in contrast to earlier coverage, Yugoslavia's post-war economic development was now elaborated in greater detail and praised more explicitly.⁷⁹ The following day, a full article was dedicated to welcoming Tito, featuring affectionate phrases such as: "People are grateful to this eighty-five-year-old president for travelling thousands of miles to make an official friendly visit to our country, and for bringing with him the fighting friendship of the Yugoslav people."⁸⁰

Compared to the description of Bijedić two years earlier, the focus this time was

⁷⁷ "发扬自力更生精神为祖国建设多作贡献 罗马尼亚职工积极开展“自装”活动 铁门水电站超额完成发电任务 [Keeping the Spirit of Self-reliance, Making More Contributions to Building Homeland, Romanian Workers Actively Conduct 'Self-Installation'; Iron Gate Hydroelectric Power Station Exceeds the Electricity Production Task]", *People's Daily*, 15 December 1975, p. 5.

⁷⁸ "南斯拉夫努力建设加强国防 [Yugoslavia Strives to Build and Strengthen National Defence]", *People's Daily*, 5 June 1976, p. 6.

⁷⁹ "社论 热烈欢迎铁托总统 [Editorial: Warm Welcome to President Tito]", *People's Daily*, 30 August 1977, p. 1.

⁸⁰ "欢迎您，铁托总统！ [Welcome, President Tito!]", *People's Daily*, 31 August 1977, p. 4.

more strongly placed on Tito's personal stature. He was presented as an eminent statesman on the world stage. In the editorial, Tito was described as "one of the renowned anti-fascist leaders of the older generation during the World War II, the founder of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the outstanding and time-honoured leader of the Yugoslav people," who "not only enjoys the highest prestige among the Yugoslav people, but has also earned the respect of peoples around the world." In the context of China's continued diplomatic isolation in 1977, his visit carried a distinctly high profile. Notably, Tito was referred to with both his party and state titles: "President of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia" and "President of Yugoslavia." However, the word "comrade" was still not used in the press to refer to the Yugoslav guests, even though Hua Guofeng, in a departure from earlier Chinese convention, addressed Tito as a "comrade" during their meeting on 31 August.⁸¹ The word "comrade" was finally used again on 12 November 1977, for the first time since 1958, to refer to a sitting Yugoslav politician, Milutin Baltić, who was heading a delegation from the Confederation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia (SSJ) to China.⁸²

Meanwhile, the reports still implied that the relations were based on the "past anti-fascist struggle and current anti-imperialist and anti-hegemonic struggle". In the above-mentioned editorial, a paragraph again linked the historical "mutually echoing" (遥相呼应) anti-fascist struggle with the current "common struggles as developing countries" to prove the inevitability of Sino-Yugoslav solidarity. The experiences of the anti-fascist war were heavily used to invoke an image of Yugoslavia as a heroic country, and thus an ally in the present struggle against imperialism and hegemony.

Interestingly, one article titled *Unity of Will is an Impregnable Stronghold* (众志成城) on the eve of Tito's visit portrayed an image of inter-ethnic unity in Yugoslavia:

⁸¹ (Radović 2023, 155)

⁸² "倪志福同志欢宴南工会联合会代表团 [Comrade Ni Zhifu Hosts a Banquet in Honour of the Delegation from the Confederation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia]", *People's Daily*, 12 November 1977, p. 4.

“The fire of the anti-fascist war thirty years ago tempered the Yugoslav people of different nationalities into one united, single entirety. Today, the Yugoslav people of different nationalities cherish the unity more than ever... Only unity can [enable us to] defend against the enemy, only unity can [enable us to] develop, only unity can [enable us to] win.”⁸³

The number of articles about Yugoslavia rose sharply after August 1977. Rarely did one week pass without some news from the country. Besides quantity, the coverage now also had more depth: there were more dispatches sent by Chinese correspondents in Yugoslavia, rather than only quoting from the Yugoslav press.

News pieces about Yugoslav economy contributed the most to the growth of Yugoslavia-related reports. Almost every month there was a new article with titles like *Great achievements in Yugoslavia's economic construction*, citing the Yugoslav press' reports on the rise of economic indicators, the opening of new factories and mines, and the modernisation in both industry and agriculture.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Chinese journalists went to various factories and sent back vivid and enthusiastic accounts of Yugoslav economy in action. One report on the 3. Maj Shipyard in Rijeka contained the archetypical elements of their impression: it praised the “excellent craftsmanship of the hardworking, intelligent Yugoslav shipbuilders”, recounted that the Rijeka workers had

⁸³ “众志成城 [Unity of Will is an Impregnable Stronghold]”, *People's Daily*, 29 August 1977, p. 6.

⁸⁴ “南斯拉夫经济建设成就显著 工农业生产和一些主要经济指标都完成或超额完成计划 [Yugoslav Economic Construction Has Significant Achievements; Industrial and Agricultural Production and Several Major Economic Indicators Fulfil or Exceed the Plans]”, *People's Daily*, 1 January 1978, p. 5. “南斯拉夫战后经济建设取得显著成就 三十年来工业总产值增加十三倍 二十五年农业产量提高二点四倍 [Yugoslavia's Post-war Construction Has Significant Achievements; In Thirty Years Total Industrial Production Increases Thirteenfold; In Twenty-five Years Agricultural Production Increases by 2.4 times]”, *People's Daily*, 12 April 1978, p. 5. “南斯拉夫经济建设不断取得新成就 现代化铸造厂水泥厂露天煤矿相继投产并发现新油田 [Yugoslav Economic Construction Continue to Make New Achievements; Modernised Foundry, Cement Factory, Open-pit Coal Mine Start Production; New Oil Field Discovered]”, *People's Daily*, 19 October 1977, p. 5. “南斯拉夫基本实现农业机械化 促使农业迅速发展, 与解放初相比小麦增产两倍多玉米增产三倍多 [Yugoslavia Achieves Basic Agricultural Mechanisation, Prompting Rapid Agricultural Development; Compared to the Year of Liberation Wheat Production Increases Over Twofold and Maize Production Over Threefold]”, *People's Daily*, 5 January 1978, p. 5.

“fought the aggressors in an unbroken struggle”, that after the war the yard had recovered quickly and had been advancing in modernisation in the last decade, and that it had trade with other countries including “friendly relations with China”.⁸⁵ The new focus on technological modernisation and international trade can be seen as an indication of the Chinese leadership’s interest in them.

A significant new development appeared in a report on the Zagreb Rade Končar electrical company in November 1977. It started typically with the revolutionary history (“the famous People’s Hero of Yugoslavia, Rade Končar created the union and led strikes”), the post-war recovery and the importance of technology. Then something completely novel turned up in the text: “Rade Končar electrical company is ‘self-managed by the workers’.” The report laid out an outline of self-management in the company, explaining how the workers’ council was elected and how it carried out the management. It even mentioned the latest changes regarding delegates’ rights in the 1974 Constitution and the new Law on Associated Labour.⁸⁶ **This was the first time Yugoslavia’s self-management model was ever introduced in the Chinese official press.** Later, there were more correspondents’ reports about Yugoslav companies that also described their workers’ self-management, such as Energoinvest in Sarajevo, “one of the first companies where workers’ councils were established”.⁸⁷ Although the correspondents did not pass judgement on the correctness or effectiveness of the self-management system, the detailedness of the reporting suggests a great interest in learning more about it.

⁸⁵ “访里耶卡 “五·三” 造船厂 [Visiting the 3. Maj Shipyard in Rijeka]”, *People’s Daily*, 3 September 1977, p. 6.

⁸⁶ “访 “拉迪·康查尔” 电气公司 [Visiting the Rade Končar Electrical Company]”, *People’s Daily*, 10 November 1977, p. 5.

⁸⁷ “萨拉热窝动力投资公司纪事 [Chronicle of Energoinvest in Sarajevo]”, *People’s Daily*, 23 February 1978, p. 5.

In stark contrast to earlier reporting patterns, political developments within the League of Communists of Yugoslavia now received prominent attention.⁸⁸ The most significant example was the Eleventh Congress of the LCY in June 1978, which was covered extensively by the Chinese press. Tito's speech at the congress was cited at considerable length, so much so that it occupied an entire page of the newspaper, an extraordinarily favourable treatment rarely afforded to a foreign leader.⁸⁹ The tone of the coverage was strikingly positive and triumphalist, as exemplified by phrases such as, "the Congress elected the Central Committee and central governing body in an atmosphere of solidarity."⁹⁰ One "dispatch from Yugoslavia" vividly described how "applause resonated through the conference hall like sea waves stirred by a powerful spring wind" when Edvard Kardelj read aloud a congratulatory telegram from the Communist Party of China on the first day of the congress.⁹¹ Another article, published shortly before the Eleventh Congress, noted that the LCY Central Committee had decided to use the new book by Kardelj, *The Directions of Development of the Political System of Socialist Self-management*, as the ideological basis for the preparation of the congress.⁹² The report mentioned no more details about the book.⁹³

⁸⁸ "隆重纪念克罗地亚共产党成立四十周年 南斯拉夫萨格勒布举行盛大集会 铁托主席强调南各民族团结一致才能取得成就 [In Splendid Celebration of the Fortieth Anniversary of Establishment of Croatian Communist Party, Grand Rally is Held in Zagreb; President Tito Stresses That Achievements Can Only Be Made with Solidarity of All Ethnic Groups of Yugoslavia]", *People's Daily*, 3 October 1977, p. 6.

⁸⁹ "铁托主席在南共联盟第十一次代表大会上的报告 [President Tito's Report at Eleventh Congress of LCY]", *People's Daily*, 22 June 1978, p. 5.

⁹⁰ "南共联盟十一大胜利闭幕 铁托同志继续当选为南共联盟主席 卡德尔、多兰茨和科托里奇分别在十一大上发言和作报告 [Eleventh Congress of the LCY Concludes in Victory; Comrade Tito Continues to be Elected as President of LCY; Kardelj, Dolanc and Kotorić Make Speeches and Deliver Reports]", *People's Daily*, 24 June 1978, p. 5.

⁹¹ "响亮的声音 [Loud and Clear Voice]", *People's Daily*, 25 June 1978, p. 4.

⁹² The book was written by Kardelj in preparation for the Eleventh Congress, but did not serve as its "ideological basis". In fact, Kardelj's idea of further weakening of central authority was controversial and only partially adopted at the congress. Cf. (Burg 1983, 301-302).

⁹³ "在南共联盟十一大的前夕 [On the Eve of Eleventh Congress of LCY]", *People's Daily*, 18 June 1978, p. 6.

Ethnic policy was another new focus of the reports on Yugoslavia. Various reports praised Yugoslavia's policy of "ethnic equality and ethnic solidarity". Education and media in minority languages in the Socialist Autonomous Provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina were highlighted.⁹⁴ In one overview of Yugoslavia's ethnic policy, the correspondent wrote enthusiastically that they saw in museums that during World War II "peoples of all ethnic groups wrote 'Death to Fascism, Freedom to People!' (*Smrt fašizmu, sloboda narodu*, a motto of the Yugoslav Partisans) in their languages." They explained that "the ethnic key" was applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that "Montenegro with the population of over half a million and Serbia with the population of over eight million have the equal voting power." Notably, the report mentioned that Yugoslav leaders stressed "ethnic economic equality was necessary for political equality", and explained that "more advanced republics aid the undeveloped republics" through a federal fund. The article ended with "peoples of all ethnic groups are living completely equally in brotherhood, and have truly become the masters of their own destiny."⁹⁵ In this Yugoslavia presented by the correspondent, there were apparently neither ethnic tensions nor discontents from republics about federal voting and aid arrangements.

Other aspects of the reports remained the same after Tito's visit. News about Yugoslavia's efforts and leaders' speeches on national defence still appeared frequently. One correspondent positively reported on Yugoslavia's Total People's Defence, mentioning that the Energoinvest company "bought eight cannons using their own money."⁹⁶ In other national security news, it was reported that the "head of anti-

⁹⁴ "南斯拉夫蒂萨河大坝建成 科索沃自治省在经济、文教方面取得新发展 [Yugoslavia Completes Construction of Tisa Dam; Kosovo Autonomous Province Achieves New Development in Economy, Culture and Education]", *People's Daily*, 4 December 1977, p. 5. "南斯拉夫伏伊伏丁那自治省 重视民族平等政策 加强各族人民团结 [Yugoslavia's Vojvodina Autonomous Province Attaches High Importance to Policy of Ethnic Equality, Strengthens Solidarity of Ethnic Groups]", *People's Daily*, 18 December 1977, p. 5.

⁹⁵ "团结就是力量 [Unity is Strength]", *People's Daily*, 6 February 1978, p. 5.

⁹⁶ "不容侵犯的 '铁刺猬' [Inviolable 'Iron Hedgehog']", *People's Daily*, 24 January 1978, p. 6.

Yugoslav clique” Mileta Perović who had “long lived in the Soviet Union” was arrested.⁹⁷ In reports about Yugoslavia’s foreign relations, Soviet threat remained the central theme. The NAM Foreign Ministers’ Conference in Belgrade in July 1978 was reported alongside condemnation of Soviet intervention, which by now was “using Cuba” for “destructive activities” with in the movement.⁹⁸ Even a review of partisan films *Walter defends Sarajevo* and *The Bridge* did not forget to comment on the current international situation: “We now understand why the Yugoslav people so cherish their hard-earned independence and sovereignty.”⁹⁹

2.4 August 1978 – 1980: Broad Interest in Yugoslavia’s System

2.4.1 Yugoslavia as a Successful Socialist Country

Three weeks before Hua Guofeng’s visit to Yugoslavia, on 3 August, for the first time, a correspondent’s report made appraisals on the self-management model, rather than merely introducing it. As everyone they met in Yugoslavia believed the system fit the Yugoslav conditions, the correspondents pondered: “Why has Yugoslavia’s economy developed so quickly? Why do Yugoslav workers have very high sense of ownership and responsibility? Self-management must be an important reason. [Judging

⁹⁷ “南斯拉夫逮捕反南集团头目 佩罗维奇长期侨居苏联犯有反人民反国家罪行 [Yugoslavia Arrests Ringleader of Anti-Yugoslav Clique; Perović Has Long Lived in USSR and Committed Anti-people and Anti-Country Crimes]”, *People’s Daily*, 26 November 1977, p. 6.

⁹⁸ “不结盟运动将在斗争中团结前进 [Non-Aligned Movement Will Unitedly Move Forward in Struggle]”, *People’s Daily*, 13 July 1978, p. 5. “南报和通讯社就不结盟国家外长会议发表评论 必须坚持不结盟运动反帝反霸方针 [Yugoslav Newspapers and News Agency Comments on NAM Foreign Ministers’ Conference, Stresses on Adherence to NAM’s Anti-imperialist and Anti-hegemonist Guideline]”, *People’s Daily*, 22 July 1978, p. 6.

⁹⁹ “人民游击战的壮丽颂歌——评南斯拉夫故事影片《瓦尔特保卫萨拉热窝》和《桥》 [Glorious Ode to People’s Partisan War — Review of Yugoslav Story Film *Walter Defends Sarajevo* and *The Bridge*]”, *People’s Daily*, 4 September 1977, p. 6.

from] the socialist self-management system, we see that the LCY led by comrade Tito believes in people, relies on people, and is good at organise people's strength.”¹⁰⁰

Hua's return visit in late August 1978 received even more coverage than the Tito's visit to China, occupying not only the front page but also some other full pages. The report of Hua's arrival in Belgrade talked about the “widening friendly cooperative relations between Chinese and Yugoslav parties, states and peoples”, emphasising the inter-party relations.¹⁰¹ Hua's visit to Skopje was accompanied by journalists' account of Yugoslavia's policy of supporting underdeveloped regions, comprising the Socialist Republics of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, as well as the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo. The text presented the Federal Fund for the Underdeveloped Regions, and described how Skopje was rebuilt with the help from “brotherly republics and autonomous provinces”. They were presented as examples of “the true ethnic equality” in Yugoslavia.¹⁰²

During the visit, one article reported on the progress in Yugoslavia's economy, claiming that self-management “let the working class and the working people widely participate in the management of production, distribution and other social affairs, stimulated their motivation to build socialism, therefore promoted the rapid development of the national economy of Yugoslavia.”¹⁰³ Upon the conclusion of the

¹⁰⁰ “铁托和人民——访问南斯拉夫通讯之一 [Tito and the People — Dispatch from Yugoslavia, Part One]”, *People's Daily*, 3 August 1978, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ “华主席到达南首都进行正式友好访问 铁托总统在白宫举行隆重的欢迎仪式 铁托总统举行盛大宴会热烈欢迎华主席 铁托总统和华主席在宴会上发表热情洋溢的讲话 [Chairman Hua Arrives in Yugoslavia's Capital in an Official Goodwill Visit; President Tito Holds Welcoming Ceremony in White Palace; President Tito Hosts Grand Banquet to Warmly Welcome Chairman Hua; President Tito and Chairman Hua Make Enthusiastic Speeches at the Banquet]”, *People's Daily*, 22 August 1978, p. 1.

¹⁰² “在“不发达地区”——访问南斯拉夫通讯之三 [In ‘Underdeveloped Regions’ — Dispatch from Yugoslavia, Part Three]”, *People's Daily*, 25 August 1978, p. 5.

¹⁰³ “南斯拉夫社会主义建设取得巨大成就 三十年来工业生产增长十三倍，农业生产增长一倍半 [Yugoslavia's Socialist Construction Makes Great Achievements; In Thirty Years Total Industrial Production Increases Thirteenfold, Agricultural Production Increases by 1.5 times]”, *People's Daily*, 23 August 1978, p. 5.

visit, the newspaper's editorial made a more comprehensive analysis: "the LCY applied the universal truth of Marxism to the concrete practice in Yugoslavia, and established and developed the socialist self-management system which suits its own conditions...The Chinese people feel sincere happiness from and are deeply inspired by each of the achievement of the Yugoslav people in revolution and construction."¹⁰⁴ These are the clear indications that the Chinese authorities by now had a very positive assessment of the Yugoslav self-management socialism, even taking "inspirations". Moreover, "applying the universal truth of Marxism to the concrete practice" was a paramount appreciation from the CPC, since Chinese communists had been using the same phrase to define their own cause (see Subchapter 4.5).

After Hua's visit, the newspaper published more positive stories of Yugoslavia's economy. Some were correspondents' reports on how the self-management model functioned, with more details than previous reports. One report was about how a loss-making knitting Factory in Belgrade turned profitable. It explained that: "In Yugoslavia companies are managed by workers. If a company is badly managed, the manager either resigns or is fired by the workers' council." The report claimed that the key to the company's success was the personnel change.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, a couple of reports praised the principle of distribution according to work, in opposition to "absolute egalitarianism", which had led to losses.¹⁰⁶ Some dealt with more concrete issues, such as professional tourism schools in Yugoslavia, which were "perhaps also needed in

¹⁰⁴ "中南关系史上的里程碑——热烈祝贺华主席访问南斯拉夫圆满成功 [A Milestone in the History of Sino-Yugoslav Relations — Warm Congratulations on the Complete Success of Chairman Hua's Visit to Yugoslavia]", *People's Daily*, 30 August 1978, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ "从亏损到赢利——记贝尔格莱德“绿山”针织厂的变迁 [From Loss to Profit — An Account of the Transformation of Zeleno Brdo Knitting Factory in Belgrade]", *People's Daily*, 31 October 1978, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ "他们是怎样实行按劳分配的 [How They Implement the Principle of Distribution According to Work]", *People's Daily*, 5 August 1979, p. 4. "南斯拉夫企业进一步贯彻按劳分配原则 久拉诺维奇说南经济近三年发展很快但也存在一些问题 [Yugoslav Companies Continue to Implement the Principle of Distribution According to Work; Đuranović Says That Yugoslav Economy Develops Rapidly in Last Three Years but Problems Exist]", *People's Daily*, 8 June 1979, p. 6.

China.”¹⁰⁷ One report advocated for introducing advanced technology from abroad and invoked the example of Yugoslavia (alongside Romania).¹⁰⁸ The newspaper also published “letters from readers” who sent in their suggestions for various issues, some of which looked at Yugoslavia’s experience, including a suggestion that markets could allow agricultural companies and farmers sell products.¹⁰⁹

A significant change in this period is the deeper coverage of the Yugoslav political system, which now went far beyond the token adjectives for the leadership such as “united”, “intelligent” or “heroic”. The correspondents explained that “self-management is not only in companies but have spread to all dimensions of the society, such as culture, education and sciences.” Two dispatches from Zvezdara, a municipality of the city of Belgrade, and Zlatibor, a popular tourist resort in west Serbia, gave detailed introductions to the self-managing community of interest (*samoupravna interesna zajednica*), and the delegate system (*delegatski sistem*). It was noted that both were new changes introduced by the 1974 Constitution. The correspondent believed these systems were “praiseworthy”.¹¹⁰ Regarding the cadre policy, a dispatch reported that it was common that “a company manager had been a minister or even vice prime minister”, and explained the rotation was intended to “train more cadres and avoid the concentration of social power in the hands of a few people.” The article also described the open competition for all kinds of positions from new employees to managers, noting that “some people have remarked that having the right ‘connections’ (*veze*) makes it easier to get hired,” before immediately adding that “without ability, one cannot be

¹⁰⁷ “为旅游事业培养干部 [Training Cadres for Tourism Industry]”, *People’s Daily*, 26 March 1979, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ “大胆引进加快速度 [Courageous introduction (of advanced technology) and Speeding Up]”, *People’s Daily*, 17 September 1978, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ “改革城市蔬菜供应体制的几点建议 [Several Suggestions on Reforming Urban Vegetable Supplies System]”, *People’s Daily*, 4 January 1979, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ “访“自治利益共同体” [Visiting a ‘Self-managing Community of Interest’]”, *People’s Daily*, 29 November 1978, p. 5. “从区议会看南斯拉夫代表团制 [Yugoslavia’s Delegation System, Viewed from a Municipal Assembly]”, *People’s Daily*, 20 December 1978, p. 6.

chosen, even with ‘connections’”.¹¹¹ News reported that Tito’s proposal to strengthen collective leadership had been “warmly embraced by all communists, workers, working people and firmly supported by all levels of party organisations, parliaments, self-management institutions and social-political organisations.”¹¹² The political system was rather idealistically portrayed by these reports.

There were still news reports on strengthening national defence, but less frequently. There was a subtle change in the selected inclusion of Yugoslav leaders’ quotes. One report included Tito’s words from a speech at the Goša factory in Smederevska Palanka that “the Yugoslav working class would not easily **abandon self-management** (emphasis added by the author of the dissertation)”.¹¹³ Another reported that Stane Dolanc, the Secretary of the Presidency of the Central Committee of the LCY, said: “We do not allow now, and will not allow in the future, anyone to impose their prescription on us.”¹¹⁴

The newspaper continued to report the Yugoslavia’s position on foreign affairs when it fit the current Chinese position. When Vietnam invaded Khmer Rouge-ruled Cambodia, the newspaper published for consecutive days the Yugoslav government’s and newspapers’ condemnation of Vietnam’s military action against Cambodia.¹¹⁵ Then

¹¹¹ “南斯拉夫干部政策的几个侧面 [Several Aspects of Yugoslavia’s Cadre Policy]”, *People’s Daily*, 8 October 1979, p. 5.

¹¹² “发扬社会主义民主 防止官僚主义专横 南斯拉夫积极贯彻加强集体领导的原则 [Promoting Socialist Democracy, Preventing Domineering Bureaucracy, Yugoslavia Actively Implements Principle of Strengthening Collective Leadership]”, *People’s Daily*, 21 July 1979, p. 5.

¹¹³ “铁托总统发表讲话强调 要象明天就要发生战争那样作好防御准备 南斯拉夫人民军 in 实现装备现代化方面取得成就 [President Tito in His Speech Stresses the Need to Prepare as if War Would Happen Tomorrow; Yugoslav People’s Army Makes Achievements in Equipment Modernisation]”, *People’s Daily*, 4 October 1978, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ “南斯拉夫领导人多兰茨等谈东南亚局势 希望有关国家停止冲突从别国撤出所有军队 谴责有人企图诋毁南斯拉夫政策施加巨大压力破坏不结盟运动 [Dolanc and Other Yugoslav Leaders Comment on Situation in Southeast Asia, Hoping Relevant Countries Cease Conflict and Withdraw All Armed Forces from Other Country, Condemning That Somebody Attempts to Discredit Yugoslav Policy and Exert Huge Pressure to Disrupt Non-Aligned Movement]”, *People’s Daily*, 28 February 1979, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ “南斯拉夫《战斗报》发表评论 指责越南对柬埔寨的军事行动 [Yugoslav Newspaper *Borba* Condemns Vietnam’s Military Action Against Kampuchea]”, *People’s Daily*, 9 January 1979, 5. “南斯

it was reported that, as a result, “Yugoslavia’s righteous positions face hostilities from the USSR.”¹¹⁶

2.4.2 Neglection of Yugoslavia’s troubles

Although Yugoslavia was facing mounting problems in late 1970s, the problems were generally overlooked by *People’s Daily*. Even when problems were mentioned, they were presented as either marginal or belonging to the past. Such “past political troubles” were briefly mentioned in an article that commemorated the LCY’s history at the sixtieth anniversary of its foundation: “Within the Party, there were attempts to abolish the Party and return to the capitalist system, there were figures who stood against the development of the self-management system, and there were nationalists who agitated for secessions.” However, the conclusion of the text remained highly positive: the LCY “is still continuously drawing lessons and moving forward.”¹¹⁷

The coverage of economy acknowledged slightly more of the existence of problems, but the overall tone was still rather positive. One report mentioned problems of “the rise of consumption exceeded the possibility of production” and “the overextension of infrastructure construction” but then optimistically commented: “Finding a new problem and identifying its crux - the start of resolving the problem.”¹¹⁸ Another report reviewed the economic situation in the first half of 1979. After quoting the achievements, it continued: “Due to multiple factors such as the international market and the abnormal climate, there were also many difficulties and problems... Three main problems are: price rises, payment deficit, and reduced agricultural output.” It then

拉夫领导人米尼奇谴责外国入侵柬埔寨 呼吁安理会采取措施维护柬埔寨领土完整 [Yugoslav Leader Minić Condemns Foreign Invasion of Kampuchea, Calls on Security Council to Take Measures to Safeguard Kampuchea’s Territorial Integrity], *People’s Daily*, 14 January 1979, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ “维护不结盟原则 [Upholding the Principle of Non-Alignment]”, *People’s Daily*, 24 January 1979, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ “战斗的六十年 [Sixty years of Struggles]”, *People’s Daily*, 21 April 1979, p. 5.

¹¹⁸ “为经济的稳定发展而奋斗——南斯拉夫为什么把今年定为“经济稳定年” [Striving for Stable Economic Development — Why Yugoslavia Designates This Year as ‘Year of Economic Stability’]”, *People’s Daily*, 3 April 1979, p. 5.

mentioned efforts by the LCY and the government to stabilise the economy. The ending of the report read almost like a piece of propaganda tailored for domestic consumption, something that would appear natural in the Yugoslav official press. The Chinese journalists asked a Yugoslav official: “The difficulties and problems in the Yugoslav economy are not as serious as some press articles claimed, are they?” And the answer was: “We are accustomed to taking more seriously our own problems and difficulties...”¹¹⁹

2.5 Tito's Death, May 1980

After Tito's sudden health deterioration and hospitalisation in January 1980, the Chinese newspaper published regular updates (citing Tanjug press releases) on Tito's latest condition.¹²⁰ The news of Tito's death was published on 5 May, as a short bulletin at the top of the front page.¹²¹ Evidently, the news had arrived just before the printing of that day's edition. The next day's edition devoted three pages, including the front page, to Tito. Tito's obituary and Chinese leaders' telegrams of condolence were published.¹²² The editorial titled *In Deep Mourning of the Outstanding Proletarian Revolutionary Comrade Tito* wrote that “the Chinese people are deeply saddened” and listed Tito's main achievements: He “led the Yugoslav people to the great victory in the national liberation struggle on their own strength”; after World War II, he “applied the universal truth of Marxism to the concrete practice in Yugoslavia, and discovered a

¹¹⁹ “成就和问题——南斯拉夫今年上半年经济情况综述 [Achievements and Problems — Overview of Yugoslavia's Economic Situation in the First Half of This Year]”, *People's Daily*, 30 July 1979, p. 5.

¹²⁰ E.g. “铁托总统病情略有好转 [President Tito's Condition Has Slightly Improved]”, *People's Daily*, 1 May 1980, p. 3.

¹²¹ “最后消息：铁托总统逝世 [Latest News: President Tito Passes Away]”, *People's Daily*, 5 May 1980, p. 1.

¹²² “南共联盟中央和联邦主席团关于铁托同志逝世的讣告 [Obituary of Comrade Tito by Central Committee of LCY and Federal Presidency]”, *People's Daily*, 6 May 1980, 2. “华国锋、叶剑英、邓小平同志致电南斯拉夫党政领导人 沉痛哀悼铁托同志逝世 [Hua Guofeng, Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping Send Telegrams to Yugoslavia's Party and Government Leadership, in Deep Condolences over the Passing of Comrade Tito]”, *People's Daily*, 6 May 1980, p. 1.

way to build socialism with Yugoslav characteristics”; he was “a model of adherence to national independence and never yielding to force in international affairs”; he was “one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement”; he was “a respected comrade-in-arms of the Chinese people”. The editorial noted that “the valuable experience of the Yugoslav people building socialism under the leadership of Comrade Tito has attracted high attention among the Chinese people.”¹²³

Contrary to the usual practice when reporting on the death of non-Chinese leaders, condolences from other foreign leaders were also published. Tito’s life story, *A man of Steel* (a title based on the wordplay made by Mao Zedong during his meeting with Bijedić in 1975, referencing the Chinese transliteration of Tito’s name, see Subchapter 1.2), was published as a two-part series.¹²⁴ The newspaper treated Tito’s death in the same way it would report the death of a Chinese top-level revolutionary politician, and this exceptional treatment became even more evident when the Chairman of the PRC from 1959 to 1968, Liu Shaoqi’s memorial service was announced on 17 May. Only then the coverage of Tito stopped and the following weeks’ newspapers similarly devoted full pages to the mourning of Liu.

2.6 Conclusion

Between 1975 and 1980, the portrayal of Yugoslavia in the Chinese official press was consistently positive, but the content changed greatly. The main interest in Yugoslavia shifted from the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggle to the model of developing socialism.

At the time of Bijedić’s visit, Yugoslavia was reported as a friendly country with similar views on the diplomatic front. History and “national character” were often

¹²³ “深切悼念杰出的无产阶级革命家铁托同志 [In Deep Mourning of the Outstanding Proletarian Revolutionary Comrade Tito]”, *People’s Daily*, 6 May 1980, p. 2.

¹²⁴ “钢铁的人——铁托同志生平片断（上） [A man of Steel — Episodes from Comrade Tito’s Life (Part One)]”, *People’s Daily*, 6 May 1980, 7. “钢铁的人——铁托同志生平片断（下） [A man of Steel – Episodes from Comrade Tito’s Life (Part Two)]”, *People’s Daily*, 7 May 1980, p. 7.

invoked to enhance the image of Yugoslavia as an independent country at present. The solidarity between the two countries was built on the common threat of hegemonism, a term that the *People's Daily* primarily used to criticise the Soviet Union. In this respect, Yugoslavia did not possess a special status, compared to other NAM countries or the diplomatically semi-independent Romania.

A definitive shift occurred around the time of Tito's visit in August 1977, as economic development replaced defence as the central theme of coverage. Yugoslavia was increasingly portrayed as a prosperous socialist country. Its ethnic policy, particularly its emphasis on economic equality, was praised. The *People's Daily* subsequently introduced the concept of workers' self-management to its readership. Hua Guofeng's visit to Yugoslavia in 1978 marked the peak of interest in the Yugoslav socialist system. By this point, the newspaper had begun not only to praise self-management, but also to present the concrete workings of workers' councils and recent innovations such as the delegate system to Chinese readers. From then until 1980, Yugoslavia occupied a distinctive place in Chinese state propaganda, portrayed as the socialist country undertaking the broadest and most far-reaching reforms.

3 Local-level Sino-Yugoslav Exchanges from 1977 to 1981

3.1 “Valter” in Shanghai!

Velimir “Bata” Živojinović (1933-2016) was a prominent Yugoslav and Serbian film actor, famed for portraying a variety of Yugoslav partisan heroes in the anti-fascist resistance during the World War II. His characters killed so many Nazis on the screen that Yugoslavs started to joke that the last words of Hitler to his successors had been “You must kill Bata!”¹²⁵ Bata has not only been popular in Yugoslavia and its successor states, but has also been a household name in China since the end of the 1970s, in particular due to his portrayal of the mysterious partisan hero Valter in the 1972 film *Walter Defends Sarajevo*. Bata visited China more than ten times during his lifetime; at the time of his first visit in 1979, he was likely the biggest international film star in China at that moment. His popularity remained high across the decades, and remained a reference in Chinese popular culture. In the 2010s, cunning Chinese entrepreneurs appropriated the name and image of Valter for a beer brand.¹²⁶

As recorded by an internal report from the Shanghai Municipal Film Bureau during his 1979 visit, Bata was so popular that he was once stranded by thousands of locals, who were adoringly shouting “Valter” – a sight uncommon for China at the time. He commented that “[i]n a lifetime of artistic endeavour, I have never encountered a more exciting and unforgettable scene.”¹²⁷

Just as Bata’s experience was a good reflection of the booming relations between China and Yugoslavia at the end the 1970s, the report which documented this event was

¹²⁵ Bata Živojinović himself recounted the joke in the documentary film *Cinema Komunisto* (Turajlić 2011).

¹²⁶ (Čukić 2016).

¹²⁷ SMA. B177-4-752-22. 上海市电影局关于接待南斯拉夫电影代表团情况的简报 [Briefing by the Shanghai Municipal Film Bureau on the Reception of the Yugoslav Film Delegation].

only a sample of what turned out to be a bunch of valuable but untapped sources for studying Sino-Yugoslav relations, more than 200 internal reports written by Chinese institutions between 1977 and 1981, currently preserved in the Shanghai Municipal Archives (SMA), which this chapter capitalises upon. In the following section, the chapter briefly overviews the value of these internal reports. Then thematic analysis is used by identifying and interpreting themes and patterns of exchanges at the local level between Shanghai municipality and various Yugoslav institutions.

3.2 Finding Beijing Without Beijing: A Methodological Detour Through Local Archives

In the four years after Tito's visit to China in August 1977, thousands of individuals from China and Yugoslavia went on institutionally organised exchange visits. The institutions that sent and received these visitors were governmental bodies, Party organisations, state enterprises, state-run trade unions, other state-run public institutions such as universities, museums and theatres, and, especially in Yugoslavia's case, mass organisations such as the Association for Sports and Recreation of Disabled People of Yugoslavia. Individuals who participated in these exchanges not only included Party and state officials, but also various professionals from all walks of life: musicians, actors, directors, university professors, agricultural specialists, documentary makers, and doctors. Some of the visits were primarily aimed at establishing and maintaining institutional contacts, some had a mission of studying the other country (*studijski boravak* "study trip" in Serbo-Croatian and 考察团 "study/investigative/exploratory mission" in Chinese), and others were essentially professionals carrying out their work, e.g., when a Shanghai children's choir participated at the International Children's Festival in Šibenik or when three documentary makers from TV Skopje shot scenes in Shanghai and Urumqi as well as other Chinese cities for a documentary titled *China Today*.

Shanghai – the second important city in China after the capital, Beijing, as well as

a sister city of Zagreb since 1980 – dispatched multiple Chinese delegations to Yugoslavia, while also hosting numerous Yugoslav delegations in China. Chinese institutions that were involved in the exchanges wrote reports for internal review and record-keeping. Chinese visitors to Yugoslavia would record their trips in reports (usually called 外事简报 “foreign affairs briefings,” FAB) and upon returning, submit them to their institutions. The Chinese institutions that hosted guests from Yugoslavia would also note down the course of events and the visitors’ statements and actions in internal reports. Also valuable were the “reception programmes” (接待计划) made by Chinese institutions which usually contained basic information of the Yugoslav guests, schedule, transport and accommodation arrangements, but sometimes also included their opinion on the delegations and expectations of the visits. Most of these reports in the Chinese archives are not available to researchers today, but 243 reports from 1977 to 1985 in the Shanghai Municipal Archives are accessible.

Those reports turned out to be very important for studying Sino-Yugoslav relations during that period, especially since documents from the central state and party bodies of China remain inaccessible to researchers. Their particular value is twofold:

First, as internal reports, they recorded moments of the bilateral exchanges that were unsuitable for public dissemination. As is discussed below, sometimes both sides admitted shortcomings in their work, and on some occasions Yugoslav visitors made unflattering remarks on some aspects of China. Such instances were never reported in Chinese state newspapers, which only painted a positive picture of those visits. Therefore, the internal reports help capture the internal discussions and attitudes of Chinese institutions in a nuanced manner, providing valuable insight into their thought patterns that underpinned decision-making in foreign and domestic policy.

Second, they can be used to gauge whether the enthusiasm for Yugoslavia as displayed in Chinese state media actually existed among the people who were involved in bilateral interactions. By looking at the content of the reports, we can cross-check the authenticity of the official and media enthusiastic discourse against the tone of the

internal communication. Moreover, the internal reports provide critical insight into the outcomes and impacts of these visits, which in turn helps provide original contribution to the research on Sino-Yugoslav relations.

Typically, internal reports were written by one of the people who participated in the “foreign affairs”, i.e., members of delegations either visiting another country or hosting the foreign guests. They were handwritten or typed/printed on official paper of the institution. Usually, they were sent to the higher-level institutions for approval, and sometimes they were additionally delivered to other institutions that were deemed relevant. For example, a report written by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Press and Publication on the visit by two editors from the Belgrade publishing house *Jugoslovenska revija* were sent to both the Foreign Affair Office of Shanghai People’s Government and the State Administration of Publication for approval, as well as copied to the Publicity Department of the Municipal Committee, the Shanghai Public Security Bureau, and the Shanghai People’s Fine Arts Publishing House.¹²⁸ The reports usually were three to five pages long. Reporting on longer visits, some reports covered different days or events of the visits. The reports did not have a single format: some were more formal, concerning only the core purpose of the visit and contained only the officialese, comprising of routine phrases, and they usually only recorded the strictly work-related issues; some contained much more information, e.g. sightseeing trips, interactions with the local people, the two sides’ commentaries on each other. It is exactly among those “additional” contents we can see some interesting patterns.

3.3 Warm and Friendly, but not Brotherly: Sino-Yugoslav Comradeship

The most prominent feature of the reports was the emphasis on Sino-Yugoslav friendship. At the time, the CPC’s leadership was keen on promoting Sino-Yugoslav

¹²⁸ SMA, B167-5-311-7, 接待南斯拉夫《评论》出版社两名编辑的简报 [Briefing on the Reception of Two Editors from the Yugoslav Publishing House *Jugoslovenska revija*].

comradeship and encouraged cadres to align with this line of thinking in all relevant writings. The local level reports from Shanghai thus tended to describe the attitude of the Yugoslavs using routine phrases such as “warm and friendly” (热情友好, which sounds more verbose in Chinese than in the literal English translation).¹²⁹ Such phrases were also used in Chinese state media. Yet, this spotlight on friendship could not be only attributed to a blind adherence to official guidelines. These reports, in fact, often gave specific examples of Yugoslavs’ friendliness and hospitality. Chinese hosts frequently recorded their Yugoslav guests’ praise of China and display of enthusiasm about China’s development.

A prominent example was a report written in June and July 1979, when a children’s ensemble from Shanghai was invited to participate at the 19th International Children’s Festival held in Šibenik and to perform in other cities of Yugoslavia. The head of the ensemble, the deputy director of Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Culture, Xu Ping wrote a detailed report of their experience in Yugoslavia. They were not only impressed by the exceptional courteous reception by their institutional hosts, but also by the spontaneous affection and hospitality from common people. At one of their performances, the Yugoslav audience started to sing together with the Chinese choir, and many spectators later came on stage to kiss and hug the child performers, and gave them flowers and souvenirs. When Chinese visitors went to shops, the shop assistants ask local customers to let the “Chinese comrades” be served first. Chinese visitors met random Yugoslav locals on street who would proudly show their shoes made in China. A particular memorable episode happened when a Yugoslav driver skipped part of his honeymoon in order to re-join the ensemble’s journey, saying: “I have a whole life to live with my wife, but only a few days together with the Chinese comrades.” The Chinese visitors were deeply moved. Xu described the Yugoslavs’ sympathy and

¹²⁹ SMA, B1-8-131-1, 赵行志在市人大常委会第十四次会议上关于上海市友好代表团访问南斯拉夫的情况报告 [Zhao Xingzhi’s Report on the Visit of the Shanghai Friendship Delegation to Yugoslavia at the 14th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Shanghai Municipal People’s Congress].

enthusiasm towards China and the Chinese guests as an ongoing wave of “Sinomania” (中国热).¹³⁰

When hosting Yugoslav delegations, representatives of Chinese institutions reported that they received guests with the warmest hospitality, and some reports, in particular those on Bata’s visit, revealed the general population’s spontaneous display of affection for Yugoslavia.

In the internal reports, the warm Sino-Yugoslav friendship at the time was interpreted as a result of the similarities between the two countries. One perceived similarity was to be found in their comparable historical trajectories. During the exchange visits, both the Chinese and Yugoslavs sometimes recalled how “both peoples contributed to the anti-Fascist war” during World War II. Both sides glorified each other as “heroic peoples.”¹³¹ Xu wrote that they were particularly impressed by how well Yugoslavia preserved its World War II memorials and thus “educated the mass of the revolutionary tradition using historical objects.”¹³² For both Chinese and Yugoslavs, the concern with the historical struggle was directly connected to the then-current tensions on the international stage, as the conflict of global superpowers posed challenges to other international actors. Ivan Jurković, a Yugoslav geologist who was heading a scientific and technology cooperation delegation to China in May and June 1977, told his hosts that against the backdrop of the global situation, Yugoslavia and China were “beholding each other’s independence and self-reliance.”¹³³

In fact, although many visits were apparently of a strictly professional or cultural nature, the reports revealed that the Chinese and Yugoslavs often exchanged their

¹³⁰ SMA, B172-7-136-5, 中国上海儿童艺术团出访南斯拉夫的总结报告 [Summary Report on the Visit of the Shanghai Children's Art Troupe to Yugoslavia].

¹³¹ SMA, C1-4-205-22, 上海市总工会国际联络部编印《外事情况简报》1979 年第 23 期 [FAB, No. 23 (1979), Compiled and Printed by the International Liaison Department (ILD) of the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU)].

¹³² SMA, B172-7-136-5.

¹³³ SMA, B246-3-478-13, 接待南斯拉夫科技合作代表团简报 [Briefing on the Reception of the Yugoslav Delegation for Scientific and Technological Cooperation].

concerns over current geopolitical affairs in their conversations. Just as they bonded over the historical resistance against fascism, they also founded common language on their shared struggle against imperialism in the then-present. In contrast to Chinese state media which sometimes did not name names but vaguely talked about “the imperialists,” in those internal reports it was quite clear that the Chinese side devoted most of their antagonism to the USSR, and were keen to observe the same anti-Soviet grievances on the Yugoslav side.¹³⁴ The Tito-Stalin split from 1948 and 1953 was an obvious source of the grievances. Dušan Šinigoj, who later became the last president of the Executive Council (equivalent to the position of prime minister) of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, headed a Yugoslav education delegation that visited several Chinese cities in 1979. He told his Chinese hosts from the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Higher Education that Yugoslavs “would never forget” the Soviet oppression and isolation of Yugoslavia in 1948.¹³⁵ A delegation from TV Skopje visited the Shanghai Automobile Factory and was told the story of the Soviet Union withdrawing its experts during the Sino-Soviet split. The head of the delegation replied: “the Soviets did the same to us. We have common enemies, so we are friends.” In an ironic coincidence, the Macedonian editor’s name was Stalin Lozanovski.¹³⁶

Zhao Xingzhi, the then vice-mayor of Shanghai visited Yugoslavia in 1981, and observed in his report that the Yugoslav people were “highly vigilant of Soviet expansionist ambitions.” Zhao described the Belgrade “on-call command centre” which could “mobilise all citizens within ten minutes in emergency” as an example of

¹³⁴ While China and the USSR had been fiercely attacking each other in propaganda and even had periods of armed confrontation since the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, Yugoslavia maintained normalised relations with the Soviet Union since 1955. Nonetheless, the common rejection of the 1968 Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia was a crucial factor bringing China and Yugoslavia back on friendly terms.

¹³⁵ SMA, B243-4-20-53, 上海市高等教育局关于接待南斯拉夫教育代表团情况的汇报 [Report on the Reception of the Yugoslav Educational Delegation by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Higher Education].

¹³⁶ SMA, B285-2-884-17, 上海市广播事业局办公室编印《外事简报》1979年第24期 [FAB, No. 24 (1979), Compiled and Printed by the Office of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Broadcasting]

Yugoslavia's vigilance. He noticed that the Yugoslav side criticised the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and voiced their discontent with the Soviet domination of Eastern European countries. To prove the last point, he quoted an anti-Soviet political joke told by his host in Zagreb.¹³⁷

Of particular curiosity to the Chinese side was the fact that Yugoslavs had never called the Soviet Union "Big Brother" as the Chinese used to do before the Sino-Soviet split. Various reports mentioned a quote that had allegedly originated from Tito: "One can choose one's friends and comrades, but not brothers. In a brotherly relationship there are always a big brother and a little brother."¹³⁸

In contrast, the mentions of vigilance against the US and the West in general were noticeably rare in those reports. One Yugoslav official did warn his Chinese hosts that caution should be exercised while cooperating with capitalist states. However, this was more of a warning against defrauding when pursuing cooperation, rather than an expression of a concern about the geopolitical threat.¹³⁹

3.4 China's Fascination with Yugoslavia

Aside from the earnest friendliness and intense curiosity displayed by the Yugoslav people, Chinese visitors – even though coming from Shanghai, China's economically most developed area – were awestruck by Yugoslavia's advanced development. Xu described at length Yugoslavia's achievements in civil engineering and urban construction, transport infrastructure development, and the highly developed tourism

¹³⁷ SMA, B1-8-131-1. The joke was as follows: In Poland the churches are full of people and there are long queues in front of shops. Polish authorities have failed to solve these problems until a new leader makes three new commands: open the western border; close the eastern border; hang portraits of Brezhnev on all walls of the churches.

¹³⁸ SMA, C1-4-202-18. 南斯拉夫马其顿共和国《劳动报》总编西莫·伊凡诺夫斯基在外地活动概况 [Overview of the Activities in Other Parts of China by Simo Ivanovski, Editor-in-Chief of *Trudbenik*, Socialist Republic of Macedonia, Yugoslavia]. The quotation also appeared in SMA, B172-7-136-5.

¹³⁹ SMA, B32-2-196-49. 关于接待南斯拉夫科技合作代表团的情况简报（外经工作情况第五期） [Briefing on the Reception of the Yugoslav Delegation for Scientific and Technological Cooperation (Foreign Economic Work Bulletin, No. 5)].

industry. The population's high living standard was depicted in detail: Yugoslavia was a country where private cars, refrigerators and TV sets were accessible to most people, and where one did not need ration coupons for grocery shopping.¹⁴⁰ The contrast with China was drastic: in the late 1970s, private cars and electronic appliances that were common in Yugoslavia, were extremely rare in Chinese households. Moreover, there was a rationing system for foodstuff, cloth and other household stuff in China, which required buyers to provide the corresponding coupons in addition to paying with money.¹⁴¹

At the same time, Yugoslavia was plagued by inflation, foreign debt, and unemployment, and would face deeper economic crises in the 1980s. However, almost no internal reports between 1977 and 1981 mentioned Yugoslavia's economic difficulties. The only exception was Zhao's report in 1981, but he used merely two sentences in the very last page to cover the negative aspect and immediately followed it up with mentioning Yugoslavia's efforts to stabilise the economy.¹⁴²

Chinese visitors were further amazed by Yugoslavia's political stability, or at least the impression thereof. Both Xu and Zhao's reports described Yugoslav people's "love and respect" for Tito, and Zhao who visited Yugoslavia one year after Tito's death noted that "Yugoslav people's resolve to continue Tito's work and follow Tito's path is unshakeable."¹⁴³ Xu's report mentioned a level of democracy and tolerance that was atypical for a country ruled by a Communist party. He noted that the LCY and the government were separate in Yugoslav politics, and that LCY members did not enjoy special privileges. The Shanghai ensemble was surprised when the mayor of Tuzla, a town in Bosnia and Herzegovina, arrived on foot to greet them. Furthermore, Xu noted that political opponents to Tito's leadership had not been purged with the same

¹⁴⁰ SMA, B172-7-136-5.

¹⁴¹ (郎友兴 [Lang Youxing] 1997).

¹⁴² SMA, B1-8-131-1.

¹⁴³ SMA, B1-8-131-1.

ruthlessness as in other socialist states. As an example, he mentioned that Aleksandar Ranković, a former vice president and security and intelligence czar, who had a fallout with Tito in the 1960s, was still allowed to live a comfortable life, and despite the political disagreements, his role and legacy were not erased from the historical accounts of Yugoslavia's revolution.¹⁴⁴

With today's hindsight, the most extraordinary observation that Chinese visitors made concerned the relations between Yugoslavia's ethnic groups. Xu described that Yugoslavia had solved the "long-lasting national question" relatively well, so that "external enemies were unable to abuse it and provoke problems".¹⁴⁵ Chinese visitors did not report on any current inter-ethnic or inter-republican tensions, nor did they dedicate space in their reports to the historical background of the "long-lasting national question." Even in 1981, as Yugoslavia was shaken by the protests in Kosovo, Zhao's report neither detailed the grievances of the ethnic Albanian protestors nor depicted a general picture of inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo, but only noted that Yugoslavia believed the "Kosovo Incident" had a Soviet and Albanian (referring to the Hoxha-ruled country, not the ethnic group in Kosovo) background.¹⁴⁶ These observations would turn out to be far off the mark, as in the 1980s Yugoslavia experienced series of economic and political crises, before finally breaking up along ethnic lines in a series of bloody wars in the 1990s.¹⁴⁷

Why did the Chinese visitors to Yugoslavia from 1977 to 1981 appear mostly oblivious of Yugoslavia's actual economic conditions and social tensions? It is possible that they actually did notice problems in Yugoslavia and chose not to write them down in order not to ruin Yugoslavia's image in an era of heightened Sino-Yugoslav friendship. However, was it necessary to do so even in internal reports? A more likely

¹⁴⁴ SMA, B172-7-136-5.

¹⁴⁵ SMA, B172-7-136-5.

¹⁴⁶ SMA, B1-8-131-1

¹⁴⁷ The history of Yugoslavia's crises in the 1980s and its violent break-up in the early 1990s can be found in (Calic 2019), 249-31; (Ramet 1992), 176-224; (Cohen and Dragović-Soso 2007).

explanation is that it was simply impossible for them to see Yugoslavia more extensively or independently during the short period of their visits. It was thus easy to overlook the less appealing side of Yugoslavia, as they were overwhelmed by the hosts' warmth and hospitality. After all, for the most part, their visits were carefully organised and curated, as the Yugoslav hosts strived to leave Chinese visitors with a positive image of Yugoslavia. However, we cannot attribute Chinese visitors' overly positive impression of Yugoslavia to any act of Yugoslavs' covering up their problems, since quite a few Yugoslavs candidly talked about their own troubles, as we shall see in a later section.

3.5 Mushrooms and Puppets: Drawing Lessons from Yugoslav Comrades

Excited with the sight of a prosperous and seemingly well-governed country, Chinese visitors delved deeper into the causes of Yugoslavia's apparent success, believing that there were "many things we can draw lessons from." Xu, for instance, identified the use of foreign capital, decentralisation of economic decision-making powers, and the principle of distribution according to work (in contrast to absolute egalitarianism) as crucial factors that have led to Yugoslavia's economic boom.¹⁴⁸ Zhao praised Yugoslavia's "fact-based approach" in socialist construction and the concept of "combining people's long-term and current interests".¹⁴⁹

The intention to learn from Yugoslavia was even more evident in the "Reception Programmes" issued by Chinese institutions that received foreign visitors. Besides information about visitors and logistics, the programmes also pointed out objectives to be achieved and established conduct guidelines. Usually, these guidelines dictated that the reception should be "warm and friendly" and that the hosts should "exhibit the

¹⁴⁸ SMA, B172-7-136-5.

¹⁴⁹ SMA, B1-8-131-1.

excellent state of affairs” (宣传大好形势) , with the exact phrases varied. However, the reception programmes for Yugoslav visitors sometimes also spoke about learning from Yugoslavia. While they generally used the short phrase on “learning from each other”¹⁵⁰, in some cases they were more detailed instructions, for example, when the Communist Youth League (CYL) Shanghai Municipal Committee wrote in a “Reception Programme for the delegation of *Narodna tehnika*”¹⁵¹ that the hosts should “pay attention to [the Yugoslav organisation’s] positive experience in mobilising and organising youth activities in science and technology.”¹⁵² A “reception programme” made by the Shanghai Bureau of Agriculture in 1979 noted that “there are things for us to learn from [the Yugoslav Autonomous Province of] Vojvodina in terms of economic construction and management systems.”¹⁵³ There was a surprising level of candour and openness in talking about China’s problems with the Yugoslav side. Many “reception programmes” contained guidelines to “talk about achievements, as well as problems and difficulties” (that the Chinese institutions faced in their work).¹⁵⁴ “Seek truth from facts”, the slogan of Deng Xiaoping’s reforms which implied facing one’s problems honestly, was frequently invoked.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ E.g., SMA, B243-4-236-42, 上海市高等教育局关于接待南斯拉夫“萨格勒布电影资料馆-16”代表团的计划 [Reception Programme by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Higher Education for the Filмотека 16 Delegation from Zagreb, Yugoslavia].

¹⁵¹ *Narodna tehnika* was a Yugoslav institution that promoted amateur cultural and scientific activities. The name of this Yugoslav institution has been translated into English as “People’s Technics” clubs or National Technical Organisation in various literature.

¹⁵² SMA, C21-5-43-22, 共青团上海市委关于接待南斯拉夫“人民技术”联合会代表团的计划 [Reception Programme by the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Communist Youth League for the Delegation of the *Narodna tehnika* Federation from Yugoslavia].

¹⁵³ SMA, B45-8-115-1, 上海市农业局革命委员会关于接待南斯拉夫伏依伏丁那自治省执行委员会克梅集奇一行的请示 [Request from the Revolutionary Committee of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Agriculture Regarding the Reception of the Delegation Led by Kmezić from the Executive Council of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Yugoslavia].

¹⁵⁴ SMA, C1-4-205-2, 上海市总工会国际联络部关于接待南斯拉夫工会报告员计划的请示 [Request from the ILD of the SFTU Regarding the Reception Programme for the Yugoslav Trade Union Rapporteur]. SMA, C1-4-596-3. 上海市总工会国际联络部接待南斯拉夫工会报告员计划 [Reception Programme by the ILD of the SFTU for the Yugoslav Trade Union Rapporteur].

¹⁵⁵ SMA, C1-4-596-3.

In fact, there is evidence that the instructions on learning lessons and being honest came from the central authorities. In a “reception programme” made by the CYL Shanghai Committee, it was mentioned that the CYL Central Committee demanded the hosts to “seek truth from facts” and to present both achievements and “shortcomings in their work”.¹⁵⁶ The assessment of Vojvodina came from the higher authority of the Shanghai Bureau of Agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.¹⁵⁷ The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) also frequently reminded the local hosts of Yugoslav guests to “avoid chauvinism”.¹⁵⁸ An official from the ACFTU explicitly told that the Shanghai branch that the good relations between China and Yugoslavia meant that conversations should be more “intimate and cordial”, and criticised a trade union branch in another city for only telling Yugoslav guests about their achievements, while not discussing challenges.¹⁵⁹

The eagerness and openness of the Chinese side to learn from Yugoslavia prompted their guests to share their experiences and lessons in great details, which were then recorded in reports compiled by the Chinese hosts. The “lectures” given by the Yugoslav counterparts tended to include a brief account of Yugoslavia’s modern history and an overview of the self-management system, which was likely done at the request of their hosts. Thus, sometimes their conversations might appear unusually political and theoretical for what had been envisioned as a working exchange between professionals who were not Party workers or Marxist theorists.

A good example of practical conversations taking a heavy theoretical turn was

¹⁵⁶ SMA, C21-5-249-89, 共青团上海市委关于接待南斯拉夫少先队工作者代表团的计划 [Reception Programme by the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Communist Youth League for the Delegation of Workers from the Union of Pioneers of Yugoslavia].

¹⁵⁷ SMA, B45-8-115-1.

¹⁵⁸ SMA, C1-4-205-12, 中华全国总工会国际联络部接待南斯拉夫工会报告员计划 [Reception Programme by the ILD of the ACFTU for the Yugoslav Trade Union Rapporteur]. SMA, C1-4-596-9, 中华全国总工会国际联络部接待南斯拉夫工会报告员计划 [Reception Programme by the ILD of the ACFTU for the Yugoslav Trade Union Rapporteur].

¹⁵⁹ SMA, C1-4-202-18.

when Yugoslav tourism operators and officials participated in a colloquial with their colleagues in Shanghai in November 1980 and they explained to their Chinese audience that:

“In 1950 Yugoslavia introduced ‘workers’ self-management’ and changed state ownership of the means of production to social ownership. It is neither state ownership, nor collective ownership. The means of production belongs to the entire society and is owned by all the working people.”¹⁶⁰

Besides the historical and theoretical part of the talk, Yugoslav visitors also talked about specific technical aspects of their profession or expertise. Members of the same group of representatives of Yugoslavia’s tourism sector thus talked about the practicalities of managing tourism business, the allocation of income within the industry, the construction of hotels and the arrangement of homestays. They explained that in Yugoslavia, tourist agencies were in a “socialist competition” with each other, and the Community of Tourism Organisations of Yugoslavia was responsible to make adjustments and resolve their conflicts.¹⁶¹

In separate visits to China, a delegation of the Yugoslav Federal Committee for Agriculture and Dušan Ferluga, a Slovenian expert on mushroom processing both told their Chinese counterparts that agricultural research institutions in Yugoslavia received little to no funding from the state and generated its income from contracts with production companies on research projects. Ferluga encouraged Chinese agricultural companies to introduce foreign technologies by saying that Yugoslavia did the same thing and witnessed changes within four years.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ SMA, B50-6-118-67, 上海机关事务管理局 1980 年 11 月 21 日在上海大厦 17 楼与南斯拉夫旅游代表团（17 人）举行座谈的报告 [Report on the Meeting between the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Government Offices Administration and the Yugoslav Tourism Delegation (17 People) Held on the 17th Floor of the Shanghai Mansion on 21 November 1980.].

¹⁶¹ SMA, B50-6-118-67.

¹⁶² SMA, B45-8-23-33, 上海市农业局编印的《接待南斯拉夫农业委员会代表团的情况简报》 [Briefing on the Reception of the Delegation from the Committee for Agriculture of Yugoslavia, Compiled and Printed by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Agriculture]. SMA, B45-8-23-6, 上海市农业局编印的《接待南斯拉夫蘑菇专家的情况简报》 [Briefing on the Reception of the Mushroom

A delegation of puppet theatres from Belgrade and Niš explained in painstaking details not only the techniques and performances of Yugoslav puppetry, but also the management and organisation of puppet theatres in Yugoslavia. Among other things, they mentioned that there were heated arguments over choice of screenplays and actors, since such choices concerned conflicting private interests; that wage structure was determined through collective discussions of all theatre employees; that some directors, designers, composers, and even actors were freelancing, and were well-paid for their service by theatres; that managers played crucial role in the theatres, motivating the staff and connecting theatres to the outside world, and they would be dismissed if their work was poor.¹⁶³ The TV Skopje delegation led by Stalin Lozanovski explained similar rules regarding factory directors in Yugoslavia: the employees elected a director for a four-year term, and might re-elect the director for another four years if he or she was exceptionally good, but the director was not allowed to be chosen for a third term, regardless of his or her performance and popularity.¹⁶⁴

In general, those visiting Yugoslav officials and experts depicted a Yugoslavia with certain features: the republics and provinces had a relatively high degree of autonomy, the political-administrative apparatus had a relaxed control over the economy and professional work, the use of foreign capital and technology was widespread and deemed crucial for achieving progress, and both competition and democracy existed in some form at the workplace. Most of these features were new and perhaps appeared shocking to some of the Chinese counterparts, since China in the late 1970s was still based on Stalinist orthodoxy of command economy. At the same time, the professional, specialised, and sometimes technical details of the Yugoslav participants' accounts were

Expert from Yugoslavia, Compiled and Printed by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Agriculture].

¹⁶³ SMA, B172-7-154-15, 上海市文化局关于接待南斯拉夫木偶艺术考察小组的报告 [Report by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Culture on the Reception of the Yugoslav Puppetry Study Delegation].

¹⁶⁴ SMA, B285-2-884-22, 广播事业局国际联络部编印《广播局外事简报》1979 年第 19 号 [FAB of the Central Bureau of Broadcasting Administration, No. 19 (1979), Compiled and Printed by the ILD of the Central Bureau of Broadcasting Administration].

thought-provoking in their own right and likely aroused significant interest from the Chinese side. These interactions added concreteness to the vague idea of “learning from Yugoslavia” and the abstract notion of the “Yugoslav way.”

3.6 Attitudes of the Yugoslavs: To Be or Not to Be (Teachers)

How did Yugoslav interlocutors respond when the Chinese side adopted a modest stance, openly acknowledging China’s problems, showing eagerness to learn from Yugoslavia’s experience? In most cases, the Yugoslavs also responded in fairly humble and cordial manner. Most Yugoslavs would express something to the effect of “We are not teachers but students”, a phrase uttered by the above-mentioned tourism delegation that participated in a colloquium in 1980.¹⁶⁵ Some Yugoslav participants in the exchanges, including the well-known opera singer Radmila Bakočević, declared that there were many things to be learned from China, too.¹⁶⁶ Some expressed interest in, for instance, experiences of Chinese institutions due to the sheer organisational capacity needed for the size of China.¹⁶⁷ However, in most documents, the Chinese side did not specifically record what “precious lessons from China” the Yugoslavs had in mind. It is possible that to some extent, the expression of intent to learn from China was simply courteous platitude of the Yugoslavs.

One significant exception is the remark of Vinko Hafner, the president of the League of Trade Unions of Slovenia, who listed the “lessons” that interested him personally: the refinement of the Party’s leadership (in enterprises), having workers’

¹⁶⁵ SMA, B50-6-118-67.

¹⁶⁶ SMA, B172-7-286-13, 上海市文化局党委办公室编印《文化简报》外事情况（第36期）1980年12月12日——南斯拉夫女歌唱家、钢琴家访沪情况 [Cultural Briefing – Foreign Affairs Section, No. 36 (12 December 1980): Visit to Shanghai by Yugoslav Female Singer and Pianist, Compiled and Printed by the Party Committee Office of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Culture].

¹⁶⁷ SMA, C1-4-552-33, 上海市总工会国际联络部编印《外事情况简报》1981年第4期 [FAB, No. 4 (1981), Compiled and Printed by the ILD of the SFTU]. SMA, C1-4-552-46, 中华全国总工会国际联络部编印《外事情况简报》1981年第11期 [FAB, No. 11 (1981), Compiled and Printed by the ILD of the ACFTU].

Congress in enterprises, expansion of enterprise powers, enterprises' disposal of total income and the wage system. These points were very similar to what the Chinese side was interested in learning from Yugoslavia as well. However, more details on why those issues interested Hafner were not mentioned in the internal report made by the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU), leaving us with limited understanding of the nature of his interest to learn from China.¹⁶⁸

Other Yugoslavs put more emphasis on the “not being teachers” part. While introducing Yugoslavia's workers' self-management to his Chinese hosts, Simo Ivanovski, the editor-in-chief of the Macedonian newspaper *Trudbenik (Labourer)*, stated in earnest:

“We don't consider this system flawless, nor is it the sole path of socialism. [...] Workers' self-management is practiced under the specific circumstances of Yugoslavia. You have your own circumstances, so you should not copy our system. It would be best to come to our country to observe it on the spot, in order to see which part is beneficial to you and which is not.”¹⁶⁹

While Yugoslav institutions cautiously made arrangements to show only the highlights from Yugoslavia, individually the Yugoslav individual participants involved in Sino-Yugoslav exchanges often displayed a great amount of honesty and nuance in discussions about their country. Sometimes, this appeared as a display of humility. For example, Ivan Šenk, the vice-director of Yugoslavia's Federal Bureau for International Scientific, Educational, Cultural and Technical Cooperation “repeatedly” expressed that Yugoslavia was only a “small country” and a “mid-level developed country”.¹⁷⁰

In many other cases, however, the Yugoslavs pointed to concrete problems their country experienced. A delegation of the Yugoslav Conference for Women's Social

¹⁶⁸ SMA, C1-4-596-21, 上海市总工会国际联络部编印《外事情况简报》1981年第31期 [FAB, No. 31 (1981), Compiled and Printed by the ILD of the SFTU].

¹⁶⁹ SMA, C1-4-202-21, 上海市总工会国际联络部编印《外事情况简报》1979年第20期 [FAB, No. 20 (1979), Compiled and Printed by the ILD of the SFTU].

¹⁷⁰ SMA, B32-2-196-49.

Position Affairs informed their Chinese hosts that women in Yugoslavia also suffered from heavy load of housework and difficulties in finding employment. They singled out employment, childcare and housing as three areas in which Yugoslav women were experiencing the greatest challenges. The delegates also noted, with a touch of wry observation, that the widespread ownership of television sets had made it harder to engage women in organisational meetings, as many no longer wished to attend.¹⁷¹

In addition to social and economic problems, some officials from the Confederation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia (SSJ) also did not avoid talking about political issues. Ante Budimir, the president of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Bosnia and Herzegovina who visited China in 1979, mentioned that in Yugoslavia there were also opponents to socialist self-management and the LCY.¹⁷² Mika Špiljak, a prominent politician in Croatia and Yugoslavia in the 1980s, visited China as the president of the SSJ in 1980. He told the Chinese hosts that some Yugoslav cadres wanted to roll back reforms due to their fear of “the political problem of widening inequality” and “that was what happened in Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1970s,” apparently referring to the conservative backlash within the Yugoslav leadership after the suppression of the Croatian Spring in 1971.¹⁷³

In 1981, two high-ranking officials in the SSJ, Vinko Hafner and Rade Galeb, in separate visits to China gave extensive accounts of Yugoslavia’s problems to their Chinese hosts. They reported major problems in Yugoslav economy and finance, including instability, high inflation and budget deficit, with foreign debts “on the brink of a crisis.” They openly admitted that the economic difficulties were primarily caused by “their own” (that is, the Yugoslav authorities’) “mistakes in work.” However, they

¹⁷¹ SMA, C31-6-30-178, 上海市妇女联合会联络部关于南斯拉夫妇女社会地位问题代表团在沪活动的简报 [Briefing by the Liaison Department of the Shanghai Women’s Federation on the Activities in Shanghai of the Yugoslav Delegation on Women’s Social Position].

¹⁷² SMA, C1-4-205-27, 中华全国总工会国际联络部编印《外事情况简报》1979 年第 50 期 [FAB, No. 50 (1979), Compiled and Printed by the ILD of the ACFTU].

¹⁷³ SMA, C1-4-330-27, 中华全国总工会国际部编印《外事情况简报》1980 年第 4 期 [FAB, No. 4 (1980), Compiled and Printed by the ILD of the ACFTU].

were adamant about the correctness of the self-management system, rejecting the claims from “within and outside Yugoslavia” that those problems were caused by Yugoslavia’s political system. Vinko Hafner, who was from the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, stressed that bottom-up planning was much better than top-down planning. He also claimed that strikes were even less frequent than before.¹⁷⁴

While the Yugoslav officials were rather candidly confiding to their Chinese comrades about Yugoslavia’s economic difficulties, they were not so forthright in recognising Yugoslavia’s most sensitive issue of inter-ethnic tensions. With regards to the protests in Kosovo that had taken place that year, Rade Galeb, an ethnic Serb from the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, described them as an “isolated incident”, claiming that the local population did not support the protests and that all ethnic groups in Yugoslavia “were determined to maintain national independence and territorial integrity.” He called the events in Kosovo as part of a broader “anti-Yugoslav strategy of certain people in foreign countries.” Notably, he also commended Chinese newspapers for their “completely objective reporting” on the matter “based on internal communications from Yugoslavia”.¹⁷⁵

In addition to their modesty, another notable aspect of the behaviour of the Yugoslav visiting delegation members was their praise of China. Many visitors, including the geologist Ivan Jurković during his visit in 1977, not only cited struggle against Fascism during World War II as a link between the two countries, but also spoke highly of China’s rebuilding “a war-torn country into a strong one in only 30 years”.¹⁷⁶

Notably, however, Chinese hosting institutions recorded quite a few instances of Yugoslav delegation members initially regarding China as a backward country and then changing their mind in the course of their visits. For example, the well-known Slovenian journalist Jože Hudeček from TV Ljubljana during a visit to Shanghai in

¹⁷⁴ SMA, C1-4-596-21.

¹⁷⁵ SMA, C1-4-552-46.

¹⁷⁶ SMA, B246-3-478-13

1980 told the hosts that what he saw in China was “completely different from what he had heard outside of China,” believing that China did not do enough to promote itself internationally.¹⁷⁷

Some remarks made by Yugoslavs at the start of their visits might have been difficult for the Chinese side to accept. A delegation of the Association for Sports and Recreation of Disabled People of Yugoslavia expressed “incomprehension” of the fact that in China care for disabled people was administered by several institutions and even asked what lessons a previous Chinese delegation had learned from their visits to Yugoslavia. However, the delegation’s critical perception changed after a few days of the visit, as they acknowledged that China, contrary to what they had initially thought, had in fact achieved great results in caring for disabled people.¹⁷⁸

Similarly, Chinese hosts from the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Agriculture wrote in a report that a delegation of the Executive Council of Vojvodina had initially believed that China’s industry and agriculture were backward and had intended the visit mainly as an opportunity to promote the sale of Yugoslav products to China. After their tour of Shanghai, the Yugoslavs reflected that their previous assessment of China’s level of development was inaccurate and acknowledged that the two countries could have “mutual exchanges in many areas” as equals. The Vojvodina delegation also praised the cleanness of the clothes worn by people in Shanghai and called it a mark of “good upbringing and morality of Chinese people”.¹⁷⁹ Although such a remark is eerily similar to a colonialist discourse that frames level of personal hygiene and appearance

¹⁷⁷ SMA, B167-5-315-45. 上海市出版局办公室关于接待南斯拉夫“评论之友”友好访华团的小结 [Summary Report by the Office of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Press and Publication on the Reception of the Friendly Delegation from the “Friends of *Revija*” Association of Yugoslavia].

¹⁷⁸ SMA, B127-6-394-45, 接待南斯拉夫联邦残疾人体育娱乐联合会代表团小结 [Summary Report on the Reception of the Delegation from the Federal Association for Sports and Recreation of Disabled People of Yugoslavia].

¹⁷⁹ SMA, B45-8-115-18, 上海市农业局编印的《接待南斯拉夫伏伊伏丁那自治省执委会代表团的情况简报》 [Briefing on the Reception of the Delegation from the Executive Council of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Compiled and Printed by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Agriculture].

as measures of being civilised, it was apparently well received by the Chinese hosts.

Even though most Yugoslavs rejected to be called “teachers”, some were more comfortable giving advice to their Chinese interlocutors than others. The 1979 educational delegation headed by Dušan Šinigoj suggested to their hosts that more technical and professional secondary-level schools should be established and primary schools should be longer than five years. Their Chinese counterparts considered their advice “sincere” and “worthy of a serious study.”¹⁸⁰

While some Yugoslavs gave the Chinese side advice as peers, in a manner that befit an equal and comradely relationship, some other interactions resembled a teacher-pupil relationship. For example, a Yugoslav cultural delegation led by Mirko Miloradović, an accomplished writer and director of the People’s Theatre, told their Chinese hosts to keep their own character when learning from other countries, Yugoslavia included. Their somewhat blunt comments explicitly asserted that the Chinese practice in the past had been erroneous: “The shortcoming in your past was blindly copying the Soviet system. [...] We did not do that.”¹⁸¹ After the actor Bata Živojinović heard that in China whether a director directed films or not, or whether an actor acted in one or three films would not affect their income, he instantly questioned: “How on earth is that ‘To each according to his contribution’?” The abruptness of his question seemingly alerted his colleague in the delegation, Hajrudin Krvavac, the director of *Walter Defends Sarajevo*, who quickly tried to calm the situation down, by conceding that there were “problems in Yugoslavia’s system as well.”¹⁸²

Sometimes the Yugoslavs’ critiques were rather extreme and borderline undiplomatic. When the educational delegation headed by Dušan Šinigoj in 1979 heard

¹⁸⁰ SMA, B243-4-20-53.

¹⁸¹ SMA, B172-7-286-47,上海市文化局党委办公室编印《文化简报》外事情况（第37期）1980年12月18日——南斯拉夫政府文化代表团情况 [Cultural Briefing – Foreign Affairs Section, No. 37 (18 December 1980): Report on the Yugoslav Government Cultural Delegation, Compiled and Printed by the Party Committee Office of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Culture].

¹⁸² SMA, B177-4-752-22.

that students at a Chinese technical school were not allowed to receive any income from the sale of the products they made in the school-affiliated factory, the delegation members called the practice “an intolerable act of exploitation.”¹⁸³ Mika Špiljak, the president of the SSJ, sharp criticised the trade union at a Chinese factory for failing to control the level of noise at a cotton weaving workshop. He said: “Normally, trade unions must not tolerate this situation. The trade unions must fight against this.” Furthermore, he said that had workers in Europe faced such noisy working conditions, trade unions would have led strikes.¹⁸⁴ Those critiques were remarkable not only for their bluntness, but also because they struck at some of the core issues of socialist politics: the distribution system and workers’ rights. Essentially, Yugoslavs were criticising certain Chinese practices for violating the principles of socialism. The fact that those critiques were uttered and recorded demonstrated the extraordinary open nature of Sino-Yugoslav relations in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

As forthright as the above quoted comments were, they were still well-intentioned, out of a genuine desire of the Yugoslavs to discuss with the Chinese side about, or alternatively, to teach the Chinese, what a socialist society should be like. However, on very rare occasions, some comments that were recorded in the Chinese reports seemed to represent a snobbish attitude by the Yugoslavs. Dušan Ferluga, the mushroom expert was so angry about bikes and other vehicles obstructing the traffic in Shanghai, that he told the Chinese host: “If I were to drive the car, I would have surely hit that vehicle! Yugoslav police would have punished them.”¹⁸⁵ In June 1978, during a visit to the Shanghai Yimin No. 1 Food Factory, one of the largest food factories in China at the time, Sokolj Nimani, the assistant president of the Yugoslav Federal Committee for

¹⁸³ SMA, B243-4-20-34, 上海市高等教育局关于接待南斯拉夫教育代表团的计划 [Reception Programme by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Higher Education for the Yugoslav Education Delegation].

¹⁸⁴ SMA, C1-4-330-19. 上海市总工会国际联络部编印《外事情况简报》1980 年第 3 期 [FAB, No. 3 (1980), Compiled and Printed by the ILD of the SFTU].

¹⁸⁵ SMA, B45-8-23-6,

Agriculture, criticised the hygiene condition and remarked that in Yugoslavia, such an old and small factory would have been demolished a long time ago. Realising that he may have gone too far, he then asked the interpreter not to translate this sentence. However, the interpreter (from the Chinese institution) did translate both the brash comment about the factory and the remark, and as a result, we can still read the words “do not translate this” in the Chinese report.¹⁸⁶ Judging from the tone of the reports, such unfriendly remarks made the Chinese hosts uncomfortable and angry. Still, it should be stressed that those incidents were very rare in Sino-Yugoslav interactions and had no significant consequences.

3.7 Chinese Reflection of Yugoslavia's Lessons

As seen in the examples discussed throughout this chapter, the Chinese side in Sino-Yugoslav interactions was eager to learn from Yugoslavia's experiences. How did the Chinese participants in these exchanges, then, perceive the lessons offered by the Yugoslav counterparts actually shared their experiences? The majority of the reports only noted down the speeches and activities of the Yugoslavs and did not mention the reactions of the Chinese participants. However, some exceptions exist. For instance, over the course of several visits to Shanghai by different delegations of SSJ representatives, they were invited to deliver lectures on Yugoslavia's experiences to Chinese party and trade union cadres and representatives of workers. The reports of those lectures provide a nuanced picture of the impressions they made. For example, the Chinese audience praised Vinko Hafner's lectures for their lively Q&A format and for the fact that Hafner linked Yugoslavia's experiences to the situation in China.¹⁸⁷ Regarding the contents of the lectures by Ante Budimir, the audience was most interested in four aspects: (1) the decision-making power of Yugoslav workers in the enterprises and the processes of democratic consultations; (2) Yugoslavia's cadre policy

¹⁸⁶ SMA, B45-8-23-33.

¹⁸⁷ SMA, C1-4-596-21.

and workers' recruitment and dismissal policy that was perceived as motivating both cadres and workers to work hard; (3) the fact that the LCY was not in charge of everything; (4) the fact that trade unions in Yugoslavia had genuine powers and were protected by laws.¹⁸⁸

In the discussion after a lecture by Budimir, cadre trainees at the Cadre School for All-China Federation of Trade Unions expressed "strong wishes" to learn from Yugoslavia in those three aspects: trade unions should become "worker's homes"; trade unions should work independently and with its own responsibility; the experiment to expand the decision-making power of enterprises should be sped up; Party committees should truly stick to Party lines, principles and policies, and not replace the government with the Party.¹⁸⁹ The last suggestion was quite radical, and it corresponded with comments on Budimir's lecture from another discussion by Trade Union cadres in the Putuo District of Shanghai: "in Yugoslavia the trade unions count, in our country the Party committees count."¹⁹⁰ The fact that such comments and suggestions were recorded in the first place, even if they were in internal reports, does indicate a relatively relaxed and even vibrant political atmosphere in China, especially at lower levels.

However, some Chinese audience members had less faith in Yugoslavia's experiences. Some believed that Yugoslav experiences could not be successfully applied in China due to differences in institutions, the legal systems and in particular, different understanding of democracy.¹⁹¹ Others believed that China should look at Yugoslavia's experiences "dialectically" and select the usable parts, but not to copy blindly from Yugoslavia as China did from the Soviet Union in the 1950s. Some thought the most important issue for China's reforms was to embody the leadership of the party,

¹⁸⁸ SMA, C1-4-205-27.

¹⁸⁹ SMA, C1-4-205-27.

¹⁹⁰ SMA, C1-4-205-37. 上海市总工会普陀区办事处关于讨论南斯拉夫安蒂·布迪米尔同志报告的情况反映材料 [Report on the Discussion of the Lecture by Comrade Ante Budimir from Yugoslavia, Compiled by the Putuo District Office of the SFTU.].

¹⁹¹ SMA, C1-4-205-22.

contrary to Yugoslavia, which had abandoned the Party's leadership.¹⁹² Notably, while the (state-level) ACFTU report noted that general consensus of the audience was that Budimir was candid and humble, two out of six cadres in the report from the Putuo district (two levels below the ACFTU) mentioned that the lecturer appeared "not very friendly, humble and warm" for "believing their system was perfect", but unfortunately the report did not record any further details.¹⁹³

3.8 Conclusion

The internal reports writing by representatives of Shanghai institutions provide a fascinating insight into the firsthand accounts of the Sino-Yugoslav mutual visits. These reports show a warmly cordial but also asymmetrical relation from 1977 to 1981, with the Chinese side eager to learn from Yugoslavia's experiences. The interactions between participants of Sino-Yugoslav exchanges were marked by a strong sense of bilateral friendship and comradeship. Both sides experienced and exhibited mutual cordiality and sympathy towards each other. As the Chinese side noted, the Yugoslavs tended to cite the common struggle against Fascism during World War II and the current strained relations with the Soviet Union as evidences of both countries' independence and self-reliance, and thus giving the Sino-Yugoslav friendship both a historical and a current geopolitical angle.

The interactions were also marked by a certain asymmetry that coexisted with the cordial friendship. Chinese visitors to Yugoslavia were fascinated by its economic prosperity, and somewhat ironically considering later events, its political stability. Chinese participants in Sino-Yugoslav interactions were eager to learn from Yugoslavia's experiences. At the Chinese's request, the Yugoslav side not only gave an overview of Yugoslavia's history and socio-political order, but also explained in detail how things functioned in their own discipline or industry. They depicted a country that

¹⁹² SMA, C1-4-205-37.

¹⁹³ SMA, C1-4-205-37.

in various aspects was considerably less tightly controlled and more vibrant than China. In the unbalanced relationship, the Yugoslav participants of Sino-Yugoslav interactions displayed a variety of attitudes, ranging from sincere humility to patronising condescension.

Comparing the internal reports from local-level institutions with the reports appeared in the state media, it is evident that the Chinese officials and professionals who participated in those exchanges were not merely following directives of higher authorities. They experienced and recorded personal and vivid examples of Sino-Yugoslav friendship, documenting their learning experiences. They had their own, professional and sometimes technical interest in Yugoslavia's system, which turned the abstract task of learning the Yugoslav Path into a concrete and specific policy-oriented inquiries.

4 Chinese Economists on Yugoslavia: From Enthusiasm to Disenchantment

4.1 Rediscovery of Yugoslavia

At the turn of 1978 and 1979, a group of economists from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) was visiting Yugoslavia. During their meeting with Yugoslav economists in Belgrade, Ivan Maksimović, a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and Professor of Political Economy at the University of Belgrade, remarked: “Many aspects of our economic reforms were inspired by Sun Yefang, the director of your Institute of Economics.” What followed was an unexpected and almost cinematic moment. The head of the Chinese delegation pointed across the room and said, “Sun Yefang is here.” Taken by surprise, the Yugoslav economists stood up in unison and greeted Sun with enthusiastic handshakes, one after another, visibly moved by the coincidence.¹⁹⁴

Sun Yefang (孙冶方), one of the most renowned and reform-minded economists in post-1949 China, visited Yugoslavia at a time when what might be termed a wave of “Yugomania” (南斯拉夫热) was sweeping through Chinese intellectual and economic circles. This study visit, however, was not the first significant visits by Chinese economists to Yugoslavia following two decades of criticism of the self-management system as revisionist. The Chinese economists’ rediscovery of Yugoslavia had begun just a few months earlier, at a crucial turning point in Sino-Yugoslav relations.

In March 1978, a politically significant delegation of Party Workers of the Communist Party of China had visited Yugoslavia, marking a key moment in the renewal of bilateral ties. Among the twelve members of that CPC delegation were three prominent economists: Yu Guangyuan (who served as the deputy head of the delegation), Luo Yuanzheng (罗元铮), and Su Shaozhi (苏绍智). Although the

¹⁹⁴ (柳红 [Liu Hong] 2010, 285).

delegation's stated purpose was to "investigate Yugoslavia's party, political system, and economy"—in that order—the study report on the visit that they subsequently produced for the Central Committee of the CPC was heavily weighted toward economic analysis. Of the nine chapters in the final report, four of the seven fact-finding chapters, and 17 of its 36 pages, were devoted to detailed examination of Yugoslav economic institutions and practices. Even though economics was officially listed last among the mission's objectives, it clearly emerged as the area of deepest interest.

There main findings can be summarised as follows:¹⁹⁵

Chapter titles	Main topics of each sub-chapter
4. Relations of production in industry	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The means of production are under social ownership. 2. The primary form of economic organisation is the organisation of joint labour (<i>organizacija udruženog rada</i>). 3. Basic organisations of joint labour are managed by workers' councils elected by workers' collectives. 4. Income within a basic organisation is distributed by its workers' council. One part is used for expanded reproduction, reserves and public consumption; the other part is intended for the distribution of personal income. 5. The distribution of personal income follows the

¹⁹⁵ Tongliao Municipal Archives, 1-7-248, 中国共产党党的工作者访问团对南斯拉夫考察的报告 [Report on the Study Visit to Yugoslavia by the Delegation of Party Workers of the Communist Party of China]. This report was located neither in the major archival institutions typically associated with centrally produced materials nor in major cities like Shanghai, on whose archives the dissertation's Chapter Three is primarily based. It was discovered in the local archives of Tongliao, a small city in Inner Mongolia, during a broader trawl through lesser-known local archives across China. It stands out as a rare example of a high-level document accessible at the local level, despite remaining classified elsewhere.

	principle of “to each according to his work”.
5. Relations of production in agriculture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Both social ownership and individual ownership of the means of production exist in Yugoslavia’s countryside, with social ownership dominating the agricultural sector. 2. Yugoslavia promotes the socialist transformation of individual peasants by encouraging cooperation with agricultural-industrial combines (<i>poljoprivredno-industrijski kombinat</i>). 3. Advantages of agricultural-industrial combines. 4. Efforts to counter the “spontaneous tendency” (i.e. the resurgence of capitalist elements) in the countryside.
6. Social planning and market economy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Historical evolvement of Yugoslavia’s planning system. 2. Social planning operates through a bottom-up process, beginning with negotiations at the level of joint labour organisations and gradually progressing to the federal level. 3. Market mechanisms are respected, while their negative effects are mitigated through planning. 4. Prices are established through social contracts. 5. The government monitors economy through the Social Accounting Service (<i>Služba društvenog knjigovodstva</i>).
7. Achievements and problems of Yugoslavia’s	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Historical difficulties: underdevelopment, WWII destruction and post-1948 external

socialist development	<p>pressure.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Industrial and agricultural growth. 3. Significant rise of living standards. 4. Rapid developments of culture, education and healthcare. 5. Yugoslavia's achievements are inseparable from the socialist self-management system. 6. Problems in experimenting the self-management system and efforts to solve them.
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Chapters 4 through 6 presented detailed accounts of the main features of Yugoslavia's economic system. While certain aspects, such as the role of the market, were only superficially touched upon, other sections provided in-depth explanations of several key institutional mechanisms. For example, Subchapter 6.2 outlined the process for concluding self-management agreements across five hierarchical levels from the bottom to the top: within a organisation of associated labour, within a complex organisation of associated labour, among organisations of associated labour with shared interests, at the republic level, and at the federal level. Subchapter 4.3 described in detail how organisations of associated labour recruited managers through public advertisements in newspapers, how the hiring decisions were made through votes by workers' collectives and workers' councils, and how managers could be dismissed by the same councils. Specific details were included, such as the four-year term length for managers and their lack of voting rights within workers' councils. The institutional features documented in the report, including workers' councils, agricultural-industrial combines, bottom-up social planning, and the Social Accounting Service, were all absent in China. Moreover, some of these practices directly contradicted the dogmatic interpretation of Marxism that had dominated Chinese political discourse until the late 1970s. For instance, the principle of "to each according to his work" had been denounced as a manifestation of "bourgeois right" during the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter 7 of the report stated that “in the last 30 years, especially the last several years, Yugoslavia made significant achievements in its socialist development.” It cited numerous statistics to demonstrate the high levels of industrial and agricultural production and the transformation of the country’s economic structure. Notably, the report highlighted improvements in living standards, education, and healthcare as achievements equal in importance to economic growth in industry and agriculture. The final section of the chapter addressed existing problems in Yugoslavia, acknowledging that “problems and mistakes did happen, some of which were serious, especially before the early 1970s.” Among the current issues, the report mentioned, though without elaboration, unemployment and Gastarbeiter, the pace of transforming individual peasants into socialist producers, trade deficits, inflation, and the spread of a bourgeois lifestyle. However, these concerns were quickly followed by a reassuring statement: “The League of Communists are not ignoring those problems, but strive to solve them with measures that suit the interest of the people ... It is the solemn attitude belonging to a proletarian party.”

Based on these positive observations, the report concluded that the LCY was a Marxist-Leninist party. It recommended that the CPC formally restore relations with the LCY in June 1978 and that Hua Guofeng visit Yugoslavia in the second half of that year. Although archival sources detailing the exact process of decision-making at the CPC’s power centre are currently not available to researchers, it is evident that both of these recommendations were subsequently turned into reality by the Chinese leaders. This suggests that the proposals were accepted and implemented within the highest levels of the CPC leadership.

Beyond its significance in reestablishing CPC-LCY relations, the report also drew the attention of the Party leadership during one of the State Council’s “theory-discussion” meetings (务虚会), held between July and September of that year. The term 务虚 is difficult to translate literally; it refers to discussions focused on theoretical or strategic issues, as opposed to 务实, which deals with concrete or practical matters.

This series of meetings revolved on the theme of modernisation and is widely regarded as the starting point of the CPC's shift towards reforming China's economic system.¹⁹⁶ According to Yu Guangyuan, the March 1978 study visit gave rise to the notion that the economic models of socialist states can be diverse. At these “theory-discussion” meetings, Yugoslavia served as a case in point for participants in recognising this diversity.¹⁹⁷

4.2 Yu, Luo and Su: Initial Enthusiasts

It was no accident that the delegation of Party Workers took a particular interest in Yugoslavia's economic system and reported extensively on their observations of it. The presence of three prominent economists, Yu, Luo, and Su, within the delegation helps explain this focus. All three were well-established experts in their respective fields, with long-standing careers in economic research and policy advisory roles.

Yu had a remarkable personal history. After graduating in physics from a top Chinese university in the 1930s, he abandoned a potential career in the natural sciences and redirected his energy toward political activism. He became a leader in student movements and joined the Communist Party. In 1940, he made the arduous journey from Peiping (today's Beijing) to Yan'an, then the centre of the Chinese Communist Revolution, travelling on donkeyback while translating Friedrich Engels' *Dialektik der Natur* from German into Chinese. Once in Yan'an, he continued his work with the Party's youth organisations while also conducting economic research on the communist-controlled areas. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Yu held various influential positions, including vice chairman of the State Science and Technology Commission.

Luo was the first Chinese citizen to earn the Candidate of Economic Sciences

¹⁹⁶ (于光远 [Yu Guangyuan], 1978: 我亲历的那次历史大转折 [The big historical change that I have personally experienced in 1978] 2008).

¹⁹⁷ (柳红 [Liu Hong] 2010, 222).

degree (a qualification equivalent to the PhD in other countries) in the Soviet Union in 1954. Upon his return to China, he worked at the Institute of Economics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).¹⁹⁸ Su, meanwhile, had studied both neoclassical and Keynesian economics in the 1940s, and in the 1950s, he taught political economy at Fudan University.¹⁹⁹

Like most Chinese intellectuals of their generation, Yu, Luo, and Su were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. Yu and Su were branded “reactionary academic authorities,” and all three were sent to the so-called May 7th Cadre Schools in the countryside, where they were subjected to “re-education” through manual labour. Despite the harsh conditions, they survived the political turmoil and were gradually permitted to return to professional life toward the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Between 1974 and 1975, Yu worked in the Political Research Office of the State Council, which was formed to host a group of trusted advisors for Deng Xiaoping in his efforts to counter the ultra-leftist Gang of Four. In the meantime, after Mao Zedong died in 1976, Hua Guofeng and his allies arrested the Gang of Four, and assumed the leadership of the Communist Party. By 1978, all three economists had once again assumed important roles in the country’s academic and political landscape. Yu had become vice-president of the newly founded CASS. Luo had been appointed vice-director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP) at the CASS in June of that year. Su, for his part, was head of the Theoretical Department at the Party organ *People’s Daily*.

As Su would later recall, the CASS, serving in effect as a government think tank, established the Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought “in order to guide practice and provide reform with a theoretical basis.”²⁰⁰ Yu, highly regarded by the

¹⁹⁸ (罗元铮 [Luo Yuanzheng], 中国走向世界的求索 罗元铮文选 [China’s Quest to Step onto the World Stage: Selected Writings of Luo Yuanzheng] 1996, Frontmatter 2).

¹⁹⁹ (蘇紹智 [Su Shaozhi] 1996, 13-19).

²⁰⁰ (Su 1993).

Party leadership, became the institute's founding director. Su would later succeed him in 1982. Yu's influence extended even further: from 1982 to 1992, he served on the Central Advisory Commission of the CPC, a powerful body composed of senior Party elders, charged with providing political counsel and continuity during China's reform era.

Those scholars closely linked to China's forthcoming reform agenda not only re-evaluated Yugoslavia on behalf of the leadership, but also took active steps to disseminate knowledge about the country upon their return from the March 1978 visit. Their enthusiasm did not remain confined to internal reports; they became vocal and visible conduits of information about the Yugoslav model across various platforms.

Yu recounted the delegation's visit in an article titled *I Return from a Visit to Yugoslavia*.²⁰¹ Luo published two articles in 1978, addressing themes such as Yugoslavia's approach to social planning and market economy, as well as Yugoslavia's socialist self-management.²⁰² Su, for his part, examined the creation and distribution of income in socially owned enterprises, offering insights into the functioning of the Yugoslav production sector.²⁰³

In addition to publishing written reflections, the delegation members were frequently invited by Party and state institutions across China to speak about their experiences in Yugoslavia. These lectures served to transmit first-hand impressions to a wider domestic audience hungry for new ideas. Su alone is known to have delivered at least forty such talks. However, only a small portion of these lectures was recorded and subsequently published, limiting our ability to assess their full impact.²⁰⁴ Yu also

²⁰¹ (于光远 [Yu Guangyuan], 最近我从南斯拉夫访问回来 [I Return from a Visit to Yugoslavia] 2015). The article was translated into English as (Yu 2018).

²⁰² (罗元铮 [Luo Yuanzheng], 南斯拉夫的社会计划与市场经济 [Social Planning and the Market Economy in Yugoslavia] 1978). (罗元铮 [Luo Yuanzheng], 南斯拉夫的社会主义自治制度 [The Socialist Self-Management System of Yugoslavia] 1978).

²⁰³ (苏绍智 [Su Shaozhi], 南斯拉夫社会所有制生产部门中收入的形成和分配 [The Formation and Distribution of Income in Yugoslavia's Production Sector under Social Ownership] 1978).

²⁰⁴ Including: (于光远 [Yu Guangyuan], 南斯拉夫的“社会簿记机构” [The "Social Accounting Service" of Yugoslavia] 2015), (于光远 [Yu Guangyuan], 停在 1963 年 7 月 26 日 5 点 17 分的一座

prepared a radio broadcast script for China National Radio, introducing listeners throughout the country to Yugoslavia's economic accomplishments.²⁰⁵

The content of these various writings and lectures was mostly similar to what the delegation had recorded in their official report, but they also revealed a more personal sense of fascination and engagement with multiple aspects of Yugoslav socialism. Yu openly acknowledged that the three-week visit was far too short for them to fully understand many issues, including the exact implications of "social ownership." Despite this limited understanding, the delegation was confident enough to reach the conclusion that Yugoslavia was "undoubtedly" a socialist country.²⁰⁶

Some elements of the Yugoslav system left particularly vivid impressions. Both Yu and Su highlighted the work of the Social Accounting Service as "especially worth mentioning"; Yu even described it as "a very interesting new thing to me."²⁰⁷ According to Yu's *I Return from a Visit to Yugoslavia*, the delegation was struck by the openness of several Yugoslav communists, who candidly admitted that they were still behind West Germany in matters of organising production. Yu praised this attitude as reflecting a "Marxist approach that proceeds from the reality and the mass." Yu also applauded the democratic spirit he encountered in Yugoslav urban governance. One example he cited with admiration was a project in Belgrade, where the city's planning department collected residents' opinions, selected 2,000 responses, printed them with departmental commentary, and then redistributed the material for further feedback. He presented this as an example of democratic engagement that was rare in socialist

大钟 [A Grand Clock that Stopped at 5:17 on 26 July 1963] 2015), (苏绍智 [Su Shaozhi], 南斯拉夫的经济发展与经济制度——南斯拉夫考察见闻 [Economic Development and Economic System of Yugoslavia - Observations from a Study Tour of Yugoslavia] 1978).

²⁰⁵ (于光远 [Yu Guangyuan], 南斯拉夫经济在社会主义道路上迅速发展 2015)

²⁰⁶ (于光远 [Yu Guangyuan], 最近我从南斯拉夫访问回来 [I Return from a Visit to Yugoslavia] 2015, 11).

²⁰⁷ (于光远 [Yu Guangyuan], 南斯拉夫的“社会簿记机构” [The "Social Accounting Service" of Yugoslavia] 2015).

countries.²⁰⁸

The delegation's visit to Skopje, which had been rebuilt after the devastating 1963 earthquake, left an especially deep impression on Yu. He expressed admiration for the speed of post-disaster reconstruction and contrasted it with the protracted delays in completing a metro line project in Beijing, which had dragged on for over eight years.²⁰⁹ He also praised the symbolic preservation of the old railway station building, where the clock had been frozen at 5:17, the moment the earthquake struck. Yu described it as a great "museum," educating the people not only about the earthquake itself, but also the superiority of the socialist self-management system in the reconstruction of "such a beautiful city".²¹⁰

4.3 Institutionalising Studies of Yugoslavia

Yu's efforts to promote a deeper understanding of Yugoslavia's economy were not limited to writing and lecturing. Around the end of summer and the beginning of autumn 1978, he took further initiative by encouraging a younger economist, Jiang Chunze (江春泽), to begin studying Serbo-Croatian and to establish a new academic organisation dedicated to the study of the Yugoslav economic system. Jiang, who had originally specialised in the Soviet economy, was appointed vice director-general of the newly founded Society for Studying Yugoslav Economy in August 1978. While Luo Yuanzheng was formally named as director-general, it was Jiang who effectively managed the organisation's operations.²¹¹

Jiang, together with Zhang Dexiu (张德修), an economist at Peking University

²⁰⁸ (于光远 [Yu Guangyuan], 最近我从南斯拉夫访问回来 [I Return from a Visit to Yugoslavia] 2015, 15-16)

²⁰⁹ Ironically, Yu was apparently unaware of the fact Yugoslavia never constructed a metro system in any of its cities. The Belgrade metro project started in the 1970s and still has not been fully constructed half a century later.

²¹⁰ (于光远 [Yu Guangyuan], 最近我从南斯拉夫访问回来 [I Return from a Visit to Yugoslavia] 2015, 17-18).

²¹¹ (中国经济体制改革研究会 [China Society of Economic Reform] 2018, 483).

who also came from a background of studying Soviet economy and began learning Serbo-Croatian around the same time, immediately set to work on a short introductory book titled *The Economy of Yugoslavia*.²¹² Much like the three senior economists who participated in the March 1978 delegation, Jiang would go on to play a role in shaping policy during China's reform era. By the late 1980s, she held a position of influence as vice director of the Department of Foreign Economic Systems at the State Commission for Restructuring the Economic System, where she contributed to internal research efforts intended to support high-level decision-making. In the early 1990s, she authored numerous internal reports for the central leadership, reflecting the continued relevance of her expertise.

With Yu, Su, and other prominent economists including Huan Xiang (宦乡), Sun Yefang, and Qian Junrui (钱俊瑞) serving as advisors, the Society for Studying Yugoslav Economy experienced swift and energetic growth. By 1982, its membership had risen to over 300 scholars and practitioners. The society became a lively forum for academic exchange: it organised lectures, symposia, and seminars devoted to Yugoslavia's economic system, including two nationwide conferences held in Kunming (1980) and Xingzi (1982).

Beyond hosting events, the society was involved in the compilation, translation, authorship, and publication of a growing body of literature including books, booklets and journals on Yugoslavia. Books that were published under the name of the society included *Yugoslavia*, *Yugoslav Economy and Politics* and *A Glossary of Yugoslav Political and Economic Terms*.²¹³ Members of the society translated, or assisted in the translation of, key texts by Yugoslav leaders and scholars. Among these were Edvard Kardelj's *Contradictions of Social Ownership in Contemporary Socialist Practice*

²¹² (江春泽 张德修 [Jiang Chunze & Zhang Dexiu] 1979).

²¹³ (南斯拉夫经济研究会 [Society for Studying Yugoslav Economy] 1982). (南斯拉夫经济研究会 [Society for Studying Yugoslav Economy] 1983). (南斯拉夫经济研究会 [Society for Studying Yugoslav Economy] 1987).

(*Protivrečnosti društvene svojine u savremenoj socijalističkoj praksi*),²¹⁴ Dragutin V. Marsenić's *The Economic System of Yugoslavia (Privredni sistem Jugoslavije)*,²¹⁵ Petar J. Marković and Dragoljub Č. Simonović's *Agricultural Economics (Ekonomika poljoprivrede)*.²¹⁶ Through these activities, the society emerged as a key platform for scholarly engagement with Yugoslavia's economic model within reform-era China.

This surge in translation activity was accompanied by an ambitious campaign to train new speakers of Serbo-Croatian, often with remarkable urgency. Like Jiang Chunze and Zhang Dexiu, many researchers and professionals who had previously studied Russian were rapidly retrained in Serbo-Croatian. As noted by a Serbo-Croatian instructor dispatched to China, in a report submitted in 1980 to the Committee for Culture, Physical and Technical Culture of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, former Russian-language professors and translators were expected to achieve working proficiency in Serbo-Croatian within a matter of months, on the assumption that the shared Slavic roots would facilitate the transition. She also recounted the strikingly ambitious expectations of Chinese institutions. One student, after only three months of study, was handed Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* in Serbo-Croatian and instructed by his supervisor to translate it into Chinese using nothing but a dictionary, apparently as a test of his progress. The same supervisor, who could not produce even a simple sentence in the language, was nonetheless regarded as an "excellent translator" from Serbo-Croatian to Chinese.²¹⁷ Such episodes, though occasionally absurd, reveal the intensity of China's commitment to linguistic self-reliance and the belief that understanding Yugoslavia's economic system required mastering its language, no matter how quickly.

²¹⁴ (爱德华·卡德尔 [Edvard Kardelj], 公有制在当代实践中的矛盾 [Contradictions of Social Ownership in Contemporary Practice] 1980).

²¹⁵ (马尔塞尼奇 [Dragutin V. Marsenić] 1981).

²¹⁶ (德拉格留博·西蒙诺维奇, 彼德·马科维奇 1982).

²¹⁷ Croatian State Archives (HDA), HR-HAD-2093. RKPFTK, kutija 649, 8522/1, Izvještaj o radu na lektoratu u Pekingu.

The Society for Studying Yugoslav Economy, together with the CASS and other academic institutions, extended invitations to Yugoslav scholars to visit China and deliver lectures on their country's economic system. In October 1979, Ivan Maksimović undertook a twenty-day visit, speaking in several cities across China. His talks addressed key themes such as self-management, social ownership, income distribution, and the relationship between planning and the market. He also offered reflections and suggestions on China's own economic management and potential reform paths. On 27 November 1980, Nikola Uzunov, professor of economics at the University of Skopje, gave a lecture on the nine basic characteristics of Yugoslavia's economic system, along with a candid account of his country's economic challenges. The influential Slovenian politician and diplomat Anton Vratuša visited China in January 1981, contributing further to the exchange of ideas. Notably, Slobodan Unković, a Serbian economist and vice-rector of the University of Belgrade, lectured at Peking University in July 1980.²¹⁸ He would later serve as the ambassador of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to China from 1995 to 2001.

During this period, many Chinese institutions began sending "study delegations" to Yugoslavia in order to gain deeper insights into its political and economic system, management practices, and technological development. The most notable of these was a delegation of economists from the CASS, who visited Yugoslavia and Romania between November 1978 and January 1979. They spent thirty-six days in Yugoslavia, travelling through every republic and autonomous province, closely observing the country's institutions and economic practices. It was during this visit that the dramatic encounter between Sun Yefang and Ivan Maksimović, recounted at the beginning of this chapter, took place.

The delegation focused its investigation on several key areas: agriculture, enterprise management, the relationship between planning and market mechanisms, the

²¹⁸ (本刊通讯员 [This journal's correspondent] 1980).

balance between accumulation and consumption, and the institutional study of economics, including the training of economic management cadres. Compared to the March 1978 delegation, they were able to observe a wider range of phenomena and with greater detail. For instance, they noted the “internal price” system used among basic organisations of joint labour, and the coexistence of multiple theoretical schools within Yugoslav economic scholarship.

The delegation expressed high regard for many aspects of Yugoslavia’s economy and reported being “deeply moved by the achievements of the two countries.” In particular, they found Yugoslavia’s method of planning through contractual agreements especially instructive for Chinese economists seeking to understand the compatibility of planning and market mechanisms. They argued that once the relationships between suppliers, producers, and consumers were governed by binding contracts, as was the case in Yugoslavia, planning and the market no longer appeared mutually contradictory. This represented a significant departure from views previously dominant in Chinese economic thought. At the same time, the delegation cautioned that China could not directly replicate Yugoslavia’s model of high accumulation and high consumption, as the two countries differed fundamentally in levels of productivity.²¹⁹

In general, the CASS delegation extended and deepened the work begun by the economists of the March 1978 visit, contributing to a more systematic understanding of the Yugoslav experience within China’s emerging reform discourse. Together, the Society for Studying Yugoslav Economy, the CASS, and other institutions came to serve not only as centres of research, but also as bridges of language and understanding between two socialist worlds.

²¹⁹ (中国社会科学院经济学家考察团 [Delegation of economists from the CASS] 1979).

4.4 Chinese Understanding of the Basics of Self-management

On the fundamental characteristics of Yugoslavia's economic system, the writings of Liu Guoguang and Jiang Chunze stand out as representative of Chinese economists' interpretations during this period. In 1979, Liu outlined four key dimensions through which Yugoslavia's system had to be understood.

First, he noted that Yugoslavia placed strong emphasis on the withering away of the state within socialist society, a principle long embedded in the LCY's understanding of the Marxist theory.

Second, Liu stressed that Yugoslavia was built not upon state ownership, but on social ownership of the means of production, and that it used social management rather than state management. In the system of workers' self-management, workers were said to be directly united with the means of production.

Third, and as a logical extension of this structure, Yugoslavia had devolved economic authority downward: from the federal state to the republics and autonomous provinces, and even all the way down to the level of individual enterprises.

Fourth, Liu observed that Yugoslavia made full use of the market mechanism, reducing the centralised control of state planning.²²⁰

Jiang Chunze's interpretation closely echoed Liu's, while offering her own conceptual language and emphases. She described the system of self-management as "the concentrated expression of the results of Yugoslavia's exploration of the path to socialism." For her, the basis of this system lay in social ownership of the means of production, understood as structurally distinct from state ownership. The basic feature of social ownership, she wrote, was that workers were directly united with the means of production, which were directly managed by the associated workers themselves. The labour output, accordingly, was distributed by the workers according to the interests of

²²⁰ (刘国光 [Liu Guoguang] 1979).

the whole society.

This configuration, Jiang argued, led to the replacement of a highly centralised executive management with a decentralised worker's democracy's management. She also drew attention to the theoretical and institutional innovation of associated labour, which she presented as a significant evolution in the form of self-management organisation introduced during the 1970s.²²¹

Jiang further traced the roots of Yugoslavia's theory of social ownership to its reading of Marxist theory of the state. In the view of Yugoslav communists, she wrote, once the proletariat had seized political power, the state was expected to gradually wither away, otherwise socialism would turn into state capitalism.²²²

4.5 Chinese Economists' Assessment of Yugoslavia

During much of 1978 and 1979, Chinese economists expressed overwhelmingly favourable views of Yugoslavia and its economic system. Many shared the belief that the system of self-management was the key driver behind the rapid development of Yugoslavia's socialist economy. As Su commented in one of his lectures: "The rapid development of the socialist economy of Yugoslavia is a strong indication that the line pursued by the LCY and the socio-economic system of Yugoslavia are in line with the specific conditions of Yugoslavia and promote the development of the productive forces."²²³

Chinese scholars were particularly impressed by Yugoslavia's break with Soviet orthodoxy. One frequently cited formulation praised the country for its intellectual and

²²¹ (江春泽 [Jiang Chunze], 向社会主义过渡途径的探索——南斯拉夫社会主义自治制度简介 [Exploring the Path to Socialism: An Introduction to Yugoslavia's System of Socialist Self-Management] 1980).

²²² (江春泽 [Jiang Chunze], 关于生产资料的社会主义国家所有制与社会所有制……南斯拉夫经济学界有关观点简介 1980).

²²³ (苏绍智 [Su Shaozhi], 南斯拉夫的经济发展与经济制度——南斯拉夫考察见闻 [Economic Development and Economic System of Yugoslavia - Observations from a Study Tour of Yugoslavia] 1978).

ideological independence: “Yugoslavia was the first to reflect independently on the experience of the Soviet Union, the earliest to emancipate its mind, break down superstitions and make daring explorations on a series of fundamental issues of socialist revolution and socialist development”²²⁴

In several studies of specific policy areas, Chinese economists drew attention to how the Yugoslav experience highlighted the limitations of the Soviet model, and how that model should not be followed uncritically. For example, Liu Wenpu and Ding Zeji, researchers at the Institute of Agricultural Economics at the CASS, concluded their article on Yugoslav agriculture with a pointed observation: “Treating one way and method of development as the only correct and orthodox model of socialism does not make sense in theory and is even more harmful in practice.”²²⁵ The phrase “one way and method of development” clearly referred to the Soviet model of socialism, and the critique it implied was unmistakable.

Both Su Shaozhi and Yu Lixuan cited a key line from Hua Guofeng’s speech at the Fifth National People’s Congress of China, in which he declared that China would “resolutely support socialist countries to integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete conditions of the country.” They observed that Yugoslavia had done precisely that.²²⁶ In their view, the Yugoslav path to socialism was not a deviation, but a faithful and creative application of Marxist principles to local realities.

Furthermore, Chinese scholars frequently evaluated Yugoslavia’s socialism through two major lenses. The first was the theoretical framework of Marxism-Leninism, within which they interpreted Yugoslav developments as theoretical contributions. “Yugoslavia enriched the Marxist-Leninist theory of the socialist transformation of agriculture with its own experience,” Liu Wenpu and Ding Zeji

²²⁴ (江春泽 [Jiang Chunze], 向社会主义过渡途径的探索——南斯拉夫社会主义自治制度简介 [Exploring the Path to Socialism: An Introduction to Yugoslavia’s System of Socialist Self-Management] 1980).

²²⁵ (刘文朴 丁泽霁 [Liu Wenpu & Ding Zeji] 1980).

²²⁶ (于立暄 [Yu Lixuan] 1978).

wrote.²²⁷ The second closely related lens was that of the international communist movement, where Yugoslavia was seen as a source of renewal. “[Yugoslavia’s practice] provides valuable new lessons for international communism,” as Su noted.²²⁸

A comprehensive expression of admiration can be found in the preface written by Jiang Chunze and Zhang Dexiu to their book *The Economy of Yugoslavia*. They wrote:

“The LCY adheres to the principle of combining the universal truths of Marxism with the specific conditions of the country. While guaranteeing the socialist orientation and the gradual expansion of public ownership, it has enabled the working masses to participate directly in the management of production and social affairs through socialist self-management. This is conducive to promoting socialist democracy, to giving full rein to the enthusiasm and creativity of the masses, to developing production, and to accelerating the country's modernisation. In the course of practice, thanks to the constant summing up of experience and the adoption of new measures by the LCY, the existing problems were gradually overcome, and the face of Yugoslavia changed dramatically within a short historical period.”²²⁹

On the 30th anniversary of the Basic Law on the Management of State Economic Enterprises by Working Collectives, Luo Yuanzheng likewise offered unreserved praise for Yugoslavia’s economic experiment. He wrote:

“The people of Yugoslavia have made unremitting efforts and achieved commendable results in exploring ways to develop socialist democracy, effectively manage the socialist state, organise social production, rationally distribute the national income, raise the material and cultural living standards of the people, constantly sum up the experiences of socialist self-management and develop the theory of scientific

²²⁷ (刘文朴 丁泽霁 [Liu Wenpu & Ding Zeji] 1980)

²²⁸ (苏绍智 [Su Shaozhi], 南斯拉夫的经济发展与经济制度——南斯拉夫考察见闻 [Economic Development and Economic System of Yugoslavia – Observations from a Study Tour of Yugoslavia] 1978).

²²⁹ (江春泽 张德修 [Jiang Chunze & Zhang Dexiu] 1979, 4).

socialism.”²³⁰

4.6 Problems exist, but...

Amid the overwhelmingly positive portrayals of Yugoslavia’s economy between 1978 and early 1980, a few Chinese economists did note the existence of certain problems. In many cases, however, these issues were discussed as historical challenges that the Yugoslavs themselves believed they had already addressed. Both Jiang Chunze and Xiong Jiawen, writing in separate articles, pointed to the failures of the collectivisation campaign carried out between 1945 and 1953. They attributed its shortcomings to flawed policies, especially the involuntary nature of the campaign and the uncritical transplantation of the Soviet kolkhoz model. As Xiong summarised, Yugoslavia was only able to formulate a more suitable agricultural policy after what was described as “paying the price [for the mistakes in collectivisation], undergoing intensive ideological struggle, and engaging in ten years of exploration.”²³¹ The intention of these Chinese economists was not to criticise Yugoslavia. On the contrary, they regarded the willingness to confront and resolve such problems as an essential part in advancing socialism.

Yugoslavia was also facing a number of more current and unresolved challenges. The March 1978 delegation of Party Workers had already noted some of these issues in their report, though without offering further analysis or detail. It was Su Shaozhi, in the numerous lectures he gave during the second half of 1978, who provided a fuller picture.

In these lectures, Su outlined five major concerns observed in the Yugoslav economy: unemployment, the Gastarbeiter phenomenon, trade deficits, use of foreign capital and debt, and inflation. Yet not all of these were viewed as problematic. Su

²³⁰ (罗元铮 [Luo Yuanzheng] 1980)

²³¹ (熊家文 [Xiong Jiawen] 1980). (江春泽 [Jiang Chunze], 自愿、民主、物质利益、逐步过渡——南斯拉夫在调动农民生产积极性方面的历史教训与经验 [Voluntary Participation, Democracy, Material Incentives, and Gradual Transition: Yugoslavia’s Historical Lessons and Experience in Stimulating Farmers’ Motivation for Production] 1980).

clarified that two of the five, Gastarbeiter and foreign capital, should be regarded not as problems, but simply as issues to be considered.

In the case of Gastarbeiter, Su argued that their temporary migration posed no harm to Yugoslavia at the time; on the contrary, workers were acquiring technical skills abroad and sending valuable foreign currency back home. On the matter of foreign capital, Su noted that the Yugoslavs had expressed confusion over China's reluctance to make use of it. As he put it, "they were very puzzled why China refused to use them."

The remaining three issues (unemployment, trade deficits, and inflation) were, in Su's view, rooted in broader processes: the consequences of urbanisation, the general underdevelopment of the economy, and the ripple effects of the global capitalist crisis of 1975. Su described Yugoslavia's efforts to address these problems, noting that the Yugoslav communists themselves had presented them candidly to the Chinese delegation. He praised their willingness to confront shortcomings and learn from mistakes, rather than conceal them.²³²

Within the context of Su's lectures, however, these problems were treated as a secondary theme. The emphasis remained firmly on Yugoslavia's achievements, and on what China might learn from them.

Outside of Su Shaozhi's lectures, references to Yugoslavia's economic problems remained scarce throughout 1978 and 1979. Only in 1980 did a few articles begin to include brief sections addressing the difficulties facing the Yugoslav economy. Some economists analysed these problems through the lens of Yugoslavia's planning system. They argued that structural imbalances, a slowdown in growth, rising inflation, and unemployment were the result of the weakening of state planning in the face of an increasingly strong market, a trend that had taken root in the 1950s and accelerated during the 1960s. These economists noted, however, that Yugoslavia had taken steps to

²³² (苏绍智 [Su Shaozhi], 南斯拉夫的经济发展与经济制度——南斯拉夫考察见闻 [Economic Development and Economic System of Yugoslavia - Observations from a Study Tour of Yugoslavia] 1978).

strengthen the planning function again in the early 1970s.²³³

Wang Limin, for instance, wrote that the introduction of the system based on associated labour had already helped alleviate economic disorder and ease inflationary pressure.²³⁴ Gao Chengxing from the Renmin University of China likewise praised what he called Yugoslavia's "courageous, constant rejections and reforms of outdated economic systems" grounded in "objective requirements and experiences from practice," describing them as "progressive efforts that meet the requirements of developing social productive forces."²³⁵ Yet others remained more sceptical. Pang Chuan and Li Guang'an observed that the new planning mechanisms still failed to resolve the problems. They argued that centralisation and state control over the economy remained insufficient, and that issues such as imbalance, deficits, and inflation were not yet under control.²³⁶

Jiang Chunze and Zhang Rende approached Yugoslavia's difficulties from a different angle. In their view, the underlying problem was the imbalance between high consumption and low accumulation, which they believed had led to inflation, mounting foreign debt, unfinished projects, and a general slowing of growth. Their "preliminary analysis" pointed to three possible causes: enterprises held excessive power in the process of reproduction; the country lacked a unified institution to balance the national economy; and the banks possessed too much power.²³⁷

It is worth noting that, until the second half of 1980, such discussions of Yugoslavia's problems appeared only as brief concluding remarks in otherwise favourable studies. They typically appeared as final sections, often occupying no more than a page at the end of articles that examined specific aspects of the Yugoslav

²³³ (代边 [Dai Bian] 1979).

²³⁴ (汪丽敏 [Wang Limin] 1980).

²³⁵ (高成兴 [Gao Chengxing] 1980).

²³⁶ (庞川 利广安 [Pang Chuan 1980]).

²³⁷ (江春泽 张仁德 [Jiang Chunze & Zhang Rende] 1980).

economy. For instance, in their thirteen-page article, Pang and Li devoted less than a single page to economic problems. The majority of articles during this period did not include such sections at all.

4.7 Fading of Enthusiasm

The “Yugomania” that had gripped Chinese intellectual and policy circles began to wane between the second half of 1980 and 1982. There was no single, clear moment that marked the beginning of this decline. Chinese scholars did not abruptly turn toward criticism, nor did they move in unison. On the contrary, most works on Yugoslavia at the time still consisted of information and analyses of particular aspects of its economy, and the intention remained to use them as positive experiences from which China could learn.

However, a gradual shift became visible. There was a slow but steady increase in the discussion of Yugoslavia’s problems, and at this stage, a few authors began to devote entire articles to challenges facing the Yugoslav economy, rather than weaving brief mentions of problems into an otherwise optimistic narrative.

For example, in 1981, Chao Rongfen published an article on what she described as Yugoslavia’s “faster-than-ever” rise in prices. Chao attributed the surge in inflation to “longstanding problems in the Yugoslav economy that were yet to be resolved” and to “drawbacks in policies since the previous year.” At the same time, she noted that anti-inflation measures were already underway and had begun to show “some initial effects.”²³⁸

Chen Changyuan also examined the causes of inflation and the government’s policy responses. She framed Yugoslavia’s experience as a valuable lesson: inflation, she argued, was not unique to capitalist systems but could emerge in socialist economies as well. For this reason, she urged that China must recognise the problem, study it

²³⁸ (巢蓉芬 [Chao Rongfen] 1981)

carefully, and take measures.²³⁹

Paradoxically, the waning of “Yugomania” among Chinese scholars was, at least in part, a result of their deepening understanding of Yugoslavia itself. The very economists who began writing about Yugoslavia’s problems, Wang Limin, Jiang Chunze, Zhang Rende, Chao Rongfen, and Chen Changyuan, were all proficient in Serbo-Croatian, and several of them had translated the works of Yugoslav economists into Chinese. Their ability to follow Yugoslavia’s current economic situation and Yugoslav scholars’ studies on it made them aware of Yugoslavia’s problems. This linguistic and scholarly access enabled them to closely follow Yugoslavia’s current economic developments, as well as the debates unfolding within Yugoslav academic and policy circles. It was precisely this proximity, both intellectual and linguistic, that allowed them to see more clearly the contradictions and difficulties within the system that had aroused so much enthusiasm.

Chinese economists also learned about Yugoslavia’s difficulties through the lectures delivered by visiting Yugoslav scholars. Ivan Maksimović identified four key problems in the Yugoslav economy: a low level of accumulation, inflation, income disparities caused by non-labour factors, and the over-empowerment of banks. Nikola Uzunov acknowledged that some challenges, such as unemployment, inflation, and budget deficits, were common to many developing countries. However, he also pointed to deeper issues specific to Yugoslavia’s economic model: imbalances in the industrial structure, weakness of social contracts, and bureaucratic inefficiencies.²⁴⁰ Anton Vratuša went even further: his entire lecture was devoted to the problems and difficulties facing the Yugoslav economy. It is clear that Chinese economists took careful note of these remarks. For example, in their own explanation of the imbalance between high consumption and low accumulation, Jiang Chunze and Zhang Rende

²³⁹ (陈长源 [Chen Changyuan], 南斯拉夫经济中的通货膨胀问题 [The Problem of Inflation in the Yugoslav Economy] 1981)

²⁴⁰ (孙家恒 郑怡 [Sun Jiaheng & Sun Yi] 1981).

explicitly quoted Maksimović's comments on the over-empowerment of banks.²⁴¹

Another aspect of the fading of “Yugomania” was the gradual redirection of attention among some of the very economists who had once been its most enthusiastic advocates. Several of those who had played crucial roles in introducing and disseminating knowledge about Yugoslavia in China eventually turned their focus to other countries or broader comparative frameworks.

Most notably, Yu Guangyuan led a delegation to Hungary in 1979 to study its economic reforms, with Su Shaozhi and Liu Guoguang among its members. Following the visit, they produced a large number of reports and analyses on the Hungarian economy, adopting an approach similar to their earlier writings on Yugoslavia. In 1980, Yu published an article titled *Some Suggestions on Reforming the Economic System in Our Country*. In it, he reflected on the origins of Yugoslavia's self-management system, observing that it had emerged in the context of the country's sudden split with Stalin, which left little time for careful institutional design. As a result, he noted, Yugoslavia encountered numerous difficulties and followed what he described as a tortuous path in the development of socialist self-management. Hungary, by contrast, had introduced its reforms in more stable circumstances and was able to proceed gradually. Yu suggested that, in terms of historical conditions and institutional environment, China's situation more closely resembled that of Hungary, making Hungary's experience potentially more applicable as a reference point.²⁴²

At the same time, Jiang Chunze, who had written prolifically on Yugoslavia between 1978 and 1980, began to shift her focus toward the broader task of establishing comparative economic systems as a new academic discipline within China.²⁴³ For these economists, this turn did not imply a loss of interest in Yugoslavia. Yu delivered

²⁴¹ (江春泽 张仁德 [Jiang Chunze & Zhang Rende] 1980).

²⁴² (于光远 [Yu Guangyuan], 关于在我国实行经济体制改革的若干建议 [Several Suggestions on Implementing Economic System Reform in China] 1980)

²⁴³ (中国经济体制改革研究会 [China Society of Economic Reform] 2018, 483).

the opening speech at the Society for Studying Yugoslav Economy's conference in 1980, and Jiang continued to be actively involved in the Society's activities.

Nevertheless, Yugoslavia gradually ceased to occupy the same place in the Chinese economists' imagination. As scholarly attention broadened to include other reforming socialist countries, Yugoslavia became a less central point of reference, especially for those who were not specialists in the region or fluent in Serbo-Croatian.

4.8 Critical Debate: August 1982

The watershed moment came in August 1982, when the Society for Studying Yugoslav Economy held its second national conference. The theme was both timely and pointed: "Yugoslavia's economic reforms and the cause, nature, and perspective of its current economic difficulties."²⁴⁴

Some of the papers presented at the conference echoed earlier interpretations, attributing Yugoslavia's economic problems to the state's weak control over the economy, and noting recent efforts by the Yugoslav government to strengthen its coordinating functions.²⁴⁵

However, a significant development at this conference was the emergence of a more fundamental debate: were Yugoslavia's economic troubles systemic in nature? In particular, some scholars began to question whether the difficulties were inherent to the self-management system itself, rather than simply the result of policy missteps or external pressures.

The opinions presented at the conference were conspicuously diverse. Chen Changyuan argued that Yugoslavia's economic difficulties stemmed from the "insufficient implementation" of self-management and were related to "certain concrete mistakes in economic systems, policies, or measures." She defended Yugoslavia's efforts to address these issues, emphasising that the problems could not be resolved

²⁴⁴ (Editors of 经济研究参考资料 [Review of Economic Research] 1982).

²⁴⁵ (孙家恒 [Sun Jiaheng] 1982).

within a year or two. Chen further observed that other socialist countries had begun their reform processes later than Yugoslavia, yet all had encountered similar difficulties “to different degrees” and had adopted measures “in different forms” that bore resemblance to the Yugoslav experience.²⁴⁶

Zhu Xingqiao also defended the self-management system, cautioning against judging the success or failure of a model based solely on short-term economic outcomes. He listed both domestic and external factors behind Yugoslavia’s inflation and called for a broader perspective. Another of Zhu’s arguments stood out for its conceptual clarity. He proposed two criteria by which a socialist system should be judged: whether it aligns with the general principles of Marxism, and whether it suits the specific conditions of the country in question. On this basis, he concluded that the self-management system was well-suited to Yugoslavia, and was therefore a good system.

What made Zhu’s intervention especially remarkable was his insistence that the value of the Yugoslav model could not be determined by its applicability to China. Even as a specialist defending the Yugoslav system, Zhu admitted that it was, for the most part, unsuitable as a model for China’s own reforms.²⁴⁷

Other participants at the conference expressed even less confidence in Yugoslavia’s economic system. Yang Dazhou argued that both the country’s achievements and its difficulties were closely tied to the structure of self-management. He contended that under this system, the federal government had ceased to function as an effective, unified centre of political authority. One of his main concerns was procedural: he questioned the viability of a system in which major decisions on the national economy were meant to be determined through self-management agreements, noting that a significant number of social contracts remained unsigned, let alone implemented.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ (陈长源 [Chen Changyuan] 1982).

²⁴⁷ (朱行巧 [Zhu Xingqiao] 1982)

²⁴⁸ (杨达州 [Yang Dazhou] 1982).

Li Xinnan, by contrast, offered a different interpretation by distinguishing federalism from self-management. In Li's view, Yugoslavia's economic troubles stemmed from decentralisation, localism, nationalism, and bureaucracy, phenomena he associated not with self-management per se, but with the federal structure of the state. Self-management, Li argued, was originally conceived as a means of creating "a free association of producers regardless of nationality." For this reason, Li believed that the solution lay not in abandoning self-management, but in fully and faithfully implementing it.²⁴⁹

Ironically, the most fundamental critique of Yugoslavia's system came from one of its earliest and most prominent enthusiasts. Luo Yuanzheng argued that Yugoslavia had placed premature emphasis on the withering away of the state's economic function. To support his view, he quoted both Engels: "the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things," and Lenin, in order to reaffirm the necessity of the state's economic function in the building of socialism. Luo contended that because of the premature emphasis on the withering away of the state's economic function, Yugoslavia had drastically weakened the authority of the centre and lost overall control over the national economy. In addition, he criticised the country for overemphasising the market at the expense of planning, a move he believed had led to serious imbalances and economic instability. He described this as a "deeply profound" lesson.

Yet Luo also tempered his criticism, noting that Yugoslavia had accumulated valuable experience in the course of its system reforms, and that these should not be overlooked. His intervention, while sharply critical, still acknowledged the significance of Yugoslavia's long-standing efforts to rethink and reshape socialist institutions.²⁵⁰

The August 1982 debate definitively marked the end of the period of "Yugomania." Books on Yugoslavia continued to be written and translated after 1982²⁵¹, but the tone

²⁴⁹ (李新南 [Li Xinnan] 1982)

²⁵⁰ (罗元铮 [Luo Yuanzheng] 1982)

²⁵¹ Including: (中国社会科学院苏联东欧研究所 [Institute of Soviet and East European Studies,

had shifted. Luo Yuanzheng's critique cast doubt on the Marxist foundations of the entire Yugoslav model, and even those who continued to defend self-management, such as Zhu Xingqiao, no longer regarded it as "usable" for China's own reforms.

As a logical outcome, Yugoslavia was no longer viewed as a singular exception, an innovator in socialist reform or a treasury of inspiration across all sectors of economic life. Instead, it came to be seen as one among many socialist states, a country that had experienced both achievements and failures through its experimentation with reform. Increasingly, it was used as a pragmatic reference for exploring specific issues encountered in the Chinese reform process.

The new attitude was encapsulated by the Chinese translators of Dušan Bilandžić's book *Ideas and Practice of Social Development of Yugoslavia 1945–1973* (*Ideje i praksa društvenog razvoja Jugoslavije 1945–1973*), who asked in the preface:

"Can our country absorb certain beneficial things from the Yugoslav model while **going our own path** [emphasis added by the author of this dissertation]?...This book provides many thoughts and materials for us to study those questions"²⁵²

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences] 1984), (中国社会科学院苏联东欧研究所 [Institute of Soviet and East European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences] 1986), (中国社会科学院苏联东欧研究所 [Institute of Soviet and East European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences] 1985), (邓荣霖 [Zheng Ronglin] 1987), (杜尚·比兰契奇 [Dušan Bilandžić] 1986), (韦利米尔·瓦西奇 [Velimir Vasić] 1984), (巴甫洛维奇 [Milovan Pavlović] 1985), (爱德华·卡德尔 [Edvard Kardelj] 1986).

²⁵² (杜尚·比兰契奇 [Dušan Bilandžić] 1986, Translators' Preface).

5 The Trajectory and Impact of Sino-Yugoslav Relations (1977-1981): Conclusions and Aftermath

5.1 Answering the Research Questions: Learning from Yugoslavia as a Deliberative, System-wide Endeavour

The three lines of inquiry developed across Chapters Two, Three, and Four offer a reasonably comprehensive account of Sino-Yugoslav relations between 1977 and 1981 from the Chinese perspective. An analysis of Yugoslavia-related coverage in the *People's Daily* from 1975 to 1980 reveals a marked transformation in the Chinese leadership's perception of Yugoslavia: from a friendly nation sharing concerns about Soviet hegemonism to a genuinely socialist country whose reform experience was viewed as a valuable reference for China's own development. This elevated regard was not confined to official Party rhetoric. It found further expression in the growing interest of reform-minded economists and in the enthusiasm of professionals engaged in local-level exchanges. While economists concentrated on analysing Yugoslavia's political and economic system and its possible relevance for China's reform efforts, professionals from various fields enthusiastically engaged with their Yugoslav counterparts, seeking practical insights into how their respective sectors functioned in Yugoslavia.

Taken together, these three sets of sources (official media, local archival documents, and the writings of Chinese economists) provide a clear answer to the **second research question**: did the proclaimed effort to learn from Yugoslavia remain confined to rhetorical expressions and propaganda, or did it result in a substantive, system-wide attempt to engage with Yugoslav models and experiences? The evidence presented here demonstrates that the Chinese engagement with Yugoslavia extended well beyond official declarations. Between 1977 and 1981, the relationship reached its

zenith, and it is no exaggeration to describe the period between 1978 and 1979 as a moment of genuine “Yugomania” in China.

To answer the **first research question** of this dissertation, namely, whether the shift in Chinese policy towards Yugoslavia in the late 1970s was primarily driven by Hua Guofeng’s personal initiative or whether it reflected a more deliberative and collective decision-making process within the Chinese Communist Party, it is essential not only to recognise the complementary nature of the three source bases used, but also to examine how they challenge and contextualise one another.

A superficial reading of the Chinese official press might seem to support the interpretation that Hua’s personal role was decisive: the sharp changes in tone and content coincided with Tito’s visit to China and Hua’s subsequent visit to Yugoslavia. This aligns with the document of the LCY Central Committee, which claimed that the CPC Politburo had adopted the decision to restore party relations just days before Tito’s arrival in Beijing. However, when official media narratives are systematically compared with the writings of economists, a different picture emerges. These writings suggest that the decisive turning point came only after the March 1978 visit to Yugoslavia by the delegation of Chinese Communist Party Workers.

Although the inaccessibility of central Chinese archives prevents us from tracing the exact decision-making process behind the dispatch of the delegation or the approval of its recommendations, the content of the delegation’s report, based on empirical observations and interpreted through the members’ own understanding of socialism and Marxism, makes it clear that their conclusions played a crucial role. This suggests that the subsequent restoration of relations with the LCY in June 1978 and Hua’s visit later that year were the result of a broader, more consultative process rather than a decision made unilaterally by Hua.

The apparent contradiction that the CPC’s decision to restore party-to-party relations were reportedly made twice, first in August 1977 (according to the LCY Central Committee document) and then again between March and June 1978, can be

resolved by recognising the qualitative difference between the two moments. The 1977 decision likely entailed a functional re-establishment of ties without a clear endorsement of the LCY's Marxist legitimacy. In contrast, the 1978 restoration was much deeper in nature, accompanied by explicit ideological affirmation and even praise for the Yugoslav path to socialism. Thus, the evidence suggests that the transformation in Chinese policy was ultimately the outcome of a complex and substantive internal process.

5.2 From Momentum to Stagnation: The Levelling Off of Sino-Yugoslav Exchanges (1982–1991)

While the preceding analysis concludes the main historical period of this dissertation, Sino-Yugoslav relations continued beyond 1981. The period is not examined in detail in this dissertation, but is briefly explored here in the final chapter based on available evidence. The analysis of economists' fading interest in Yugoslavia from the second half of 1980 in Subchapters 4.7 and 4.8 is a key indicator, as well as a key contributing factor, to the broader stagnation of Sino-Yugoslav relations during the 1980s.

Despite continued diplomatic friendliness, Yugoslavia ultimately did not become the model for China's far-reaching reforms. High-level visits to Yugoslavia continued: Chinese President Li Xiannian and Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang visited Yugoslavia in 1984 and 1986, respectively. However, Deng Xiaoping, who began to assume paramount leadership in December 1978 and consolidated his position after Hua Guofeng's departure from the centre of power in 1981, subsequently overseeing China's sweeping economic and political reforms, never visited Yugoslavia, despite being a keen traveller abroad.

This cooling of enthusiasm is not fully apparent from official media alone. As instruments of the Party's narrative, state newspapers maintained a generally positive tone, offering only a gradual reduction in the fervour of their coverage. It is only by

bringing together all three sets of sources of official media, local archival documents, and the writings of Chinese economists, that a fuller picture of the evolving relationship emerges. Whereas official media portray a surface continuity, internal documents and intellectual writings reveal a notable shift in substance and sentiment.

In the years following 1981 the intensity of bilateral exchanges waned. The number of institution-organised visits between China and Yugoslavia decreased. In a more substantial sense, the one-sided eagerness on the Chinese side to draw lessons from Yugoslavia waned. In the peak years between 1977 and 1981, Sino-Yugoslav exchanges were characterised by an asymmetrical pattern, with China actively seeking advice and Yugoslavia largely providing it. By contrast, interactions between 1982 and 1985 became more balanced and routine. Reports from the Shanghai Municipal Archives on Yugoslav Justice Minister Borislav Krajina's 1984 visit to Shanghai and a 1985 visit by the Shanghai Agricultural Economic Delegation to Zagreb reflect this shift.²⁵³ These exchanges, while still cordial, were characterised by technical observations and discussions rather than genuine intellectual curiosity or in-depth learning. The carefully prepared questions of earlier delegations gave way to cursory displays of interests in each other's development. What had once been a relationship marked by candour and even ideological bluntness transformed into a more conventional, diplomatic and professional engagement, though occasional exceptions did persist, as shown below in the 1985 criticisms of Yugoslavia's political system by Dušan Čkrebić.

More importantly, the initial hope that China might adopt some of Yugoslavia's practices in its reforms ultimately yielded limited long-term influence. Although on the surface, the introduction of market competition in the Chinese economy was a measure that echoed the Yugoslav model, China never adopted socialist self-management, a

²⁵³ SMA, B317-1-360-15, 上海市司法局办公室编印《司法外事情况》(1984年第5期)——南斯拉夫司法代表团访沪简况 [Judicial Foreign Affairs Bulletin (No. 5, 1984) — Briefing on the Visit of the Yugoslav Judicial Delegation to Shanghai].

defining feature of Yugoslav socialism. This was true both in the narrow sense of worker control over enterprises and in the extended sense as a general way of organising the socialist political and social system.²⁵⁴ In the end, Yugoslavia served more as a temporary reference point than a lasting model. Its most significant contribution to reform-era thinking appears to lie in the idea it helped to introduce: that the economic models of socialist states can be diverse.

Why did Chinese interest in Yugoslavia's socialism begin to fade at the start of the 1980s? While the key pieces to the puzzle may ultimately lie in the classified files in the Central Archives and the Archives of Foreign Ministry of China, valuable insights can nonetheless be drawn from local archival documents and the writings of Chinese economists. These sources allow us to formulate plausible explanations for the shifting attitudes within the Chinese leadership.

First, the warm political ties between China and Yugoslavia in the late 1970s were not matched by deeper and more substantive forms of economic cooperation. While Yugoslavia welcomed China's interest in its socialist practices and reform experience, there was growing frustration over the imbalance between rhetorical engagement and concrete outcomes. In particular, Yugoslav partners expressed dissatisfaction with the Chinese emphasis on learning and observation rather than on expanding bilateral trade. After a study visit to Yugoslavia in 1985, a delegation from the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Agriculture reported that their Yugoslav counterparts were eager to pursue tangible economic cooperation with Shanghai, but showed little interest, and even signs of fatigue, when it came to hosting yet another Chinese delegation focused on studying Yugoslav agriculture in general.²⁵⁵

Second, although the warmth and cordiality experienced by both Chinese and

²⁵⁴ As Bakota describes succinctly: "Yugoslav model was reduced to its economic skeleton", (Bakota 2023, 187). See also: (吴敬琏 [Wu Jinglian] 2010).

²⁵⁵ SMA, B45-6-787-111, 上海市农业局关于上海市赴南斯拉夫萨格勒布市考察农业经济情况的报告 [Report by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Agriculture on the Study Visit to Zagreb, Yugoslavia, Concerning Agricultural Economy].

Yugoslav participants in bilateral exchanges were genuine, the asymmetrical nature of the relationship made it difficult to sustain in the long term. This imbalance was evident in the markedly greater enthusiasm shown by the Chinese side, whose delegations consistently pursued knowledge and practical insights from their Yugoslav counterparts. However, this dynamic was not without its tensions. Yugoslav participants, at times adopting a somewhat condescending tone, often reminded their Chinese counterparts not to fall into the trap of uncritically adopting foreign models once again: having previously done so with the Soviet Union, they should now avoid doing the same with Yugoslavia. Yet such warnings often missed the mark: Chinese delegates had no intention of turning their country into a “Yugoslavia-lite.” The Chinese participants, in reality, saw Yugoslav experiences as tools that could help liberate their minds, using them as inspiration or a starting point to make discussions more vibrant, and as a reference for their reform designs. In several internal reports, the Chinese “pupils” of Yugoslavia even expressed ambitions to surpass their “teachers.” For instance, a delegation from the Chinese leather industry wrote that they hoped domestic pigskin production would “catch up with or exceed” Yugoslav standards in a year.²⁵⁶ In this context, the extremely candid critiques from some Yugoslavs were only acceptable as long as the Chinese side was still comfortable with the role of the “pupil,” but the Chinese were not willing to play that role for a long period.

Third, by the 1980s, Yugoslavia’s socialist system was sinking into an increasingly deep and visible crisis. In the late 1970s, Chinese scholars and local participants involved in Sino-Yugoslav exchanges were either unaware of the extent of Yugoslavia’s economic and political difficulties or tended to underestimate them. With time, however, and as exposure to Yugoslavia increased, this perception changed. On one hand, the Chinese side acquired a more accurate understanding of the Yugoslav crisis. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, some of the earliest critiques of the Yugoslav economy

²⁵⁶ SMA, B158-4-192-1. 赴南斯拉夫皮革工业考察组考察总结 [Summary Report of the Study Delegation to Yugoslavia on the Leather Industry].

came from scholars who had initially been among its strongest proponents in China. These individuals, having gained proficiency in the languages of Yugoslavia and access to detailed Yugoslav economic research, began reassessing their earlier optimism.

On the other hand, as shown in Chapters Three and Four, many Yugoslav officials, experts, and hosts involved in exchanges with China played an important role in shaping Chinese perceptions. They contributed significantly to deepening Chinese awareness of the crisis. Over time, some Yugoslavs became increasingly candid in acknowledging their country's internal problems, offering their Chinese interlocutors a more sober picture than before. For instance, in 1981, Rade Galeb, the ethnic Serb trade union official from Bosnia and Herzegovina, still downplayed the seriousness of the ethnic tensions. Yet by 1985, a marked shift had occurred: Dušan Čkrebić, a senior political figure from Serbia, openly offered a scathing critique of Yugoslavia's political system during meetings with his Chinese hosts:

“The political system is inclined to reaching consensus, which was beyond [the requirements of] the constitution, as a result, state institutions have a low efficiency. Some republics and autonomous provinces care more about their own developments than federal developments.”²⁵⁷

The final sentence was not only a striking display of candour towards the Chinese hosts, but also a revealing indication of the depth of Yugoslavia's internal political crisis. That a leading figure from one republic would deliver such a harsh critique of other federal units while abroad, and in conversation with foreign counterparts, underscored how fractured the federation had become. In retrospect, this moment could have offered the Chinese side both a glimpse into the growing tensions among Yugoslavia's federal units and an early indication of the political disintegration that would unfold by the late 1980s and early 1990s.

²⁵⁷ SMA, A76-3-232-24. 中共上海市委党校办公室编印的《党校简报》1985年第6期（总第299期） [Party School Bulletin, No. 6 (1985, Total Issue No. 299), Compiled and Printed by the Office of the Party School of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the CPC].

While these explanations primarily draw upon local archival materials and the writings of Chinese scholars, rather than the theoretically most authoritative sources, the central state and Party archives, they nevertheless provide valuable insights. They suggest that the rise and subsequent decline of China's interest in Yugoslavia's socialist model cannot be attributed solely to the personal preferences or initiatives of China's top leaders. Instead, a complex interplay of factors shaped this trajectory. These included Yugoslavia's deepening socioeconomic crisis, China's evolving and increasing demands for knowledge transfer, and the relatively modest development of bilateral economic cooperation, which together made sustaining China's enthusiasm for Yugoslav experiences increasingly difficult over time.

Perhaps the nature of the evolving relationship in the 1980s can be best illustrated by the following exchange in 1985 between the LCY delegation led by Čkrebić and the Party School in Shanghai:

The Yugoslav delegation in their report about Yugoslavia's political development mentioned such a sentence: "State centralist and techno-bureaucratic forces stubbornly strove to maintain their achieved status."

Someone from the Chinese side could not understand it and asked: "Could you please explain what you meant by 'techno-bureaucrats?'"

However, the Yugoslavs completely misunderstood the question and continued to explain: "You can reduce techno-bureaucracy by ..."²⁵⁸

The term "techno-bureaucracy," of which the Chinese side had no idea at all, was deemed by the Yugoslavs as such a common problem in their socio-political system that they could not even imagine that the Chinese were asking for its definition. It was probably a good metaphor for the two countries' path in the late 1970s and early 1980s:

It had been about three decades since the Yugoslavia started its original reform, and its self-management model was facing increasingly greater crisis, making it inward-

²⁵⁸ SMA, A76-3-232-24.

oriented and introspective, focusing on certain problems were linked to the specific condition of Yugoslavia's socialist model. Yet those problems were still unheard of in China, which was at the start of the period of Reform and Opening up, which entailed its own set of difficult challenges, but was yet to face many problems brought by the market-oriented decentralising reforms. The term "techno-bureaucracy", for example, was difficult to comprehend for the Chinese side, since at that time the bureaucracy in China was heavily centralised and controlled by the CPC, unlike in Yugoslavia, where three decades of reforms had created a bureaucracy that was administratively separate from the LCY.

In this sense, the Sino-Yugoslav encounter of the late 1970s and early 1980s was, in some ways, a dialogue between different stages of socialist time, one nearing dusk, the other barely past dawn. That the relationship eventually plateaued after 1981 was perhaps not a failure, but the predictable pause of two systems moving along diverging paths.

5.3 Valter, Victimhood, and the Vestiges of Friendship:

After Yugoslavia

Four decades later, the reforms that took off in the late 1970s eventually led to China becoming one of the two largest economic and political powers in the world, while Yugoslavia has been long gone. Out of its ruins have arisen seven states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, as well as Kosovo, whose independence is disputed by Serbia) with different geopolitical status and orientation, and having various level of stability and prosperity, but none of them possesses the level of international impact and prestige that Yugoslavia once enjoyed.

Today, China maintains friendly relations with six of the seven successor states, while continuing to regard Kosovo as part of Serbia. Legacies of Sino-Yugoslav relations, such as memories of Yugoslav partisan films in China, have been referenced

by Chinese diplomats during their engagements with several of those countries.²⁵⁹ However, it is only in Sino-Serbian relations that the 1970s and 1980s Chinese intense interest in Yugoslavia has been explicitly invoked in a diplomatic context. Notably, an example can be found in Chinese President Xi Jinping’s article published in the Serbian newspaper *Politika* during his state visit to Serbia, where he wrote that “in the 1980s, when it was the crucial period for the implementation of the policy of Reform and Opening-up, the successful practice and experience of the Serbian people served as valuable examples for China.”²⁶⁰ Beyond this reference, however, the broader story of China taking inspiration from Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s is seldom mentioned in today’s diplomatic discourse. Instead, a more recent and emotionally resonant event has taken centre stage in the contemporary discourse of Sino-Serbian relations: the 1999 NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY)—a state entity that succeeded, but was distinct from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia discussed throughout this dissertation—during which the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was bombed and three Chinese journalists were killed. As I argued elsewhere, this event has become central to what I have termed the *narrative of “shared victimhood”*, a discursive frame that continues to shape how Beijing and Belgrade present their contemporary partnership.²⁶¹

From the vantage point of today, it may seem unimaginable that China was once so eager to learn almost everything from Yugoslavia. It seems that even at the time, the Yugoslavs did not fully realise the potential of this relationship. One could perhaps wonder whether in the late 1970s, Yugoslavia missed a historical opportunity to globalise self-management socialism, or other Yugoslav practices that inspired the

²⁵⁹ Example from China-Bosnia and Herzegovina relations: Ѓи Ping [Ji Ping], “Naše dvije zemlje promoviraju mir i prosperitet [Our Two Countries Promote Peace and Prosperity]”, *Dnevni Avaz*, 3 April 2020, p. 12; from Sino-Montenegrin relations: (中国驻黑山使馆 [Chinese Embassy in Montenegro] 2023).

²⁶⁰ Си Ђинпинг [Xi Jinping], “Вечни пријатељи, искрени партнери [Eternal Friends, Sincer Partners]”, *Politika*, 15 June 2016, p. 1.

²⁶¹ (Zhou 2022).

Chinese counterparts in the Sino-Yugoslav exchanges. Yet even without such hypothetical grandiose achievements, the Sino-Yugoslav connections in the late 1970s and early 1980s still left a positive trace of friendship between the Chinese people and the people of the successor states of Yugoslavia: the enduring popularity of Valter in China is one of the best examples of it.

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