

Meet the Author

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Biography

Liu graduated from UCSD in March of 2025. He was a History major with a research interest in Chinese and modern European history. UCSD has given him the opportunity to conduct an independent research project through the History Honors Program. Currently, his research focus has shifted more towards Chinese history and politics, as well as social media, but this research project has given him not only substantial research experience but also confidence for his future career.



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"To those who have passed, their stories shall never fall away."

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Initial Enthusiasm and Lasting Estrangement: Shift in the Relationship between China and East Germany after the Chinese Great Leap Forward

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Abstract

The deterioration of the relationship between China and East Germany was critical and has been under-researched. Many scholars have emphasized the importance of diplomatic events in contributing to such a deterioration. Yet, less focus was paid to Chinese internal policies, specifically the Great Leap Forward. Though implemented nationally, the Great Leap Forward had an international influence on the GDR's national situation and its relationship with China. This paper will argue that the Chinese Great Leap Forward was instrumental to the collapse of the Sino-East German relationship in 1961, specifically analyzing how the Great Leap Forward contributed to this relationship shift within the context of the Sino-Soviet Split. In terms of the primary sources, while most of them will be archival government documents, interviews from native Chinese people who experienced the event will also be taken into account as oral history. The submission will incorporate Chapter 3 – the most significant part of the thesis, which discovers the correlation between China's Great Leap Forward and the deterioration of the China-GDR relationship – and a supplementary part from Chapter 2, which includes the interviews from people who had experienced the period.

Introduction

In contemporary academia, a considerable number of scholars have explored the history and politics of post-World War II China and Germany, respectively. However, only in the past two decades have certain Chinese and Western scholars begun to examine the relationship between China and Germany, particularly East Germany, which became part of the socialist bloc and was governed under communist authority following the division of Germany in 1948. While many researchers have addressed critical aspects of the bilateral relationship during the 1950s and 1960s, a gap appears to exist in the extant literature. Chinese scholars tend to focus more on specific issues, such as Chen Tao's thesis on East Germany's introduction of the Chinese mass line experience, or Ge Jun's article on economic interactions between the two nations. Conversely, Western scholars tend to offer more comprehensive perspectives; for instance, Axel Berkofsky authored a book covering the relationship from 1949 to 1989. Despite the broad temporal scope, the level of detail in Berkofsky's work is less specific compared to Chinese theses. Consequently, this article aims to synthesize these perspectives and primarily concentrate on the external repercussions of the notorious Chinese Great

Leap Forward on the bilateral relationship between China and East Germany immediately following the program and the famine it incited, specifically during the period from 1958 to 1963.

After the Second World War and the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the leadership of the CCP, under the guidance of Chairman Mao Zedong, established the authoritative regime of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949. From this point forward, the party embarked on a series of domestic reforms aimed at recuperating the nation from the devastations caused by war and consolidating communist authority. Drawing on experiences from the Soviet Union and adapting the Soviet model to local conditions, Mao and his colleagues initiated numerous reforms across various sectors. The 1950 Land Reform redistributed land from landlords to peasants, addressing issues of starvation and livelihood. The First Five-Year Plan (1953–1957), modeled after the Soviet Five-Year Plan, advanced China's heavy industry, thereby promoting the nation's industrialization. Additionally, the 1950 Marriage Law granted women the right to pursue their own interests, a milestone that many Western nations had not yet achieved, thereby fulfilling the ideals of a classless communist society. China has also begun establishing diplomatic relations with other nations.

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During the Cold War era, the Chinese government primarily concentrated on strengthening ties with socialist states within the Eastern bloc, specifically the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

Nevertheless, all the developments were accompanied by questions and disputes that would incite future disagreements. With the swift advancement of industry and social infrastructure, China experienced a period of widespread enthusiasm for over a decade. The entire nation harbored a strong belief that the country could surpass Western powers economically and industrially within a relatively short timeframe, specifically several years. The 1958 Chinese Great Leap Forward was proclaimed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in this socio-political climate nationwide. Renowned, albeit notoriously, for slogans such as "人有多大胆，地有多高产" (How bold people are determined, how much the land produces), the nation was swept by a wave of exaggeration, wherein all agricultural and industrial outputs—both the quotas and reported yields—were vastly overstated, leading to incalculable waste. Coupled with unscientific methods employed to increase production, the nation succumbed to a delusion of inexhaustible grains and materials. Consequently, the Great Leap Forward resulted in one of the most catastrophic famines in history, caused by human activity.

Regarding the establishment of the East German regime, the process differed from that of China; however, the outcome was a comparable communist state. Following Germany's surrender in 1945 and the Berlin Blockade between 1948 and 1949, Germany underwent a series of societal and political transformations. The definitive decision to partition Germany and the inauguration of Walter Ulbricht led to the establishment of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) one week after the founding of the PRC. Owing to its geopolitical position and unresolved issues between socialist and capitalist powers, East Germany encountered considerable pressure from both the socialist and Western blocs, despite robust support from the Soviet Union. As a border state between the two blocs, East Germany faced substantial economic and diplomatic challenges from its Western neighbors. Within the socialist bloc, many allied countries remained uncertain about East Germany's status, presumably concerned that the reunification of the two German states could adversely affect their own national interests, thereby creating hesitation to form strong alliances with the GDR.

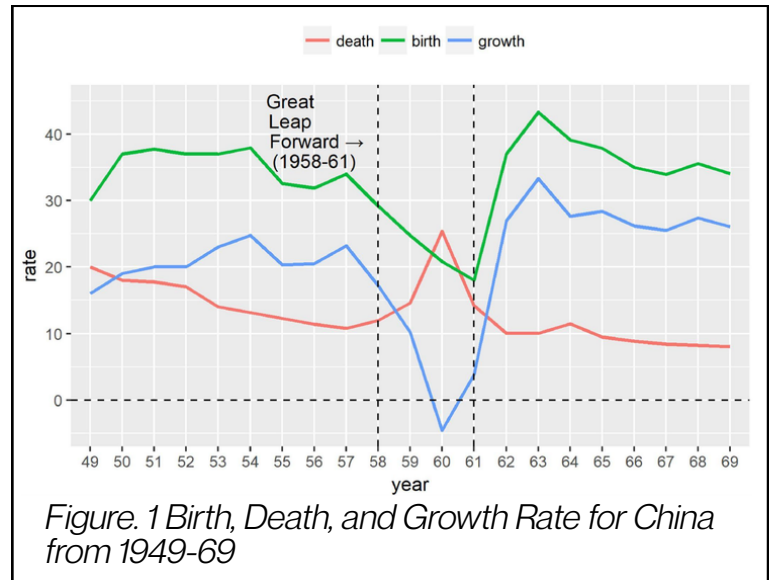


Figure. 1 Birth, Death, and Growth Rate for China from 1949-69

In light of shared national concerns and external pressures, the diplomatic relationship between China and East Germany was established promptly following the formation of both nations. As proponents of Stalin and his associated cult of personality, both Mao Zedong and Walter Ulbricht were fervent supporters of the Soviet Union and its policies during the early 1950s. Their respective national policies closely emulated Soviet models in pursuit of the ideal of ultimate communism. However, subsequent to Stalin's death and the delivery of Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956, East Germany's international position became increasingly precarious. On the one hand, Khrushchev's critique of Stalin adversely affected his relationships with both Mao and Ulbricht, thereby straining Soviet relations with China and East Germany. Conversely, East Germany's heavy dependence on Soviet support for resources and international esteem compelled Ulbricht to refrain from overtly expressing discontent towards Khrushchev, complicating his ability to initiate and implement national policies, particularly those reminiscent of Stalin's approach. This dilemma ultimately established the GDR's preference for alignment with the Soviet Union over China.

The evolution of attitudes within the Soviet Union and in its bilateral relationships underwent significant change between 1958 and 1963. While China experienced a series of climaxes and fall-downs during the Great Leap Forward, East Germany was also severely affected in multiple respects. In light of the successful propaganda campaigns and the outcomes of the Great Leap Forward in 1958, East German leaders developed a strong belief in the Chinese model and in Mao's interpretation of Marxist-Leninism.

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In an effort to emulate the Chinese Great Leap Forward, East German officials actively promoted bilateral engagement from 1958 to 1960. However, the ramifications of China's leap culminated in substantial social issues and widespread food shortages within the nation. Nevertheless, China's desire to preserve its international reputation led to a discrepancy between the officially propagated statistics and the actual conditions on the ground in socialist countries, fostering growing mistrust in East Germany towards the Chinese government. Furthermore, the national economic difficulties precipitated by the Great Leap Forward led to a deterioration of international trade relations between China and East Germany. Lacking guarantees regarding exports, maintaining a positive relationship became increasingly challenging. Additionally, these prior events, coupled with failures in negotiations regarding these matters, led East Germany to recognize the ideological divergences existing between the two nations. Collectively, these factors, stemming from the immediate consequences of the Great Leap Forward, initiated a process of estrangement between China and East Germany.

Proclaimed Success and International Influence

Since 1956, following the revelation of Khrushchev's secret speech at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to socialist nations, both Mao Zedong and Walter Ulbricht had endeavored to identify an alternative to the Soviet model of communism. Mao's execution of the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Great Leap Forward exemplified his ability to govern a nation utilizing a cult of personality akin to that of Stalin. Together with the agricultural and industrial achievements he secured for China, he thereby demonstrated the viability of his distinctive perspective on Chinese communism. As articulated during the 8th Central Committee meeting of the Chinese Communist Party, the strategy of combining reforms with a centralized government that ensured democratic processes within the party corresponded with the sentiments of both conservative and reformist factions within the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). Consequently, subsequent to the 20th Congress of the CPSU, East Germany commenced the process of learning from and emulating Chinese experiences.

Despite the profound tragedy—the Great Famine, one of the most disastrous anthropogenic famines in human history that caused millions of deaths—induced by the Great Leap Forward, East Germany actively supported this transformative policy in China, with Ulbricht initiating

several imitations of the people's communes between 1958 and 1960. A declassified research paper authored by the CIA in 1960 indicates that the international influence of China and the Great Leap Forward was extensive and significantly strengthened the bilateral relationship during that period. In contrast to the Soviet Union's conservative stance, it is noted that East German leaders and media had consistently praised the communes and even characterized the commune movement as being of great international importance, an enrichment of Marxism-Leninism, an extraordinary consolidation of the worker-peasant alliance, the foremost of many Chinese achievements, and an example for other Asian peoples. While these statements may reflect a bias from a U.S. perspective, the numerous accolades offered underscore the effectiveness of Chinese international propaganda concerning its accomplishments during the Great Leap Forward.

Through solely international propaganda, the GDR may not fully endorse all of these achievements, as acquiescent exaggeration was frequently embedded within international campaigns. Nevertheless, according to a report from People's Daily dated October 8, 1959, regarding Ambassador Paul Wandel's address (who served as East Germany's ambassador to China during that period), Wandel expressed his gratitude towards the People's Republic of China and lauded the significant accomplishments realized during the Great Leap Forward. It is acknowledged that Wandel may not have had the opportunity to investigate the actual conditions faced by Chinese peasants, which indicates that his remarks could convey inaccurate information. However, from the perspective of East Germany, the insights provided by Ambassador Wandel may constitute the most genuine information available regarding China. His speech reflected that China managed to obscure the true situation from the international media, a situation attributable either to China's information blockade or the misrepresentation of reality by local officials. In any case, both CIA research and Chinese news outlets suggested a discrepancy between the realities in China and what East Germany perceived. During the years when both nations were still able to derive mutual benefits, bilateral relations were sustained despite this discrepancy. However, as diplomatic tensions began to surface, such an imbalance of information was likely to exacerbate the situation.

The successful implementation of people's communes, which Ambassador Wandel argued ranked among the

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foremost of the most important achievements in China, indicates that China's agricultural collectivization model was both feasible and successful. However, by the end of 1959, disagreements arose between China and East Germany, despite the latter's support of the assertion, highlighting the communes' international influence. Although not overtly expressed, Paul Wandel communicated the Chinese leaders' message regarding the potential for an East German implementation of a similar system. Nonetheless, the response from East Germany clearly indicated a rejection of such experiments, stemming from concerns over the dangers the communes might pose to the country. It is presumed that East German leaders were apprehensive that a collectivized agricultural system like China's people's communes could exacerbate the exodus problem that had emerged since 1959. Due to multiple comparisons between life in East and West Germany, the differences in living standards and freedom allowed West Germany to attract East Germans to migrate, thereby causing the exodus issue in East Berlin. To justify their refusal, East Germany explicitly stated that their commendation was directed towards "the Chinese action in solving their problems." According to CIA research, rather than attempting to replicate the communes, East German leaders appeared more inclined to adopt the rationale and spirit that underpinned them.

The CIA research presented a favorable view of the bilateral relationship between China and East Germany; however, 21st-century scholarly investigations revealed greater complexity. Regarding the SED's stance on the implementation of the Chinese commune system, it was initially stated that in July 1959, the SED ordered Neues Deutschland (official party newspaper of the SED) to put its approval for Mao's leap and the communes on paper, declaring that the GDR's great leap of agricultural production was being made possible by the Agricultural Production Cooperatives (Landwirtschaftliche Produktions Genossenschaft, or LPG). Only when East German farmers became aware of Ulbricht's intention to introduce the Chinese-style communes and subsequently rebelled against it did the SED alter its position, asserting that the commune was "China-specific." Furthermore, research conducted by Chen Tao, an associate professor at Tongji University who specializes in German History and Cold War International History, indicates that East Germany modified its public stance towards Chinese-style communes after the construction of the Berlin Wall. This event, which was a direct response to the issue of exodus, marked the failure of East Germany's objective to achieve German reunification through the

establishment of socialism and to demonstrate the superiority of its ideology with an open border. In order to avert further exodus and farmer dissatisfaction, public support for the people's commune had to be eschewed. Simultaneously, East German leaders received feedback regarding the failure of the Chinese Great Leap Forward, which fostered increased skepticism regarding the GDR's trust in China.

The summer of 1960 signified a pivotal juncture in the bilateral relations between China and East Germany concerning the people's commune. For the Chinese authorities, the principal directive for their participation in East Germany's agricultural exhibition, held from June 5 to July 17, was the promotion of the Great Leap Forward in accordance with the General Line (总路线). Consequently, all Chinese exhibitions and propaganda incorporated elements pertinent to the national program, particularly emphasizing the commune system. Conversely, East Germany, for the first time, publicly asserted that the Chinese experience regarding the commune system was unsuitable for its context. Furthermore, during the subsequent International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties, held from June 24 to 26, Ulbricht explicitly criticized China's interference in East Germany's domestic affairs, stating, "For East European nations, the people's commune represents a fundamentally erroneous path." Through this overt critique of the Chinese communes, East Germany's concerns regarding the model transformed into an overt discontent with China's propagandistic portrayal of their experiences.

The comparative analysis between the CIA's research and Chen Tao's scholarly paper elucidates the disparities between the domestic policies of China and East Germany. While East Germany appreciated China's rationale and commitment to developing effective policies and achieving success, China's proposals did not align with the specific demands of East Germany. The criticism of the people's commune in 1960 indicated a rejection of the Chinese model, highlighting the divergence of national interests and concerns that had emerged at that time. Following the changes in China's national policies since 1959, the Chinese government sought to enhance its international prestige through the promotion of its experiences. Conversely, East Germany, facing adverse consequences from enforced agricultural collectivization—such as a significant exodus to West Germany—could no longer endorse a similar concept within its own borders. Coupled with an increased suspicion in East Germany due to prior discrepancies in information, a deterioration of the

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bilateral relationship commenced in the 1960s.

Trades, Deficits, Economic Disagreements

The transition from Ulbricht's reluctance to establish the commune in 1960 to the explicit denunciation of China's situation in 1961 cannot be attributed solely to growing distrust stemming from information discrepancies. Instead, several other factors must be considered to account for this significant shift. The economy, recognized as a fundamental component of international relations, played a pivotal role in the deterioration of the relationship between China and East Germany from 1960 to 1961 and beyond. Around the same period, when Chairman Mao articulated his intention for China to surpass the United Kingdom in steel production, Ulbricht declared that East Germany would outpace West Germany in food and industrial consumption by 1961. Nevertheless, the Landwirtschaftliche Produktions Genossenschaft (LPG) promoted in East Germany did not achieve its goal of enhancing agricultural productivity; on the contrary, it resulted in a decline. For instance, in 1959, a privately owned cow produced an average of 3.246 kilograms of milk per day, but following its integration into the LPG, the yield decreased to 2.529 kilograms. Acknowledging this failure, East German leaders endeavored to ensure the sustainability of food supplies for civilians by procuring supplies from China, primarily peanuts and beans, since 1959. Nonetheless, from the Chinese perspective, fueled by the widespread enthusiasm of the Great Leap Forward, imports of German goods surpassed exports, leading to trade deficits that could jeopardize the stability of the bilateral trade relationship. Despite this, the extensive engagement with national policy resulted in an increase in import levels.

It was only upon the visit of Peng Dehuai, the Minister of National Defense of China, to East Germany in May 1959 that Ulbricht became cognizant of the unreliability of China's food exports. During the meeting, while Ulbricht expressed hopes that Peng would enhance Chinese meat exports, Peng responded hesitantly, indicating that there remained Chinese citizens enduring starvation. However, the concerns of East German leaders regarding China did not pertain to China's ability to support East Germany, but rather to the accuracy of Peng's assertions. Peng faced accusations of being a rightist due to his criticisms of the Great Leap Forward at the Lushan Conference, and East Germany was informed of both Peng's criticisms and the assurances surrounding Chinese production. The two conflicting

pieces of information relayed by China exacerbated East Germany's skepticism regarding China's true economic conditions and reinforced its resolve to continue trade relations with East Germany.

The definitive cessation of bilateral trade occurred towards the end of 1960, following China's execution of a new trade agreement designed for the bilateral trade for the period of 1960-1962. However, China found itself unable to fulfill East Germany's requests for essential grains, such as beans. According to research conducted by Professor Ge Jun of East China Normal University regarding economic relations from 1956 to 1964, it was evident that post-Lushan Conference, Chairman Mao's persistence in pursuing an accelerated industrial initiative, particularly targeting steel production in spite of the national economic imbalance, precipitated significant economic challenges nationwide. These challenges encompass substantial financial deficits, market shortages, and a considerable contraction in production.

Consequently, these complications had a direct impact on China's export capabilities; by July 25, 1960, the annual procurement plan for export goods was only able to fulfill 43.3% of its original targets, whereas the export plan was completed at a mere 38%. Furthermore, despite China's attempts to reorganize its trade strategies, it still faced an outstanding debt of approximately 2 billion rubles owed to the Soviet Union and other communist nations by the end of 1960. Specifically regarding trade with East Germany, there was an initial plan for East Germany to import 192,000 tons of beans from China in 1960, with a contract signed for 180,000 tons. However, by the end of the second quarter, China had fallen short by 9,000 tons of beans and indicated that there would be no further exports of beans or peanut oil for that year. Estimates suggested that by the end of 1960, China would incur a deficit of approximately 120 million rubles. More critically, this delinquency in 1960 had adverse implications for subsequent bilateral trade agreements. China resolved to address the outstanding deficits prior to entering new contracts, resulting in a diminished trade volume in future agreements. Collectively, these statistical figures illustrate the immediate repercussions of the Great Leap Forward on China's national economy and its international trade relations.

The significant transformation in China's stance regarding its trade with East Germany, along with the substantial debts incurred, culminated in a critical juncture for the economic relationship between the two

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nations. In January 1961, Walter Ulbricht dispatched a representative of the SED Politburo, Hermann Matern, to China with the objective of compelling the Chinese government to honor the trade agreements established in 1960. Despite the extensive censorship of documents from the Chinese Diplomacy Bureau, insights derived from a publication by the Chinese scholar Tong Xin indicate that the discussions between Premier Zhou Enlai and Matern did not unfold favorably. While both parties articulated their respective national predicaments, Matern's demands were limited to an inquiry directed at Zhou Enlai regarding which aspects of the 1960 trade contract could potentially be fulfilled. Conversely, Zhou Enlai explicitly communicated China's inability to comply with the trade agreement or to supply the promised foodstuffs, attributing this shortfall to an acute nationwide food crisis. This exchange underscored the detrimental consequences inflicted by the Great Leap Forward, which had fundamentally undermined China's agricultural productivity. Furthermore, the failed LPG initiative, a German adaptation of agricultural cooperatives drawing from Chinese experiences, was notably hampered by the imposition of rigid communist ideologies, resulting in severe repercussions for both East German agriculture and the broader economy, ultimately spurring widespread civilian flight. It is evident that had circumstances in East Germany been more favorable, Matern would not have needed to explicitly interrogate the viability of any components of the trade contract, and China could have readily extended vital assistance to East Germany, which would have contributed to the continuation of their prior amicable relationship. Nonetheless, both nations found themselves compelled to exert pressure upon one another. Following this incident, economic discord escalated into political conflicts, as both parties questioned their commitment to further economic cooperation and mutual political support. Ultimately, the bilateral diplomatic relationship deteriorated significantly, primarily due to economic discord stemming from the economic difficulties wrought by the Great Leap Forward in China and the mass emigration resulting from East Germany's misguided replication of these experiences.

Following the distressing dialogue between Zhou Enlai and Hermann Matern, the nature of Sino-East German trade underwent a significant transformation. Ge Jun asserts that by 1962, bilateral trade had evolved into a mechanism for political rivalry. While some degree of mutual understanding regarding each other's national challenges remained, the negotiations surrounding trade

increasingly emphasized pragmatism. A key reference in Ge Jun's research highlights that East Germany postponed negotiations concerning cultural cooperation and demonstrated hesitance in providing materials for technological collaboration. Conversely, the GDR insisted that China furnish increased quantities of grease and ore, as well as accommodate a higher influx of East German visitors. These instances served as a direct response from East Germany to China's failure to adhere to trade agreements, citing the economic difficulties precipitated by the Great Leap Forward as justification. Ultimately, this complex and estranged economic dynamic transformed the previously amicable trade relationship, a shift attributable to the enduring impact of the Great Leap Forward, as well as the domestic economic and political changes in the GDR.

Sino-Soviet Split and Ideological Disparity

While the evident impacts of the Great Leap Forward were primarily societal and economic in nature, its failure prompted inquiries regarding the fundamental aspects of Mao's ideologies. In 1958, at the time when the Great Leap Forward attained its initial successes, Mao proclaimed it a successful alternative to the Soviet model and further characterized it as the ideological successor to Stalin's industrial revolution. Alongside existing discord regarding Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence with the West versus Mao's inclination towards inevitable confrontation, Khrushchev ultimately withdrew all Soviet experts from China. Coupled with other contributing factors, this culminated in the Sino-Soviet Split that unfolded during the 1960s.

Under such circumstances, East Germany found itself in a precarious position. Five years subsequent to Khrushchev's declaration of de-Stalinization and the pursuit of peaceful coexistence with Western powers, East Germany and China espoused an ideology of forging distinct approaches to communism, in alignment with Stalin's model and cult of personality. Although their ideologies were comparable, the initially proclaimed successes of the Great Leap Forward, coupled with an increase in economic collaboration, instilled confidence in both nations regarding their respective choices. In the case of East Germany, this fostered a resolve to extricate itself from Soviet hegemony. One primary motivation for East Germany's examination of Chinese experiences was the admiration held by the SED leaders for Mao's commitment to developing an independent model of communism that diverged from the Soviet paradigm; the early accomplishments further

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validated the plausibility of pursuing such autonomy. Consequently, through the emulation of the Chinese model and the anticipated enhancement of economic and thus international standing, East Germany sought to attain its diplomatic and economic independence from being a satellite state of the Soviet Union. However, in 1960, as these achievements manifested into disasters and economic collaboration disintegrated, East German leaders recognized the ideological disparities between Mao's interpretation of communism and the policies deemed suitable for their nation. Specifically, Ulbricht articulated during the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties in June that the Chinese experiences might engender discord within the East German populace and party, as previously noted. In response, senior officials of the SED issued directives to confer with Soviet communists prior to engaging in negotiations with China.

The most significant event that underscored the ideological conflicts between China and East Germany was the Sixth Congress of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) held in 1963. Drawing upon Chen Tao's research regarding the tensions between China and East Germany during this Congress, it becomes evident that China's anti-revisionist ideology—contextualized by Mao's characterization of the Soviet Union as representative of "modern revisionism"—underscored China's response to the Sino-Soviet Split. Additionally, diplomatic disputes involving China and various socialist and third-world nations elicited a substantial international wave of criticism directed toward China. During the Congress, Ulbricht's inaugural address articulated the GDR's support for Khrushchev while indirectly condemning China's "adventurism." Although Ulbricht did not explicitly intend to disparage China, he emphasized the importance of internal negotiations within the socialist bloc and the avoidance of escalating tensions, which was perceived by China as East Germany's overt criticism for the first time. Furthermore, the Chinese representatives interpreted both Ulbricht's condemnation and Khrushchev's subsequent address, which called for an end to public disputes, as an effort to foster collaboration aimed at garnering international support from other socialist nations, thereby attributing the Sino-Soviet Split to China. Following discussions between the Chinese representatives and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after both speeches, a comprehensive struggle approach was adopted by the latter, leading the representatives to decline participation in multiple diplomatic engagements subsequent to the Congress.

Subsequently, the representatives from China delivered a speech that criticized several socialist parties, including the SED and the Soviet Communist Party, which elicited immediate condemnation. Furthermore, East German radio reported that the Chinese representatives had attacked the fraternal parties, which the chairman of the meeting promptly refuted on the spot. Throughout the remainder of the meeting, while Ulbricht continued to advocate for the preservation of camaraderie with China and to promote mutual understanding and benefits within the socialist bloc, China's stance was evidently characterized by indifference and even opposition. Following the Congress, Chinese representatives declined to participate in any diplomatic events or comply with arrangements proposed by East Germany.

The Sixth Congress of the SED significantly exacerbated the estrangement in the Sino-GDR relationship on diplomatic matters, particularly from China's perspective. While China maintained a relatively radical approach both domestically and internationally, the Soviet Union and East Germany adopted a more moderate stance. While more complexity existed within the bilateral relationship between the GDR and the USSR, Ulbricht's critique of Chinese ideologies served as an indicator of his pro-Soviet alignment amid the rivalry between China and the USSR from the Chinese perspective. Consequently, although East Germany endeavored to reconcile with China and uphold their tenuous relationship, the People's Daily, with Mao Zedong's endorsement, disseminated an editorial denouncing the SED's conduct of advocating unity among communist allies while condemning parties such as the Chinese Communist Party. This editorial expressed astonishment at China being accused by other socialist factions of decrying Yugoslav revisionism. Rather, the divergent attitudes regarding the Yugoslav issue and the contrasting ideological interpretations of revisionism between China and East Germany underscore a growing alienation in the bilateral relations of the two nations.

In addition to the ideological divides and conflicts evidenced during the Sixth Congress of the SED, similar public attitudes toward their authorities also indicated the sensitive nature of the bilateral relationship between China and East Germany. A comparative analysis of Chen Tao's thesis regarding East German engineers in Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan Province in China, along with the aforementioned oral history, reveals that citizens of both nations exhibited a hesitancy to comment on political matters. Firstly, some East German

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engineers and elderly individuals from Taizhou shared a cautious approach regarding political discourse. Following the Sixth Congress of the SED, Walter Berger, a former leader of the engineers, declined to express his views when presented with an editorial from the People's Daily by the director of Ersha—a cooperative factory between China and East Germany that is also the focus of this article. Moreover, when Heinz Rast, the deputy head of the German engineers, was urged by his Chinese translator to accept a German-language propaganda pamphlet, he refused, stating his desire to avoid potential complications. These instances are comparable to the concerns expressed by the elderly residents of Taizhou. Specifically, Mr. Lyu voiced his apprehension regarding the discussion of certain topics, asking, "Can we really chat about these topics, like the Great Leap Forward?"

In summary, the ramifications of the Chinese Great Leap Forward on the deterioration of Sino-East German relations were both immediate and long-lasting. The orchestrated achievements and international propaganda cultivated a disjunction between the actual circumstances and the perceptions held by East Germany, resulting in an escalating distrust between the two nations as conditions deteriorated. The economic challenges encountered in bilateral trade, which coincided with the growing distrust fueled by misinformation, further aggravated the bilateral relationship. Ultimately, the intensifying skepticism and trade disputes culminated in East Germany's diminishing confidence in Mao's alternative model of communism. Particularly within the context of the Sino-Soviet Split, East Germany's pro-Soviet inclination irrevocably influenced its bilateral relations with China, which, following the Sixth Congress of the SED, ultimately resulted in a sensitive political environment among both diplomatic occurrences and public sentiment.

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