

The Transformation of Chinese Foreign Policy and Its Impact on East Asia: International Patterns in the 1950s

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This paper investigates the main characteristics of the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) during the 1950s and the impact of that policy on the international order in East Asia. During the 1950s, PRC foreign policy demonstrated an evolution that can be roughly divided into three stages.

The first stage is from the winter of 1948 to the end of 1953, during which time PRC foreign policy formed and changed. Allying with the Soviet Union, the PRC actively intervened in issues involving its peripheries, such as the Korean War and the First Indochina War. Some key decisions are well known to have played an important role in shaping PRC foreign policy.

The second stage is from July 1954 to the end of 1957. It is regarded as a stabilization period, when the PRC participated in some international conferences, such as the Geneva Conference in 1954 and the Bandung Conference in 1955. Engagement in those multilateral international meetings was very significant in allowing Chinese leaders to understand foreign policy affairs and in helping them to complete a fundamental vision for the nation's identity.

The third stage is from the summer of 1958 to the end of 1959. This stage is one of radicalization, in which PRC foreign policy began to undergo what is called "revolutionization."

Describing the changes in PRC foreign policy in the 1950s, this paper argues that those changes are a result of the interaction between domestic politics and the external international environment. Chinese domestic politics played a more significant role than the external situation. But seen in terms of consequences, all changes in Chinese foreign policy have had important influences on the East Asian international politics.

I. The revolutionary nature and domestic orientation of early-stage PRC diplomacy

One prominent characteristic of early PRC foreign policy is its origins from the latter period of the Chinese revolutionary movement instead of from the birth of the new nation.

The goals, theoretical thought and latter practices of the movement played a significant role in molding PRC foreign policy. After the founding of the PRC, three important decisions were adopted in response to the external situation: allying with the Soviet Union, aiding Vietnam in its fight against France, and becoming involved in the Korean War. On the one hand, these three decisions lead to “Lean to One side” (the initial foreign policy of the PRC) being more extreme during the early period of the PRC. On the other hand, they gradually highlighted that the domestic situation facing the Chinese leaders was more complex than that during the latter revolutionary period.

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) began to consider PRC foreign policy around the end of 1948. The main diplomatic principles, formulated over the course of approximately three months, consisted of the following: non-recognition of imperialism, with a bias in favor of the Soviet Union (later called “leaning to one side”); “building a new stove” (cooking one’s meals in a new way) and “cleaning up the house first, then inviting guests.”¹ In light of the guiding principles and the problems to be resolved, all three principles showed a strong revolutionary commitment.

“Revolutionary commitment” here means that they were inspired by Chinese revolutionary theory and were closely linked to the fundamental problems that remained to be resolved from the late phase of the Chinese revolution. In this sense, “leaning to one side” was the most representative of three principles of earlier foreign policies. The other two are “putting the house in order before inviting guests (dasao ganjing wuzi zaiqingke)” and “starting all over again (lingqi luzao).” “Leaning to one side” was a product of more than twenty years of revolution and was put forward as a cardinal principle on the eve of victory. It is impossible to interpret the formation of this principle and the inherent limitations in the later readjustments made to PRC foreign policy without understanding the relations between the Chinese revolution and world politics in the minds of the CPC leaders.

The great changes brought about by the end of World War I and the victory of “the October Revolution” in Russia established the international background for a Chinese revolution led by the Communists. Lenin’s theory of imperialism, the October Revolution, the lessons learned from the failure of the 1911 revolution and the experiences and plight of the early CPC leaders were all incorporated into the Communists’ knowledge of important matters, such as international affairs and the place of the Chinese revolution in world

¹ Zhang Baijia, “Jiefang zhanzheng shiqi Mao Zedong de guoji zhanlue sixiang [Mao Zedong’s Thought on International Strategy during the Civil War],” in *Foundation of International Strategy*, ed., *Huangqiu tongci liangre – yidai lingxiu de guoji zhanlue sixiang* [Great Unity: International Thought of a Generation Leaders] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1993), p. 60.

affairs. In their view, “the world capitalist and imperialist powers are in collaboration to exploit the proletariat and the oppressed nations throughout the world.” The Chinese revolution would prevail over imperialism “only if it integrates itself into the world revolutionary trend of the oppressed nations and is linked to the international proletarian revolutionary movement.” “This is the only road that will enable the toiling Chinese masses to gain liberation from imperialist oppression.”² As testified by history, this knowledge, gained in the early stages, influenced the strategies and tactics of the CPC in all later periods, although some changes occurred during the Second World War and shortly thereafter.

The outbreak of full-scale civil war in China and the beginning of the Cold War between Washington and Moscow in the summer of 1946 made the leaders of the CPC change the basic views they had held since the summer of 1942, and the concept of an “intermediary zone” was put forward from the spring of 1946. This concept had rich connotations and far-reaching significance. One element of the concept was that the rivalry between America and the Soviet Union would not decidedly influence the political situation in China.³ However, the concept of an “intermediary zone” lasted for only a short period in the minds of the CPC leadership, because Moscow raised the theory of “two blocs” in September 1947.⁴

From the spring of 1948, the Communist leaders began to express their ardent desire to strengthen ties with the Soviet Union, and they made urgent political and ideological preparations for this new development within the party. In an article, Liu Shaoqi stated simply and straightforwardly that in the current situation it was impossible to remain neutral between the United States bloc and the Soviet bloc, and that an alliance with the Soviet Union was “a demarcation line between revolution and counter-revolution” and “a demarcation line between progress and retrogression” for a nation.⁵ Soon after that, the communist leadership began to map out their foreign policy. They had a relatively profound but fixed understanding of the world political situation and the trends of development, and they believed that “conflict between the two blocs headed respectively

² “Zhongguo gongchandang dierci quanguo daibiao dahui xuanyan [The declaration of the Second Congress of the CCP]” (July 1922), in Central Archives ed., *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji* [The Selected Documents of the CCP’s Central Committee] (Beijing: Zhongyang dangxiao, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 107–109.

³ Niu Jun, “Mao Zedong waijiao sixiang de qiyuan [The Origin of Mao Zedong’s Thought on Diplomacy],” *Modern History* 6 (1992), pp. 14–16.

⁴ *Gongchandang qingbaoju huiyi wenjian huibian* [Collection of Documents from the Meeting of the Communist Information Bureau] (Beijing: Renmin, 1954), p. 5.

⁵ Liu Shaoqi, “On Internationalism and Nationalism,” *People’s Daily* (November 1, 1948).

by the United States and the Soviet Union is the most fundamental conflict, and the struggle between the two blocs is a life-and-death struggle.”⁶

As noted by some scholars, the term “leaning to one side” had another meaning and was put forward as the “general fundamental principle of the CCP.”⁷ When Mao Zedong advocated leaning to one side in “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship,” he was answering a question greater than foreign policy: the question of what road the PRC should follow. The logical inference was that Mao Zedong’s consideration of PRC diplomatic strategy was closely linked to the nation’s development strategy after the founding of the PRC, and that the former was also closely linked to the Communist leadership’s decision to set up a government following the Soviet model and follow the so-called “Soviet socialist road” for national development.

“Leaning to one side” involved two aspects: forming an alliance with the Soviet Union and pursuing the “non-recognition” of imperialist countries, particularly the United States. The latter aspect also demonstrated the revolutionary nature of PRC diplomacy in its embryonic form. In deciding to “ally” with the Soviet Union, the CPC Central Committee also adopted the principle of non-recognition of Western nations; that is, it was in no hurry to establish diplomatic relations with countries such as the U.S. and Great Britain, and it would be in no hurry to do so for a fairly long period after the founding of the PRC so that the influence of imperialist forces could be completely eradicated.⁸ The definition of the nature of the Sino-American confrontation, the alliance with the Soviet Union, the complete elimination of American influence in China immediately after the founding of the PRC and similar measures demonstrated that coordinating Sino-American relations would have been an extremely difficult and protracted affair, even if the Korean War had not occurred.

Chinese scholars have long emphasized the complete difference between the diplomacy of the PRC and that of previous Chinese governments. In fact, there was continuity between the diplomacy of the two, as demonstrated by China’s domestic orientation. “Domestic orientation” means that Chinese foreign policy as a whole was geared to domestic political objectives and was swayed by domestic politics. This feature

⁶ Yu Zhanbang, “Mao Zedong’s Important Talk with Zhang Zhizhong,” *Materials of the CCP’s History Studies* 48 (1992), p. 153.

⁷ Zhang Baijia, “Jiefang zhanzheng shiqi Mao Zedong de guoji zhanlue sixiang,” p. 63.

⁸ Mao Zedong, “Zai zhongguo gongchandang diqijie zhongyang weiyuanhui dierci huiyi shangde baogao [The Report on the Second Session of 7th Central Committee of CCP]” (March 5, 1949), in *Mao Zedong Xuanji* [Selected Works of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin, 1991), vol. 4, p. 1435.

can be traced back to the mid nineteenth century, and it lasted into the twentieth century. Previous studies have shown that from the end of the Anti-Japanese War to the PRC's founding, the needs of domestic political struggle were always one of the CPC Central Committee's main considerations in determining its foreign policies. This practice would inevitably influence the foreign policy of the PRC.⁹

The first and most important diplomatic move after the PRC was founded was the conclusion of a treaty of alliance with the Soviet Union. During Mikoyan's visit to Xibaiko in January 1949 and Liu Shaoqi's visit to Moscow in July, the leaders of the two parties had discussed the handling of the old Sino-Soviet treaty and the possibility of signing a new one. When Mao Zedong paid a visit to Moscow soon after the PRC's founding, the main problem to be resolved was the conclusion of a new treaty. During his first meeting with Stalin on 26 December 1949, Mao Zedong declared, "China now needs a breathing spell of three to five years to restore its economy to the pre-war level and to stabilize the nation." He also pointed out that the aim of alliance with the Soviet Union for China was to look for security safeguards, political support and economic assistance, and that a new Sino-Soviet treaty would secure these requirements. At first Stalin clearly ruled out the possibility of concluding a new treaty.¹⁰

According to a telegram that Mao Zedong sent to the CPC Central Committee, it was only during his talks with Molotov and others on the evening of 2 January 1950 that the Soviet side agreed to sign a new treaty. Mao Zedong told them that a new treaty would command support from Chinese people of all walks of life and be of help in dealing with the treaties signed by old China with imperialist countries.¹¹ Thereafter, Mao Zedong continued to persuade the Soviet side that the new treaty should reflect the "completely new relationships" between the two countries. "Some of the Chinese people are very unhappy with the existing Sino-Soviet treaty," he emphasized.¹² Obviously Mao Zedong

⁹ The opinions seen in Xu Xin, "Wanqing zhongguo waijiao: lishi chongtu zhongde shiluo yu gengxin [China's diplomacy in the latter period of the Qing Dynasty]," and Zhang Baijia, "20 shiji zhongguo waijiao jiben xinasuo chuyi [The basic line of China's diplomacy during the 20th century]," in Yuan Ming, ed., *Kua Shiji de Tiaozhan: Zhongguo Guoji Guanxi xueke de Tiaozhan* [Crossing the Century's Challenge: The Challenge to China's International Studies] (Chongqing: Chongqing Chuban, 1992).

¹⁰ "Record of Conversations between Stalin and Mao Zedong" (December 16, 1949), kept in Document Section of Center for International Cold War History Study, East China Normal University, no. 00255.

¹¹ Mao Zedong, "Zhou Enlai Came to the Soviet Union to Negotiate and Sign the Treaty" (January 2, 1950), *The Selected Writings of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian and Shijie zhishi, 1994), pp. 120–122.

¹² "Record of Talks between Mao Zedong and Andrei Vyshisky" (January 6, 1950), *Materials*

used the difficulties he had encountered at home as leverage for Soviet concessions. Considering the situation at that time, there is no reason to doubt that Mao Zedong's main concern was the domestic political situation.

Zhou Enlai proved to be a tough negotiator in later talks related to the conclusion of a new treaty, which astonished the Soviet delegates, who went as far as to ask, "how can the Soviet Union and China be regarded as allies now that things are going this way?"¹³ Upon returning after signing the Sino-Soviet Treaty, Mao Zedong stressed that the new treaty was a "patriotic one" that accorded with the needs of Chinese economic reconstruction and national security.¹⁴ The disturbances in China that followed the signing of agreements in March on the establishment of Sino-Soviet petroleum and non-ferrous metal joint-stock companies provided indirect support for Mao Zedong's statement. It can be seen from the document drafted by Liu Shaoqi that the two agreements had raised doubts among students and were sharply criticized by them.¹⁵

PRC diplomacy in the early days displayed an obvious "extroversion," as demonstrated by the concern and support for revolutionary movements outside China. In part this was inspired by the Chinese revolution and the desire for victory to have a great influence throughout the world, or at least on China's neighbors. However, this "extroversion" did not overwhelmingly influence PRC diplomacy, and the domestic orientation remained dominant, as fully demonstrated by the policy decisions made with respect to aiding Vietnam in its war against the French in 1950 and sending troops into the Korean War.

During negotiations on a new treaty with the Soviet Union, the Chinese leadership decided to aid Vietnam in its fight against the French. This was a strategic decision of great significance, both in terms of the guiding principles of the PRC's foreign relations and in terms of its influence on later Chinese diplomacy.

One of the successes of this decision was that China was not drawn into a foreign war again, as had happened on the Korean Peninsula, nor did it upset the domestic agenda. There was therefore no divergence of opinion among the top leaders. Liu Shaoqi explained

of CCP's History Studies 5 (1998), p. 10.

¹³ "Andrei Vyshisky's Report to Stalin regarding the Conversation with Zhou Enlai" (February 2 and 3, 1950), *Materials of CCP's History Studies* 5 (1998), pp. 20–24.

¹⁴ Mao Zedong, "The Great Significance of Signing the Soviet-Chinese Treaty" (April 11, 1950), *The Selected Writings of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy*, pp. 131–132.

¹⁵ Liu Shaoqi, "The Telegraph Regarding the Central Committee's Explanation to the People about Soviet-Chinese Association" (March 30, 1950), in Institute of Central Literature Studies ed., *Liu Shaoqi's Writings since the PRC's Founding*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 2005), pp. 501–502.

how aiding Vietnam related to China's security: If China did not aid Vietnam, the enemy would stay in Indochina and "there would be more difficulties and troubles for us."¹⁶

In contrast, the decision to send troops into the Korean War was much more difficult, since it involved the underlying question of PRC foreign policy. The PRC began to provide assistance to North Korea soon after that nation was founded. With the outbreak of the Korean War, the Northeast Frontier Army began full-scale mobilization from the middle of July, to prepare for emergencies.¹⁷ The speech made by Zhou Enlai at the preparatory conference of the Northeast Frontier Army on 26 August 1950 expressed the basic views of the Chinese leadership with regard to the Korean War: that as a result of American military involvement, the Korean War "has become the central issue of current world conflict." This was not only "a problem for a brotherly neighbor," but also a threat to the security of Northeast China. China must thus be prepared to enter the war, in order to help the North Koreans unify their country and "wipe out the American forces one by one." Perhaps in order to induce the armed forces to agree to shelving the plan for liberating Taiwan for the time being, he added that victory in the Korean War would pave the way for the solution of the Taiwan issue.¹⁸

The landing at Inchon of American forces abruptly turned the tide of the war and made it unfavorable to the North Koreans. Almost simultaneously, on 1 October, the Chinese leaders received Kim Il-sung's request for armed assistance and Stalin's letter soliciting the same for North Korea. The situation on the battlefield was now even worse than they had anticipated in August. Although it was felt that entering the war could have very serious consequences for China, Mao Zedong made a quick decision to dispatch troops to Korea. It is worth noting that, in the telegram he drafted to Stalin on 2 October, Mao Zedong focuses on the losses that the Korean revolution would suffer and the negative influence on the "whole East" if American forces were to occupy the entire peninsula. He made no reference to the threat to China's own security, which was stressed again and again when the Chinese leadership explained to the Chinese people their rationale for sending troops to Korea.¹⁹

¹⁶ Institute of Central Literature Studies, ed., *Liu Shaoqi's Chronicle 1898–1969*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1996), p. 256.

¹⁷ Institute of Central Literature Studies, ed., *Zhou Enlai's Chronicle 1949–1976*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1997), p. 53.

¹⁸ Zhou Enlai, "Zhunbei chongfen, chushoujisheng [Making Full Preparations and Winning the War as soon as China is Involved in it]" (August 26, 1950), *Selected Writings of Zhou Enlai on the Military* (Beijing: Renmin, 1997), vol. 4, pp. 43–49.

¹⁹ Mao Zedong, "Guanyu jue ding Zhiyuanjun ruchao zuozhan de wenti [Issues Regarding Entry by the PLA into the Korean War]" (October 2, 1950), *Selected Writings of Mao Zedong*

Mao Zedong's decision quickly met with opposition from his colleagues. It is still not certain how many of the decision-makers opposed him, but the number could not have been small, since Mao Zedong was forced to change his decision. Two factors were responsible for reversing the decision to send troops to Korea. First, some of the decision-makers did not approve of dispatching troops. In their opinion, first priority should be given to domestic needs. Second, even Mao Zedong himself, although full of revolutionary fervor and strongly in favor of sending troops, had serious misgivings and believed that military failure would have serious political, economic and security consequences for China.

Under such circumstances, pressure from Stalin played an important role. In his telegram to Mao Zedong on about 5 October, Stalin stressed that China's participation in the war would compel the U.S. to make concessions and "give up Taiwan" even, and that China "could not even get Taiwan" if it did not enter the war.²⁰ Stalin's hint at possible betrayal of China over the question of Taiwan must have had a profound impact on the Chinese leadership. Stalin issued a more serious warning in his talks with Zhou Enlai and Lin Biao on 11 October. He stressed that American occupation of North Korea would pose a long-term threat to the security of China and exert a negative influence on economic development in the northeast. Furthermore, if North Korea were to fall, its cadres and main forces would swarm into Northeast China.²¹

According to the available archival records, Chinese leaders in Beijing had received reports of Stalin's view even before 13 October. Mao Zedong's telegram to Zhou Enlai on 13 October showed that he was giving first priority to national security. In the same telegram, Mao Zedong instructed Zhou Enlai to secure Soviet weapons on credit so that the national budget would guarantee the needs of economic and cultural reconstruction; only in this way could China sustain the war effort on the Korea Peninsula for any length of time and "maintain the unity of the majority at home."²² On the same day, Mao Zedong summoned Nicolas Rosin, the Soviet ambassador to China, to an interview and told him that China was unable to pay cash for Soviet weapons and had to buy them on credit. In

on Diplomacy, p. 139.

²⁰ "Fengxi guanyu zhongguo chubing wenti zhi Jin Richeng xin [Fenxi's Letter to Kim Il-sung Regarding China's Troops Entering the Korean War]" (October 8, 1950), in PLA's Institute of Military Science ed., *Guanyu chaoxian zhanzheng de eguo dang'an* [Russian Archives Regarding the Korean War] (1996), pp. 100–101.

²¹ Alexandre Y. Mansourov, "Stalin, Mao, Kim and China's Decision to Enter the Korean War," in *The Cold War in Asia* (Cold War International History Project Bulletin), Issues 6–7 (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1995/1996).

²² *Zhou Enlai's Chronicle 1949–1976*, vol. 1, p. 86.

this way the 1951 national budget would not be disrupted and “the democratic parties would be more easily convinced of our argument for entering the war.”²³

By the time Mao Zedong finally decided to send troops to the Korea Peninsula, he had shifted the focus of his concern from “fulfilling the international duty” to protecting the interests of national security and domestic stability. At the same time, he tried his utmost to mitigate the effects of entering the war on efforts to improve the war-torn economy and thereby to overcome resistance to his decision. It could therefore be concluded that China’s role in the Korean War did not fundamentally alter the introversion of PRC foreign policy; it only achieved a new balance between introversion and extroversion, with a bias towards introversion.

Regardless of the reasons behind the three important decisions made after the founding of the PRC, they had vital importance to East Asia during the early Cold War period. The foreign policy decisions of the PRC resulted in a large-scale extension of the Cold War to East Asia that put China at the forefront of the East Asian Cold War and in direct opposition to the U.S. for a long time, thereby roughly molding the Cold War pattern in East Asia that has been kept for almost 20 years.

II. The historical meaning of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence for PRC diplomacy

The CPC Central Committee first formally announced the principles of the PRC with regard to the establishment of diplomatic relations soon after the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) crossed the Yangtze River. As the spokesman of the PLA General Headquarters, on 30 April, Mao Zedong promulgated the principles for establishing formal relations with foreign countries. The new Chinese government would be willing “to consider the establishment of diplomatic relations with foreign countries; and such relations must be based on equality, mutual benefit, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and, first of all, on no help being given to the Guomindang reactionaries.”²⁴ We do not know the detailed process of drafting and announcing this statement, but it could have been a response to the American search for contacts with the Chinese Communists and a tactic for ruling out military intervention by foreign countries. In other words, it was made for the

²³ “Luoshen guanyu Mao Zedong jueding chubing deng wenti zhi Feili pouf dian [Rosin’s Telegraph to Stalin Regarding Mao Zedong’s Decision to Send Chinese Troops into the Korean War]” (October 13, 1950), *Russian Archives Regarding the Korean War*, p. 103.

²⁴ Mao Zedong, “Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun zongbu fayanren qi yingguo junjian de baoxing fabiao de shengming [PLA spokesman’s statement against Britain’s gunboat atrocity]” (April 30, 1949), *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 4, pp. 1460–1461.

final victory of the Chinese revolution.

Diplomatic relations were established with eleven countries, all of them within the Soviet bloc, within the third month after the founding of the PRC. By the eighth month, the number had reached seventeen. However, by 1955, when the Bandung Conference was convened, only a further five had been added, increasing the number to twenty-two. These included five northern or central European countries, and five Asian countries. Under such circumstances, it would have been very difficult for the PRC to score greater diplomatic victories if it had not made adjustments to its foreign policies. One of the preconditions for making adjustments in this area was to step beyond the limits of the two-bloc doctrine and deepen knowledge of the relations between states.

The Chinese Communist leaders adopted very revolutionary criteria when they classified the states in the world during the later part of the PRC's revolutionary movement. In their eyes, all the states outside the Soviet camp, including all countries in Asia, were either imperialist or under the control of imperialist or reactionary forces. According to the views expressed by Mao Zedong in his work "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship," the PRC did not need to urgently establish close relations with these countries, and the Chinese leadership showed more concern for the working people and so-called revolutionary movement, even for the armed struggles against governments in these countries.²⁵

At the Conference of Trade Unions of Asia and Oceania convened in November 1949, Liu Shaoqi clearly defined many of the states as "colonial or semi-colonial nations" and spoke glowingly of the revolutionary situation and the development of armed struggles in Asian countries. He also declared that the victory of the Chinese revolution was both an inspiration to and an example for the "war of national liberation" in these countries, and that the PRC as a newly liberated nation would shoulder "heavy responsibilities" to aid revolutions in other countries.²⁶

Once the PRC openly declared its obligation to aid the revolutionary movement, especially armed struggles in a number of countries, it would have been difficult to develop normal relations with the governments of these countries. Although the decisions to aid Vietnam against the French and to send troops into the Korean War against the U.S. were made mainly out of considerations for the national security of China, some Asian

²⁵ Mao Zedong, "Lun Renmin Minzhu Zhuangzheng [On the People's Democratic Dictatorship]" (June 30, 1949), *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 4, p. 1472.

²⁶ Liu Shaoqi, "The Opening Address on the Union Meeting of Asia and Australia" (November 16, 1949), *Liu Shaoqi's Writings since the PRC's Founding*, vol. 1, pp. 160–161.

governments saw them as an embodiment of China's revolutionary stance and as policies for aiding the revolutionary movement; thus, they regarded China with apprehension. Clearly the diplomatic principles formulated against the background of victory in the revolutionary period, the world outlook they embodied and the inherent momentum of revolutionary movements had become the main obstacles to the development of formal diplomatic relations with other countries, particularly with Asian ones.

At the beginning of 1951, there appeared a trend towards the localization of the Korean War, and in February the Chinese leadership began to take economic reconstruction as the "central task" and proposed starting large-scale economic reconstruction after twenty-two months of preparation.²⁷ In the autumn of 1952, domestic developments convinced the Chinese leaders that the transitional period had come to an end. The First Five-year Plan was instituted in 1953, and the whole country was geared to large-scale economic reconstruction. With the new developments at home, it was imperative to make adjustments to China's foreign policy.

China faced two main national security problems. One was the Korean War, which not only threatened the security of the PRC, but was also a drain on China's manpower, materials and finances. The best alternative was to end the war as soon as possible. The other was the worsening security situation surrounding China that had resulted mainly from American expansion in Asia and its policy of containing China. During the Korean War, the U.S. began to build a military encirclement around China consisting of military bases, a stronger military presence and military pacts. These posed a long-term threat to China. The most urgent task for national security at that time was to improve relations with neighboring countries.

It was under such conditions that, between 1952 and 1954, China developed its foreign policy of a "peaceful united front (heping tongyi zhanxian)" and tried to unite as many peace-loving countries as possible.²⁸ The two main objectives of this policy, "enhancing the trend towards peace and neutrality" and "enlarging the zone of peace and neutrality," were fulfilled first of all in areas around China. To be precise, a new foreign

²⁷ Liu Shaoqi, "Zai Beijingshi disanjie renmin daibiao huiyi shangde jianghua [Speech at the Beijing Third Congress]" (February 28, 1951), *Selected Works of Liu Shaoqi*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin, 1985), p. 60; Mao Zedong, "Zhonggong zhongyang zhengzhiju kuo da huiyi jueyi yaodian [The main points of solution on Politburo meeting of CCP Central Committee]" (February 18, 1951), *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 5 (Beijing: Renmin, 1977), p. 34.

²⁸ Mao Zedong, "Guanyu zhongjiang didai, heping gongchu yiji zhongying zhongmei guanxi wenti [Issues Regarding the Intermediary Zone and Peaceful Co-existence and China-Britain Relations and China-America Relations]" (August 24, 1954), *Selected Writings of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy*, pp. 159-160.

policy was carried out to create a security buffer zone around China.

The policy of “peaceful united front” brought obvious changes in PRC diplomacy. The signing of a ceasefire agreement in Korea in the summer of 1953, the insistence on ending the Indochina War by peace negotiations during the Geneva Conference from April to July 1954 and the drive for good neighborly relations with Asian nations after conclusion of the Geneva Conference: These all directly related to this policy. Relevant published historical information and research is still insufficient to fully reveal how this policy was shaped. However, we can clearly see the following important changes in the thinking of the Chinese leadership.

First and foremost, the basic aim of the new foreign policy was to preserve China’s national security. This was characterized by the creation of a buffer zone between China and imperialist countries such as the U.S. and by the establishment of a “collective peace” and the enlargement of the “peace area.” The enforcement of this policy presupposed good relations with surrounding countries, and it was thus necessary to reevaluate their natures and roles.

Second, closely related to the policy mentioned above was a deepening of the understanding of state diplomacy. As shown by archives available now, on 30 April 1952, Zhou Enlai stated explicitly for the first time at a conference of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that diplomacy “is the connection between states.”²⁹ This statement was of great significance for PRC diplomacy, since it meant that the essential difference between the diplomacy of the PRC and that of the Chinese revolutionary movement in terms of their respective relations with foreign countries was finally acknowledged and revealed.

Even if Zhou Enlai’s statement in 1952 was only a general summation of previous experiences, there was no mistaking the aim of the new foreign policy. The question at the top of the agenda was how to develop closer relations with countries in the “intermediary zone,” especially the surrounding Asian states. Previously, the Chinese Communists had mainly had relations with “brotherly states” led by “brotherly parties” within the Soviet bloc, and the “principle of proletarian internationalism” that governed these relations was in direct line with that governing the foreign relations of the revolutionary government. However, this principle was not universally applicable in relations with other countries, and it was problematic even in relations with “brotherly states.” Thus the special background and needs of PRC diplomacy led to the formulation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

²⁹ Zhou Enlai, “Women de waijiao renwu yu fangzhen [Our Diplomatic Task and Guidance]” (April 20, 1952), *Selected Writings of Zhou Enlai on Diplomacy*, p. 52.

The Geneva Conference, convened in April 1954, provided a critical occasion for implementing the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Their success at the conference greatly encouraged the Chinese leadership and spurred them to abandon the principle of “cleaning up the house first, then inviting guests.” At the enlarged Politburo meeting on 7 July 1954, Mao Zedong stated that the PRC should step out onto the world stage.³⁰ Following this policy, Chinese leaders tried their best to pursue good-neighbor diplomacy in Asia. A series of policies were formulated in quick succession, including those related to solving border problem with neighboring states, the dual nationality of overseas Chinese in Asia and non-interference in the internal affairs of non-socialist Asian countries.

The PRC’s progress in foreign relations in 1954 and 1955 demonstrated that the appearance of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence was a milestone in the development of PRC diplomacy in this period. It signaled the critical transition from the diplomacy of the revolutionary movement to state diplomacy, and was a sign that PRC diplomacy was entering a new stage.

The direct stimulus of the change certainly was Chinese development strategy and security strategy. Based on both these strategies, the change inevitably accompanied the understanding and recognition by Chinese leaders of national identity, regional identity and national liberation movements. Through a series of international multilateral conferences such as the Geneva Conference and the Bandung Conference, China not only redefined its national identity, but also played the role of a liaison between the socialist bloc and national liberation movements. China’s influence in East Asia dramatically increased during the more than two years from 1954–1955.

III. The origins of upheavals in Chinese diplomacy in the late 1950s

When the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were announced in 1954, China’s foreign policy began a period of quite smooth exploration and favorable evolution until the end of 1957. But momentum in that direction did not last long. Events in two fields – namely, upheavals in Sino-Soviet relations and the onset of the “Great Leap Forward” – began to adversely affect China’s foreign policy.

Scholars around the world have pointed out that there were complicated reasons behind the upheaval of the Sino-Soviet alliance from the summer of 1958. The key factor in the all-out shakeup of that alliance was the fact that the “leader/ follower” relationship of the Soviet Union and China in the framework of the Sino-Soviet alliance turned out to be

³⁰ Jin Chongji, ed., *Zhou Enlai’s Biography*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1998), p. 189.

no longer possible after the impact of events in Poland and Hungary in 1956. This situation underwent some changes, as evidenced by the fact that the Chinese leaders, taking advantage of what had happened in Poland and Hungary, managed to convince their Soviet counterparts to change some of their ways and codes of behavior in handling relations among countries within the socialist bloc and by the fact that China saw its clout obviously growing within this bloc, especially among Eastern European countries.

There was a reason for the Chinese leaders to believe that the previous “leader/follower” relationship was no longer valid. After what happened at the 20th Congress of the CPSU and in Poland and Hungary, the widespread opinion among the Chinese leadership was that the old “cat and mice” or “father and sons” dichotomy of Russia (the cat/ father) versus China and the other socialist countries (the mice/ sons) had changed altogether.³¹ No longer would they tolerate behavior on the part of the Soviet leaders that could be seen as forcible imposition. They would severely condemn and resolutely resist any Soviet action believed to be a violation of the new norms of equality, branding it as a repetition of the mistakes of the Stalin period. This was the basic reason why divergences arose in the summer of 1958 between China and the Soviet Union over a combined fleet, a long-wave radio station and other issues.³²

The changes that took place in Sino-Soviet relations meant in fact greater clout for China in the socialist bloc. At issue were the following questions: To what extent had it become greater? To what extent would the Soviet leadership allow this? When divergences occurred, could the Chinese leaders constrain their Soviet counterparts such that they would adapt their behavior and policy to what should be understood as norms governing a new relationship of equals? And, in further analysis, how could the Sino-Soviet alliance be maintained when one of its basic cornerstones, the old syndrome of “leader/follower,” had changed? What norms should their new relationship be based upon? In other words, was it possible to expect the Soviet leadership to accept the new norms the Chinese leaders wanted them to comply with? No one at that time answered these questions, nor was it possible for anyone to do so. After all, China had never had any

³¹ Yang Kuisong and Chen Jian, “Mao Zedong yu zhongsu tongmeng de xingshuai [Mao Zedong and the Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance],” and Li Jie, “Cong jiemeng dao polie zhongsu lunzhan de qiyuan [From Ally to Split: the Reason for the China-Soviet Controversy],” in Li Danhui, ed., *Beijing yu Mosike: Cong Lianmeng Zouxiang Duikang* [Beijing and Moscow: From Alliance to Confrontation] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue, 2002), pp. 359–360, 442.

³² Mao Zedong, “Tong sulian zhuhua dashi youjin de tanhua [Conversation with Yudin, the Soviet Ambassador in China]” (July 22, 1958), *Selected Writings of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy*, p. 321.

experience of an alliance with a great power in its modern history.

The Sino-Soviet alliance, or more broadly, an all-around, developing Sino-Soviet relationship, was a giant and crucial cornerstone of Chinese foreign relations at the time. Once such a cornerstone was shaken, there would be overall instability in Chinese foreign relations, and even in Chinese domestic politics, which was demonstrated by later history.

Likewise, China's domestic policy underwent radical changes in the wake of the Lushan Conference (Lushan huiyi) held in July 1959. Two major events had taken place in China in the late spring and early summer of 1957 and in the summers of 1958 and 1959: the so-called "Democratic Rectification Campaign" and the "Great Leap Forward." Both ended in failure. The former led to the "anti-Rightist Struggle," and the latter to a serious economic recession. The worst aspect of both failures was not merely the failure itself but, more importantly, the political belief, implicitly enshrined throughout that period of successive instances of inner and outer Party struggle waged by stifling any dissent, that any approach favoring radical change and pursuing optimistic goals should be judged in terms of political correctness, regardless of its practical results, whereas any pragmatic and rational consideration or policy should have its living space not only confined to the field of mere tactics, but also drowned shortly afterwards by an even newer and stronger wave of fervor. Once entrenched, such a "better far left than right" priority of political values made it very difficult for any readjustment toward a more realistic and stabilizing approach to be carried out and, even if it were carried out, to persist in China's foreign policy.

The failure of the Great Leap Forward was nearly simultaneous with upheavals in China's foreign relations. Firstly, the condemnation at the Lushan Conference of Marshall Peng Dehuai, China's supreme military commander through the Korean War, occurred just as a crisis was emerging in Sino-Soviet relations. Believing that Khrushchev's talk about the communes in Poland in July 1959 was an insinuation against the People's Communes Movement, Mao Zedong virtually made up his mind to publicly split with the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's talk, which was published in the *Neibu cankao* (*Internal References*) for the CCP leaders and was regarded as attacking the People's Communes, in the eyes of Mao was also regarded as hitting a person when he was down and echoing Peng Dehuai's criticism at home. He promptly ordered a counter-strike against the "factions of opposition and suspicion" in the Soviet Union, as soon as the autumn of 1959, and no later than the spring of 1960, and he even considered publishing Khrushchev's "anti-communes" words in the *People's Daily*.³³ This was not done only when other leaders disagreed, after some

³³ Mao Zedong, "Guanyu yanjiu renmingongshe wenti de piyu [The Comments Concerning the

discussion.³⁴

In Mao's eyes, what Khrushchev was doing amounted to a blow against people having a hard time, added fuel to burning flames and amounted to an "echo from the outside," repeating what people like Peng Dehuai were advocating "on the inside." He immediately ordered arrangements to be made so as to launch a counter-attack against the Soviet "oppositionists and skeptics," a decision he only agreed to give up after discussions with other members of the leadership.³⁵ The role Khrushchev played in the subsequent events related to the Sino-Indian border dispute was quite a challenge, especially his attempt to persuade Mao Zedong to go along with the Soviet Union's foreign policy when he, on his way home from Washington after meeting President Eisenhower, detoured all the way to Beijing. Mao Zedong received his words and actions with strong antipathy. He labeled Khrushchev's tendency as "rightist opportunism," adding, "there are two things that the Soviet leaders are afraid of, the first being imperialism and the second Chinese communism."³⁶ This Sino-Soviet summit was in fact a turning point marking the beginning of the decline of their alliance.

Next came the aggravation of the Sino-Indian border dispute. Stubbornly laying claim to Chinese territory, in the summer of 1959, India staged two armed clashes with China, at Longju and the Kongka Pass, immediately triggering a tense situation all along the Sino-Indian border, and thereby undoubtedly adding to China's difficulties in putting down the Tibetan Rebellion, besides indirectly damaging Sino-Soviet relations. The Sino-Indian border dispute was, in a sense, an ill omen of a worsening in China's relations with surrounding countries. In the summer of 1960, the Soviets provoked a border incident

Study of the Issues of the People's Communes]" (July 29 and August 1, 1959), "Guanyu dui renmingongshe jinxing diaocha yanjiu wenti gei Wu Lengxi, Chen Boda, Hu Qiaomu de xin [The Letter to Wu Lengxi, Chen Boda, and Hu Qiaomu Concerning the Issue of Conducting Research and Study of the People's Communes]" (August 9, 1959), and "Guaiyu zhuyi fabiao guowai duihua pinglun wenti de piyu [The Comments Concerning the Issue of Paying Attention to the Publication of Foreign Remarks on China]" (May 4, 1959), in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao Zedong's Writings since the PRC's Founding], vol. 8, pp. 390–392, 462–463, 504.

³⁴ Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan* [A Decade of Polemics], vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999), p. 204.

³⁵ Mao Zedong, "Guanyu yanjiu renmin gongshe wenti de piyu [Comments on the Studies on People's Commune Issues]" (July 29, 1959), Institute of Central Literature Studies, ed., *Mao Zedong's Writings since the PRC's Founding*, vol. 8 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1993), pp. 390–392; Mao Zedong, "Guanyu zhuyi fabiao guowai duihua pinglun wenti de piyu [Comments Regarding Paying Attention to the Publication of Foreign Comments on China]" (September 4, 1959), *Mao Zedong's Writings since the PRC's Founding*, vol. 8, p. 504.

³⁶ Mao Zedong, "Guanyu guoji xingshi de jianghua tigang [Outline Regarding the International Situation]" (December, 1959), *Mao Zedong's Writings since the PRC's Founding*, vol. 8, p. 601.

in the vicinity of the Potzuaikerh Pass, in China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. From then on, there was no more peace on the Sino-Soviet border. At the same time, things were growing more and more alarming in Indochina because of what was happening in Laos, especially owing to more active U.S. intervention in the region.

The deterioration of China's relations with its immediate neighbors began to stir up serious worries among the Chinese leadership. What was going on was, in Mao's words, "a menacing international tide bearing down on China," involving imperialists, revisionists and reactionaries alike.³⁷

As described above, from the summer of 1958 to the end of 1959, Chinese foreign policy obviously demonstrated a trend of radicalization. In the meantime, the regions surrounding China showed a tense atmosphere. There surely existed an interaction between the two. The deterioration of the surrounding environment became one of the key reasons prompting Chinese leaders to adopt relatively pragmatic foreign policies once again. But comparatively speaking, the domestic politics of China remained the key factor. In light of this judgment, it is necessary to further study the causal relationship between the changes of Chinese foreign policy and East Asian international politics from the late 1950s to the mid the 1960s.

³⁷ Wu Lengxi, *Shinian Lunzhan* [Ten-Year Controversy], vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1999), p. 234.