Chinese Foreign Policy toward the Asian/Pacific Area: Conceptual Changes in the Post-Mao Era

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The close relations between domestic politics and foreign policy have been widely recognized among specialists of international realtions. China's case is no exception. It is increasingly obvious that there are two clear-cut periods in contemporary Chinese politics: the Mao Zedong era (1949-1976), and the post-Mao era (1977-present).

1976, the year of Mao Zedong's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, is the watershed between the raidcal period that caused what the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) itself describes "the most severe setback and the heaviest losses...since the founding of the People's Republic,"(Central Committee, 1981:32) and the current period that has created, as Deng Xiaoping called, "a new situation in all fields of socialist modernization."(Deng Xiaoping, 1984:395).

The post-Mao era can be regarded as post-revolutionary era. The differences between a revolutionary state and a post-revolutionary state are not difficult to find out: First, the former conducts a so-called "continuous revolution" internally and externally, whereas the latter puts economic development as its first priority. Second, the former regards itself as an "outsider" in the international community trying to change the status quo, whereas the latter acts like an "insider" seeking maximum opportunities for its own development from the existed order. Third, the former emphasizes ideological consideration, whereas the latter believes that pragmatism would better serve its national interests.

Ever since the death of Mao Zedong, China has undertaken a series of profound economic and political reforms domestically. An important part of China's reform movement is its "open policy" toward the outside world. All these reforms have had tremendous impact on Chinese foreign policy. As Kenneth Lieberthal points out, "Each of China's principal domestic strategies—from the First Five Year Plan (FFYP) and the Great Leap Forward (GLF) of the 1950s, through the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, to the

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Four Modernization of the 1980s—has had clear and direct implications for its posture toward the rest of the world."(Lieberthal, 1984:43)

This article will examine Chinese foreign policy toward the Asian/Pacific area. The emphasis will be put on the conceptual changes in the post-Mao era. These changes include at least the following five aspects: (1) changes from advocating world revolution to pursing a peaceful international environment, (2) changes from ignoring the existed international norms to standing in the international order, (3) changes from emphasizing political and military buildup to concentrating on economic modernization, (4) changes from dogmatic communism to a growing pragmatism, and (5) changes from liberation of Taian by force to a peaceful unification and the notion of "one country two systems." The continuities of Chinese foreign policy will also be examined. In the end, I will discuss future options of Chinese foreign policy toward the Asian/Pacific area and its implication including a brief survey on policy toward individual state and area.

1. From "World Revolution" to "World Peace"

"Continuous revolution" was one of the main themes throughout the Mao's era. Internally, "class struggle" and political campaign was repeatedly emphasized, which led the ten-year Cultural Revolution. Externally, China pursued radical policies to promote "world revoltuion."

A typical statement was made by China's defense minister Lin Biao in 1965. Lin elaborated the strategy for the "world revolution," he claimed, "Taking the entire globe, if North America and Western Europe can be called 'the cities of the world.' then Asia, Africa and Latin America constitute 'the rural areas of the world'." Here Lin drew a striking analogy between the strategy of people's war—establishing revolutionary base areas in the rural districts and encircling the cities from the countryside—that was carried out by the Chinese communists. In the final analysis, the whole cause of world revolution hinged on the revolutionary struggles of the Asian, African, and Latin American people, who make up the overwhelming majority of the world's population.(Lin Biao, 1965. Griffith, 1967:431-433).

Followed this radical line, China put its efforts in supporting struggles of the third world countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and vigorously opposed the two superpowers. By the late 1950s, China started to accuse the Soviet Union as "revisionist," for the Russians, under the leadership of Khrushchev, were seeking "peaceful existence" with "the number one imperialist country"—the United States, therefore, was not "revolutionary" enough.

In the Asian/Pacific area, China supported any forces, North Korean and the

North Vietnam for example, that fought against the United States. Those countries that stood together with the U.S., such as Japan, South Korea, and South Vietnam, were labeled "running dogs of American imperialism." In addition, China was the major supporter of the communist armed movements in Southeast Asia, including Burma, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Malaya, and Indonesia.(North, 1978:106-107).

It is true that Mao Zedong was the major architect for the reconciliation with the United States as early as the beginning of the 1970s, marked by Nixon's historic visit of Beijing in 1972. But that decision does not mean that Mao gave up his world revolution idea. To the contrary, by placing the two superpowers together as main targets of the world revolution in his theory of the three worlds, Mao continued to call for fighting against the two "imperialist countries."

There are two explanations for the Chinese behavior in this period. First, the Chinese communists regarded their revolution is a part of the world revolution. Thus, it was only nature for China to continue this course after its tremendous victory in 1949, defeating the U.S. supported Chiang Kaishek's nationalist party (KMT). Second, the historical consciousness of "China as the central kingdom in the world" still remained in the minds of many Chinese leaders, especially Mao Zedong. Therefore, for quite a long period especially during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese propaganda machine vigorously advocated that China was the center of the world revolution, and Mao was this revolution's "great leader and great helmsman."

This radical position has changed since the death of Mao Zedong. China is no longer regarding itself as the "center of the world." As acknowledged by Chen Qimao, Director of the Shanghai Institute of International Studies, "Ever since human society came into being, its development has been multicentrical, not monocetrical. This phenomenon has never been truer of the world than today."(Chen Qimao, 1986:26).

Furthermore, Chinese leaders have repeatedly claimed that to maintain international peace is one of the major goals of its foreign policy. Secretary General Zhao Ziyang confirmed this point at the thirteenth party national congress in 1987, "Together with other peace-loving countries and people around the globe, we shall work to promote the development of the internatioal situation in a direction favorable to the world's people and to international peace ."(Zhao Ziyang, 1987:76).

2. From an "Outsider" to an "Insider"

The performance in the first two decades after the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 demonstrated a strong dissatisfaction toward the

existing international order.

For the last century prior to 1949 China was repeated invaded imperialist powers starting from the Opium War of 1840. This bitter experience had great impact on the attitude of Chinese leaders and people toward the outside world. The U.S. containment policy and effort to isolate China in the 1950s, for example preventing China from being a member in the United Nations, further increased China's distrust toward the West. Beginning in the 1960s, the Soviet Union carried out a Chauvinist policy toward China. This made China more suspicions toward the established powers.

In the 1950s and the 1960s, China carried out Afro-Asian diplomacy, symbolized by its leading role in the Bandung Conference of April 1955.(Levine, 1984:116). Beijing vigorously criticized the existing international organizations, in particular, the United Nations. A dramatic move in the early 1960s was an effort, together with Sucarno's Indonesia, to call for the creation of a new United Nations. It's members would be mainly so-called the "newly emerging forces".(Ness, 1971). The new United Nations never came into being. But China, at the same time, did try very hard to support the Djakarta "International Games of Newly Emerging Forces", which was designed to replace the Olympic Games.

The PRC returned to the United Nations in October 1971. But its suspicion toward the UN and other international organizations did not immediately disappear. At that time, China was still in the domestic chaos of the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese political stage was largely dominated by Mao Zedong and his radical followers—the gang of four. China continued to criticize that the United Nations was manipulated by the two superpowers.

This "outsider" position, however, could not continue when China started its far-reaching policy of reform and openness since 1978. As Harry Harding points out, "Beijing has secured the formal recognition of all major nations, occupies a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, is respected as a major regional power in East Asia, and is considered by some analysts to be a 'candidate superpower' which will make an increasing mark on global issues as well."(Harding, 1988:12). China has also actively participated in international economic organizations including, among others, the World Bank, the International Monetary Funds, and the Asian Development Bank. In 1984, for the first time, the PRC sent its teams to participate in the Olympic Games held in Los Angeles.

With regard to regional affairs, China has behaved more like an "insider" playing a constructive role rather than a distrubing role. An obvious example is China's attitude toward the ASEAN. China has no longer considered the ASEAN as a threat to its security. To the contrary, the Chinese now believe

that the ASEAN is very important to the regional stability, especially to the final settlement of the Indochina situation.

Therefore, one can conclude that China has changed from ignoring the existed international norms to standing in the international order.

3. From Political-Military Orientation to Economic Modernization

In Mao Zedong's era, the goal of Chinese foreign policy was to gain maximum political influence and military strength. There are three reasons.

First, the fresh memory that China had repeatedly been invaded by outside powers for the last on hundred years made the Chinese leaders always feel insecure. The sensibility toward outside threat was enhanced by the regional wars after the 1949 revolution, namely the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the border clashes with India and the Soviet Union. Mao Zedong, Lin Biao and others firmly believed that World War III would be inevitable. Therefore, China must prepare for "an early and total war."

Secondly, the orientation of Chinese foreign policy has been, at most of the time, in line with the development of domestic politics. Mao Zedong consistently put priority on "continuous revolution" and "class struggle." When applying these principles to the field of foreign policy, ideological, political and strategic considerations would inevitably maintain upper-handed.

Thirdly, since China was regarded as the center of the "world revolution," and Mao himself as the leader for the poeple of the whole world, it was PRC's responsibility to support other peoples' revolution.

All these ideas have now gone. Facing Mao's legacy in late 1970s, the new leadership represented by Deng Xiaoping painfully realized that China was not only far behind of developed countries such as the United States and Japan, but also behind of its small neighbors. Even Hong Kong and Taiwan, Chinese territories ruled by capitalist governments, were more prosperous than the socialist mainland. Therefore, for the first time in China's modern history, economic modernization has become the number one goal for national development.

Beijing's modernization drive includes two important parts: reform and openness, all centering in economic development. China's foreign economic activities, including foreign trade, foreign investment, joint ventures, exporting labors, have increased rapidly.

As if to further demonstrate this determination, around 1985-86, China successfully cut its armed forces by one million, with the new assumption that World War III may be avoided. China's military budget has also reduced

significantly.[1]

4. From Dogmatism to Pragmatism

During the peak of the Cultural Revolution in late 1960s, China carried out a radical foreign policy, not only in slogans, but also in actions. China fought against both superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, in real wars—border clashes with the Soviet Union in the North, and an undeclared war with the United States via Vietnam in the South.

Furthermore, Beijing called back all but one of its ambassadors abroad. In addition to the worsened relations with the West, the PRC could not get along with most of socialist "brothers," nor third world countries. At that time, China could maintain good relations with only a handful of small countries, such as Albania and several Africa states. There was a long list of neighboring countries that were in disputes with China, to name a few: Indonesia, Burma, North Korea, Britain, Japan, Thailand, India, and so on.

The Beijing authorities deliberately cut off relations with outside world as much as possible, making its people become one of the most less informed in the world. People would be sent in jail if they were discovered that they had listened to such foreign radio broadcast as the Voice of Amercia, the Radio Moscow.

China paid heavy prices for this dogmatic foreign policy. It became one of the most closed and isolated countries in the world, making its economic development further behind. Strategically, China was encircled by the two superpowers and hostile some neighbors, putting itself into a kind of international environment that was the most dangerous one ever since the founding of the People's Republic.

Although Mao Zedong, during his last few years in the 1970s, made efforts to break the isolation by starting rapprochement with the United States, Japan, and most of the western states, the basic revolutionary rhetoric and dogmatic principles remained largely unchanged.

The catastrophic Tangshan earthquake in 1976 was a good example. Thangshan was a large coal industrial city in north China. Almost a half of a million people were killed in this disaster, making it one of the largest tragedies in contemporary world. Many governments, organizations, and individuals all over the world offered help. Beijing government refused to accept such offers, believing that if accepted, the principle of "self-reliance" would be violated.

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(1) For detailed account on China's military cut at the post-Mao era, see Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army After Mao*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, pp. 134-137.

Obviously, this kind of rigid policy had to be changed after the death of Mao Zedong. For best serving its own interest, Beijing has adopted an "independent foreign policy," not associating with any superpowers. This does not mean, however, to antagonize superpowers as China did before. Chian has tried on the one hand to maintain a friendly relationship with the United States, and on the other hand to improve its tie with the Soviet Union. Neverthelss, since the U.S. and the West can meet the demand of China's modernization drive much more than the Soviet blocs does, it is necessary for China to be closer to the West. Therefore, Cinese foreign policy can be described as a tilt independent policy—tilt toward the United States, Japan, and Western Europe.

This new pragmatism also cna be found in China's policy toward the South Korea. For the last several years, bilateral trade between China and South Korea has increased rapidly. In 1986, for example, China's trade with the South Korea, direct or indirect, reached $1 billion, as twice as much of its trade with the North.(Harding, 1988:37). This development has nicely met the demands from both sides: China needs South Korea's capital and advanced technology, and South Korea needs China's huge markets.

Although this kind of bilateral realtions are currently under the name of "unofficial exchanges," Beijing government has no longer held it as secrets. For example, in a recent talk on China's foreign policy, Premier Li Peng openly confirmed that "China has trade relations with South Korea," and "China will send its teams to the 1988 Seoul Olympic."(Renmin Ribao, July 4, 1988).

Much different from previous practice, Beijing is now more than willing to accept all kinds of foreign aids, from world bank loans to disaster relief funds. The Chinese government even agreed to allow Amercian Peace Corps to send its teams to China. There are numerous kinds of joint economic cooperations between China and the West, including direct investment, joint ventures, and inviting foreign experts to be factory managers, etc.

In the strategic area, China's practice and policy has also become quite flexible. In 1986, an American naval fleet visited Qingdao, an important naval base in northern China. This was the first of this kind of military visit ever since the 1949 revolution. the United States was also allowed to place its monitoring stations aiming at the Soviet Union in the Xinjiang Minority Autonomus Region, the far west part of China.

All these moves demonstrate that China has significantly moved away from the previous dogmatic patters of foreign policy, and moved toward a growing pragmatism and flexibility.

5. From "Liberation of Taiwan" to "One Country Two Systems"

The change of PRC's Taiwan policy corresponded to the emergence of the pragmatic Deng Xiaoping leadership. The slogan "to liberate Taiwan" was the counterparts of Taiwan authorities' slogan "to recover the Mainland." To liberate Taiwan was the guideline throughout the Mao Zedong era. In late 1970s, Beijing made a significant change in its Taiwan policy by advocating a new slogan "peaceful unification." In early 1980s, this policy which could also apply to the status of Hong Kong.

The proposal of "one country, two systems" will only solve the issue of "one China," not the issue of differing social systems. For a long period (fifty years, one hundred years, or longer) after the unification, the political and economic systems of both sides will develop according to their own directions. That is to say, Taiwan's political and economic system and the way of life will not be intervened. Furthermore, the political forces including the ruling party and other political forces of each side should not be controlled by the other side. The leading positions of the CCP and the KMT on the mainland and Taiwan respectively will not be changed by the unification.

In order to maintain this autonomy, Taiwan will be allowed to maintain its foreign economic and cultural ties with other countries and to keep its own military forces. The central government in Beijing will not send its army, the PLA, to Taiwan. The two ruling parties and other forces will not go to the other side to carry out their political activities. Instead, they will send representatives to each other, i.e., the KMT and opposition parties will participate in the leading bodies of the central government, such as the State Council, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and the People's Supreme Court, whereas the CCP and the central government will send representatives or liaison officials to Taiwan.

PRC's new formula further demonstrates the rising of nationalism and the declining of ideological considerations. The notion of "one country, two systems" will have considerable impact on China's political development. Externally, there will be a central government that represents "one China." Internally, there will be two leading political parties, the CCP and the KMT, in roughly equal positions in the sense of political legitimacy, yet independent from one another. "One country, two systems" may well develop into "one country, two parties," as an unintended consequence of the unification. Therefore, the whole process will become a gradual breaking up of the political monopoly of the ruling parties on both the mainland and Tawian. In this sense, unification will serve as a catalyst for China's political pluralization. Development towards political pluralization would become a peaceful, evolutionary process.

Therefore, in China's future political life, the CCP and the KMT, together with a few minor parties, will co-exist peacefully for the first time since the outbreak of the civil war in the middle of the 1940s.

According to a conventional argument, few Leninist regime could convert itself into a democratic society based on its own internal development. Thus, it will be the first time, in the international communist movement, for a Leninist state to transform itself into a pluralistic society. The changing forces will be a combination of those within and without. The communist party will have to allow the existence of opposition parties, and even more, to tolerate a local government at a provincial level actually controlled by an opposition party.

There are also far-reaching implications to international relations. China's successful unification will remove for good the "time bomb" between the United States and China, and to a lesser degree between Japan and China, thereby further increasing room for political, economic, and strategic cooperations between China and the West. This development will also enhance stability and prosperity of the Asian/Pacific area.

6. Continuities

After discussing changes of Chinese foreign policy in the post-Mao era, it is necessary for us to also examine, briefly, its continuities.

Four major principles in Chinese foreign policy have remained unchanged. First, China has continued to oppose any hegemony, such as the Soviet military expansion in the Asian/Pacific area. Beijing stands firm on its three conditions for normalize relations with Moscow: to reduce the Soviet troops from the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolia border, to withdrew its troops from Afghanistan, to stop its support of Vietnam invasion of Cambodia. China has been strongly against Vietnam's attempt to establish its regional hegemony in the Indochina area.

Second, China has continued to support the third world countries. Chinese leaders have frequently claimed that China is a part of the South in the so-called North-South disputes in economic areas, and China would defend the interests of less developed countries.

Third, the PRC has continued to be sensitive toward external threat and toward issues of national sovereignty. This is particularly true with regard to the issue of Taiwan. Beijing would do whatever possible, including the use of military forces, to prevent Taiwan from going to independence. Since the U.S. has involved deeply in the Taiwan affairs, the future of Taiwan has become the trouble-making issue between China and the United States.

Fourth, the making of foreign policy in China has been always highly centralized. Reform and openness has led decision making process in many other

fields, such as economic planning and cultural policy, move towards decentralization. Foreign policy, however, has always been controlled by a small group of top leaders in China's political life.

7. Future Options and Implications

The significant post-Mao changes in China's foreign policy have enabled the PRC to face broader opportunities and to assume greater responsibilities that its has never experienced before.

In terms of general direction of the future development, there are two basic options: to return to the "revolutionary" way of Mao's era, or to continue the current "open" and independent policy.

The first choice could take place only if the internal political trends drastically turn to the "Gang of Four" type of radical ideas. It means that China will be isolated again from the outside world or even go back to the "old days" of making an alliance with the Soviet Union.

After the Cultural Revolution, there has been a consensus among the Chinese people—never again. Radical revolutionary ideas have lost most of their bases in the Chinese society and do not appeal to the majority people any more. In addition, both the isolation from the outside world and making alliance with the Soviet Union will inevitably hurt China's modernization drive. Therefore, this option is very not likely, if not impossible.

To continue the current policy of "open and reform" would better serve China's national interests. One may expect that China's foreign policy in the foreseeable future will more or less follow the current pattern: a pragmatic, economic oriented, cooperative yet independent, and more stable and mature foreign policy.

Now, let us make a brief survey on China's foreign policy toward major states or regions in the Asian/Pacific area.

Sino-American relations in all three major fields—political, economic, and strategic—will continue to develop. The U.S., together with Japan, will be regarded as the major sources of advanced technology, capital, and markets. On the other hand, as long as the Taiwan issue remains unsettled, there are always potential conflicts of basic interests between the two countries. There are also secondary problems, such as protectionism of the U.S. markets and otehr issues, which may make the relationship become "prickly." (Ignatius, 1988).

China will further improve its relations with its giant neighbor, the Soviet Union. As a high ranking PLA official has recently predicted that "if the Soviet continue their domestic reforms and accompanying adjustments in foreign policy, eventually the Three Obstacles will be eliminated and Sino-Soviet relations

will be normalized." That could mean not only a Deng-Gorbachev summit but an exchange of high-level military visits as well.(Talbott, 1988). Although the normalization of relationship would facilitate China's modernization drive, there is no way for the Chinese to return to the "old days" of the 1950s. A Chinese strategic-affairs expert comforted a visiting Amercan delegation by saying, "You shouldn't worry. We've had several hunred years' experience with the Russians. You can rest assured that we will be realistic in our dealing with them now."(Talbott, 1988).

Japan will remain as China's number one trading partner, and China's markets will be increasingly important to Japan. This very fact will keep the two countries close. Nevertheless, the issues of trade deficit and right-wing activities in Japan, such as "remilitarization", will continue to be leading problems in bilateral relations for a long period to come.

The policy toward the Korea peninsula will continue to present a dilemma to Beijing. The PRC has been able to manage to develop relations with both sides: maintaining good terms with the North, whereas expanding bilateral economic and cultural ties with the South. But it is very difficult for Beijing to go one step further, namely from "cross contact" to "cross recognition," establishing formal diplomatic relations with Seoul. Pyongyang's opposition is one reason, Beijing's own concern over the issue of Taiwan is another one, perhaps more important one. The PRC certainly does not want to see the cross recognition of "two Koreas" leading to the cross recognition of "two Chinas," although these two issues are different in many aspects. Therefore, PRC's Korea policy will be flexible yet cautious.

Beijing's conciliatory policy twoard Taiwan beginning from the end of the 1970s finally received positive reaction from Taipei. Although there have been significant improvement of the relationship with the mainland, Taiwan authorities have still remained skeptical.

According to a recent report from a Chinese newspaper, Beijing has dropped all conditions except one to use military forces toward Taiwan. That one condition is "Taidu" (Taiwan independence). The PRC will not use force against Taiwan except that Taiwan claims to be an independent state.(Zhong Bao, May 18, 1988). Since this is an important development in terms of PRC's Taiwan policy, one would expect a full, more authoritative statement from PRC's highest level to confirm. This is an issue of priority: if the anti-Taidu goal has priority over the destabilize-Taiwan goal, the Beijing government should try to begin negotiations with Taipei to trade very public CCP assurances that Taidu would be the only condition of military threat to Taiwan for KMT assurances that "confidence building" could be extended. Beijing should clearly distinguish Taiwan strength from "Taidu" by stating that only Taiwan legal independence is

unacceptable, whereas Taiwan's economic and political development would be welcomed. This would certainly help prevent "Taidu," and create a more relaxed atmosphere between the Taiwan Strait. In sum, as long as Taiwan does not announce independence, there is plenty of room for the two sides to develop a more cooperative relationship.

The strategic important Southeast Asia is another foreign policy focus of Beijing. The withdraw of the Vietnamese occupation troops from Cambodia would be the top demand from China. China will continue to work together with the ASEAN states to keep pressure on Vietnam. The question now is how to deal with a post-Vietnam-occupation Cambodia. Will Beijing continue to support the Cambodian communists, the Khmere Rouge, and try to bring them back in power? Not very likely. A regime with radical Maoist reveloutionary ideas would not be in line with China's interests. Beijing will likely support a coalition government headed by a neutral leader, such as Prince Sihanouk.

In sum, the post-Mao China has entered the post-revolutionary stage. As a regional power with global interests, the People's Republic will continue to assume an important role in the Asian/Pacific area. China's open policy will serve its won interests for modernization drive. It will also contribute to the regional stability and prosperity. A radical, "revolutionary" China will not only bring disaster to the Chinese people, but also disturb the Asian/Pacific area as a whole. Therefore, to help China maintain its current momentum for political and economic reforms is in line with the interests of every country in the area.

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