

A STUDY OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY OF CHINA FROM 1960A.D

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ABSTRACT

As the study of the history of modern Chinese foreign policy deepens, Chinese scholars have begun to turn their attention to the sharp turn toward extreme leftist policies that occurred in the early 1960s.¹ Emphasizing the severe domestic and international difficulties China faced in 1962, recent studies highlight the combination of international incidents and domestic challenges, concluding that these factors had a significant impact on the change in Chinese foreign relations. ² However, the precise relation between domestic and international factors has yet to be established. How did the two interact and which factor was more influential? This article discusses the interactions between domestic politics in China and the constantly changing international milieu in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Part one examines the profound impact of the turbulence in Chinese foreign policy in the late 1950s; Part two discusses the reasons for the adjustment in foreign policy embarked on in 1960; Part three the characteristics and nature of the changes in Chinese foreign policy in 1962. It argues that the left turn did not result primarily from difficulties in the international environment, but rather from the interaction between domestic politics and the general guidelines the leadership adopted for foreign policy. It was the struggle over how to assess the disastrous Great Leap Forward that led most decisively to the change of course in foreign policy.

KEYWORDS: international, history modern Chinese, foreign policy, Chinese foreign policy

INTRODUCTION

The basic features of a so-called leftist foreign policy need to be clarified, since the conceptions of “left” and “extreme left” had different definitions under different political circumstances. In

the Cold War era, some seemingly radical policies may not have shared the same origin, while some so-called moderate policies may not necessarily have stemmed from pragmatic deliberations. In Chinese politics, to put it simply, a leftist policy means one that pursues goals that are ahead of their time or higher than realistically possible. When extended to the domain of foreign policy, left or extreme left policy has four basic characteristics. First, on the theoretical dimension, leftist policy holds a dogmatic attitude toward the traditional doctrine of time. It refuses to make a concrete analysis of the continuously changing international political situation. It simply asserts that the world is “in a time in which capitalism and imperialism are moving toward destruction, and socialism and communism are striding toward victory,” and therefore denies the existence and meaning of detente in international situations, and does not acknowledge the possibility of maintaining peace over the long term. 3 Second, leftist policy exaggerates China’s position and influence in world politics. A manifestation of this is the theory of “China as a center of revolution,” which proclaims China as “the focus of world contradictions and the center of the world revolutionary storm,” and argues that the direction China takes is “an issue that concerns the fate of the world proletarian revolution,” “a matter of paramount importance concerning the fate of the world revolution,” and so on.4 The “China as a center of revolution” theory reflected the strategic thinking of Chinese leaders on the important issues of China’s position and influence in world politics. From a deeper perspective, it more or less involved the “China at the Center” view of the history of China. Third, leftist policy places so-called proletarian internationalism in the supreme position, denying the paramount status of national interests in making and implementing foreign policies. For instance, “The Bulletin of the Eleventh Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Congress of the Communist Party of China” (Zhonggongzhongyangbajieshiyizhongquanhuigongbao) declared “proletarian internationalism” to be “the highest guiding principle” of Chinese foreign policy. 5 Fourth, in terms of specifics, leftist policy calls for struggling against imperialism, revisionism, and anti-revolutionists, and adopts strategies such as “striking enemies with two fists,” (lianggequantou da ren) and “attacking in all directions” (simianchuj). Since others have studied this aspect of leftist policy, it will not be further discussed in this paper. 6 Taking these four characteristics as criteria, we can conclude that extreme leftist foreign policy took shape roughly before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. To be more specific, the Eleventh Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Congress in September 1956 marked the arrival of this policy.

THE TURMOIL IN CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY IN THE LATE 1950S

To understand the significance of the adoption of an extreme leftist policy, we must first examine the basic contours of Chinese foreign policy before 1962. After the People’s Republic of China [PRC] adopted the “Five Peaceful Co-existence Principles” in 1954, Chinese foreign policy entered a period of smooth development. Prior to the Eighth Party Congress, Beijing defined the direction of its foreign policy as “to strive for the enduring peace of the world.” Whatever analysis this policy was based on, Chinese leaders explicitly asserted that “[since] the world situation is moving toward detente, it has become possible to achieve enduring peace in

theworld.”⁷ However, the momentum fueling this direction did not last long before it was interrupted by two cataclysmic events: the decay of the Sino-Soviet alliance and the unleashing of the Great Leap Forward. One of the key reasons the Sino-Soviet alliance deteriorated was that the relationship of leading (the Soviet Union) and being-led (China) that had been created during the formation of the alliance could not be sustained after the shock of the revolts in Poland and Hungary in 1956. Capitalizing on the severe crisis the Soviet Union faced as a result of these uprisings, Chinese leaders compelled Soviet leaders to change their approach to inter-state relations within the socialist bloc. Beijing’s Manifesto Concerning Developing and Further Strengthening the Basis of Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and Other Socialist Countries called on the Soviet Union to acknowledge previous mistakes.⁸ Moreover, in the course of resolving the incidents in Poland and Hungary, China achieved, at least temporarily, the position of mediator between the Soviet Union and the fraternal states of Eastern Europe. These developments heightened China’s role and influence within the Socialist bloc, as demonstrated during the Moscow Conference in November 1957, when it became clear that Mao was respected by Khrushchev and by other socialist leaders.⁹ Beijing now believed that there was no longer a relationship of leading and being-led between China and the Soviet Union and Soviet leaders also acknowledged this change, at least on the surface. Earlier analyses of the roots of the Sino-Soviet split by Chinese scholars have emphasized the serious disagreements over the assessment of Stalin and other theoretical issues after the 20th Party Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February 1956.

An important factor that has been neglected, however, is that after the de-Stalinization campaign begun at the 20th Party Congress and the uprisings that fall in Poland and Hungary, Chinese leaders came to realize that Moscow’s earlier relations with other countries in the Socialist camp, especially with China, characterized as a “cat-mouse relationship” or “father-son relationship,” had fundamentally changed.¹¹ As a result, Chinese leaders could no longer tolerate what they perceived as the arrogant attitude of the Soviet leadership and rebuked their Soviet comrades for repeating the mistakes of the Stalin period. Without a belief that the relative positions of China and the Soviet Union had fundamentally changed, Mao Zedong would not have become so irritated about the Soviet proposals to create a “united fleet” and “long-wave radio station” that he complained to Soviet Ambassador Yudin on 22 July, saying that the Soviet demands reminded him that “Stalin’s behavior is coming [surfacing] again,” and “now again [you are] doing what Stalin did.”¹² The change in the Sino-Soviet relationship indeed reflected the rise of China’s position within the Socialist camp. However, it remained for Beijing to discover how far it had risen, to what extent Moscow would tolerate such a change, and, when disagreements arose, whether the Chinese would be able to force the Soviets to change their attitudes and policies in accordance with Beijing’s understanding of the degree of change in Sino-Soviet relations. Moreover, since the relationship of leading and being-led had been one of the fundamental factors in establishing and sustaining the Sino-Soviet alliance, when this condition changed, how would the alliance be sustained? Except for its participation in the international alliance against the axis powers during the last four years of the Anti-Japanese War, China had

had no experience with alliances in the modern period, though it had wished to conclude alliances at several points. Consequently, the only basis the PRC leadership had for dealing with the complicated situations that arose in the Sino-Soviet alliance was their experience with inter-party relations in the international communist movement, “fellow traveler” relationships in the international united front, and inter-state relations in a general sense. In contrast, the Soviet Union had a rich experience with alliances, and knew very well that to sustain an alliance it was sometimes necessary to chastise allies. Of course, such chastisement might damage or devastate an alliance if not exercised properly. The Sino-Soviet alliance, and more broadly the Sino-Soviet relationship, had seen the cornerstone of Chinese foreign relations in the 1950s. As later events demonstrated, once such a cornerstone was shaken, Chinese foreign relations and domestic politics became unstable. However, because the hostility between the two states after the Sino-Soviet split was so intense, scholars within China have long underestimated the importance of the alliance for Chinese foreign policy. Beijing might not have anticipated the extent to which the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet alliance would impact China. The PRC leadership did not clearly define the guidelines for managing the Sino-Soviet relationship after the deterioration of the alliance, and neither did their Soviet counterparts. It is thus not surprising that Beijing’s goals were not accomplished. It is then worthwhile to explore more deeply how Chinese leaders dealt with the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relationship and how they understood the alliance relationship. Soon after the alliance began to deteriorate, Chinese domestic policy fundamentally changed, as seen in two important events from the spring of 1957 to 1959. The first event was the so-called “mizhuzhengfeng” [the Democratic Consolidation of Spirits] in the spring of 1957. Having drawn lessons from the uprisings in Poland and Hungary, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) launched a mass movement against bureaucratism, subjectivism, and factionalism. The aim was to resolve the contradictions between the masses and some party cadres through a so-called “democratic consolidation of spirits.” The second event was the Great Leap Forward launched in 1958, and aimed at accelerating the modernization of China’s economy through large-scale mass movements. The goal was to outpace Western powers such as Britain and the US economically and achieve communism in China as quickly as possible. Both the Democratic Consolidation of Spirits and the Great Leap Forward ended in debacles. The former directly caused the anti-rightist campaign, which intensified social contradictions, and the latter led to three years of catastrophic economic recession, significantly aggravating the already tense atmosphere within the Chinese Communist Party.

The repercussions of the failure of these two reforms on Chinese foreign policy were far-reaching. Their most important consequence was the political norm created by the continuous struggles both within and outside the party and the crackdown on divergent opinions. Regardless of its effects of a proposed policy, such policy would be considered “politically corrective” as long as it pushed forward radical transformations and pursued passionate goals. Rational thinking about policy would remain only as a tactic, and would usually soon be submerged by a new, stronger passion. The political value of “would rather go left than right” established through

relentless party struggles made any adjustment of Chinese foreign policy in the direction of pragmatism and stability difficult and unsustainable. By the summer of 1959, it became evident that the Great Leap Forward could not continue. Opinions about how to correct its mistakes had been voiced within the leadership, but Mao Zedong refuted all criticism within the party as “rightist,” and regarded the emergence of different opinions as “the continuance of the life-and-death struggle between two antagonistic classes.”¹³ Thus, Marshall Peng Dehuai, who had fought shoulder-to-shoulder with Mao for more than twenty years, was identified as only a temporary “fellow traveler of the revolution,” and was destroyed politically. It is worth noting that at the same time that Peng Dehuai was criticized as “a rightist opportunist” at the Lushan Meeting in July 1959, Sino-Soviet relations descended into crisis. Believing that Khrushchev’s speech that month criticizing the communes in Poland was an indirect attack on China’s People’s Commune Movement, Mao Zedong made up his mind to break publicly with the Soviet Union. Khrushchev’s speech, which was published in the *Neibucankao* (Internal References) for CCP leaders, was in Mao’s eyes equivalent to hitting a person when he was down. It also dangerously echoed Peng Dehuai’s criticism of Mao’s policies. Mao therefore promptly ordered the party to begin a counter-strike against the “opposition and suspicious factions” of the Soviet Union at the earliest in the autumn of 1959 and no later than the spring of 1960. He even considered publishing Khrushchev’s “anti-communes” speech in the *People’s Daily*.¹⁴ This final step was not implemented, however, after other party leaders disagreed with the idea.¹⁵

THE FOREIGN POLICY ADJUSTMENT OF 1960

From November 1959 through the first half of 1960 the Chinese leadership spent a lot of energy and time discussing international issues in an effort to comprehend and respond to the deteriorating strategic environment.²⁰ It did not take long, however, for them to decide to adopt a principle of steady response. Wu Lengxi recalled that the Standing Committee Meeting of the CCPC Politburo presided over by Mao Zedong from 7 to 17 January 1960 reached the conclusion that “new initiatives should be adopted vigorously in order to create a new situation in diplomacy.”²¹ Subsequently Committee members convened several meetings, confirming the spirit of the January Meeting, and discussing concrete forms for its implementation. Guided by this new principle, pragmatism reemerged in Chinese diplomacy. First, in terms of Sino-Soviet relations, the leadership was determined not only to avoid a split, but also to strive to “reach unity based on new foundations,” even “to make [reach] unity with him [Khrushchev] and not split shamelessly.”²² This is why even after several months of quarrels with the Soviet Union, including the poignant clash at the Romanian Workers Party Congress in Bucharest in June 1960 and the withdrawal of all Soviet experts from China, the Chinese still reached an understanding with their Soviet ally at the Moscow Conference of 81 Communist and Workers’ Parties in December 1960, where they agreed “to confer together on anything that may come up so as to avoid conflict.”²³ Bilateral relations further improved after Chairman Liu Shaoqi made a follow-up state visit to the Soviet Union. By 1961 Moscow had again decided to transfer to China advanced military technology, such as equipment for producing the MiG 21 fighter jets.²⁴ One

of the key adjustments in Chinese foreign policy was the effort to defuse tensions along the Sino-Indian border. With the rebellion in Tibet and the rise of border skirmishes, Sino-Indian relations had deteriorated dramatically during 1959. Indian policy, Chinese leaders believed, had severely weakened China's security and that New Delhi was using the border conflicts to coordinate its policy with the West's "anti-China tide." Operating under these assumptions, Beijing decided to strike back firmly. However, after August border clash, the PRC leadership did not want its relations with India to deteriorate further, nor did it allow the Sino-Indian border conflict to become the focal point of the policy agenda. The Politburo decided on 8 September to try to resolve the conflict through negotiation.²⁵ Two days before the 8 September Politburo meeting, Beijing briefed Moscow on the Sino-Indian border conflict. However, the day after the Politburo meeting, the Soviet news agency TASS issued a statement declaring that Moscow did not approve of the Beijing's policy. Chinese leaders were startled by this action and concluded that it was an effort by Moscow to "present Eisenhower a gift" and "to please American imperialism."²⁶ As a result, Mao Zedong decided to stop public discussion of the border issues with India, and directed the media to cease any related reports.²⁷ At its meeting in January 1960, the Standing Committee of the Politburo adopted guidelines for the peaceful resolution of the dispute with India and proposed that the PRC reach a compromise through "mutual understanding and mutual concession" (hulianghurang). The Politburo also decided that Zhou Enlai would visit New Delhi to negotiate in person.²⁸ Meanwhile, Chinese troops stationed along the Sino-Indian border were ordered to adopt policies designed to avoid armed clashes, such as not opening fire, patrolling, hunting, military exercises, and explosions or chasing rebels within twenty kilometers of the effective line of control on the Chinese side. ²⁹ In preparation for the visit to India, Zhou Enlai worked out The Proposal Concerning the Border Issue Meeting between the Premiers of China and India (Draft). Zhou anticipated that the visit to India would not solve the problems completely, but that the negotiations would not break down. The most likely result would be a limited agreement of some kind. Zhou suggested that the PRC try to defuse the tensions while not being afraid of a delayed resolution. China, Zhou continued, should also set as the goal of the visit to further ease bilateral relations and prepare the conditions for continued meetings and a peaceful resolution of the border issues in the future.³⁰ Other party leaders agreed with Zhou Enlai's suggestions. His visit to India 19 to 26 April proved that Beijing's assessments were basically correct. Sino-Indian relations temporarily improved, and the tension along the border eased.

Resolving the Sino-Indian border issue and improving relations with India were arguably among the government's top priorities,³¹ but Beijing also sought to resolve border issues with other neighboring countries. At the same meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee in January 1960, the leadership thoroughly discussed the border issues with all neighboring countries. Probably influenced by the progress made in the Sino-Burmese and Sino-Indian border negotiations, the Politburo established as a guideline to resolve border issues through step-by-step negotiations, as quickly as possible. The rough order was to try to resolve the Sino-Indian border issues first, then turn to North Korea and Mongolia as quickly as possible, and

subsequently accelerate the pace in resolving border issues with Burma, Nepal, and Laos. Because of Vietnam's war with America, the issues regarding its border would temporarily be set aside. China's longest border was with the Soviet Union, and the problems there were very complicated, yet, Beijing was still determined to try to resolve them.³² Although the border dispute with India was not resolved, China basically accomplished the rest of the plan outlined at the Standing Committee meeting in January 1960. The PRC signed border agreements with Burma, Nepal, Pakistan, Mongolia, and North Korea. One could argue that a smooth conclusion of the the Sino-Soviet border negotiations, which began only after 1964, might have been reached in 1960 had Sino-Soviet polemics not sabotaged the process. With regard to Indochina, as tensions with Moscow escalated, Beijing faced two problems: whether to support the armed struggle in South Vietnam and how to solve the Laos crisis. By 1959-1960, Chinese leaders were more preoccupied with the Laotian crisis than with the situation in Vietnam. Yet, under the pressure of the dramatic changes in the situation in South Vietnam in 1959 and 1960, the leaders of the Vietnam Worker's Party (the VWP) began to change the strategy of strengthening communist construction in the North and striving for peaceful unification they had adopted after the 1954 Geneva Conference.³³ Instead, a policy of strengthening the armed struggle for the liberation of the South was adopted at the Third National Congress of the VWP in September 1960.

The VWP's change of policy and the development of the liberation war in South Vietnam confronted China with a very complex situation. In 1958 the PRC clearly declared that the VWP should regard as its prime task the consolidation and construction of the North, and adopt in the South "a guideline of long-term lying in wait, accumulation of strength, contacting the masses, and waiting for an opportunity [to strike]."³⁵ By 1960, however, China had to make a choice between the contradictory goals of maintaining peace in Indochina and preventing large-scale American military intervention on the one hand, and supporting a traditional ally on the other. The Chinese reactions to the Vietnam situation unfolded gradually. First, the situation in South Vietnam was not a top priority of PRC foreign policy. The situation in Laos was a more direct and serious menace to China. Since North Vietnam was a buffer, the limited US intervention in South Vietnam did not constitute a direct threat to China. Second, VWP policy was developing gradually, and at least in 1960 did not cause a dramatic change in the situation in South Vietnam. Third, China had to keep its Indochina policy in line with its overall foreign policy. The above factors explain Beijing's reserved attitude toward the question of whether North Vietnam should launch an armed struggle. On the one hand, China promptly expressed its support of the VWP's effort to strengthen armed struggle in the South. The People's Daily released an editorial during the Third National Congress of the VWP publicly endorsing the VWP's policy of supporting armed struggle in the South.³⁶ China immediately lent recognition and support when the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (the NLF) was established in December 1960. On the other hand, the PRC did not want the leaders of the VWP to rule out completely the option of a political resolution. Beijing also did not want to escalate the war in South Vietnam to such an extent as to invite a large-scale American military intervention. Beijing stressed Hanoi, again and

again, to that it “must liberate the South,” but must also pay attention to the tactics of its struggle, noting the difference between rural and urban areas. The Vietnamese should adopt a “flexible strategy,” and “combine political struggles with military struggles.”³⁷ Until mid 1961 China continued to declare publicly that it supported Vietnam’s struggle to “strive for the peaceful unification of the motherland” according to the Geneva agreements.³⁸ Those public declarations should not be considered as part of a propaganda campaign. Indeed, they indicated that Beijing did not want the VWP completely to give up efforts to strive for peaceful unification. China’s persistent effort toward a peaceful resolution of the Laos crisis during this period may better reflect the characteristics of its Indochina policy. Bordering Laos, China was more directly threatened by American military intervention there than in South Vietnam. Moreover, the situation in Laos was more complex and explosive. Therefore, Chinese leaders were more occupied by the Laos crisis and invested much more energy in managing it. As a result, PRC policy toward the Laos issue was much more clear-cut and stable than its policy toward Vietnam. China was active in convening the Geneva Conference to resolve the Laos crisis, and played an important role in the final signing of the Neutral Statement Concerning Laos and its related agreements.³⁹

The importance of China’s Laos policy cannot be overstated, not only because it successfully defused the explosive situation in Indochina and postponed the American intervention in the region, but also because it implied continuity in Chinese foreign policy. The PRC leaders almost replicated the thinking, assessments, and strategic choices they had made in the 1954 Geneva Conference. Even when they regarded the United States as escalating its intervention in Indochina, they still made an effort to break the stalemate in Sino-American relations. Although such an effort was a very limited probe, it could, in a sense, demonstrate Beijing’s determination to adjust its foreign policy. At the Standing Committee meeting of the CCP Politburo in January 1960, the leadership also outlined its guideline for handling Sino-American relations as “to talk but not in haste, to talk but not break off.” In other words, Beijing wanted to continue to negotiate with the Americans and not to break off the talks, but also not establish a diplomatic relationship with the US too hastily.⁴⁰ Under such a guideline, Chinese policy toward the US showed increased flexibility. Mao Zedong himself showed interest in a report of January 1960 that analyzed a possible change in Washington’s China policy.

The report concluded that the US might increase contacts with China in the future, and use the Warsaw talks to make further probes.⁴¹ So far no documents have revealed whether and how Mao further pondered these issues, though later events indicate that he might have been doing more than showing some interest. Of course, this policy was connected to the on-going presidential election in the US, which gave Chinese leaders the opportunity to assess the future American policymakers and consider whether a change in US policy toward China was possible. Zhou Enlai indicated to British Field Marshall Montgomery in May 1960 that the PRC was willing to resolve the Taiwan issue peacefully, and that as long as the US announced that it was willing to withdraw American troops from Taiwan, China and the US could open negotiations.⁴²

Zhou proposed to the American journalist Edgar Snow on 30 August a more flexible resolution of the issue of American withdrawal of troops from Taiwan: that the US had first to promise to withdraw its troops, but the questions of when and how to do so could be left for future discussions.⁴³ On 18 October Zhou Enlai again met with Snow, further expounding on Beijing's position on disarmament, PRC representation at the U.N., nuclear tests, and the Taiwan issue, and introducing issues regarding the Sino-Soviet split. Since Zhou Enlai showed an in-depth knowledge of the China policy of the Kennedy Administration, it is likely that his conversation with Snow was carefully prepared and purposeful.⁴⁴ Four days later, Mao Zedong again received Snow and discussed with him the Kennedy/Nixon presidential debates. Mao told Snow explicitly that China would leave the Jinmen [Quemoy] and Mazu [Matsu] islands in the hands of Jiang Jieshi, because what China "wanted was the whole Taiwan area." However, China would assume responsibility for maintaining peace, would not fight Americans on its own initiative, and "wanted to resolve [the Taiwan issue] through negotiation."⁴⁵ Mao and Zhou's meetings with Snow during the American presidential election served a particular purpose. It is evident that Chinese leaders were trying to probe for a possibility to contact the new American president. After John F. Kennedy was elected, Chinese Ambassador to Poland Wang Bingnan indicated to his American counterpart in the Warsaw talks, Ambassador Jacob A. Beam, that China hoped the Kennedy Administration "would make some progress in developing Sino-American relations." This statement had to have been approved by the top leadership.⁴⁶ Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi conveyed the same message when visiting Burma.⁴⁷ Considering these acts together with the general guideline of "creating a new situation in diplomacy," one could argue that the PRC's efforts to stabilize and even try to ease its relationship with the Americans was an important component of the adjustment in Chinese foreign policy during this period.

CONCLUSION

Chinese foreign policy in 1962 was influenced by structural contradictions at two levels. First, while the domestic economic recession demanded an adjustment of foreign policy in the direction of more pragmatism and stability, the deterioration of the environment along the borders forced the PRC leadership to act harshly in some instances, such as the Sino-Indian border conflict. Second, the Chinese leadership differed over how to assess the Great Leap Forward and how to deal with the economic recession, which then influenced the direction in which foreign policy was adjusted. Moreover, the contradictions at these two levels did not suddenly emerge in 1962. They could be traced to different origins, and were interconnected and mutually influenced. This article demonstrates that the contradiction at the second level clearly had a major impact on Chinese foreign policy and was, in fact, the main reason for its change of course. In conclusion, the change in Chinese foreign policy was caused neither by severe changes in the external environment (such as world war, large-scale invasion by foreign enemies, or other events threatening fundamental national security), nor by a complete re-examination of various aspects of foreign policy (i.e., the situations prior to the Eighth Party Congress and

around early 1960s). Rather, it was propelled by changes in domestic politics and began as a change in the guiding principles of Chinese foreign policy.

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