

**DIPLOMACY ON A SOUTH-SOUTH DIMENSION:
THE LEGACY OF MAO'S THREE-WORLDS THEORY AND
THE EVOLUTION OF SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS**

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Researchers in the West, preoccupied by the complexities of their own relations with Asia and Africa, have taken comparatively little time to examine how the peoples of those regions have related among themselves. Indeed, the action and reaction of Western and non-Western values is a major theme of the modern world. Since Vasco da Gama arrived in the Indian Ocean at the end of the 15th century, the story of humankind has been largely an account of the response of Asia, Africa, and South America to the alien culture of the West.¹ However, long before the West rose into prominence, contacts between other cultures flourished.²

Building international diplomacy requires understanding ourselves, others, and how we relate together. It also involves understanding how others relate among themselves.³ In efforts to internationalise and build a truly global future, the consideration of contacts among all parts of the world becomes critical. The sustained diplomatic cooperation that has taken place in the last fifty years between China and African nations may be an instructive example. This major phenomenon, which deserves more attention than it has received, is the focus of this paper.

Introduction

Since its establishment in 1949, the People's Republic of China has made a concentrated effort to forge close ties with African nations. Sino-African relations have thus largely resulted from the diplomatic initiatives of the People's Republic of China rather than those of African nations.⁴ This immediately gives rise to a number of questions. Why is China interested in Africa? How does Africa fit into China's image of the world?

Samuel Kim⁵ proposes that China's image of world order is a corollary of its image of internal order and thus a projection of self-image. China's behaviour in the international community can therefore be viewed as a reflection of its world image and self-image. In this light, Kim advances the notion that these images integrate both normative and epistemological principles. On the one hand, these images embody dominant social norms and values. As such,

they serve as philosophical assumptions about the international order. On the other hand, these images provide an epistemological paradigm. This paradigm performs cognitive, evaluative and prescriptive functions; it leads policy makers to define the state of the world, to evaluate the meaning of the world and to prescribe the correct behaviour to heed.

The theme that correct behaviour is a manifestation of correct thought permeates all important theoretical writings in the People's Republic of China. Such a notion is referred to as the Chinese "world outlook." Since 1949, China's world outlook has been largely shaped by Mao Zedong's thought. Therefore, China's definition of its place in the world during the Maoist reign serves as a useful context in which to explore China's global policies. Moreover, the Maoist image of world order provides an indispensable frame of reference for assessing any change or continuity in the post-Mao global policy.

Purpose and Focus

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the historical context of Sino-African diplomacy. To do this, I trace the evolution of China's definition of its place in the world as reflected by the evolution of China's three main foreign policy strategies: the "Peaceful Coexistence" strategy of the 1950s, the "Revolution" approach of the 1960s, and the "Grand Alliance" tactics of the 1970s.⁶ Within this purview, I examine components of the Maoist world vision and highlight China's policy towards the Third World. Finally, I point out that while all three strategies failed to survive in totality, each, in part, continues to influence current policies as China continues to define itself and its place in the world.

Phase One: The Peaceful Coexistence Approach

The Peaceful Coexistence approach of the early 1950s had its intellectual roots in the 1940s. During World War II, Nationalist and Communist Chinese leaders, engaged in civil war, sought support from the emerging superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively. When the Communists won victory in October 1949, they strengthened their alliance with the Soviet Union, the "motherland of socialism," and began to share the Soviet view of the United States as the major imperialist adversary.⁷

Two-World Theory

Just months before the official establishment of the People's Republic of China, Mao declared this alliance:

Internationally we belong to the anti-imperialist front, headed by the Soviet Union.... The Chinese people must either incline towards the side of imperialism or that of socialism. There can be no exception to the rule. It is impossible to sit on the fence. There is no third road.⁸

Articulating the principal contradiction of the post-war international system,⁹ Mao thus obliged all Chinese to lean in the direction of a socialist alliance with the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Mao looked to the Soviet Union as a model to emulate and claimed, "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is our best teacher and we must learn from it."¹¹

However, Chinese and Soviet expectations of each other within this teacher/pupil alliance soon proved to be unrealistic. As the alliance began to falter, Mao continued the call to learn from the Soviet Union but began to stress the necessity for China to acquire an independent outlook: We must not eat pre-cooked food. If we do we shall be defeated. We must clarify this point with our Soviet comrades. We have learned from the Soviet Union in the past, we are still learning today, and we shall still learn in the future. Nevertheless our study must be combined with our own concrete conditions. We must say to them: We learn from you, from whom did you learn? Why cannot we create something of our own?¹²

Intermediate Zones

Indeed, Mao did create something unique. In the process of establishing independence from the Soviet Union, Mao modified the prescribed Two-World Theory and raised the notion of "an intermediate zone." Instead of predicting an impending confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, as many had when the Cold War began, Mao declared the international situation to be "extremely favourable."¹³ In his paper tiger thesis,¹⁴ Mao minimised the strength of the US and the dangers of a Soviet-US war. Mao proclaimed that the true battlefield now lay, not between the two worlds, but rather in the vast zone that separated the two rivals: a zone that included many capitalist, colonial, and semi-colonial countries across Europe, Asia, and Africa. This intermediate zone became the new ally for the socialist camp because

it served as a protective buffer, constituting, in Mao's own words, "the rear areas of imperialism."¹⁵ Thus, the theory of the intermediate zone, comprising what later came to be known as the Second and Third Worlds, reflected Mao's changing perceptions of the international environment.

Henceforth, Chinese leaders were nurtured with a tripartite perspective of international relations. According to Lin¹⁶, Mao's emphasis on the existence and importance of a third force enabled China to develop its own identity and expand its own influence in international relations. China could now maintain its ideological commitment to the Soviet Union and at the same time seek relations with other nations with whom it shared a more common historical experience and international stature. Theoretically, China had defined an area that belonged neither to the Soviet Union nor to the United States. This middle ground not only served China's own interests but the larger interests of the socialist world as well. Mao's assertion of a changing world order and China's place within it later crystallised into his Three-Worlds Theory. This notion of three worlds, though not yet fully developed, began to influence China's conception of the world in general and the Third World in particular. In fact, China's first articulated Third World policy of Peaceful Coexistence was based upon this tripartite perception.¹⁷

Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were first introduced by Zhou Enlai to an Indian delegate in 1953 and subsequently appeared in the Sino-Indian agreements on Tibet, signed in Peking on April 29, 1954.¹⁸ These agreements gave rise to the following five principles:

- Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty;
- Mutual non-aggression;
- Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs;
- Equality and mutual benefit;
- Peaceful co-existence.¹⁹

In essence, four of the five principles decreed a hands-off policy towards other sovereign states. The remaining stipulation, to seek equality and mutual benefit, was both a political and economic guideline. Thus, the five principles could be reduced to two: justice and non-interference. Though criticised as vague and platitudinous by some, as a doctrine these principles constituted a set of rules to govern international behaviour. As a strategy, these principles revealed China's desire to create a united, self-conscious, anti-colonialist, and anti-imperial-

ist coalition among newly independent countries. Such a broad coalition was to manoeuvre China out of isolation and secure its rightful position in the world. To this end, China tempered ideological differences and extended reconciliatory policy initiatives as a means of approaching many Third World countries.²⁰

As early as August 11, 1954, the relevance of these principles extended beyond Asia, as Zhou Enlai declared them the basis for “relations between China and the various nations of Asia and the world.”²¹ The following year, Zhou firmly established these principles as China’s official state policy towards other Third World countries at the Bandung Conference.

Bandung Conference

The Bandung Conference, held in Indonesia, April 18-27, 1955, was conceived by the Colombo Powers of Burma, Ceylon, India, Pakistan, and Indonesia and consisted of twenty-nine Afro-Asian states. The conference was not initiated by China, nor did China take a part in its planning. In fact, China was not even envisaged as a participant in the original proposal.²² However, contrary to expectations, China was not in the periphery at Bandung; rather, for the first time in modern history, China played an active role as an acknowledged, independent power, shaping the pattern of world order.

Bandung signified China’s modern debut onto the world stage, and this debut marked a watershed in Chinese diplomacy.²³ Zhou Enlai, representing the Communist delegations, strove to resolve outstanding differences and establish a reputation for reasonableness. He avoided conflict, sought reconciliation, and steadfastly identified China with the common cause.²⁴ He even managed to introduce two additional principles to the original five:

Respect for the freedom to choose a political and economic system;
Mutually beneficial relations between nations.²⁵

However, Zhou’s “master card” was his offer to negotiate with the United States, China’s main rival, on the Taiwan issue. He made this proposal at precisely the right moment to achieve the desired effect,²⁶ gaining prestige at the conference with a triumph of personal diplomacy while China gained a reputation for being accommodating and ready to resolve differences through negotiation.²⁷ In the wake of Bandung, moderation and neutralism emerged as positive forces in Chinese foreign policy.²⁸

In addition to marking China’s diplomatic debut and new current of moderation, Bandung also marked the beginning of China’s Third World dimension of foreign policy.²⁹ Zhou utilised the setting as a platform to establish China’s

Third World credentials, stressing two points that China shared in common with all the other countries: a history of colonial dominance and a need for further independence based on economic reconstruction. Significantly, neither of these points applied to the Soviet Union. From this time on, China's foreign policy drew away from Soviet clutches and drew towards embracing a common identity with former colonial countries. Henceforth, the Chinese leadership attached increasing significance to Afro-Asia as the primary centre of the anti-imperialist struggle, and Afro-Asian solidarity, as embodied by the "spirit of Bandung," became a prominent theme in Chinese pronouncements.³⁰

The proposed image of Afro-Asia, that Asians and Africans share a common political and social task, provided powerful rhetoric. Bandung initiated the articulation of a Third World voice that was to be heard in the global arena thereafter. In this way, Bandung was of great and lasting symbolic significance. Beyond symbolism, however, the spirit of Bandung soon diminished.

Strategy Downfall

The spirit of Bandung never materialised into broadly effective institutions, nor did it create any substantial mechanisms for ongoing relations. China was unable to harness the momentum gathered at Bandung and unable to establish any type of extensive relations with the Third World. Ultimately, the strategy failed to create a viable foreign policy framework. Lin³¹ explains that both domestic and international factors contributed to this failure.

Domestically, the increasing radicalisation within China, as evidenced by movements such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957) and the Great Leap Forward (1958-60), made a moderate foreign policy line politically unappealing. Internationally, the second Taiwan Strait crisis in 1958 and the subsequent efforts of the United States to contain China diminished hopes of maintaining a stable environment. China's calls for the unity of the Third World were further muted by the looming Sino-Soviet split, as China now found it increasingly necessary to distinguish pro-Soviet from pro-Chinese countries. Moreover, China's relations with neighbouring nations became increasingly strained as outstanding boundary and territorial problems emerged. According to Yahuda³², China's neighbours feared that a newly reunified China would be influenced by the legacy of its imperial past that wielded a superior lordship over the other Asian rulers. In addition, Beijing's commitment to communism deepened their distrust. Beijing was perceived as a supporter of local communist parties dedicated to the overthrow of the newly established and fragile regimes. These neighbours feared that China would exploit domestic weaknesses as well as inter-regional disputes. In 1958, when Chinese foreign policy

shifted away from the moderation of Bandung towards a more militant revolutionary line, these misgivings about China intensified.³³

Phase Two: The Dominance of Revolution

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, both domestic and international conditions created an atmosphere in China in which the low-key, conciliatory approach of Peaceful Coexistence was replaced by a revolutionary-based strategy towards the Third World. Two developments especially contributed to this revolutionary spirit in China: the escalating tensions between China and the Soviet Union and the growing independence movements in Africa.³⁴

The Collapse of the Sino-Soviet Alliance

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Soviet factor had been at the centre of Chinese politics. China's ideology, economy, national security and foreign policy were all based on the "leaning to the side of" the Soviet Union in a bipolar world. The rupture with the Soviet Union fundamentally altered this paradigm. This rupture did not emerge suddenly but, rather, unfolded in the process of the deteriorating Sino-Soviet alliance. The alliance, seemingly cemented by the Korean War, began to unravel as historical, cultural and socio-economic differences surfaced and proved to be irreconcilable. Eventually, differences over international politics and strategy drove the ultimate wedge between China and the Soviet Union.

Yahuda³⁵ explains that the Soviet Union, as the senior partner, could not permit China to jeopardise Soviet global interests. Concurrently, an independent China could not permit itself to be made subordinate to the Soviet Union. These tensions affected the very nature of the entire international communist movement. Moreover, because ideology was at the core of the legitimacy of the movement, these differences were expressed in ideological terms. Therefore, the legitimacy of each regime was challenged by these rising disputes. Ultimately for Marxist-Leninists theorists, only one correct view could exist and no true comrade would persist in publicly putting forward a contrary perspective. By the early 1960s, both sets of leaders accused the other of betraying the communist cause and their own people.³⁶

One root of this complex problem stemmed from their respective relationships with the United States. After Stalin, Khrushchev sought to ease tensions with the USA, in part to carry out reforms at home but also to reduce the costs and risks of maintaining nuclear weapons. At the same time, the Chinese lead-

ers also sought to diffuse tensions with America, in order to focus on domestic economic development. Unlike their Soviet colleagues, however, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai found the Eisenhower administration unresponsive. American policy held that the way to divide the two communist giants was to keep up the pressure on China; thus, they denied to China the diplomatic overtures extended to the Soviets. As a result, China found no reason to believe Khrushchev's claims that the United States had moderated its tactics.

These differences quickly escalated into issues of national and international security. In 1959, when the Soviet Union and the United States joined forces to restrain China from developing nuclear arms, it was a point of no return.³⁷ In the following year, the Soviets dealt the Chinese leaders a huge blow by withdrawing all economic aid and technical expertise. In 1962, China, still reeling from this withdrawal and from the failure of the Great Leap Forward, faced three major crises at its borders. In Xinjiang, tens of thousands of Kazakhs crossed into the Soviet Union; in the southeast, Taiwan posed the threat of an invasion; and in the southwest, a border war erupted with India. In this war, the Soviet Union sided with Britain and the United States in support of India and thus confirmed China's worst fear: an unholy triple alliance between the reactionaries (India's ruling class), the revisionists (the Soviet Union) and the imperialists (the United States). From this point forward, Chinese and Soviet leaders took opposite positions on all key international issues.³⁸

Impact of the Collapse

The impact of the Sino-Soviet collapse on international politics in the Asia-Pacific region was not immediately obvious. By contrast, the impact on the Third World was keenly and immediately felt. After the split, both the Soviet Union and China increased their efforts to enlarge their own geographical stake on the international scene. From the early 1960s, the two nations competed for the allegiance of the various liberation movements and newly independent countries in the Third World.³⁹

Chinese leaders felt that their Third World policy had to be more militant in support of their strong criticism of the Soviet's alleged "sell out" by the "revisionist" Khrushchev. Thus, partly to respond to the split and partly to challenge Soviet dominance, China adopted a distinctively radical, revolutionary-based Third World policy throughout the rest of the sixties.⁴⁰

Independence Movements in Africa

Given their historical, demographic, and geographical ties, South East Asia was a primary concern for China's Third World policy. In many of these Asian

countries, independence was accompanied by well-developed social and economic infrastructures. By contrast, many newly independent African states were open to new social and economic models. Thus, African decolonisation contributed to China's revolutionary zeal in that it provided a rare opportunity for China to put its new revolutionary-based policy into practice.

Chinese leaders felt that the modern Chinese revolutionary experience provided them with the insight to understand and deal with the problems of the African continent. Moreover, they felt that knowledge of this Chinese revolution could help Africans deal with African problems. At one point, Chinese leaders actually proposed to teach Africans Chinese history so that the Africans might better understand *African* conditions:

Africa itself looks like the seven powers of [China's] Warring States [403 BC to 221 BC] with its Nasser, Nkrumah, Hussein [sic], Sekou Touré, Bourguiba and Abbas [sic], each with his own way of leading others. In general everyone is trying to sell his own goods. Africa is now like a huge political exhibition, where a hundred flowers are truly blooming, waiting there for anybody to pick. But everything must go through the experience of facts. History and realistic life can help the Africans to take the road of healthy development. We must tell them the Chinese revolutionary experience in order to reveal the true nature of both new and old colonialism. In Africa we do no harm to anyone, we introduce no illusions, for all we say is true.⁴¹

Thus, the Chinese historical experience was advanced as a useful framework within which African conditions could best be understood.⁴² China's attempt to apply and universalise its experience to Africa was further revealed by Foreign Ministers Chen Yi's remark, "our yesterday is their today and our today is their tomorrow."⁴³ Thus, attracted by both a perceived common past and ripe revolutionary opportunities, China attempted to implement its new Third World policy in Africa.

Two Components of the Revolution Approach

Unlike the Peaceful Coexistence approach, which was vague and fragmented, the Revolution approach was comparatively concrete and systematic. The strategy had two major components: first, China supported countries fighting for independence or struggling against reactionary regimes and, second, China advocated self-reliance.⁴⁴

Component One: Symbolic and Substantive Support

China increased both symbolic and substantive support for African countries undertaking various forms of struggle. In particular, Chairman Mao Zedong, on behalf of 650 million Chinese people, declared “full sympathy and support for the heroic struggle of the African people against imperialism and colonialism, ... [and expressed] firm confidence that ultimate victory would certainly be won.”⁴⁵

To promote the common struggle, the Chinese Communist Party reached out not only to national leaders but also to ordinary citizens. As early as 1949, China began offering Africans opportunities for higher education. Bringing with them an image of an altruistic Communist government, young African scholars thus arrived in Beijing.⁴⁶

Upon arrival, these African students were welcomed with extraordinary fanfare: They were carried shoulder-high, showered with flowers and confetti and bombarded with the din of traditional rejoicing, gongs and cymbals and fire-crackers. They were led before microphones to voice their demands for freedom to applauding crowds half a million strong. They were borne round in limousines like ministers and seated beside the Chinese leaders at rallies and parades. ... Very humble Africans, unknown young men and women, were received with honour by the greatest personalities of the land. ... [Many] ... found themselves closeted, almost as a matter of course, with Mao, his Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, his Foreign Minister Chen Yi; or all of them.⁴⁷

Beyond the symbolic fanfare, however, China delivered substantial support for revolutionary activities. In a systematic study of China's support for wars of national liberation in 1965 (the peak year of the Revolution strategy), Peter Van Ness examined three questions critical to China's state policy: (1) Did the relevant state have diplomatic relations with Peking? (2) Did they vote in favour of admitting Peking to the UN in 1965? (3) Did their trade relations with Peking exceed \$75 million in 1964 and 1965?⁴⁸ Van Ness tested whether the nature of state-to-state relations correlated better than officially articulated revolutionary theory. He concluded: “Whether a foreign non-Communist country was seen to be ‘peace-loving’ or ruled by ‘reactionaries,’ or whether a Communist Party state was viewed in Peking as ‘socialist’ or denounced as ‘revisionist’ largely depended on the extent to which that country's foreign policy coincided with China's own.”^{49,50} In fact, during this period, China

endorsed revolutionary armed struggle “in only 23 of a possible total of some 120 developing countries.”⁵¹ Lin, however, firmly asserts that China would have supported more countries if it had been able.

Snow⁵² concurs that China offered what economic assistance it could. In the following two decades, Africa became the object of a philanthropic crusade. The Chinese government spent approximately US\$2 billion in loans, food, and aid projects.⁵³ Regardless of China’s own domestic problems, assistance to Africa was to be a heroic endeavour: the poor helping the poor.⁵⁴

Component Two: Advocacy of Self-Reliance

China’s willingness to provide economic aid to other Third World countries, even though it was far from rich in resources itself, supported the prevailing view that the struggle for political independence would be incomplete unless followed by a nationalised, self-sufficient economy. To that end, China urged newly independent states to develop strategies distinct from those of the Western imperialists or Soviet revisionists. Thus, in addition to lending symbolic and substantial support, the second component of the Revolution strategy involved advocating self-reliance. Shih explains:

One of China’s missions in the Third World is to help these nations achieve self-reliance in order to sever links with imperialism and facilitate its eventual collapse. Although China does not have the resources of a superpower, China can demonstrate its sincere support in every possible fashion and without political strings. In an anticolonial struggle, China will sometimes back all the factions involved. Third World nations are expected to appreciate truly friendly support and gradually phase out the politically motivated assistance given by other powers. This is probably why the Chinese deem South-South cooperation critical to overall development of the Third World. The notion of South-South cooperation extends the scope of self-reliance to include the Third World as a whole. Receiving aid from China is thus more desirable than receiving it from a non-Third World nation. The stress on self-reliance portrays China as a model and the Chinese presence as being morally appealing.⁵⁵

This message of self-reliance and self-sufficiency was brought directly to the African continent by Foreign Policy Minister Zhou Enlai during his 1963-1964 tour. The dominant theme of Zhou’s visit, the call for a new, independent, and prosperous Africa, was warmly welcomed. Six more African countries estab-

lished diplomatic relations with China in that year alone. Zhou's tour represented a breakthrough; never before had China been so positively received.

Closer to home, however, China's revolutionary initiatives were less favourably greeted. The major diplomatic victories that China did realise, such as the signing of border treaties with neighbouring states including Burma, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Mongolia, were overshadowed by failures. China's increasingly militant stance, particularly the encouragement of domestic revolutions, fuelled existing suspicions among its neighbours. Except for a few countries such as Indonesia and North Vietnam, most Asian nations responded to these hard-line policies with caution. Lin Piao's famous 1965 article on the universal application of "People's War" confirmed these misgivings.

Failure of the Revolution Strategy

By the mid 1960s, the Revolution strategy had begun to unravel. In Southeast Asia, China lost one of its last remaining allies when diplomatic ties with Indonesia were severed in response to the bloody coup of 1965. Even in Africa, initial enthusiasm for the revolutionary spirit had been replaced by a more sober appreciation of its limits. China's hopes of revitalising the spirit at a second Asian-African conference were quashed when the conference was cancelled because of a coup in Algeria, the host country. In addition, a series of subsequent coups drove out many African leaders with close ties to China. This led to the expulsion of many Chinese diplomats and contributed to growing suspicions about China's presence on the continent. In the end, not a single government or movement significantly expanded their power because of China's revolutionary tactics.

According to Lin, the Revolution strategy failed for two main reasons: overreaching and miscalculation. First, by committing to a broadly defined goal of revolution, China overextended itself into too many regions. The intense ideological component of the revolutionary strategy inhibited China from establishing priorities and developing effective means to implement them. Second, by relying on an ideologically based strategy, China seriously miscalculated the complexity and diversity of the Third World. China alienated itself from many countries by insisting on a united Third World struggle against both revisionism and imperialism. China failed to consider that each country had its own conception of national interest and wanted to define its own relationship with the superpowers. Moreover, China misinterpreted international trends and its own ability to influence world events. Chinese leaders believed that the Revolution approach, like the Peaceful Coexistence approach, would encourage a movement that would inevitably lead to vast changes benefiting all

Third World nations. When this did not happen, Chinese leaders were forced to re-evaluate and reorient their foreign policy strategy.⁵⁶

Phase Three: The Grand Alliance

The transition from revolutionary chaos to pragmatic reconstruction began in late 1968 and culminated in April 1969 at the First Plenum of the Ninth Chinese Communist Party Congress. The new strategy, based on the concept of a united front of China, the US and sympathetic Third World countries against the Soviet Union, ushered in a new era of Chinese foreign policy. Once again, domestic and international pressures combined to prompt the changes. Domestically, the disruptive effects of the Cultural Revolution, which had put Chinese foreign policy in limbo between 1966 and 1968, were subsiding. As the frenzy waned, Mao and other top leaders shifted their focus to more threatening developments, especially the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the Soviet border clash with China in 1969. The risk of Soviet military intervention against China, rendered plausible by the upheaval from the Cultural Revolution, pushed Beijing to reassess its foreign policies.⁵⁷ The reassessment followed a new analysis that identified four contradictions in the world, instead of the idealised one contradiction.⁵⁸ Kim⁵⁹ explains that Mao's difficulty in identifying the single principal contradiction revealed his "agonising reappraisal" of the international system. Kim adds that the structural shift from bipolarity to multipolarity, coupled with the Sino-Soviet split, prompted Mao to examine different variations on the theme of multiple zones.⁶⁰

Ultimately, because of the superpowers' hegemonic "contention and collusion" in both intermediate zones, Mao proclaimed it desirable to combine the two zones in order to create the broadest united front.⁶¹ The *People's Daily* newspaper was used to reinforce this united front stand and to argue that the immense changes of the late 1960s had led to this new historical situation: for a time US imperialism remained the archenemy of the people of the world. However, many countries in its camp were no longer taking their cue from it and most countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America won independence. Meanwhile, the Soviet leadership betrayed socialism, restored capitalism at home and the Soviet Union degenerated into a social imperialist country. Then, after a succession of grave events, the Soviet Union not only turned into an imperialist superpower that threatened the world as the United States did, but also became the most dangerous source of another world war.

Thus, the United States was portrayed as on the defensive and in decline (largely as a result of the protracted Vietnam War) while the Soviet Union, as a younger imperialist power, was depicted as on the offensive and on a ruthless and insatiable incline. Henceforth, Soviet social-imperialism, rendered “more crazy, adventurist, and deceptive” than US imperialism, became China’s number one enemy.⁶²

Alignment with the United States

The Soviet threat to Chinese security provided a rationale for establishing a temporary strategic alignment with the United States: the imperialist superpower that, though weakened, remained the sole power able to counter this danger.⁶³ China’s perceptions of the Soviet Union began to coincide with the United States’ own anxiety over unprecedented Soviet expansion. Subsequent Nixon-Kissinger advances enabled China to shift its international strategy of opposing both superpowers to opposing only the Soviet Union. China then could embrace the United States as an implicit ally. Levine⁶⁴ concludes that for both parties, a classical balance-of-power politics prevailed over ideology. The Sino-American rapprochement of the 1970s, culminating in the normalisation of formal diplomatic relations on January 1, 1979, was rooted in a shared strategic assessment representing the union of two parallel obsessions: America’s Cold War obsession with the Soviet Union and Maoist China’s latter-day obsession with Soviet social-imperialism.⁶⁵

The Sino-American rapprochement, the new Grand Alliance, held tremendous practical implications for China.⁶⁶ First, it enabled Beijing to establish new contacts with other industrialised nations. During the final years of Mao’s rule, political and economic relations flourished with the West. In 1973, for example, China purchased US\$4.3 billion worth of industrial equipment from the West, the largest such move made since China accepted Soviet aid to construct its industrial base in the 1950s. Second, due to improved relations, Beijing was able to forge new contacts with pro-US developing countries. Between 1971 and 1972, twenty-four Third World countries opened or resumed diplomatic relations with China. In short, the reorientation of China’s foreign policy in the early 1970s put China in a far better position to implement its Third World policy.⁶⁷ After the initial focus on the Sino-US rapprochement, Mao turned his attention to a more systematic and theoretical basis for this new arrangement.⁶⁸

Three-Worlds Theory

Mao's image of China and of the new world order finally crystallised in his Three-Worlds Theory.⁶⁹ The Three-Worlds Theory began to develop as a response to the increasingly untenable "lean-to-one-side" policy that Mao himself had earlier pronounced. As discussed, Mao premised that policy on a Two-World Theory that he later modified by the notion of intermediate zones, comprising what he later termed the Second and Third Worlds. According to Kim, Mao's repeated attempts in the 1960s to define the theory of intermediate zones in the face of a rapidly changing world revealed an acute crisis of Chinese identity. By the early 1970s, however, Mao finally resolved the crisis by positioning China with the Third World. Thus, within the final refinement of the theory of the intermediate zone emerged a model of the Three-Worlds.

The Three-Worlds Theory was officially pronounced by Deng Xiaoping at the Sixth Special Session of the UN General Assembly on April 10, 1974. Three months earlier, however, Mao first discussed this theory in an interview with Zambian President Dr K. D. Kaunda. At this meeting, Mao stated:

In my view, the United States and the Soviet Union form the first world. Japan, Europe and Canada, the middle section, belong to the second world. We are the third world. . . . The third world has a huge population. With the exception of Japan, Asia belongs to the third world. The whole of Africa belongs to the third world, and Latin America too. (*Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), "Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds Is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism."⁷⁰)

Kim⁷¹ explains that the Three-Worlds Theory is a simplified model to define and assess the main contradictions in the international order. The theory operates as a geopolitical compass for China to establish its rightful place in the world. Like the Wallerstein world-system model, which divides the global political economy into core, semiperiphery, and periphery, the Three-Worlds Theory also makes a tripartite division of the globe: the First World of two superpowers in predatory competition or collusion; the Third World of developing nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America; the Second World of Northern developed countries in between. Kim⁷² captures the essence of the theory in the following synopsis:

Stripped to its core, Mao's Three-Worlds Theory is a theory of anti-hegemonism designed to strengthen the weak and the poor (includ-

ing China) to overcome the strong and the rich. It envisions a united front strategy, derived from China's own revolutionary experience, that has been extrapolated to the global setting to pit the nations of the Third World against those of the First in an unfolding struggle to transform the postwar international system. Although the theory calls for a dual-adversary approach directed against both superpowers, in practice the Soviet Union has often been singled out as the greater threat to world peace.⁷³

The Three-Worlds Theory served different purposes at different times.⁷⁴ While Kim interrogates Mao's use of Third Worldism, he also cautions against its quick dismissal. Kim⁷⁵ warns that

deconstructing the symbolism of the Third World as an independent force in world politics, if carried too far, can be just as misleading as the earlier claims on behalf of its negotiating solidarity. A more valid critique is normative and conceptual. The term 'Third World' is increasingly challenged by those claiming to represent that world, who prefer such terms as 'nonaligned' and 'South' to a designation they see as unwittingly legitimating a hierarchy in the global political system. Without completely rejecting this critique ... the label 'Third World' [endures] partly because it persists in Chinese policy pronouncements and partly because it is emblematic of the common identity and shared aspiration that still link the countries and peoples of the poor South in an essential but elusive struggle to escape from poverty and underdevelopment.

It initially served as a theoretical underpinning for the drastic shift in China's foreign policy. It also negated any misgivings some Third World nations felt about the rapprochement and the subsequent close relations between China and the United States. Soon, however, the theory became a convenient tool to justify China's focus on the Soviet Union. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Three-Worlds Theory supported the Grand Alliance strategy with the United States, which strongly influenced the development of China's Third World policy.⁷⁶

The Grand Alliance strategy affected China's Third World policy in two main ways. First, the strategy tied China's Third World policy closer to its concerns regarding the two superpowers. As China's relations with the two superpowers changed, so did its Third World policy. As a result, China's Third

World policy became less coherent. Second, under the Grand Alliance strategy, China tended to judge other Third World nations according to their degree of "Soviet connections."⁷⁷ Supporters of the Soviet Union were enemies and those who were not were allies.⁷⁸

Demise of the Grand Alliance

Within a few years, three fundamental limitations of the Grand Alliance strategy began to surface. First, the strategy proved to be too simplistic. By insisting on the anti-Soviet criterion, many Third World states were alienated. By focussing largely on the single anti-Soviet factor, this strategy, like the Revolution approach, underestimated many developing nations' will to determine the nature of their own foreign relations. Second, the increasing parallels between Chinese and American policy on many Third World issues, especially those involving regional disputes, incited suspicions and resentment from many who viewed these parallels as evidence of China's increasing deviation from its proclaimed Third World position.⁷⁹ However, as the strategy distanced China from many potential Third World allies, it further attached China to the United States. Thus, the third and perhaps the most serious flaw of the plan was the over-reliance on compatible and sustainable relations with the US that, in the end, left China somewhat isolated. In the early days of the Reagan administration, any illusions of a Sino-American partnership were quickly exposed as the new American government took an increasingly pro-Taiwanese stance, accompanied by a revived US-Soviet rapprochement. While this new US stance did not escalate into a major confrontation, it did signify the beginning of China's disenchantment with the Grand Alliance Approach.

Dropping the Grand Alliance

Above all else, the most important motive for dropping the Grand Alliance stemmed from China's increasing concentration on domestic reform and modernisation.⁸⁰ With the main benefit of the strategy, the normalisation of diplomatic relations with the US, now exhausted, the continuation of the policy would only increase costs with no return. Moreover, to invest huge resources in direct conflict with the Soviet Union became counterproductive. To continue to distinguish between pro and anti-Soviet states only limited China's expanding relations. Moreover, harsh anti-Soviet propaganda now seemed outdated as the domestic scene de-radicalised. Indeed, internal affairs took precedence, particularly in the two years immediately following the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong in 1976. In fact, due to the serious domestic situation in the immediate post-Mao period, Beijing was in no position, militarily or other-

wise, to employ provocative tactics. Thus, for a while China assumed a relatively passive position in which it remained before taking its first step in the post-Mao years of foreign policy.⁸¹

Conclusions

During the Maoist reign, China's definition of its place in the world underwent a protracted struggle. The 1950s witnessed a dialogue between the two-camp theory and the theory of the intermediate zone, as China made its diplomatic debut with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence at the Bandung conference. The spirit of Bandung, however, was short-lived. As China continued to search for a place in the rapidly evolving international system, revolutionary tactics seemed more promising. The identity crisis of the 1960s, evident in China's repeated efforts to define the theory of the intermediate zone, was manifested in the break with the Soviet Union, in the conflicts with neighbouring nations, and in the loss of credibility on the African continent. Finally, however, China made peace with itself as a member of the Third World. China's foreign policy may thus be seen as an adjustment of diplomatic struggles - of conflict, competition, coexistence, and cooperation - whose focus shifts from time to time, place to place, and actor to actor.⁸²

Endnotes

- 1 P. Snow, *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa* (London: The Bath Press, 1988), xiii.
- 2 In fact, seventy-five years before Vasco da Gama sailed round the Cape of Good Hope to establish a Portuguese empire, the court of the Ming dynasty had repeatedly sent expeditions across the Indian Ocean to the ports of the East African coast. For a closer look at the nature and depth of these historical linkages, see J. J. L. Duyvendak, *China's Discovery of Africa: Lectures Given at the University of London on January 22 and 23, 1947* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1949); T. Filesi, *China and Africa in the Middle Ages* (London: Frank Cass, 1972); A. Hutchison, *China's African Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1975); J. D. Fage, *A History of Africa* (London: Hutchinson, 1978); R. Portères and J. Barrau, "Origins, Development and Expansion of Agricultural Techniques," in *General History of Africa I: Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1981), 687-705; N. M. Sheriff, "Nubia before Napata (-3100 to -750)," in *General History of Africa II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa*, ed. G. Mokhtar (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1981), 245-297; P. Vêrin, "Madagascar," in *General*

- History of Africa II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa*, ed. G. Mokhtar (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1981), 693-717; P. Snow, *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa*; D. Hickey and K. C. Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness: The American Vision of Africa in the Twentieth Century* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1993).
- 3 P. Snow, *Star Raft*, xiii.
- 4 A. Ogunsanwo, *China's Policy in Africa 1958-71* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 1.
- 5 S. Kim, *China, the United Nations, and World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 49; and S. Kim, "Mao Zedong and China's Changing World View," in *China in the Global Community*, ed. C. Hsiung and S. S. Kim (New York: Praeger, 1980), 16-39.
- 6 M. B. Yahuda, *China's Role in World Affairs* (London: Redwood Burn Limited, 1978), 102; and M. B. Yahuda, *Towards the End of Isolationism: China's Foreign Policy after Mao* (London: Macmillan Press, 1983).
- 7 Z. Lin, "China's Third World Policy," in *The Chinese View of the World*, ed. Y. Hao and G. Huan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 225-259.
- 8 A. Ogunsanwo, *China's Policy in Africa*, 3.
- 9 Kim ("Mao Zedong and China's Changing World View," 20-21) explains that the Law of Contradictions is a central idea in Mao's world view. Mao's philosophy of life revolved around the belief that contradiction is inherent in the social process itself and without it no social progress will occur. Every contradiction represents an objective reality. To resolve contradiction is to engage in a protracted struggle because, as the moving force in nature, contradictions rise, resolve, and rise again. In the relationship between various contradictions, one and only one is the principal contradiction that necessarily determines the development of the others. In every given situation, the crucial task of leadership is first to identify and then to resolve the principal contradiction. The remaining problems (the secondary contradictions) can easily be solved once subordinated to the resolution of the principal contradiction.
- 10 Kim, "Mao Zedong and China's Changing World View," 16-39.
- 11 Yahuda, *China's Role in World Affairs*, 46.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 106.
- 13 Lin, "China's Third World Policy," 225-259.
- 14 Mao launched his concept of imperialism as a "paper tiger" in an interview with Anna Louise Strong. Mao stated, "The atom bomb is a paper tiger used by the U.S. reactionaries to scare people. It looks terrible, but in fact isn't.... All reactionaries are paper tigers. In appearance, the reactionaries are terrifying, but in reality they are not so powerful. From a long range point of view, it is not the reactionaries but the people who are really powerful.... U.S. reactionaries, like all reactionaries in history, do not have much strength.... Although the Chinese people still face many difficulties and will long suffer hardships from the joint attacks of U.S. imperialism and the Chinese reactionaries, the day will come when these reactionaries are defeated and we are victorious. The reason is simply this: The reactionaries represent reaction, we represent progress" (Extracts from *Mao's Interview with Anna Louise Strong*, August 1946, as cited by Hsuan Chi, IV: 1192-93 as cited by S. R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung* (New York: Praeger, 1963), 279-80).
- 15 Kim, "Mao Zedong and China's Changing World View," 30-31.

- 16 Lin, "China's Third World Policy," 225-259.
- 17 Ibid., 229.
- 18 B. D. Larkin, "China and the Third World in Global Perspective," in *China in the Global Community*, ed. J. C. Hsiung and S. S. Kim (New York: Praeger, 1980), 63-84.
- 19 Ogunsanwo, *China's Policy in Africa*, 3.
- 20 Lin, "China's Third World Policy," 230.
- 21 Larkin, "China and the Third World," 66.
- 22 Ibid., 66.
- 23 J. K. Cooley, *East Wind over Africa: Red China's African Offensive* (New York: Walker and Company, 1965), 11.
- 24 Ogunsanwo, *China's Policy in Africa*, 3.
- 25 Cooley, *East Wind over Africa*, 11.
- 26 Ibid., 3.
- 27 Yahuda, *China's Role in World Affairs*, 46.
- 28 Kim, "Mao Zedong and China's Changing World View," 30-31.
- 29 The Bandung conference marked the first opportunity for leaders of the six participating African states, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gold Coast (later Ghana), Liberia, Libya and Sudan to meet the rulers of Communist China (Ogunsanwo, *China's Policy in Africa*, 8). These meetings were followed by Chinese efforts to renew diplomatic, economic and cultural contacts that had begun over 500 years ago. As Ogunsanwo points out, in 1956, one year after the conference, Chinese cultural missions visited Egypt, the Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia and Ethiopia. China also made commercial inroads into Africa with large cotton purchases from Egypt, followed by its first commercial contracts with other African countries, beginning with the Sudan and Morocco. On the diplomatic front, China succeeded in obtaining recognition from Egypt in May 1956 and the first Chinese embassy in Africa was established in Cairo. Ambassador Ch'en Chia-k'ang was sent to Cairo, where he remained until December 1965. From Cairo, China's diplomats began to follow the situation on the continent.
- 30 Yahuda, *China's Role in World Affairs*, 46.
- 31 Lin, "China's Third World Policy," 231.
- 32 M. B. Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific, 1945-1995* (London: Routledge, 1996), 55.
- 33 Ibid., 55.
- 34 Lin, "China's Third World Policy," 231.
- 35 Yahuda, *International Politics of the Asia-Pacific*, 57-58.
- 36 Ibid., 57-58.
- 37 In 1959, the Soviet Union refused to supply China with a sample atomic bomb. A Test Ban treaty was signed in 1963. Undaunted, in 1964 China tested its first device.
- 38 Ibid., 59.
- 39 Yahuda, *Towards the End of Isolationism*, 125.
- 40 Lin, "China's Third World Policy," 231.
- 41 Yahuda, *Towards the End of Isolationism*, 125.
- 42 According to Yahuda (*China's Role in World Affairs*, 126), "it is critically important to note that China's didactic intentions did not call upon the Chinese to direct and instruct the Africans. Even though Peking was perceived as the true source of Marxism-Leninism and as the centre of principled opposition to imperialism, there was no sign that China's leaders sought to ... direct its member constituents.

- ... The Chinese position was still country-centred. ... Mao had never practised the export of revolution.”
- 43 Yahuda, *Towards the End of Isolationism*, 125.
- 44 Lin, “China’s Third World Policy,” 232-233.
- 45 Chinese African People’s Friendship Association (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1961), 3.
- 46 M. J. Sullivan, “The 1988-1989 Nanjing Anti-African Protests: Racial Nationalism or National Racism?” *The China Quarterly* 138 (June 1994), 438-457.
- 47 Snow, *Star Raft*, 73.
- 48 Yahuda, *China’s Role in World Affairs*, 159.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 50 Yahuda cautions that perhaps Van Ness went too far in this conclusion. He believes that China’s foreign policy concerns went beyond those of narrow state interest.
- 51 Van Ness, 1970, as cited in Lin, “China’s Third World Policy,” 231.
- 52 Snow, *Star Raft*, 144-185.
- 53 The Tanzanian-Zambian Railway, initiated in 1965 and completed in 1975 (two years ahead of schedule), stands as China’s most significant accomplishment on the continent. The “Tan-Zam” remains not only the longest railway in Africa (1,860 kilometres), but also the longest railway completed anywhere in the world since the end of the Second World War.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 145.
- 55 C. Y. Shih, *China’s Just World: The Morality of Chinese Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1993), 175-176.
- 56 Lin, “China’s Third World Policy,” 234-235.
- 57 S. I. Levine, “Chinese Foreign Policy in the Strategic Triangle,” in *Chinese Defence and Foreign Policy*, ed. J. T. Dreyer and I. J. Kim (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 63-86.
- 58 According to Mao, the four major contradictions in the world now were: (1) oppressed nations vs. imperialism and social-imperialism; (2) the proletariat vs. the bourgeoisie in the capitalist and revisionist countries; (3) imperialist vs. social-imperialist countries; and (4) socialist countries vs. imperialism and social-imperialism (Kim, “Mao Zedong and China’s Changing World View,” 32).
- 59 *Ibid.*, 32-33.
- 60 Mao’s different variations on the theme of multiple zones included: (1) the super-power zone, comprised of US imperialism and Soviet social-imperialism; (2) the socialist zone, made up of all Socialist countries; (3) the first intermediate zone, including Asia, Africa, and Latin America; and (4) the second intermediate zone, representing the major capitalist countries in the East and the West, except the two super powers (Kim, “Mao Zedong and China’s Changing World View,” 33).
- 61 *Ibid.*, 32-33.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 63 Levine, “Chinese Foreign Policy,” 63-86.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 63-86.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 167-168.
- 66 Lin, “China’s Third World Policy,” 234-235.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 234-235.
- 68 Kim, “Mao Zedong and China’s Changing World View,” 32-33.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 183-184.

- 70 Ibid., 33.
- 71 Kim, "China and the Third World: In Search of a Neorealist World Policy," in *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy in the Post Mao Era*, ed. S.S. Kim (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 178-211.
- 72 Ibid., 183.
- 73 Ibid., 184.
- 74 While acknowledging the variety of purposes the Three-Worlds Theory served, Kim critiques Mao's construction of Third Worldism and concludes it "was more symbolic than substantive." He states, "The cleavages in the South between fast-growing and stagnant, small and large, coastal and landlocked, left and right, and democratic and authoritarian made any claim of a unified Third World movement seem a curious mixture of rhetoric and wishful thinking. . . . The uneven and differentiated performance in economic growth and social equity has introduced a measure of distortion to the holistic image of the Third World." S. Kim, "China and the Third World in the Changing World Order," in *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. S. S. Kim (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 129.
- 75 Ibid., 129.
- 76 Lin, "China's Third World Policy," 234-235.
- 77 Ibid., 234-235.
- 78 Ibid., 234-235.
- 79 Ibid., 234-235.
- 80 Ibid., 234-235.
- 81 R. G. Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Policy: Developments after Mao* (New York: Praeger, 1986).
- 82 Kim, "Mao Zedong and China's Changing World View," 21, 34.

Part **III.**

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