

# Sino-Soviet Relations in the 1950s: Situational Cordiality

Hiroki Takeuchi (htakeuch@smu.edu)

Southern Methodist University (SMU)

## ABSTRACT

This article explores the origin of historical distrust in Sino-Russian relations by discussing the following key events in the development of the Sino-Soviet split and later conflict: Mao's "Leaning to One Side" Speech, the 1950 Friendship Treaty, the Korean War, and the 1954 Geneva Conference. It brings to light the perspectives of some prominent Japanese historians as well as the more conventionally known Western and Chinese historians. Conceptualizing Sino-Soviet relations in the 1950s as "situational cordiality," it argues that relations between China and the Soviet Union were never as cordial as commonly believed, that the conflicts were rooted in Chinese nationalism rather than communist ideology, and that China's desire for national independence was countered by the Soviet Union's desire to subordinate China as part of the communist bloc. It suggests that Mao used anti-imperialist ideology to differentiate China from the Soviet Union when claiming leadership in the international communist movement.

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## Introduction

Unlike its current image as a world superpower of the twenty-first century, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, its leaders struggled with how to avoid being looked down upon by other countries in international politics. How did China wrestle with overcoming its image as—and the reality of being—a weak country? Through evaluation of perspectives of some prominent Japanese historians as well as the more conventionally known Western and Chinese historians, this article answers this question by reevaluating Sino-Soviet relations in the 1950s.<sup>1</sup>

Conceptualizing relations as “situational cordiality,” with the implication that the cordiality was extremely shallow, this article argues that Sino-Soviet relations in the 1950s were never as friendly as commonly believed. The conflict derived from Chinese nationalism based on anti-imperialism rather than from different interpretations of communist ideology. Many would say that the 1950s marked a period of cordial relations between China and the Soviet Union, and that the 1960s signaled the worst period of the Sino-Soviet conflict. China and the Soviet Union were in an alliance relationship in the 1950s. One day after the founding of the PRC on October 1, 1949, the Soviet Union officially recognized the new regime in Beijing, and as early as December 16 Mao Zedong visited Moscow and signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance (hereafter “1950 Friendship Treaty”). This relationship was strengthened by the Korean War between 1950 and 1953: China entered the war against the United Nations Army

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<sup>1</sup> When introducing a Chinese or Japanese source, I put the author's surname first and given name last.

led by the United States. China received approximately 300 million dollars in loans from the Soviet Union during the First Five-Year Plan between 1953 and 1957, and also many Soviet advisors and technicians came to China to support industrial construction. Thus, it is conventional wisdom that the Sino-Soviet rift did not originate until February 1956 when Nikita Khrushchev denounced Joseph Stalin at the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

However, a number of questions as to the origins of the Sino-Soviet rift remain debatable. Was 1956 really the origin of the rift? And was the Sino-Soviet alliance based on communist ideology? Do the 1950s represent an age of cordial Sino-Soviet relations? Or were there signs that the relationship had begun to deteriorate at some point before this? This article argues that the conflict between China and the Soviet Union had continued without interruption, and explores why Sino-Soviet relations improved temporarily, at least superficially, in the 1950s despite the many past conflicts and potential sources of forthcoming conflicts between them. Such an approach requires reevaluation of relations in the 1950s in terms of how deep the conflict was, rather than how deep the friendship was. This article suggests that Sino-Soviet relations were not affected as much by communist ideology or by the need to balance against U.S. power as they were by Mao's desire for independence. This desire was countered by the Soviet desire to subordinate the PRC as part of the communist bloc. Given China's suffering at the hands of Western and Japanese imperialism, not surprisingly Mao placed greater priority on anti-imperialism than proletarian internationalism. This article discusses four key events in the development of the Sino-Soviet split and later conflict: Mao's "Leaning to One Side" Speech, the 1950 Friendship Treaty, the Korean War, and the 1954 Geneva Conference.

## **Khrushchev's Denunciation of Stalin and the Sino-Soviet Rift**

Generally accepted arguments focusing on the cordiality of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1950s assume that the Sino-Soviet rift originated in 1956 when Khrushchev denounced Stalin, after which the two countries' disagreements began to stand out. Following the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1958, Soviet advisors' leaving China in 1960, and China's opposition toward the Soviet's conclusion of the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) in 1963, China and the Soviet Union began to dispute publicly in 1963. Then, following the Soviet military involvement in the Prague Spring and China's harsh criticism of it in 1968, the rift eventually gave way to armed conflicts in 1969. After Leonid Brezhnev proposed a theory of "limited sovereignty" (the Brezhnev Doctrine) to justify the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, which "in effect gave the USSR the sovereign right to determine the foreign and domestic policy limits of all bloc members and left the latter a choice between compliance and military occupation,"<sup>2</sup> China called the Soviet Union "socialist imperialist," and in response the Soviet Union called China a "military bureaucratic state under Mao's dictatorship."<sup>3</sup>

Lorenz Lüthi emphasizes Mao's radical ideology as the cause of the split and essentially blames China while overlooking the Soviet role.<sup>4</sup> He classifies the causes of the Sino-Soviet rift after 1956 into the following four factors: (1) China's nationalist and security concerns with its state interest; (2) relative changes in the triangular power balance of China, the Soviet Union, and

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<sup>2</sup> Lowell Dittmer, *Sino-Soviet Normalization and Its Implications, 1945–1990* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> Kikuchi Masanori and Shishido Hiroshi, "Hajimeni" [Introduction], in Kikuchi Masanori, Hakamada Shigaki, Shishido Hiroshi, and Yabuki Susumu, eds., *Chū-So Tairitsu: Sono Kiban, Rekishi, Riron* [The Sino-Soviet Conflict: Its Foundation, History, Theory] (Tokyo: Yūhikaku), p. ii.

<sup>4</sup> Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

the United States; (3) Chinese domestic politics; and (4) conflicts over the correct interpretation of communist ideology.<sup>5</sup> Reconsidering these arguments by using the newly available documents, he argues that the ideological disputes played a significant role for the Sino-Soviet rift, suggesting that “the Chinese side was far more active in pursuing ideological conflict.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed many works have argued that ideology mattered for the rift. For example, in one of the earliest works on the Sino-Soviet rift, Donald Zagoria focuses on differences of ideology as one of the main causes of the rift while also raising other issues such as how to build communes, global strategy, and so on.<sup>7</sup> Yamagiwa Akira, a Japanese diplomatic historian, argues that the ideological differences evolved around the method of socialist construction as well as in foreign policies after Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin.<sup>8</sup> Taking the framework of relative changes in the China-Soviet-U.S. triangular power balance, Lowell Dittmer argues that ideological disagreements, especially those over the economic model, were a cause of the rift, and points out two reasons why Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin led to the Sino-Soviet rift.<sup>9</sup> First, by that time the Soviet Union had already achieved a certain degree of development under the socialist system while China had just started the socialist transformation. It was also the period when China evolved its distrust of the Soviet model in terms of a developmental strategy. This led to China’s departure from the Soviet precept, and brought about mutual distrust under conditions in which the Soviet Union would support China if and only if China followed the Soviet Union. Second, the change of China’s national identity

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 3–8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956–1961* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> Yamagiwa Akira, “Chū-So Kankei no Tenkai: Bei-Chū-So Kankei no Shiten kara” [The Evolution of Sino-Soviet Relations: From the Viewpoint of U.S.-China-Soviet Relations], in Yamagiwa Akira and Mōri Kazuko, eds., *Gendai Chūgoku to Soren* [Contemporary China and the Soviet Union] (Tokyo: Japan Institute of International Affairs, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> Dittmer, *Sino-Soviet Normalization and Its Implications*.

from a member of the communist bloc into a revolutionary leader in the Third World did not suit the Soviet's preference of keeping China as a faithful follower of the Soviet Union.

Chen Jian argues that ideology matters and claims that Mao used foreign tensions for domestic mobilization to implement policies reflecting his ideology of continuous revolution.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Khrushchev's "peaceful coexistence" argument proposed in his 1956 speech directly contradicted Mao's ideological standpoint. Khrushchev insisted that the Soviet Union could peacefully coexist with the United States under conditions in which both the Soviet Union and the United States had nuclear weapons. Mao strongly opposed Khrushchev's view. He made a statement that "the East Wind prevails over the West Wind" when he attended the fortieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1957, arguing that the communists led by the Soviet Union would ultimately triumph over the capitalists led by the United States. This was during the time when the Soviet Union successfully launched a satellite, Sputnik, and developed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).<sup>11</sup> Mao argued that communist countries were more technically advanced than capitalist countries, had larger populations, and would prevail even if nuclear war occurred; and hence that peaceful coexistence should be unnecessary. Khrushchev was surprised by Mao's conclusion and criticized it as adventurism. This tension culminated when China called the Soviet Union "dirty fake and fraud" after the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and the PTBT in 1963, both of which were based on Khrushchev's peaceful

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<sup>10</sup> Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, pp. 7–8.

<sup>11</sup> It is true that the Soviet development of ICBMs in this period, in reality, was way behind that of the United States, which was totally different from the Soviet announcement. However, China believed in the Soviet announcement. See Miyamoto Nobuo, *Chū-So Tairitsu no Shiteki Kōzō: Bei-Chū-So no "Kaku" to Chū-So no Taikoku Minzoku Shugi / Ishiki no Shiten kara* [Historical Structure of the Sino-Soviet Conflict: From the Viewpoint of the U.S.-China-Soviet "Nuclear" Issue and Great Power Nationalism of China and the Soviet Union] (Tokyo: Japan Institute of International Affairs), pp. 654–61.

coexistence argument.<sup>12</sup> For Mao, this *détente* seemed to be for the purpose of seeking a monopoly of nuclear weapons between the Soviet Union and the United States, each of which China was in conflict with at that time.

Slightly different from these conventional explanations of the Sino-Soviet rift after 1956, Miyamoto Nobuo, a diplomat who has expertise in Sino-Soviet relations, points out China's role in settling the East European uprisings following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, arguing that the Sino-Soviet rift did not occur immediately after Khrushchev's speech.<sup>13</sup> Khrushchev's sudden speech brought about uprisings in Poland (June) and Hungary (October) in 1956. Despite its dissatisfaction with this speech, at the moment of disorder in Eastern Europe China insisted on protecting the unity of the communist bloc headed by the Soviet Union. Premier Zhou Enlai visited the Soviet Union and East European countries and helped settle the issue, elevating China's prestige in the communist bloc. However, this stimulated China's potential consciousness as a great power, increased China's competitive feelings toward the Soviet Union, and as a result exacerbated the Sino-Soviet rift.<sup>14</sup>

Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia suggest a more complicated picture of how Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin started the Sino-Soviet rift.<sup>15</sup> Although there were ideological disagreements over the economic model, in reality "neither the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] nor the CPSU was able to make a break from the Stalinist model and think about socialist development from the perspectives of actually changing or reforming the socialist system."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> William Griffith, *The Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964), p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> Miyamoto, *Chū-So Tairitsu no Shiteki Kōzō*, pp. 212–311.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 301–3.

<sup>15</sup> Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership, 1945–1959: A New History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

Instead, Khrushchev's speech gave Mao newly founded confidence to "lead and guide the international Communist movement" and made him believe that "he would be a much more charismatic leader of the socialist world than Khrushchev."<sup>17</sup> In fact, although Mao explicitly supported the Soviet leadership in the communist bloc, his support was conditional as long as the Soviet Union treated China as an equal partner and not as a subordinate.<sup>18</sup> Once Mao became confident, personality differences between Mao and Khrushchev exacerbated the Sino-Soviet rift. While Mao respected Stalin because of his industrialization of the Soviet Union and defeat of Adolf Hitler, he had no respect for Khrushchev. Later when their disagreements over China's Great Leap Forward policy were evident, "Khrushchev was sensitive about Mao's claims to preeminence in questions of theory and philosophy while his own reputation never went beyond well-known aptitude for growing corn."<sup>19</sup>

When the confident Mao confronted the Soviet-led proletarian internationalism, he used the nationalist, anti-imperialist ideology to differentiate China from the Soviet Union. Indeed, Jeremy Friedman says: "For the Chinese...having had more direct experience with the trials and tribulations of imperialism, anti-imperialism remained the guiding focus of the revolutionary process, and socialism was seen as a tool with which to shift the global balance to power through economic development and autarchy."<sup>20</sup> Mao's confidence as a leader in the international communist movement strengthened with "the increasingly radical rhetoric emerging from the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>18</sup> Zhuhua Shen and Yafeng Xia, "Hidden Currents during the Honeymoon: Mao, Khrushchev, and the 1957 Moscow Conference," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Fall 2009), pp. 94–100.

<sup>19</sup> Shen and Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership, 1945–1959*, p. 295.

<sup>20</sup> Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p. 2.



developing world along with the rapid pace of decolonization.”<sup>21</sup> As a result, “the Chinese saw anti-imperialism as the chief goal of their revolutionary program, and they prioritized that goal over any attempt to build socialism in the developing world.”<sup>22</sup> In sum, the different ideas on revolutionary policies in developing countries were one of the causes of the Sino-Soviet rift. In fact, Austin Jersild argues: “The Chinese were persistent and consistent in their beliefs about the ‘revisionism’ of the bloc that betrayed China and let it as the principal bastion of support for the international communist movement.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Continuous Conflict in Sino-Soviet Relations in the 1950s**

Contrary to the argument that the Sino-Soviet rift started with Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin, Nakajima Mineo, leading Japanese scholar on Chinese politics and international relations, argues that the conflict between China and the Soviet Union never went away. He illustrates the shallowness of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1950s to make his point.<sup>24</sup> Nakajima rejects the argument that the 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty was a symbol of cordiality, saying that it is flimsy and ridiculous to accept this treaty as a symbol of friendliness based solely on shared communist ideology between China and the Soviet Union.<sup>25</sup> He also resists the argument defining Sino-Soviet relations in the 1950s merely as a series of conflicts between top leaders: i.e., the conflicts between Mao and the successive Soviet leaders: namely, Stalin and Khrushchev.<sup>26</sup> He criticizes that this

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>23</sup> Austin Jersild, *The Sino-Soviet Alliance: An International History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), p. 175.

<sup>24</sup> Nakajima Mineo, *Chū-So Tairitsu to Gendai: Sengo Ajia no Saikōsatsu* [Sino-Soviet Conflict and Current International Relations: Reexamination of Post-War Asia] (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1978).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

argument is not compelling because the Chinese leadership applauded when the Soviet leadership changed. Mao and the CCP originally welcomed Stalin's death and Khrushchev's takeover even though the approval was short lived.

Takahashi Nobuo, a Japanese political historian and an expert of CCP history, argues that the CCP had to balance pressure from Moscow with maintaining its originality and independence from the Soviet Union both before and after the founding of the PRC.<sup>27</sup> To explain the Sino-Soviet rift, he conceptualizes two frameworks through which China saw Cold War international politics: that of "communists and capitalists" (which he names "East and West"), and that of "anti-imperialists and imperialists" (which he names "South and North").<sup>28</sup> Mao always gave the framework of "anti-imperialists and imperialists" priority over that of "communists and capitalists." For Mao, Stalin's attitude toward China in the summit talks in 1950 was imperialistic, and later, Khrushchev's détente with the United States seemed to be an alignment between imperialists. China expected the Soviet Union to be the leader of the anti-imperialists, but was disappointed because the Soviet Union instead gave priority to the framework of "communists and capitalists."

Chen argues that Mao's insecurity in international relations was based on Chinese "victim mentality," which was rooted in "the age-old Central Kingdom concept so important in China's history and culture"; as a result, "a victim mentality gradually dominated the Chinese conceptualization of its relations with the outside world."<sup>29</sup> Chen's argument of Chinese "victim mentality" is consistent with Takahashi's argument that the framework of "anti-imperialists and

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<sup>27</sup> Takahashi Nobuo, *Chūgoku Kakumei to Kokusai Kankyō: Chūgoku Kyōsantō no Kokusai Jōsei Ninshiki to Soren, 1937–1960* [The Chinese Revolution and the International Environment: The CCP's Understanding of International Affairs and the Soviet Union, 1937–1960] (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 205–11.

<sup>29</sup> Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 12.

imperialists” was always given priority over that of “communists and capitalists” in Mao’s mind. When Mao “revealed a deep-rooted belief that in a moral sense the United States and other Western powers owed the Chinese a heavy historical debt,” arguably his concept of “Western powers” included the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup> China struggled to keep its policies independent of the Soviet Union; it was a weak country and needed to rely on a superpower to keep its national security. Therefore, China followed the Soviet Union in the 1950s only to pursue the nationalist goal of independence—a communist ideological alliance was merely a stratagem as a means for that purpose. In other words, ideology mattered for the Sino-Soviet rift, but it was the nationalist ideology that mattered.

### **Reevaluation of the Sino-Soviet Conflict: Events Showing Cordiality**

Three events determined the framework of the Cold War in East Asia: Mao’s “Leaning to One Side” Speech, the 1950 Friendship Treaty, and the Korean War. It is conventional wisdom that the 1950 Friendship Treaty got China’s “leaning to the Soviet Union” policy well underway, and that after the Korean War the Sino-U.S. conflict, not the U.S.-Soviet conflict, became a framework of the Cold War in East Asia. Then, in the Geneva Conference in 1954, which ended the war in the Indochina Peninsula and was the first international conference that China participated in after the founding of the PRC, China and the Soviet Union showed a cordially cooperative relationship. The period between Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin (from 1953 to 1956) was when Sino-Soviet relations were friendliest, and the series of agreements and communiques announced in this period seemed to illustrate the strength of the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

Sino-Soviet alliance. However, this section reevaluates these events and shows how the cordiality was situational.

### *Mao's "Leaning to One Side" Speech*

On June 30, 1949, Mao presented the now famous paper, "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship." In this paper, he insisted that China could only rely on the anti-imperialist bloc headed by the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> This has been considered evidence of the Sino-Soviet cordiality since it announced the CCP's intention of "leaning to the Soviet Union." For example, *Newsweek* of July 11, 1949 carried an article titled "Mao Thumbs His Nose at the West" and labeled the speech as "Mao's proclamation of allegiance to the Soviet Union."<sup>32</sup> There have been two approaches to answering the question of why China decided to "lean to the Soviet Union."<sup>33</sup> The first approach argues that "leaning to the Soviet Union" was a logically necessary conclusion based on communist ideology shared by China and the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> The second approach argues that

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<sup>31</sup> Partha Ghosh, *Sino-Soviet Relations: US Perceptions and Policy Responses, 1949–1959* (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1981), pp. 48–50.

<sup>32</sup> "Mao Thumbs His Nose at the West," *Newsweek*, 11 July 1949, p. 27.

<sup>33</sup> Yafeng Xia and Zhi Liang suggest: "American scholars generally agree that there may have existed room for a modest level of diplomatic and economic relations between Mao's China and the United States in early 1949 and that the two sides were moving in that direction by establishing contact with each other. Chinese scholars, however, contend that there was never any chance for averting confrontation between the CCP and the United States." See: Yafeng Xia and Zhi Liang, "China's Diplomacy toward the United States in the Twentieth Century: A Survey of the Literature," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (April 2017), p. 255.

<sup>34</sup> For example: Doak Barnett, *China and the Major Powers in East Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1977); Steven Goldstein, "Chinese Communist Policy Toward the United States," in Dorothy Borg and Wald Heinrichs, eds., *Uncertain Years, Chinese-American Relations, 1949–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); and Tatsumi Okabe, "The Cold War and China," in Yonosuke Nagai and Akira Iriye, eds., *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1977).

“leaning to the Soviet Union” was a result of the CCP’s choice between the Soviet Union and the United States based on China’s economic and security consideration.<sup>35</sup>

However, Takahashi challenges both of these arguments.<sup>36</sup> He insists that although both arguments focus on Sino-U.S. relations and only discuss effects of American China policy, Mao’s statement was in reality a product of the tension between international pressure from the Soviet Union and the domestic need to keep Chinese originality in the revolution. On the one hand, the Soviet Union demanded China not to make diplomatic relations with any Western bloc country in order to consolidate the unification of the Eastern bloc. On the other hand, Chinese domestic politics demanded Mao to make diplomatic relations with any country as long as the relationship would help China keep its national independence.

First of all, one should note that since the period before World War II the relationship between Mao and Stalin was not cordial. During the Chinese Civil War Stalin recognized Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) as the leader of China, and it was as late as 1948, when the CCP’s victory became evident, that he decided to treat Mao as China’s national leader. Even after the decision to treat Mao as a leader, the Soviet embassy still went with the Nationalist Party (Guomindang: GMD). It was not until October 2, 1949 that the Soviet Union officially recognized the PRC and finally broke off diplomatic relations with the GMD. In the meantime, Mao was reluctant to follow Stalin. In the report in 1945, “On Coalition Government,” he advocated that a new democratic

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<sup>35</sup> For example: Michael Hunt, “Mao Tse-tung and the Issue of Accommodation with the United States, 1948–1950 in Dorothy Borg and Wald Heinrichs, eds., *Uncertain Years, Chinese-American Relations, 1949–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Robert Simmons, *The Strained Alliance: Peking, P’yongyang and the Politics of Korean Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1975); and Donald Zagoria, “Choices in the Postwar World (2): Containment and China,” in Charles Gati, ed., *Caging the Bear: Containment and the Cold War* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974).

<sup>36</sup> Takahashi, *Chūgoku Kakumei to Kokusai Kankyō*, pp. 90–133.

government should include bourgeois elements as well as workers and farmers, and “did not delineate any obvious pathway for its transformation to socialism.”<sup>37</sup> In short, Mao always thought that Maoism was different from Stalinism, and Stalin always doubted Mao’s loyalty to the Soviet Union.

Interestingly, right after the presentation the CCP started trying to inform the Western bloc countries that “leaning to one side” did not mean a change of previous policies. Mao and Zhou emphasized: “on no account can ‘leaning to one side’ be misinterpreted as implying dependence on others. To understand the phrase in that way would be an insult,” when they met Chen Mingshu, Chairman of the Shanghai Board of the GMD Revolutionary Committee, after Mao’s speech.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, within the CCP there was an argument that it was groundless to fear that the “leaning to one side” policy might make China’s relations with capitalist countries break off.<sup>39</sup> Thus, there was no basic change in their stance of trying to balance between following the discipline of the communist bloc and responding to the need in domestic politics not to depend on a single country. In short, “leaning to one side” was not “leaning to the Soviet Union.” However, the question remains as to why Mao used the expression of “leaning to one side,” which would give a radical impression. Takahashi argues that because Stalin increasingly doubted Chinese support of Soviet policies, Mao used this radical expression to wipe away Stalin’s doubt.<sup>40</sup> This explanation is supported by the fact that Liu Shaoqi visited Moscow on July 2, 1949, just after Mao’s speech.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 36.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1949* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), Vol. 8, p. 773.

<sup>39</sup> Zhang Mingyang, “Wei Shenme Yibiandao” [Why Leaning to One Side] in *Shijie Zhishi* [World Knowledge], Vol. 20, No. 10 (August 1949).

<sup>40</sup> Takahashi, *Chūgoku Kakumei to Kokusai Kankyō*, p. 117.

<sup>41</sup> Even after 1949 when the Soviet Union officially recognized the PRC and the Soviet advisors came to China, there were articles expressing China’s distrust of the Soviet Union. For example:

After August, the CCP's intention to maintain the channels for capitalist countries continued. From October to November, the CCP announced a new policy that the treaties and agreements made by the GMD should be evaluated to decide whether the CCP would recognize, abolish, modify, or remake them, rather than abolishing them all together.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, it argues that China should make diplomatic relations with imperialist countries.<sup>43</sup> These arguments show that the CCP continued the efforts to keep the possibility of making diplomatic relations with as many countries as it could. Mao's "Leaning to One Side" Speech was presented to pretend that the CCP was following the discipline of the communist bloc.

Zhou indeed said in April 1949: "We must not have an attitude of relying on the Soviet Union or the people's democratic states."<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Okabe Tatsumi, a veteran Japanese scholar on Chinese foreign policy, argues that for Mao the relationship between capitalists and communists was neither the sole nor major framework; he considered the relationship between imperialist and colonized countries more important.<sup>45</sup> In that sense, Mao's view was very different from Stalin's view of the Cold War framework. Mao's "Leaning to One Side" Speech was "intended primarily to serve his goal of national revival, not fundamentally to align the CCP's foreign policy with 'proletarian internationalism' or the will of Moscow."<sup>46</sup> However, whatever its intention was, the CCP's choice set was limited by the boundaries of the bloc after all.<sup>47</sup> Shen Zhihua suggests that

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Qian Junrui, "Guojizhuyi de Zhuyao Biaozhi" [The Principle Standard of Internationalism] in *Xuexi* [Studies], Vol. 1, No. 2 (December 1949).

<sup>42</sup> He Bainian, "Xin Minzhuzhuyi de Waijiao Zhengce" [Foreign Policy of New Democracy] in *Xuexi* [Studies], Vol. 1, No. 2 (December 1949), p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Takahashi, *Chūgoku Kakumei to Kokusai Kankyō*, p. 109.

<sup>45</sup> Okabe Tatsumi, "Chūgoku Gaikō no 40-nen" [40 Years of Chinese Foreign Policy] in Okabe Tatsumi, ed., *Chūgoku o Meguru Kokusai Kankyō* [The International Environment Surrounding China] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1990), p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> Takahashi, *Chūgoku Kakumei to Kokusai Kankyō*, pp. 121–5.

although “Mao’s policies now were not simply reactions to Stalin’s wishes...Mao realized that only the Soviet Union would support the Chinese revolutionary cause, and he therefore needed to show respect for the Soviet Union as the leader of world communism.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, Zhihua Shen and Danhui Li conclude that although Mao and Stalin shared common goals on the aspects of economy, ideology, and security, they had very different visions about how to achieve those goals. They suggest: “Mao focused his attention on how to create an independent diplomatic image for the New China, how to protect Chinese interests in a new treaty with Moscow, and how to convince the ‘democratic parties’ in China and the entire Chinese nation to accept the CCP’s pro-Soviet stance.”<sup>49</sup>

Contrary to the above argument, Chen suggests that “new Chinese and Russian evidence reveals that the relationship between the CCP and Moscow in 1949 was much more intimate and substantial than many Western scholars previously realized.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, he argues that “the most profound reason underlying the CCP’s anti-American policy was Mao’s grand plans for transforming China’s state, society, and international outlook,” and hence that the primary cause of the CCP-U.S. breakup was not America’s pro-GMD policy but Mao’s use of foreign tensions for domestic mobilization.<sup>51</sup> In other words, although his “Leaning to One Side” Speech was not motivated by the shared communist ideology with the Soviet Union, Mao found anti-American nationalism to be a useful tool to mobilize popular support for his domestic agenda. In short, again, the ideology that mattered was not communism but nationalism.

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<sup>48</sup> Shen Zhihua (translated by Neil Silver), *Mao, Stalin and the Korean War: Trilateral Communist Relations in the 1950s* (New York: Routledge 2012), p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> Zhuhua Shen and Danhui Li, *After Leaning to One Side: China and Its Allies in the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, p. 44.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.



### *The 1950 Friendship Treaty*

After the founding of the PRC on October 1, 1949, Mao visited Moscow as early as December 16, and China concluded the 1950 Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union on February 14. Having accomplished a historic communist revolution, Mao should have had certain confidence and expectation when he left Beijing. At the same time, considering the many problems between China and the Soviet Union, he might have been anxious to improve Sino-Soviet relations to help China obtain an equal status. This treaty is seen as a symbol of Sino-Soviet cordiality in the 1950s and is considered one of the major pillars of the Cold War framework in East Asia. However, Nakajima rejects this argument, pointing out continuous conflicts between China and the Soviet Union in the 1950s.<sup>52</sup> This part of the article discusses the reality of the summit talks between Mao and Stalin, and shows how Mao struggled to fight the dominance of the Soviet Union in order to achieve his desired independence.

It is not correct to say that this summit meeting brought nothing to China. However, it is not correct, either, to say that this meeting brought as much as Mao had expected. Compared to the treaty made between the GMD and the Soviet Union in 1945, the PRC won a certain concession from the Soviet Union: that is, the return of the Soviet's right of ownership of properties in Manchuria, including the Changchun Railroad and the cities of Dalian and Port Arthur (Lüshunkou District). However, "[t]he return of the Manchurian property was more symbolic than practical, because most of the property involved, equipment captured by the Red Army, had already been removed to the Soviet Union."<sup>53</sup> In the meantime, the PRC was forced to recognize the

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<sup>52</sup> Nakajima, *Chū-So Tairitsu to Gendai*.

<sup>53</sup> Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, p. 120.

independence of Outer Mongolia, and the Soviet rights and interests in Xinjiang—especially in natural resource development—continued through the founding of “joint venture companies.”<sup>54</sup>

Obtaining economic aid from the Soviet Union was another major objective of Mao’s visit, but the amount agreed to was extremely small. The Soviet Union agreed to offer 300 million dollars in loans to China within five years, which China had to return with one percent interest. This was not only far less than the amount of 2.8 billion dollars which Mao had hoped for, but also much less than the amount of 450 million dollars which the Soviet Union offered to Poland.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, this compares poorly with the 400 million dollars that the United States offered in grant—not in loans—to the GMD in Taiwan in one year.<sup>56</sup> Especially considering the difference in population scale among these countries, the aid from the Soviet Union to the PRC was insignificant.

In sum, the summit talks in 1950 brought Mao slight benefit while leaving him disappointed with Stalin and the Soviet Union. The event, which was believed to be a model of solid communist alliance, was actually a starting point of the Sino-Soviet rift and reconfirmed Sino-Soviet mutual distrust. I argue that the main reason for this is that the primary goals of Mao and Stalin were contradictory on a fundamental level. Mao’s primary goal was to consolidate the national independence of China and Stalin’s was to consolidate the communist bloc headed by the Soviet Union. To achieve these goals, Mao demanded the return of all the rights and interests in Manchuria and Xinjiang, and also that China be treated on the same basis as the Soviet Union—as a big power—while Stalin required China to remain a weak country within the Soviet Union’s

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<sup>54</sup> Nakajima, *Chū-So Tairitsu to Gendai*, pp. 98–101.

<sup>55</sup> Naruse Kyo, “Stalin to Mo Takuto: Ikiteiru Yaruta no Mitsuyaku” [Stalin and Mao Zedong: The Secret Agreement of Yalta Is Still Influential] in *Keizai Orai* [Economic Interactions] (April 1974).

<sup>56</sup> Nakajima, *Chū-So Tairitsu to Gendai*, pp. 101–2.

sphere of influence.<sup>57</sup> In the negotiation for the treaty, Stalin encouraged Mao to seize Hong Kong because he was upset that the British recognized the PRC on January 6, and even opposed Mao's plan of the liberation of Taiwan.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Stalin's goal was separating China from the United States.

Shi Zhe, who then went to Moscow as Mao's interpreter, introduces an interesting episode which focuses on the gap in expectations between Mao and Stalin, wherein Mao felt uncomfortable because the meeting reminded him of the imperialist tendency that the Soviet Union had always had.<sup>59</sup> During Mao's stay in Moscow, on January 12, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson announced that the Soviet Union was trying to annex the northern part of China. On January 17, Mao agreed with Soviet Vice Prime Minister Vyacheslav Molotov and Soviet Foreign Affairs Minister Andrei Vishinsky to announce the joint protest of China and the Soviet Union that what Acheson said was a lie. On January 21, the Soviet Union announced its protest under the name of Vishinsky. In the meantime, also on January 21 the PRC announced its protest under the name of Hu Qiaomu—Chief of the Governmental News Office. This protest was the first joint effort for China and the Soviet Union to confront the United States together.

According to Shi, there was a dialogue in late January on this issue among Mao, Stalin, and Molotov as follows.<sup>60</sup> Molotov asked: "Did you announce your protest against Acheson's speech?" Mao answered: "Yes, we did. We announced under the name of Hu Qiaomu." Stalin asked: "Who is Hu Qiaomu?" Mao answered: "He is Chief of the News Office, and we announced it with his name and status." Stalin said: "According to international customs, every journalist is

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 100–1.

<sup>58</sup> Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 97–104.

<sup>59</sup> Shi Zhe, *Zai Lishi Shenbian: Shi Zhe Huiyilu* [Along the History: The Memoirs of Shi Zhe] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1995), pp. 454–61.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 455–6.

able to present his own view on any issue. But their announcements do not represent any governmental position at all.” Molotov added: “We originally agreed that China would announce a governmental official statement.” Stalin added: “By this affair, we [the Soviet Union and China] broke steps and our power was decreased.” Shi says: “This dialogue made Chairman Mao quite angry. He kept silent all the time.”<sup>61</sup>

As someone who sees international relations within the framework of “anti-imperialists and imperialists,” Mao expected Stalin to be a leader of the anti-imperialists. However, Stalin’s attitude in the meeting in 1950 was imperialistic and therefore disappointed Mao. In short, Mao’s intention for concluding the 1950 Friendship Treaty was to move China toward independence, not to follow the alliance of the communist bloc.

### *The Korean War*

The Korean War stands as both one of the major determinants of the Cold War in East Asia and as the first test case of the Sino-Soviet alliance. Yamagiwa raises four implications of the Korean War on Chinese foreign policy.<sup>62</sup> First, the Korean War led to the Taiwan issue. As soon as the Korean War started, the United States sent the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait and declared a policy preventing China from armed “liberation” of Taiwan, rejecting its former policy of non-involvement. Second, the Korean War led to an armed conflict between China and the United States. This ended the possibility of a Sino-U.S. détente and drove China to the Soviet bloc completely. Third, the Korean War offered a test case of the 1950 Friendship Treaty, resulting in China’s increased dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union. Fourth, the Korean War notified China

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 457.

<sup>62</sup> Yamagiwa, “Chū-So Kankei no Tenkai,” pp. 6–8.

as to the necessity of modern weapons. Based on this experience, Defense Minister Peng Dehuai started military modernization.

Nakajima raises three premises to discussing the Korean War.<sup>63</sup> First, the United States did not have much interest in defending South Korea or Taiwan (the GMD) before the start of the Korean War. The United States was dissatisfied with the governing ability and the lack of democracy in South Korea's Syngman Rhee administration as well as Taiwan's Jiang Jieshi administration. Thus, Acheson denied the possibility of America's military involvement January 12, 1950. Second, just after the war broke out January 25, the United States did not have a clear perspective of the future of this war. This was the consequence of its lack of interest in the Korean Peninsula before starting the war. Third, the United States did not expect China to enter the war. Disregarding this possibility would lead to the decision of the United States to cross the thirty-eighth parallel.

Nakajima raises three reasons for China's reluctance to enter the war.<sup>64</sup> First, just five days after the Korean War started, China legislated the Land Reform Law. Considering the importance of land reform in its revolution, the war would have been unwelcome for China. Second, Mao was directing part of the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to return to domestic construction. This also indicates that China's intention was to focus on domestic issues. Third, at that time China had extremely important issues for national unification: that is, the Tibet and Taiwan issues. Although the "liberation" of Tibet was achieved in October 1950, the "liberation" of Taiwan was postponed and would not be achieved after all, since China mobilized the troops prepared for Taiwan's "liberation" for the Korean War and the United States sent the Seventh Fleet

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<sup>63</sup> Nakajima, *Chū-So Tairitsu to Gendai*, pp. 129–44.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135–7.

to the Taiwan Strait. Allen Whiting also argues that China had not prepared well before it entered the Korean War:

While positive proof is lacking, the evidence indicates that China made no early plans to commit the PLA to combat in Korea. The military movements, the equipping, training, and indoctrination of troops, diplomatic developments, and shifts in the propaganda line all combine to indicate that the initial decision to take military action, should political moves fail, was made in late August. Implementation of this redeployment beginning in mid-September, and the formal warnings from Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai] in late September and early October. Final mobilization, however, was not authorized until after the U.N. rejection of the warnings and the crossing of the parallel.<sup>65</sup>

Then why did China decide to enter the Korean War in the end? One of the answers to this question, the least complicated one, is that China intended to defend a communist regime. However, I argue that China entered the war because it decided that its entry would be the best way to keep its national independence. China's objective was to defend an anti-imperialist country, rather than to defend a communist country. First of all, China considered its entry to the war useful to contain the coalition among its enemies such as the U.S.-Japanese alliance, thinking that "a military response might deter the enemy from further adventures."<sup>66</sup> Second, China was afraid that if it did not enter the war the Soviet Union would have an excuse to operate in Manchuria.<sup>67</sup> Third, Mao was afraid that the United States might invade China after bringing North Korea under

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<sup>65</sup> Allen Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 126.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>67</sup> Nakajima, *Chū-So Tairitsu to Gendai*, p. 132.

control. These three points all suggest that China was taking precautions against the imperialists, and that China's objective was defending North Korea from an imperialist invasion. In other words, China's primary motivation was its nationalist ideology.

Chen Jian focuses on the impact of Chinese domestic politics in its decision to enter the war. He argues that Mao exploited the Korean War as a means to push forward with his radical policies leading to the Great Leap Forward, and more distantly the Cultural Revolution. He suggests that experiencing the war "from Mao's perspective, China's gain was considerable. China's involvement in the Korean War stimulated a series of political and social revolutions in China that would have been otherwise inconceivable during the early stage of the new republic."<sup>68</sup> I agree with the argument that Mao used this foreign tension for domestic mobilization. However, I am not sure how useful Mao found the Korean War to be to push forward his radical policies. In fact, it was as late as 1958 that Mao's policies turned radical and he unleashed the Great Leap Forward. There were a few events accelerating Mao's tendency to seek radicalness and originality after the Korean War, such as the Hungarian Uprising in foreign affairs and the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Anti-Rightist Movement in domestic politics. Thus, I instead argue that China's decision to enter the war was based mainly on the necessities of its foreign policy, rather than on its domestic politics. Although the Korean War was used as a pretext to push domestic policies like socialist transformation, I do not think that Mao entered the Korean War to accomplish those policies. Although ideology mattered for China's decision to enter the war, it was not the communist ideology but the nationalist ideology that convinced Mao to take the huge risk of confronting the United States and entering the war.

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<sup>68</sup> Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 220.

Why did the United States cross the thirty-eighth parallel? This question is important not only because China considered the United States crossing the thirty-eighth parallel as a condition of its entry into the war, but also because it was unexpected since China believed that the main concern of the United States was Europe. China thought that “Washington would come under increasing pressure from its European allies to terminate its engagement in what they considered a peripheral region.”<sup>69</sup> However, Thomas Christensen shows that the United States crossed the thirty-eighth parallel exactly because “China was clearly not on the list of the State Department’s global strongpoints.”<sup>70</sup> He argues that for “raising funds for Europe, Truman needed a clear anticommunist message to mobilize the public.”<sup>71</sup>

The arguments over the question of why China entered the Korean War stated previously do not support the argument that its motivation was to defend a communist regime. China entered the war: first, to keep its national independence; and second, to support an anti-imperialist regime. Thus, when China decided to enter the Korean War, it did so based on the framework of “anti-imperialists and imperialists.”

### *The Geneva Conference and After*

The Geneva Conference was the first international conference for the PRC. It was held from April to July 1954, wherein two topics were mainly discussed: such as the post-Korean War issues and how to solve the Indochina issues. China sent approximately two hundred delegates to this conference led by Zhou. The Chinese were nervous about

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<sup>69</sup> Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners*, p. 182.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 58.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.



participating in this conference and so they arrived heavily prepared. Zhou went to Moscow several times to consult with the Soviet Union and to confirm their alliance before the conference, and he also stopped over in Moscow on his way to Geneva. As a result, “the Soviets and Chinese were working largely from the same playbook, and coordination between Beijing and Moscow would never be tighter.”<sup>72</sup> Coercive diplomacy worked in the conference because China and the Soviet Union were able to send a unified signal to the United States.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the Sino-Soviet alliance present at the Geneva Conference has been considered as evidence of the cordiality of their relationship. The journalists of the Western bloc countries reported that the cooperation between the representatives of China and the Soviet Union “was a miracle in contemporary diplomatic history; a model of fraternal friendship.”<sup>74</sup>

However, the “fraternal friendship” shown in the conference does not necessarily mean that the alliance was based on communist ideology. China had to rely on the Soviet Union because China did not have experience participating in an international conference, and the Soviet Union was the only country on which China was able to rely at that time to confront the U.S. bloc, which threatened China.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, China played an active role in the conference despite not being given “equal footing” with the Soviet Union or the United States because China found the conference to be a good opportunity to remove the U.S. presence from its neighborhood.<sup>76</sup> Although it seems possible to interpret their

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, *Worse Than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 126.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122–35.

<sup>74</sup> Shi, *Zai Lishi Shenbian*, p. 548.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 536–54.

<sup>76</sup> Tao Wang, “Neutralizing Indochina: The 1954 Geneva Conference and China’s Efforts to Isolate the United States,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Spring 2017), pp. 3–42.

cooperation in the Geneva Conference as an example of their cordiality, it is also possible to interpret it as a necessary step toward China's mission to confront the imperialist threat—the United States in this case. Considering that the Chinese suffered from the negative Soviet attitude toward the Korean War, the latter interpretation seems more compelling.

The Geneva Conference took place during the period between Stalin's death in 1953 and Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956, when Sino-Soviet relations seemed most cordial. This amity culminated just after the Geneva Conference when Khrushchev visited China from September 29 to October 12 and announced several communiques and agreements. Miyamoto points out four reasons why Sino-Soviet relations seemed so cordial in this period.<sup>77</sup> First, the Soviet Union highly valued what China had accomplished in the Korean War. Second, Stalin's death solved the personal conflict between Mao and Stalin. Third, China implemented the First Five-Year Plan, which had been planned relying on Soviet aid. Fourth, both China and the Soviet Union needed a stable international environment in order to concentrate on domestic issues: such as, implementing the First Five-Year Plan for Mao and winning power in the Kremlin after Stalin's death for Khrushchev.

However, the cordiality of their alliance was temporary because these four factors did not satisfy what China had hoped for the Soviet Union or what the Soviet Union had hoped for China. China had hoped that the Soviet Union would treat China as an equal ally and would fill the leadership role of the anti-imperialist countries; while the Soviet Union had hoped that China would be a subordinate member of the communist bloc and

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<sup>77</sup> Miyamoto, *Chū-So Tairitsu no Shiteki Kōzō*, pp. 212–6.

an inferior ally to the Soviet Union. Thus, the factors that brought temporary détente between China and the Soviet Union did not make up the gap between the Chinese framework of “anti-imperialists and imperialists” and the Soviet framework of “communists and capitalists.” This gap erupted when Khrushchev proposed the peaceful coexistence policy with the United States, which China considered as a Soviet attempt to ally itself with an imperialist superpower, and therefore revealing the Soviet’s true imperialist nature.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Arguably, the four events discussed in this paper—Mao’s “Leaning to One Side” Speech, the 1950 Friendship Treaty, the Korean War, and the Geneva Conference—have been considered evidence of the cordiality in Sino-Soviet relations, rooted in communist ideology. As shown in this paper, however, this cordiality was not based on an ideological alliance but on a compromise born of each party’s self interest. China was cordial with the Soviet Union because there was no country other than the Soviet Union that supported a newly-born and weak China.

Although Mao’s “Leaning to One Side” Speech was taken as China following the order of the communist bloc, in reality it was China’s compromise to keep, and to achieve, its national independence. In that sense, this speech should be interpreted as China following the nationalist goal of keeping its policies independent of the Soviet Union, rather than as China following the communist ideological alliance. The 1950 Friendship Treaty was a significant treaty between China and the Soviet Union and has been seen as a symbol of cordial relations. However, the process of concluding this treaty brought out the imperialist nature of the Soviet Union, which China had suffered from before the founding of the PRC. Mao realized that following the order

of the communist bloc could be contradictory to keeping national independence. However, under the formation of the Cold War structure, there was no way for China to become independent other than concluding a comprehensive treaty with the Soviet Union. Therefore, this treaty should not be considered a symbol of the communist alliance, but a compromise for China to seek its independence.

The Korean War was the first test of the Sino-Soviet alliance, and the Cold War structure took a firm hold in international politics in East Asia when the conflict between the communist and capitalist blocs turned “Hot.” Although China has been considered to have entered the war because it was following the order of the communist bloc, this article shows that China entered the war to confront imperialists. Therefore, China’s entry into the Korean War should also be interpreted as an act to achieve the nationalist goal of independence. Then, during the Geneva Conference China and the Soviet Union formed a coalition to confront the Western bloc. This coalition has been seen as evidence of the the communist alliance. However, when considering that it was the first international conference for China to participate in, and that the Soviet Union was the only country China could rely on, I argue that China stood at the side of the Soviet Union because of its nationalist need. It was between 1953 and 1956 when Sino-Soviet relations were most cordial. However, cordiality was a result of compromises by both sides, which each sought its own interests—such as, keeping national independence for China and keeping unity among the communist states for the Soviet Union. Because of the gap between the Chinese framework of “anti-imperialists and imperialists” and the Soviet framework of “communists and capitalists,” this cordiality was situational. The 1950s, which are generally considered a “honeymoon” period between China and the Soviet Union, were in reality a period when China struggled to balance its national interests against the Soviet’s pressure to follow the order of the communist bloc. In other

words, in the 1950s China tried to keep its policies independent of any imperialist while the Soviet Union expected China to follow the communist alliance. This gap made Sino-Soviet relations highly situational, although certain circumstances allowed for relations to appear cordial.

The concluding section highlights a few implications drawn from this article. First, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956 was not necessarily the start of the Sino-Soviet rift; it helped to fuel the rift. While it is true that Mao hated Khrushchev's speech, we should not underestimate the mutual distrust that had been building for a long time. Second, the superficial cordiality of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1950s was not based on communist ideology, at least from the Chinese perspective. China aligned itself with the Soviet Union after determining that there were no other countries for China to rely on. Third, the Western bloc countries assumed that China was in the Eastern bloc in the 1950s even though China did not subscribe to the international framework of "communists and capitalists." This assumption led most of the Western bloc countries to give up seeking a diplomatic relationship with China in this period.

This reinterpretation of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1950s raises the question of how to define the conflict between the two countries, a conflict which dates back to the founding of the PRC. It is useful to consider what the major goals of Chinese foreign policy were. Until the 1970s, China's foreign policy was based on nationalism. China focuses on confronting imperialists rather than following the communist alliance. Its main task was defining the primary imperialist enemy and seeking a coalition to confront this enemy. In the 1950s, China's only choice for such a coalition was the Soviet Union, which China considered to be much less imperialistic than the United States. Once the Soviet Union reached a *détente* with the United States under Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence policy, China tried to rely on Third World countries to confront the two imperialists—now both the Soviet Union and the United States—in the 1960s, but in the end this

strategy worked poorly. After the Sino-Soviet armed conflicts, China's main enemy became the Soviet Union, and China sought an alliance with the United States to confront the Soviet Union in the 1970s.

In accordance with the economic reform that began in the 1980s, China has begun to behave as a developing country. Behaving as a developing country since the 1980s is different from China's behavior in the 1960s in three aspects although in both periods China focused on building relations with developing countries. First, China has now defined itself as one of the developing countries, instead of as the leader of the developing countries as it did in the 1960s. In the past China showed the developing countries how to be independent of the imperialists, rather than how to achieve economic development. Second, China today no longer defines developing countries as a counter-concept of the imperialists as it did in the 1960s. Third, China has stopped defining a "main enemy" and a counter-partner to confront the enemy, and has now been seeking a cooperative relationship with any country under its "multi-faceted diplomacy" (*quanfangwei waijiao*). China no longer classifies international politics in the framework of "imperialists and anti-imperialists." In short, China's goal was to confront imperialists during the Maoist period, and now its goal is economic development during the post-Mao period.

In what sense is the reevaluation of Sino-Soviet rift related to understanding China's role in international politics in the present day? First, in regard to ideology, this article suggests that Chinese foreign policy was mainly oriented by nationalism, rather than communist ideology. Although communist ideology is no longer relevant to Chinese foreign policy, nationalism is still relevant.<sup>78</sup> One should note that Deng Xiaoping's reforms focusing on economic development

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<sup>78</sup> Numerous books have been written on the roles of nationalism in Chinese foreign policymaking. For example: Etō Naoko, *Chūgoku Nashonarizumu no Naka no Nihon: Aikokushugi no Hen'yō to Rekishi Ninshiki Mondai* [Japan in Chinese Nationalism: Changes in Nationalism and the History

started with the intent to avoid being looked down upon by foreign countries. Moreover, modernization has consistently been a task for recovering national pride since facing the Western “wealth and power” in the Opium Wars. Neither internationalization nor marketization has ever been a goal in itself, but both have been means of supporting China’s national independence. On the one hand, both nationalism and internationalism might serve for this goal; but on the other hand, nationalism might hinder China from fully benefiting from the global economy. If China is too attached to nationalism, it will lose benefits from economically interdependent relations with its trading partners like the United States and Japan.

Second, this paper offers an explanation of the historical mutual distrust between China and the world. The myth of the Sino-Soviet cordial alliance caused Western countries to distrust China, while China was not able to enjoy the “Long Peace” and had to confront the threat of two superpowers during the Cold War period. However, by adopting “multi-faceted diplomacy” China has joined the global economy. Julien Gewirtz suggests that the origin of China’s current prosperity is not nationalism but internationalism, arguing that a coalition of Chinese reformers and Western economists made it possible for the post-Mao economic reform to emerge in the 1980s.<sup>79</sup> He also reveals the coalition of conservatism and nationalism as an opposing force to that of reformism and internationalism in Chinese domestic politics. Today, Xi Jinping’s nationalist slogans, such as the “China dream” (*Zhongguo meng*) and the “great restoration of the Chinese nation” (*Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*), make other nations doubt China’s intention to

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Recognition Issue] (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 2014); Peter Hays Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Jessica Chen Weiss, *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China’s Foreign Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Suisheng Zhao, ed., *Construction of Chinese Nationalism in the Early 21st Century: Domestic Sources and International Implications* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>79</sup> Julien Gewirtz, *Unlikely Partners: Chinese Reformers, Western Economists, and the Making of Global China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

use its power as a responsible stakeholder.<sup>80</sup> Although China is eager to expand its influence in the world, it does not seem to feel any responsibility for whether its behavior will lead to regional stability and security. It is doubtful whether it can provide international public goods of regional stability and peace in lieu of the United States even if it becomes as powerful as the United States. In that sense, the rise of China in the early twenty-first century may be similar to that of Russia (the Soviet Union) in the early twentieth century, which also had no intention to provide international public goods. This article does not conclude that the rise of China will follow that of Russia. However, if U.S. influence in Asia retreats under the current conditions, the region could become destabilized. And now, as the U.S. influence in Asia indeed retreats under the Donald Trump administration, the role of the stabilizer falls to China. Therefore, internationalism must prevail over nationalism in the power struggle under the Xi administration.

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<sup>80</sup> For example, Elizabeth C. Economy, “China’s Imperial President: Xi Jinping Tightens His Grip,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 6 (November/December 2014), pp. 80–91.