

China in post-WWII Global History

3. Evolution of China's role in geopolitics (1960s – 1970s)

Prof. Valeria Zanier

Europe in a Global World (Global history)

Rome University Tor Vergata, 19 September 2022

Part I

Emergence of PRC in the international arena (1950s – 1960s)



Role of ideology in China's foreign policy

- Mao's main focus on China's domestic issues
- Foreign policy → since 1949 subordinate to ideology
→ Integral part of Mao's continuous revolution
- Remove stain of "century of national humiliation"

Foreign exploitation from Opium Wars (mid 1800s) to PRC (1949)

- Sino-Soviet Split (1960-1963) → China challenged US system of alliances by establishing formal relations with France (1964) and challenged the Soviet Union by forming a bond with Albania
- 1963 → Soviet Union and US signed the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty
- PRC accused Soviet Union of joining an anti-Chinese conspiracy
- Mao strengthened anti-foreign line & self-reliance (Third Front)
- People's War Every Chinese citizen always prepared to fight against foreign invasion (which never happened)
- China's first atomic explosion (Oct. 16, 1964)

Security issues & military confrontations

- **Korean War** (1950-1953) → Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North) vs Republic of Korea (South) with participation of pro-Communist and pro-capitalist allies – Sov. Union & PRC helped the North
- **Taiwan Straits Crises** (1954–55 & 1958) → Tensions between PRC and ROC led to armed conflict over strategic islands
- Formosa Resolution (1955) gave US right to intervene on behalf of ROC
- Continuous shelling on both sides but no major damage until late 1970s
- **Sino-Indian border disputes** (1959 & 1962) → India's northern border near Himalayan states of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim and China's Tibet & Xinjiang
- **Sino-Soviet border dispute** (1969) → China's North-eastern border (Ussuri river) total war was avoided but agreement was only reached in 1991

Contradictory aspects in China's foreign relations

Pragmatic attitude

- Geneva conference 1954
- Sino-Indian relations (1950s)
- Support to certain African countries
- Opening relations with France (1964)
- Foreign economic relations with capitalist countries
- Keeping good relations with Chinese overseas communities (S-E Asia)

Moscow 1952

- Moscow International Economic Conference (April 1952) = response to American embargo policy
- (Originally launched by World Peace Council) Organised by the Soviet government It signalled that there were potential markets in the Soviet Bloc open to a wide public.
- non-governmental character
- 471 participants from 49 countries
- The peak of opportunities created by the Korean War for Western European companies was expiring. Uncertainty starting to spread in Western markets.
- Conference = Prelude to a turning point in the foreign economic strategy of the Soviet Union and the Bloc countries
- For PRC this event had the value of a worldwide test

Geneva 1954

- The Geneva Conference on Indochina (spring 1954)
- Important occasion to decide the future of Western foreign policy in East and South-Asia when communism and national independence were acquiring increasing importance.
- Negotiations on Korea's partition unfruitful, but end of hostilities between France and the Viet-minh
- For the first time China participated together with the big powers. Zhou Enlai (Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs) met high-profile delegates from non-communist countries (British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and French Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Pierre Mendes-France).
- China in fact participated with two delegations. The second one was a business delegation led by Vice-minister of Foreign Trade Lei Renmin (200 people) talks with West European business leaders

Bandung 1955

- **Bandung = birth of non-aligned movement**

Zhou Enlai → Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (ideological neutrality)

- Mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty
- Mutual non-aggression
- Non-interference in each other's internal affairs
- Equality and mutual benefit
- Peaceful coexistence

- **1955 Emergence of China as potential leader of Third World struggle**

- Based not on ideology but on concrete example
(peasants acted the Chinese revolution = people's war)

- First World (US + capitalism)
- Second World (Socialist countries)
- Third World (underdeveloped)

The transnational element: Chinese Diaspora(s)

- **1949** capitalist background élite (businesspeople and economists) flee from Mainland to Taiwan, Hong Kong, SE Asia (Singapore, Malaysia, etc...), US, Europe
- **Taiwan** they contribute to export-led growth (1950s – 1960s) financed by US and supported by local state policies → continuity with ROC govt-led economic development (1928-1937)
- **Mainland** → Few businessmen take part in CCP project of national economic development
- Some had been active under GMD while secretly adhering to CCP (outlawed)
- Some had experience in other capitalist countries (HK, SE Asia, US, Europe)
- PRC → some continuity with GMD- and international capitalism
- Bigger continuity line is with Chinese diaspora(s)
- SE Asia → Chinese merchants had established business networks already since 15th century.
- Cold War → ROC and PRC strive to involve overseas communities (Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia) into their projects

Part II

(re)entering UN and international economic organizations



1960s increase of China's international visibility & definition of Chinese revolutionary identity

- 1960s → crucial transformation of China's international alliances and of China's identity
- Emergence of PRC as a potential leader of underdeveloped countries and of non-aligned movement
- Mutual interest between China and Eastern Europe diminished drastically
- Chinese activity in proxy Cold War conflicts opposed to US (Vietnam) and to Soviet Union (Africa)
- China support to independent projects of non-aligned countries in Africa
- China's role = defender of Third World
- End 1960s romanticized view of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution → inspiration for leftist movements in the West → 'global Maoism' for leftist intellectuals and philosophers in Western Europe and US.

Indirect contacts with global governance institutions before 1971

- The issue of China's non-representation raised annually in the UN and several specialized agencies. Until 1971 the result was the same: the delegates designated by Taiwan retained China's seats.
- Several Chinese-Americans and international civil servants of Chinese ethnicity sustained contact with PRC organizations in 1950s and 1960s, providing detailed information about the IMF, the WB, and GATT.
- GATT's headquarters in Geneva (Switzerland dipl rel with PRC) → the Chinese could informally observe GATT activities
- IMF and WB less direct observations, but information arrived through branches of Bank of China in HK and in London

Re-joining international community in 1970s

- 1971 PRC gains seat in UN Security Council
- 1972 Nixon's visit to China
- 1972 Japan, Italy, Germany, Belgium open official relations with PRC
- 1979 China - US establish diplomatic relations
- The decision about China's participation in IMF, World Bank and GATT is linked to Nixon's opening and to China's gaining back UN seat in 1971
However, this did not mean that Beijing was prepared rapidly to enter international organizations immediately
- October 1971 UN General Assembly Vote → surprising and quick event
- Re-entering GATT/WTO → longer process (1986 – 2001)

China in the UN

- The lowest point of appreciation of the UN by the PRC was in mid-1960s **UNSURPRISINGLY**
- 1965 → an editorial in the People's Daily (CCP official newspaper) characterized the UN as a 'dirty international political stock exchange in the grip of a few big powers'
- 2005 → PRC government described UN in a major official statement as 'indispensable' and the 'most universal, representative, authoritative intergovernmental international organization . . . the best venue to practice multilateralism, and an effective platform for collective actions to cope with various threats and challenges'
- In a relatively short period of time (40 years) China shifted from dismissing the UN to embracing it
- Still now – 50 years after China's admission – it is difficult to make sense of China's engagement with UN. Is China a 'supporter' that takes its fair share of responsibilities, or is it a 'spoiler' that seeks to transform the UN's contribution to world order?

Evolution of China's attitude in the UN 1971–1979

- **1971–1979: Non-Participation** at the UN Security Council and Support for the “Third World”
- China's initial years at the UN Security Council showed its “strict moral disgust” regarding intervention. China cast abstention votes or pursued the so-called “fifth-voting style,” simply not casting a vote while present in chambers.
- China demonstrated against superpower abuse of the Third World and emphasized its solidarity and leadership over Third World politics

Evolution of China's attitude in the UN 1980–1989

- **1980–1989: Passive Support for Intervention.** China gradually eased into supporting intervention, casting its first vote to support a mandate extension for the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) in 1981, almost a decade after its arrival at the UN Security Council.
- China began contributing to the UN peacekeeping budget and participating in other specialist UN agencies.
- China shows greater priorities at international level
- The UN system provided China the means to develop its economy, promoting China's profile as a destination for foreign trade and investment

Evolution of China's attitude in the UN 1990–1999

- **1990–1999: Pragmatic Flexibility**
- NB: it was only after the 1990s that intervention was viewed with increasing legitimacy in response to mass rights violations. The post-Cold War euphoria led to a drive to implement intervention on the grounds of gross domestic human rights abuses, with a view to “right wrongs.”
- In the early 1990s China had already experienced the first decade of economic reforms
- 1989 the Tian'an men incident brought the country again to international isolation. But China's place in the UN remained.
- China tried to reverse its post-Tiananmen diplomatic isolation by acting as a more compliant player. However, China remained true to its principles, viewing these seminal moments of intervention as “exceptions.”

China's worldview in political global governance

'The Chinese government has come to articulate a world view that reflects a strong commitment to a triadic model that it believes is superior to the UN's three-pillar structure. UN structure is designed to promote the interlinkages among development, peace and security, and human rights in order to provide protection for individuals. Beijing's triadic model, on the other hand, connects economic development, the strong state, and social stability on the understanding that having these three components in place better guarantees international peace and security and thus human protection.

Necessarily, therefore, this Chinese model downplays the significance of human rights.'

Rosemary Foot

Author of: *China, the UN, and Human Protection: Beliefs, Power, Image* (2020)