

CHAPTER 4

OUTLINE OF CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY DURING MAO ERA

4 Outline of Chinese Foreign Policy During Mao Era

4.1 Background

China has risen as a great power in the 21st century. To understand the path that had been chosen by Beijing to rise as a great power with distinguished role of its foreign policy is the main objective of this dissertation. The People's Republic of China was formally established in 1949 A. D. Since 1949, China has been determinedly engaged in various activities to enhance power in order to rise as a great power. There has been a background to this engagement that is discussed in this chapter that gives us a clarity why China aimed to rise as a great power immediately after its formal establishment, whereas it did not have the legitimate status of a Sovereign State of China from the other actors of the international system. The mindset of the leaders and people of PRC has been discussed which adds better understanding of the objective and aim of China to rise as a great power. There are some fundamental actions which have been traced in foreign policy during Mao era that has significantly contributed to the enhancement of power. Consequently, the domestic policies and the foreign policies aimed at generating power have been discussed in this chapter.

The rise of China is prominently seen during post-Mao era; however the basic steps of power generation are traceable in foreign policy during the Mao era. Consequently, the chapter aims to bring out those features of rise of China as its background in brief. The pre-Mao era cannot be neglected in order to understand the establishment and the nature of state of PRC as a background to the aim of China to rise as a great power. "The Chinese obsession with great power relations is rooted in historical humiliations, ideological adjustments, and power politics"(Rozman, 2004, p. 123).

4.1.1 Chinese Foreign Policy During Pre-Mao Era

The Chinese civilization has been considered as one of the oldest civilizations. The legacy of Chinese Empire remained effective and powerful in Asia as the Chinese Empire had Tributary System under which they used to protect the neighbouring states and those states were directly under Chinese political control as well as cultural influence (Hinton, 1972, p. 6).

The Modern history which led China to move on a path of development from the weakness embarks on second half of the 19th century, when Manchu Dynasty started declining. China was left with demographic issues such as population exceeded and the psyche of the people who were mostly idler and lazy when Empress Dowager CiXi came to power. Her young son became the emperor of the Qing Dynasty. The internal problems of China were unmanageable hence she had to rely on foreign friends. Chinese went on for a treaty with Japanese with high expectations. Sino-Japanese war in the late nineteenth century was the time for China slipping into complete weakness. During that time Western imperialism was at its peak which naturally would not miss to have hold over China too along with other Asian giants. “The Chinese melon was being carved up in one of the worst cases of unadulterated imperialism in modern times. With the brutal methods they had become accustomed to using in dealing with China, the Western nations – Russia, Great Britain, France and Germany especially- and Japan forced the Chinese to grant leaseholds of territory along the coast, which became the wedges for the creation of spheres of interest in the hinterland”(Levi, 1953, p. 41).

After the fall of Manchu Dynasty, Yuan Shih-K'ai came to power who failed to have control over the outer regions from the foreign influence. Manchuria was under Russian

and Japanese influence, Outer Mongolia and Sinkiang under Russian and Tibet under British influence (Hinton, 1972, p. 12). Sun Yat-Sen formed a revolutionary party Kuomintang with an aim to unite all regions of China under central government but after the death of Yuan Shih-K'ai, China was mainly divided into provinces and was under different warlords.

The end of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia brought different set of developments and changes in the China's foreign policy. Sun Yat-Sen came to know about Lenin's Comintern by 1922 (Hinton, 1972, p. 13). The Nationalists were liberals but still got attracted towards the Bolshevik Revolution and saw a ray of hope for Chinese people. Sun Yat-Sen had three main principles – nationalism, democracy and people's livelihood (Pye, 1984, pp. 142-143). His ideas were similar to the communists in the matters of anti-imperialist policy which gave a chance to Russians to gain sympathy from Chinese Government and the people which further contributed in a complete paradigm shift in the nature of the State (Levi, 1953, p. 175). After the death of Sun Yat-Sen, Chiang Kai-Shek took over the Kuomintang Party.

Chiang Kai-Shek's main objective was to follow Sun-Yat Sen's "Three Principles" and make China stand on her feet. He stated that "We will be pro any country which helps us to put China on her feet" (Levi, 1953, p. 175). His end was the development of China but his means was to get help from those foreign invaders. While Mao's objective was to build China into a Communist State with the proper implementation of Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist theory and be free from the imperialist states with the help of all the classes of people of China.

On 1st October 1949, the People's Republic of China was formulated under the leadership of Mao Tse-Tung by hoisting new flag at Tiananmen Square. The three most important institutions the Chinese Communist Party, the People's Liberation Army and the state bureaucracy remained associated since then (Pye, 1984, p. 173). Consequently, the journey of China's rise began with introducing new domestic policies delineated in such a manner that can be extended in terms of foreign policies.

Mao Tse-Tung was the chairman of People's Republic of China till 1959. He had accepted the thoughts of Sun Yat-Sen regarding the People's livelihood and Democracy. Mao Tse-Tung could successfully defeat the Nationalists during the Civil war due to his determination to make China a Communist Society by considering all the classes of people and defining their role to achieve his ideological goal.. For Mao Tse-Tung, the Chinese culture was the ideological form through which the highest stage of Communism could be achieved with the stability in politics and rise in economics because Mao Tse-Tung in his writings has mentioned that "Any given culture (as an ideological form) is a reflection of the politics and economics of a given society, and the former in turn has a tremendous influence and effect upon the later; economics is the base and politics the concentrated expression of economics"(Philosophical Library, 1968, p. 70). Mao Tse-Tung viewed China to be under the colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal influence from which a need of New Democracy emerged where the new state could consists of "the state system, a joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes and the system of government, democratic centralism- these constitutes the politics of New Democracy" (Tse-Tung, 1967, p. 20). With this Mao could successfully establish the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the Nationalists were marginalized to the island of Taiwan.

4.2 Chinese Foreign Policies as an Extension of Domestic Policies

Traditionally, foreign policies are considered to be an extension of domestic policies. After the establishment of PRC, the domestic policies were delineated with certain objectives or goals for the development of China in terms of relative power. China's foreign policy during Mao era had a vision and goal to enhance the power so the fundamental domestic development in economic and military aspect became possible as the foreign policy decisions were taken with a mindset of getting stronger to reply back to the great powers that had victimized China in the past century.

4.2.1 Domestic Policies

The domestic policies in various sectors were aimed specifically to enhance the capability of state. The initial phase focused on various agricultural policies in order to enhance the economic power as well as nuclear development to make military power stronger.

4.2.1.1 Economic Aspect

As China is an agrarian state, it mainly focused on the improvement of its agricultural policies. Communists gave emphasis to peasants and spent most part of its capital on irrigation. "At the time of Sino-Soviet rift, China was importing less than a million tons of fertilizer a year, but by 1968 it increased to 6 million tons and by 1975 it reached 30-35 million tons"(Pye, 1984, p. 263).

Because of China's major focus on the agricultural production and its growth, the modernization was conducted in the agricultural sector instead of industries. Only heavy industries were developed to make machinery. The 70% of economic exports during Mao era was dependent on agricultural sector having half of its GDP (Pye, 1984, p. 263).

During early 1950s, Soviet Union and Eastern European states became the main source of foreign aid, trade and technological assistance which could be considered as the first step to the development of industries after the establishment of People's Republic of China. Pye has mentioned that "the extent of Russian technical assistance can be seen from the fact that between 1950 and 1960 at least 10,800 Soviet and 1,500 Eastern European specialists and technicians were sent to China" (Pye, 1984, p. 258). Later on Sino-Soviet rift resulted into a lot of pending projects as all the major sources were not available in 1960s due to which there was a major halt in the development process. Soviet Union mainly introduced heavy industries in China which was a challenge for the newly emerged state to manage. By 1971, Chou En-lai's contribution gave a new path for the development by concentrating more on exporting light consumer goods (Pye, 1984, p. 259) which by 1975 could bring change in the worst situation after the Cultural Revolution and moved on the path of economic development for the rise of People's Republic of China as a Great Power. However, the military aspect and the development of nuclear arsenals have also contributed in the rise of PRC.

4.2.1.2 Military Development- Nuclear Weapons Production

People's Liberation Army has been considered one of the largest standing people's army. When PRC was established, it was divided into two groups-one was radical which wished to continue with guerrilla warfare whereas another group wished to develop with technological weapons in the nuclear era to resist against the great powers. Soviet Union's technical assistance in the earlier stage helped China to detonate first nuclear device by 1964 (Pye, 1984, p. 284). Atomic bombs as well as hydrogen bombs were detonated in

1960s, which was a fast development. The testing of nuclear bombs by China had become a major concern for the other nuclear powers of the international system.

China's overall military strategy during Mao era was more neo-realist offensive foreign policy approach towards neighbours and neighbouring regions in order to balance between the two superpowers. "Neo-realists might argue that China's militarized behaviour reflects the frictions generated by its efforts to balance against the dominant player(s) in the international system, given the threat posed to the security and autonomy of China from a system dominated by other power" (Johnston, 2009, p. 278). Consequently, China had to work on enhancement of strengths which required more economic endorsement for strengthening of PLA to be capable to become a great power. The relative capability in terms of quantitative data of demography, economy and military are shown in table 4.1. The population growth was needed to be controlled as China was having highest population in the world. In the below table, by 1975, there has been reduction in population growth. The economic resources based on gross national product had increased as compared to the GNP that China had in the initial years after the establishment. The total military force and the detonation of bombs indicate the military strength of China by 1975. These domestic capabilities could be generated with the help of foreign policy objectives in order to ensure the security and rise of the capabilities of China.

Table 4.1 Comprehensive National Power during Mao Era

Sr. No.	China's Capability	1952	1975
1.	Average Annual Population Growth Rate	2 to 2.5%	1.8%
2.	Economy (Total GNP in U.S billion Dollars) Chinese Government figures	51.9	193
4.	Foreign Trade (in millions of U.S.) (turnover)	1,890	14,575
5.	Military	Regular Forces	4.23 million
		Atomic bomb detonated	Oct. 16, 1964
		Hydrogen bomb detonated	June 17, 1967
		Space satellite launched	Aug. 24, 1970

Source: (Pye, 1984, pp. 8-10)

4.2.2 Foreign Policy Objectives

To delineate and implement the policies of a state, an objective is set. The most basic objective for any state is to survive and maintain the security of the state. To protect its territory, China's another goal was to include Taiwan, Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang and Tibet into mainland China. Another major objective of China was of modernization with the help of enhancing economic, political, and military power. With the success in the establishment of the state the system level external goals were to be recognized legitimately as a sovereign independent state. It has also been traced that China had a deep quest for status and influence in the international system. Consequently, the

external goals were twofold with the emergence of PRC (Hinton, 1972, pp. 165-175). The anti-hegemony and anti-imperialism are the other objectives at the systemic level. However, in order to understand and clarify the external systemic level goals one should have an understanding of the international world order that existed during 1945 to 1990.

4.2.3 Cold War World System

After the end of World War II in 1945, two states U.S. and U.S.S.R. emerged as the most powerful states in the world. Both the power blocs had different nature of state and thus emerged a bipolar system with Cold War between them. “The stakes were high—total annihilation—and so most nation-states in the world, big or small, felt compelled to join the bloc of one superpower or the other” (Faust, 2007, p. 13).

To analyze foreign policy approach in the bipolar world during the Cold War era, one can divide it into two parts. Since the end of World War II till 1970s and from 1970s to 1990 the system had different approaches that need to be understood by scholars and leaders. The initial phase of Cold War as discussed above was still in a war situation and both the superpowers were trying to find an alternate option to war and establish peace in the world. Till 1970s, the newly independent states of Asia, Africa and Latin America were compelled to join any one power bloc by adopting the nature of the state as per their ally. Consequently, Beijing adopted the policy of “leaning towards one side” i.e. Soviet Union. “The most important single step in the field of foreign policy taken by the new Communist Chinese regime in the first few months of its existence was the forming of an alliance with the Soviet Union” (Hinton, 1972, p. 37). However, China has undergone many ups and

downs during the Mao era that could be understood well with the explanation of its foreign policy discussed in the next section through various phases.

4.3 Chinese Foreign Policy During Mao Era

Chinese foreign policy during Mao era has been tumbled up and down. The foreign policy during Mao era is not consistent in its growth. There are several reasons -domestic as well as external situations and China's reaction to it shows a particular pattern and its overall objective to rise as a great power. The Chinese leadership had a vision and determination lying in its psyche that can be traced in the foreign policy approach adopted by Beijing during Mao era. Samuel Kim has viewed it as "the Maoist moral and political commitment to build a conceptual environment conducive to a new egalitarian international order" (Kim, 1979, p. 476). It reflects Mao's dream of China to be a powerful state. His aim was not limited to the national interest of China but to rise as a great power and alter the world order with his contribution.

In order to understand the rise of China and its foreign policy, it has been divided into three phases: the initial phase, the changes in the foreign policy of initial phase and the foreign policy during the Cultural Revolution phase.

4.3.1 Chinese Foreign Policy from 1949- 1955

The first five years were the deciding years of adopting suitable nature, characteristics, constitution and stabilizing the domestic system after the end of the World War II and the Civil War within two groups of people. Beijing initiated to follow Soviet Union because of the support that Communist party received during pre-establishment period of China had been enough for Chinese leaders to lean towards Soviet Union. China got engaged in the international system with Soviet Union perception during these five years. During that

time in 1948, South Korea got independent as well as North Korea got freedom from Soviet troops (Hinton, 1972, pp. 40-41). China being a Communist state had obvious relations with North Korea and was expected by Soviet Union to have indirect control over North Korea through Chinese occupation.

China had intended to help Viet Minh establish Communist regime in three Indochina countries. America agreed not to intervene in the independence of the agreement of the three states. Chou had been successful in convincing Molotov to accept the idea of three different states in the region. This gave a partial success and created an image of China which it was longing for in the international system (Hinton, 1972, pp. 65-66).

After the Indochina agreement China began to march towards Quemoy to fulfil its national interest of having control over Taiwan and merging it into the mainland China. The “Formosa Agreement” of 1955, under which United States had agreed to provide security in case of Communist attack. Consequently, the Taiwan Strait crisis remained tensed; however China relaxed pressure after the Formosa Agreement.

4.3.2 Chinese Foreign Policy from 1956-1964

After 1955, the Chinese foreign policy had witnessed a stage of a challenge for Chinese leadership. After the death of Stalin, Mao’s cult and personality became more arbitrary. But in Soviet Union, Khrushchev came to power and formally began to change Stalin’s foreign policies and establish his power over the Communist states in the world.

Due to Mao’s act in Taiwan Strait, Sino-Soviet relations worsened in 1958. Khrushchev condemned Mao Tse-Tung publicly over Taiwan Strait action, hence Sino-Soviet relations were damaged, resulting into Sino-Soviet rift with the issue over Albania in a conference in 1960.

In 1962, on one side Khrushchev got involved in Cuban missile crisis and on other side China had decided to go offensive against India in Aksai Chin area. But soon Khrushchev defended India over Sino-India crisis and that had completely worsened relations between China and Soviet Union.

By 1964, China tested her nuclear weapon, first atomic bomb that gave serious tensions to all the major powers in the world. Khrushchev demanded for the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty to curb China's growing military power.

4.3.3 Chinese Foreign Policy from 1965-1975

In 1965, Mao formally launched the Cultural Revolution to bring reforms by punishing those colleagues who were his critics and many authors who criticized the Great Leap Forward policy. This had a serious impact over failures of Chinese image in the world. It worsened almost all foreign relations with superpowers as well as the relations with the Third World states. "...the Cultural Revolution was drastically reducing China's effectiveness in nearly every department of its foreign policy" (Hinton, 1972, p. 136).

America had launched an attack over North Vietnam in 1965 that had been a stress as well as a shock for China. But with the China's nuclear test, America changed its approach towards China and agreed not to attack each other.

In 1950s, China had declared itself to be a leader of Third World states and hence tried to send aids to the North African and Central African states. Chou En-Lai's visit to African states in 1963 had helped China to hold another Afro-Asian conference at Algiers. But since there was tension with Soviet Union, China tried to conduct the conference without Soviet Union. The African and other Asian states received great aid from Soviet Union, so

most of them did not agree with China's proposal to drop Soviet Union that later on moved to a postponement of conference and probably cancellation of it.

Overall one can analyze a kind of competition between Soviet Union and China in which China was much less powerful at that time to stand without American support. But the Chinese spirit and potential with the goal to enhance its domestic capabilities had its impression over United States. Henry Kissinger and Chou En-Lai met to establish a hotline between Washington and Beijing. Finally, President Nixon's visit to China in 1971 gave China an opportunity to act in the International System and have its stand in UNSC.

All these foreign policies had been executed by various strategies adopted by Chinese leaders. These strategies helped China stand during crisis and manage to come out with positive step towards the goal of modernization of PRC.

4.4 Various Strategies Adopted During Mao Era

The strategies adopted during Mao era in order to achieve its national interest have been discussed in this section. The strategies are discussed to understand the relevance of foreign policy during post-Mao era. The foreign policy strategies of China are based on trial-and-error method. There is some clarity in the goal but the path to reach the goal is not clear. The strategies adopted by China helped it reach a decision to form an alliance with United States which brought a significant change in Chinese relative capabilities.

4.4.1 Neighbourhood Policy

China had been largely in an offensive approach with its neighbours during Mao era. As discussed above, China was in dispute with Soviet Union, Manchuria, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Indochina as well as India. This neighbourhood policy rather than helping

her to enhance her capability had been damaging its international image and her economic and military capabilities.

China's aim was to generate economic and military capabilities to rise as a great power, so China expected those techniques of power generations from the superpowers. In order to maintain good relations with superpowers, China could not simultaneously focus on good relations with its neighbours due to Cold War going on between superpowers. Initially, China was involved in disputes as Soviet Union representative to deter American influence in the neighbouring regions. Consequently China went astray from its goal to rise as a great power.

4.4.2 Interventionist Policy

After the formal withdrawal of troops from North Korea, Soviet Union wished to have its control over North Korea. Stalin found an option to assign China to keep North Korea engaged and possess an indirect control over it. "Stalin was obviously angry at the failure of his plan to overrun South Korea and worried by the impending loss of North Korea, which would carry with it a threat to the rest of his territories and allies in the Far East...Stalin was prepared to promise, and actually delivered during the next several months, substantial new military aid to Communist China of the kind that had sent to North Korea before the beginning of the war" (Hinton, 1972, pp. 44-45).

China also intervened in Indochina and Southeast Asia to deter American occupation in the region, as well as got into direct confrontation with the two super powers that had injured the image of Chinese leadership.

4.4.3 Nuclear Policy

China, during Mao era has developed nuclear weapons and became the fifth state to possess the nuclear power. There was a concern and opposition from Khrushchev government in Moscow for China's attainment of the nuclear weapons, even then Chinese nuclear policy did not change. This shows China's determination to attain the great power status. Mao used to consider these weapons as "paper tigers" but did not drop the policy to possess nuclear weapons (Lanteigne, 2009, p. 78). This created a threat among other neighbouring states as well as great powers.

4.4.4 China's Relations with Other Great Powers

During the Cold War era, there were two great powers United States and Soviet Union. Geographically, China's land connects it with Soviet Union and waters of Eastern coast of Pacific Ocean are connecting it with Western part of United States.

China's nature of state has been derived from Soviet Union but China's potential and quest to lead the Third World states resulted into China's differences with Soviet Union. In case with United States, China's approach was to make the region free from American influence which resulted into confrontation with United States in various conflicts that occurred during Mao era.

As regards China's economic and military capabilities, Soviet Union initially provided major support. It also received major support from East European states. But Sino-Soviet rift had left many underdeveloped projects unattended and did not receive any aid from any great power. The post-Cultural Revolution brought a change in China's recognition as a sovereign state and the permanent membership to Security Council. This was possible

due to change in China's foreign policy towards United States. It began with the establishment of hotline between Washington and Peking.

Consequently, one can analyze a shift in Chinese foreign policy behaviour during Mao era: beginning with leaning towards Soviet Union, then a phase of isolation and then alliance with United States.

4.5 Conclusion

Chinese foreign policy during Mao era had a motivation and determination to become a great power but the strategies adopted to execute the foreign policy did not work effectively and did not give expected outcomes. There are various steps which are noteworthy regarding its contribution in the rise of China as a great power such as becoming nuclear power, alliance with United States, getting permanent seat in Security Council giving recognition to PRC as a sovereign independent state.

Mao Tse-Tung had focused to bring reforms in domestic policies and depended only on the demography and military power. He could have considered other aspects such as political, economic, technological as well as cultural aspects along with demographic and military aspect in China's foreign policy. The domestic policies delineated based on the international system gives fruitful results than focusing only on the domestic policy reforms in isolationism.

Another aspect was Mao Tse-Tung's focus on the actions and threats from two super powers. If Mao Tse-Tung could have opted for the balance-of-power by aligning with its neighbours in order to get some relaxation from both the super powers. But due to Mao's ambitions for China were so high, both the super powers kept China engaged in various disputes rather

than focusing on the enhancement of capabilities. Consequently, in the post-Mao era, the reforms were required to be introduced for China's rise as a great power.

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