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FOREIGN POLICY AND OFFICIAL  
NATIONAL IDENTITY**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper was originally written for a conference in January 1990 at Princeton University on Chinese national identity and PRC foreign policy, organised by Samuel Kim and Lowell Dittmer. The organisers provided a conceptual framework, which is briefly summarised here, and then assigned each of the participants a topic. Mine was: China as a third world state. In effect, the question was: to what extent does the Chinese leadership identify China as third world. My answer is that China in many respects (culture, history, relative poverty, etc.) is objectively 'third world', and certainly the PRC leadership has often attempted to build political support among the states of Asia, Africa, and Latin America by invoking concepts of third world solidarity in CCP propaganda; but in the final analysis, the leadership essentially views China as unique—as Samuel Kim says, a group of its own (G1).

# CHINA AS A THIRD WORLD STATE: FOREIGN POLICY AND OFFICIAL NATIONAL IDENTITY

*Peter Van Ness*

## **Introduction: Official National Identity**

One of the most consistent themes in Beijing's foreign policy statements over the four decades of the PRC is the identification of China with the third world. As Samuel Kim has put it: 'If China's policy pronouncements are taken at face value, the centrality of the Third World is assured by three recurring themes: that China is a socialist country *belonging* to the Third World; that support for and solidarity with the Third World is indeed a basic principle in Chinese foreign policy; and that such identification will continue undiminished even if China ever becomes a rich and powerful state'.<sup>1</sup>

'And yet', Kim continues, 'China has emerged as perhaps the most independent actor in global group politics, a veritable Group of 1 (G-1)', and has maintained that independence, despite important changes in its foreign policy position, since the PRC's entry into the United Nations in 1971.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as Michael Ng-Quinn has warned, China often puts on different faces to manipulate the world.

How can we resolve this contradiction? Do China's leaders truly identify the PRC as a third world state? Or is the Chinese rhetoric about the third world merely propaganda intended to create a third world image of China that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders themselves do not believe in?

We know from experience in analysing the foreign policy of any modern state that official statements by policy-makers do not necessarily reflect their perception or basic understanding of events. Official statements are often purposefully made to mislead or to create a certain image or impression. Official positions can mislead by what they include as well as by what they omit.<sup>3</sup>

Because the Chinese leadership invokes the history of Chinese humiliation at the hands of the Western powers, and *talks about* a common bond between China and all other nations that were similarly victims of Western imperialism, does not necessarily mean that those same leaders, or the Chinese public for that matter, truly believe in a shared identity with the third world. Clearly, Chinese, especially older people, feel strongly about China's own century of humiliation; but it does not necessarily follow from that fact that they feel a common bond with the other, non-Chinese victims.

Kim and Dittmer, in their conceptualisation of national identity, have emphasised the importance of national identity for establishing and maintaining domestic legitimacy, for specifying a country's global role, and for bolstering claims to international leadership. To this list of key concerns, I would add that we should investigate the relationship between a proclaimed national identity and the success or failure of a particular foreign policy line undertaken under its auspices. Especially, what happens to national identity when the foreign policy line fails? Also, it is only realistic to assume, I think, that within any national leadership there are likely to be competing images of national identity that may become involved in struggles for power among political factions.

Finally, we must, I would urge, continually exercise the foreign policy analyst's rule of thumb: always compare what foreign policy-makers say with what they actually do. Do statesmen practice what they preach, or not? A more formal way of making the same point is to say that we should consistently compare 'declaratory policy' with 'operational policy'.

When Sam Kim and Lowell Dittmer began this project, they proposed that we conceive of China's national identity in terms of a pyramid of four levels of variables '(beginning from the top): policies, principles, "basic line" (*jiben luxian*), and worldview (*shijie guan*).'<sup>4</sup> To my mind, these variables constituted something closer to official ideology or what might be called 'official national identity', i.e. a sense of China articulated by government and party leaders as a part of their official responsibilities, a collectively-determined official position regarding China's role in the world. This is not necessarily the same thing as national identity in the sense of what individual Chinese think about the global role of China, be they officials or everyday citizens. The debate prompted in 1988 by the television production *He shang* [River Elegy] is a good example of the range of the more basic notions of Chinese identity.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, I will begin with foreign policy and work back toward the more fundamental dimensions of official national identity, i.e. into the deeper layers of the Kim-Dittmer pyramid. The analysis will attempt to illuminate how China's official national identity as a third world state was employed by the leadership to enhance the legitimacy of the regime, and to stake a claim for world leadership. In turn, I will examine how the failure of a particular PRC foreign-policy line seemed to reshape China's official national identity.

My argument is comprised of three parts. First, I want to put the analysis into the perspective of a particular interpretation of forty years of PRC foreign policy. In that interpretation, I distinguish three 'lines', one of which is the *Third World Line* (1960-1970). Second, I will compare the *Third World Line* with the reform period, 1978-1988, discussing what the implications of the

market-reform strategy adopted during that decade were for the PRC's third world identity. And, finally, I conclude the paper with an analysis of the re-emergence of an emphasis on the PRC's third world identity in the post-June 4 reaction to Western sanctions.

Before attempting this analysis, it is important to be clear about what is meant by the term 'third world'. Usage of the term is usually ambiguous, and the ambiguities often disguise issues of substantial importance. There are at least five separate criteria generally used by analysts to identify countries of the so-called third world: *economic* (poor and/or underdeveloped), *cultural* (non-Western), *racial* (non-white), *political* (non-aligned), and *geographical* (situated in Asia, Africa, or Latin America). Historically, the idea of a third world emerged out of the independence struggles of societies dominated by Western imperialism.

The French apparently coined the term, *tiers monde*, in the mid-1950s after the first conference of Afro-Asian states at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955.<sup>5</sup> The French term originally emphasised the idea of a third force or a group of states between, and distinctively apart from, the two major alliances of that time, the West and the socialist camp. The Chinese concept of a third world similarly envisages a grouping of states opposed to the two major world power centres—the alliances led, respectively, by the United States and the Soviet Union. One wonders, today in the 1990s as we witness the end of the Cold War, what will become of this concept of third world as the global competition between the two superpowers gradually dissolves into history.

The intellectual roots of CCP ideology regarding the third world are to be found principally in Mao Zedong's concept of 'new democratic revolution'<sup>6</sup>, and the Maoist idea of China's relationship to the third world is probably most fully stated in Lin Biao's 1965 essay on 'people's war'.<sup>7</sup> The most famous formulation is in Mao's three-worlds theory, first publicly put forward by Deng Xiaoping in a speech to the Sixth Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1974.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1960s, the Maoist leadership put forward China as a model of third world revolution that other countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America might emulate.<sup>9</sup> To be third world meant to share a common sense of deprivation and exploitation at the hands of the rich and powerful. The *Third World Line* in PRC foreign policy sought to shape the 'have nots' of Asia, Africa, and Latin America into a revolutionary motive force to overturn the global status quo.

But is China in the eyes of its leadership essentially a third world country as CCP propaganda has continually stated? No question points more directly to the

basic contradiction in China's global status. The two sides of the debate take familiar lines. *Yes*: China is non-Western culturally, non-white racially, has been the victim of Western imperialism, and is poor in per capita GNP. But, *No*: China has the longest continuous political tradition in recorded history and an unsurpassed record of cultural achievement up through the eighteenth century; since 1964, has been a member of the exclusive club of nuclear-weapons powers; is a permanent member of the UN Security Council; and is the world's most populous country, third largest in land area, and resource-rich.

This paper will examine these issues and assess this debate in terms of a concept of *official national identity*, i.e. the CCP leadership's image of China and specification of the PRC's role in the world. This is the CCP leadership's official answer to the questions: who are we, and what should we collectively aspire to be? what is especially important about being Chinese, and what is it that most significantly distinguishes us Chinese from the rest of the world?

For the PRC leadership, their answers to these questions must be tenable both domestically and internationally, in two very different political realms. As Kim and Dittmer have pointed out, a viable sense of national identity is vital domestically to securing the political legitimacy of a regime, and equally vital internationally as the political rationale supporting claims to international leadership.

At the Princeton Conference, both Michael Hunt, when assessing Chinese national identity problems from the end of the Qing Dynasty to 1949, and Merle Goldman, when analysing the late 1980s, focused on periods in Chinese history when the basic national identity of China was in dispute. These were periods of national identity crisis—i.e. times when the official definition of national identity and the leadership's answers to the key questions regarding China's collective identity were found to be politically untenable.

As Arthur Waldron commented during the deliberations in Princeton, the significance of national identity involves a leadership successfully linking *symbols*, to *power*, to *performance*. In effect, from the founding of the CCP in 1921 until the Communist victory in 1949, the Guomindang and the CCP competed with each other to provide a new national identity for China, a convincing vision of a rich and powerful modern China—and a viable alternative to the Confucian sense of identity that had served Chinese so well for two thousand years. Now, in the 1990s, one reason that politics in China is so volatile and potentially explosive is that, once again, China's national identity is in dispute.

## Forty Years of PRC Foreign Policy

Tables 1 and 2 summarise an interpretation of the history of PRC foreign policy that I would like to propose as a basis for examining China's third world identity. It focuses on analysing China's foreign policy lines (*luxian*). As understood in terms of this approach, a foreign policy line is comprised of four component parts: the CCP leadership's worldview; the political-strategic component of foreign policy; the economic component of foreign policy; and a sense of China's global role (see Table 1). In the essay from which this interpretation is drawn, I have presented data on the direction of PRC foreign trade, support for revolution, and Chinese economic aid to the third world to demonstrate empirically the changes in Chinese foreign policy behavior.<sup>10</sup>

Table 1

### THE THREE LINES IN CHINESE FOREIGN RELATIONS: COMPONENTS

	Socialist Camp Line (1950-1957)	Third World Line (1960-1970)	Modernisation and Opening to the West Line 1978-1988)
1. CCP leadership perception of the global system or worldview:	a world divided between capitalist and socialist camps	a world dominated by two imperialistic superpowers	a world shaped by superpower rivalry for hegemony
2. Political-strategic component of PRC foreign policy			
a. basis of China's national security:	socialist camp alliance	Third World coalition	to play USA against USSR
b. concept of world politics:	alliance confrontation (socialism vs imperialism)	structural transformation through class and national struggles	balance of power/politics
3. Economic component of PRC foreign policy			
a. strategy for domestic development:	command-economy model	social-mobilisation model	market-socialism model
b. source of technology and capital for development:	Soviet Union and Eastern Europe	self-reliance	US, Japan, Western Europe and UN agencies
4. China's global role:	junior member of the weaker coalition in an ideologically divided bipolar global system	challenger of the superpower-dominated global system	supporter of global status quo while focused on building domestic capabilities



Table 2

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY AND  
POLITICAL-MILITARY POLICY SINCE 1950**

Time	International Economic Policy	Political-Strategic Policy	PRC Foreign Relations Line
1950	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration into the socialist camp world economy (1950-1959)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic alliance with the USSR (1950-1957)</li> </ul>	Socialist Camp Line (1950-1957)  [transition: Maoist concepts of 'East Wind Over west Wind' and Chinese road to socialism beginning in 1957-1958]
1960	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-reliance (1960-1977)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third World anti-imperialist coalition (1958-1970)</li> </ul>	Third World Line (1960-1970)
1970		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Détente</i> with the US (1971-present)</li> </ul>	[transition: PRC turns to US to deter Soviet threat to China's national security, beginning in 1971]
1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration into the capitalist world market (1978-present)</li> </ul>		Modernisation and Opening to the West Line (1978-1988)

I think it is important to distinguish between national-identity formation, on the one hand, and national-identity implementation, on the other. For example, during Mao Zedong's rule in the PRC, he took upon himself almost exclusively the prerogative of defining China's official national identity. Implementation of national identity, however, inevitably involves the entire official PRC apparatus as they attempt to turn the collective image of China into viable political action, both domestically and internationally. One way of analysing a particular foreign policy line is to conceive of it as a form of national-identity implementation, i.e. a specification of roles for the PRC on the basis of a given Chinese self-image.

Table 1 is organised to distinguish three foreign policy lines according to these four component parts. They are: the *Socialist Camp Line* (1950-1957), the *Third World Line* (1960-1970), and the *Modernisation and Opening to the West Line* (1978-1988). Table 2 describes the evolution over time of PRC foreign policy lines, especially in terms of their component parts of international economic policy and political-strategic policy.

For the Chinese leadership, a foreign policy line is a unified, theoretically articulated, comprehensive design for dealing with the global system. Such a 'line' begins with an analysis of the international situation. Then, on the basis of that analysis, the line prescribes a strategy for dealing with the principal problems that the analysis has identified. It is a paradigm or logically

integrated model of foreign relations containing prescriptions for both political-strategic policies and international economic relations.

It is argued here that there have been only three periods in the forty years of PRC history during which the CCP leadership implemented a comprehensive and consistent line in foreign relations. Each of the three lines was based on a different perception of the global system and China's role in it; and as can be seen from Table 1, each line constituted a different approach to dealing with the global environment. In terms of this particular interpretation, a foreign policy line requires that the components of political-strategic policy and international economic policy be compatible or in sync.

Most analyses of Chinese foreign policy focus on the political-strategic component. There is good reason for this because defending the security of the state and society from unwanted foreign penetration is almost always the principal concern of the foreign policy-makers of any country, and national defence has primarily to do with political-strategic considerations.

It is also obvious, however, that the foreign policy of every modern state includes an economic component. Each state seeks to maximise the benefits it can derive from the global system for its economic development. Different development strategies call for different kinds of economic foreign policies. International economic policy for underdeveloped countries is substantially different from that for industrialised countries, because of their relative poverty and limited opportunities for domestic capital accumulation, and because of their technological backwardness.

Typically, third world countries are preoccupied with maximising access to foreign capital and technology for development, and in expanding foreign markets for their exports in order to pay for the imported capital and technology. In addition to worrying about the terms of trade for their exports *vis-à-vis* their imports, third world countries are also especially concerned to avoid to the greatest extent possible vulnerability to outside influence (either purposeful efforts by foreign states to affect their domestic situation, or world market influences) resulting from the conditions obtaining in their trade, foreign aid, and foreign investment relationships.

In these respects, China is objectively a third world country. There is no question that China is poor in comparative terms (twenty-first poorest in the world at \$330 GNP per capita among 121 reporting countries, according to the World Bank)<sup>11</sup>, and despite its ranking as the world's third most important nuclear-weapons power, the PRC is still in many respects underdeveloped. Yet, to what extent does China identify as a third world country? What is the substance behind the often repeated official statements that China is a

developing country that belongs to the third world—a 'developing socialist country?'

During the forty years of the PRC, China's international economic policy and its political-strategic policy have followed different paths, responding to different circumstances and changing at different times. Inevitably there arise contradictions between these two foreign policy components, since the political-strategic component is shaped largely by what happens outside China in the global system, while the economic component is principally determined by the leadership's assessment of domestic needs and choice of domestic development strategy.

The CCP leadership attempts to give the impression in its public statements that at all times the Chinese state is implementing a consistent and comprehensive policy line. In fact, of course, this is not the case, especially in periods of transition from one line to another. PRC policy, like the policy of any state, must change in response to changing conditions.

Inferring more from PRC actions than from CCP leadership statements, I argue that there have been only three periods since 1950 when China has implemented a comprehensive and consistent foreign policy line. As already mentioned, these were the *Socialist Camp Line* (1950-1957), the *Third World Line* (1960-1970), and the *Modernisation and Opening to the West Line* (1978-1988). In between have been periods of transition, during which PRC economic policy and its political-strategic policy were in contradiction with each other (see Table 2). At present, following the Beijing massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators in June, CCP policy appears once again to have entered a period of transition.

Each of the three lines that I have identified incorporates an analysis of the global system, integrates both economic and political-strategic components into a consistent world view and theoretical framework, and prescribes a particular role for China in global politics. The *Socialist Camp Line* conceives of China as a junior member of the Moscow-led alliance of communist-party states in an East vs. West, bipolar world. The *Third World Line*, alternatively, adopts a South vs. North, 'have nots' vs. 'haves' position. According to this line, China attempted to lead, in part by the example of its own experience, a third world challenge to superpower control of the global system. And, finally, the *Modernisation and Opening to the West Line* constitutes a design that in effect entails joining the North while still talking about South vs. North. This line aims to rely on the US to deter possible Soviet threats to China's national security on the one hand, and to integrate the Chinese economy into the capitalist world market system on the other. It is important to keep in mind that each line involves an effort to deal

successfully at the same time with the competing demands of: (a) designing a viable global role for the PRC, and (b) implementing an effective domestic strategy of socialist construction in a country which is both poor and the most populous in the world.

When China's international economic policy and its political-strategic policy are in sync, Chinese foreign policy is stable: strategies to maintain national security, on the one hand, and to serve the domestic development imperative, on the other, are built into a common foreign policy line. When they diverge, the process of transition to something new has once again begun.

### **The Role of the Third World in Chinese Foreign Policy**

During the *Socialist Camp Line* of the 1950s, China temporarily accepted the role of a dependent to the Soviet Union, showing deference to Moscow's ideological and foreign policy leadership. But as the differences between China and the Soviet Union grew in the late 1950s, and finally lead to a break in relations in 1960 when Moscow withdrew its aid program from China<sup>12</sup>, Beijing shifted its strategic base of support away from the socialist camp to an attempt to build a broad coalition of radical forces within the third world against the global status quo. At first, the main target was 'US imperialism'. Later, especially after the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, 'Soviet revisionism' and ultimately 'Soviet social imperialism' were also singled out for attack.

In hindsight, a question that must be asked is why China took such risks during the 1960s to confront both of the world's two most powerful states at the same time? How did China's leaders think they might ever succeed? What was at stake from their point of view, and what does this tell us about China's third world identity?

During the 1960s, Mao Zedong saw the third world as presenting an opportunity to assert Chinese leadership and to achieve a measure of global power. As the Sino-Soviet dispute deepened, Beijing made a carefully conceived effort to create a new force in world politics to be comprised primarily of the colonial or newly independent countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The Chinese saw the third world as the area of greatest political opportunity on the contemporary world scene. It was a world in flux, one in which old political orders and alliances were crumbling and new ones being formed—an area where new friends could be won, old balances of power upset, and powerful new alliances established.

Capitalising on the various appeals of the Chinese revolutionary experience before and after 1949, the Beijing government saw in the volatile conditions of

Asia, Africa, and Latin America its best chance to influence world politics and to apply most fruitfully China's limited resources toward the attainment of foreign policy objectives. A measure of Chinese confidence in the political potential of Asia, Africa, and Latin America was the vision of the world put forward by Lin Biao in September 1965, which viewed North America and Western Europe as 'the cities of the world', and Asia, Africa, and Latin America as 'the rural areas of the world' which would ultimately encircle 'the cities' with world revolution.<sup>13</sup>

In pressing their offensive in the third world, the Chinese strategy during the 1960s was profoundly radical, but their tactics (except for the peak years of the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969) remained astutely pragmatic. By seeking to undermine the power and influence of the superpowers in the developing world, the Chinese hoped to alter the entire global power structure. Beijing sought to build broad alliances on several levels. Government-to-government relations, the granting of economic and technical assistance, forming new trade relations, the use of 'people's diplomacy', as well as support for revolutionary wars of national liberation—all played a part in Beijing's vigorous foreign policy offensive.<sup>14</sup>

Beijing had apparently come to believe that, compared with the relative political stability of the industrialised countries of the West at that time, the conflicting political economic forces so evident in the new nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America provided a vastly greater potential for radical change. Propelled into modernity by the trauma of World War II and the subsequent struggle for independence from Western colonialism, the third world had become the scene of the most profound postwar political changes. As Lin Biao put it, 'In the final analysis, the whole cause of world revolution hinges on the revolutionary struggles of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples who make up the overwhelming majority of the world's population'.<sup>15</sup>

In appealing to the third world, the Chinese focused essentially on local nationalistic aspirations and fears of renewed foreign domination. The basic cement of Beijing's desired alliance with the underdeveloped world was a common colonial experience and a continuing opposition to any form of foreign intervention or interference. Economically, Beijing stressed a common poverty and backwardness in comparison with the prosperous, capitalist countries of the West, and pointed to the danger of new colonial control by 'economic imperialism'.<sup>16</sup> Culturally, the Chinese argued that each country of Asia, Africa, and Latin America should develop its own unique way, maintaining its own national heritage and identity, free from the stifling influence of American 'cultural aggression'.<sup>17</sup> They said in effect: borrow from the West if you will, but beware of becoming Westernised or coming under Western control. And, finally, Mao demonstrated that he was not above at least indirectly suggesting race as

an issue if it might be useful. In a statement on American racial discrimination made before a large group of visiting Africans, he linked slavery and racial discrimination to US imperialism, arguing that racial discrimination was a class phenomenon; and he called on people 'of all colours in the world, white, black, yellow, brown, etc., to unite to oppose the racial discrimination practised by U.S. imperialism'.<sup>18</sup>

The sum of the various dimensions of China's appeal to the countries of the third world during the 1960s was an attempt to pit colonials against colonialists, 'have nots' against 'haves', coloured against white, and East against West in an effort to unify the third world into a new global political force. The reason that Mao was prepared to incur the risk of opposing both superpowers at the same time was because, in his view, the opportunity to take a leadership role in global politics and to enhance China's power was so great.

As it turned out, Mao was wrong. The *Third World Line* failed. Despite their admiration for China's audacity, few third world countries were willing to take the risk to follow China's lead in simultaneously opposing both the US and the USSR, the world's two most powerful countries and, in addition, the most important sources of much-needed economic and technical assistance for their development.

Moreover, by the mid-1960s, the American escalation of the US intervention in Vietnam threatened to lead to a war with China, and Sino-Soviet differences had become so sharp during the Cultural Revolution that, by 1969, it seemed clear that the Soviet Union was considering the option of a military strike against China's small nuclear weapons and missile-delivery system. Thus, the PRC's *Third World Line* had not only failed to unify the countries of the third world into an anti-superpower global coalition, but it had put China's own national security at risk.

In an effort to deter the Soviets, the CCP under Mao in the late 1960s began to consider the possibility of an accommodation with the United States. For Mao, despite the strategic concessions the PRC was forced to make to the US in order to consolidate the American deterrent to a possible Soviet attack on China during 1971-72, the world role of an autonomous, self-reliant China was still central to his concept of Chinese national identity. It was only after Mao's death that the Deng Xiaoping leadership would implement an international economic policy that profoundly compromised that image.

During the *Modernisation and Opening to the West Line* of the reform decade 1978-1988, China in fact turned its back on the third world. The new, post-Mao leadership still repeated many of the old 1960s slogans in Chinese propaganda ('self-reliance', third world solidarity against foreign threats to state sovereignty,

etc.), but the entire thrust of PRC foreign policy had changed. International economic policies that were anathema under Mao Zedong's rule were vigorously pursued by the Deng Xiaoping reform leadership: establishing joint ventures in China with multinational corporations; joining the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the two key multilateral institutions linking the capitalist industrialised countries with the third world; accepting long-term foreign loans; building a foreign tourist industry; importing foreign consumer goods for sale to Chinese citizens; and sending thousands of Chinese students and scholars abroad for academic training in capitalist countries.

China in the 1980s became a supporter of the global status quo as the CCP sought to ameliorate international conflict in its effort to use its foreign relations to achieve the greatest possible material benefit for its domestic economic and technology development. No longer the radical champion of the 'have nots', the PRC was attempting as quickly as possible to join the 'haves'. The countries that became most important for China were those which had the capital and technology vital to PRC development. China had adopted in effect a 'first world', or 'first and second worlds' policy.

### **The CCP's Response to Western Sanctions Following the Beijing Massacre in June 1989**

As Merle Goldman has argued, the pro-democracy protests of 1989 emerged as part of a quest for a new, post-Cultural Revolution national identity for China. The Beijing massacre and the suppression of the pro-democracy movement have produced the most serious legitimacy crisis and, in that sense, crisis of national identity in the history of CCP rule. International events, especially the liberation of Eastern Europe and the international sanctions imposed on the PRC since the massacre, have deepened the internal crisis and raised serious doubts about the future of socialism in China.

In the competition within the top leadership of the CCP in the post-Mao period, different images of China's national identity have been put forward in the contest for power. Usually the issues in dispute involve both foreign policy and domestic concerns. In the final years of the reform decade in China, 1978-1988, one could identify three distinct positions within the CCP leadership regarding the controversial issues of market reform and the future of socialism in China. They were the conservatives, the reformers, and the radicals.<sup>19</sup>

The conservative position was the orthodox view. Conservatives, often older party leaders who were veterans of the struggle for power before 1949 and who typically might have responsibilities in the military or public security organs, defended the party's monopoly of political power and the economic control

maintained by the planning bureaucracy as hallmarks of what it means to be a socialist society. They cited ideological chapter and verse from Lenin (and sometimes even from Stalin and Mao) to defend their position, and pointed to the CCP's achievements since winning power in 1949. Although they might have agreed to a minor role for the market in a socialist society, the conservatives generally saw systematic market reforms as a 'capitalist' heresy, one that contained the danger of undermining party control and reversing progress already achieved on the road to communism.

Reformers, by contrast, pointed to the inefficiencies that had become apparent in the command economy and argued that the best way to restore vitality and initiative to China's socialist society in an increasingly competitive global environment was to introduce systemic market reforms. Moreover, they postulated that the prerequisite to socialist construction was a more substantial economic foundation (a more developed 'forces of production') and argued that unless sustained and substantial economic growth was achieved, communism would continue to be postponed.<sup>20</sup> The reformers attempted to justify their initiatives in terms of Marxist ideology, even when their reform policies were designed to operate in terms of a logic borrowed from Western neoclassical economics.

Finally, many (but not all) of the radicals rejected Marxism as a philosophical orthodoxy for determining the future of socialist societies. The most prominent radicals were former or even current party members. Most would probably have agreed with radical Fang Lizhi, when he said in an interview, 'Marxism is a thing of the past. It ... belongs to a precise epoch of civilization which is over. It is like a worn dress that must be put aside'.<sup>21</sup> The radical critique focused on political change: the democratisation of what Marxists called 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and what critics understood as totalitarianism. Radicals argued that the market reforms could never be successful without a basic political transformation. Their principal target was the party's monopoly of political power.

To summarise the basic differences among the three positions, the conservatives wanted to keep the Soviet-type system fundamentally intact (a little market reform perhaps, but nothing that would change the fundamentals of the system); the reformers wanted to change the operation of the economy in order to make it more efficient, while preserving the party's monopoly of political power and continuing to proclaim loyalty to Marxism; and the radicals wanted to throw out the entire Soviet-type social system, politics as well as economics, and begin with a democratisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.



To cite individual examples of the three different positions in China in 1987 just before the 13th Party Congress, the then veteran Politburo Standing Committee member Chen Yun and National People's Congress Standing Committee chairman Peng Zhen were representatives of the conservative position; both Deng Xiaoping and his then protégé, Zhao Ziyang, were prototypical reformers; and the jailed dissident Wei Jingsheng and astrophysicist Fang Lizhi were two of the most prominent Chinese radicals. The 13th Party Congress appeared to be a resounding victory for the reform position, especially when four key conservatives (Chen Yun, Peng Zhen, and ideologues Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun) were retired from their top party jobs. But in May 1989, in order to put together a CCP leadership coalition sufficient to oust Zhao Ziyang and willing to use force to suppress the pro-democracy movement, Deng brought the conservatives back in.

The conservatives, the reformers, and the radicals each addressed questions of national identity differently, and only for the conservatives did a third world identity for China seem positive or constructive. By contrast, the reformers identified with the East Asian NICs (which are the exceptions rather than the norm of third world development) as their implicit model; and many of the radicals aspired to China's full participation in global civilisation, partaking of the best of culture wherever it was to be found rather than identifying with a more parochial and limited notion of national identity.

Over the decade of reform, the debate about China's future became increasingly heated as the problems of reform became more grave. The crunch came in 1988—in just the same way as it had come earlier for Yugoslavia and Hungary, the two other communist-party states that had pioneered in implementing systematic market reforms.<sup>22</sup> Inflation, corruption, unemployment, budget and trade deficits, and increasing income inequalities had all become serious problems—but without enough of a market in place to truly force competition and increase economic efficiency. The CCP leadership had either to bite the bullet and push forward with the political reforms needed to make the transition across the structural threshold from what was still basically a command economy to what would be basically a market system, or the Chinese economy would teeter on that threshold, as Yugoslavia had now for several years, suffering in many respects the worst of both economic worlds.<sup>23</sup>

Deng backed off. In September 1988, the CCP leadership decided not to push forward with price reform, a key feature of the market strategy, and backed away from fundamental political change. And then the pressure began to build: from everyday citizens whose salary increases were lost to inflation and who were disgusted by official corruption, from innovative entrepreneurs strangled by

Party interventions, and from idealistic students eager to lead China into a better future.<sup>24</sup>

Since the massacre in June 1989, the new Jiang Zemin government has closed the door to dissent as a part of a countrywide repression, reversed the earlier political reforms, and attempted to reshape the objectives of economic reform.<sup>25</sup> In trying to deny responsibility for the atrocities of June<sup>26</sup>, the CCP regime has found itself confounded in contradictions of its own making. In response to foreign condemnation of the official terror, and domestic passive resistance to the widening repression, a siege mentality has set in among the conservative CCP leaders in Beijing.

Gorbachev's official visit to China in May 1989, intended by Deng Xiaoping as a celebration of a normalisation of Sino-Soviet relations on Chinese terms (i.e. the PRC having gotten Soviet concessions on all of the so called 'three obstacles') and to form the basis for launching a truly 'independent foreign policy', came in the midst of the embarrassing pro-democracy demonstrations. Humiliated by their inability to maintain order in the capital city, the CCP's subsequent use of force against what they called a 'counter-revolutionary rebellion'<sup>27</sup>, not only outraged the West, but launched China on to a repressive, anti-reform path directly counter to the direction of events in Eastern Europe. The conservatives in the leadership seemed to want to shut the PRC off from both East and West.

Emerging in official PRC replies to the international sanctions imposed by the West on China since June are themes reminiscent of the 1960s. Once again, we hear the protests of a third world China under assault by Western imperialism. Charging the United States with interference in China's internal affairs, and seeking to refute the Western concept of universal human rights, Yi Ding, for example, wrote that 'third world countries, given their national conditions, stress collective rights. They regard collective human rights as the foundation of individual rights and the precondition for individuals to enjoy all rights and freedoms'.<sup>28</sup> Repeatedly, the author invoked the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, including the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of other countries<sup>29</sup>, principles which originate from the early years of Afro-Asian solidarity.

China's democracy movement is described by the CCP as a premeditated conspiracy that 'colluded with foreign forces' to overthrow the communist party and subvert Chinese socialism.<sup>30</sup> Once again, the image of a beleaguered third world China defending itself valiantly against the sinister designs of Western imperialism is invoked.

## Conclusion

In the 1990s, we may come to witness the complete collapse of *any* viable concept of third world, not only as a result of the growing economic, political, and ideological differences among third world countries themselves (already apparent for many years), but also because of the end of the Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. If indeed Communism is dead as a viable alternative road to modernisation (as Mikhail Gorbachev's implicit concession of defeat in the Cold War and the East European revolutions of 1989-1990 strongly suggest) and Moscow and Washington decide to end their competition for the hearts-and-minds of the world, there no longer will be strategic benefit to be gained by trying to play the US and the Soviet Union off against each other. Without the global competition between the two superpowers, the idea of a *third* way loses all political meaning. Already several Marxist states in Africa have begun to move more toward a market-economy orientation as a result of the Soviet defeat.<sup>31</sup>

Most noticeable so far is the disappearance of the so-called strategic triangle. Robert Delfs observes: 'The strategic triangle is gone, and with it China's influence on events outside the region. Western leaders no longer see any compelling logic to compromise or cooperate with China—hence the alacrity with which many agreed to economic sanctions over Tiananmen'.<sup>32</sup>

To my mind, the central questions of Chinese national identity (as opposed to the *official* national identity put forward by the CCP leadership for policy purposes) focus on two sets of issues: (1) how to relate to China's cultural tradition (illustrated by the debate prompted by the TV series *He shang*); and (2) the debate about the best strategies for achieving wealth and power (which virtually all Chinese seem to think is China's due).

A third world identity for China does not help to address or to resolve either of these questions. During the 1960s, China attempted to lead the third world and to shape the 'have nots' into a third force in global politics; but the policy failed when other countries did not want to risk opposing both superpowers at the same time, and the Soviet threat to China forced Mao into an accommodation with the US. Moreover, during the reform decade, 1978-1988, Beijing gave up almost entirely on collective action, and sought instead to join the 'haves' by making a separate peace with the global status quo. If anything, China has shown that it wants desperately to escape from being 'third world'!

But how are we to interpret and to understand official PRC claims to a third world identity? Since in many respects China is still objectively third world, isn't it likely that CCP leaders truly identify China in those terms?

Probably not.

Obviously we do not know what goes on the minds of China's leaders, but let me suggest three reasons to be sceptical. First, virtually all Chinese leaders manifest in one way or another a national pride in being Chinese, an identification with the glories of China's past, and, one might say, a typical Chinese cultural arrogance. All of these traits point to a sense of China's uniqueness, rather than to characteristics shared with the third world. It is in this sense that when PRC leaders invoke a third world official national identity, which domestically evokes memories of national humiliation among Chinese citizens, the international relations result is not necessarily a basic Chinese sense of common bond with the third world.

Second, the Chinese have had great difficulties on a person-to-person basis translating their official policy of third world solidarity into interpersonal cooperation and harmony. Chinese racist attitudes towards African blacks studying in China are a notorious example. Too often, when attempting to implement a PRC official identity as third world, the Chinese sense of superiority and the expectation that others will defer to PRC leadership emerges through the rhetorical smoke screen. In this respect, it is not surprising that Kim has found, in his empirical research on China's role at the United Nations, that when one presses beyond the rhetoric to investigate the PRC's actions, China behaves not as a typical third world country but, as Kim aptly puts it, as a Group of One (G-1).

Finally, it is remarkable how completely the *Third World Line* of the 1960s was replaced during the reform decade, 1978-1988, with policies that rejected *de facto* all of the principles which earlier had been proclaimed as fundamental to third world solidarity (common opposition to imperialism, self-reliant development, South-South cooperation, etc.). After Mao's death when the opportunity became available for China to take the fast track to wealth and power by cooperating with the capitalist West instead of opposing it, China's third world identity (except for propaganda purposes) rapidly slipped away.

Meanwhile, however, the propaganda statements repeatedly claiming for the PRC a third world national identity are intended to tap basic feelings of Chinese nationalist sentiment, and to keep alive the option of a renewed effort to build coalitions among the countries of the third world if necessary. In 1989, when relations with the superpowers rapidly deteriorated because of Western condemnation of the Beijing massacre and the rapid development of fundamental political changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, official CCP statements invoking a Chinese third world identity once again re-emerged. But the reason for their reappearance, to my mind, is not because the third world constitutes a fundamental dimension of Chinese identity, but rather because, in

a time of need, a conservative CCP leadership has fallen back on old symbols in the vain hope that they will still have some political usefulness.

Confounded by a national identity crisis of the most fundamental proportions, the CCP in 1990 is no more likely to be able to regain either domestic or international support by invoking the tattered slogans from the 1960s, urging third world solidarity, than it is by rehabilitating the discredited Cultural Revolution role-model Lei Feng, who has also been returned to the ideological fray.

The Chinese people seem simply to be waiting—waiting for the ideologically bankrupt, Long March generation of leaders to die, so that they can once again resume their search for a viable, modern national identity for China.

## Endnotes

- 1 Samuel S. Kim (ed.), *China and the World: New Directions in Chinese Foreign Relations* (Boulder: Westview, 1989), Ch.7, p.148.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 For example, during the period of the *Socialist Camp Line*, virtually no claim was made in PRC official statements that Maoist theory had made a significant contribution to Marxist-Leninist ideology—to the point that Franz Schurmann in his research on China in the 1950s mistakenly inferred that the CCP leaders had accepted the notion that Mao's intellectual contribution was only to what he called 'practical ideology', not to the more important and fundamental 'pure ideology'. Only after the Sino-Soviet dispute became an open conflict, did it become apparent that the CCP had withheld such theoretical claims for Maoist ideology during the 1950s in deference to Moscow's leading role in the socialist camp. For Schurmann's definitions of pure and practical ideology, see Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p.22.
- 4 For one thoughtful commentary on the six-part television series and the debate it provoked, see Frederic Wakeman, Jr., 'All the Rage in China', *New York Review of Books*, March 2, 1989, pp.19-21.
- 5 Paul Robert, *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la Langue Française* (Paris, 1969), s.v. 'tiers monde'.
- 6 For the original text, see Mao Zedong, *Xin minzhu zhuyi lun* [On New Democracy] (Liberation Association, 1940).
- 7 Lin Biao, 'Long Live the Victory of People's War!' *Peking Review*, September 3, 1965.
- 8 The official English translation was published as a supplement to *Peking Review*, April 21, 1974. Also of theoretical importance for understanding the Maoist notion of the third world is the concept of 'intermediate zones'. See the discussion in John Gittings, *The World and China, 1922-1972* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), and for an example of the concept applied, see *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], January 21, 1964.

- <sup>9</sup> The earliest statement of a Chinese revolutionary model to be published after the establishment of the PRC was in an address by Liu Shaoqi to an Asian and Australian Trade Union Conference convened in Beijing in November 1949. See *Xinhua yuebao*, December 15, 1949, pp.440-1. After the PRC's military and economic ties with the Soviet Union were formalised in early 1950, however, any claim to a uniquely Chinese revolutionary model was dropped from Chinese policy statements, apparently in deference to Soviet insistence on their particular notion of ideological orthodoxy, until the 1960s. See footnote number 3 above.
- <sup>10</sup> Peter Van Ness, 'Three Lines in Chinese Foreign Relations, 1950-1983: The Development Imperative', in Dorothy J. Solinger (ed.), *Three Visions of Chinese Socialism* (Boulder: Westview, 1984).
- <sup>11</sup> World Bank, *World Development Report 1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.178.
- <sup>12</sup> Stress in the Sino-Soviet alliance reached the breaking point in 1960 when Moscow unilaterally withdrew its aid program and all of its aid technicians from China in a matter of weeks, apparently in an effort to force the CCP back into the ideological fold. Compounded by problems resulting from the failure of Mao's Great Leap Forward, the Soviet aid withdrawal led to an estimated 47.5 per cent drop in China's industrial output in one year, from 1960 to 1961, and a determination by the Maoist leadership to reject dependency on the Soviet Union and to undertake a new self-reliant economic strategy. See Robert F. Dernberger, 'Economic Policy and Performance', in Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the US, *China's Economy Looks Toward the Year 2000* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1986), Vol.1, p.46.
- <sup>13</sup> Lin Biao, 'Long Live the Victory of People's War!'.
- <sup>14</sup> Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).
- <sup>15</sup> Lin Biao, 'Long Live the Victory of People's War!' p.24.
- <sup>16</sup> See, for example, Guo Wen, 'Imperialist Plunder — Biggest Obstacle to the Economic Growth of the "Underdeveloped" Countries', in *Peking Review*, 1965, Nos.25 and 26; and Nan Hanzhen's speech before the Afro-Asian Economic Seminar published in *Peking Review*, 1965, No.10, pp.16-26.
- <sup>17</sup> Wen Yuan, 'The Cultural Aggression of US Imperialism in Afro-Asian Countries', *Shijie zhishi* [World Culture], 1965, No.20, pp.11-14.
- <sup>18</sup> *Peking Review*, 1963, No. 33, pp. 6-7.
- <sup>19</sup> This typology is drawn from the more general analysis of leadership debates in socialist societies undergoing market reforms in Peter Van Ness, 'Introduction', in P. Van Ness (ed.), *Market Reforms in Socialist Societies: Comparing China and Hungary* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989).
- <sup>20</sup> For example, then General Secretary Zhao Ziyang in his report to the 13th Congress of the CCP argued that 'Marxist historical materialists have held all along that the productive forces are ultimately the decisive factor in socialist development... Unless the productive forces are developed, there can be no socialist society, and socialism cannot advance from one stage to another until the realization of communism'. Subsequently, he added: 'Whatever is conducive to this growth [of the productive forces] is in keeping with the fundamental interests of the people and is therefore needed by socialism and allowed to exist. Conversely, whatever is detrimental to this growth goes against scientific socialism and is therefore not allowed to exist. *In these historical circumstances, the growth of the productive forces is the immediate and decisive criterion*'. Emphasis added. Zhao Ziyang, 'Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: Report Delivered

at the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China', translated in *Beijing Review*, November 9-15, 1987, pp.i-xxvii.

- 21 Tiziano Terzani interview with Fang Lizhi in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 22, 1987, p.53.
- 22 See Peter Van Ness (ed.), *Market Reforms*, especially Janos Kornai, 'Some Lessons from the Hungarian Experience for Chinese Reformers'.
- 23 The Hungarian economist, Janos Kornai, probably the most accomplished analyst of market reforms in socialist command economies, concludes in his most recent book that market socialism everywhere it has been attempted (including China) has failed. Contrary to his earlier advocacy of such reforms, Kornai is now convinced that, 'The time has come to look this fact in the face and abandon the principle of market socialism'. For Kornai, market reforms cannot successfully transform a command economy into an efficient and competitive economic system, and the only answer is full scale privatisation, 'a free economy', which in turn, he argues, requires political democratisation. His book is a prescription for achieving these fundamental changes. Janos Kornai, *The Road to a Free Economy — Shifting from a Socialist System: The Example of Hungary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), pp.57-8.
- 24 See Anita Chan, 'The Challenge to the Social Fabric', *Pacific Review*, Vol.2, No.2., 1989; Brian G. Martin, *China in Crisis: The Events of April-June 1989* (Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Legislative Research Service, Current Issues Paper No.1, 1989-90: 1989); John Fincher, 'Zhao's Fall, China's Loss', *Foreign Policy*, No.76, Fall 1989; and Lowell Dittmer, 'The Tiananmen Massacre', *Problems of Communism*, September-October 1989.
- 25 The official CCP theoretical position supporting the policy changes appears in Jiang Zemin, 'Speech at the Meeting in Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China', *Beijing Review*, October 9-15, 1989, pp.11-24. For analysis of the human rights situation, see Ann Kent, *Human Rights in the People's Republic of China: National and International Dimensions* (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, Australian National University, 1990); and for a commentary on the legal situation, see Jerome Alan Cohen, 'Law and Leadership in China', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 13, 1989, pp.23-24. See also 'Beijing Reinforces Central Planners' Role and Extends Austerity', *International Herald Tribune*, December 2-3, 1989, p.19; and 'China Harbors Last "True Marxists"', *Beijing's Economic Planner Says*, *International Herald Tribune*, December 6, 1989.
- 26 For the CCP's official view of what happened, see Chen Xitong, 'Report on Checking the Turmoil and Quelling the Counter-Revolutionary Rebellion', *Beijing Review*, July 17-23, 1989, pp.i-xx.
- 27 For the best estimates of loss of life and the extent of the repression, see Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China: Preliminary Findings on Killings of Unarmed Civilians, Arbitrary Arrests and Summary Executions Since 3 June 1989* (London: Amnesty International, August 1989); and Asia Watch, *Punishment Season: Human Rights in China after Martial Law* (New York: Human Rights Watch, February 1990). For the best analysis of where and when the killing took place in Beijing, see Robin Munro, 'The Real Story of the Slaughter in Beijing', *The Nation*, June 11, 1990.
- 28 Yi Ding, 'Opposing Interference in Other Countries' Internal Affairs Through Human Rights', *Beijing Review*, November 6-12, 1989, pp.10-12.
- 29 Paradoxically, these are the same principles that the CCP proclaimed so ostentatiously during the 1960s when meanwhile providing active support to revolutionary movements seeking to overthrow other third world

governments. Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy*, especially Part II.

<sup>30</sup> Chen Xitong, 'Report on Checking the Turmoil', pp.i-iv.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond Bonner, 'African Democracy', *New Yorker*, September 3, 1990.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Delfs, 'China 1990: Foreign Policy — Exit (World Stage Left)', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 23, 1990, p.32.