CHINA'S POLITICAL REALITY AND RECONCILIATION OF THE SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

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Overview

Now we should not expect that the political and social conflicts inherent in China today are so great that the country is likely to go through another process of political turbulence. It seems impossible to reverse the pragmatic trend against Mao Zedong's politics.

De-Maoization is now steadily going on in China with the former great chairman's political views completely undermined. The most important problem in this connection now is what actual effects such internal developments will have on Beijing's relationships with other countries, especially the Soviet Union.

In this sense, "the resolution concerning some historical problems of the party since the foundation of the People's Republic" endorsed by the sixth plenum session of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee in June 1981 and Hu yaobang's Political Report at the 12th National Congress of CPC in September 1982 proved to be highly impressive in that the documents made affirmative evaluation of the Soviet Union. Ever since, the relations between Beijing and Moscow seem to have been undergoing subtle and clear changes.

It is true that the two countries' public bickerings are less intense today than before.

Even though China is demanding, at the second round of Sino-Soviet sub-Cabinet level talks in Moscow last

March, the Soviet Union stop supporting Vietnam, remove its troops from Outer Mongolia and withdraw its troops from Afghamistan, these conditions are not much important because the issue of normalizing their relations is entirely of a bilateral mature.

The Course of Change in China

As China moves to undo the excesses of Mao, the country is gradually turning away not only from Maoist domestic administration but from Maoist foreign policy and world strategy as well. Recent Chinese moves toward a rapprochement with the Soviet Union are on result.

The period in which Mao sought his "utopia in poverty" is viewed by the Chinese masses as a dark and tragic era. No more do they rally behind Maoist slogans. Now that the country is expanding its contacts with the outside world, its leaders realize that they must make China more affluent if they wish to retain popular support. It seems likely, therefore, that the Deng Xiaoping-Hu Yaobang dictatorship of party bureaucrats will continue to plot the course of change in Chinese society, and that the cycle of moderation and radicalism or political dynamics and oscillations hitherto latent in Chinese politics, whereby a major shakeup occurred every five years or so, will not be repeated. The trend toward de-Maoization seems irreversible.

The fundamental change in political values that has taken place in China is aptly illustrated by the comeback of persons who were discredited and persecuted by Mao. In fact, China's present political leadership is dominated by Liu Shaoqi, the foremost target during the Cultural Revolution.

Rule by pragmatists means a more orthodox socialist

system run by party bureaucrats—a "nomenclature" or dictatorship of "Red aristocrats." Eventually Chinese society will come to resemble Soviet society. The fact that the functions of the secretariat of the Central Committee were greatly expanded and the secretary-general designated the country's highest official at the 12th CPC Congress is clear indication that things are moving in that direction.

After the political triumph at the 3rd plenam of the CPC Central Committee in December 1978, the Deng Xiaoping-Hu Yaobang leadership has gradually done much to de-Maoize national politics. Besides passing a resolution at the 6th plenary session of the CPC Central Committee in June 1981, it has revised the Constitution and carried out a personnel shakeup in the State Council, China's government. The finishing touches were put on the drive at the 12th CPC Congress last year.

It goes without saying that the future of China after Deng will be insecure if de- Maoization is limited to the internal mechamism of the power structure and to documents of the Central Committee, because the death of a powerful Chinese leader has always been accompanied by a political reversal. For this reason, Deng and his associates feel that more sweeping changes are necessary. Deng will not be satisfied until the country has been de-Maoized both institutionally and organizationally.

Deng's de-Maoization program is supported mainly by technocrats and bureaucrats, orthodox socialists who vow

allegiance to the party. Their view of the Soviet Union differs fundamentally from the intensely anti-Soviet attitude of their predecessors during Mao's era. Significantly, the standard epithet "Soviet socialist imperialism" was not included in the new party rules and the new Constitution of the PRC. Moreover, the policies of Liu Shaoqi, some times called China's Khrushchev, and the group headed by Peng Dhuai, whose sympathies with Khrushchev were unmistakable, have been fully rehabilitated. For example, Huang Kecheng, former chief of staff of the People's Liberation Army, who was deposed with Peng, as well as men who were described as Peng's associates such as Xi Zhongxun and Zhang Aiping are back in positions of power. Huang is permanent secretary of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, and Xi is vice-chairman of the National People's Congress and secretary of the CPC Central Committee. Zhang is in the important position of defense minister. These political moves can be explained by the logic of a counter-revolution away from Mao's revolutionary politics.

However, particularly significant is the reappearance en bloc of the leaders of the Stalinist Gao Gang group, who were expelled from the party as anti-revolutionary elements after they attempted to turn Northeastern China into an independent state in the first half of the 1950s.*

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*For details on how the Gao Gang affair affected S no-Soviet relations, see Mineo Nakajima, "The Gao Gang Affair and Sino-Soviet Relations," Review No. 44 (1977). Japan Institute of International Affairs.

Guo Feng, then deputy organization chief of the Northeast Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and director of personnel affairs of the Northeast People's Government, has been appointed first secretary of Liaoning Province, a key section of the Northeast region. Similarly, Zhao Dezun, who was rural work chief of the Northeast Bureau of the Central Committee, has been named first secretary of Heilongjiang Province, an area of crucial importance in that it adjoins the Soviet Union. He concurrently serves as director of the standing committee of the provincial people's congress of Heilongjiang.

It should be noticed that a great deal of experts on the Soviet Union,——members of "the Russian language group"——also have been reinstated. The fact also must not be forgotton that the Chinese-speaking generation in the Soviet Union and the Russian-speaking generation in China who grew up in the two countries' honeymoon period have now grown to the mature ages of over fifty and are ready to take charge.

These figures are buttressed by large numbers of "the Soviet generation"——the party cadre who were trained and entered public life during the 1950-65 Sino-Soviet alliance. Then, Beijing looked to Moscow for cues on all issues. While the party has traditionally been controlled by a central political bureau under the charismatic Mao, it is now becoming more bureaucratized and controlled by a secretariat that is presided over by the

secretary-general. Almost half the 200 members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party are new faces from the Communist Youth League, which constitutes "a new bureaucratic aristocracy."

Under the Deng Xiaoping-Hu Yaobang leadership, former leading cadres of the Youth Communist League—most of them belong to "the Soviet generation"—are getting important positions in China's political scene.

In addition, officials who have a good knowledge of the Soviet Union are gaining increasing prominence. For example, at the 12th CPC Congress, Vice Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, a leading authority on Soviet affairs at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, who attended the recent Sino-Soviet talks, was appointed alternate member of the Central Committee, an unusual promotion for a diplomat. It should perhaps be recalled in this connection that Deng himself studied at Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) University in Moscow when he was a young man.

The above facts of the changing course of China's internal politics is now leading to the eventual Sino-Soviet rapprochement.

Conflict and Reconciliation between Beijing and Moscow

If a significant change in Sino-Soviet relations is conceivable, to what extent might they improve? Will they change so importantly that the United States and her Western Allies will be compelled to radically amend their world policy? Will there be a monolithic Sino-Soviet unity again that will be firm enough to threaten Japan's security?

To make valid predictions on these questions, it is essential to analyze the structure of Sino-Soviet confrontation.* Sino-Soviet antagonism today consists of conflicts at four different levels, one resting upon another and forming a complex whole: (1) conflict between the two peoples or their nationalisms, (2) conflict between the two states or their egoisms, (3) conflict between the ideologies of the two countries or between their respective "heresies," and (4) conflict between their governments or between their foreign policies. These may be called respectively nation-to-nation conflict, state-to-state conflict, party-to-party conflict, and government-to-government conflict.

Referring to the first——nation-to-nation conflict——which is the deepest-rooted, the history contacts between the Chinese and the Russians in the last 300 years is full of conflicts. The two great peoples have lived opposite

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*For my further discussions on the Sino-Soviet confrontation in historical and theoretical perspective, see Mineo Nakajima, Chūso tairitsu to Gendai: Sengo Azia no Saikōsatsu (The Sino-Soviet confrontation and the Present Age: A Reappraisal of Post-war Asia (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Sha, 1978).

each other on the Eurasian continent with the vast Mongolian territory lying between them as a sort of intermediate zone, and their competition for the control of this area has led to the hot rivalry between the two nations.

The second conflict, state-to-state, is based on the first and has been carried on historically over border and territorial issues. Indeed, it quickly damped the Leninist spirit of internationalism intoned in the Karakhan Manifestos (1919) following the success of the Russian Revolution. The subsequent emergence of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Maoism in China provided ideological justifications to their respective nationalisms or state egoisms, making them more exclusive of each other in their conflict at the inter-state level. Generally, journalists and foreign policy experts tend to call diplomatic or intergovernmental conflicts discords "interstate." But what I mean by the "state-to-state conflict" here is one between two states aware of their different stands based on their respective nationalisms and ideological justifications, rather than a conflict in intergovernmental or diplomatic relations (which belongs to my fourth category).

The third conflict, party-to-party, refers to what began as the Sino-Soviet dispute in 1956 and is still continuing as an ideological conflict between the Communist parties of the two countries. In the general context of Sino-Soviet antagonism, the conflict at this level theoretically seems to be subject to change. Partly because

Sino-Soviet relations have often depended on internal fights within the Communist parties of the two countries (especially that of China), it is always possible that this third conflict could be significantly affected by developments in such intraparty struggles and leadership changes.

The fourth conflict, government-to-government, can change not only in accordance with leadership changes and new developments in the party of each county but also with changes in international relations.

From the above considerations, it may be reasonable to assume that the Sino-Soviet conflict at the nation-to-nation level will probably remain irreconcilable. The conflict at the state-to-state level also will be hard to resolve unless, in some distant future, the existing social, political, and economic gaps between the two countries are filled. On the other hand, the conflict at the third level, party-to-party, may change as the result of a leadership change at any time. It should be remembered in this connection that the current Sino-Soviet antagonism began with Mao Zedong's intense antipathy against the Soviet Union and the latter's reaction to it and represents the culmination of a process in which the Sino-Soviet conflicts at the above-mentioned four levels have been growing in a complex, integrated form. Hence, Sino-Soviet conciliation was quite impossible while China was under Mao's leadership and will remain very difficult so long as the CCP leadership persists in its present Maoist view of the Soviet Union.

Within the limits of the fourth conflict, however, it is theoretically possible to think of some improvement in Sino-Soviet relations under the impact of some international developments, such as an unfavorable turn in Sino-U.S. relations.

As we have seen, China today is undergoing extensive de-Maoization at home, and it is no longer possible to reverse this trend.

Thus, so far as the influence of China's internal affairs on relations with the Soviet Union is concerned, it should be noted that circumstances are maturing in favor of possible improvements in Sino-Soviet relations at the party-to-party as well as the government-to-government level. Under these maturing circumstances, China will—— in the 1980s, at least——try to form its relations with other countries while paying constant attention to the "Soviet card."

Of course, it my be argued that Sino-Soviet relations are generally unlikely to improve, since China today must depend on Japan, the United States, and other Western countries for assistance in the implementation of its Four Modernizations program, or that China will continue to need and outside archenemy to keep the people united in surmounting internal difficulties arising in the course of national modernization. As we have seen, however, analysis of the structural makeup and historical background of the Sino-Soviet antagonism indicates that important

circumstances are now maturing in favor of reconciliation of the conflict.

In effect, China's new leaders look to Soviet methodology as the alternative to the strategies of Mao, who sought strictly Chinese solutions to that country's problems. And this new bureaucracy, heavily larded with "the Soviet generation," is searching for a model after the near-chaos that resulted from Mao's policies. They cannot look to the West and Japan because liberal political institutions built into their systems would threaten the Communists' monopoly of power. This is the reason why the bureaucracy will go back to "the Soviet model" for economic development——as well as political stability——however strong its flirtation with Western technological development.

Is Cnina's New Model the Soviet Union ?

What will become of China is of vital concern not only to the Chinese themselves but indeed represents the greatest question in the history of civilization in the twentieth century. Perhaps China may also turn out to be the biggest "North-South problem" in the present world.

China today is concerned with the backwash of the Cultural Revolution and the new social pathological symptoms created by the process of change to an "open China." As unfavorable consequences of the Cultural Revolution, it will suffice at this moment to mention the tendency to vagrancy and delinquency of urban youths sent to rural areas for training, the general demoralization and opportunism of the cadres, and the emergence of an extensive group of dropouts represented by the "rural people coming up to town" from the lowest level of agrarian society to demand rehabilitation from false condemnation in the past and to ask for jobs. As many social values are being radically upset, increasing contacts with Japan, the United States, Western Europe, and the rest of the West are causing the Chinese people to show symptoms of "moral subservience to foreigners"——such as the "cult of the West" and "yearnings for Japan"——in reaction to the old prevalence of xenophobia. At the same time, some aspects of "old China" are beginning to reappear in various sectors of Chinese society, which, in fact, was never reformed completely

even in Mao's days. China today is faced with the vital task of properly controlling these and other social problems and establishing new standards for its society.

What then are China's options ? Now that the experiment to achieve economic development with assistance from advanced nations has clearly failed, the country does not have many options left. Some in the West would like to think that China will continue to give priority to economic cooperation with Japan, the United States and other Western countries. It is more likely, however, that it will act to strengthen its relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, whose systems are more attune with its own.

Under these circumstances, China's path is severely limited. Now that the leadership is leaning towards Soviet-style socialism, the best option seems to be to pattern the Chinese system on the Soviet model. The similarities between China and the Soviet Union as socialist states are sure to become greater as the four modernizations policy makes headway. In a sense, it is as if the Soviet Union's age of the New Economic Policy of the 1920s and the age of de-Stalinization of the 1950s have arrived in China together.

Eventually the theoretical and ideological differences with the Soviet Union will disappear, bringing a party-level reconciliation and opening the way for a full-fledged rapproachement between the two communist giants. Despite

the many dissimilarities between the two nations, China will pattern itself on the Soviet model. Of course there is no guarantee that the four modernizations will then succeed, but what other option does China have under the Present circumstances ?

What will become of China tomorrow ? After a quarter century of turbulence and faced with various difficulties today, the country may look forward to eventually developing a unique socialist society, but such a rosy prospect is still far off. At present, Chinese society is undergoing changes involving symptoms of something similar to Soviet revisionism. This tendency may be inevitable in socialism, in communist state, although the society of China differs in some basic respects from that of the Soviet Union. In this situation, China's new leaders underscored the need of the two countries to unite together to cope with what they called the "crisis of Socialism," exemplified in the recent case of Poland.

Both Cnina and the Soviet Union are now determined to do what they have to do for the benefit not only of their respective socialist structures but also of world socialism.

All these facts show that we can ignore, only at our own risk, the fact that there exists a trend of interdependence and mutual cooperation between China and the Soviet Union.*

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*On this point, see Mineo Nakajima, Chūso Dōmei No Shogeki (Shock of the Sino-Soviet Alliance)(Tokyo: Kōbun Sha,1982).