

2475/4273

No Revisions.

**MONASH UNIVERSITY**  
**THESIS ACCEPTED IN SATISFACTION OF THE**  
**REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

ON.....19 April 2005.....

Sec. Research Graduate School Committee

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**Chinese Foreign Policy  
Towards Southeast Asia in the  
Post-Tiananmen Period,  
1989-1995**

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the  
School of Political and Social Inquiry  
Monash University  
April 2004**

## Abstract

The Tiananmen Incident on 4 June 1989 was an event that presented China's evolving foreign policy with yet another turning point. At a time when the whole world was adapting to the shifts caused by the collapse of the Cold War bi-polar system, the Incident sparked dramatic changes not only in China's view of the world, but also in its response towards these conditions. In particular, the events following the Incident impacted the way in which China interacted with the West, which in turn, caused a transformation in Chinese approaches towards Southeast Asia, especially the region's ASEAN countries.

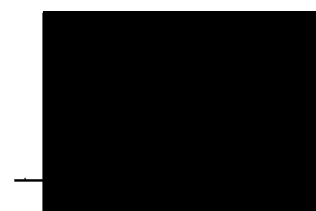
The violence with which the Chinese government responded to the student-led demonstration in the Tiananmen Square spurred international criticisms and sanctions (especially from western countries) aimed at both punishing China for its human rights violations and pressuring Beijing into adopting policies and norms that were supposedly more befitting of a rising Great Power. The Chinese responded to these unfavourable conditions by turning away from the West and looking for friends in other places, particularly in Southeast Asia, as these countries were less critical of China's domestic conditions. Most importantly, these countries provided the Chinese with the means necessary to not only stay afloat in the uncertain post-Cold War environment, but also re-establish its image in the eyes of the international community. China's approach towards the ASEAN countries was a means to seek

support on some of the most pressing issues of the moment such as economic development, human rights, and multi-polar regionalism.

This dissertation argues that the transformation of China's foreign policy towards the ASEAN countries in the post-Tiananmen period was largely a process of "adaptation"; it was induced by changes to the external and leadership determinants of foreign policy-making, but not by changes to the internal determinant (the push towards greater economic modernization). During its most dire times, China sought support from Southeast Asia, yet once the storm had been weathered, Chinese foreign policy was once again expected to resume the path on which it was travelling before the Tiananmen Incident derailed its progress. Indeed, Sino-Southeast Asian relations had always had their challenges and difficulties; yet, during the period between the Tiananmen Incident and Deng Xiaoping's southern tour in 1992, the two sides were able to sweep these problems under the carpet in order to secure greater cooperation. As the path towards resuming pre-Tiananmen economic reforms and international openness appeared more visible (following a breakthrough in relations with the United States), the Chinese decided that the future of its economic modernization relied more on stronger ties with the West than with the Third World and the ASEAN countries. This did not necessarily mean that China was more antagonistic towards the region; it was just no longer willing to bend over backwards in order to appease its southern neighbours. As a result, the potential resurfacing of past problems became greater.

## Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this dissertation is, to the best of the author's knowledge and belief, original and the author's own work, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in the whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.



Santo Darmosumarto, April 2004



## Acknowledgements

The study of China's foreign policy has always been of interest to me since the early years of my academic career in Canada, first at the University of British Columbia and later at the University of Victoria. Thus, when presented with the opportunity to further my knowledge in the field, I decided to take a leave of absence from my work in Jakarta at the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, and come to Australia to realize the lifelong dream of studying the development of China's relations with Southeast Asia at the turn of the 1990s.

In researching the topic and writing this dissertation, I owe a great deal of debt to a number of people without whose support and assistance the completion of this research project would not have been possible. Firstly, I would like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Dennis Woodward, for his tireless patience, guidance, and support. In particular, I cannot thank him enough for the time he spent on drafts after another of this dissertation; his corrections, suggestions, and depth of knowledge in the topic was invaluable, and I could not have been more fortunate to have him as a mentor. Secondly, I would like to thank those in the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University who have provided me with much-needed directions, suggestions, and comments; these included, in particular, Dr. Richard Devetak and Dr. Andy Butfoy. And thirdly, my appreciation goes to Jim Zubic and all the people at Monash International, who have helped me adapt to Australia since the day I first set my foot on this country.

During my field research to Singapore and Beijing in October 2003, I benefited from the hospitality of Dr. Sheng Lijun (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore) as well as the scholars at the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), China Reform Forum, and the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, who provided me not only with insightful suggestions and comments for my research project, but also additional sources with which the writing of the thesis would not have been achievable. As well, I would like to thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to the People's Republic of China, H.E. Aa Kustia, who along with his family and staff made my visit to Beijing a productive and pleasant one.

My sincerest gratitude also goes to the thesis' examiners for the precious time that they have dedicated to considering the arguments that I have made and providing fruitful comments to them.

Lastly, but certainly not the least, I would like to thank Mama, Papa, Sandy and Sandra in Jakarta, who always showed faith in my capabilities as a scholar. And to Nansy Sentana, my beloved partner, I dedicate this dissertation to you for the support, love, and care that you have given me throughout the ups and downs of this dissertation's research and writing process.

## List of Abbreviations

AMM: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting  
 APEC: Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation  
 ARF: ASEAN Regional Forum  
 ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations  
 CCP: Chinese Communist Party  
 CMC: Central Military Commission  
 CPM: Communist Party of Malaya  
 EAEC: East Asian Economic Caucus  
 GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade  
 GDP: Gross Domestic Product  
 GNP: Gross National Product  
 MFN: Most Favoured Nation  
 NAM: Non-Aligned Movement  
 NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
 NDR: New Democratic Revolution  
 NKCP: North Kalimantan Communist Party  
 PLA: People's Liberation Army  
 PKI: Partai Komunis Indonesia [Indonesian Communist Party]  
 PRC: People's Republic of China  
 ROC: Republic of China  
 UN: United Nations  
 UNHRC: United Nations Human Rights Commission  
 SEANWFZ: Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone  
 ZOPFAN: Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality

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## Chapter One:

# Introduction

As with studying the foreign policy of any country, an attempt to analyze the manner in which China formulates its policy towards Southeast Asia is indeed a challenging task. The exercise is further complicated by the fact that unlike most western democracies, the decision-making process in Beijing is relatively less accessible to the public in general. Thus, in attempting to conduct a comprehensive study of the matter, certain details and issues are often beyond the observation capabilities of most western scholars. Nevertheless, the challenges posed by these conditions should not be regarded as insurmountable, as there are sufficient resources to make the exercise worthwhile. In adhering to this belief, this dissertation aims to contribute to the growing body of academic literature on the study of China in general, and of Chinese foreign policy in particular.

While foreign policy-making in Beijing is very much influenced by the conditions of China's external environment, a comprehensive analysis would not be achieved without taking into consideration the internal and leadership determinants in foreign policy decision-making. As changes occur in the external environment, China's adaptation (as a means to ensuring its survival in the international system) is carried out on the basis of the foreign policy goals pushed by China's national interest as well as the leadership's perspective on accommodating these goals when faced with shifts

in the external determinant. With regards to its relations with Southeast Asia – especially with the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – in the early parts of the post-Cold War era, Beijing's changing approach was primarily determined by how the leadership perceived and responded to unfavourable external conditions. As such, the dissertation focuses on a particular event around which analyses of Chinese foreign policy have revolved in the 1990s: the Tiananmen Incident, 4 June 1989.

### 1.1. The Tiananmen Incident and Its Impact on Chinese Foreign Policy

On 4 June 1989, the world watched as the "People's Army" turned its guns against the very people it was supposed to be defending. The cracking down on "dissidents" had been numerous and equally brutal throughout China's history; however, this time around, the presence of foreign news people ensured that the rest of the world witnessed the shocking horror of that day's events. As the gigantic statue of the "Goddess of Democracy" crumbled to the ground, so did the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) international confidence and credibility.<sup>1</sup> At a time when trends in international politics increasingly emphasized the values of democracy and human rights, the brutality with which the Communist government responded to the student-led demonstration was shocking to many people, especially those in the West. Furthermore, Beijing's subsequent, violent persecution of supposed "enemies of the state" and its continued denial of gross violations of human rights (despite repeated

<sup>1</sup> Samuel S. Kim, "Chinese Foreign Policy after Tiananmen", *Current History*, 89:551 (September 1990), p. 246.

evidence to the contrary) worsened the situation, as fears grew of a return to Maoist China as it had been during the Cultural Revolution.

There remain questions regarding the actual happenings during and surrounding the event, as studies are presently still being carried out in an effort to find answers to such questions.<sup>2</sup> However, the Tiananmen Incident, and the ensuing crises both at home and abroad, became a turning point in China's tumultuous relations with the West and countries in Southeast Asia. Forced into a corner and struggling for survival in the uncertain post-Cold War environment, Beijing had to make drastic changes to its foreign policy strategy, which had provided the country with tremendous economic benefits in the previous decade or so. Yet, the desired shift in strategy had to be manoeuvred with subtlety, skill and a cool head, especially considering the potential tendency to resort to knee-jerk responses in the face of ostracism and condemnation. In essence, the post-Tiananmen climate presented Chinese diplomacy with probably one of the most daunting challenges since the Sino-American rapprochement in the 1970s.

The Chinese' "mishandling" of the Tiananmen Incident only served to spur international sanctions aimed at both punishing China for its violations of human rights and pressuring Beijing into adopting policies and norms that were supposedly more befitting of an aspiring Great Power (as these policies and norms were perceived from a western, democratic perspective). The West's strong reaction took the Chinese leadership by surprise, especially considering that events prior to Tiananmen had

<sup>2</sup> One of the most recent, noted findings of events during that period is Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

indicated a vast improvement in ties between the two sides.<sup>3</sup> Sino-American trade had reached record levels and the opening of China's economy to the world had drawn massive interest and investments from Western Europe and Japan. Therefore, when confronted with western chastising, Beijing's immediate response was to develop a foreign policy consisting of elements of semi-isolationism based on Marxist fundamentalism as well as a damage control mechanism aimed at both "staying afloat" in the international scene and repairing the government's shattered image.

At the beginning, many Chinese leaders believed that Beijing's post-Tiananmen attitude towards the rest of the world should not divert too much from its previous attempts to reform and create a more open economy. Deng Xiaoping, China's eldest and most influential leader at the time, wanted a continuation of an "independent and peaceful foreign policy", which Beijing first adopted in 1982 as a means to modernizing China's economy and bringing up its status in the international community.<sup>4</sup> This policy encouraged equal friendly relations with the Soviet Union and the United States, improved links with Eastern Europe and Pacific Asia, while at the same time, ensured continued fraternal ties with the rest of the Third World.

However, sustained harsh criticism from the West on China's domestic politics compelled Deng to reconsider this line of thought, especially considering the shaky political ground on which he was standing at the time. With his health ailing and the domestic political leadership in disarray after the death and purge of Deng's allies Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, respectively, the reformist faction was in danger of being sidelined by the politicking and growing influence of Chen Yun (one of the most

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<sup>3</sup> Kim, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-246.

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<sup>3</sup> Kim, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-246.

prominent post-Tiananmen CCP leaders) and his group of ideologues and leftists.<sup>5</sup> Among this particular faction of the Party leadership there was a growing appeal to engage the United States with a more hawkish stand and to fall back into the comfort of being in the company of the less-critical Third World countries.<sup>6</sup> In their perspective, the need to distance themselves from Washington (at least, temporarily) seemed crucial if the Chinese were to protect their sovereignty and salvage some sense of national dignity and integrity. Deng could not dismiss these views lightly, as direct confrontation would have only resulted in later endangering his legacy of openness, reform and economic development.

The aftermath of Tiananmen left China's domestic and foreign policies in a state of confusion. Within weeks after the Incident, China lost almost all of the international confidence, credibility and support that it had garnered from close to a decade of reform and opening up to the outside. Its hard-earned international status was reduced to that of a pariah state; the West imposed economic and military sanctions, and embarked on a campaign to isolate the Chinese from the international community. This presented a crisis to the Chinese, especially when considering that at the time such treatment could only be seen in the United States' policy towards countries with which it harboured a great deal of enmity such as Cuba, Libya, and North Korea.<sup>7</sup> For the next couple of years, there would be limited interaction between Chinese leaders and their counterparts in the West. The international media, especially those based in western countries, demonstrated its support for Chinese pro-democracy movements

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<sup>4</sup> Lee Deng-ker, "Communist China's Foreign Policy since June 4, 1989", Issues & Studies, 26:5 (May 1990), pp. 87-88.

<sup>5</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour: Elite Politics in Post-Tiananmen China", Asian Survey, XXXIII:8 (August 1993), pp. 740-745.

<sup>6</sup> Allen S. Whiting, "Chinese Nationalism and Foreign Policy after Deng", The China Quarterly (1995), pp. 297-300.

by painting an image of a Middle Kingdom that was ruled by tyranny, violence, and suppression.<sup>8</sup> This, in turn, moved the peoples of these countries to pressure their respective governments to condemn Beijing for its atrocious human rights violations; demonstrations outside of Chinese embassies around the world grew.<sup>9</sup> Almost overnight, denouncements from western countries, threats of military and economic sanctions, as well as the withdrawal of western nationals from China rapidly increased.<sup>10</sup> In the end, these events tarnished China's image as a growing regional power, and opened the potential for setbacks in its efforts to modernize the economy.

The unfortunate situation was worsened by the fact that China's "opening-up policy" and increased reliance on foreign investments had rendered it vulnerable to sanctions and punishment from the West. For example, Japan suspended a \$6.25 billion loan, which had been planned for financing Chinese development programs.<sup>11</sup> Tokyo made it clear that resumption of the loan depended on improved conditions within China's domestic politico-security conditions. The United States also responded severely to the Tiananmen Incident by quickly announcing suspension of arms sales and its support for World Bank loans to Beijing.<sup>12</sup> This was a harsh blow, as Japan and the United States were two of China's main trading partners and sources of financial aid. Although Deng had insisted on carrying on with the pre-Tiananmen foreign policy,

<sup>7</sup> A more detailed elaboration of these conditions will be provided in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

<sup>8</sup> In describing the events in the Tiananmen Square, *The New York Times* elaborated the Chinese military's viciousness in "firing directly at crowds of men and women". And *The Toronto Star* emphasized that the "assault on students was a reminder of the brute force" that the Chinese government had at its disposal. These are only a couple of examples of the kind of images portrayed by the western media of the Chinese military's brutal handling of the peaceful demonstration in Beijing. "Crackdown in Beijing", *The New York Times* (4 June 1989), p. 1; "Scores Killed as Troops Storm Square", *The Toronto Star* (4 June 1989), p. A1.

<sup>9</sup> "The West Condemns the Crackdown", *The New York Times* (5 June 1989), p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>11</sup> John W. Garver, "Chinese Foreign Policy: The Diplomacy of Damage Control", *Current History*, 90:557 (September 1991), p. 241.

<sup>12</sup> Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

conditions pointed at the need to resort to alternative approaches to re-establishing China's image in the international arena.

The temporary shift away from the United States and the rest of the West was somewhat of a mechanism to salvage China's national integrity and dignity in the eyes of the international community. Adopting a fully isolationist stance and returning to autarky (as had been attempted during Mao's period) was considered to be counter-productive because China had for some time abandoned ideological issues in its foreign policy-making and engaged itself with the international world through more pragmatic, economically-sound approaches. Thus, it could no longer turn its back on the world without suffering dire economic and social consequences. In the end, the need to embark on a policy shift resulted in Beijing looking for friends in familiar places: the Third World. China publicly re-affirmed its status as a Third World nation and re-launched a new doctrine of "anti-hegemonism", which it had abandoned throughout the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> And in pursuing this strategy, there was a precise need to secure the support of the grouping's leaders, the ASEAN countries. Although the tumultuous ties between China and these countries had undergone improvements in the lead up to 1989, the Tiananmen Incident provided the catalyst for a speedier normalization of relations.

China's strategy to engage the ASEAN countries was part of a larger plan to rekindle its past warm ties with the Third World. As part of Mao Zedong's "new democratic revolution" concept, Communist China had been a strong force behind movements to

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Y.S. Cheng, "China's Post Tiananmen Diplomacy", in George Hicks, ed., *The Broken Mirror: China After Tiananmen* (Essex: Longman Group, 1990), p. 405.

install left-wing governments in many Third World countries.<sup>14</sup> However, when Deng rose to power in the 1970s, he guided China's role in international politics away from that of the hotbed for "international revolution" towards that of the champion of the status quo, modernization and an open economy.<sup>15</sup> This departure from Mao's foreign policy outlook resulted in China slowly shedding its Third World status. As well, there were other factors such as the shifting balance of power between China, the Soviet Union and the United States as well as China's ambition to become a "responsible" Great Power<sup>16</sup>. Although Beijing's Third World rhetoric continued, it no longer showed a genuine interest in pursuing deep alliances with these developing countries. The push to reform and modernize, which began in the early 1980s, had somewhat put the Third World at the bottom of China's foreign policy agenda.

However, in an attempt to deal with the unfavourable international political climate in the aftermath of Tiananmen, the Chinese had to rely once again on the support of its old friends. Such efforts were conducted primarily by sending out high officials to Third World capitals as a way to demonstrate these countries' supposed importance in China's foreign policy agenda.<sup>17</sup> Just a month after the Tiananmen Incident, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen went on a tour of Africa. This was then followed by Premier Li Peng's visit to countries in the Indian sub-continent. Chinese advances on Southeast Asia came a bit late, but did not lack in importance. In 1990, Beijing finally came to terms with Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore (which, along with the Philippines and

<sup>14</sup> Peter Van Ness, "China and the Third World: Patterns of Engagement and Indifference", in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 153-155.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>16</sup> A discussion of what China views as being a "responsible" state in the international community can be found in: Rosemary Foot, "Chinese Power and the Idea of a Responsible State", *The China Journal*, 45 (January 2001), pp. 1-20.

<sup>17</sup> Garver, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

Thailand, were considered to be the region's core countries) when the sides re-established diplomatic relations that had been severed for decades.<sup>18</sup>

In light of the domestic upheaval plaguing most Eastern Bloc countries, China's rapprochement with the Third World, especially the ASEAN countries, seemed strategically necessary. Despite heavy efforts to increase economic and cooperative ties between Beijing and Eastern European capitals since June 1989, it was clear that Communist regimes in those countries were falling one after another by the end of the year. The fall of these governments not only signified that China's goal of creating a network of economic and political support had become a spent effort, but also that it could possibly jeopardize Chinese relations with post-Communist Eastern Europe, thus making things worse in the long run. Moreover, the CCP leadership feared that the tide of democratization and anti-Communism in Eastern Europe could fuel further social and political unrest within the Middle Kingdom.<sup>19</sup> As a result, relations with the Eastern Bloc had to be limited, and in its place, stronger ties with the Third World became essential.

Resorting to support from Third World countries seemed beneficial for a number of reasons. Beijing needed allies to support its human rights diplomacy, which was designed to lift western sanctions and refute the stigma of being labelled as one of the world's most brutal regimes.<sup>20</sup> The Third World was a "natural" ally in this because these countries were less likely to condemn Beijing for its domestic misconduct.

<sup>18</sup> The travels of China's leaders to the Third World in the period after Tiananmen will be elaborated in more detail in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

<sup>19</sup> Garver, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-2.

<sup>20</sup> Such an Orwellian image of China can be observed in human rights reports conducted by international non-governmental organizations (INGO) such as Asia Watch. Asia Watch, "Punishment

Many of them had their own "skeletons in the closet" and often also suffered from the West's chastising and criticisms of their domestic political condition.<sup>21</sup> Not surprisingly, these developing countries were more than pleased to support a move challenging the West's increasingly predominant views of universal human rights.

Among the Third World, the ASEAN countries became the focus of Beijing's human rights diplomacy because Chinese leaders were keen on pushing the idea of "Asian values", which was championed by Malaysia's Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad and Singapore's elder statesman, Lee Kuan Yew.<sup>22</sup> Greater acceptance of "Asian values" – especially in its application to issues of human rights – could allow China a means of justifying its domestic policies and at the same time rebuild its shattered image abroad. Moreover, ASEAN's organizational protocol stressed the importance of holding up high the concept of non-intervention in the domestic issues of member states and dialogue partners (the latter of which China was soon to become). This gave the Chinese some assurances that in interacting with Southeast Asia they would not be judged harshly for their troubled domestic political situation.

The drift towards Southeast Asia was also economically sound. Because Beijing was adamant at not succumbing to western pressure, it feared the possibility of long-term sanctions and exclusion from the international economy. This compelled the Chinese to consider other sources of funds and investment. Although the majority of the Third World was not in the position to provide financial support, the economies of the

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Season: Human Rights in China after Martial Law", in George Hicks, ed., *The Broken Mirror: China After Tiananmen* (Essex: Longman Group, 1990), pp. 369-389.

<sup>21</sup> Chen Jie, "Tactical Alliance: Southeast Asia and China's Post-1989 Human Rights Diplomacy", *China Rights Forum*, 46 (Fall 1998), pp. 8-11.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*; Diane K. Mauzy, "The Human Rights and 'Asian Values' Debate in Southeast Asia: Trying to Clarify the Key Issues", *Pacific Review*, 10:2 (1997), pp. 210-236.

ASEAN countries were, at the time, experiencing a miracle-like growth. In particular China recognized the possibility of receiving some form of financial support from overseas Chinese living in the region.<sup>23</sup> This view was bolstered by the fact that a considerable proportion of overseas Chinese regularly brought their money back and invested in businesses in their homeland.<sup>24</sup> Although funds coming from these sources would unlikely match those that had been injected by the West prior to Tiananmen, they certainly provided a form of "safety net" against the possibility of continuing ostracism and economic sanctions from Japan, Western Europe and the United States.

In addition to seeking support in its human rights diplomacy and modernization plans (lest the worst case scenario), China's intensified engagement with Southeast Asia was also based on the perception that the strategy would allow China to rise up as the region's leader and develop a multi-polar power constellation in the post-Cold War environment. The development of confidence and mutual trust was important considering that ASEAN governments still harboured deep suspicion of China because of the latter's involvement (direct or indirect) in many revolutionary movements in their countries throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In the long term, the Chinese viewed that their involvement with these countries (especially considering their strategically important geography) could prove to be a way for Beijing to balance effectively the United States' influence in the entire Pacific Asia.

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<sup>23</sup> Ian Wilson, *Power, The Gun and Foreign Policy in China since the Tiananmen Incident* (Working Paper No. 232) (Canberra: RSPAS, Australian National University, 1991), pp. 8-10.

<sup>24</sup> Joan Ogden, "How the Overseas Chinese are Financing Asia's Growth", *Global Finance*, 9 (November 1995), pp. 49-51.

Although China's effort to approach Southeast Asia was often seen as part of its strategy to regain Third World support, the warming of ties was no longer based on ideology (as it had been in the 1960s and most of the 1970s), but on mutual interest.<sup>25</sup> Most Southeast Asian governments did not adhere to China's newfound, post-Tiananmen fundamentalist Marxist rhetoric; nor did they entirely agree on China's anti-hegemonist stance against the United States. ASEAN continued to see the United States' presence in Asia as a key factor in ensuring regional stability, security and growth.<sup>26</sup> Instead, what most Southeast Asian leaders sought was the opportunity to bring China into their economic sphere (which had been difficult previously, considering Beijing's focus on North America and Japan) and gain an ally in the human rights debate between Asian values and western "universalism". Although these conditions were sufficient to allow for a stronger relationship between the two sides, they also meant that the nature of such a relationship was conditional and complex.

Despite mutual interests in developing an amicable and cooperative regional environment, the evolution of Sino-Southeast Asian relations were complicated by the fact that most governments in the region were still suspicious about China's strategic intentions. Even though most of these governments shunned from directly addressing their concerns regarding China's encroachment on their territory, historical animosities and other unresolved issues created a cloud of uncertainty and insecurity in the region. This concern was worsened by China's aggressive conduct in the South China Sea. The Chinese military's continued expansion and "creeping assertiveness"

<sup>25</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>26</sup> He Kai, *Interpreting China-Indonesia Relations: 'Good Neighbourliness', 'Mutual Trust' and 'All-Round Cooperation'* (Canberra Working Paper No. 349) (Canberra: Australian National University, 2000).

in this disputed area had set off alarms in ASEAN capitals on numerous occasions.<sup>27</sup> Although many Chinese diplomats noted the concerns expressed by their Southeast Asian counterparts, complexities within China's foreign policy making – especially taking into consideration the domestic leadership crisis following Tiananmen – posed difficulties not only on how China was going to engage the ASEAN countries, but also on how scholars can analyze and make sense of the issues, decisions and conditions at the time. It is with this in mind that a study of China's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia becomes necessary.

## 1.2. Principal Findings

This dissertation argues that the shifts in Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia in the post-Tiananmen period were largely a process of "adaptation" in which they were induced by changes to the external and leadership determinants of foreign policy-making, but not by changes to the internal determinant (the national interest in pushing for greater economic modernization). At a time when the Chinese were being cornered by western criticisms and sanctions following the outbreak of human rights violations in China during and after the Tiananmen Incident, it sought support from those with whom it had historically endured tumultuous relations, the ASEAN countries. In other words, Beijing shifted the focus of its foreign policy towards Southeast Asia as a way of securing alternative means of survival in the increasingly uncertain international climate, which was itself undergoing dramatic changes as a result of the thawing of the Cold War.

<sup>27</sup> Ian James Storey, "Creeping Assertiveness: China, the Philippines and the South China Sea Dispute", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 2:1 (April 1999), pp. 95-118.



The drive towards engaging Southeast Asia, particularly the ASEAN countries, was indeed intense, particularly in the first two years following the Tiananmen Incident. It was in general framed within China's conceptualization of a Third World policy that upheld values such as peaceful co-existence, anti-hegemonism, non-intervention, mutual economic benefit, and common ideas on human rights. Although the Third World had slowly lacked importance in China's foreign policy agenda since the launch of Deng's economic reforms in the late 1970s (during which China focused its effort to achieve Great Power status through engagement with the more prosperous West, particularly the United States), conditions after the Tiananmen Incident pointed at the need to once again rely on the developing countries for support, as the West had somewhat abandoned the Chinese in the international system. As such, China's approach towards the ASEAN countries was carried out with the intention of seeking these countries' support on some of the most pressing issues of the moment such as economic development, human rights, and multi-polar regionalism. In doing so, China sought in Southeast Asia an alternative means to sustain its existence in the international system throughout its most dire times. Yet once the storm had been weathered, Chinese foreign policy was again expected to resume the path on which it was travelling before the Tiananmen Incident derailed its progress.

The above argument is supported by the fact that by the end of 1992, relations between China and Southeast Asia were no longer as warm as the conditions immediately after the Tiananmen Incident. Indeed, Sino-Southeast Asian relations had always had their challenges and difficulties; yet, during the period between the Tiananmen Incident and Deng Xiaoping's southern tour in 1992, the two sides were

able to sweep these problems under the carpet in order to secure the means to enhance ties and cooperation. Matters changed, however, once China's relations with the United States improved and the path towards resuming pre-Tiananmen economic reforms and international openness appeared more visible. At that moment, the Chinese decided that the future of its economic modernization relied more on stronger ties with the West instead of with the Third World and the ASEAN countries. This did not necessarily mean that China became more antagonistic in its approach towards the region; it was just no longer willing to bend over backwards in order to appease its southern neighbours. As a result, the potential for past problems to re-surface became greater.

### 1.3. Contributions and Limitations

The lack of historical analyses of Beijing's post-Tiananmen "damage control" foreign policy can be attributed to the fact that presently China is no longer in the same conditions as it was then. Through persistence, Chinese officials have skilfully restored their country's foreign policy onto the tracks that they had been before the Tiananmen Incident occurred. Although it is still considered as a possible source of regional instability, China is no longer seen as the pariah state that it was during the phase immediately after Tiananmen.<sup>28</sup> It has re-established its Great Power status, increased its regional role by challenging the United States' influence in the Asia-Pacific, and become a major force in the international economy. As a result, it does not seem surprising that scholars and students of international relations often regard

<sup>28</sup> Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), pp. 1-3.



the period between the Tiananmen Incident in 1989 and China's return to international affairs a few years later simply as an insignificant blip in Chinese foreign policy history.

The explanation above then begs the question "Is the proposed research analysis pointless?" Absolutely not. As the continuation of this chapter will explain, the study of Chinese foreign policy towards the ASEAN countries between 1989 and 1995 will provide a significant contribution to the field of Chinese foreign policy analysis as a whole. A review of China's recent history of interactions with these countries will not only provide a fresh appraisal of Chinese foreign policy during times of crisis, but also bring out other issues associated with that difficult period such as China's Third World politics, human rights diplomacy, economic engagement with the region, and management of persisting conflicts and rivalries. Most importantly, such an analysis will assess the extent to which Sino-Southeast Asian relations were a factor in Beijing's quest for international legitimacy following the shattering of its image during the Tiananmen Incident.

### 1.3.1. Literature Review

An inquiry into Beijing's policy towards its southern neighbours in the period immediately following the Tiananmen Incident is essential largely because there has not been sufficient work written on the topic. Although there has lately been an abundant amount of analyses of Chinese foreign policy – especially considering the increasing importance of the Middle Kingdom in international politics nowadays – there has not been an adequate amount of concentrated studies on what kind of impact

did the Tiananmen Incident have on Chinese attitudes towards Southeast Asia, and particularly the ASEAN countries in the region. It is true that there were a number of studies carried out by well-known China watchers on this matter at the beginning of the 1990s (as exemplified by the academic works appraised in the following section). However, in general, there are limitations in the breadth and depth of these studies, especially considering the significance of such a phenomenon in China's diplomatic history.

During this author's initial efforts to research the topic, there were a number of writings by other China scholars that could be used to draw facts, thoughts, and ideas for the basis of this dissertation's discussion. Indeed, each one of these writings may not address directly some of the approaches put forward in this study; however, their inclusion in this dissertation provides the building blocks necessary to generate an analysis that goes beyond what other China scholars have ventured to study. The following section highlights some of these works, and elaborates on their weaknesses and strengths, particularly vis-à-vis the dissertation's focus on Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia in the post-Tiananmen period. In doing so, it provides a greater understanding of how the dissertation (through expanding on the issues and arguments put forward in analyses previously written by other China scholars) contributes to the growing body of literature on Chinese foreign policy analysis. Although the following literature review does not elaborate on the majority of sources used for this author's research project, it emphasizes on the academic writings that have not only stimulated his fascination towards the study of Chinese relations with Southeast Asia during that particular period, but also shaped his ideas and perspectives on the topic throughout the process of writing this dissertation.

Studies on Chinese foreign policy have often overlooked Chinese relations with the ASEAN countries in favour of analyzing the former's ties with the United States. Such a tendency can be observed when generally surveying works written by western and foreign-based China analysts since the end of the Second World War. To a certain extent, this is somewhat natural, when considering that the study of China has grown the strongest in the United States. Since President Richard Nixon's historical trip to Beijing in 1972 and the subsequent rapprochement between the two countries, American scholars have attempted to peer behind the Great Wall in their efforts to learn not only how the Chinese view the world, but also the manner in which these views transpire in their foreign policy.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, for the most part, these efforts have been geared towards shaping the American government's approach towards Beijing, particularly considering China's rise as a Great Power in the twentieth century and its significance in American foreign policy. As such, the growing breadth of literature on China in the western hemisphere since the 1960s has undoubtedly been shaped by American interests in studying China's conduct in the international arena.

In 1936, Edgar Snow became one of the first westerners to have personal access to China's leadership at the time. To a certain extent, Snow's work (particularly his interview with Mao, which was published in the much-read American publication, *Life*) generated an enthusiasm among Americans to learn more about China and its people.<sup>30</sup> Snow's efforts were also complemented by other western journalists' achievements, such as Neville Maxwell's interview with China's top foreign policy-

<sup>29</sup> The continuance of this Chapter will further elaborate the academic writings produced during this period.

<sup>30</sup> Edgar Snow, "A Conversation with Mao Tse-tung", *Life*, 70:16 (30 April 1971), p. 47-48.

maker at the time, Premier Zhou Enlai.<sup>31</sup> Most importantly, however, the growth of the academic field of Sinology in the post-Second World War era should be attributed to the works of many well-known scholars such as A. Doak Barnett, John K. Fairbank, John Garver, Kenneth Lieberthal, Michel Oksenberg, and Robert Oxnam who toiled in their efforts to deepen western analyses of China, and particularly its foreign policy.<sup>32</sup>

This is not to say that there was never an analysis of Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia at the time. In 1960, A. Doak Barnett provided an analysis of China's foreign policy towards Asia in one of his many writings on the topic.<sup>33</sup> However, as most China literature of that time, the analysis of Chinese foreign policy towards the region was conducted within the framework of understanding how the issue concerns primarily the United States government. As such, although the focus may have been on Sino-Asia relations, the study was primarily carried out with a view to extending American interests on the matter. For this dissertation's purposes, Barnett's analysis did not encompass some of the issues that would become important in the early 1990s, as the thinking behind it was very much influenced by the Cold War politics that surrounded the time during the writing of his book. Moreover, considering that

<sup>31</sup> Neville Maxwell, "Midnight Thoughts of Premier Chou (An Interview)", *The Sunday Times*, (5 December 1971), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> The body of literature produced by these authors is extensive. However, for reference purposes, the author has occasionally consulted the following sources: John K. Fairbank, *China: The People's Middle Kingdom and the U.S.A.* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1967); John K. Fairbank, *China Perceived: Images and Policies in Chinese-American Relations* (London: Deutsch, 1976); John K. Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); John Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968-1971* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982); Michel Oksenberg and Robert B. Oxnam, eds., *Dragon and Eagle* (New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers, 1978); A. Doak Barnett, "The Changing Pattern of U.S.-China Relations", *Current Scene*, X:4 (10 April 1972); A. Doak Barnett, *China Policy: Old Problems and New Challenges* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1977); A. Doak Barnett, *The Making of Foreign Policy in China: Structure and Process* (London: Tauris, 1985); and, Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Boston: Princeton University Press, 1988).

ASEAN was not founded until 1967, Barnett's writing did not address certain issues which comprise the crux of this dissertation's analysis. As a result, although writings such as Barnett's provide a historical approach on the topic, it does not necessarily extend the dissertation's argument on China's shifting foreign policy towards Southeast Asia (particularly the ASEAN countries) in the period after the Cold War.

Indeed, this author is not alone in pointing out the significance of the 1989 Tiananmen Incident in shaping Chinese foreign policy. A survey of articles written on China's post-Tiananmen "damage control" foreign policy demonstrates that scholars John Garver, Samuel Kim, Lee Deng-Ker, Steven Levine, Ian Wilson and Joseph Y.S. Cheng were also well aware of this issue and presented an array of views and analysis on how the Incident impacted on China's foreign relations.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, for this dissertation's purposes, the above scholars' accounts and arguments emphasised mainly how China dealt with the pertaining issues of that period vis-à-vis the United States. Indeed, some of the writings give glimpses of China's possibly changing attitude towards Southeast Asia, yet for the most part this was as a minor component of their writings' larger scope of analysis. When considering the immediate importance of studying Sino-American relations at the time, it is somewhat understandable that a proper analysis of China's key connection with its southern neighbours may have been unfairly overlooked. It is noticeable, from the contents of the above-mentioned works, that there was not an immediate importance to study at length the impact of China's crisis on its relations with Southeast Asia. However, as

<sup>33</sup> A. Doak Barnett, *Communist China and Asia: Challenge to American Policy* (New York: Harper Publishers, 1960).

<sup>34</sup> Garver, "Chinese Foreign Policy... *op. cit.*", p. 241-246; Kim, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-248, 280-282; Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-99; Steven I. Levine, "The Uncertain Future of Chinese Foreign Policy", *Current History*, 88:539 (September 1999), pp. 261-264, 295; Wilson, *op. cit.*; Cheng, *op. cit.*

this dissertation develops, a strong argument will be made regarding the need to correct such a neglecting perspective.

A further explanation to such minimal treatment of China-Southeast Asia post-Tiananmen ties can also be attributed to a broad notion that these ties were merely part of China's larger scheme to rebuild its relations with the West, especially the United States. As explained in Lee Deng-ker's piece, China's engagement with Southeast Asia was simply part of a strategy to persuade the West into easing its sanctions.<sup>35</sup> By establishing closer ties with its southern neighbours, China sought to create a web of security on which it could fall back in case its efforts to appease the West failed. The Chinese were unwilling to accept western "punishment" and chastising. Therefore, building an alternative set of friends among the Third World and the ASEAN countries was more of an attempt to create the impression among the United States and its western allies that China can survive without necessarily depending on their aid. The Chinese believed that the Americans had as much to lose in permanently cutting ties with China (even if these views were mostly espoused through the Chinese leaders' rhetoric in government-controlled publications such as *Beijing Review*).<sup>36</sup> Hence, the ASEAN countries were viewed by China mostly as a piece in a puzzle, whose bigger picture is a normalization of relations with the United States, Japan and Western Europe. And in viewing matters through such a perspective, it is not difficult to demote the importance of studying Sino-Southeast Asian relations to that of a second-degree analysis.

<sup>35</sup> Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-98.

<sup>36</sup> "Anti-China Clamour Cannot Intimidate Chinese People", *Beijing Review*, 32:29 (17-23 July 1989), pp. 7-8; "Beijing Continues to Open the Door", *Beijing Review*, 32:30 (24-30 July 1989), pp. 15-16;

One thing that needs to be kept in mind is that the main issue dominating China's post-Tiananmen foreign policy was the re-establishment of the Communist government's image as a "responsible" member of the international community considering that the achievement of this would allow for a resumption of its pre-Tiananmen modernization scheme and open economy.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable that in discussing the above issues in relation to Beijing's human rights diplomacy, Chinese interactions with Southeast Asia come into the picture. Indeed, some of the scholars mentioned in this section have given substantial attention to this point (albeit not to the desired level of comprehensiveness) when elaborating on the subject. However, to provide such a broad account of the situation at the time does not do justice to the complexity and noteworthiness of China-Southeast Asian post-Tiananmen relations as a whole. Moreover, it needs to be noted that although this dissertation will include discussions on human rights issues as part of its analysis, they are not its sole focus of analysis. Therefore, more than just noting Beijing's need to re-establish its image in the international arena through improving conditions at the human rights front, a more fruitful exercise needs to go into more detail on how the "damage control" foreign policy was exactly carried out throughout the gloomy days following Tiananmen.

Another important issue in efforts to understand China's policy towards Southeast Asia in the post-Tiananmen period is the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Chinese expansionist tendencies in the area have always been attributed to the government's attempt to play the "nationalism" card and rally the masses around the

<sup>37</sup> "China's Internal Affairs Brook No Interference", *Beijing Review*, 32:31 (31 July-6 August 1989), p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-99.

flag in order to elevate the leadership's image in the eyes of its own people.<sup>38</sup> To a certain extent, such an approach has some bearing towards this dissertation's analysis. However, as a whole, this dissertation will analyse the issue within the framework of understanding how China's attitude on resolving the dispute shifted throughout the beginning half of the 1990s as a result of changing relations with the United States and Southeast Asia. In general, analyses of the South China Sea have mostly been conducted through strategic studies' lenses as being associated with issues of power balances and China's ascendancy as a force (or a menace) within the region.<sup>39</sup> On other occasions, some scholars have also tried to link the South China Sea problem with issues of economics<sup>40</sup>, energy<sup>41</sup> and domestic bureaucratic politics<sup>42</sup>. However, there have been limited occasions when scholars explore the connection between China's South China Sea strategy and the external conditions that followed the Tiananmen Incident in 1989. Such an approach is important in the study of Sino-Southeast Asian diplomatic relations when considering that the changing international climate caused by the Incident (as well as the ending of the Cold War) impacted how China perceived the region vis-à-vis the South China Sea disputes, and vice versa.

<sup>38</sup> One study linking China's policies of territorial irredentism and the manipulation of nationalist tendencies and furor is Erica Strecker Downs and Philip C. Saunders, "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Islands", *International Security*, 23:3 (Winter 1998-99), pp. 114-146.

<sup>39</sup> For example: Ji Guoxing, "China Versus South China Sea Security", *Security Dialogue*, 29:1 (1998), pp. 101-112; Kim Shee Poon, "The South China Sea in China's Strategic Thinking", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 19:4 (March 1998), pp. 369-387; Edmond D. Smith Jr., "China's Aspiration in the Spratly Islands", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 16:3 (December 1994), pp. 274-294; David Winterford, "Chinese Naval Planning and Maritime Interests in the South China Sea: Implications for the U.S. and Regional Security Policies", *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 2:4 (Winter 1993), pp. 369-398; Zhan Jun, "China Goes to the Blue Waters: The Navy, Seapower Mentality and the South China Sea", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 17: (September 1994), pp. 180-208.

<sup>40</sup> For example: Michael Leifer, "Chinese Economic Reform and Security Policy: The South China Sea Connection", *Survival*, 37:2 (Summer 1995), pp. 44-59; Daniel Y. Coulter, "South China Sea Fisheries: Countdown to Calamity", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 17:4 (1996), pp. 371-389.

<sup>41</sup> For example: Mark J. Valencia, *China and the South China Sea Disputes* (Adelphi Paper 298) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Furthermore, one cannot leave out analyses and historical accounts of the dynamic interaction between China and Southeast Asian countries in general. Surveys and studies on this topic have undoubtedly been abundant, and they have carried out perspectives from China, the West, and Southeast Asia. Some have opted to focus on the historical ties between these neighbouring countries<sup>43</sup>, while others have been more concerned with economic issues<sup>44</sup> and security concerns<sup>45</sup>. And more specifically, some analysts have narrowed down their studies to more comprehensive readings of relations between China and certain key Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia<sup>46</sup>, the Philippines<sup>47</sup>, Thailand<sup>48</sup> and Vietnam<sup>49</sup>. Nevertheless, these studies have not been satisfactory – at least, in the sense of this particular author's research needs and point of view – because they have not been incorporated into a directed, comprehensive study of China's foreign policy in the post-Tiananmen period. As mentioned previously, other factors such as human rights, Communist Party-to-Party relations, Third World politics, and the "Taiwan problem" need to be included in order to build a more comprehensive examination of this significant issue.

<sup>43</sup> For example: John W. Garver, "China's Push Through the South China Sea: The Interaction of Bureaucratic and National Interests", *The China Quarterly*, 132 (December 1992), pp. 999-1028.

<sup>44</sup> For example: Chen, *op. cit.*, pp. 443-462.

<sup>45</sup> For example: John Wong, *The Political Economy of China's Changing Relations with Southeast Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1984); Leo Suryadinata, ed., *Southeast Asian Chinese and China: the Politico-Economic Dimension* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> For example: Joseph Y.S. Cheng, "China's ASEAN Policy in the 1990s: Pushing for Regional Multipolarity", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 21:2 (August 1999), pp. 176-204; Qingxin Ken Wang, "In Search of Stability and Multipolarity: China's Changing Foreign Policy towards Southeast Asia after the Cold War", *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 6:2 (December 1998), pp. 57-76.

<sup>47</sup> For example: He, *op. cit.*; Ian James Storey, "Indonesia's China Policy in the New Order and Beyond: Problems and Prospects", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 22:1 (April 2000), pp. 145-74.

<sup>48</sup> For example: Storey, "Creeping Assertiveness... *op. cit.*", pp. 95-118.

<sup>49</sup> For example: Michael Vatikiotis, "Suddenly, It's Cool to Be Chinese: Business and Culture draw Thailand and China closer", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 159:22-5 (Jan. 11, 1996); Bates Gill, "China Looks to Thailand: Exporting Arms, Exporting Influence", *Asian Survey*, 31:6 (June 1991), pp. 526-539.

<sup>50</sup> For example: Chang Pao-Min, "Vietnam and China: New Opportunities and New Challenges", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 19:136-51 (1997).

As mentioned previously, such an effort can be based in part on a furthering of past analyses of China's association with the Third World. Peter Van Ness argues that Beijing's reference to Third World politics mainly depended on convenience and need, instead of ideology or idealism.<sup>50</sup> An observation of China's Southeast Asian policy during the post-Tiananmen period reveals evidence of Van Ness' claim. With a deeper and more comprehensive analysis, further studies can be carried out on understanding the pattern of China's crisis decision-making behaviour in reference to its ties with the Third World, especially the countries in Southeast Asia. As a matter of fact, this dissertation embraces Van Ness' argument on China's pragmatic approach towards the Third World and uses it as a means to elaborate on the pattern of shifts in Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia after Tiananmen. This type of approach and perspective is what is lacking from most analyses of China's post-Tiananmen foreign policy. In addition to observing Beijing's contemporary views on the Third World, one also needs to take into consideration historical accounts as well as some of the theories upon which this relationship is founded. Only then will it be possible to generate a study that can be beneficial not only for analysing China's present relationship with Southeast Asia, but also for understanding its possible future.

Indeed, some studies, such as those conducted by Chen Jie, have touched upon the impact that the Tiananmen Incident had on Sino-Southeast Asian relations, especially with regards to the convergence of human rights issues and diplomatic solidarity.<sup>51</sup> According to Chen, China's ASEAN foreign policy after June 1989 was an attempt to establish a "tactical alliance" against the onslaught of western criticisms on human

<sup>50</sup> Van Ness, "China and... *op. cit.*", p. 156.



rights issues. Although there were mutual benefits enjoyed by Southeast Asian governments in allowing this relationship of convenience to evolve, Chen's study emphasizes the magnitude of this relationship's significance within Beijing's post-Tiananmen "damage control" foreign policy. Furthermore, as the argument in this dissertation will attempt to strengthen, Chen notes that as Chinese ties with the United States improved, Southeast Asia once again returned to the background of China's foreign affairs objective.<sup>52</sup> It is, therefore, with the intention of complementing studies such as Chen's that this PhD research and analysis is proposed.

For that matter, this dissertation is as a whole an attempt to extend Chen's efforts to raise the profile of Sino-Southeast Asian relations (with a particular emphasis on Chinese relations with ASEAN countries) in the field of Sinology. The two works Chen wrote on these relations' focus on human rights issues provided this author with the initial idea on analysing the evolution of relations between China and the ASEAN countries following the Tiananmen Incident. Chen's articles not only pointed out the shift that occurred immediately after the Incident, but also argued that the evolution of relations between China and the region experienced another turning point in 1992, as conditions between China and the United States improved. In a sense, Chen's argument provided the basis of this dissertation's enquiry into how China's relations with the ASEAN countries were impacted by changes in its external climate, especially by the state of Beijing's relations with Washington. In addition to this, this author also notes Chen's efforts to raise the issues of Taiwan<sup>53</sup>, Communist Party-to-

<sup>51</sup> Chen, "Tactical Alliance... *op. cit.*", pp. 8-11; Chen Jie, "Human Rights: ASEAN's New Importance to China", *The Pacific Review*, 6:3 (1993), pp. 225-237.

<sup>52</sup> Chen, "Tactical Alliance... *op. cit.*", p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> Chen Jie, "Taiwan Problem" in Peking's ASEAN Policy", *Issues and Studies*, 29:4 (April 1993), pp. 95-124.

Party relations<sup>54</sup>, and territorial disputes in the South China Sea<sup>55</sup> in his study of Sino-Southeast Asian relations. As such, this author's research agenda is to expand on what Chen's has successfully achieved in order to provide a comprehensive study of the trends and issues that predominated the development of such relations in the post-Tiananmen environment.

### 1.3.2. Assessing the Research Project's Value, Limits and Challenges

The significance of this dissertation's research agenda is demonstrated in that it is bound to open up other related issues concerning China's foreign policy behaviour. When the Chinese embarked on their path towards modernization and reform, they looked to the outside for assistance. In particular, they sought engagement with the United States as a means to sustain their efforts towards greater economic and political status in the international system. However, during a period of crisis such as that in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident – in which it was isolated by the West – China turned to the ASEAN countries and the rest of the Third World for various kinds of support including financial assistance, political solidarity and backing votes in international forums such as the United Nations. What does this tell us about China's treatment of its Third World policy? And in particular, how does this affect China's perception and long-term outlook on ties with the ASEAN countries?

<sup>54</sup> Chen Jie, "Shaking Off an Historical Burden: China's Relations with ASEAN-based Communist Insurgency in Deng's Era", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 27:4 (1994), pp. 443-462

<sup>55</sup> Chen Jie, "China's Spratly Policy: With Special Reference to the Philippines and Malaysia", *Asian Survey*, XXXIV:10 (October 1994), pp. 893-903.

The research provides an assessment of related issues such as the post-Tiananmen leadership crisis, the growth and political manipulation of neo-nationalist tendencies, the involvement of the military in foreign policy-making, the conceptualization of an Asian-based human rights diplomacy, the development of a strategy to settle territorial disputes in the South China Sea, the management of economic competition with the region, the treatment of overseas Chinese in the region (particularly as this issue concerns Communist Party-to-Party relations and the region's economy), and the "Taiwan" problem. Of course, the examination of these issues will all be tied up with the main theme of understanding how China attempted to make use of its relations with Southeast Asia as a means to regaining its status in the international community. As a whole, this dissertation's research plan offers a different perspective on the study of Chinese foreign policy and sheds some light on the complexity and tumultuous history of China's relations with its southern neighbours.

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, there are genuine limitations to sources of facts and analysis for a comprehensive study of the topic. As in most analyses of any country's foreign policymaking process and outcome – regardless of how democratic and transparent this particular country's government system is – there are always conditions and situations beyond the observation of academics, especially those conducting such analyses from the outside. Undoubtedly, one is bound to encounter numerous "black boxes" in any attempt to re-construct and study events in Beijing's relations with Southeast Asia after Tiananmen. This dissertation does not pretend to open every single one of these "black boxes", as this is almost logically impossible. However, what it promotes to do is a greater awareness of certain aspects of China's

foreign relations, which (despite its significance) have unfairly been relegated to analysis of a second-degree.

China's open-door policy firstly, and the end of the Cold War secondly, have allowed some of the barriers previously constricting the field of study to be slowly broken down. Although the opening of China, as preached by Deng Xiaoping, was theoretically limited to matters related to trade and the economy, it has significantly allowed greater access for efforts to understand not only public life behind the Great Wall, but also better understanding of policymaking processes in Beijing and the rest of China in general.<sup>56</sup> The post-Cold War period furthered these efforts by both shifting the focus of the study of international relations as a whole away from the United States-Soviet Union bi-polar politics to regional issues. As an aspiring regional power, China inescapably became the centre of attention in efforts to assess the Asia-Pacific in the post-Cold War's period of political, military and economic uncertainties. Moreover, the opening of China's economic front and the end of the Cold War also saw a need to study China beyond the framework of "the politics of ideological rivalry" (in other words, seeing the Middle Kingdom simply as the menacing "Red China"), which in turn has provided room for alternative perspectives among China-watchers. Recognition of the importance of Beijing's role in international affairs has thus caused a greater need, as well as interest, in studying both China's domestic and foreign policies.

<sup>56</sup> To observe the level of openness in western accounts of China's political, social and economic conditions (both at the academic and journalistic levels), one could easily consult books such as the following: Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn, *China Wakes: The Struggle for the Soul of a Rising Power* (New York: Times Books, 1994); Jane Hutcheon, *From Rice to Riches: A Personal Journey Through a Changing China* (Sydney: Macmillan Press, 2003).

In general, analyzing foreign policy is indeed a complex effort. One theory after another has been formulated by leading scholars such as Charles Hermann<sup>57</sup> and James Rosenau<sup>58</sup> to help make efforts to understand the development of foreign policy less complicated. However, without depreciating the value of these scholars' works, such theories have only been able to provide a very general framework for foreign policy analysis. Moreover, the fact that such theories are based on policymaking in the West renders problems for its application to studying such processes within countries whose culture, history and government structure are not the same as that of the western people.<sup>59</sup> The need for a theoretical foundation for the purpose of researching and analyzing China's foreign policy is obvious, yet one cannot simply disregard the potential tendencies towards *orientalism*<sup>60</sup> – as warned by Edward Said – in such efforts.

In general, the "black boxes" in China's foreign policymaking process mainly originate from the lack of transparency within the works of the Communist government in Beijing. As in their defence policy, China's diplomacy is so shrouded with secrecy and internal intricacies that a comprehensive study of it is indeed challenging. For example, despite the growing trend of confidence building efforts among countries in the Asia-Pacific, it took a long while before the Chinese published

<sup>57</sup> Charles F. Hermann, Charles W. Kegley, and Jams N. Rosenau, eds., *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

<sup>58</sup> James N. Rosenau, ed., *Comparing Foreign Policies: Theories, Findings, and Methods* (New York: Sage Publications, 1974); James N. Rosenau and Mary Durfee, *Thinking Theory Thoroughly: Coherent Approaches to an Incoherent World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000).

<sup>59</sup> Further discussion on this subject will be carried out in Chapter Two of the dissertation.

<sup>60</sup> A well known theory proposed by cultural studies/linguistics scholar, Edward Said, the theory of "orientalism" – in a nutshell – refers to the creation of the image of "the other" without taking into account pre-conceived views and ideas of such "otherness". As a result, instead of searching for true conditions on the research field, what is learned is a form of false otherness, as the analysis merely reinforces the pre-conceived views that had already existed before. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

its first ever *Defence White Paper* in 1998.<sup>61</sup> To many leaders in Beijing – especially those who prefer to look "in" instead of "out" in their view of achieving national security and furthering national interest – any form of transparency is seen as a sign of weakness. As noted by some China watchers, there is a tendency to sustain the image of the Great Wall around China so as to avoid the recognition that what lies behind is actually an empty fortress.<sup>62</sup> And although the predominance of such thinking has lately undergone significant changes, the shroud of secrecy was particularly very thick during the period of history that this dissertation will be concentrating on: that immediately following the Tiananmen Incident.

As in most autocratic governments, foreign policy in China has been characterized by the presence of a dominating leader, who not only guides the direction of policymaking processes, but also has the final say on most decisions. Until his death, the Great Helmsman, Mao Zedong, was the person who wielded this power. Although he had a great foreign policy and diplomatic strategist at his side in Premier Zhou Enlai, Mao viewed the world generally from his own perspective; this was reflected in his decisions regarding China's relations with the rest of the world.<sup>63</sup> When Mao passed away, Deng Xiaoping ultimately took the relay baton and continued the autocratic trend that had been set by his predecessor. Although unlike Mao, Deng did not rule over China without any competition from other CCP leaders. This was most apparent at the beginning of his rule as well as towards his demise

<sup>61</sup> To examine a copy of China's Defense White Paper and to recognize the availability of such a document to the public these days, a more recent edition of the White Paper is available online at the following internet address: [www.chinadaily.com.cn/highlights/paper/ndefence.html](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/highlights/paper/ndefence.html).

<sup>62</sup> Andrew J. Nathan and Robert S. Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> In his writing, Harrison Salisbury noted that China's decision to intervene in Korea in 1950 had resulted from Mao's individual decision. Although the military leaders at the time was not in favour of the move, Mao's personally-signed telegraph to Stalin was the document with which China announced



around the Tiananmen period. Nowadays, despite the current leadership's need to compromise with military Generals and provincial leaders, China's foreign policy continues to be heavily influenced by decisions made at the individual level among Chinese leaders. In areas such as foreign policy, national security and ideology, policymaking remains in the hands of the top elite within the bureaucracy, without any main constraint from lower levels of the government structure.<sup>64</sup>

The intricacies surrounding Chinese foreign policy formulation adds another dimension to the difficulty of analyses in this field. Since Mao's period, there has been a growing pluralism in policymaking within the Chinese central government. There is greater involvement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and related think tanks in the form of policy recommendations. The former has also been given the mandate to implement policies and coordinate routine matters.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the military leadership continues to hold a considerable amount of influence in the formulation of foreign and defence policies.<sup>66</sup> Regardless, major decisions continue to be the prerogative of the top leader in the Party, or at times, the Standing Committee of the Politburo, which in itself is not a coherent body (especially considering that each member of the Committee holds some form of institutional influence and power of his own).<sup>67</sup> Faced with this pluralist nature of foreign policymaking, any effort to analyze the issue will undoubtedly be challenging. It will not only have to consider the blurring division of labour between the different levels

*the sending of "a volunteer army" to aid the North Koreans.* Harrison E. Salisbury, *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), p. 111.

<sup>64</sup> Zhao Suisheng, "The Structure of Authority and Decision-making: A Theoretical Framework", in Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao, eds., *Decision-making in Deng's China: Perspectives from Insiders* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), p. 236.

<sup>65</sup> George Yang, "Mechanisms of Foreign Policy-making and Implementation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs", in Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao, eds., *Decision-making in Deng's China: Perspectives from Insiders* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 91-100.

<sup>66</sup> Garver, "China's Push... *op.cit.*", p. 1026.

of the bureaucratic structure, but also take into account the personality/ideological clashes horizontally and vertically within this structure.

This dissertation is based upon analysis of sources that are derived from various origins, and most importantly, are applicable to both answering the question in hand (the dissertation's thesis) as well as addressing the analytical/methodological issues outlined above. The bulk of the analysis relies upon information from secondary sources, as they are found within western academia. This includes consultation on ideas and theories of foreign policy analysis, which is expected to create a sound framework for the investigation. Of course, such efforts are combined with sensitivity towards conditions specifically related to China's policymaking environment. In part, this is approached through resorting to observations of Beijing's behaviour in the international arena from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Much of this can be found among works by noted scholars in the West, particularly the United States, as well as the growing number of China specialists in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>68</sup> Considering the amount of effort and funding dedicated to the study of China in recent years (coupled with increased opportunities to study the Chinese, as its society opens more to the West), the value of western academic secondary sources should not be belittled.

<sup>67</sup> Zhao, "The Structure of Authority... *op.cit.*", pp. 233-245.

<sup>68</sup> Please consult the list of references to view the extensive amount of sources used in this dissertation. In particular, however, scholars such as Jian Sanqiang, Samuel Kim, Thomas Robinson, David Shambaugh, and Zhao Quansheng have attempted to use western-based theories to analyze conditions that are particular to China. Jian Sanqiang, *Foreign Policy Restructuring as Adaptive Behaviour: China's Independent Foreign Policy, 1982-1989* (Boston: University Press of America, 1996); Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Zhao Quansheng, *Interpreting Chinese Foreign Policy: The Micro-Macro Linkage Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Furthermore, to ensure a more accurate view of the issue from Beijing's point of view, the dissertation also takes into consideration sources originating from the Mainland. Although the sources consulted are works that have already been translated into English, this should not in any way lessen their value as tools of analysis. Leaders' speeches and government statements on foreign policy, which are usually available in journals such as *Beijing Review*, not only provide an outlook of China's behaviour towards the world, but also allows for an analysis of the workings of the central government in establishing a coherent and united foreign policy. It should be noted that a number of studies on Chinese foreign policy have been based on such a reading of Chinese media and journalistic sources.<sup>69</sup> The usefulness of Chinese media sources is significant especially when considering that it has often been exploited by the central government as its means of announcing policies, whether they are for domestic or foreign purposes. Although this effort may not open each and every one of the many "black boxes" that litter this particular field of study, it certainly allows a mechanism for the uncovering of a number of them.

In addition to media sources, Chinese perspectives can also be found among works of academic think tanks on the Mainland. The growth of such groups has been prosperous in recent years, especially since the ascension to power of Jiang Zemin.<sup>70</sup> Consultation with the works of academic think tanks (especially those in Beijing) allows for a different perspective towards the formulation of policy, considering that most of these groups are heavily funded by the central government. Even if the

<sup>69</sup> For example: Chen, "Shaking Off... *op.cit.*", pp. 443-462; Chen Xiangming, "Taiwan Investments in China and Southeast Asia", *Asian Survey*, XXXVI:5 (May 1996), pp. 447-467.

<sup>70</sup> For a more in-depth study of this trend, consult the following: Bonnie S. Glaser and Phillip C. Saunders, "Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes: Evolving Roles and Increasing Influence", *The China Quarterly*, 171 (September 2002), pp. 597-616; David Shambaugh, "China's

impact of these think tanks' recommendations towards government policy is not as influential as can be found in the West, their existence allows for a means to greater interaction between Chinese and foreign scholars within the fields of international politics, security and economy. Some think tanks, such as the Centre for International Strategic Studies (CIIS), the Institute of Asia-Pacific, and the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) even publish journals in English<sup>71</sup> that contain observations and analyses of China's role in international relations as well as some policy suggestions for the CCP leadership. Giving attention to these works is crucial to efforts at understanding China's view of the world since they are written by people who are in closer contact with the actual conditions that surround the policymaking process in Beijing.

Works by scholars on the Mainland are also increasingly being complemented by those carried out by the growing number of Chinese academics abroad. Although most of these scholars' higher education has been based in the West, their familiarity with conditions "at home" as well as continued links with scholars there can prove to be a valuable asset to the field of study. In many cases, such scholars are in an excellent position to apply theoretical frameworks based on studies in the West towards analyses of China's foreign policy. For example, works by Yuan Jing-dong (in the United States) and Chen Jie (in Australia) are examples of this growing body of literature by more established Chinese scholars abroad.<sup>72</sup> Consultation with these

International Think Tanks: Evolving Structure and Process", *The China Quarterly*, *The China Quarterly*, 171 (September 2002), pp. 576-596.

<sup>71</sup> CIIS publishes *International Strategic Studies*, which is available in many western academic institutions' libraries. While the Institute of Asia-Pacific and CICIR publishes a series of working papers and *Contemporary International Relations*, respectively, which are available in some western libraries. This author was able to obtain such materials during his field research to Beijing in October 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Please consult list of references to view works by these authors used in this dissertation.

works increases the breadth of analyses for the basis of this dissertation, as they – in comparison to those produced by scholars based on the Mainland – provide possibly a more objective insight into the study of the domestic roots of Chinese foreign policy.

A comprehensive analysis of China's foreign policy and intentions towards Southeast Asia in the wake of the Tiananmen Incident is a challenging task to accomplish. The matter becomes more complicated when one attempts to understand the thinking that lies behind Beijing's actions. Often, it is perceived that only those close to the *zhongnanhai*<sup>73</sup> are able to provide an accurate understanding of Chinese foreign policymaking process. Nevertheless, to settle with this argument is somewhat unsatisfactory, as there are sufficient reasons and academic sources to at least make a concerted effort at learning about China's foreign policy and some of the key issues upon which it is founded. Through a close observation and study of the sources available, this dissertation provides a new addition to the field's body of literature as well as further insights into understanding the foreign relations behaviour of this influential regional power.

The dissertation's analysis may at first appear to be a simple historical reading of the phase between 1989 and 1995. However, an appraisal of this particular period cannot simply be shelved on the history section of academic literature because its findings may prove essential in providing a glimpse of China's future interaction with the region. The international political climate after the Tiananmen Incident paved the way for improved relations between China and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the United States' lack of assistance to the region during the recent Asian financial crisis

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<sup>73</sup> *The compound in Beijing where most of the top Chinese leaders live.*

and China's sympathetic, more helpful posture have raised the latter's prominence within the foreign policy agenda of many governments in the region. However, one can observe that the intensity of China's courting of Southeast Asia today is not as it used to be during the period after the Tiananmen Incident. This is an issue that deserves greater analysis. Whenever analyzing current trends in Sino-Southeast Asian relations, scholars often solely focus (too conveniently) on issues that are presently occurring. A study of events in the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident will indeed provide a stronger foundation and a more comprehensive look at recent analyses. It is with this view in mind that this dissertation's research agenda is framed and put forward.

#### 1.4. Thesis Structure

Chapter Two of this dissertation concentrates on exploring questions related to international relations theory and foreign policy analysis methodology. The discussion draws its sources mainly from western ideas and theories on foreign policy analysis. However, it remains sensitive to China's particular conditions through incorporating views and suggestions put forward by China specialists. Indeed, the dissertation's framework of analysis is based considerably on the "micro-macro link approach" as introduced by scholars such as James Rosenau, and adopted to Chinese conditions by Samuel S. Kim and Zhao Quansheng.<sup>74</sup> In doing so, it emphasizes the need to understand the three main determinants of foreign policy-making – internal, external, and leadership – as well as the manner in which these determinants interact with one another. At the same time, the Chapter also stresses the need for an

analytical structure that reflects on the political realist tendencies of most Chinese leaders. This entails a focus on observing foreign policy-making factors that are of an external nature and the manner in which Chinese leaders perceive such factors. Chinese conduct abroad, particularly during the period around the Tiananmen incident, was the result of Beijing's response to external stimuli, which in turn, centred on Chinese leaders' perception of the international system and China's place in it. And based on this belief, Chapter Two proposes a *Modified* Micro-Macro Linkage Approach to identify whether the changes in China's foreign policy during that period were motivated by attempts at policy "re-structuring" (permanent) or "adaptation" (temporary).

Chapter Three provides a historical account of China's relations with Southeast Asia by tracing back these relations to the Imperial period of the Middle Kingdom, as this author recognizes that efforts to understand modern China's interaction with the ASEAN countries requires first an awareness of why historically the relationship took the form it did. Such a discussion provides a glimpse of the origins of China's worldview, and in doing so, assesses the importance (or lack thereof) of Southeast Asia in the development of Chinese foreign relations as a whole. The Chapter then looks at how these relations took form during Mao Zedong's rule, in which the Great Helmsman attempted to re-establish the tradition of Chinese hegemony in the region through an adaptation of China's worldview and sense of leadership within contemporary, modern surroundings. In doing so, The Chapter reveals the evolving pattern of interactions between China and Southeast Asia, in which Chinese leaders viewed such interactions mostly as a means to shape policies towards the world's

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<sup>74</sup> The process in which these authors contribute to the development of this dissertation's framework of

major states. In a sense, Southeast Asia played a lesser role in Beijing's foreign policy calculations, and the intensity level of their relations was determined generally by how they could improve China's position vis-à-vis the Great Powers. All in all, an account of the origins of Sino-Southeast Asian relations provides an introduction to the basic thinking underlying many of the decisions by Chinese leaders in formulating policies towards their southern neighbours.

Once this has been established, Chapter Four then explores the shifts in international politics throughout the rise of Deng Xiaoping as China's most prominent leader in the late 1970s and 1980s. A discussion of this not only allows for a greater understanding of Beijing's changing attitude towards the ASEAN countries, but also provides an insight into how leaders in the region altered their views towards the growing potential of China in international politics. As ties with the United States turned from one that were governed by enmity to one of amity, China saw the possibility of building cooperation with Southeast Asia as a means to furthering its domestic calls for economic development and modernization. Yet at the same time, there continued to be an array of issues and challenges preventing interactions from becoming even warmer. Considering the relationship's long history – especially when remembering the antagonistic stances predominant during certain periods of this history – the road towards greater multi-dimensional cooperation remained littered with numerous hurdles originating from a sense of mutual distrust and lack of confidence. As these countries (including China) struggled to identify and consolidate their nationhood in the post-World War Two world, issues of sovereignty, economic rivalry, overseas Chinese, as well as the Major Powers' interference and dominance posed problems

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analysis will be elaborated in Chapter Two.

that could potentially unravel the slowly growing web of ties between China and Southeast Asia.

As the main crux of this dissertation's analysis, Chapter Five delves further into the development of relations between China and Southeast Asia – particularly the ASEAN countries – in the period after the Tiananmen Incident. When the Chinese were feeling cornered by the West's pointing fingers, they were comforted by the knowledge that they had the continued support of their non-intervening southern neighbours as a safety net on which to fall back. And considering that the ASEAN countries possessed a growing economic potential and were well-known as leaders of the Third World, improved relations with these countries was seen as an alternative means towards maintaining the goals of developing China's economy and repairing its tarnished image abroad. Realizing the severity of international repercussions caused by its violent oppression of demonstrators, China was simply not in the position to sit back and wait for the ASEAN countries to come to them; instead, it launched a "blitz" diplomacy aimed at securing the support of these countries. Nevertheless, China's efforts were never problem-free, as there were numerous challenges and difficulties plaguing the development of relations. As a result, these unfavourable conditions were promptly dealt with – particularly from the Chinese point of view – in order to facilitate better relations between the two sides. In elaborating on these issues, the Chapter concludes that China's shifting foreign policy towards Southeast Asia during this period was marked by a process of adaptation, in which such shifts were determined mainly by changes in the country's external conditions as well as uncertainties related to its leadership, but not by any change whatsoever within its internal need for economic progress and openness towards the rest of the world.

While Chapter Five describes the growing relations between China and the ASEAN countries in the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, Chapter Six describes how such trends underwent another shift since 1992 following China's decision to resume a policy of economic reforms and openness to the world akin to that carried out prior to the Incident. Although Beijing still needed the latter to ensure the creation of a multi-polar post-Cold War balance of power as well as a safety mechanism in case similar unfavourable conditions re-appeared again in the future, a return to pre-Tiananmen reform and open-door policies meant that China's survival in international affairs would no longer center on its ties with these countries. Despite wanting to maintain amicable and cooperative relations with the region, Beijing was pursuing a foreign policy platform that attributed less importance on giving concessions to the capitals in the region as a means to secure ties and cooperation. Thus, the full return of China to the international community pointed at the possibility of a resurfacing of the problems and challenges that had plagued the Sino-Southeast Asian relations in the past. The fact that the Chapter ends its discussion by addressing issues and events in 1995 (particularly regarding aggressive Chinese maneuvers in disputed territories in the South China Sea) demonstrates just how much relations between China and the ASEAN countries had changed between 1989 and 1995. These trends are highlighted in the Chapter through a discussion of the factors that underwent changes as well as those that remained constant.

The concluding Chapter Seven ties the issues discussed in this dissertation together through highlighting its main theme: Beijing's pursuit of a cooperative policy towards the ASEAN countries as a means of re-establishing its image abroad following the

internal and external crises caused by the Tiananmen Incident. In studying events during this period, one of the concerns governing Beijing's foreign relations was the need to develop a "damage control" human rights policy, which was geared towards fighting chastising and alienation from the West. However, this approach needs to be studied in conjunction with other issues that influenced the nature of China's relations with its southern neighbours. Thus, the Chapter concludes that Beijing's effort to address issues pertaining to its relations with Southeast Asia – particularly the ASEAN countries – was simply the creation of an alternative path whose goal is the resumption of economic reforms and international openness that had been in place since the late 1970s.

This dissertation does not necessarily cover every issue that surrounded China's foreign policy after Tiananmen. It focuses on an aspect that is significant, yet often overlooked: China's relations with Southeast Asia (particularly the ASEAN countries) within the context of Beijing's effort to rebuild its shattered image abroad and to resume its push towards achieving Great Power status in international affairs. This dissertation provides a greater understanding of the manner in which decision-making within China's foreign policy strategy vis-à-vis the West, the Third World, and the ASEAN countries was carried out during the period of calamity following the Tiananmen Incident. As well, it discusses how such decisions not only took into consideration, but also were heavily affected by the greater issues of state legitimacy in the eyes of the international community.

## Chapter Two:

# **Establishing a Theoretical Framework for the Study**

## 2.1. Introduction

Analyses of foreign policy constitute some of the most dynamic research in the field of international relations. The limited shelf life of most books, journal articles, and unpublished manuscripts written on countries' foreign policies is somewhat a testament to this. As socio-politico-economic conditions undergo shifts – both in the domestic and external spheres -- some are often perceived as factors that could threaten state survival. In order to stay afloat and wait for the storm to pass, states need to create changes in their policy direction – be they subtle or drastic ones. When such situations happen, greater effort has to be attributed to understand the reasoning behind these changes. Because foreign policies are constantly changing, the methods and means of studying them – if the research is to remain valuable – will also have to undergo continuous revisions and re-inventions.



Numerous works have been written on foreign policy analysis, yet much has been discussed about the field of study's supposed theoretical vagueness.<sup>1</sup> To a certain extent, criticisms often draw from many researchers' focus – and at times, reliance – on circumstantial data, events, and national attributes. In many cases, there is a lack of attention to the processes of foreign policy making; instead, researchers are usually satisfied with explaining occurring events, without necessarily elaborating more on the conditions underlying these events or their overall implications in a more in-depth fashion.<sup>2</sup> At times, the foreign policy making process is too easily viewed as an untouchable "black box", and efforts to examine it are considered too difficult to accomplish, as there are too many factors that need to be considered, and often evidence of theoretical accuracy cannot be found with certainty. Nevertheless, admitting defeat would be somewhat premature, as foreign policy analyst, Charles Kegley, reminds us that in this field of study the "absence of evidence is not [necessarily] evidence of absence".<sup>3</sup>

The study of a state's foreign policy goals, grand strategy, and maneuvers is indeed challenging. Foreign policy analysis guru, James Rosenau, in a book co-written with Mary Durfee, could not have said it better when he commented as follows:

...We dare to think we can make sense of this complex, swift-moving world, with its welter of details, intricate relationships, mushrooming conflicts, and moments of cooperation! How nervy! How utterly absurd! What sheer craziness!<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quansheng Zhao, *Interpreting Chinese Foreign Policy: The Micro-Macro Linkage Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Charles W. Kegley, Jr., "Decision Regimes and the Comparative Study of Foreign Policy", in Charles F. Hermann, Charles W. Kegley, Jr., and James N. Rosenau, eds., *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 248

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> James N. Rosenau and Mary Durfee, *Thinking Theory Thoroughly: Coherent Approaches to An Incoherent World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed (Boulder Westview Press 2000), p.1.

It requires a magnitude of will to probe into a state's conduct abroad, as the dynamics and controls manipulating and surrounding every policy direction are never constant. At different times, governments are continuously confronted with various sets of external challenges, which in turn require them to formulate directional transformations and adjustments in order to ensure the state's continued survival. And no matter how broad the above assumption may be, it applies to all countries in the world. If foreign policy analysis is to produce anything significant for academia and the general public, its development is bound to be a complicated and lengthy process.

When considering the above argument, one may shudder at the thought of having to analyze China's foreign policy. If efforts to probe into policy machinations of any country are difficult in general, then doing so in a country with a closed system of government such as the People's Republic of China is therefore akin to embarking on a journey into the "realm of the improbable".<sup>5</sup> The shroud of secrecy that typically veils the decision making process in Beijing is a major impediment to any efforts to carefully analyze Chinese policies. The lack of transparency does not allow the free movement of information on state decision-making processes, and in turn, this situation often leaves many researchers – especially westerners – out in the dark, scavenging for answers, and having to rely on intuition to make intelligent guesses.

Indeed, the condition of the field of study as painted here may be an extreme one.

The growing literature in Chinese politics demonstrates that the field remains a fertile

ground for new and innovative analyses. Through careful theorizing and years of observing patterns and regularities in China's internal and external conditions, one may reach a certain familiarity and knowledge of the ways in which policies are developed and carried. Even though questions regarding China's foreign policy remain abounding, their answers are not always impossible to come by. Nevertheless, establishing credibility in efforts to answer these questions should first begin with the acceptance that the proposed answers are ever-evolving and can never be completely conclusive.

Despite its forecasted challenges and difficulties, understanding China's foreign policy remains a plausible undertaking if first conducted through an elaborate discussion of its theoretical framework of analysis. Although an overemphasis on theory can be tiring and not always result in many fruits, an analysis based on sound theoretical foundations is likely to provide a better medium for explaining events and situations, which at first glance, may seem mere coincidences. By expanding on this and slowly developing a solid base of analysis, an exclusive look at China's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia in the post-Tiananmen period will allow for a greater insight into the country's foreign policy behavior and adaptability.

By first outlining and discussing some of the challenges faced in trying to create a theoretical framework, this Chapter will emphasize the need for an analytical structure that reflects on the political realist tendencies of most Chinese leaders. This entails a focus on observing foreign policy-making factors that are of an external nature and

<sup>5</sup> James N. Rosenau, "China in a Bifurcated World: Competing Theoretical Perspectives", in Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford:

the manner in which Chinese leaders perceive such factors. Chinese conduct abroad, particularly during the period around the Tiananmen incident, was the result of Beijing's response to external stimuli, which in turn, centered on Chinese leaders' perception of the international system and China's place in it. Based on this belief, Chapter Two proposes a *Modified Micro-Macro Linkage Approach* to identify whether the changes in China's foreign policy during that period were motivated by attempts at policy "re-structuring" (permanent) or "adaptation" (temporary).

## 2.2. Some Initial Considerations

Observing a country's behaviour within a particular time period – through a study of factors present during that period – contributes to a greater understanding of that country's decision making process as a whole – at least for that chosen time period. This can be initialized by assuming an optimistic attitude based on the belief that any country's foreign policy is "necessarily calculated and goal-oriented"<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, whether its actions are deemed to be hasty or considered, vague or pointed, short term or long range, in the end they are all directed towards some conception of what should and should not happen with respect to the country's external conditions. Rosenau points out that these actions need to be perceived as efforts by a state to initially cope with pressing and unfavourable conditions by either altering or preserving them.<sup>7</sup> Although the changes in policy may eventually result in certain adaptations regarding the state's place in the international system, its immediate intentions are not always

Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 526.

<sup>6</sup> James N. Rosenau, "Comparing Foreign Policies: Why, What, How", in James N. Rosenau, ed., *Comparing Foreign Policies: Theories, Findings, and Methods* (New York: Sage Publications, 1974), p. 6.



framed as so. The primary goal of foreign policy – and its subsequent ability to adapt through directional changes – is to ensure a capacity for the state to survive within a potentially hostile international environment.

Indeed, a number of common rules need to be laid out before one embarks upon the task of interpreting and understanding any country's foreign policy. Realizing the complexities involved in efforts towards achieving such a goal (let alone studying comprehensively China's foreign policy), a key step towards building a solid argument thus starts with an appreciation of such complexities and an obligation to remain in awe of them for the entire length of the research project. It is necessary to bear in mind that conclusions drawn from foreign policy analyses are mostly tentative, and are therefore open to alterations and improvements.

Moreover, as researchers, we need to recognize the tendency to frame our investigations along certain elements of bias. Facts do not speak for themselves; we make them speak by purposefully according them importance and meaning.<sup>8</sup> Conclusions are derived from the process of identifying and separating the facts that we consider to be significant from those that are not. As a result, an analysis of China's foreign policy – or any assessment within the field of social science, for that matter – would only go as far as the researchers' identification of a paradigmatic framework and their sensitivity towards recognizing such shortcomings.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Rosenau and Durfee, *op.cit.*, p.4.

A theoretical framework can be outlined to provide a mechanism towards identifying resources and processes that are deemed relevant, while dismissing others as trivial. In essence, a theoretical framework that is designed specifically for a particular analysis provides the basis for "teas[ing] meaningful patterns out of the endless details and inordinate complexities" sustaining international politics.<sup>9</sup> There is a need to be less worried with anomalous situations, and focus more on patterns reflecting fundamental tendencies. Although facts and details are important building blocks for developing a solid argument, asking broader, more thematic questions leads to more interesting and probing investigations into a country's foreign policy.

Robert Cox claims that "theory is always *for* someone and *for* a purpose".<sup>10</sup> While there is a tendency among researchers to value the objectivity of theory, much applause should be given to those who are more willing to admit that their theory is based on a particular view of the world. And because views derive from a position in social and political time and space, no theories are therefore free from the subjective underpinnings of the researcher's purpose for analyzing certain issues or phenomenon. Researchers choose a set of theories as a basis for their framework of analysis; it allows them the means necessary to prove a hypothesis. Considering this, their choices therefore accommodate the conditions and situations surrounding the issue that they are trying to raise, discuss and analyze. The subjectivity of a researcher in his/her analysis cannot be avoided; the least that can be done to maintain

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory" in Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 87.

the credibility of the research project is to recognize the extent to which this condition may be detrimental to its overall value.

With regards to this dissertation's object of analysis, it is crucial to identify the reasoning behind a strong Realist tone to this author's analytical approach. This emphasizes the differentiation between external and internal inputs to foreign policy-making, and once having done so, stresses the importance of putting forward observations of the former over those of the latter. Such an approach to studying China's relations with Southeast Asia appears as the one that allows for a better understanding of events at the time. Beijing's foreign policy maneuvers centered on its leadership's view and interaction with the country's external environment. Although internal conditions may have played some role in providing a post-conduct justification for a certain policy choice, they were not necessarily the factors underlying the choice in the first place. One may be moved to study these events using a framework based on ideas beyond the chosen paradigm, but remaining within it may actually guide one's research through the complexities with more ease.

As such, this dissertation's approach can be identified in Cox's term as a "problem-solving" one.<sup>11</sup> It does not question heavily the division between external and internal inputs on foreign policy-making, and stresses the importance of observing patterns in such processes. However, despite the lacunae regarding the structure of China's foreign policy-making bureaucracy, it views conditions after the Tiananmen Incident through limiting the parameters of analysis to a certain number of variables; this allows for a closer examination of the issue. This author realizes the limitations of

such an approach and has commented that the chosen framework of analysis is not objective, but instead subject to his goal of proving and gauging China's foreign policy's adapting capabilities between 1989 and 1995. Thus it is with these notions in mind that this chapter elaborates the study's theoretical framework.

### 2.3. Finding an Approach to Studying Chinese Foreign Policy

Once some basic notions have been established, the next task would be to identify ideas that can be brought in to construct a framework of analysis. Indeed, the need for a lengthy discussion on theory may be contested, especially by some Sinologists, who claim to observe events "as it is".<sup>12</sup> Such an argument may be valid to a certain extent. Nevertheless, in spite of these researchers' self-professed "feel" for China, the Chinese people, and everything else concerning the Middle Kingdom, it does not free them from littering their intellectual practices with un-based convictions and assumptions. In asserting propositions, gauging behaviours, examining institutions, recognizing patterns, and putting forward conclusions, their efforts' accuracy may be overlooked. How unfortunate would this become if it were to occur, as such carelessness could, in the end, prove detrimental to the value of their analysis as a whole. Therefore, regardless of criticisms, any effort to construct a framework of analysis through theorizing is beneficial, as it demonstrates a definite first step towards presenting our thoughts and analysis in a systematic fashion. The development of a theoretical framework allows for a means to fill in any gaps left out

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>12</sup> Rosenau, "China in a... *op.cit.*", p. 525.

in our empirical observations; more importantly, however, it provides us with a guide to carry out such observations.

Numerous methods have been proposed for the study of Chinese foreign policy. A holist approach could be pursued simply through studying how foreign policy is shaped by the interests and structures of the international system. This approach views the country as a single unit, and argues that an inquiry into China's foreign conduct can be conducted through recognizing its interests as *one* and observing the external factors that influence, promote, and/or restrain the pursuit of such interests. Researchers adhering to this perspective argue that the factors influencing China's domestic politics play a minimal role in the formulation of its foreign policy.<sup>13</sup> As such, their approach, therefore, emphasizes the state-centric manner in which China interacts with the structures and norms of the international system.

Alternatively, a focus on China can be carried out through analyzing the role played by culture, history, institutions, economy and other internal elements in shaping its conduct abroad. In other words, Chinese foreign policy can be explained by analyzing the behaviour of its parts through conducting years of direct field studies and learning the intricacies involved between the people, the state, and their ways in dealing with issues that surface. To focus strictly on the manner in which external factors shape foreign policy only allows for a limited understanding of the decision-making process as a whole, as Chinese political analyst, David Bachman, argues that

<sup>13</sup> Zhao, *Interpreting... op.cit.*, p. 12.

"foreign policy-making [...] increasingly resemble domestic policy formulation".<sup>14</sup>

Thus, emphasizing China's uniqueness, such an approach argues that an analysis of Chinese foreign policy must begin with a thorough understanding of elements within its domestic politics.

Each of the two approaches described above is often criticized as being simplistic when performed on its own. On the one hand, an emphasis on the external factors influencing Chinese foreign policy overlooks the role played by domestic politics in the policy-making process as well as China's ability to maintain an independent foreign policy. On the other hand, strictly focusing on the internal dynamics of Chinese politics foregoes the importance of changes within the international system in limiting or furthering Chinese interests abroad.

Developments in the study of foreign policy have proven that the interdependence of external and internal conditions in the foreign policy-making processes cannot be denied.<sup>15</sup> Despite the difficulty of assessing China's domestic conditions, it is unlikely that a comprehensive understanding of Chinese foreign policy could be carried out without looking at both the international situation with which it is confronted and the attitude adopted by its leaders in perceiving world politics. In essence, Chinese foreign policy analysis needs to incorporate elements of both approaches described earlier, and concentrate on the ways in which national leaders

<sup>14</sup> David Bachman, "Structure and Process in the Making of Chinese Foreign Policy, in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the Millennium* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Rosenau and Durfee, *op.cit.*, p.4.

seek a balance between external and internal demands confronting them.<sup>16</sup> As these demands are interactive (that is, one affects the other in a causal way), a comprehensive analysis can only be accomplished by taking into account every factor involved in the process.

Such a pluralist approach indeed leads to the possibility of creating an ideal framework of analysis; yet – just as the other two approaches – it is not entirely free from its own weaknesses and criticisms. In trying to consider as many factors as possible in one's method of analysis, there is often a tendency to overlook prioritizing these factors. The potential disregard for this restricts efforts to focus on certain conditions as the main policy driving force.<sup>17</sup> By spreading the breadth of analysis – through surveying every factor involved in the making of foreign policy – such an approach consequently sacrifices a certain element of precision. Furthermore, a study that is based on a pluralist framework of analysis may be too overwhelming for a researcher to carry out on his/her own, as it asks the individual to be an expert not only in the field of international relations, but also Chinese domestic politics, culture, and history.

It thus becomes essential that we remember beforehand the focus of this dissertation. During events after the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, China's leaders attempted to keep domestic concerns insulated from the dynamics of the country's external environment. Therefore, it would make more sense to stress the study of the external factors influencing China's foreign policy behaviour. This does not mean that the

<sup>16</sup> Rosenau, "China in a... *op.cit.*", p. 530.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

involvement of internal concerns in the process is discounted completely; it simply brings our attention more to the greater importance of regarding China's conduct abroad as mostly a product of observing and reacting to foreign stimuli.

Chinese foreign policy specialist, Michael Ng-Quinn, recognizes a dilemma similar to the one described above. There may be strong arguments behind the idea that by considering as many variables as possible, such an approach to Chinese foreign policy analysis allows for an understanding of the many complexities inherent in the decision-making process. Yet, the end product of such an exercise may be poverty in the creation of certain logical patterns or regularities. In other words, a research methodology based on simultaneous analyses of multiple variables could result in the reductionist fallacy of explaining China's foreign policy in terms of the attributes and interactions of its parts.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, the study of Chinese foreign policy can also be based on analyses of patterns and regularities. This can be pursued through establishing predictability in the form of definite causal relationships among variables.<sup>19</sup> However, such an approach also risks falling into another reductionist fallacy; it reduces complexities and plurality to simplicity and singularity. Although this methodology may be preferred when considering that empirical data on Beijing's policy inputs and decision-making processes are hard to come by, it also runs the risk of sacrificing an element of accuracy, which in the end, could potentially lessen the value of the research as a whole.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Ng-Quinn, "The Analytic Study of Chinese Foreign Policy", *International Studies Quarterly*, 27 (1983), p. 203.

An alternative approach, therefore, is needed. Ng-Quinn proposes one in which "particulars" (variables related to the decision-makers and domestic politics) and "regularities" (variables related to war, peace, and the external environment) are integrated in a prioritized fashion.<sup>20</sup> Neither of these factors alone is sufficient to explain China's foreign conduct. Yet, considering that the former is constrained by the latter, an approach should then be developed to take into account firstly, the external conditions with which the Chinese are confronted, and secondly, the leadership's view of the world and of China's place in it. In essence, a framework with strong Realist undertones is proposed, which prioritizes observations of external factors influencing Chinese foreign policy over domestic ones.

Such an approach would relegate certain factors in China's policy-making development to a secondary function; these include culture, ideology and idiosyncrasy. Although these factors may be significant, assigning them as the basis of our analysis could induce certain misconceptions and misperceptions. A supposedly "unique" treatment of China through emphasizing the value of culture – for example, by analyzing dynastic texts – can be flawed. Throughout China's history, the primacy of balance-of-power principles – as seen in the modern nation-state system – has been observed.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, although a "culturalist" approach may be appealing, there are strong reasons to validate an analysis of China's foreign policy that is based on Realist notions used in western academia.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>21</sup> For an excellent argument supporting this point, consult: Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

The application of ideology to the real world has taken place with a certain "national" context, and thus, has been constrained by the latter's *objective* empirical conditions.<sup>22</sup> For example, by supporting Third World countries as a means to counter the hegemony of the West, China's foreign policy was rhetorically formulated as a reflection of Mao's interpretation of Lenin's theory on ridding the world of imperialism and capitalism, and with that, the realization of international socialism. Because imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism, Lenin believed that unity among the working classes of the world is needed in order to topple colonial powers. Revolutionary groups who have succeeded in doing so in their own countries are expected to provide help to those in other countries who are still involved in such struggle.<sup>23</sup> It is certainly difficult to know for certain whether China's foreign policy has been motivated by these ideas or not; only the foreign policy-makers themselves know the extent to which their country's ideology has underpinned its foreign policy. However, further observation of the issue reveals that the strength of ideology in shaping China's foreign policy has depended more on the perceived needs of its strategy to deal with the West and Russia; the Third World has been a good ally only when the need is there to balance against the Great Powers' dominance over world politics.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, centering on ideology alone (and not taking into consideration how ideology is tied in with national interest) would definitely cause grave misinterpretations of China's foreign policy in general.

<sup>22</sup> Ng-Quinn, *op.cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>23</sup> A short elaboration of this topic can be found in Chen Jie, "Shaking Off and Historical Burden: China's Relations with the ASEAN-based Communist Insurgency in Deng's Era", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 27:4 (December 1994), p. 444.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Van Ness, "China and the Third World: Patterns of Engagement and Indifference", in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), p. 164.

As well, focusing excessively on the idiosyncrasy of China's leadership is precarious because the causes of behaviour can be an effect of other empirical conditions; as these conditions change, so will the behaviour of the object being analyzed. In a closed system like the Chinese', in which the dominance of a supreme leader such as Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping is obvious in most of its decision making processes, the state's conduct at home and abroad supposedly can be analyzed through studying the behaviour of these leaders. As such, foreign policy can be gauged by the intricacies surrounding the country's internal politics of leadership. However, researchers adhering to these analytical means more often reduce the behaviour patterns of these leaders to that of "face-saving".<sup>25</sup> This is an oversimplified analysis, as other factors need to be considered to come to such a conclusion. And although the behaviouralist approach may provide some indication of the basis upon which policy is framed, it usually falls into a "predetermined mould" that is far from explaining how specific policies are formulated with regards to changes in the international system.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, considering the dependence of these factors on other conditions, they cannot be used as the main object of this dissertation's analysis.

Culture, ideology, and idiosyncrasy are never static; they are in constant interaction with empirical conditions. As long as the conditions being prioritized are those related to the country's survivability in the international system, one is thus forced to address external factors ahead of the others. When judging the hostile external environment confronting the Chinese after the Tiananmen Incident, Ng-Quinn argues

<sup>25</sup> Thomas F. Christensen, "Chinese Realpolitik", *Foreign Affairs*, 75:5 (September/October 1996), p. 38.

that "the necessity to survive is all too clear a reality to be misperceived".<sup>27</sup> Despite the value of a more pluralist approach to studying foreign policy, in China's case, a framework of analysis with a Realist theme appears to hold the ground stronger.

Limiting the internal factors to just the political elite's view of the world could be seen as an attempt to make this PhD research project more manageable. However, it is a consideration that is calculated and based on preliminary observations of the manner in which foreign policy is formulated in China, and especially during the difficult period after the Tiananmen tragedy. In a closed system like the Chinese, political participation is neither voluntary nor autonomous; it is mobilized by the elite.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in facing extreme difficulties, internal mobilization may be correlated with – instead of caused by – hostile external conditions. The range of foreign policy conduct and goals is defined by the elite, and not by the masses. And although there may be some debate among the people, it is mainly for pure domestic consumption. Actual foreign policy behaviour is constrained by external conditions and decisions related to it remain within the domain of the political elite in Beijing. The conditions for debate stay within the limits imposed by the elite because "uncontrolled" domestic debate could result in foreign policy options that are non-plausible or non-rational.<sup>29</sup> In a sense, unlike debates on domestic policy, debates on foreign policy as a whole are simply propagandistic tools, and are rarely translated into actual foreign policy outputs.

<sup>26</sup> Zhao, *Interpreting...* op.cit., p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Ng-Quinn, *op.cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>28</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 31 (1998), pp. 289-291.



Chinese foreign policy is subject mainly to the constraints superimposed by conditions within the international system. China specialist, Wang Jisi, sums this up in one of his writings:

In order to understand Chinese international behaviour at any given time, one must look at both the international system to which China must respond and the attitude towards the outside world prevailing within the Chinese leadership.<sup>30</sup>

Domestic politics, accidents, and coincidences (or what Ng-Quinn refers to as "particulars") are relevant factors, but only to the extent that they have an effect on changing China's capabilities abroad. To be able to understand this, the factor that matters the most is the leadership's outlook on the international system, and more importantly, China's place in it. By observing China's relations with the Great Powers a pattern of interactions can be recognized; and once this has been achieved, other aspects of foreign policy behaviour can be expected to fall within the narrow probable ranges of policy option.<sup>31</sup> However, an in-depth analysis of China's relations with Great Powers goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Instead, the focus is on China's relations with Southeast Asian countries, which became the former's allies after the Great Powers had cornered it into a difficult position following the events of July 1989. The study looks at the manner in which the Chinese leadership responded and adapted to the changing external conditions. In turn, it observes the reactions from Southeast Asia's capitals as a means of assessing the success of China's foreign policy adaptive capability. In essence, the bulk of the study emphasizes the interplay of politics and diplomacy between China and its

<sup>29</sup> Ng-Quinn, *op.cit.* pp. 211-212.

southern neighbours. China's internal environment does come into play because foreign policy is never formulated within a domestic vacuum; however, this aspect of the study will be limited to China's political elite's view of the world and of the Middle Kingdom's position in it. This dissertation argues the importance of Beijing's Southeast Asian policy in studying China's road to recovery after Tiananmen. This is a worthwhile exercise when considering that debates on foreign policy in China do not usually center on re-evaluating past policies and re-directing Chinese goals, but rather on observing present external conditions – especially those concerned with national security – and being reactive to them.<sup>32</sup>

#### 2.4. Political Realism in China

The politics of international relations is centered on unending state insecurities resulting from a conflictual environment.<sup>33</sup> A framework of analysis coloured with Realist undertones thus stresses the notion that a state will always strive towards maximizing its national interests in the face of ever-present hostility. As the primary actor in world politics, the state is responsible for ensuring that the country remains competitive in an international system that is governed by a lack of central authority, or in other terms, anarchy. Within such a self-help system, politics are governed by the possession of power, which is obtained mainly through military means. As so,

<sup>30</sup> Wang Jisi, "International Relations Theory and the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy: A Chinese Perspective", in Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 490.

<sup>31</sup> Ng-Quinn, *op.cit.* pp. 211-212.

<sup>32</sup> Wang, *op.cit.* p. 490.

<sup>33</sup> Barry Buzan, "The Timeless Wisdom of Realism?" in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski, eds., *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 51.

international politics is a game of power played with the least amount of moralistic and ethical considerations.

The ensuing development of this thinking leads to a separation between domestic and international politics; whereas the former constitutes the noble struggle for the people's "good life" through means such as justice and prosperity, the latter is engrossed with ways to ensure the state's survival *by any means necessary*.<sup>34</sup> As this dichotomy solidifies, the state leadership becomes increasingly insulated from domestic influences in their formulation of a foreign policy that is rationally beneficial for the whole country.<sup>35</sup> And in order to attain an assertive unitary voice in this anarchic climate of international politics, the views and actions of these leaders become the objective representation of the interests of the nation.

Indeed, it is complex to identify what actually constitutes the national interest and how such interest is molded into a one voice for foreign policy purposes. Many scholars, depending on their background fields of study, propose different ways to gauge and define the sources and actors of this concept. As multiple issues become more prominent in international politics, Realism's stress on security and military concerns appears narrow and overly simplistic. Richard Ashley stresses this point as follows:

In a period of world economic crisis, welling transnational outcries against the limits of the realist vision, and evidently politicized developments that

<sup>34</sup> Martin Wight, "Why Is There No International Theory?", in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds., *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays on the Theory of International Relations* (London: Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1966, pp. 26-27.

<sup>35</sup> For an excellent elaboration and critique on the "inside/outside" dichotomy discussed here, consult: R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

realism could not comprehend, the classical realist tradition and its key concepts suffer[s] from a crisis of legitimacy.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, defenders of the theory argue that the key factor determining the conception of national interest remains the state's ability to survive in a self-help international system. Despite the ever-growing tendency to include more contemporary issues and concepts into the study of international relations, military and security concerns remain "too important for the field to be diverted into a prolix and self-indulgent discourse that is divorced from the real world".<sup>37</sup> The pursuit of other interests such as the environment and human rights is impossible without assurances that the basics of survival are present and protected. As so, territorial integrity and state sovereignty are the main priorities in any state's foreign policy-making process.

Attacks against the Realist approach to international relations have existed since it gained dominance in the field; yet, stronger criticisms surfaced after the demise of the Cold War. With the growth of globalization and interdependence among countries, there was a greater need for foreign policy analyses that considered notions of shared ethics and values. The trend grew not only in academic literature, but also among many politicians' rhetoric. As the Cold War scare slowly withered, much was talked about regarding the possible evolution of an interdependent world system. And although states remain heavily dependent on their domestic conditions as a source of

<sup>36</sup> Richard K. Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism", in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 262.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen M. Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies", *International Studies Quarterly*, 2:35 (1991), p. 223.



their political legitimacy, this does not preclude the potential for cultivating collective identities. Alexander Wendt elaborates on the foundation of this trend as follows:

Anarchic structure explains by itself; what matters is the identities and interests that states bring to their interactions and the subsequent impact of the latter on the former... Anarchy is what states make of it.<sup>38</sup>

As the likelihood of conflict decreases and the notion of a common fate increases, states willingly shed their egoistic self-interests in favour of creating a community of mutual interests at the international level. Through constant interaction and cooperation, states learn to internalize the shared values and ethics needed for the creation of an interdependent world. Even though the international system remains an anarchy, Wendt suggests the possibility of an "anarchy of friends", which is very much a concept far from Realists' anarchy of hostile, self-interested states.<sup>39</sup>

However, the Chinese government continues to view globalization and interdependence through a state-centric prism, in which only the benefits of following such trends are being paid attention, without necessarily taking into consideration the constraints that come with it.<sup>40</sup> To make an omelette, one needs to break an egg. The Chinese certainly would not mind having an omelette, but certainly not at the cost of having to break even one egg. Attributing high value on the notion of state sovereignty, China perceives excessive participation in trends towards greater international interdependence as dangerous. While other countries may be more willing (or, on many occasions, co-opted and pressured) to allow a certain degree of erosion in their states' sovereignty, China does not consider the creation of a global

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State", *American Political Science Review*, 2:88 (June 1994), p. 388.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Yong Deng, "The Chinese Conception of National Interests in International Relations", *The China Quarterly*, 154 (June 1998), p. 310.

society to be so worthy that it should be put ahead of its self-centered national interests.<sup>41</sup>

Chinese leaders look at the external environment as one that is dominated by hostile intentions among states. In order to survive, China needs to put its interests ahead of others' through any means necessary, including force. Any concession made at this level is considered to be a sign of weakness, and in an environment as hostile as today's international politics, such a sign could result in Chinese interests being trampled on by the rest of the world, especially the West.<sup>42</sup> This dissertation will elaborate further on this point and demonstrate the predominance of such thinking among Chinese leaders. Indeed, although there have been indications that the Chinese are more willing to involve themselves in certain forms of multilateral linkages, the intentions behind such moves remain unclear. Does China view the growth of international interdependence as a "win-win" situation? Or does it remain a staunch believer that international politics have to be viewed from a "win-lose" perspective? If the former is the case, then this can be translated as a process of learning, in which China has internalized the norms surrounding international interdependence, and has subsequently changed the goals and approaches to its foreign policy-making processes. However, if the latter condition is more likely, then China's adherence to multilateralism is upheld only in cases where its national interests are not seen to be compromised whatsoever. This dissertation adheres more to the latter explanation of the situation.

<sup>41</sup> Christensen, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

The predominance of Realist tendencies in China's foreign policy does not necessarily mean that the views espoused by its leadership are based on readings of Realist traditions in international relations theory. Instead, such an inference is drawn from observing patterns of behaviour in China's interaction with the rest of the world. Chinese leaders view world politics and foreign affairs as "inter-state relations", in which states are seen as the dominant actors and the formulation of foreign policy is separated as much as possible from domestic concerns.<sup>43</sup> In other words, despite its rhetorical emphasis on supporting states with socialist governments, relations among countries are not based on whether or not the countries have compatible domestic political systems.<sup>44</sup> From such a viewpoint, the rational pursuit of national interest becomes the focus of foreign policy-making. As a hierarchy of issues is created – with those related to military, security and the protection of sovereignty at the top – the use of force in achieving such pursuits is deemed as acceptable – and at times, necessary.<sup>45</sup> Despite growing trends in globalization, the logic of state sovereignty within a self-help international system remains the supreme thinking among the Chinese leadership.

Alastair Iain Johnston claims that throughout China's history, traditional strategic thought is dominated by a parabellum paradigm, in which it is assumed that because conflict is a constant feature in the zero-sum relationship among states, the use of force (or the threat of its use) in furthering national interest is deemed as not only

<sup>42</sup> John W. Garver, "China's Push Through the South China Seas: The Interactions of Bureaucratic and National Interests", *The China Quarterly*, 132 (December 1992), pp. 1027-1028.

<sup>43</sup> Wang, *op.cit.*, pp. 492-495.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 487.

<sup>45</sup> Yong, *op.cit.*, p. 311.

acceptable, but also crucial to the decision-making process.<sup>46</sup> If we were to compare this line of thinking with those present in western academic literature, it is very much similar to Realist notions of statecraft and inter-state conduct. While the popular approach among many Sinologists is to accept at face value the influence of Confucian-Mencian ideology on China's international relations, such relations can actually be analyzed using theories developed in the West. Although links can be made between modern Chinese leaders' strategic thoughts and those present during the dynastic periods, one also needs to realize that whatever streams of thought were adapted the past could on most occasions be identified within literature used in western academia. In essence, this condition shows that Chinese leaders' anxiety towards the outside world can be understood from a non-cultural perspective.

This perception of living in a hostile international environment can be traced to the shame resulting from years of domination by foreign powers. As a proud society that identifies itself as the world's "Middle Kingdom", the Chinese have been trying to do away with this bad stigma.<sup>47</sup> As such, the Chinese adhere not only to a sense of nationalism that boasts their uniqueness and pride, but also to one that is more "assertive", in which other states are constantly viewed as possible threats to their interests and identity.<sup>48</sup> Despite changes in the global distribution of power – in which China can no longer claim to be the victim of injustices perpetrated by foreigners – China's identity continues to be shaped by its leaders' stress on "us-

<sup>46</sup> Johnston, *op.cit.*, pp. 249-250.

<sup>47</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on China's "Middle Kingdom" mentality, consult the following sources: C.P. Fitzgerald, *The Chinese View of Their Place in the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese Empire: And What It Means to the World* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003), pp. 55-86.

<sup>48</sup> Allen S. Whiting, "Chinese Nationalism and Foreign Policy after Deng", *The China Quarterly*, (1995), p. 295.

them" differences between the Middle Kingdom and the rest of the world. As a result, this constructed, Realist identity leaves little room for cooperative inclinations, and more for state-centric, competitive behaviour in the international system. And as conditions deteriorate, their combination can induce a siege mentality, which in the end further strengthens assertive notions of nationalism.<sup>49</sup>

Most Chinese leaders perceive the world as "an arena of interactions between sovereign states engaged in merciless competitions".<sup>50</sup> Based on this notion of international anarchy and power politics (as well as the separation between domestic and international politics), China's national interests are thus conceptualized. As in most vertically-controlled government systems, Chinese nationalism is practically state led. The state is viewed as "an embodiment of the nation's will", and the separation between state interests and regime interests becomes blurred. Thus, Chinese national interests exist objectively and its furtherance in the international arena is carried out by the state's foreign policy. Rooted in feelings of anti-foreignism caused by past humiliations by invaders, and furthered by the dominant perception of the anarchic nature of international relations, China's leaders stress the division between "us" and "them" in creating a national identity for the Chinese. As such, in attempts to find support for their decisions in the international arena, the leaders frame this process within the notions of not only supporting the state's national interests, but also loyalty towards the nation.<sup>51</sup> In the past, China's foreign policy was guided by the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology espoused by the Communist regime. However, as the strength of ideology dwindled, especially

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>50</sup> Yong, *op.cit.*, p. 311.

following the Tiananmen Incident, Chinese leaders realized that the common denominator providing a support basis for its decisions in the international arena exists in the form of a state-conceptualized notion of national interests.<sup>52</sup>

As we consider the dominance of Realist thinking among Chinese leaders, scholars, and the majority of the people, it is not entirely far-fetched to assume that an analysis of China's foreign policy is best conducted within the constructs of a Realist paradigm. Within such a framework of analysis, the Chinese state is regarded as the highest, unitary representation of the country's national interests. As such, the key factors needing to be observed and analyzed for a proper understanding of China's foreign behaviour are those related to its external environment and the manner in which the leadership perceives them. This does not completely discount the growing importance of looking at events and issues from a pluralist perspective, and including the internal concerns of Chinese politics. Nevertheless, this dissertation regards such an approach ineffective, as it does not cater to the situation faced by China at the time. Despite realizing changes that are presently happening within China's policy-making structure and process, its international relations academia, as well as its conception of national interest, a study of Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia in the period following the Tiananmen Incident requires an emphasis on the state-centric, pragmatic, Realist nature of state-craft and inter-state relations.

<sup>51</sup> Zhao, "A State-Led... *op.cit.*", pp. 290-291.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 289-291.

## 2.5. Designing a Micro-Macro Linkage Approach

In his notable work titled *Interpreting Chinese Foreign Policy: The Micro-Macro Linkage Approach*, Zhao Quansheng proposed a method of foreign policy analysis that is based on observations of events and issues at the macro and micro levels.<sup>53</sup> Zhao identifies the micro level as analysis of decision-makers, while the macro level is a combined study of, on the one hand, the international system and structure, and on the other, the domestic elements and institutions of Chinese politics. The relationship between these levels of analysis is summarized in the following diagram.

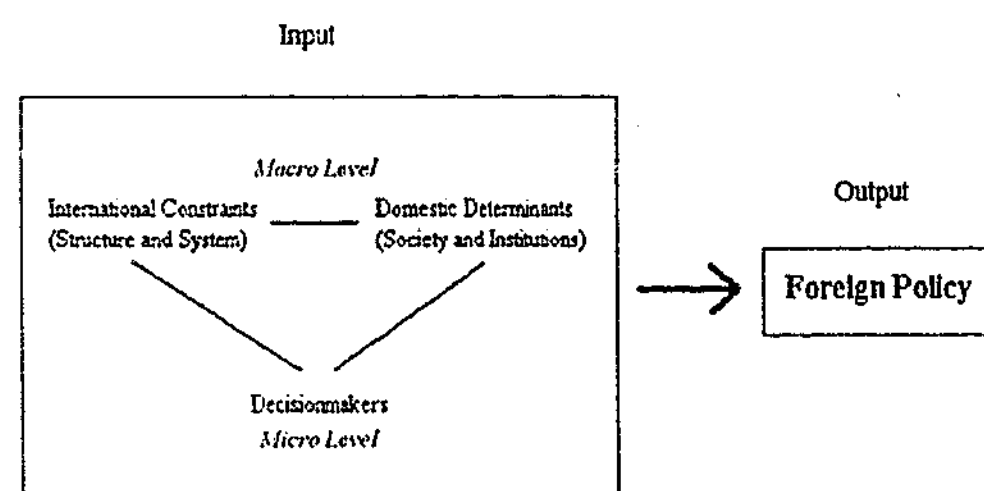


Figure 1: Zhao's Micro-Macro Levels of Chinese Foreign Policy Analysis  
(source: Zhao, *Interpreting... op.cit.*, p. 19)

Zhao explains that the three elements influencing Chinese foreign policy interact in a three-way fashion. Therefore, while a purely *domestic-international linkage* approach – as put forward by numerous other foreign policy analysts – limits itself to observing the formulation of Chinese foreign policy only at the macro level, the addition of a micro level analysis – in the form of analysis of *decision-makers* – provides a deeper

and more comprehensive study of the dynamics that surround China's conduct abroad as well as the mechanisms and processes that led to its conception. Macro level elements by themselves cannot account for the entire decision-making process in foreign policy; to complement analysis at this level, there needs to be an understanding of how decision-makers perceive such elements. The outlook of decision-makers in observing these constraints and influences are factored in as a key element shaping the state's behaviour. This latter element is crucial to the understanding of foreign policy-making processes when we consider that variables at the individual level can explain variables characterizing social systems, and vice versa.<sup>54</sup> Such an approach is more apt in the study of Chinese foreign policy, as decisions by the political elite are usually considered as a voice representing the entire country's views and aspirations. A study based on Zhao's framework of analysis allows for a proper and comprehensive investigation into changes in China's domestic and international environments, and the manner in which they are perceived by its leaders as factors influencing foreign policy.

In incorporating the study of the role of decision-makers in shaping China's foreign policy, Zhao proposes simultaneous, detailed analyses of a) Chinese leaders' outlook of the world; b) the mechanisms and processes of decision-making; and c) the struggle among leaders for control of these factors. However, as this chapter has briefly explained, and the rest of this dissertation will further elaborate, the latter two forms of analysis lose their significance when contrasted with the situation that surrounded Chinese politics in the post-Tiananmen period. An examination of the

<sup>53</sup> Zhao, *Interpreting... op.cit.*

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.27.

mechanisms and processes of decision-making no longer becomes crucial when considering that foreign policy decisions (particularly on issues of strategic and national security) were based on a top-down hierarchic structure and heavily monopolized by a small group of elites at the highest rungs of government. These people acted in "relative isolation from information and advice regarding the interests of various bureaucracies and localities".<sup>55</sup> In addition to this, the in-fighting within this group of elites was sustained mostly by China's domestic political needs as a means to distract the people from the realities of post-Tiananmen's chaotic conditions.<sup>56</sup> Despite the lack of harmony in internal politics, China's foreign policy continued to be guided by some semblance of a united front at the highest level of government. The reduced impact that bureaucratic politics and elite rivalry have on shaping foreign policy decisions thus leads us to the initial conclusion that the most valuable element of micro level analysis lies strictly in the study of Chinese leaders' perceptions and visions of the country's external environment and its place within the international society.

Nevertheless, pursuing analysis through the above-mentioned approach is not entirely free from obstacles and limitations. The difficulty with identifying decision-makers as the element defining micro level analysis is that it assumes that the perceptions and visions of all Chinese leaders are the same. Of course, this is far from reality, especially when considering that Chinese politics during the period after Tiananmen was mostly highlighted by a struggle for power among Party elites. With the removal of CCP Secretary General, Zhao Ziyang – who at the time theoretically held the

<sup>55</sup> Zhao, "The Structure... *op.cit.*", pp. 236-237, 240, 242.

<sup>56</sup> Ng-Quinn, *op.cit.*, p. 212.

highest government seat in Beijing and was positioned to succeed Deng Xiaoping's mantle – the Chinese leadership was somewhat in disarray; the process of finding a united voice was difficult, even for issues that required the provision of such (for instance, China's foreign policy). The condition was so dire that an observer went as far as predicting that the leadership could turn out to be "the last communist ruling elite of China".<sup>57</sup>

For the purpose of this dissertation, this author's micro level analysis will emphasize the foreign outlook of Deng Xiaoping, who remained China's most prominent leader during the post-Tiananmen period. Indeed, there is the potential reductionist inclination in generalizing the views of China's political elites, and limiting their study to a focus on the perspective and vision of a particular political personality. However, in a country with a strong "supreme leader" tradition such as China, it is understandable to bring down the micro level analysis to a manageable emphasis on Deng's perception of his country's international environment and the manner in which it should engage the rest of the world.

At the time, there were those who commented on Deng's slow retreat from politics, as he allowed other leaders to fight for control over China's policy-making instruments and processes.<sup>58</sup> However, once we look retrospectively at the bigger picture, Deng's supposed lessening role in governmental decision-making actually served the purpose of China's domestic and foreign policy demands then. When the need to re-align foreign policy became pressing, and the international environment became more

<sup>57</sup> Jurgen Domes, "The Rulers: China's Last Communist Leadership?", in George Hicks, ed., *The Broken Mirror: China after Tiananmen* (Essex: Longman Group, 1990), p. 130.

conducive for its realization to take place, Deng was heavily involved in ensuring that all this would happen. His Southern Tour in 1992 marked a turning point in China's constantly shifting post-Tiananmen foreign behaviour, especially with regards to its relations with Southeast Asia. It re-directed China's foreign policy – which had shied from the West, and particularly the United States – away from Southeast Asia and back to its original track before the Tiananmen Incident had abruptly derailed its progress. As such, giving emphasis on Deng's worldview – without necessarily lessening the value of other Chinese leaders' outlook of the country's external environment – allows for a more manageable framework for this dissertation's overall analysis.

Moreover, once perimeters for micro level analysis have been defined, a similar procedure could be performed on the structure of analysis at the macro level, as this further narrows down this dissertation's breadth of investigation. This chapter has attempted to explain in its earlier parts that analysis of the role of domestic determinants in foreign policy-making can be reduced to a minimum considering China's tendency to act mostly in response to external stimulus. Despite other studies indicating greater complexity in assessing the origins of China's foreign policy today (that is, higher levels of decision-making pluralism within the bureaucracy and among the people in general), the public's participation in such processes during the post-Tiananmen period was kept to a minimum.<sup>58</sup> In addition to this, notions of nationalism, which had replaced the lackluster CCP ideology in providing broad guidelines for China's foreign conduct after Tiananmen, were largely conceptualized

<sup>58</sup> Zhao, "Deng Xiaoping's... *op.cit.*", p. 740.

<sup>59</sup> Zhao, "The Structure... *op.cit.*", p. 242.

by the leadership elite, who acted supposedly on behalf of and for the interest of the people.<sup>60</sup> In a sense, foreign policy fell within the realm of what the leaders, especially Deng, viewed as best for China and its people. Thus, attributing too much value to the analysis of Chinese foreign policy's domestic determinants could draw efforts away from examining the more decisive aspect shaping the decision-making process: China's external environments' constraints and influences.

When considering these factors, an appraisal of Zhao's micro-macro level analysis framework calls for some modifications. This dissertation proposes this in the form of limiting assessment at the macro level to only that of the external constraints and influences shaping the leadership's view of China's conduct and place in the international environment. Figure 2 provides a diagrammatic view of this relationship.

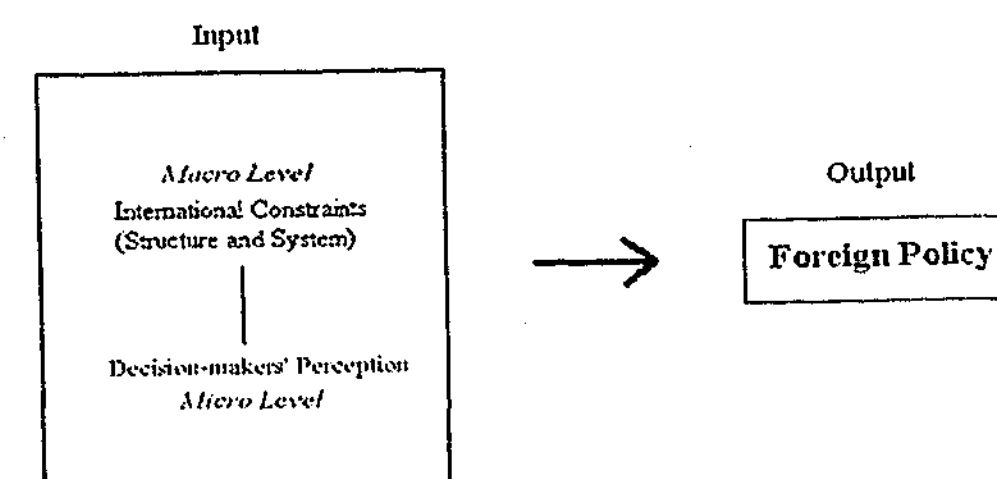


Figure 2: Modified Micro-Macro Linkage Approach to Chinese Foreign Policy Analysis

In spite of following the general idea of Zhao's model of micro-macro analysis as a means to incorporate better the examination of Chinese decision-makers' view of

<sup>60</sup> Yong, *op.cit.*, p. 329.



international relations, this *modified* framework of analysis factors out the domestic determinant element of Chinese foreign policy-making for reasons previously explained. This does not necessarily mean that domestic determinants are irrelevant and unimportant to understanding Chinese foreign policy-making in general; however, for the purpose of this dissertation's specific topic of research, it has been determined that their omission from analysis does not affect greatly efforts to understand China-Southeast Asia relations during the period. This proposed framework of analysis allows a greater emphasis on studying the external conditions that constrain and influence China's conduct abroad. And by combining this with an examination of how Chinese leaders perceive and react to these constraints and influences, the approach will provide the basis necessary for an insightful and valuable appraisal of China's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia in the period after the Tiananmen Incident.

#### 2.6. Identifying Learning and Adaptation Using the Modified Micro-Macro Linkage Approach

Once a modified framework of analysis, based on the micro-macro linkage model, has been tailored to the needs of this dissertation, it can then be used to investigate whether China's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia in the period between 1989 and 1995 was based on notions of either *learning* or *adaptation*. One could say that a general observation of events during this period is a worthy enough justification for carrying out a dissertation project. Yet, the value of such an observation is magnified if underlying it is an intention to identify whether the process of decision-making was conducted on the basis of foreign policy learning or adaptation. This dissertation

scrutinizes not only the changes that occurred in China's foreign policy over this period, but also the possibility that such changes were reflective of old patterns of foreign relations and possibly indicative of future ones. Indeed, this Chapter will not venture overly into the debates regarding theories of learning and adaptation in foreign policy, as they go beyond the scope of its analysis; much has already been written by other scholars to provide a background study on this.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, in order to ensure the continuance of this dissertation as well as to further shed light on the issue concerned, a brief elaboration should be provided on the use and value of these notions.

*Learning* can be defined as a "change of beliefs" or a "development of new beliefs, skills, or procedures as a result of observation and interpretation of experience".<sup>62</sup> Although learning is mostly attributable to individuals, organizations can be moved to behave in the same manner when these individuals are able to influence other members (through the creation of coalitions) to think along the same line of ideas and act upon them. In foreign policy terms, learning involves shifts in the central paradigm of state policy (for example, a shift in the understanding of what national security entails, from one that is based on Realist notions, to one based on Idealism) which then leads to changes in preferences over conduct at the international stage.<sup>63</sup>

The process of learning occurs in levels; at the simple level, learning induces changes

<sup>61</sup> In addition to the works cited in this chapter, studies on learning and adaptation can be furthered using these writings: Jian Sanqiang, *Foreign Policy Restructuring as Adaptive Behavior: China's Independent Foreign Policy, 1982-1989* (Boston: University Press of America, 1996); Dan Reiter, "Learning, Realism and Alliances: The Weight of the Shadow of the Past", *World Politics*, 46 (July 1994), pp. 490-526; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

<sup>62</sup> Jack S. Levy, "Learning and Foreign Policy: A Conceptual Minefield", *International Organization*, 48:2 (Spring 1994), p. 283.



in means but not ends; while at the more complex level, the process involves not only a change in means, but also in ends.<sup>64</sup> The former is what some scholars have identified as *adaptation*; for this dissertation's purposes, the distinction between learning and adaptation will be based on this understanding as well.

In one of his many works on Chinese foreign policy analysis, Alastair Iain Johnston defines adaptation as changes in foreign policy that are mostly tactical in nature and do not constitute an alteration of the state's central paradigm and grand strategic perspective of the world.<sup>65</sup> In response to shifts within the external environment – especially if these changes are to the detriment of a state's national interests – leaders formulate policies that force the state to undergo adjustments in its conduct abroad as a means to preserve (and with time, hopefully improving) its relative capabilities. Thus, while the fundamental thinking in foreign policy-making remains the same, the costs and benefits of previous tactics are re-evaluated in the face of changing external conditions. This is all carried out with a view to formulating more adequate tactics to ensure the survivability of the state within the international arena.<sup>66</sup>

The micro-macro linkage approach allows one to identify either learning or adaptation in foreign policy shifts, as it provides a framework for analyzing not only the external determinants of these shifts, but also the role of decision-makers in the process. This is important when we consider that the variables used to determine learning and adaptation in foreign policy are as follows:

<sup>63</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, "Learning versus Adaptation: Explaining Change in Chinese Arms Control Policy in the 1980s and 1990s", *The China Journal*, 35 (January 1996), p. 33.

<sup>64</sup> Levy, *op.cit.*, p. 286.

<sup>65</sup> Johnston, "Learning...*op.cit.*", p. 30.

- a) national interests;
- b) assessment of the international environment; and
- c) the means of pursuing national interests.

In China's case, examination of national interests and perceptions of the international environment can be performed using the micro level analysis; at the same time, observations of changes in the means of pursuing national interests can be conducted through analysis at the macro level. Once this has been determined, we can thus assess that learning occurs when changes in the first two variables (national interests and assessment of the international environment) lead to adjustments in the third variable (the means of pursuing these interests and goals). However, when change in the third variable is not preceded by that in either of the first two, then we can determine that a process of adaptation has taken place instead.

Of course, before we can start to recognize any shift in the variables mentioned above – especially, the first two – there needs to be an identification of the initial standpoint from which policy would later depart. In the case of Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia after Tiananmen, this can be achieved through determining the paradigm underlying conceptions of national interests and perceptions of the external environment prior to the infamous incident in 1989.<sup>67</sup> Only by doing so will we then be able to observe whether or not shifts in foreign policy were primarily instigated by a transformation of this paradigm. If the Chinese leaders had perceived the international environment through a Realist perspective (as earlier parts of this Chapter have attempted to explain briefly), did the Tiananmen incident cause a shift

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>67</sup> The following Chapter will provide a comprehensive look at this.

in perspective? And if it did, then was the pursuit of national interests re-formulated using concepts based on a paradigm of thinking different to Realism?

This dissertation, as the remaining Chapters will elaborate, argues that while there were changes to the leadership's perception towards China's external environment (which in itself was undergoing dramatic shifts caused by the West's harsh response to China's brutal crackdown of the pro-democracy movement as well as the collapse of the Cold War), the national interest throughout that period did not undergo a transformation of any kind. Despite Beijing's changing approaches towards the United States and Southeast Asia following the Tiananmen Incident, China's national interest remained fixed on the notion of furthering its process of economic modernization. In other words, the changes in the means to pursue the national interest resulted from an effort to adapt to changes in the external environment, and not from actual changes to the national interest itself.

The issues raised by efforts to determine learning and adaptation in Chinese foreign policy provide a theme colouring this dissertation's analysis in general. And in doing so, the process attributes greater value to what would have been just a general observation of events surrounding China's policy towards Southeast Asia in the post-Tiananmen period. In the end, such an exercise will provide not only an appraisal of past events, but also some insights into guesstimating China's future conduct in the chance that it encounters similar challenging external conditions.

## 2.7. Conclusion

Understanding the value of theories in formulating and structuring a more comprehensive study of social and political phenomena, this Chapter has provided a foundation for analysing data, information, and sources gathered through research. A sound theoretical framework not only anchors the analysis to a strong basis (which prevents tendencies to go off on a tangent during discussion) and creates a systematic flow of argument, but also allows for a finer interpretation of the sources available.

Yet, at the same time, the theoretical background outlined in this Chapter does not pretend to provide a framework of analysis for every aspect of China's foreign policy. It has been tailored to the needs of the dissertation by taking into consideration the issues and situations surrounding events during that particular period of time. The discussion is mainly drawn from western ideas and theories on foreign policy analysis. However, it remains sensitive to China's particular conditions through incorporating views and suggestions put forward by China specialists, both westerners and Chinese.

By initially elaborating on the Realist bent of this dissertation in general, and the views of Chinese leaders in particular, the Chapter adopts the micro-macro linkage approach – as proposed by Zhao Quansheng – as its theoretical model after considering its usefulness in linking the examinations of Chinese foreign policy's external stimuli and the decision-makers' perception of them. The approach's structure was then modified in order to accommodate better the issues and situations

previously mentioned. With these modifications, the proposed framework of analysis is thus designed with a view to revealing ideas on whether the process of learning or adaptation had provided the driving force for Chinese foreign policy-making at the time.

Having established the theoretical framework to be employed in this dissertation, it is appropriate to turn to an observation of the history linking China and Southeast Asia.

This is the subject of the next Chapter.

### Chapter Three:

## **China and Southeast Asia: A Historical Background**

### 3.1. Introduction

The history of China's relations with Southeast Asia dates back to the former's Imperial times. Ever since the unification of Chinese territories under the Qin dynasty, the Middle Kingdom never entirely renounced the potential for strong relations with polities in the region. The development of these ties occurred even though more attention was given to dealing with foreign elements to the west and north of the Chinese borders. Indeed, the scale of interaction with Southeast Asia was at times limited due to a number of factors. For example, despite the potential maritime capabilities demonstrated by the Song and Ming Dynasties, China was for most of the time never a naval power; the recognition of this limitation often drove the Emperor to emphasize domination of proximate land territories and kept interactions with Southeast Asian kings and princes to a minimum necessity (unless Chinese territories to the south were threatened by encroachment from Southeast Asian militaries).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Lattimore, Inner Asian Frontiers of China (Boston: Beacon Press, 1940), p. 4.

However, as trade with the region grew in importance and the presence of overseas Chinese became more visible, ties strengthened even when they were not carried out under the official sanctioning of the Imperial court. Such trends in relations further evolved with the arrival of colonizing Europeans, as China was too weak to challenge Europe's power in its own coastal territories (especially in port cities such as Hong Kong, Macao, and Shanghai), let alone in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, although China's influence in Southeast Asia waned at the official level, relations were maintained at the people-to-people level through the increasing economic success of overseas Chinese merchants and traders in the region.<sup>2</sup> Thus, having prevented Sino-Southeast Asian ties from being completely severed throughout colonial Europe's domination of Asia, the grounds were preserved for the nurturing of stronger relations once the Europeans withdrew from the region by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

This Chapter will provide a historical account of China's relations with Southeast Asia before the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, and particularly before the rise of Deng Xiaoping as China's most prominent leader. Through such a discussion, it can be observed that Southeast Asia consistently played a secondary role in China's foreign policy. Although the Chinese were often forced into viewing that their relations with the region rested on an equal footing, the more predominant perception among Chinese leaders was that, in comparison to Southeast Asian governments, China was a greater power. Limited by its ability to deal with foreigners (despite its pride of being the Middle Kingdom on which the rest of the world revolved), China approached Southeast Asia only when the relationship served the purpose of enhancing its status

<sup>2</sup> John K. Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution: 1800-1985* (London: Picador, 1988), pp. 144-145.

in international relations. However, when occupied with matters concerning other Great Powers or threatened with encroachment from the north and west, Chinese leaders were more than happy to let their southern counterparts carry the burden of maintaining the Sino-Southeast Asian brotherhood.

The Chapter's discussion traces back Sino-Southeast Asian relations to the Imperial period of the Middle Kingdom, as this author recognizes that efforts to understand modern China's interaction with Southeast Asia requires first an awareness of why historically the relationship took the form it did. Such a discussion provides a glimpse of the origins of China's worldview, and in doing so, assesses the importance (or lack thereof) of Southeast Asia in the development of Chinese foreign relations as a whole. As well-known China scholar, John K. Fairbank, notes, the modern Chinese governments inherited a set of institutionalised attitudes and historical precedents in their view of the world and China's place in it "that is of more than historical interest and bears upon Chinese political thinking today".<sup>3</sup> An account of the origins of Sino-Southeast Asian relations provides an introduction to the basic thinking underlying many of the decisions made by Chinese leaders in formulating policies towards their southern neighbours.

Once an elaboration of Imperial Chinese relations with Southeast Asia is achieved, the Chapter then looks at how these relations took form during Mao Zedong's rule, emphasizing the region's role in China's Third World politics. An observation of Sino-Southeast Asian relations during this period reveals an attempt by the Great

<sup>3</sup> John K. Fairbank, "A Preliminary Framework", in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 4.

Helmsman to re-establish the tradition of Chinese hegemony in the region through an adaptation of China's worldview and sense of leadership within contemporary, modern surroundings. Under Mao's guidance, China's interaction with governments in Southeast Asia experienced extreme high and low points, as Cold War politics made the two sides the best of allies on one day, and the worst of rivals on the next. A discussion of this also reveals the evolving pattern of interactions between China and Southeast Asia, in which Chinese leaders viewed such interactions mostly as a means to shape policies towards the world's major states. In a sense, Southeast Asia played a lesser importance in Beijing's foreign policy calculations, and the intensity level of their relations was determined generally by how they could improve China's position vis-à-vis the Great Powers.

This Chapter does not pretend to provide a comprehensive historical account of China's relations with Southeast Asia. Works in this area of study have already been carried out by scholars such as John K. Fairbank, Martin Stuart-Fox, Peter Van Ness, and Wang Gungwu.<sup>4</sup> However, considering the importance attributed to history by most Chinese leaders in their perception of the world and conception of China's place in it, this author recognizes the need to provide some historical background discussion on pre-1989 Sino-Southeast Asian relations. As historian C. P. Fitzgerald claims:

One of the first things to recognise in dealing with China is that we are encountering a very old and different tradition of political life and action. This tradition has been modified during the past century to conform... with the conventions established originally in Western Europe, and is now

<sup>4</sup> John K. Fairbank, *China: A Modern History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Stuart-Fox, *op.cit.*; Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy: Peking's Support for Wars of National Liberation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Wang Gungwu, *China and the World Since 1949: The Impact of Independence, Modernity and Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977); Wang Gungwu, "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia: A Background Essay", in Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order... op.cit.*, pp. 34-62.

widespread, but the thinking behind Chinese policy is often much closer to the ancient pattern than to the modern appearance.<sup>5</sup>

By analysing patterns of relations in the past, the possibility becomes greater for efforts to understand more recent forms of such relations. Of course, the discussion here will incorporate only elements within China's history that is of relevance to the dissertation's topic.

Therefore, in presenting an appraisal of China's interactions with its southern neighbours beginning from Imperial times until the late 1980s, this Chapter will provide a glimpse of why such interactions developed to take the form they did, as well as the manner in which this has affected more recent political decision-making. In doing so, the exercise allows for a stronger basis of analysis for the continuation of this dissertation, whose key issue centres on China's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia (particularly the region's ASEAN countries) after the Tiananmen Incident.

### 3.2. Imperial China and Southeast Asia

To assume that the Chinese people had no experience of inter-state relations prior to the arrival of westerners would be erroneous as there are numerous historical accounts proving otherwise. A vague concept of *guo* (state) was first recorded during the late Zhou dynasty (771-256 B.C.); along with this concept was recognition of the legitimacy of other states beyond Chinese territories as well as the existence of a multi-state system that is somewhat comparable to the modern understanding of

<sup>5</sup> C. P. Fitzgerald, *Changing Directions of Chinese Foreign Policy* (Hobart: The Australian Institute of International Affairs, 1971), p. 6.

international relations.<sup>6</sup> Such recognition demonstrates the extent to which Emperors of the Middle Kingdom were not only aware of, but also paid significant attention to issues and concerns affecting people beyond the territorial borders. Indeed, the scale of foreign interaction was limited, as the government of a *unified* China slowly took form after years of war among its own peoples. It is important to note that it had not been until the Qin dynasty's (221-206 B.C.) dominance that a single ruler dominated Imperial Chinese relations with foreign polities.<sup>7</sup> In turn, such political conditions sowed the seeds for a distinct Chinese view of the world and China's place in it. As well, the Qin's emphasis on separating the treatment of domestic and non-Chinese affairs meant that control of China's foreign policy was structured within a definite bureaucratic hierarchy, and that records of interactions with foreigners were regularly kept up. Nevertheless, it was not until the arrival into power of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) that such records became more elaborate and precise, and the notion of a traditional Chinese worldview and international system were concretised.<sup>8</sup>

In its interaction with the rest of the world, China's conduct was dominated by Sinocentrism and a sense of superiority. Just as its domestic politics, foreign relations were carried out in a hierarchic, non-egalitarian fashion. As Martin Stuart-Fox notes:

China's isolation and its sense of superiority shaped not only Chinese attitudes towards other peoples, but also their conception of themselves... the Chinese stood at the centre of the universe, that theirs was the 'Middle Kingdom', surrounded in all four directions by less culturally advanced, barbarian peoples.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, such a concept was different from the European international system, as it was based on the Chinese world order, which emphasised the maintenance of a tribute system. Yang Lien-sheng, "Historical Notes on the Chinese World Order", in Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order... op.cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Wang, "Early Ming Relations... *op.cit.*", p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Stuart-Fox, *A Short History of China and Southeast Asia: Tribute, Trade and Influence* (Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003), pp. 33-34.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p. 9.

Based on the teachings of Confucius, the centrality of the Emperor in the Chinese worldview was crucial, as he was given the mandate of heaven – in the form of *de*, or virtue – to rule over Chinese territories and beyond. The presence of *de* guaranteed that a hierarchy of social order was maintained; within this hierarchy, people accepted their place as well as the responsibilities and duties that went with such positions. Thus, it was believed that without a virtuous leader, who provided the ultimate moral example for the people, such a system would crumble in the face of anarchic disorder.<sup>10</sup>

Despite its Sinocentrism, the Chinese never ignored the presence of other peoples, including those of non-Chinese tradition. The Chinese simply adapted their understanding of domestic political hierarchy towards their relations with these peoples. The Emperor was not only ruler of his territories, but also of the entire universe. And within a universe centred on the Middle Kingdom, the outer areas are divided into three main zones: the Sinic zone (Korea, Vietnam, Ryukyu Islands, and at times, Japan), the Inner Asian zone (nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of Inner Asia), and the Outer zone (the rest of the world).<sup>11</sup> Southeast Asia lies within the Outer zone, and thus, its interactions with China were limited to the informal level. The kings and peoples of the region were to be treated with "paternal benevolence, as objects of the Emperor's protection" and absorbed into the Chinese worldview through ritual processes.<sup>12</sup> Thus, subjugation by forceful means was unnecessary as long as the Southeast Asian peoples demonstrated their submissiveness to the Chinese

<sup>10</sup> Wang, "Early Ming Relations... *op.cit.*", p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> Fairbank, "A Preliminary Framework... *op.cit.*", p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Stuart-Fox, *op.cit.*, p. 18.



Emperor and refrained from encroaching on Chinese territories to the south. Through the mandate of heaven, it was believed that the peoples inside and outside of China would offer submission and leadership to the *Tianzi* (Son of Heaven).<sup>13</sup>

The maintenance of relations between the Middle Kingdom and the Outer zone was performed within the framework of a tribute system, in which areas such as Southeast Asia recognized the power of the Chinese Emperor through ritual presentations of gifts. Although the tribute system provided the channels for trade relations to develop, it was not perceived as a transfer of economic resources from Southeast Asia to China. Believing in its cultural supremacy, China assumed that it did not need anything from the barbarians.<sup>14</sup> Their interactions emphasized ritual processes that showed the magnanimity of the Middle Kingdom, as this was a demonstration of the Emperor's virtue and the Chinese people's superiority over the rest of the world. Trade was thus a symbolic submission to the Chinese world order. However, submission did not necessarily mean subjugation, and this allowed greater acceptance of the Chinese worldview among Southeast Asian kings and princes.<sup>15</sup> Although trade relations may have been viewed by China as insubstantial, Southeast Asia regarded them as its lifeblood. Thus, it did not matter which Chinese dynasty was in power, the continuation of trade was too important for the many kingdoms in the region to quibble over the Chinese's terms.

<sup>13</sup> Wang, "Early Ming Relations... *op.cit.*", p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> C.P. Fitzgerald, *The Chinese View of Their Place in the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 22-23.

<sup>15</sup> Stuart-Fox, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

The Han dynasty further reinforced the Chinese worldview, which had been previously implanted by the Qin, by extending China's empire to Guangdong and northern Vietnam in the early first Century.<sup>16</sup> It laid out a more elaborate strategy for incorporating non-Chinese peoples into the Chinese sphere of influence. However, such a strategy did not wholly materialize with regards to establishing ties with Southeast Asia's archipelagic territories. Overseas trade was not encouraged because of its dangerous nature and a lack of interest in the region's products, which were regarded as of less value compared to those obtained through the Silk Road trade with Inner and South Asia.<sup>17</sup> There was neither a need for a concerted effort to engage archipelagic Southeast Asia nor for Chinese people to go abroad, as foreign vessels constantly arrived at Chinese ports to facilitate the growth of maritime trade. Subjugation of territories beyond the Chinese mainland was not necessary considering that Southeast Asia neither posed a threat to China's territorial integrity nor challenged its political supremacy. And considering that the Chinese lacked the naval potential to maintain control of the Chinese Seas and was still preoccupied with consolidating its borders to the north and west, the Han's strategy to keep relations with Southeast Asia to a minimum formality – while continuing to emphasize its supremacy in the region through the tribute system – was calculatively efficient.

It was not until the arrival of the Ming dynasty that China finally showed some maritime prowess. Between 1405 and 1433, the Ming navy, known as the Treasure Fleet, made its presence felt throughout the China Seas and the Indian Ocean. The Chinese Empire, under the rule of Emperor Zhu Di, had theoretically extended its

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*



sphere of influence to the entire Asian region and beyond, as foreign goods, medicines, and all forms of knowledge flowed into China at an astounding rate.<sup>18</sup> In Southeast Asia, the Chinese supported kingdoms such as Malacca (in present day's Malaysia), which provided them with a guaranteed safety passage through the strategic Malacca Strait. Additionally, they arranged to replace unfriendly foreign leaders whenever they encountered difficulties with anyone who was unwilling to trade on the Middle Kingdom's terms.<sup>19</sup> Expanding on the Qin and Han's use of the tribute system, the Ming employed its navy to bring non-Chinese peoples into the Chinese worldview. Despite its power, the Ming armada did not subjugate foreign navies through forceful means. Instead, its sheer presence was enough to ensure Southeast Asian leaders' submission to the supremacy of the Chinese Emperor's throne. Such was China's influence that by 1415 it had incorporated within its hegemony important trading routes in the Indian Ocean (as far as East Africa) and the China Seas (Korea, Japan, and the Southeast Asian archipelago).<sup>20</sup>

However, just as suddenly as the way in which China became a maritime power, the demise of the Ming navy came about in a rapid fashion at the end of Emperor Zhu Zhanji's (Zhu Di's grandson) rule. What had initially appeared as China's rise as a global power was systematically dismantled in order to pave the way for a return to the Middle Kingdom's tradition of isolationism and focus on consolidating continental territories. Historians today are still confounded by the sudden end of China's maritime supremacy under the Ming dynasty; some attribute this to

<sup>18</sup> Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-1433* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>20</sup> Gavin Menzies, *1421: The Year That China Discovered the World* (London: Bantam Press, 2002).

bureaucratic politics in the capital, while others to shifting priorities as the threat from the Mongols in the north increased.<sup>21</sup> In any regard, the demise of China's influence came about just as colonial Europe bulldozed its way into Asia, and particularly into Southeast Asia. Unable to compete with the Europeans, it was not until the Communists took power in the mid-twentieth Century that the Chinese attempted to regain their leadership and dominance over countries in the region.

A look at Imperial China's interactions with Southeast Asia reveals certain patterns that would later on profoundly colour the two's relationship in modern times. Maintaining ties with Southeast Asia was important, especially considering the constantly increasing number of overseas Chinese migrating into the region. However, the importance of such ties extended only as far as they did not hamper the Middle Kingdom's dealings with other foreign elements, such as the Mongols to the north and the Persians and Indians to the west. Within the Chinese worldview, which was materialized in the form of a tribute system, the onus of maintaining Sino-Southeast Asian relations rested on the region's princes and kings as they were seen to be the ones more in need of China for trade purposes, instead of the other way around.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the Middle Kingdom for most of the time may have been constricted in its ability to stress hegemony over archipelagic Southeast Asia because of its military's limited maritime capabilities. However, even when the Chinese had the strongest forces at sea during certain periods of the Ming dynasty – and had the potential to solidify its dominance over the region – they retreated to isolationism as matters with other foreigners on the continent became more pressing.

<sup>21</sup> Levathes, *op.cit.*, pp. 175-179.

<sup>22</sup> Stuart-Fox, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

At the dawn of a unified Chinese Empire, the Qin dynasty formulated a Chinese worldview that saw the Middle Kingdom at the apex of a hierarchic international relations structure. Southeast Asia was part of the Outer zone, and thus, its importance in Chinese foreign policy's list of priorities was considerably low. Later dynasties such as the Han and Ming emulated and strengthened this uniquely Chinese perspective of international relations in order to reassure themselves of China's cultural superiority. This was done because of the Chinese leaders' keen sense of the relevance of their history for all time.<sup>23</sup>

However, the tribute system worked mostly at the theoretical level as a guide for the achievement of an ideal foreign policy. As historian Wang Gungwu notes, even though the institutions reflected a view of Chinese superiority over the barbarian non-Chinese peoples, they also contained an unspoken understanding that foreign polities were equal, and thus should be treated with impartiality.<sup>24</sup> The Middle Kingdom treated inferior Southeast Asian princes and kings only as far as the latter were willing to interact under such terms. What was surprising was that the Southeast Asian peoples accepted these conditions; recognizing the Chinese' magnanimity, they consented to being treated as of secondary importance in China's foreign relations. This form of relationship would continue even as the Imperial Empire declined, and a new Chinese republic was created, first under the Nationalists, then later under the Communists.

<sup>23</sup> Wang, "Early Ming Relations... *op.cit.*, p. 61

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

### 3.3. The Mao Period

The dominance of colonial Europe in Asia and the demise of the Qing dynasty – which symbolized the end of Imperial China – dealt a severe blow to Chinese perceptions of cultural superiority. Having provided the guiding principle for China's interactions with the rest of the world since the unification of Chinese lands under the Qin dynasty, the traditional Chinese worldview slowly crumbled in the face of Europe's onslaught in the region. With the signing of the "Unequal Treaties" at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Chinese renounced their Sinocentric view of the world, and were obliged to accept the authority of an international system based on western conceptions; the claims that the Middle Kingdom's Emperor was the world's supreme monarch, and that other rulers should be treated as tributaries, no longer became a plausible framework for formulating China's foreign policy in the modern era.<sup>25</sup> China had been able to hide its weaknesses and pay no heed to the realities of the international system by accepting as true a conception of a hierarchic, Sinocentric world order; as well, it had successfully kept Southeast Asian polities in awe of its magnanimity through the rituals of a tribute system. However, as times changed, the traditional Chinese worldview became irrelevant and lost its place in a world that was dominated by western powers and their ideas on the structure of international relations.

At the end of the Imperial period, conditions both at home and abroad did not provide China with an environment conducive for greater participation in international affairs.

<sup>25</sup> Fitzgerald, *Changing Directions... op.cit.*, p. 6.

Having just woken up from a dream of supremacy in a hierarchic world order, China found itself in a society of states in which it was a lesser power compared to geographically smaller countries such as Great Britain, France, and Japan. The 1840 Unequal Treaties had furthered China's problems, as other Great Powers were steadily making political gains at the expense of the Chinese.<sup>26</sup> This was somewhat natural considering that China was late in entering the modern western-based international system; the other countries were more adapted to taking advantage of this structure.

At the same time, the Nationalist Guomindang government's position as China's foreign policy-making entity was never stable even since the creation of the Chinese Republic. While Japan was rapidly encroaching on and occupying Chinese territories, the Communists were slowly eroding the government's authority at home by gaining the support and allegiance of more Chinese people. In the face of such challenges to its legitimacy, China's ruling elite was unable to lift the country to a more prominent status in international affairs. And when the Second World War ended, the inclusion of China in the winning alliance (which is the basis for the United Nations Security Council Permanent Membership) was not entirely a recognition of Nationalist China's Great Power status, but instead an effort by the West to keep a check on Japanese militarism as well as gain a partner in its fight against the growth of communism around the world.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Wang, *China and the World... op.cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27.

Nevertheless, in spite of China's mediocre status in the international system at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it continued to hold Great Power aspirations. Many Chinese leaders recognized that the view of a world order in which China had an over-all supremacy was no longer valid; however, they remained keen on reviving certain aspects of the country's glory days. The belief was that there was nothing essentially flawed with the Middle Kingdom's civilization and its traditional worldview.<sup>28</sup> The Nationalist leaders attempted to realize this perception, but were hampered not only by the legitimacy problems they encountered within and beyond China's borders, but also by the fact that they were the force which had actually instigated the demise of Imperial China and its traditions. Thus, it was not until Mao adapted the traditional Chinese worldview in a modern setting that the Chinese people could once again hope their country would assume its natural status as a Great Power in international relations.<sup>29</sup>

Learning from history in the process of foreign policy-making meant that efforts were needed once again to establish a world order in which the relationship between China and Southeast Asia was based on the notion of *primus inter pares*. However, considering China's greater preoccupation with domestic matters and general weakness abroad in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, not much could be done with regards to developing strong ties between the Nationalist government and Southeast Asian polities, which at the time, were also more concerned with their own internal issues. Fortunately, the end of the Second World War provided numerous opportunities for such ties to take form. China's status as part of the War's winning

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Fairbank, "A Preliminary Framework... *op.cit.*"

alliance enhanced its position as one of the top leaders in international affairs. Despite lacking in actual political influence, the Chinese had once again gained a sense of superiority (especially in Asia) similar to that made popular during Imperial times. Most importantly, soon after the end of the Second World War, the Communists took power of the Chinese government and pushed the Guomindang out of Mainland China into Taiwan; the main internal issue that had plagued China's foreign conduct (the rivalry between the Communists and Nationalists) was eliminated, and thus, China's foreign policy was once again in the hands of a single, united, and strong entity: the Communist government in Beijing led by Mao.

Mao was a dedicated student of Chinese history, and his decisions on domestic and foreign policies often reflected his knowledge of China's glorious past. Realizing the potential that laid behind the vastness of Chinese territories as well as it being steeped in culture and tradition, Mao approached the governing of modern China akin to the ruling of an ancient empire. Thus, "if he was to rule the empire, he must be guided by the wisdom of past emperors".<sup>30</sup> Mao continued studying Chinese history up to the day he died; the dynastic texts on war and statecraft never stopped shaping his perception of the world and China's place in it. In essence, as Mao had the power to exercise final decisions in foreign policy-making processes, references to the Middle Kingdom's glorious past provided the guiding light for China's foreign conduct during the Great Helmsman's era of rule.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Harrison E. Salisbury, *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), p.17.

<sup>31</sup> In one of his many works, Ross Terrill described in length how Mao constructed the People's Republic of China in the image of the Middle Kingdom's Imperial tradition. Mao not only created an internal party structure that resembled the country's dynastic past, but also viewed the world from a perspective in which China was the center of the world, and the other countries part of its vast tribute

Despite regaining the status of Great Power (even if such status was more symbolic than actual), China needed a foreign policy vehicle that would allow it to re-establish hegemony over the region. The Cold War had polarised the world into two rivalling sides and the Chinese could not compete against the Soviet Union's or the United States' influential powers. Therefore, the only means possible for them to exercise some leadership in a world dominated by the US-USSR bi-polarity was to create a third pole in the form of a united Third World front. Claiming itself to be a big brother in a fraternity of newly-independent, developing states, China sought to enhance its role in international politics by playing the part of representing the marginalized voice of the Third World.<sup>32</sup> Cloaked in such rhetoric, the Chinese' struggle to embrace Southeast Asia was also a means to reviving the sphere of influence that Imperial China had once achieved in the region.

### 3.3.1. The Third World and China's Credentials

The term "Third World" is used often within various fields of social science. Despite acknowledging the differences that exist among countries that are regularly identified as part of this grouping, these countries share a number of characteristics that set them apart from the more developed countries in the Western Hemisphere. Members of the Third World are alike in terms of these of factors:

system. This particular chapter of Ross' writing was aptly titled "Red Emperor". Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese Empire: And What It Means for the World* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Peter Van Ness, "China and the Third World: Patterns of Engagement and Indifference", in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

- a) colonial background;
- b) lack of internal cohesion;
- c) lack of unconditional legitimacy of national borders, state institutions and governing elite;
- d) susceptibility to internal and external threats;
- e) susceptibility to external intervention in domestic affairs;
- f) early stages of development; and
- g) marginalization from the dominant international security and economic analyses.

This characterization paints a picture of the Third World as "weak, vulnerable and insecure - with these traits being the function of both domestic and external factors".<sup>33</sup>

In economic terms, the concept of a Third World may no longer be relevant considering some of the countries in the group have been able to achieve great economic successes (e.g. Saudi Arabia and Singapore) while the rest have not (e.g. Ghana and the Philippines).<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, in analyzing security issues, this identification remains highly appropriate. At least three reasons account for this condition. First, scholars and state elites continue to acknowledge the north-south division. This emphasizes the distinct nature of the south's security concerns. Second, despite their differences, Third World states share common characteristics which determine significantly their security environment. These characteristics include the fear of internal threats and a dependence on external guarantees. Third, the term Third World was originally coined by the analogy of the "third estate of pre-

<sup>33</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1995), p. 15-16.

<sup>34</sup> Studies conducted by Kalevi J. Holsti, Davis B. Bobrow and Steve Chan all identified these countries as being part of the Third World. Kalevi J. Holsti, "International Theory and War in the Third World", in Brian L. Job, ed., *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1992), pp. 37-62; Davis B. Bobrow and Steve Chan, "Simple Labels and Complex Realities: National Security for the Third World", in Edward E. Azar and Chung-in Moon, eds., *National Security in the Third World: The Management of Internal and External Threats* (Hants, England: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1988), pp. 44-76.

Revolutionary France to refer to social groups other than the most privileged groups".<sup>35</sup> This situation is parallel to that of the Third World as it exists within the marginalized strata of the international system. In sum, through studying the security concerns of these countries, their association in the form of a Third World group becomes apparent. As one scholar summarizes it:

The diversity of the South... cannot be denied, but these features are nothing new and by themselves should not negate the Third World's claim for a collective label; the Third World states have never pretended to be a homogenous lot.<sup>36</sup>

If we were to refer to some of the characteristics distinguishing the Third World from the rest of the world, as described above, there are reasons to believe that China belongs to this grouping of countries. China's association with the Third World mainly stems from the view that it shares a similar historical experience with most of these countries' past sufferings. Being part of this group of "marginalized" nations meant common feelings of victimization and grievance at the hands of the rich and powerful. To some extent, the fact that the last dynasty ruling the Middle Kingdom was not of Han ethnicity (of which the majority of China's population is) often contributed to the feelings of deprivation and foreigner exploitation within the people's psyche. Although the Chinese never truly experienced a total occupation of its area by any western power, British and Portuguese occupation of Hong Kong and Macao, respectively, was until just recently a thorn in the side of Communist China's struggle for national integrity and identity. Moreover, the destruction inflicted by Japan during the Second World War continue to remind the Chinese of their country's

<sup>35</sup> This paragraph mainly draws from: Amitav Acharya, "The Periphery as the Core: The Third World and Security Studies", in Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, eds., *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 316-317.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 316.

vulnerability to external threats and the propensity for intervention in its domestic politics. Leaders in Beijing know about such deep fears, and they have often manipulated these feelings rather effectively in order to justify their decisions within the foreign policy realm, and in turn, strengthen their legitimacy.

Time and again, Chinese leaders have confidently re-iterated their country's Third World credentials. However, beyond what has been described in the previous paragraph, China's claim to Third World membership is day-by-day becoming highly questionable. With the exception of the period immediately after the Tiananmen Incident, the growth of China's economy (as indicated by its GNP growth rate) since the early 1980s has been impressive and has occurred at a very rapid pace.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, one cannot deny the level of poverty found in some areas of China's inland regions; nevertheless, a quick look at the coastal regions reveals a country whose economy is bustling and people's lifestyle is becoming modern (in the western sense). Development indicators such as life expectancy, literacy rate and general, physical quality of life demonstrate that China no longer belongs to the poor Third World.<sup>38</sup> And most importantly, the size of its population and territory allows for an abundance of the basic resources necessary for further economic development, and with this, greater improvement of the country's social conditions.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Van Ness, "China as a Third World State: Foreign Policy and Official National Identity", in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds., *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 196-198.

<sup>38</sup> Lillian Craig Harris and Robert L. Worden, "Introduction: China's Third World Role", in Lillian Craig Harris and Robert L. Worden, eds., *China and the Third World: Champion or Challenger* (Dover, Mass.: Auburn House Publishing Company, 1986), pp. 1-2.

China's claim to Third World membership is also problematized by the distinguishing status of its state system and military power. Despite the Communist government's relative youth, the Chinese have a strong political tradition and cultural achievement dating back to the Imperial period.<sup>39</sup> This obviously separates them from most Third World countries, whose liberation from the shackles of western colonial subjugation only started to take place after the Second World War. In terms of military strength, China belongs in the same league as the world's Great Powers, if not, as a regional power. The People's Liberation Army is one of the largest in the world. While it continues to employ weaponry that is often outdated, its sheer size continues to present a genuine threat to any of China's neighbours. With the rapid modernization of certain "pockets of excellence" within the forces (along with its frequent aggressive stance in dealing with border disputes) the Chinese will undoubtedly further raise the sense of insecurity among Asia-Pacific countries. Moreover, China has been a member of the "nuclear club" since 1964 and some even argue that its arsenal has now surpassed those of Great Britain and France.<sup>40</sup> From a strategist's perspective, this puts the Chinese just behind the United States and Russia in terms of potential power capacity. These arguments, then, beckon the question: How can such a potential world power continue to claim itself as belonging to a group of poor, weak, under-developed countries?

Indeed, the term "Third World" in itself is a rather contentious issue, especially considering its (ir)relevance in today's world politics. As tenets identifying membership of the Third World go through dramatic transformations since the term's

<sup>39</sup> Van Ness, "China as... *op.cit.*", p. 198.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel S. Kim, *The Third World in Chinese World Policy* (World Order Studies Program Occasional Paper No. 19) (Princeton: Center of International Studies, 1989), p. 3.



use re-surfaced in the 1950s, such uncertainty is further increased by the Chinese' insistence on being part of this grouping of countries despite factors indicating that it no longer is. As one scholar argues, "China is part of the Third World because China assigns itself to that amorphous group... It should be remembered, however, that an identity that is chosen can also be rejected".<sup>41</sup> The continuation of this Chapter will reveal the reasons behind China's association with the Third World as well as its resolve to remain part of the grouping despite factors indicating otherwise.

### 3.3.2. The Rhetoric of China's Third World Policy

As in other countries, the framework of China's foreign policy is founded upon a number of ideological beliefs. Ideology is used not only as the basis for foreign policymaking, but is also a potent source of its legitimisation and justification. Indeed, one may never know if every single move China makes in the international forum is motivated by ideology. However, an understanding of the matter will, at least, allow one to have a point of reference when observing and interpreting changes within China's regional and international postures. Being aware of China's policy foundations will allow for a more careful analysis of shifts (or the lack thereof) in foreign policy behaviour, as it proposes initial understanding of the possible reasons and explanations for such shifts.

Based on an interpretation of Lenin's analysis of the struggle of the international proletarian class, Mao's idea of New Democratic Revolution (NDR) claims that the

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<sup>41</sup> Harris and Worden, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

complete eradication of imperialist and feudal exploitation does not end with the establishment of national independence, but through transforming also the government system of these newly independent states into one that is based on communist ideology. In order to do so, China, as a self-appointed model of revolutionary success, imposed upon itself the responsibility to aid other groups around the world to achieve such goals.<sup>42</sup> Trusting that its efforts would make the greatest impact through supporting revolutionary movements in the Third World – in the form of support for independence movements against western colonialists or insurgency groups against recently-formed nationalist governments – China believed that such a foreign policy stance would allow them an important role in world politics, which was then dominated by the United States-Soviet Union bi-polarity. In time, China's leadership against the injustices of Cold War politics would assure it a place not only as a Great Power, but also as a model that most developing countries would follow.

The Three Worlds Theory, as Mao's NDR was also often referred to, was indeed an attempt by the Great Helmsman to establish a role for China in the Cold War dominated world. Considering the youth of the Chinese Communist government then, it was struggling to find an identity for itself within the domestic realm and the international forum. Although Mao considered that some effort could be put towards aiding armed struggle in the Second World (which consists of countries that were theoretically no longer under the exploitation of First World "predators", but could be persuaded to fight the cause of overthrowing these predators), he believed stronger

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<sup>42</sup> Van Ness, "China as... *op.cit.*", pp. 204-205.



that China's labours would have the most impact in the Third World. In the Third World, Mao found a possible vehicle for its efforts to water down the United States and Soviet Union's influence in international politics, and at the same time, solve China's identity crisis by casting its foreign policy as "a great motive force pushing forward the wheel of history".<sup>43</sup>

As noted China scholar, Samuel S. Kim, comments, the Three Worlds Theory was somewhat "a function of [China's] siege mentality – an instrument of an insecure underdog state in search of a united global front against powerful global predators".<sup>44</sup> It represents an on-going struggle against any form of hegemony through encouraging the transformation of the world political system. In its most basic notion, this would be carried out by progressively weakening those who are strong and rich, while at the same time strengthening those who are weak and poor. Indeed, one may argue that such a strategy could plant the seeds for another form of hegemony; however, the Chinese had no qualms over this as they saw themselves on top of this structure. If one recognizes the importance of such thinking within the foundation of China's foreign policy, then China's return to a Third World-biased foreign policy after the Tiananmen Incident will not come as a great surprise. In a time when China was being isolated and chastised by the western world for its domestic problems, Beijing was quick to switch its foreign policy attitude to one that is driven by a familiar sense of "siege mentality".

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Kim, *op.cit.*, p.5.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

In order to put Mao's theory into practice, Chinese foreign policymakers also adopted a few other ideas. One of them was the theory of contradictions, which stipulate that China is capable of distinguishing and prioritising the major contradictions (issues) in contemporary world affairs. This theory allows the Chinese to pursue tactical moves, which although they may appear mutually contradictory, are in effect, intended to advance a "higher", ultimate goal within its foreign policy's greater strategy.<sup>45</sup> For example, while continually adhering to communist slogans, China was able to change its stance towards non-communist Third World governments in the 1960s, as it believed that such a shift in policy would eventually lead to the success of its ultimate foreign policy goal: the breakdown of the United States and the Soviet Union's dominance over international politics. Such an example demonstrates the need to understand the importance of the theory of contradictions in China's foreign policy behaviour. This will, undoubtedly, shed some light on efforts to appreciate what some scholars often point out as "inconsistencies" in Beijing's policy choices with respect to its involvement in international affairs, and especially its connections with the Third World and Southeast Asia.

The theory of contradictions, in turn, is supported by practical concepts such as creating a "united front" among anti-imperialist forces, proposing the centrality of armed struggle in efforts to alter the outlook of the Cold War-dominated international politics, insisting on self-reliance in efforts to develop a socialist economy, and using China as the model for such development.<sup>46</sup> The united front concept originated as an attempt to foster a fraternity among colonized nations, underdeveloped countries and

<sup>45</sup> Van Ness, *Revolution and... op.cit.*, pp. 25-27.

<sup>46</sup> Lillian Craig Harris, *China's Foreign Policy Toward the Third World* (The Washington Papers #112) (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1985), pp. 17-23.

the socialist bloc (mainly eastern European countries) in order to fight imperialism. China was willing to turn a blind eye to the fact that some independence movements in colonized nations and recently-established governments in underdeveloped countries did not hold on to the communist ideology, and instead based its association with the Third World on a common colonial experience and continued ill-treatment by external powers. Furthermore, they stressed the level of poverty in these countries (including the Chinese themselves) as well as the danger of growing American cultural hegemony over the entire world.<sup>47</sup>

The significance of the united front concept is apparent when one analyses China's Third World policy more recently. Although the rhetoric of the communist-based NDR theory may have been watered down with the dwindling popularity of such revolutionary ideas both within China and in the world in general, Beijing's attempt to rally the Third World continues to be based on the need to unite the Third World (without prejudices against different government's political beliefs) against forces bent on sole domination of the world. With the downfall of the Soviet Union, and the American people's incessant chastising of China's domestic problems, Beijing's united front policy continues to target the potential growth of a US-dominated world.

As mentioned previously, it is difficult indeed to know for certain whether China's foreign policy has been motivated by the above-described ideas or not. In fact, such uncertainty goes with studying any country's foreign policy; only the Chinese foreign policymakers themselves know the extent to which their country's ideology has

<sup>47</sup> Van Ness, *Revolution and... op.cit.*, p. 60.

shaped its foreign policy. Nonetheless, some understanding of these ideological thoughts and leanings provide a basis for studying the intent of China's foreign policy in the Third World. Only from this basis will one then be able to fully recognize the value of any changes that have been introduced to the policy. Importantly, appreciation of China's Third World policy undoubtedly provides a deeper insight into understanding more recent interactions between the Middle Kingdom and its southern neighbours.

### 3.3.3. China, the Third World and Southeast Asia

China viewed its Third World policy as symbolical of its striving to make an impact in international affairs through creating a "third pole", which in turn, was aimed at altering the bi-polar face of Cold War world politics through uniting countries marginalized by the power structures at the time. Although China had been involved in the creation of the principles of peaceful co-existence (introduced to the world via the Bandung Conference 1955, which has often been referred to as one of the defining moments of the Third World movement), the "revolutionary" atmosphere of the Great Leap Forward was overwhelming, and it was reflected in China's foreign policy's rhetoric of autarky, anti-imperialism and militancy.<sup>48</sup> Radical Maoist leaders such as Lin Biao held sway in decision-making processes, and China's foreign policy was militant and confrontational towards not only both Superpowers, but also its supposed allies in the Third World.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Carol Lee Hamlin, "Domestic Components and China's Evolving Three Worlds Theory", in Harris and Worden, eds., *op.cit.*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40.

The publishing of Lin Biao's "the people's war" essay in the mid-1960s called for China to make itself a model of Third World revolution for people in Asia, Africa and Latin America to emulate.<sup>50</sup> Beijing's support for revolutionary movements in the Third World was largely implicit, as neither the CCP nor its leaders (especially Mao) rarely made any direct statement regarding such support. Indeed, there were occasions when explicit backing was given to certain movements or communist parties; however, in most cases, this was done only when the local movement or communist party had gained enough predominance or credit among its own people.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to propaganda support (through publications of articles and statements in the Chinese media), Beijing also provided aid in the form of military equipment and operational funds. Chinese soldiers were never directly involved in any of the revolutionary movements, except in Vietnam when it appeared as though the Americans were increasing its forces in the troubled area.<sup>52</sup> On other occasions, the involvement of the Chinese military was mostly in the form of training expertise; moreover, as in the Korean War, these military personnel disguised themselves as "volunteers". Such assistance was delivered through underground and third party means; yet, the Chinese made sure that the recipients knew where their support was coming from.

During this period, China's involvement in Southeast Asia became very strong. With the United States increasingly becoming more involved in the crisis in Vietnam, and strong elements (especially the military) within Southeast Asian countries leaning

<sup>50</sup> Van Ness, "China as... *op.cit.*", p. 197.

<sup>51</sup> Van Ness, *Revolution and... op.cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 112-114.

more towards the West, Beijing saw an added need to concentrate its effort in "exporting revolution" to this region.<sup>53</sup> China threw its support behind communist parties in Malaysia and Indonesia, rebel movements in Thailand and the Philippines, and the communist government in Laos. China's involvement in Vietnam was intensified by the fact that it feared the infiltration of American forces just south of its border. In Indonesia, Beijing's association with the local communist party (PKI) was important as PKI constituted the third largest communist party in the world. Unfortunately, this close relationship would end up disadvantageously when PKI was accused of mounting a coup against the Indonesian government and was subsequently wiped out by the military.<sup>54</sup> Indonesia, which was considered as the big brother of the region, broke diplomatic relations with Beijing (followed later by other Southeast Asian countries), thus putting a damper on China's aspirations of creating a Beijing-led Third World fraternity in Southeast Asia.

By developing a Third World alliance, China was somewhat successful in building bonds of friendship with countries in Southeast Asia. However, it failed to influence these governments because of its militant view of the international system. China's support for revolutionary forces in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines did not bode well with its attempts to cajole these recently established Third World governments into its sphere of influence. Although powerful at the beginning, the Bandung Spirit (as the Third World movement was often referred to) proved to be

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>54</sup> He Kai, *Interpreting China-Indonesia Relations: "Good-Neighbourliness", "Mutual Trust", and "All-around Cooperation"* (Working Paper #349) (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 2000), pp. 6-7.

"more words than deed."<sup>55</sup> Towards the end of the 1960s, many governments in the region did not want anything to do with China and instead fell subordinate to the United States as they attempted to fend communism away from their border. Far from achieving the goals of a sphere of influence in Southeast Asia, the Chinese had instead instigated strong anti-Chinese sentiments among regional governments and their peoples.

Although China managed to make a name for itself as a force of change in international politics, it also gained from the west the brand of a pariah state. In the end, China became isolated, and its efforts to sustain a revolutionary foreign policy were slowly draining its financial resources. Therefore, without necessarily having to discard Mao's Three Worlds Theory, China's approach to Third World politics was in desperate need of another revamp.

#### 3.4. The Post-Mao Period

In the 1970s, there was a shift towards a more moderate interpretation of Mao's ideas within China's Third World policy. To a certain extent, the shift came with the waning of Lin's influence and in its replacement, the rising prominence of Deng Xiaoping. However, a greater reason for this shift is an attempt by China to deal with changes within the international environment, which were causing problems for the development of the Chinese state and most importantly, its economy.<sup>56</sup> Instead of exporting socialist revolution, efforts grew to forge an alliance that was primarily

<sup>55</sup> Fitzgerald, *Changing Directions...* *op.cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> Hamlin, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

based on rationalist, anti-imperialist goals. In doing so, China wanted to continue its efforts to weaken both superpowers by broadening the field for setting up a third force in the bi-polar politics of the Cold War. At the same time, such a policy was expected to win back the friendship of countries such as Indonesia (and the rest of Southeast Asia) that had severed ties because of Beijing's previous militant stance.<sup>57</sup>

Differences in approaches towards foreign policy among Mao's successors resulted in confusion during the formulation of China's post-Mao Third World Policy. However, as Deng slowly rose to prominence among his peers, it appeared that his goal of pursuing a policy primarily based on peaceful co-existence – which he had initiated even before the Great Helmsman's death – was going to dominate China's international stance. Deng was mostly preoccupied with finding a solution for what he saw as the country's biggest challenge: to modernize and develop its economy rapidly.<sup>58</sup> Part of the problem's solution can be found in the domestic implementation of sound economic policies; however, another part of this solution lies in the formulation of a foreign policy that could nurture such efforts within a long-term framework.

What was apparent after the demise of Mao was that Southeast Asia no longer played a prominent role in China's foreign policy calculations. Realizing that their economy could profit from participation in the western-dominated international market, the Chinese were more preoccupied with courting the United States and its trading allies. China no longer wanted to be part of the Third World, and as the rhetoric of Third

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 4-5, 15-18.

World politics waned, so did the interest in building stronger ties with Southeast Asia. Then again, the non-existence of strong relations cannot be solely attributed to the Chinese' lack of interest, as Southeast Asian leaders were themselves very apprehensive about being too cozy with China. Just as conditions during Imperial times, modern China had left the onus for maintaining Sino-Southeast Asian relations to leaders in the region, as it preferred to pay greater attention to concerns that mattered more to its status as a Great Power: China's growing relations with the United States. A greater discussion of the development of Sino-American relations and of Chinese foreign policy under Deng's rule in general will be presented in the next Chapter.

### 3.5. Conclusion

Chapter Three outlines a historical account of the relationship between China and Southeast Asia since the Imperial period until more recent times. While the scope of discussion here does not constitute a comprehensive analysis of the subject, by touching on a number of themes highlighting this relationship, the Chapter introduced a greater understanding of the manner in which Chinese perceptions of Southeast Asia have been formed over the years. In doing so, the Chapter allowed for some groundings for analysis and comparison with the way Sino-Southeast Asian relations were carried out after the Tiananmen Incident in 1989.

As the discussion in this Chapter addressed, despite having a relatively long history of ties with Southeast Asia, China has never truly given such ties a primary role in its

foreign policy decisions. Believing that the Middle Kingdom stood at the apex of an international order based on the tributary system (in which Southeast Asian polities were at the bottom of the structure), China thought that its southern neighbours were more in need of Beijing's friendship than the other way around. Thus, Chinese leaders were comfortable with allowing their Southeast Asian counterparts to assume the initiative in maintaining the relationship. And even when China was making some effort to develop trading ties with the region, this was mostly carried out informally by Chinese merchants and traders. Such a theme in relations continues even until 20<sup>th</sup> Century, except on occasions when greater ties with Southeast Asia provided a means to improving China's importance *vis-à-vis* the other Great Powers. On such occasions (for example, during Beijing's drive for Third World solidarity) China was willing to attribute greater attention to Southeast Asia, as it hoped that such attention would produce favourable conditions for the furtherance of China's Great Power status.

Having established a pattern of relations between China and Southeast Asia from a historical perspective, and presented the general perceptions underlying the Chinese' view of their southern neighbours, the next Chapter sets the basis for a deeper look at how foreign policy was formulated and carried out during the reform period led by Deng Xiaoping. While the latter parts of Chapter Three may have slightly touched on the issue, greater comprehensiveness needs to be achieved in order to allow grounds for comparison with conditions after the Tiananmen Incident.

## **China and Southeast Asia**

### **During the Era of Deng Xiaoping**

#### 4.1. Introduction

As the previous chapter has elaborated, the relationship between China and countries in Southeast Asia has, over the years, undergone tremendous ups and downs. Despite having a history that went back as far as the Dynastic periods of the Middle Kingdom, numerous factors have prevented the development of a harmonious, good-neighbourly environment among these countries. At times, Sino-Southeast Asian relations were even antagonistic, as exemplified by events in the 1960s. As feelings of distrust, misperception and lack of confidence were high – particularly considering the Cold War climate at the time – China and Southeast Asia were both overly cautious in extending a friendship hand towards each other for fear of intervention in their internal matters. However, with shifts to the international, regional as well as domestic political climates, conditions pointed to a greater opportunity for improvement of relations among these neighbours towards the end of the 1970s.

The development of Sino-Southeast Asian relations is not determined only by the bilateral ties between China and each of these countries, but also by broader

international politics. If anything, Chinese foreign policy towards the region is formulated within the framework of its relations with the world's major powers at any particular time. During the Cold War era, Chinese interactions with the Soviet Union and the United States impacted on Beijing's perception of Southeast Asia, and in turn, its foreign policy design towards the region. In the case of those Southeast Asian countries that were part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China's ties with them were largely conditioned by how it related with the United States, as ASEAN – despite its declared neutral stance – leaned towards the West throughout most of the Cold War, especially during the Association's formative years in the 1960s and 1970s.

This Chapter explores the shifts in international politics during the 1970s and 1980s as well as the changes in China's domestic environment that led to a re-conceptualization of the Chinese perception of the world and their place in it. A discussion of this not only allows for a greater understanding of Beijing's changing attitude towards Southeast Asia, but also provides an insight into how leaders in the region altered their views towards the growing potential of China in regional and international politics. As its relationship with the United States turned from one that were governed by enmity to one of amity, China saw the possibility of building cooperation with Southeast Asia as a means of furthering its domestic calls for economic development and modernization. And from Southeast Asia's perspective, the opening up of China and its improved relations with the United States gave an opportunity to observe China in a different light. Overall, shifts in the world's balance of power provided a climate conducive to greater Sino-Southeast Asian



relations based on mutual benefit as well as mutual concerns associated with coping with these shifts.

At the same time, although channels and opportunities were opening up for relations between China and Southeast Asia to blossom, there continued to be an array of issues and challenges preventing interactions from becoming even warmer. Considering the relationship's long history – especially when remembering the antagonistic stances predominant during certain periods of this history – the road towards greater multi-dimensional cooperation remained littered with hurdles originating from a sense of mutual distrust and lack of confidence. As these countries (including China) struggled to identify and consolidate their nationhood in the post-World War Two world, issues of economic rivalry, territorial disputes, the overseas Chinese, as well as the Major Powers' interference in domestic politics posed problems that could potentially unravel the slowly growing web of ties between China and Southeast Asia.

Once the Chapter has elaborated on the conditions surrounding Sino-Southeast Asian relations in the post-Mao era, it delves into an examination of how these conditions fit within the dissertation's theoretical framework as a whole, as previously discussed in Chapter Two. Chinese foreign policy is determined by domestic issues, external matters, and the leadership's perception of China's needs within the international realm. During the 1970s and 1980s, the internal determinant remained constant after Deng Xiaoping's decision to embark the country on a path towards modernization. This provided an impetus for better relations with surrounding countries, especially

Southeast Asia. And because the leadership determinant – under the ultimate guidance of Deng – also remained constant during that period, the factor molding Chinese behaviour abroad could be boiled down to their responsiveness and adaptation towards external stimuli. Thus, with two of the three determinants remaining constant, China's shifting foreign policy towards Southeast Asia during the Deng period before Tiananmen was a process of adaptation to changes mostly outside of the country.

Building on the discussion of the earlier Chapters – especially that on the historical background of the issue – Chapter Four provides not only a greater understanding of *modern* China's ties with its southern neighbours, but also a more detailed picture that can be used for comparing conditions during and after the Tiananmen Incident in 1989. It determines the factors that allowed improved Sino-Southeast Asian relations beginning in the 1970s and provides a view to explaining why greater relations between them became both possible and necessary after the United States and the West imposed sanctions on the Chinese in 1989. Furthermore, the Chapter allows an insight into looking at China's continually shifting foreign policy after Deng's rise to power as a process of *adaptation* in an international environment that at times could provide the Chinese with an opportunity to develop its sense of nationhood, but more so often poses a threat to their sovereignty.

#### 4.2. Deng's Rise to Power and Its Impact on Sino-Southeast Asian Relations

As Chapter Three outlined, China in the latter part of the 1960s was mostly turned inwards, as government and society were both occupied by the extremist politics of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Its foreign policy was focused on opposing both the Soviet Union and the United States by creating an alternative pole in the form of Third World unity under a socialist banner. However, the realization of this strategy crumbled as leftist politics were not well received by many Third World governments – notably in Southeast Asia – and perceptions of Chinese interference in internal matters resulted in growing antagonism towards Beijing. With failures to instigate revolution in the Third World, the Chinese became more isolationist despite continuing to label themselves as “the bastion against imperialism, revisionism and all reactionaries”.<sup>1</sup> The domestic ardour for international revolution (as a product of the Cultural Revolution) painted an unfavourable picture of China as a country threatening to corrode the foundations of contemporary international relations structure. In the eyes of Southeast Asia, the strategic potential of Communist China was a growing menace that needed to be – at best – kept at bay or – even better – contained within the Middle Kingdom’s mainland borders.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, towards the end of Mao Zedong’s rule in the 1970s, a number of Chinese leaders recognized that much remained to be done in order for their country to realize

<sup>1</sup> Michael Yahuda, *Towards the End of Isolationism: China's Foreign Policy after Mao* (London: MacMillan Press, 1983), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Stuart-Fox, *A Short History of China and Southeast Asia: Tribute, Trade and Influence* (Crowns Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2003), pp. 184-185.

its status as a regional power and an influential player in international relations. Motivated by the need to overcome what China-specialist Sheng Lijun described as “status discrepancy”, the leaders saw that there was a wide gap not only between the Middle Kingdom’s glorious past and its present weaknesses, but also between its “self-judged high importance” and the low status it was being accorded by the international community.<sup>3</sup> For a country that possessed tremendous strategic potential, China’s weak economic, political and military status in the 1970s was somewhat unnatural. Therefore, a change was needed both internally and externally to overcome such vulnerabilities and uncertainties, and enhance China’s status not only as a regional power, but also as a player to be reckoned with in the international arena.

Interest among some Chinese leaders in pursuing a foreign policy that would allow economic development and liberalization can be traced to Zhou Enlai’s announcement in 1975 (during one of his last public appearances) that China would return to a pursuit of the “four modernizations” in agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense.<sup>4</sup> Mao was not wholly supportive of this initiative, and despite his health conditions continued to wield supreme leadership in the Politburo.<sup>5</sup> As a result, Zhou’s initiative never really lifted off, particularly with his passing away in the following year. Nevertheless, the seeds for reform had been planted, and the faction of political leaders that Zhou had initiated prior to his death – which included

<sup>3</sup> Sheng Lijun, “China’s Foreign Policy Under Status Discrepancy, Status Enhancement”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 17:2 (September 1995), pp. 102-103.

<sup>4</sup> Yahuda, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

moderates such as Deng Xiaoping, who held clear and strong ideas on economic development and liberalization – slowly gained the support of many people.

In 1976, the trend towards reform grew stronger with the rise of Hua Guofeng (who was open to ideas on economic modernization) as Mao's successor at the head of the CCP.<sup>6</sup> However, the realization of such a policy was strongly opposed by the Gang of Four<sup>7</sup> and other leaders with more conservative and militaristic agendas, who defended Mao's revolutionary leftist, isolationist view of China's place in the world. Indeed, Mao's ability to rule declined severely as his health conditions worsened. Nevertheless, his political influence remained strong even when he was on his deathbed, and this provided the leftists with some moral support for their attacks against those who were inclined to open up the country to greater participation in the international community as a normal state.<sup>8</sup> Thus, a power struggle between the two camps ensued and the political stalemate was not resolved until Mao's death in 1976 and the subsequent purge of the Gang of Four.

However, Hua did not escape the power struggle unscathed. Mao's decision on Hua as his successor was a compromise to prevent the flaring of rivalry between the moderates, led by Deng Xiaoping, and the Gang of Four.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Hua did not possess a power base similar to Mao, and therefore could not maintain his hold on the

<sup>6</sup> Niklas Swanstrom, *Foreign Devils, Dictatorship, or Institutional Control: China's Foreign Policy Towards Southeast Asia* (Report No. 57) (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2001), pp. 77-79.

<sup>7</sup> *The Gang of Four were leftist political leaders who were the major proponents of the Cultural Revolution. The group consisted of Mao's wife Jiang Qing, and three other leading Party members, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan. They were ousted from power in October 1976.* Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), p. 118.

<sup>8</sup> Harrison E. Salisbury, *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), pp. 345-356.

<sup>9</sup> Lieberthal, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

Party Chairmanship without the aid of other leaders. The growing trends for development and modernization forced Hua to bring Deng back into power, as the latter was better versed in ideas about economic liberalization as well as their implementation. However, Deng was not prepared to play second fiddle to Hua.<sup>10</sup> Despite the deaths of Mao and Zhou, as well as the end of the Gang of Four's challenge, Hua's influence within the circle of power stagnated; in the end, this paved the way for Deng's rise to predominance.

Deng brought with him a desire to shift China's priority from political mobilization (emphasized as "class struggle") to economic modernization. Wanting to raise the people's standard of living and at the same time, enhance the country's status in the international arena, Deng's reformist policies aimed at boosting the people's sense of confidence not only in themselves, but also in the Party's role as the country's governing body.<sup>11</sup> These shifts undoubtedly had tremendous impact on the Chinese' perception of the external environment, and subsequently on shaping China's behaviour abroad. Three elements were thus introduced. First, while Beijing remained in opposition to hegemonism, it strove for the creation of a peaceful and cooperative international environment that was conducive to its economic modernization program. Second, Beijing abandoned the pessimistic view of the inevitability of war, and opened its doors to economic and cultural exchanges with other countries, especially those in the Asia-Pacific region. And third, Beijing emphasized flexibility and pragmatism in its foreign policy, thus allowing relations to

<sup>10</sup> Swanstrom, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> John K. Fairbank, *China: A Modern History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 406-407, 419-421.

develop with countries that were not of similar ideological beliefs.<sup>12</sup> As a foreign policy centered solely on fighting Soviet hegemony became inefficient and counterproductive, the road was opening up for a new strategy in Chinese foreign policy; one that was good-neighbourly, pragmatic, and purposeful for Deng's economic modernization program.

The pursuit of an external environment that was conducive to realizing China's domestic economic modernization required a return to conducting affairs with neighbouring countries based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.<sup>13</sup> In addition to shifting the focus of foreign policy towards economic concerns, this move signified a departure from an ideologically-driven effort towards one that was guided by geopolitics and realist perspectives of international relations. Non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs became essential, and despite remaining ardent about opposing imperialism, the strategy of exporting revolution was no longer seen as a viable foreign policy option; in essence, it became the belief that "every country should form its own destiny".<sup>14</sup> In the 1950s, Zhou had believed that China could significantly raise its stature in the international community if it were to lessen its militant views and instead emphasized the strengthening of state-to-state relations regardless of its counterparts' domestic political leanings.<sup>15</sup> One may think that Zhou

<sup>12</sup> Jian Sanqiang, *Foreign Policy Restructuring as Adaptive Behaviour: China's Independent Foreign Policy 1982-1989* (New York: University Press of America, 1996), pp. 88-89.

<sup>13</sup> The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence was concretized during the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955. The Principles espoused notions of: 1) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; 2) non-aggression; 3) non-interference in internal affairs of other countries; 4) equality of status; and 5) mutual benefit. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai played a key role in the writing of these principles along with Indonesian President Soekarno and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Stuart-Fox, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>14</sup> Swanstrom, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> Kuo-kang Shao, *Zhou Enlai and the Foundations of Chinese Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 213-216.

had been ahead of his time; but, by the late 1970s, both internal and external conditions were ripe for the actual implementation of his ideas. As well, Zhou's reformist colleague, Deng, was now in a position to guide China towards a new phase of foreign policy openness and pragmatism.

China's push for economic modernization, as well as its desire to nurture amicable relations with neighbouring countries opened up new opportunities for better relations with Southeast Asia. The potential economic benefits of greater regional cooperation were attractive and these provided the Chinese leadership with a view of Sino-Southeast Asian relations different from Mao's more militant approach. Once Deng had secured significant powers within the foreign policy-making circle following Mao's demise, the former immediately took serious steps to mend links with governments in the region. Recognizing Indonesia's influential role within ASEAN, Beijing's calls for re-establishment of diplomatic ties with Jakarta came about as early as 1977.<sup>16</sup> However, the resumption of diplomatic ties with Indonesia did not materialize until 1991 after China had already normalized relations with a number of other Southeast Asian countries. Nevertheless, Deng's effort to reach out first to Indonesia as the region's most influential country indicated a genuine desire to turn a new leaf in China's Southeast Asian policy, especially when considering that Indonesia had been very antagonistic towards Chinese intentions in the region since the failed coup by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in 1965 and Beijing's supposed involvement in the movement.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Swanstrom, *op.cit.*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>17</sup> Chen Jie, "Shaking Off an Historical Burden: China's Relations with ASEAN-based Communist Insurgency in Deng's Era", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 27:4 (1994), pp. 443-462.

Deng's rise to power ushered in a wave of policies geared towards China's economic development and modernization. Such reformist policies had a tremendous impact not only on domestic matters, but also on China's behaviour abroad as it struggled to create the appropriate external environment for implementing Deng's ideas. This change of heart marked a drastic change in China's perception of the world, one whose effects we are still feeling to these days; it provided the right conditions for greater cooperation between China and Southeast Asia towards the end of the 1970s, especially when such cooperation's prospect of economic benefits were too sizeable for the new Chinese leadership to simply ignore. The striving for economic modernization forced the Chinese to view its neighbours in a different light, and as a result, improved relations were made possible within a framework of carrying out a peaceful and pragmatic foreign policy. Nevertheless, despite its importance in re-shaping China's foreign policy after Mao, the domestic push for economic development cannot be perceived as the process' sole determining factor, as other conditions also played a role in establishing an environment suitable for the normalization of Sino-Southeast Asian ties.

#### **4.3. Factors Encouraging Greater Sino-Southeast Asian Relations**

In facilitating improved relations between China and Southeast Asia, the internal push for modernization was strongly complemented by a number of other events and situations. As we proceed with the discussion in this Chapter, it will be revealed that these events and situations clearly fed off each other to create together the environment suitable for developing Sino-Southeast Asian ties. Although the

domestic drive for modernization is considered to be of most importance<sup>18</sup>, it could not have created these conditions by itself. In order to fully capture the development of events surrounding the issue, one must also take into consideration the shifting geo-political climate of the Cold War (especially with regards to China's relations with the United States), the issue of Vietnam and its impact on power relations in Southeast Asia, as well as the changing nature of Third World solidarism.

##### **4.3.1. The Changing Geo-political Climate**

As already noted, China's perception of its southern neighbours was very much determined by its interactions with the Superpowers. And although Southeast Asia carefully declared its neutrality in the Cold War's bi-polar power struggle, Beijing was always of the belief that countries in the region were never truly non-partisan.<sup>19</sup> Relations had been amicable in the 1950s, when Indonesian President Soekarno, one of the most influential leaders in the Third World at the time, looked to Chinese leaders for support in uniting the Non-Bloc movement.<sup>20</sup> China saw that under the leadership of Indonesia, relations with Southeast Asia presented an opportunity to develop an alternative pole to the Soviets and the Americans. Unfortunately, sympathetic governments such as Soekarno's did not last, and with the subsequent systematic suppression of Communist parties following failed armed insurrections in Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, relations

<sup>18</sup> Swanstrom, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>19</sup> Shao, *op.cit.*, pp. 269-270.

<sup>20</sup> From excerpts of Mao's talk with Sukarno: "On Restoration to China Her Legitimate Seat in the United Nations", *Mao Zedong On Diplomacy* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1998), p. 204.

between China and these countries rapidly soured.<sup>21</sup> The establishment of ASEAN in 1967 – in spite of its supposed emphasis on economic cooperation – was, from the Chinese perspective, a political effort to build a “joint defense against the so-called Communism threat”.<sup>22</sup> It was believed that the hands of western imperialism were behind this movement, led by the United States. China felt itself becoming increasingly contained by some countries in Southeast Asia, as the West spread its tentacles in the region. By 1969, conditions had worsened so drastically that the Chinese went as far as calling these countries, particularly those belonging to ASEAN, America’s “Asian lackeys”.<sup>23</sup>

Conditions, however, became less complicated in the 1970s, particularly as *rapprochement* between China and the United States developed. In 1972, the American President Richard Nixon visited China and signed the *Shanghai Communiqué*, in which the two countries both agreed to accelerate the normalization of ties.<sup>24</sup> The event shook the international power structures and sent political shockwaves across the world. The impact of the transition in China’s relations with the United States (from one that was based on enmity, to one based on amity) had to be accommodated not only by the two sides involved, but also by the rest of the world, including countries in Southeast Asia. As relations between China and the United States improved, Beijing saw that opportunities were opening up for it to approach Southeast Asian countries that were leaning towards the West. When we

<sup>21</sup> A detailed account of China’s involvement in Communist-based insurgencies can be found in Melvin Gurtov, *China and Southeast Asia: The Politics of Survival* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1971).

<sup>22</sup> ASEAN Research Group (CICIR), “Report on China’s ASEAN Policy”, *Contemporary International Relations*, 11:12 (November 2002), p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Yahuda, *op.cit.*, p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> Details of the agreement reprinted in “Joint Communiqué”, *Peking Review*, 3 March 1972, pp. 4-8.

consider that China’s interactions with the Superpowers was one of its foreign policy’s main determinants, the positive changes in Beijing’s view of the United States allowed for a similar possibility to develop in its perception of Southeast Asia.

Furthermore, the Sino-US *rapprochement* made it possible not only for China to view certain Southeast Asian countries differently, but also for leaders in the region to change their approach in dealing with the growing power of their larger northern neighbour. The influence of the United States, among other factors, had caused these leaders to look at China as a threat to their political survival, both in the international and domestic arenas. However, the opening provided by the Sino-US *rapprochement* led Southeast Asian countries to better understand China’s political moves, which in turn, turned their approach from one that was based on “negative precautions” to one based on “active cooperation”.<sup>25</sup> In essence, the development of constructive contacts with Beijing established “engagement instead of confrontation” as the basis of some Southeast Asian countries’ China policies.<sup>26</sup> Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand immediately began efforts to mend diplomatic ties with China, which would in the end materialize in 1974-75. Indonesia and Singapore were slower in following suit, but both countries also started signaling the possibility of improving relations in the near future.<sup>27</sup> Southeast Asia’s changing views of China further strengthened the Chinese leadership’s will to engage the region as a means to developing a peaceful and stable environment for the country’s economic modernization.

<sup>25</sup> CICIR, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Wen Guang-yi, “Prospects for Normalization between China and Indonesia”, in *The Emerging Relations between China and Southeast Asia: Limitations and Opportunities* [Proceeds and Papers of ASEAN-China Hong Kong Forum 1987] (Hong Kong: Centre for Asian Pacific Studies, 1988), p. 153.



The shift in China's view of the United States indeed had a tremendous impact on China's relations with Southeast Asian countries that were part of ASEAN. This was because ASEAN, despite its declared neutral stance and emphasis on economic cooperation, was largely seen as an attempt to resurrect the failed Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), which had been heavily influenced by the United States.<sup>28</sup> The countries belonging to ASEAN at the time (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) were wary of China's intentions in Southeast Asia due to Beijing's support of Communist movements in the region. And although the ASEAN countries were not official allies of the United States the way those of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) were, the Sino-US *rapprochement* presented better circumstances for ASEAN to establish closer ties with China. In addition to this, China's changing perception towards the United States and ASEAN allowed for greater Sino-Southeast Asian cooperation in dealing with another issue that was of immense mutual concern at the time: Vietnam's potential threat to the peace and stability of the region.

#### 4.3.2. Containment of Vietnam

Despite having similar views on ways to govern their respective domestic spheres, China and Vietnam began to have differences in their approach to foreign policy as early as the beginning of the 1970s. These differences can be traced to Vietnam's defiance of Beijing's military advice and insistence on relying on Soviet weapons

<sup>28</sup> The United States in 1954 oversaw the establishment of SEATO to counter the growth of Communism in the region through economically aiding member countries. However, the spirit of Non-alignment that prevailed in the region at the time prevented a US-backed organization from expanding. Of the Southeast Asian countries, only Thailand and the Philippines joined its membership. Stuart-Fox, *op.cit.*, p. 170-171.

during the latter part of the Second Indochina conflict against the United States.<sup>29</sup> Sino-Vietnamese relations spiraled further downward as the treatment of overseas Chinese in Vietnam worsened and China took advantage of Vietnam's domestic instability to seize the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea in 1974. When Vietnam's confrontation with the United States ended in 1975 – leading to the reunification of the former – Beijing felt that Moscow's influence on the Vietnamese was overwhelming and could potentially de-stabilize the region. "What the Chinese saw as threatened encirclement by the Soviet Union, the Vietnamese saw as an opportunity to reduce their dependency on China and to extend their influence in Southeast Asia".<sup>30</sup> At a time when the Chinese were calling for regional cooperation based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence, Vietnam was bent on using the momentum provided by its victory over the United States to expand its influence in Indochina. The continuous friction evolved into direct military conflict in 1979 when the Chinese military attacked Vietnamese territories in the north after the latter had invaded Chinese-supported Cambodia a few months earlier.

Vietnamese aspirations to extend its influence in Indochina did not bode too well either with the remainder of Southeast Asia, especially among the ASEAN countries, which feared the growth of Communism in the region. In 1971, Indonesia and Malaysia attempted to curb Vietnam's movement southward by jointly administering the strategic Malacca Strait; China supported this action even though it had neither any strategic designs in the area nor diplomatic relations with Indonesia or

<sup>29</sup> Stuart-Fox, *op.cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Malaysia.<sup>31</sup> Thailand was even more concerned with Vietnam's expansionist tendencies because of its geographical proximity. China was quick to recognize this and the importance of the Thais in containing Vietnam; it readily extended help in the form of arms and military expertise.<sup>32</sup> At first, the other ASEAN countries were uncomfortable with the growing Sino-Thai relations. However, as it became clearer that the Chinese shared their mutual concern for halting Vietnam's encroachment on the rest of Indochina, ASEAN's unity held firm in support of Thailand's new approach towards China. Thus, despite the region's uneasiness towards China's intentions, the fear of Vietnam – who had just recently defeated the mighty United States in a war – provided a common platform for cooperation between China and the Southeast Asian countries of ASEAN.

Although the cooperation was initially a strategic-military effort to contain Vietnam, it would later be overshadowed by economic considerations.<sup>33</sup> The sharing of mutual interests very much complemented China's domestic drive for economic modernization and its desire to create an external environment suitable for such trends. As a result, engagement with Southeast Asia increasingly became a crucial element in China's "economic development, all-around diplomacy, and external stability".<sup>34</sup> And the two sides demonstrated an ability to shelve political and historical misperceptions in order to emphasize developing their respective economies as well as the region's as a whole. Furthermore, the event paved the way for greater talks in cultural, scientific and technological issues; this was a significant move in

<sup>31</sup> Yahuda, *op.cit.*, p. 220.

<sup>32</sup> Stuart-Fox, *op.cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> Swanstrom, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> CICIR, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

further normalizing Sino-Southeast Asian ties, as the development of relations at the non-political level allowed for mutual confidence and trust to grow without necessarily being impeded by the political sensitivities associated with first-track (official) diplomacy.<sup>35</sup>

The United States' departure from Vietnam in 1975 caused a power vacuum in Indochina, which the Soviets immediately tried to fill by increasing its influence over the Vietnamese. The growing presence of the Soviet Union and Vietnam's expansionist inclinations were seen to be a considerable threat to regional stability. China and the ASEAN countries recognized this potential and realized that the situation could be prevented only through greater cooperation. In essence, China and the ASEAN countries mutually recognized each other as a stabilizing factor in the region.<sup>36</sup> The Chinese needed ASEAN's cooperation not only to countervail Moscow's influence in the region, but also to ensure that an environment conducive to economic modernization was sustained. Meanwhile, the ASEAN countries wanted to maintain its neutrality in the Cold War's bi-polarity by stressing that its *rapprochement* with China was based on economic considerations instead of political goals. Regardless of the rhetoric coming out of the capitals in the region, it was apparent that the common ground for increased cooperation came about mostly from the mutual need to check Vietnam's potential expansion in Southeast Asia.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Swanstrom, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

#### 4.3.3. Third World Solidarity

China's perception of Southeast Asia as a stabilizing force in international politics was also strengthened by the latter's role in the furthering of Third World solidarity. When we consider that Chinese foreign policy continued to be formulated within the framework of opposing hegemonism and imperialism, increased ties with Southeast Asia was seen as a key effort to once again revive the Bandung Spirit and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence founding the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).<sup>37</sup> The Chinese had always supported the Third World's struggle for peace, justice and equality in a world dominated by the Cold War's bi-polar rivalry; its support for revolutionary movements around the world was indicative of the drive to breakdown that period's power structures.<sup>38</sup> An approach towards Southeast Asia that was based not only on economic or geo-political considerations, but also ideological emphasis was sound, as it had the potential of being supported by both the Chinese leadership and its people. However, when bearing in mind the frictions caused by China's interference in Southeast Asian domestic politics during the 1950s and 1960s, the support for a Third World united front could no longer be in the form of exporting revolution, but instead greater economic cooperation.

As Chapter Three has elaborated, the strength of the Sino-Third World relations was founded on the Chinese' upholding of their Third World status. Such sentiments ran

<sup>37</sup> The development of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during the Cold War was highlighted in 1955 by the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. On this occasion, recently-independent and developing countries agreed to interact with one another based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and to strive for justice and equality through unity and solidarity. Stuart-Fox, *op.cit.*, p. 169-175.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy: Peking's Support for Wars of National Liberation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

deeper in China's ties with Southeast Asia, as both sides shared a similar history of suffering at the hands of western invasion, suppression, and colonialism. And even though the rhetoric of fighting western domination was toned down after Deng's rise to power in order to rid China of its past label as a revolution-exporting country, the call for a struggle towards ending hegemonism by any particular country in the world continued to resonate not only within China, but also in many other developing countries.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, it was believed that the peoples of China and Southeast Asia held common and similar cultural traditions in resisting certain values and moral standards imposed by the western civilization.<sup>40</sup> In time, the notion of "Asian Values" developed by the leaders of Malaysia and Singapore was embraced warmly by the Chinese as a demonstration of such shared cultural belief. This was somewhat different from how China related itself to Third World countries in western and southern Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. As a result, it did not come as a surprise that as the geo-political climate shifted with the change in Sino-US relations, the Chinese leaders immediately stressed the need for normalizing Sino-Southeast Asia, as this was the key to enhancing Third World solidarity in an increasingly multi-polar international scene.<sup>41</sup>

Chinese leaders made it clear to their Southeast Asian counterparts that China's relations with Communist parties in the region only remained at the moral level. This was part of an effort to assure the region that Beijing's years of inciting and

<sup>39</sup> Chen, *op.cit.*

<sup>40</sup> CICIR, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Van Ness, "China and the Third World: Patterns of Engagement and Indifference", in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 161-163.

supporting revolutionary movements had passed.<sup>42</sup> Led by Deng, the Chinese second generation leadership's desire to cultivate good-neighbourly relations and to stand apart from their predecessors was symbolized by the halting of a foreign policy based on Mao's revolutionary ideas. Within the framework of developing Third World unity and solidarity, China looked towards Southeast Asia as a partner in fighting for better conditions of survival as well as a fairer international political and economic order. The countries of ASEAN were seen as playing an important lever in their coordinating and balancing role among the Major Powers, especially with regards to power politics in the Asia-Pacific. When considering that ASEAN countries have made significant achievements in developing South-South cooperation and South-North dialogues, the strategy appeared sound and viable.<sup>43</sup> As cooperation grew, the Sino-Southeast Asian ties became once again (albeit in a different way) Beijing's main channel for developing an alternative pole in a multi-polar international system.

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The breakthrough in Sino-Southeast Asian relations in the 1970s, particularly in terms of Beijing's interactions with the ASEAN countries, was facilitated by a combination of multiple factors. Led by Deng, the second generation Chinese leadership's decision to embark the country on an economic modernization program – hence, opening it up to greater involvement in international affairs – occurred at a time when the geo-political climate was undergoing dramatic shifts, especially with regards to Sino-American ties; it changed the leadership's perspective of China's external

<sup>42</sup> Wen, *op.cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>43</sup> CICIR, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

environment and the country's place in it. These conditions allowed China to recognize Southeast Asia's potential role not only in enhancing economic development, but also in stabilizing power relations in the Asia-Pacific. In particular, cooperation had become more urgent because of mutual concerns over the Soviets' influence on Vietnam and the latter's expansionist tendencies in the region. Furthermore, Beijing perceived Southeast Asia as carrying the voice of the Third World in fighting for a fairer political and economic order in an increasingly multi-polar world.

#### 4.4. Challenges in Further Improving Sino-Southeast Asian Relations

In spite of the positive conditions described in the previous section, one must also recognize that China's relations with Southeast Asia were not completely free from difficulties at the social, economic and political levels. There were still numerous problems and challenges preventing cooperation from further developing. While both sides had agreed to shelve certain sensitive issues in order to cultivate a good-neighbourly environment, the inability to resolve these issues posed a nagging reminder of how precarious China's relations with Southeast Asia were, and that whatever progress achieved could easily collapse amidst the uncertainties of an ever-shifting international system.

From the perspective of Southeast Asian leaders, the feeling of threat emanating from China's growing power remained strong. Despite Chinese leaders' constant assurance

of Beijing's good intentions in the region<sup>44</sup>, there was still a low sense of mutual confidence deriving from a number of issues and factors. These include, among others, as follows:

- a. Historical animosities;
- b. Beijing's relations with Communist parties in the region;
- c. Overseas Chinese;
- d. Economic competition;
- e. Unresolved territorial disputes; and
- f. Cold War uncertainties.

The development of Sino-Southeast Asian relations were conditional on China's economic modernization program, *rapprochement* with the United States, and the desire to curb Soviet influence in the region. If such conditional factors were to change, the lingering issues and factors listed above could potentially threaten the survival and growth of these relations.

Historically, as noted in the previous Chapter, relations between China and Southeast Asia during the former's Dynastic period had been based on a feudal system in which the latter paid tribute to the Middle Kingdom. Within such a system, the Southeast Asian kings and princes had recognized China's superior position and the latter's capacity in interfering in their domestic politics. Understandably, with the Chinese' growing influence in the 1970s, as well as its leaders' continuous emphasis on bringing back the glory days of the Dynastic Imperial period, these pre-modern norms were fuelling tremendous tension and suspicion among the Southeast Asian countries.<sup>45</sup> Unwilling to return to the inferior position vis-à-vis their role within the international system, Southeast Asia's nationalist leaders feared the return of Imperial China and its over-reaching influence in the region. With the lessening involvement

<sup>44</sup> Chen, *op.cit.*, p. 461.

<sup>45</sup> Yahuda, *op.cit.*, p. 221.

of the United States in the region after the Vietnam War and the containment of the Soviet Union's influence in Indochina, China's rising power was not always perceived as a positive development. Among the ASEAN countries, such a trend posed a danger towards the struggle against hegemonism outlined by the Association's principles of Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). Thus, far from facilitating further regional cooperation, China's long history of relations with Southeast Asia was actually causing difficulties for the two sides to fully build mutual confidence within the setting of the contemporary international system.

Adding to the condition above, the fear of China's latent threat also stemmed from Beijing's relations with Communist parties in the region. When Deng came to power, he made a point to revise the doctrine of Communist party-to-party ties as China neither wanted local communist parties to cause situations that would jeopardize its economic relations with Southeast Asian countries nor could it control or influence the repercussions of such trouble.<sup>46</sup> Yet, at the same time, a complete severance of ties was not feasible because it would de-legitimize the government's political base. As a result, the Chinese leadership resorted to morally, instead of materially, supporting these groups; it declared that "the revolution road which suits a particular country can only be found out, invented and decided by the country's own people themselves".<sup>47</sup> In doing so, the Chinese government emphasized these parties' independence from Beijing's protective umbrella, and thus disassociated itself from the individual actions of Communist groups in the region. Nevertheless, the ASEAN countries were never fully satisfied with Beijing's reassurances. It was believed that

<sup>46</sup> Chen, *op.cit.*, p. 445.

<sup>47</sup> From a resolution passed at the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Chinese Communist Party Congress in June 1981 quoted in Chen Jie's writing, *ibid.*, p. 455.

because China had not *officially* renounced its relations with the regional Communist groups, the potential remained alive that China would revert to its former policy of assisting these groups' insurgent movements.<sup>48</sup> Such worries and suspicion were reasonable considering that countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines – which were still grappling with their own concerns related to consolidating a post-independence domestic political system – had experienced significant internal difficulties at the hand of local Communist parties.

In Indonesia, the most influential country in Southeast Asia at the time, the threat posed by China's potential interference in domestic affairs through its relations with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) somewhat tied in with the issue of the treatment of overseas Chinese. After the failed coup in 1965 involving elements of PKI, ethnic Chinese people in Indonesia experienced widespread persecution as they were singled out by the government as the basis of PKI's support.<sup>49</sup> Because it controlled much of the country's economy, the Indonesian Chinese community was perceived by many within the society and government as Beijing's tools in an effort to spread China's influence in the region. The lack of communication following Jakarta's suspension of diplomatic ties with Beijing in 1967 further undermined the situation, as the Chinese community in Indonesia suffered worse discriminatory policies, even until now. Although the Chinese government officially declared that the overseas Chinese should "observe the laws and decrees of the country in which

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Ian James Storey, "Indonesia's China Policy in the New Order and Beyond: Problems and Prospects", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 22:1 (April 2000), p. 147.

they reside... and serve the interests of the residing country"<sup>50</sup>, the Chinese people on the mainland were not willing to turn a blind eye to the suffering of their relatives in Indonesia. Thus, throughout the 1970s, the issue of the treatment of ethnic Chinese people in Indonesia remained a thorn in the side of relations between the two countries. When we consider Indonesia's influence in pulling together the voices of Southeast Asia through its leadership in ASEAN, the issue then becomes a stumbling block in further developing interactions between China and Southeast Asia as a whole.

Sensitivities related to the overseas Chinese issue in Southeast Asia were not found only in Indonesia. In Malaysia, the Chinese community amounted to 38 percent of the country's population, and any interference from Beijing was seen as a potential de-stabilizing factor in the make-up of Malaysia's recently independent multi-ethnic state.<sup>51</sup> Thus, when anti-Chinese riots occurred in 1969, the government introduced policies ensuring Malay dominance in most sectors of the society. Although the Chinese government at the official level refrained from intervening in the matter, Sino-Malay relations in general were not as amicable as either country would like it to be. The same can be said about Singapore's relations with China; fearing that Beijing could potentially interfere in the domestic politics of Singapore's predominantly-Chinese society, the Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was cautious in his dealings with Communist China.<sup>52</sup> Just like the Indonesians, the Malaysians and Singaporeans felt threatened by China's increasing influence, and despite needing

<sup>50</sup> From excerpts of Mao's talk with Indonesian Ambassador Soekardjo Wijopranoto: "Overseas Chinese Should Observe the Laws of the Country in Which They Reside", *Mao Zedong on Diplomacy* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1998), p. 194.

<sup>51</sup> Yahuda, *op.cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>52</sup> Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese Empire: And What It Means to the World* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003), pp. 253-254.



China's assistance to contain a Soviet-backed Vietnam, they wanted to ensure the preservation of neutrality in the region by also pushing the biggest Asian country to the wall.

The overseas Chinese issue was not such a debilitating factor in relations between China and Thailand, as the Thai government was successful in assimilating its large Chinese minority into the society.<sup>53</sup> As well, the threat of a government-toppling Communist-backed insurgency (although present) was not as large as it was in other parts of the region. The Thais did not share the same sentiments as either the Indonesians, the Malaysians or the Singaporeans considering that their most pressing concern was to cooperate with China in order to contain Vietnam's expansionism; this was understandable because of Vietnam's geographical proximity to the Thai Border.

Obviously, the same cannot be said about China's relations with the other countries on mainland Southeast Asia, especially with regards to Vietnam. The breakdown in Sino-Vietnamese relations was in part caused by Beijing's accusations of the Vietnamese government's mistreatment of overseas Chinese. Of course, other factors fuelled the confrontation between the two countries; however, when China invaded Vietnam in 1979, some Southeast Asian leaders – particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore – saw the move as a possible attempt to protect the ethnic Chinese population in Indochina through forceful means.<sup>54</sup> On the one side, China's intervention helped the ASEAN countries' cause in halting the Soviet's growing influence and Vietnam's expansionist ambitions; while on the other side, the invasion

<sup>53</sup> C.P. Fitzgerald, *China and Southeast Asia Since 1945* (Camberwell: Longman, 1973), p. 63.

<sup>54</sup> Storey, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

demonstrated China's capacity to intervene in the domestic politics of its neighbouring countries. Fear of a revival of China's past revolutionary foreign policy – along with its support for Communist insurgent movements in the region – prevented most Southeast Asian countries from fully opening up to Beijing in spite of the Chinese leadership's continuous reassurances of non-interference as well as the potential economic benefits associated with better ties with China.<sup>55</sup>

And even so, the economic cooperation between China and Southeast Asia was not entirely free of tension and suspicion. The Chinese did not see the rising Southeast Asian economies only as an alternative channel to pursue its trade needs, but also as the source of foreign direct investment. Beijing openly called on the overseas Chinese in the region to contribute to China's economic development and in return, gave them "preferential investment treatment".<sup>56</sup> And when considering that over 20 million overseas Chinese lived in Southeast Asia and had maintained their cultural ties with the Mainland, the flow of funds from the region to China expectedly grew enormous by the year. This condition proved a sore spot for the Southeast Asian governments, as they were themselves in heavy need of these funds to develop their local economies. Of course, nothing could really be done to stop the flow of investment from overseas Chinese to Mainland China, especially as conditions remained the same for these overseas Chinese in their residing countries. However, what was certain was that the situation exacerbated tensions, as Southeast Asia's

<sup>55</sup> Chen, *op.cit.*

<sup>56</sup> Qingxin Ken Wang, "In Search of Stability and Multipolarity: China's Changing Foreign Policy towards Southeast Asia after the Cold War", *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 6:2 (December 1998), p. 59.

suspicion of China's desire to expand and exploit the "greater China" community increased.<sup>57</sup>

The economic competition between China and Southeast Asia was also caused by the fact that both sides produced and traded goods that were similar. Indeed, there were complementarities in the economic relationship, as China looked to Southeast Asia as sources of raw materials; this trend was demonstrated by the growth of trade throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.<sup>58</sup> However, as the economies of both sides developed and the international market became more saturated with the growth of economic globalization, the threat of rivalry and competition became apparent. In the manufacturing sector, China and Southeast Asia were developing similar structures in strengthening their electronic and textile exports; both sides relied on the strength of their abundant and cheap labour as well as technological expertise at the intermediate level.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, in a globalized economy driven by foreign direct investments, China and Southeast Asia were pegged against each other in an effort to obtain such funds from industrialized countries.<sup>60</sup> Although the immediate need for economic partnership may have diverted for the time being the leaders' attention from these issues, their nagging presence posed immense difficulties for economic ties to develop further.

And even when the challenges posed by historical, social and economic factors were dealt with, there were still political and security issues that remained uncertain. When

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>58</sup> Swanstrom, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>59</sup> Wang, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 61.

the Chinese military took over the Paracel Islands from the Vietnamese in 1974, the rest of Southeast Asia easily turned a blind eye, as the move was perceived as part of an effort to contain Vietnam's regional ambitions.<sup>61</sup> However, when China went beyond the Paracels and began to have an interest in the Spratly Islands, alarms were raised in Malaysia and the Philippines as these countries had competing claims over the territory. Indonesia did not have any claims in the Spratlys, but it too was concerned over China's maritime expansion considering that its mineral-rich Natuna Islands were only a few kilometers south of the disputed area.<sup>62</sup> China declared that its movement southwards was a reclaiming of territories owned by the Chinese since the period of the Han Dynasty.<sup>63</sup> And the use of arguments based on such historical facts to justify China's claims over the islands in the South China Sea caused tremendous fears among militaries in Southeast Asia of a revival of China's Dynastic ambitions. Thus, even though both China and Southeast Asia had agreed to shelve the issues of territorial disputes in order focus on cultivating economic relations, the former's continued existence (and the countries' apparent inability to fully resolve such issues) posed a hindrance to the development of the trust and confidence needed to build a strong regional cooperation.

The inability to resolve economic and political issues may have been caused by historical tensions and suspicions. However, this was also worsened by the fact that official channels of communications were limited. Although Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand opened diplomatic relations with China in the 1970s,

<sup>61</sup> Yahuda, *op.cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>62</sup> Mark J. Valencia, *China and the South China Sea Disputes* [Adelphi Paper 298] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> Marwyn S. Samuels, *Contest for the South China Sea* (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1982), p. 10-11.

Singapore and Indonesia had not followed suit. The lack of official ties with Jakarta presented the biggest hurdle considering that the Indonesians carried the most influential voice in Southeast Asia, especially within the region's most important institution, ASEAN.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, China's confrontation with Vietnam lasted well into the 1980s and the domestic conditions in Burma, Cambodia and Laos prevented these two countries from fully engaging in regional (let alone, international) politics. China was cautious in joining any multilateral negotiations and rested its Southeast Asian policy on bilateral relations with individual countries. In doing so, the Chinese were able to use its country's size and influence to ensure that most of the advantages went to them. Such relations were indeed successful in overcoming certain issues; however, the further development of a comprehensive Sino-Southeast Asian cooperation required the cultivation of mutual trust and confidence through engaging in transparent deliberations within a multilateral setting. As well, these deliberations needed to go beyond second-track diplomacy and enter the realm of official diplomacy if they were to provide a strong basis for regional cooperation.

When considering the importance of ASEAN as a regional association, it was unfortunate that China had no links with ASEAN as an entity throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which provides the most bonafide forum of discussion for multiple issues between Southeast Asia and its dialogue partners (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, and the United States), was not created until 1993. As well, neither ASEAN-China-Japan-South Korea dialogues (also known as ASEAN+3) nor ASEAN-China dialogues (ASEAN+1) came into

<sup>64</sup> Wen, *op.cit.*, pp. 156-157.

being until 1997, thus preventing deeper and broader multilateral discussions on economic, social, cultural, political and security issues from emerging.<sup>65</sup> With the lack of such formal interacting mechanisms, the development of comprehensive, multilateral Sino-Southeast Asian ties was unsurprisingly stagnant. And even if official Sino-ASEAN ties had concretized earlier, it did not necessarily mean that the same was happening with regards to China's relations with Southeast Asia as a whole considering that the Association's membership at the time still did not include any of the countries in Indochina (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam) and Burma. Overall, China's relations with Southeast Asia was complicated not only by historical animosities and certain outstanding issues, but also by the inability to establish mutual trust and confidence through efforts at solving these issues within an official, multilateral setting.

Although the improvement in Sino-Southeast Asian ties was facilitated by circumstances of mutual need and assistance, one cannot deny the existence of issues that plagued the ties from developing even further. Considering the uncertain political climate resulting from the breakdown of the Cold War towards the end of the 1980s, it was natural that both sides continued to hold some sense of suspicion and threat towards each other. From China's perspective, the United States remained at large in Southeast Asia through its physical presence in the Philippines; the possibility was still high that ASEAN could move away from its neutral stance towards increased alliance with the United States. And from Southeast Asians' point of view, Beijing's increasing influence in the region posed the threat of Chinese domination akin to the

<sup>65</sup> *ASEAN Selayang Pandang* [An Overview of ASEAN] (Jakarta: Sekretariat Nasional ASEAN, 1998), pp. 243-246.

Middle Kingdom's hegemony during its Dynastic periods. In either case, Sino-Southeast Asian relations were precariously sustained by common interests in certain issues, and not necessarily increased mutual trust and confidence of each other's intentions in the region. As much as both sides wanted to maintain their good-neighbourly ties, a relationship based on limited trust and confidence was bound to unravel as interests change with the shifting international political climate.

#### 4.5. Conclusion

When observing the three determinants of Chinese foreign policy during the 1970s and 1980s, the trends can be summarized as follows: a) changes in the *external* environment, especially with regards to Sino-US ties, allowed China to pursue a normalization of relations with Southeast Asia; b) the new *leadership*, wanting to modernize the national economy, signaled for a change in China's perception of itself and its place in the world; and c) the national interest in pursuing economic development (with Deng as the architect of this) as the focus of the country's foreign policy's *internal* determinant.

Thus, based on the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two and China's historical ties with Southeast Asia (as discussed in Chapter Three), we see a process of *learning* in China's decision-making process, whereby changes in all three determinants of foreign policy-making together created a new Chinese approach towards its southern neighbours. The alteration in foreign policy occurred during the transition of leadership from Mao to Deng. And although the internal determinant

(the country's national interest) played a role, these shifts would not have occurred without changes to the external and leadership factors. Moreover, the change in internal factors would not have occurred in the first place had the leaders not changed their views of the shifting Cold War politics and China's role within this environment.

Since Deng's rise to power in the late 1970s, the internal determinant to foreign policy has remained the same; it stresses the importance of national economic development. Thus, changes to its foreign policy during this period have been guided mainly by China's reactions to the changing external environment as well as its leadership's perspective of China's place in the world. Considering China's relative weakness vis-à-vis the Superpowers, it has put itself in a reactive position, in which leaders continuously needed to respond to challenges and threats in their efforts to guide the country's conduct abroad. Overall, China's foreign policy changed according to how China best saw its position as well as its successful pursuit of national interests in international affairs.

While China's foreign policy mechanisms underwent a process of *learning* during the transition from Mao's to Deng's leadership, the events that happened following this were mostly processes of *adaptation*. It is important to remember that a process of learning requires changes to all three foreign policy determinants, while adaptation is a condition in which a shift in foreign policy is attributed to the changes in only one or two of these determinants. Deng's rise to power introduced economic development and modernization as the internal determinant to China's foreign policy decision-making. As such, throughout the Deng era, both the internal and leadership factors

determining China's conduct abroad remained constant. Thus, any shifts in policy since Deng's ascendancy to power was a process of adapting – and not learning – to the pressures and stimuli originating from the external environment.

With regards to China's interactions with Southeast Asia, this Chapter has demonstrated that improvement in relations was conditional on the overall political climate at the time and how the leaders perceived the situation. China's normalized relations with the United States allowed the former to engage Southeast Asia – especially the countries of ASEAN – without the fear of harming the region's balance of power. Indeed, the drive for modernization provided the impetus for engaging with Southeast Asia in the economic dimension; nevertheless, this would not have been feasible had the international political environment not experienced a shift in China's favour. The combination of these factors allowed China to view its southern neighbours in a new light, and fortunately this was well received by leaders in Southeast Asia as a means to jointly stabilize the region's uncertain political environment after the withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam.

However, as much as the international environment allowed China and Southeast Asia to cooperate in economic issues, the relationship was plagued by feelings of tension and suspicion resulting from old animosities and distrust. Issues of overseas Chinese, Communist party-to-party relations, territorial disputes, lack of diplomatic ties, and economic competition were shelved to provide the way for cooperation (conducted mostly at the non-official level) based on the common platform of helping each other's modernization schemes as well as halting the potential threat of a Soviet-

backed Vietnam. Convenient as this may have seemed, the inability to resolve these outstanding issues was a reminder of how fragile the Sino-Southeast Asian relations were and how shifts in the international environment could potentially unravel the ties that had carefully been cultivated since the 1970s. Nevertheless, as the next Chapter will discuss, the international political climate proved favourable to the Sino-Southeast Asian cause, as the Tiananmen Incident in 1989 once again provided the two sides with an even stronger reason to work together towards greater cooperation.

## **China's Foreign Policy after Tiananmen: The Third World and The Sino-Southeast Asian Connection, 1989-1992**

### 5.1. Introduction

In the early morning of 4 June 1989, Chinese troops moved into student-occupied Tiananmen Square, crushing an anti-government demonstration that had for weeks gained the sympathy of the general public throughout Beijing, the rest of the country, and even abroad. What most people had feared in the last few days of the stalemate between demonstrators and government forces had become a grim reality; the movement that had started off with smiles and idealism came to an end with blood and tears. The ensuing violence was tremendous, as government forces forcefully moved in on the demonstrators, who had barricaded themselves within the Square with makeshift fences of wood and steel. The soldiers used armed personnel carriers, tanks, assault rifles, and machine guns to disperse the crowd. As the clash escalated,

many of them began firing into the air and later at lower levels.<sup>1</sup> At first, it was believed that rubber bullets were used, but when bodies began collapsing under the rain of gunfire, the demonstrators realized that they were facing a barrage of live ammunitions from the soldiers.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, those who were in the line of fire were instantly killed or severely wounded. Although the unarmed demonstrators attempted to fight back using whatever means available, they were in the end overwhelmed by the government forces' numbers and firepower.

The statistics on casualties during the event remains sketchy, even until today. Indeed, both the government and demonstrators were manipulating these figures for their own political agendas. Even later studies by scholars such as Yi Mu, Mark Thompson, Andrew Nathan, and Perry Link pointed out the prevalence of such discrepancies and were unable to provide a conclusive account on the matter.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the fact remains that there were scores of deaths and other forms of casualties during the storming of the demonstrator-packed Tiananmen Square by government forces on 4 June 1989. It needs to be noted, however, that the occurrence of casualties were not restricted to the Tiananmen Square alone, as confrontations between government forces and demonstrators also took place in nearby areas such as along Chang'an Boulevard and Qianmen Boulevard (which runs perpendicularly to the Square's north and south ends, respectively).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Yi Mu and Mark V. Thompson, Crisis at Tiananmen: Reform and Reality in Modern China (San Francisco: China Books and Periodicals, 1989), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.

<sup>3</sup> ibid.; Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, The Tiananmen Papers (London: Abacus, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> ibid., pp. 504-506.



The initial reports by the United Press International (UPI) estimated over 176 people killed and 464 wounded; however, the number later rose to over 500 people killed and thousands wounded.<sup>5</sup> Other early sources even claimed that the number of casualties were as high as 4,000 people.<sup>6</sup> Although it was slow to give an account of facts related to the Incident, the Chinese government later reported that there were in total 241 people deaths (23 soldiers and 218 civilians) and around seven thousand people wounded.<sup>7</sup> Regardless, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the defender of Chinese sovereignty, had carried out something that went against its very own mandate; it had cold-bloodedly murdered the very people it was supposed to be defending. As the statue of the Goddess of Democracy – which had been erected by the demonstrators days earlier – crumbled to the ground, so did the image of the Communist government in the eyes of its people (particularly among the country's urban, intellectual community<sup>8</sup>) and the rest of the world<sup>9</sup>.

The violent oppression of student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square and the subsequent, systematic persecution of dissidents across the country made newspaper headlines worldwide. In a time when issues of human rights were coming to the forefront of most international relations agendas, the Chinese government's actions were viewed as tyrannical, undemocratic, and unacceptable for a country of China's

<sup>5</sup> "Scores Killed As Troops Storm Square: Chinese Army Crushes Protest", *The Toronto Star*, 4 June 1989, p. A1.

<sup>6</sup> "More Than 4,000 Killed", *DPA*, (5 June 1989), in FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> These figures are obtained from scholars Andrew Nathan and Perry Link's reading of local official accounts on the matter, as published in: Nathan and Link, *op.cit.*, pp. 574.

<sup>8</sup> During the days immediately following the Incident, students in many campuses in Beijing produced publications and radio programs denouncing the government's violent crackdown of the pro-democracy demonstration. *ibid.*, p. 507.

<sup>9</sup> As the continuance of this Chapter will describe, numerous international media publications reported the Incident through perspectives that portrayed the Chinese government in a negative light. As expected, the result of this was a barrage of denunciations by the international community (including Chinese people living abroad) against the Chinese government.

stature. The response from the West was predictable; in addition to harsh criticisms, the United States, the European Union, and Japan imposed immediate sanctions, particularly in the area of defense and military.<sup>10</sup> Such strong condemnation was voiced not only at the official levels, but also among the general international public, as protests and demonstrations sprang up in many western countries supporting the Chinese students' movement and demanding Chinese leaders' responsibility in the bloody carnage. Overnight, the perception of China as a country that had been slowly opening up to the world dramatically turned into fears of a return of Maoist China as it had been during the Cultural Revolution.

As the previous Chapter has elaborated, the period prior to the Tiananmen Incident had been a fruitful one in China's strive towards modernizing the domestic economy and raising its international status. The geo-political climate towards the end of the Cold War had provided the appropriate conditions for these developments. Direct external threats on Chinese borders had slowly disappeared as Beijing's relations with the Superpowers improved. And as a result, the government had been able to focus its nation-building efforts on carrying out economic reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping and opening up the country to international trade. By embracing the contemporary international system and adopting a more pragmatic style of foreign policy, China had been shedding its former identity as the bastion of international revolutionary movements and strengthened its status as a "responsible state" and Great Power not only within the region, but also beyond. Unfortunately, China's growing openness also meant that it was becoming more vulnerable to international

<sup>10</sup> "Beijing Pays for the Price of Tiananmen Butchery", *The Guardian (London)*, 21 June 1989.

pressures; it could no longer fend off criticisms by resorting to isolationist policies. Therefore, its "damage control" foreign policy following the Tiananmen Incident had to be designed and carried out carefully in order not to upset the progress made during a decade of reform.

Continuing on the previous Chapter's discussion of China's normalizing relations with Southeast Asia since Deng's rise to power, this Chapter delves further into the development of these relations in the period after the Tiananmen Incident. Unlike the United States and its western allies, Southeast Asian countries kept a tight lip about the way the Chinese government handled the Incident. Although the road towards improved ties between China and its southern neighbours in the 1970s and 1980s had been paved by the 1972 Sino-American rapprochement, the Southeast Asian countries were never truly allies of the United States. Most Southeast Asian countries (just like China) often found themselves at the end of western criticisms for their human rights record.<sup>11</sup> As a result, when the Chinese felt cornered by the West's pointing fingers, they were comforted by the knowledge that they had the continued support of their non-intervening southern neighbours as a safety net on which to fall back. This condition was particularly crucial because there was great uncertainty regarding the length and extent of western sanctions. When considering most Southeast Asian countries' growing economic potential and well-known status as leaders of the Third World, improved relations with these countries was seen as a way out of the international difficulties plaguing post-Tiananmen China; it provided an alternative

<sup>11</sup> Diane K. Mauzy, "The Human Rights and 'Asian Values' Debate in Southeast Asia: Trying to Clarify the Key Issues", *Pacific Review*, 10:2 (1997), pp. 212-213.

means towards maintaining the Chinese desire to continue developing its domestic economy as well as to repair its tarnished image abroad.

As Chapter Four also noted, the development of relations between China and Southeast Asia was not without its challenges and difficulties. After Tiananmen, however, the Chinese government made serious efforts to neutralize these obstacles in order to smooth the way for an increased multi-dimensional partnership within the region. Realizing the severity of international repercussions caused by its violent oppression of demonstrators, the Chinese were simply not in the position to sit back and wait for other countries to come to them (while the West chastised and looked down on them). The survival of the country depended on its image abroad, and thus, it was crucial that the "damage control" foreign policy held ground amidst tremendous international pressure; this, among others, included the sending of high-level officials on a tour of Southeast Asian capitals to speed up and further consolidate the ties that had been developing prior to the Tiananmen Incident. To a certain degree, China's approach towards Southeast Asia was somewhat a departure from past experiences, as the Chinese had always held high their status as the Middle Kingdom and allowed the onus of improving Sino-Southeast Asian ties on the latter. However, staying true to its tradition of foreign policy pragmatism, gaining support from Southeast Asia in dire situations was a necessary means to stabilize the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the world as well as save face by not bowing down to pressure from the United States and the rest of the West.

This Chapter begins with an account of the international responses to China's handling of the Tiananmen Incident as a means to demonstrate the extent of repercussions caused by the event. At the same time, this also allows us to observe the manner in which most Southeast Asian countries shied away from making unsympathetic comments on the issue. Naturally, this discussion is then followed by an elaboration of how these conditions affected China's view of the world and its position in it. In doing so, the initial parts of the Chapter provide us with a greater insight into the views and thoughts underlying the diplomatic mechanisms China pursued vis-à-vis Southeast Asia. Although Southeast Asia was not the sole focus of China's post-Tiananmen "damage control" foreign policy, a considerable amount of attention was indeed devoted to ensuring that the countries in the region sided with Beijing in its effort to re-build international support and confidence.

The Chapter then goes on to discuss the challenges and difficulties plaguing China's relations with Southeast Asian countries, and observes the manner in which these unfavourable conditions were promptly dealt with – particularly from the Chinese point of view – in order to facilitate better relations between the two sides. Notions of economic competition were replaced with the rhetoric of regional economic partnership, as Beijing slowly encouraged the building of official bilateral and multilateral ties among the countries. Furthermore, existing tensions and suspicions caused by Communist Party-to-Party relations, the overseas Chinese issue, and territorial disputes were either settled or shelved through numerous high-level declarations regarding China's peaceful intentions in the region.

Post-Tiananmen Chinese politics were highlighted by uncertainties both domestic and abroad. However, as this Chapter demonstrates, despite the leadership debacle at the dawn of Deng's rule, the internal determinant of China's foreign policy remained centered on the goal of economic modernization. Even though suggestions for a return to isolationism and autarky akin to the pre-Deng era were handed out by a number of leading members of the Party (in view of the economic and political pressure exerted by the United States and the West), such thoughts were discarded in favour of continuing with the path of reform and opening up to the international community. Therefore, in order to achieve this goal, the Chinese needed to secure the support of countries such as those in Southeast Asia, as they had both the economic and political potential to carry China out of its present difficulties. In a sense, the shifting Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia during this period was marked by a process of adaptation, in which such shifts were determined mainly by changes in the country's external conditions as well as uncertainties related to its leadership, but not by any change whatsoever within its internal need for economic progress and openness towards the rest of the world.

## 5.2. The Tiananmen Incident and the International Response

Considering China's increasing significance in international relations – especially since it started undergoing economic reform in the late 1970s – an incident of such magnitude was not going to go unnoticed by the rest of the world. International reporters had actively been following the progress of the pro-democracy movement in Beijing, particularly as negotiations between the government and student leaders

reached a stalemate. Thus, when the PLA fired their first shots at the demonstrators, the media was directly on the scene to witness the ensuing bloodshed. Coverage of the event – as well as the subsequent persecution of dissidents throughout the country – by influential western newspapers such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian (London) and The Financial Times (London) was detailed and extensive, as each drew horrifying images of the human destruction caused by the military's use of force.<sup>12</sup> And even when the street battle between the military and the demonstrators had finally settled down after seven straight hours of carnage, the media continued to bring forth horrendous updates from local hospitals packed with the dead and wounded as well as stories about the subsequent persecution of remaining dissidents throughout the city and the rest of the country.

Indeed, the use of violence was not wholly one-sided; the demonstrators were also vicious in their counterattacks against the military forces. Frustration and anger towards the government were vented on the outnumbered police officers and soldiers; some of them were beaten or stoned to death with steel fences and bricks that had previously barricaded demonstrators within the Tiananmen Square. The official government reports stated that over 5,000 troops were wounded, as demonstrators fought back and set fire on the cavalry of troops, tanks and trucks entering the battle scene.<sup>13</sup> However, the demonstrators' bricks, steel fences, molotov cocktails, and fighting spirit were no match against the military's sheer number and awesome

<sup>12</sup> For example: "Crackdown in Beijing", The New York Times (4 June 1989), p. 1; "Bush Bids to Recognize 'Aspirations' of Protesters", The Washington Post (9 June 1989); "Beijing Pays The Price... op.cit."; and "Chinese Crackdown on Activists Widen", The Financial Times (London) (13 June 1989).

<sup>13</sup> The statistic was obtained from an interview given by Yuan Mu, spokesman for the Chinese State Council two weeks after the Tiananmen Incident. "Spokesman on Current Situation", Beijing Review, 32:27 (July 3-9), p. 12.

firepower. If anything, the injuring and killing of troops only instigated the military to become more ferocious in their crackdown of the movement. Furthermore, the demonstrators' violent counterattacks provided the Party's propaganda machine with a pretext to come down heavily on these demonstrators and label the supposed pro-democracy movement a "counter-revolutionary rebellion" that was bent on toppling the People's socialist government. As such, the State radio justified the use of force as an effort to uphold "the endless revolutionary spirit of Chairman Deng Xiaoping", many in China argued that the military's actions on that day were – beyond any doubt – legitimate and served the purpose of protecting the state and its people.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the leadership's attempt to lay the blame for the outbreak of violence on the pro-democracy movement by emphasizing the material damage and human casualties on the government's side, it was obvious that the Chinese military was the one who had used excessive force. Reporters from abroad had directly been on the spot throughout the event, and the coverage that they gave to the entire world showed that the Chinese government had clearly behaved in an undemocratic manner by tyrannically crushing the aspirations of its own people. If anything, the government's attempt to cover up their mishandling of the situation only strengthened the view that the Chinese leadership was at fault. In its coverage of the Tiananmen Incident, The New York Times reported that the violent crackdown demonstrated a government that was now firmly in the control of hard-line, leftist leaders unsympathetic to the reforms launched by Deng. As well, it suggested that a "blacklist" consisting of names of student leaders and intellectuals had been issued as a precursor to systematic

<sup>14</sup> "Communique of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 13<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee: Adopted on June 24, 1989", Beijing Review, 32:27 (3-9 July 1989), p. 9; "Death Toll at 1,500-2,500", Hongkong Standard, (5 June 1989, p. 1), in FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, p. 74.

persecution of those critical of the Communist government.<sup>15</sup> Overall, reports and stories such as these were painting an ugly picture of an Orwellian Chinese state like the ones in the past, and in particular, during the Cultural Revolution. The Tiananmen Incident had seriously damaged China's reputation abroad and cast doubts over its future participation in the international arena.

France, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, West Germany, and the Vatican were quick to announce statements denouncing the Chinese military's actions. Other western countries such as Canada and Denmark (as well as Japan) would also follow suit in the following days.<sup>16</sup> Great Britain, who had significant interest in Hong Kong, was vocal about the situation. "Appalled by the indiscriminate shooting of unarmed people", Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's statement demonstrated the anxiety and fear running through the minds of many British people, especially when considering Hong Kong's transition to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.<sup>17</sup> And although other western countries' interests did not go as deep as the British', their growing trade ties with mainland China meant that further instability could only pose some form of concern or another; no self-professed democratic country could stand still watching the carnage that had happened in Tiananmen. It was natural then, that these countries, as stated by the West German Foreign Ministry, urged a halt in human rights abuses and called for "a return to [China's] universally welcomed policies of reform and openness".<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> "Crackdown in Beijing... *op.cit.*", p.1.

<sup>16</sup> "The West Condemns the Crackdown", *The New York Times* (5 June 1989), p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

The response was the strongest, however, in the United States. In a press conference from the White House, President George Bush indicated that the Chinese government's abuse of human rights could have damaging repercussions on the relations between the two countries. Having identified the PLA as mainly culpable for the outbreak of violence, Bush also announced the suspension of government-to-government military sales and contacts.<sup>19</sup> Since 1984, China had purchased 600 million dollars worth of military gear and technology; this included the building of an artillery ammunition plant, the upgrading of the electronics on Chinese jet fighters, as well as the sale of torpedoes and radar systems.<sup>20</sup> The United States' announcement of sanctions and cessation of future military dealings meant that the continuation and completion of these contracts were put on an indefinite hold and could cause a major dent in China's effort to modernize its aged military and defense.

However, avoiding any emotional responses and fearing the chaos that could happen if the Chinese leadership fell further in disarray, Bush did not make any announcement regarding the imposition of economic sanctions. Suspension of military ties was already seen as sending a sufficiently strong signal to the Chinese government that Washington wanted the Chinese to immediately resume their goal of reform and opening up to the family of nations. The American President emphasized this view in his pronouncement that "it would be a bad time for the United States to withdraw and pull back and leave [the Chinese people] to the devices of a leadership that might decide to crack down further".<sup>21</sup> It was believed that economic progress

<sup>19</sup> "Press Conference by President Bush, White House Press Briefing Room", *Federal News Services* (5 June 1989).

<sup>20</sup> "Bush Orders Halt to US-China Military Sales and Contacts", *Associated Press* (5 June 1989).

<sup>21</sup> "Press Conference by President Bush... *op.cit.*".



had been the catalyst of the Chinese pro-democracy movement, and thus, sanctions in this area would only cause more harm to China's reform policies and the United States' long-term interest there. Nevertheless, not wanting the Chinese leadership to take his actions and statements lightly, President Bush also warned that he "reserve[d] the right to take a whole new look at things if the violence escalates".<sup>22</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the violence in Beijing did not end with the last shot fired. Similar pro-democracy demonstrations had sprung up in other parts of the country, and fearing that the country would fall into complete chaos, the Chinese military was quick to apprehend not only individuals who could incite such movements, but also any who had voiced or were voicing criticisms against the government. Up to 1,300 people were arrested in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident, and a number of them were sentenced to death on charges of treason.<sup>23</sup> The persecution of these individuals clearly demonstrated to the rest of the world that the Chinese leadership was not going to pay heed to western calls for an end to human rights abuses. It needed to clamp down hard on rebellious elements within the society and protect the legitimacy of the Communist government. Following on the words of the late Great Helmsman, Mao Zedong, the Chinese leaders in 1989 were bent on demonstrating to the people that despite the chaos instigated by the demonstrators in the Tiananmen Square the government remained very much in control of the situation and that ability to exercise such "power stemmed from the barrel of the gun".

<sup>22</sup> "Bush Orders Halt... op.cit."

<sup>23</sup> "Bush Bars High-Level Contacts with Beijing", The Washington Post (21 June 1989), p. A1.

Abroad, Beijing's disregard for calls to end violence only generated stronger criticisms against the Chinese leadership. As an article in The New York Times described:

While statements by President Bush, Prime Minister Thatcher and other western leaders were forceful, it was the anguish etched on the faces of ordinary people – many of them with relatives in China – that captured the depth of emotions unleashed by the weekend massacre...<sup>24</sup>

Demonstrations critical of the Chinese government and supporting the pro-democracy movement sprang up one after another across the world, particularly in the western hemisphere. In the United States, people rallied and marched in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, San Francisco, Washington and other cities. In most cases, these demonstrations were joined in by thousands of Chinese nationals (predominantly students at American universities) denouncing the leaders in Beijing and demanding Washington to take "diplomatic and political measures" against their own country's government.<sup>25</sup> To those in the West, the sight of Chinese nationals abroad voicing their anger towards the Communist government clearly demonstrated that unlike the latter's claim, the violent crackdown of the pro-democracy movement was not supported by China's general public. This understanding may not be entirely accurate, as the views of Chinese people abroad do not necessarily concur with those put forward by people in the Mainland. Nonetheless, among westerners, the picture of a violent dictatorship abusing the rights of its people had become concrete. And this, in turn, gave the incentive for these people to further pressure their governments to impose harsher sanctions towards the Chinese state.

<sup>24</sup> "The West Condemns... op.cit.", p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> ibid.



Appalled by the continued abuse of human rights in China, and responding to pressures from the United States Congress and the American people in general, President Bush finally ordered an end to high-level talks between his government and Beijing on 21 June 1989. Along with this, Bush suspended 1.3 billion dollars worth of loans to China, thus acting upon his earlier warning that China's unwillingness to cooperate with international demands would result in not only a ban on arms sales, but also economic sanctions.<sup>26</sup> Bush, acting as leader of the most influential player in international trade, also aimed his decision to impose economic sanctions at two important financial institutions, the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), from which China had borrowed over 8 billion dollars since 1981 and was depending on for future loans for their economic modernization programs.<sup>27</sup>

The United States' economic partners were quick to follow suit. Japan, China's previously largest creditor, suspended 5.5 billion dollars of loans.<sup>28</sup> And to make matters worse, a number of Japanese companies began pulling out of China amidst fears of further instability. Many European countries, in addition to Australia and Canada, also suspended their credit packages indefinitely. Some, such as Holland and Canada, even went as far as freezing their diplomatic ties with the government in Beijing. And at the non-governmental level, almost all western companies withdrew their representatives from the Mainland. West Germany, China's biggest European trading partner, stopped negotiations on new loans, and France, who had agreed to provide over 300 million francs a year earlier, simply cancelled its deal.<sup>29</sup> As a

<sup>26</sup> "Bush Bars High-Level... *op.cit.*, p. A1.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> "Beijing Pays the Price of Tiananmen Butchery", *The Guardian* (London) (21 June 1991).

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

whole, the Tiananmen Incident and its bloody aftermath had made western financiers view China as a high political risk and as a result they were now more inclined to take their money elsewhere in order to avoid the potential losses caused by uncertainties plaguing the Chinese leadership and the Communist government in general.

Surprisingly, the harsh criticisms and sanctions carried out by the West were not followed by Southeast Asian countries. Many of them had just been improving their ties with China prior to the Tiananmen Incident; they were not going to let the event hamper their budding relationship. Indeed, there were some protests against the Chinese government in Jakarta and Bangkok; yet, in general, official reactions from the region were noticeably quiet.<sup>30</sup> In Malaysia, the local government even warned people from giving any support to the Chinese pro-democracy movement, as it was believed that such acts would only cause harm to the national interest.<sup>31</sup> The Tiananmen Incident was seen primarily as a domestic concern, and therefore, Southeast Asian leaders stressed that they had no right to intervene in such matters. The usually vocal Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad, demonstrated this view when he stated that "Malaysia was saddened by the loss of lives", yet emphasized that "it was a domestic affair".<sup>32</sup> This was supported by the Philippines' President, Corazon Aquino, who said that "[the Philippines'] friendly relations with China [were] not an issue here"<sup>33</sup>, as well as Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas, who announced that the West's interference in China should be criticized, as "it has been something that [Indonesians] would very much reject if people were doing it

<sup>30</sup> "Quiet Reaction to China Belies Fear", *Christian Science Monitor* (23 June 1989), p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> "Malaysia Warns Locals Against Supporting Dissidents in China", *Japan Economic Newswire* (12 June 1989).

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> "Quiet Reaction... *op.cit.*."

with regard to what's happening in our country".<sup>34</sup> The Thais went even further to support China against western pressure by stressing that "no matter what happens in the world, the friendly and cooperative relationship between Thailand and China will not be affected".<sup>35</sup>

Many factors had instigated Southeast Asia's benign response towards China's domestic political situation. As described at length in Chapter Four, towards the end of the 1980s, most countries in the region, particularly Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand had been making significant progress in their efforts to normalize relations with China. After decades of diplomatic stalemate and constant distrust and suspicion, there had been a general desire to turn a new page in the region's relationship with its giant northern neighbour. Amidst the uncertainties surrounding the international politico-economic climate towards the end of the Cold War, the creation of ties with China was viewed as a means to not only enhance Southeast Asia's economic prosperity, but also stabilize the entire Asia-Pacific region. There was mutual benefit in strengthening regional cooperation, particularly considering Southeast Asia's rapidly growing economies and China's potential in the same area in the coming future. Participation in the West's campaign to isolate China would have been unwise; instead, Southeast Asia saw the situation as a window of opportunity to step up their engagement with China through providing the Chinese with a means to escape the West's criticisms and sanctions. Hence, no matter how horrendous the outbreak of violence in the Tiananmen Square may have seemed, it

<sup>34</sup> "Indonesian Foreign Minister on Relations with China", *The Xinhua News Agency* (22 June 1989).

<sup>35</sup> "Thai Official Promises to Continue Good Relations", *Zhongguo Tongxun She* (18 October 1989), in FBIS-CHI, 23 October 1989, p. 7.

was an insufficient reason to set back the development of ties, especially when the event had little direct implications on regional countries' national security.

In addition to this, most Southeast Asian countries had often been criticized by the West for their own blemished human rights record. In Indonesia, condemnations had frequently been launched against the military's excessive use of force in conflict areas such as Aceh and East Timor. While in Malaysia and Singapore, both Mahathir Muhammad's and Lee Kuan Yew's governments, respectively, had come under international criticism for not allowing opposition parties to voice any form of dissent.<sup>36</sup> Realizing that they had their own skeletons in the closet and wanting to stay true to the tradition of non-interventionism that was enshrined in ASEAN's 1971 Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) Declaration, the Southeast Asian countries were of the belief that they had no right to either interfere or impose themselves on what was essentially China's internal matter. For the region to denounce the Chinese government for its violations of human rights, it would have appeared rather inappropriate, if not downright hypocritical. Moreover, such actions would have only generated more negativity than good, as feelings of distrust and suspicion could once again resurface.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, as the continuation of this Chapter will discuss, there were other factors and situations influencing Southeast Asia's silent reaction to the Tiananmen Incident and its aftermath. However, at this stage, it is sufficient to state that these could be boiled down essentially to the region's desire to continue on with the momentum that they

<sup>36</sup> Chen Jie, "Human Rights: ASEAN's New Importance to China", *The Pacific Review*, 6:3 (1993), pp. 232-233.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 234.

had achieved in normalizing relations with China as well as their sympathetic feelings towards the Chinese government's cornered position vis-à-vis the West's human rights crusade. At a time when the United States and its allies were launching harsh criticisms and economic sanctions in order to influence the outcome of China's domestic political situation, Southeast Asia recognized that the Chinese would never buckle down under such pressure as a way of saving face and protecting their integrity and legitimacy. The time was right to once again raise the spirit of Third World solidarity as a means to enhance national modernization programs and break free from the West's economic domination. As such, the Southeast Asian countries, particularly those of ASEAN, were willing to forego old animosities and allow the Chinese government with an escape from the West's pressure by providing much-needed moral, and later on material, assistance.

### 5.3. China's Initial Response to Western Criticisms and Sanctions

Having observed the level of international media exposure that the Tiananmen Incident had received, the Chinese government had expected some criticism from the West, and in particular, from the United States. However, it had not expected the criticisms to arrive in such a harsh manner because the West had previously been soft on human rights issues. When considering China's improving relations with the United States since Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972 as well as the level of openness that it had achieved since kicking off economic reforms in the late 1970s, the Chinese leaders had assumed that China's "strategic value" would be more important than

human rights concerns in the West's foreign policy agendas.<sup>38</sup> To a certain extent, such a point of view made sense, especially when taking into account China's potential as an economic giant in the Asia-Pacific. However, the Chinese leaders had underestimated both the growth of human rights advocacy in international relations and the western public's ability to pressure their leaders into launching political and economic sanctions against governments such as the Chinese, which had carried out atrocious human rights violations against their own people. In the end, unprepared to deal with the West's chastising and cornering efforts, China was suddenly pushed into a situation of *neiluan* and *waihuan* (internal disorder and external calamity) unseen since the People's Republic was first established.<sup>39</sup>

In order to maintain its integrity and legitimacy, the Chinese government had to immediately address numerous issues both at home and abroad. As criticisms and sanctions from western countries escalated, there was no other way out but to devise a "damage control" foreign policy that would re-instate China's image as a responsible state worthy of normalized relations with the rest of the world. There were, at least, three policy options that could have been pursued in order to achieve this. The first one was for China to simply revert to its isolationist self and pay no heed to criticisms from abroad. This meant that China would have to forego its policy of opening up to the world and return to an economy based on Stalinist autarky. The second policy option was to bite the bullet and accept the West's punishment for the mishandling of the Tiananmen Incident. In doing so, China would then be able to immediately re-

<sup>38</sup> Lee Deng-ker, "Communist China's Foreign Policy Since June 4, 1989", *Issues and Studies*, 26:5 (May 1990), pp. 92.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel S. Kim, "Chinese Foreign Policy after Tiananmen", *Current History*, 89:551 (September 1990), p. 245.

gain western countries' confidence and encourage a quick lifting of sanctions. Lastly, the third possible approach consisted of enlisting the aid of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the Third World as a means to build an alternative base of power, while at the same time continuing with efforts to ease sanctions through engaging the West.

The idea of returning to isolationism and economic autarky was discussed among the conservative faction of the Chinese leadership as a possible response to mounting pressures from the West. Having gained the upper hand in the decision-making process following the Tiananmen Incident and the unceremonious fall of reform-minded CCP Secretary General Zhao Ziyang (who was blamed for inciting the student demonstration), the conservatives believed that China's further opening up to the world would only lead to bigger problems. To a certain extent, the collapse of socialist states in Eastern Europe (particularly in reference to the Soviet Union's experiment with *glasnost* and *perestroika*) beginning in the latter parts of 1989 would prove these Chinese leaders' argument.<sup>40</sup> The need to re-establish legitimacy right away meant that efforts had to be stepped up to demonstrate the government's Communist colours by identifying that the recent problems and challenges plaguing the country had been instigated by counter-revolutionary forces and capitalist ideals imported from abroad. By returning to policies based on fundamentalist interpretations of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought, China would be able to correct the mistakes that it had been making since reform was first launched in the late 1970s. In a sense, efforts to restore isolationism and autarky as the basis of Chinese foreign policy were based on assessments that recent difficulties facing the

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Y.S. Cheng, "China's Post Tiananmen Diplomacy" in George Hicks, ed., *The Broken Mirror: China after Tiananmen* (Essex: Longman Group, 1990), pp. 403.

country vis-à-vis western economic sanctions and human rights movement were essentially a result of overexposing the national interest to western capitalist mechanisms.

However, as well-known sinologist Samuel S. Kim explained, the idea of returning to isolationism and autarky was actually more smoke than fire.<sup>41</sup> It was simply a knee-jerk reaction within certain factions in the Chinese leadership to demonstrate rhetorically that China was not going to accept the West's critical views on internal matters. Generally speaking, the policy was aimed at distracting the people's attention (both at home and abroad) and covering for the mistakes that the government had committed with regards to its mishandling of the Tiananmen Incident. As internal conditions in China began to stabilize, even the most hard-line conservatives recognized that the country's pre-Tiananmen drive towards reform and openness to the international economy was irreversible. Just three weeks after the Incident, the government announced in a plenary session of the CCP Central Committee that China's foreign conduct would not return to "the old, closed-door path" and would "carry out the policy of improving the economic environment and rectifying the economic order so as to better implement the policies of reform and opening up to the outside world".<sup>42</sup> Through such an official announcement, the broad guidelines to foreign policy decision-making were therefore established. Nevertheless, there were still heated debates among the leadership (even if these debates were not made known to the international public) on how the maintenance of pre-Tiananmen foreign policy was going to be achieved in a day-to-day fashion.

<sup>41</sup> Kim, *op.cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>42</sup> "Communique of the Fourth Plenary Session... *op.cit.*", p. 10.

An alternative to going back to isolationism and autarky was, of course, to accept western countries' criticisms and hope that this would somehow persuade them to immediately lift economic and military sanctions. As earlier discussed, with the growth of the reform movement and openness to the international economy, China's development had become so much dependent on foreign investment and trade, especially with countries in the West. As a result, to do away with international involvement in the national development program would be suicide and further cause domestic problems. Accepting guilt and agreeing to demands for better human rights conditions would confirm to the world China's status as a responsible member of the international community. In doing so, the Chinese could swiftly put the events of Tiananmen behind them and proceed with the goal of modernizing their quality of life.

Nevertheless, in spite of its noble intention, to think that the Chinese were going to adopt such a denigrating foreign policy stance would be naive. No self-respecting government would ever agree to foreign criticisms and condemnations, especially when the issue, such as human rights, was of domestic concern. As stated in an editorial by the government-controlled Beijing Review:

The Chinese government and people [would] never give in to any pressure, whatever its form and whichever nation it may come from. On the contrary, such pressure [would] only encourage the Chinese people to develop the spirit of hardwork and self-reliance to place their own country in an even better position.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> "China's Internal Affairs Brook No Interference", Beijing Review, 32:31 (31 July-6 August 1989), p. 10.

China's opening to the world had been carried out with a view to developing its national economy while at the same time preserving the state's political identity along the Four Cardinal Principles.<sup>44</sup> The assumption was that foreign elements would recognize the government's Communist credentials and not interfere in its domestic political situation. To a certain extent, the process of Sino-American rapprochement, which initiated China's opening up to the international community, was based on such non-interventionist and peaceful co-existence notions. Therefore, allowing foreign elements to dictate the process of Chinese politics would only further undermine the legitimacy of a government that was already troubled by domestic challenges; not even the most reform-minded Chinese leader would have agreed to such political suicide.

#### 5.4. Establishing a "Damage Control" Foreign Policy

The two policy options described above were indeed unfeasible considering that China needed to carry on its reform policies while at the same time uphold its dignity in the eyes of the international community. For all purposes, post-Tiananmen China could neither follow western demands for democratization because of ideological reasons nor completely reject participation in the rapidly growing international – yet western-dominated – economy. The formulation of a third alternative, comprising a

<sup>44</sup> The Four Cardinal Principles were formulated by Deng in 1979 as a means to counter the growing views that the reform movement would lead the country away from its socialist foundations towards fully embracing capitalist ideals. These Principles stressed conformity with a) Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought, b) the socialist road, c) continuation of the people's democratic dictatorship, and d) political dominance by the CCP. Kenneth Lieberthal, Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), p. 135.

number of different diplomatic tactics, was therefore essential to ensure that such goals were met. This comprehensive approach was broken up into:

- a) Using the "peaceful evolution card" to lay the blame for the current domestic problems on external elements;
- b) Exploiting the "China card" to warn western countries that continued isolation of China would only harm their own interests;
- c) Ensuring that the door to the outside world remained open for countries who had imposed economic sanctions to resume their ties with China;
- d) Emphasizing the values of non-intervention through developing foreign relations based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence;
- e) Stepping up ties with the Soviet Union in order to ensure that the international balance of power remained tilted in China's favour; and
- f) Fostering greater relations with the Third World, and in particular, Southeast Asia, as they had been the ones least critical of China's human rights record.<sup>45</sup>

Still defying western criticisms and sanctions – yet not wanting to completely push these countries away – a "damage control" foreign policy comprising all of the above elements was believed to contain the best solution for China's post-Tiananmen calamitous environment.

From the start, Beijing described the growing domestic discontent as a product instigated by influences from outside of the country. Instead of recognizing that the leadership's rule had been discredited by its own actions, the government-controlled media pointed the finger at western elements for carrying out a "peaceful evolution" campaign aimed at de-legitimizing China's state system. According to this point of

<sup>45</sup> These points are developed based on the author's reading of Cheng, *op.cit.*, pp. 402-403; John Garver, "Chinese Foreign Policy: The Diplomacy of Damage Control", *Current History*, 90:557 (September 1991), pp. 243-6; Lee, *op.cit.*, pp. 92-93; Kim, *op.cit.*, pp. 280-281.

view, the spreading of bourgeois ideologies and fostering of domestic societal discontent (combined with using economic pressure to prevent government suppression of challenges to its authority) was being carried out to topple socialist governments around the world (including the Chinese') from within.<sup>46</sup> The United States, and its history of exporting democratic values, was the primary target of China's accusations, as an article in *Beijing Review* demonstrated that:

...there are indeed certain people within the US legislature who are used to proclaiming themselves guardians of democracy and freedom and therefore interfere in other countries' internal affairs... During the whole process of the student movement, then the turmoil and eventually the rebellion, some people in the United States have done their utmost to abet rioters and add fuel to the flames.<sup>47</sup>

Of course, such claims were directed mainly towards domestic consumption; laying the blame for the outbreak of violence on foreign elements was the leadership's attempt to distract the people's attention from the crisis that was actually plaguing the Communist regime at the time. The strategy was meant to allow the government some room to then concentrate on its "damage control" foreign policy. At the same time, by framing western criticisms towards the Chinese leadership as an attack on the Chinese people as a whole, the government was obviously attempting to rally domestic support through appealing to the people's nationalist sentiments.

The notion that anti-China forces from abroad had caused the spilling of blood in Tiananmen played handsomely into the Chinese people's fear that their country would soon fall into chaos. By arguing for the need to guard against "attacks by material and spiritual wolves in sheep clothing", the government justified their harsh

<sup>46</sup> Article Views Danger of 'Peaceful Evolution', *Ban Yue Tan* (25 September 1989), in FBIS-CHI, 25 October 1989, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> "Anti-China Clamour Cannot Intimidate Chinese People", *Beijing Review*, 32:29 (17-23 July 1989), p. 15.



crackdown on "counter-revolutionaries" while at the same time preserved its integrity as the protector of the Chinese people.<sup>48</sup> Even though calls for democratization had been voiced by Chinese students, they were dismissed as characteristically un-Chinese; the students had been "under the influence of the western mass media and did not know the truth".<sup>49</sup> Moreover, according to the government, these people were of the belief that

...a prosperous, powerful and unified socialist China under the leadership of the CCP [did] not suit their taste; rather, under the disguise of 'democracy and freedom', a China practicing bourgeois liberalization and taking a capitalist road [would] please them.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, when the demonstration in Tiananmen grew, the Chinese military supposedly responded on behalf of a responsible government bent on stopping the spread of such seditious ideas; punishment against dissidents was much deserved considering their potential danger towards the Chinese state and society. All in all, the "peaceful evolution card" provided Beijing with not only a means to rally domestic support (by raising nationalist sentiments), but also an excuse to counter western criticisms and sanctions with much defiance and guilt-free regard.

The use of the "peaceful evolution card" in developing a post-Tiananmen foreign policy was complemented by also playing the "China card". This was carried out by sending a strong message to the world, and in particular to those countries imposing sanctions on China, that efforts to isolate the latter would only harm the former's own interests. In spite of its domestic political problems, China remained an attractive place for foreign investors to either exploit cheap labour and resources or take

<sup>48</sup> Kim, *op.cit.*, p. 280.

<sup>49</sup> "China's Diplomats Meet in Beijing", *Beijing Review*, 32:30 (24-30 July 1989), p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> "Anti-China Clamour... *op.cit.*", p. 15.

advantage of its large markets. The government was not shy in demonstrating this condition when boasting that:

...all developed countries hope to export capital to China, and there is cut-throat competition on China's monetary market. The suspension of loans, then, [would] undoubtedly cause losses to both sides. We hope that these countries [could] broaden their vision and see not only the present but also the future.<sup>51</sup>

The government defended China's defiance against western sanctions by emphasizing that even though numerous policies had in the past been attempted by foreign elements to force the Chinese people into submission, none had been successful.<sup>52</sup> The same was therefore expected of the West's sanctions against China after the Tiananmen Incident; instead of acting as a weakening agent, they would only strengthen the people's resolve and desire to defend the Middle Kingdom. Contrary to the popular notion in the West, the ultimate negative impact of sanctions and embargoes would therefore be felt more by the countries imposing these supposedly punitive actions in the first place.<sup>53</sup> In sum, the Chinese leadership knew that China had the ability to challenge the West's cornering maneuvers because of the country's increasing importance and potential in international trade.

To a certain extent, the leadership's use of such diplomatic tactics was meant not only to preserve the dignity of China's Communist government, but also to further strengthen the Chinese people's belief in their country's capabilities as a potential economic giant. It was one thing to respond to foreign condemnation with a defiant, guilt-free attitude; doing so with a strong belief in the country's ability to

<sup>51</sup> From a statement made by Liu Xiangdong, an official of the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade: "China's Foreign Trade Policy Remains Unchanged", *Beijing Review*, 32:30 (24-30 July 1989), pp. 13-4.

<sup>52</sup> "Anti-China Clamour... *op.cit.*", p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> "Text" of Qian Qichen's UN Address", *Xinhua* (29 September 1989), in FBIS-CHI, 4 October 1989, p. 1.

independently pull itself out of trouble was another. While not wanting to completely close the door to the international community, China needed to ensure that they had the capacity to dig their heels in deep in case conditions worsened.<sup>54</sup> And in trying to achieve this goal, the government realized that it needed the entire Chinese population on its side. As such, the policy of re-invigorating Chinese nationalism by playing the "China Card" was a key element in efforts to instill confidence among the people at home vis-à-vis the government's decision to defy foreign intervention in China's domestic politics. An editorial in *Beijing Review* reiterated this view when exclaiming that "self-reliance and opening up are not mutually exclusive, but complementary".<sup>55</sup> It was understandable that such self-confidence and boldness may have been simply regarded by many in the West as a pathetic attempt to lure the Chinese people into supporting a government that was actually slowly crumbling. However, to assume this attitude as a mere bluff was too risky considering the potential profit that could be made in accepting China into the membership of the international community on its own terms.

Recognizing the possibility that western countries would buy into the idea that long-term sanctions could only cause themselves more harm, the Chinese government made efforts to ensure that the door to foreign interaction (and most importantly, foreign investment) remained open after the Tiananmen Incident. Beijing realized that the western media's portrayal of post-Tiananmen China was unfavourable and could potentially cause a massive capital flight from the mainland. There was general

<sup>54</sup> "Article Discusses New 'Diplomatic Offensive'", *Kuang Chiao Ching*, Number 27 (16 December 1989), in FBIS-CHI, 20 December 1989, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Dai Yannian, "The Road to Strength and Prosperity", *Beijing Review*, 32:32 (7-13 August 1989), p. 4.

awareness that the Incident had "a bad effect on the psychology of investors".<sup>56</sup> In a sense, the playing of the "peaceful evolution card" and "China card" needed to be balanced by carrying out a tactic enticing the return of western involvement in China's economic development; the earlier-described approaches (the "peaceful evolution" and "China" cards) on their own would only push the rest of the world away and isolate the Chinese even more. In short, the government had to provide strong assurances that China not only continued to open its door to the world, but that it remained a safe and profitable place for foreign investment in spite of whatever negative image was projected to the world by the western media.<sup>57</sup> On many occasions, both at home and abroad, Chinese leaders continuously stressed this condition. They asserted that the storm caused by the Tiananmen Incident had successfully been weathered in no time and that internal conditions had returned to normal within the blinking of an eye. Proudly, the words announced to the international community were as follows: "We are fully able to smoothly fulfill any agreement and contract signed with foreign business people".<sup>58</sup>

Of course, the continued opening of China's door to foreign interactions was conditional on the latter's willingness to forego interference in Chinese politics. Central to Beijing's damage control foreign policy was the notion that China would only cooperate with those countries adhering to the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. This was first stressed during the Fourth Plenary Session of the 13<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee, in which the Party's top leadership affirmed that only China's

<sup>56</sup> "Beijing Continues to Open the Door", *Beijing Review*, 32:30 (24-30 July 1989), p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> "Jiang Zemin Says Leadership United on Commerce", *South China Morning Post* (4 October 1989), in FBIS-CHI, 4 October 1989, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> "China's Foreign Trade... *op.cit.*", p. 14.

true friends – those deserving China's attention – would stand by China during its time of need and “understand” its quelling of the “counter-revolutionary rebellion”.<sup>59</sup> This view was then expounded within an international forum through Foreign Minister Qian Qichen's UN address.<sup>60</sup> Although the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence had been the mainstay of Chinese foreign policy since the People's Republic's establishment, its rhetorical use became more predominant in the post-Tiananmen climate. In addresses, meetings, and press conferences both at home and abroad, Chinese leaders time and again emphasized the value of these principles in building a cooperative and amicable international relations system. These leaders included, among others, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, who stated in a local publication that

China respects other countries' sovereignty and does not interfere in their internal affairs; nor does it allow other countries to interfere in its internal affairs or encroach upon its sovereignty... It is an objective fact that countries have different concepts of values. The differences should be respected without imposing one's own value concepts upon others.<sup>61</sup>

By giving emphasis to these ideals, China demonstrated to the world that it was not responding to western countries' criticisms and sanctions in a confrontational manner. If anything, it only reminded these countries of how shameful it was to point a finger at China when they themselves would not want other countries intervening in their internal matters.

In searching for potential allies to help counter the West's criticisms and sanctions – thus, starting the ball rolling on its post-Tiananmen “damage control” foreign policy –

<sup>59</sup> “Communique of the Fourth Plenary Session... *op.cit.*”, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> “Text of Qian Qichen's... *op.cit.*”, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> “Foreign Minister Qian Assesses World Situation”, *Beijing Review*, 32:37 (11-17 September 1989), p. 9.

China first attempted to court the Soviet Union and the rest of the Eastern Bloc, as these countries shared China's upholding of non-interventionism in international relations. Considering the growing difficulties facing these countries' domestic political situations towards the end of the Cold War, it was natural that they would side with the Chinese in the latter's effort to stand up against the West's bullying. In addition to this, the threat of “peaceful evolution” was not exclusive to the Chinese, as Communist regimes all over the world – particularly in Eastern Europe – recognized the danger posed by western elements' subtle involvement in undermining their state structure and social fabric. All in all, China's appeal for support in challenging the West's growing predominance in international politics and economy were morally well received by the Soviet Union and the remainder of the Eastern Bloc. Devoid of the West's assistance in continuing China's road to economic development, the Chinese saw the Eastern Bloc as a possible alternative for much-needed partnership, markets, and cultural contacts.<sup>62</sup>

The strengthening of ties with the Soviet Union – which in turn, forced changes in the international balance of power – was also a means to emphasize the United States' uncertainties regarding the political and security climate in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>63</sup> Although the Soviet Union had become a weakened power in the period leading up to the Tiananmen Incident, it remained the United States' most feared rival in international politics. Indeed, the Soviets' economy and technological strength was not at-par with the United States'; however, the former's continued political influence among many socialist countries had kept the rivalry between the two Superpowers

<sup>62</sup> Steven Levine, “The Uncertain Future of Chinese Foreign Policy”, *Current History*, 88:539 (September 1989), p. 263.

<sup>63</sup> Garver, *op.cit.*, p. 243-244.

alive, even in the years to come. Therefore, it was the Chinese leaders' hope that their efforts to tilt the balance of power in the Soviets' direction would be deemed serious enough by the Americans to demand a re-consideration of their policy to isolate China and continue with the imposition of economic sanctions.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the transfer of technology from the Soviet Union – even if it was not as modern as that from the United States and the rest of the West – and the potential for business partnership would provide the Chinese leadership with some peace of mind as the West indefinitely tried to exclude China's participation in the international community.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, the response from the Eastern Bloc fell short of China's expectations. Distracted by problems at home, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were incapable of providing the necessary assistance for China to sustain the modernization program it had initiated prior to the Tiananmen Incident. In Moscow, President Mikhail Gorbachev, who had conceptualized *glasnost* and *perestroika*, was facing immense challenges from his own people, as his government began a slide towards its eventual dissolution in 1991. The diminishing popularity of reform-minded Gorbachev disheartened many Chinese leaders, as it undermined their own efforts to preserve China's road towards economic reform and greater openness to the world. And this condition was made worse by the fact that by the end of 1989 almost every Communist government in Eastern Europe collapsed without bloodshed under the pressure of their own masses.<sup>66</sup> At a time when China was badly looking for support in its efforts to challenge the West's growing predominance in world politics as well as to prove to the Chinese people that the government was capable of getting itself out

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Levine, "The Uncertain Future... *op.cit.*", p. 262-263.

<sup>66</sup> Lieberthal, *op.cit.*, p. 332.

of a conundrum, the sources previously relied upon for such support had become too distracted and debilitated by their own problems of legitimacy. As such, an alternative was considered necessary.

Countries of the Third World, particularly those in Southeast Asia, therefore became China's focus of attention. Although the support potentially obtained from approaching individual countries within this grouping was not optimal – considering the strength of the opposition in the western world – it served China's purpose for the time being. When the West was crying out condemnations following the crackdown of pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, these countries were tight-lipped about the matter; most of them had their own shortcomings in issues of human rights, and thus, were not in position to join the West in its campaign against the Chinese government. Moreover, the Third World's position as the heart of the Non-Aligned Movement – particularly Southeast Asia's leading role in the bloc – meant that they shared the Chinese view on non-interventionism in domestic politics based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence. Having experienced similar treatment from the West vis-à-vis their internal political and economic problems, these countries shared China's concerns towards the growing western hegemony. Indeed, the economic power of the Third World combined – even if we factored in Southeast Asia's rapidly growing economy then – was nowhere near the United States' might, let alone the entire western world's. However, China's expectations for the Third World as a whole were not focused simply on economics; at a time when Chinese morale was at its lowest in so many years, the Third World's anti-imperialist views and plight as the ones "left-behind" by the globalization of the economy suited

efforts to counter the West's exclusion of China in the international community in the period after Tiananmen.

### 5.5. Approaching the Third World

China's identity as a Third World nation was first concretized in the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, which was attended by twenty-four developing nations, mostly recently-independent from western colonialism. During the Conference, the Chinese delegates, along with their Indonesian hosts, pushed for the inclusion of the former's Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence as the working basis for the Non-Aligned Movement. Considering the relevance of these principles in addressing the developing world's economic and political problems, China's proposal was well received by the remaining delegates in the Conference. Thus, when the Declaration of the Promotion of World Peace and Co-operation (or better known as the Bandung Declaration) was finally adopted, China was satisfied to know that its ideas had been incorporated into the ten principles underlying relations among developing, non-aligned countries.<sup>67</sup> The writing of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence into a multilateral international document was considered a diplomatic triumph, as it confirmed not only China's membership in the Third World, but also its role as one of the grouping's leaders.

<sup>67</sup> *The Ten Principles of the Bandung Declaration included notions of: a) fundamental human rights and respect for the UN Charter; b) respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; c) equality; d) non-interference in domestic issues; e) right to self-defense; f) non-participation in Superpower politics; g) non-aggression; h) peaceful settlement of conflicts; i) mutual interests and co-operation; and j) justice and international obligation. Abridged from Asia-Africa Speaks from Bandung (Jakarta: The National Committee for the Commemoration of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Asian-African Conference, 1985), p. 148.*

However, China's foreign policy in the following years – at least from the perspective of many Southeast Asian countries – did not always adhere to its rhetoric during the Bandung Conference. These countries regarded Chinese intervention in their domestic politics (through Beijing's support of local revolutionary movements) as an act of aggression and a complete mockery of the latter's earlier calls for upholding the values of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The host of the Asian-African Conference, Indonesia (who had been China's main supporter in incorporating the Five Principles of Co-existence as part of the founding document of NAM), was so frustrated with China's meddling in its internal affairs that it cut diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1965 following a failed coup by the local Communist party. Considering Indonesia's role as the "big brother" in Southeast Asia, its hostilities with China became a source of the further fraying of friendship between the Chinese people and the rest of the region; Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand would follow suit in their distrust towards China's intentions. As Beijing continued with its policy of supporting revolutionary movements in many developing countries around the world, their solidarity as a member of the Third World became more and more questionable. And when China began its approach towards the West in its striving for economic development, the shedding of its Third World identity and non-aligned stance became apparent.

Thus, China's re-iteration of its Third World credentials following the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident (after the West had turned its back on China) came to the developing world as somewhat of a surprise. Fortunately for the Chinese, their improved relations with key members of the grouping (such as Indonesia and

Malaysia) in the 1980s ensured that opposition to this policy would not be strong. In spite of China's strong military and growing economic potential, its maltreatment at the hands of the West was somewhat sufficient justification for Beijing's decision to embrace once again the Third World's Bandung Spirit. As this dissertation previously discussed, China's membership of the Third World was constructed on the grounds that "China assign[ed] itself to that amorphous group... It should be remembered, however, that an identity that is chosen [could] also be rejected".<sup>68</sup> At a time when China needed every support it could manage in order to counter the attacks from the United States and its economic allies, its re-identification of itself as a Third World country (through emphasizing its condition as a victim of western hegemonic ambitions) was a key strategy in the struggle towards re-establishing its image abroad and, in general, re-strengthening its position in the international community.

Recognizing the Third World's valuable assistance in providing a basis for China's "damage control" foreign policy, the Chinese were quick to approach these countries.<sup>69</sup> Just a month after the Tiananmen Incident, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and his deputy, Yang Fuchang, made a comprehensive tour of Africa to reaffirm China's relations with the people on the continent; on their way, they visited Angola, Botswana, Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Mozambique, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.<sup>70</sup> In November 1989, Premier Li Peng extended this diplomatic strategy to South Asia by visiting Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.<sup>71</sup> And

<sup>68</sup> Samuel S. Kim, *The Third World in Chinese World Policy* (World Order Studies Program Occasional Paper No.19) (Princeton: Center for International Studies, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> "Text" of Qian Qichen's UN Address, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> "China Launches Africa Diplomacy Blitz", *Japan Economic Newswire* (20 July 1989).

<sup>71</sup> "China: Third World The Focus Of Reshaped Foreign Policy", *Inter Press Service* (December 6, 1989).

in May 1990, President Yang Shangkun made his way to Latin America, bringing with him a mandate to strengthen China's ties with the countries in the region as well as China's appeal for membership in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).<sup>72</sup> The importance of these trips was demonstrated not only by the presence of high-level Chinese officials, but also by the fact that China had been the one taking the initiative in the effort. When we note the Chinese' usual tendency to allow foreign countries to come to them (instead of the other way round) in the pursuit of diplomatic relations, the direct approaches carried out by Chinese officials in the period immediately following the Tiananmen Incident indicated just how needing China was of the Third World's friendship. Considering the dire situation it was facing with western ostracism, the time was not right for China to sit back and wait for requests of friendship to arrive from foreign nations. As a Party directive announced, "from now on China [would] put more effort into resuming and developing relations with old friends [in Africa] and Third World countries".<sup>73</sup>

In addition to these visits, China also made use of the NAM Heads of State meeting in September 1989 to raise its profile as a member of the Third World. Not only was this occasion a golden opportunity to approach developing countries from all over the world within a multilateral setting, it also provided the Chinese with a platform to address issues that were of immediate concern to them. Considering China's history as one of the founders of NAM, it knew exactly the general direction towards which the event was proceeding. As the meeting's agenda centered on dealing with the international climate at the end of the Cold War, the results of the deliberations could

<sup>72</sup> Garver, *op.cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>73</sup> *China: Daily Report* (3 October 1989), in FBIS-CHI, 3 October 1989, p. 3.



not have suited China's post-Tiananmen diplomacy better. These included the adoption of documents ensuring cooperation among members in striving for peace and development within a secure international environment. Furthermore, the meeting agreed to put high on the agenda the establishment of a new international economic order that challenged the growing hegemony of industrialized countries.<sup>74</sup> Holding up the banner of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and anti-hegemonism, the meeting reaffirmed NAM's adherence to principles of independence, self-reliance, non-interference and non-participation in Superpower politics. In a sense, China's efforts to counter the West's ostracism (through emphasizing a foreign policy based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence) were very much reflected in NAM's plan of action. The Chinese had found among the Third World countries shared grievances towards the industrialized West as well as the potential to create a partnership in voicing these grievances in international forums.

Throughout the 1980s, the Third World's role in international politics experienced a noticeable rise. This was, in part, due to the group's achievement in raising people's attention towards the plight of the less developed and developing countries. In the United Nations, and particularly within this organization's General Assembly, the voice of the Third World comprised an overwhelming majority. In theory, therefore, the Third World was capable of not only setting the agenda for many of the UN's bodies, but also of heavily influencing the outcome of the deliberations. The Third World (if united in a single voice) had the potential to act as "a strong force in maintaining peace and upholding justice, thereby preventing the Superpowers and

<sup>74</sup> Guo Ji, "The Non-Aligned Movement at a Turning Point", *Beijing Review*, 32:39 (25 September-1 October 1989), p. 4.

hegemonistic countries from doing whatever they please[d] as they ha[d] done in the past."<sup>75</sup> Moreover, a Third World majority was also found in the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), which the United States and the West frequently attempted to manipulate in their efforts to punish China for its poor human rights record. As Sinologist Peter Van Ness describes, Chinese delegates in the UNHRC constantly defeated any attempts by the West to pass unfavourable resolutions condemning China's human rights conditions. And in almost all of the debates on these resolution proposals, support for the Chinese position came from the Commission's Third World members.<sup>76</sup> As such, the strategy of claiming itself as a member of the Third World served China's purpose of furthering not only its interest in the international economy, but also its concern over issues of human rights and sovereignty.

Clearly, China's resurgent interest in the Third World following the Tiananmen Incident came about as an attempt to gain assistance in issues that were perceived as vital to the Chinese. In addition to finding a basis of support for its human rights diplomacy – which challenged the West's supposed interference in Chinese domestic affairs – Beijing was also approaching these countries for a way to ensure that its economic development remained alive. As an article in *Beijing Review* states:

The arduous task of establishing a new international political and economic order lies ahead. And Third World countries will play an even greater role as they expand and strengthen their forces.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Chen Jiabao, "Third World's Role in International Affairs", *Beijing Review*, 33:4 (22-28 January 1990), p. 10.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Van Ness, "China and the Third World: Patterns of Engagement and Indifference", in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), p. 159.

<sup>77</sup> Chen, "Third World's Role... *op.cit.*", p. 12.

In a sense, Beijing's growing relationship with the Third World was a means to enhance the former's position vis-à-vis the United States and the rest of the western world. And as we observe these conditions, it seems apparent that the relationship between China and the Third World in the period after Tiananmen somewhat followed an established pattern; whenever China found itself isolated and weakened, it always turned to the Third World for much needed (and readily available) assistance and support.<sup>78</sup>

Unfortunately for the Chinese, and despite as much as what most Third World countries would have liked to contribute, the economic support Beijing sought came mostly at the moral, and not material, level. Although the rhetoric of cooperation towards developing a more just international economic order was probably honest and noble, the ability of most Third World countries to actually implement such policies was questionable, especially considering their limited economic strength. When looking at the economic problems that the majority of these countries were facing at home, it was unlikely that China could have obtained from them the same level of economic assistance that they had previously received from the West prior to the Tiananmen Incident. As such, while remaining true to its new interest in the developing world, China's diplomacy had to be geared towards approaching a particular group of countries within the Third World that had the actual potential to aid not only China's human rights diplomacy, but also its economic needs; the Chinese found this in Southeast Asia.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Van Ness, "China as a Third World State: Foreign Policy and Official National Identity", in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds., *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 213.

## 5.6. The ASEAN Countries in China's Post-Tiananmen Third World Diplomacy

In the early 1990s, the economies of Southeast Asia – particularly members of ASEAN – were booming at a magnificent rate. The growth was so rapid that by 1995, ASEAN states collectively ranked fourth in the world (after only the United States, Germany, and Japan) in terms of total trade volume.<sup>79</sup> Having a total GDP of about US\$1,600 billion for that year, the ASEAN countries harnessed within them a purchasing power parity that was equalled in the Asia-Pacific only by Japan.<sup>80</sup> And although the statistics during the period immediately following the Tiananmen Incident was not as high as those noted above, the Chinese had already recognized Southeast Asia's economic potential beforehand. As a result, it did not come as a surprise that China saw in the region its way out of the economic difficulties caused by western sanctions after Tiananmen. In addition to recognizing Southeast Asia's potential as markets for Chinese products, the region was also seen as a rich source of investment and raw materials. And when we observe that the overseas Chinese population had a strong hold of Southeast Asia's economic sector, it became even more natural that Beijing stressed the need for improved relations between China and its southern neighbours. Trade with Southeast Asia – particularly with ASEAN – was perceived not only as a short-term solution to China's current problems with the West, but also as means to reduce its dependence on western funds in the long-term. This was an important strategy in ensuring the continuance of China's economic

<sup>79</sup> Joseph Y.S. Cheng, "China's ASEAN Policy in the 1990s: Pushing for Regional Multipolarity", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 21:2 (August 1999), p. 184.

<sup>80</sup> Qingxing Ken Wang, "In Search of Stability and Multipolarity: China's Changing Foreign Policy towards Southeast Asia after the Cold War", *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 6:2 (December 1998), p.59.

development plan considering the indefinite length of western imposition of economic sanctions at the time.

In addition to the potential economic assistance obtained from ASEAN, China also recognized these countries' usefulness in supporting its human rights diplomacy against the United States and the West. As this Chapter will discuss in more detail later, Southeast Asian leaders' views on the notion of "Asian values" very much fitted with China's cultural relativist perspective on human rights, as together they attempted to counter the West's universalist perspective. And although the Third World (including African and Latin American countries) in general also adhered to a cultural relativist view on human rights issues, Southeast Asia's approach to the matter was somewhat more appealing, as it emphasized a notion of "asian-ness" onto which the Chinese government could attach themselves with more ease.<sup>81</sup> Sharing similar cultural attributes as well as unpleasant experiences at the hands of western colonialism, the creation of an Asian identity (no matter how loose this identity was actually being conceived) in turn served not only the interest of challenging western hegemony in human rights issues, but also the goal of securing a multi-polar post-Cold War environment through increased regionalism.

The United States' ability to garner western support to pressure the Chinese government after the Tiananmen Incident was seen by Beijing as an indication of the extent to which the Americans could exercise a hegemonic scheme in international affairs after the decline of the Soviet Union. If such conditions were allowed to

<sup>81</sup> Chen Jie, "Tactical Alliance: Southeast Asia and China's post-1989 Human Rights Diplomacy", *China Rights Forum*, Fall 1998, p. 19.

continue, the future appeared rather bleak for China's participation in the international community as a normal state, let alone as a Great Power. Fearing that it would remain outside of this new international order, "China's objective was [thus] a multi-polar world, rather than an all-roads-lead-to-Washington" international system.<sup>82</sup> However, China in itself was incapable of developing an alternative system; it needed the support of the Third World, which made up the majority of the world's population. And most importantly, it needed the support of ASEAN countries, which were not only regarded as leaders of the Third World, but also the ones that had the true potential bargaining power to realize this goal. ASEAN's relative success as a regional organization (in dealing with social, economic, political, and security issues) provided an institutionalized means to sustain state-to-state cooperation based on the principles of sovereignty, co-existence and non-intervention much enshrined in Chinese foreign policy. To the Chinese leaders, having the support of vocal counterparts such as Malaysia's Mahathir Mohammad and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew – who constantly criticized the West's domineering approach to international relations – was an asset benefiting China's struggle not only to counter immediately the West's post-Tiananmen cornering of China, but also to ensure that similar conditions would not recur in the long run.

Thus, realizing that significant assistance was going to be found neither in the crumbling Eastern Bloc nor among the hapless African and Latin American countries, the Chinese turned their attention to making a concerted effort at approaching the ASEAN countries. In August 1990, Premier Li Peng embarked on a 10-day tour of

<sup>82</sup> Van Ness, "China and the Third World... *op.cit.*", p. 160.

Southeast Asia, visiting the capitals of Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand. The choice of Indonesia as Li's first visit was tactical, as it symbolized this country's importance – considering its role as ASEAN's leader then – in securing the support of the rest of the region.<sup>83</sup> These visits would then be followed by a second trip in December 1990 to Malaysia, the Philippines, Laos and Sri Lanka. This time around, as the Chinese media in their reports made us believe, the focus was on Li's visit to Kuala Lumpur considering that Malaysia also played an important role in ASEAN and the Third World in general.<sup>84</sup> In between these trips, Beijing's diplomacy was strengthened by the interchange of visits among lower-level officials from both sides to discuss the details and implementation of their budding cooperation. The following year, China's direct approach towards Southeast Asia was solidified through a second visit by a high-level Chinese official to Jakarta; President Yang Shangkun, at the invitation of President Soeharto, held talks with Indonesian government officials on the further development of a new Sino-Southeast Asian axis.<sup>85</sup> And to complete China's appreciation of ASEAN as a foreign policy partner in the post-Tiananmen, post-Cold War period, Premier Li ensured that no country was left out by visiting in July 1992 the organization's youngest – yet economically capable – member, Brunei Darussalam.<sup>86</sup>

In all of their visits, the Chinese leaders expressed gratefulness towards Southeast Asia's support of China during the latter's time of need. As a commentary in the Chinese media announced, "China's diplomatic sun may not shine in the West in a

<sup>83</sup> "Chinese Premier Vows to Strengthen Ties with S.E. Asia", *Japan Economic Newswire* (8 August 1990).

<sup>84</sup> "Chinese Premier on China's Policies", *Xinhua News Agency* (13 December 1990).

<sup>85</sup> "Chinese, Indonesian President Hold Private Talks", *Xinhua News Agency* (6 June 1991).

<sup>86</sup> Michael Vatikiotis, "The First Step", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 3 June 1993, p. 18.

certain period, but it will always shine in the east".<sup>87</sup> And considering that both Premier Li's and President Yang's trips carried a mandate to "promote mutual understanding, strengthen bilateral cooperation, and develop good-neighbourly ties", these leaders made great efforts to reassure their counterparts that China had neither hegemonic nor interventionist designs in the region.<sup>88</sup> This was stressed not only by China's willingness to forego any military activities that may be deemed aggressive, but also by its desire to cut ties with regional communist parties and solve all outstanding issues concerning the overseas Chinese population in the region. As Li stated after China had signed an agreement to resume diplomatic ties with Indonesia, "we agreed to let bygones be bygones and look to the future".<sup>89</sup> Recognizing China's and Southeast Asia's similar historical experiences and cultural values, the development of mutual trust and good-neighbourly relations was emphasized with a view to addressing the same task contemporarily being faced by both sides: the development of their respective national economies and their peoples' living standards. This was further emphasized by upholding the notions of peaceful co-existence and non-intervention through affirming that relations between China and Southeast Asian countries need not be based on a common political belief, but instead, on respecting the political uniqueness of each country.<sup>90</sup> In a sense, Beijing used these high-level official trips to rhetorically pronounce its commitment to turn a new leaf in the history of the tumultuous relationship between the Chinese and their neighbours to the south.

<sup>87</sup> "Significance of Resumption of Sino-Indonesian Diplomatic Relations", *Ta Kung Pao* (12 July 1990).

<sup>88</sup> "Develop Good-neighbourly Relations and Promote Common Prosperity", *People's Daily* (22 December 1990).

<sup>89</sup> David Watts, "China and Indonesia Renew Diplomatic Ties", *Times* (9 August 1990).

<sup>90</sup> "Chinese Premier on China's Policies... *op.cit.*".

Indeed, much more than words of encouragement and support were achieved during Beijing's diplomacy blitz to Southeast Asia in 1990. On Li's visit, which had been preceded by a historical visit by his Ministry's delegation in December 1989 (the first in 22 years since China severed diplomatic relations with Indonesia in 1967),<sup>91</sup> China and Indonesia at last re-established diplomatic relations after decades of animosity following Jakarta's claims that Beijing had supported the Indonesian Communist Party's failed attempt to topple the government in 1965. Although discussions leading to the resumption of diplomatic ties had been carried out since long before the Tiananmen Incident – and had been preceded by the opening of trade between the two countries in 1985 – it was obvious that the aftermath of the Incident and China's eagerness to improve relations with Southeast Asia played a key determinant in speeding up the process. Additionally, the resumption of ties did not stop at the political level, as a new agreement was also inked to facilitate the trade of Indonesian goods to China.<sup>92</sup>

The normalization of ties between China and Indonesia, in turn, encouraged a similar process between China and Singapore. The latter, which had been concerned about Beijing's potential meddling in the stability of this ethnic Chinese-dominated state, became finally convinced of China's renewed stance on peaceful co-existence and non-interference in the region, and allowed the natural progress of relations to take place. Following Li's visit in August 1990, efforts were stepped up – particularly on Beijing's part – to ensure the continuance of this progress. Within less than two

<sup>91</sup> "Foreign Ministry Delegation Arrives in Jakarta", *Xinhua Domestic Service* (4 December 1989), in FBIS-CHI, 5 December 1989, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> "Chinese Premier Vows to Strengthen... op.cit."

months, China and Singapore officially established diplomatic ties through an agreement signed by the countries' foreign ministers. As a whole, the significance of China's embracing of Singapore went beyond the two countries' bilateral relationship, as it provided another building block towards achieving regional stability and intensifying regional economic cooperation. As an article in *The People's Daily* wrote, "the establishment of Sino-Singaporean diplomatic relations [would] certainly open a broader prospect for traditional friendship and all-around cooperation between China and ASEAN".<sup>93</sup>

With regards to China's relations with Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, the visits by Chinese officials in late 1990 only strengthened the diplomatic bonds that had already been established in the 1970s. This was carried out mainly by addressing particular issues that posed the biggest thorn in the side of China's bi-lateral relations with each one of these countries. With Malaysia, Premier Li stressed his country's cessation of ties with local communist insurgency groups, thus lessening the Malaysians' suspicion of Chinese intervention in their domestic politics.<sup>94</sup> Li also commented on the issue of the Spratly Islands – over which Malaysia had significant claims – and proposed that concerns relating to territorial sovereign rights be shelved in order to pave the way for a solution based on consent and mutual benefit.<sup>95</sup> Similar issues were also raised with the Philippines, as it also faced – like Malaysia – the same challenges vis-à-vis communist insurgency and the Spratly Islands. However with Thailand, China was quick to recognize that the main problem plaguing their relationship had been the resolving of the conflict in Cambodia and deterring

<sup>93</sup> "Sino-Singapore Ties Enter a New Stage", *People's Daily* (4 October 1990).

<sup>94</sup> "Chinese Premier on China's Policies... op.cit."

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

Vietnam's expansionist tendencies in Indo-China. Considering the Thais' significant military purchases from China as well as the exemplary integration of the ethnic Chinese in the country's social fabric, Bangkok's relations with Beijing were the strongest in comparison to the other ASEAN capitals'.<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, increased Chinese commitment to find a peaceful solution to the Cambodian crisis and its interest in cooperating to halt potential Vietnamese expansionism played a significant role in further warming Sino-Thailand relations considering the latter's geographical proximity to the conflict areas. In sum, the issues that Premier Li and President Yang chose to address during their visits to Southeast Asia, and in particular, China's resumption of diplomatic relations with Indonesia, were tactical and added greatly to the region's perception of China's good intentions.<sup>97</sup>

In spite of this growing perception, however, many problems continued to challenge China's budding relations with Southeast Asia. As Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew warned, "links between China and ASEAN would depend on how comfortable Indonesia and Malaysia were about China's long-term intentions".<sup>98</sup> While Chinese reassurances of cooperative and peaceful objectives in the region were well-received not only by Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, but also the entire Southeast Asia in general, much remained to be done in order to erase fully the decades of deep-seated suspicion and distrust from the minds of the Southeast Asian peoples; there was only so much that China could have done in a couple of years of hurried diplomacy following the

<sup>96</sup> Watts, *op.cit.*

<sup>97</sup> "Editorial Hails Li Peng's ASEAN Tour", *Renmin Ribao Overseas Edition* (17 August 1990), in FBIS-CHI, 17 August 1990, pp. 8-9; "Philippines Welcomes Sino-Indonesian Ties", *Xinhua* (8 August 1990), in FBIS-CHI, 10 August 1990, pp. 6-7; "Thai Papers Praise Li Peng's Visit", *Xinhua* (7 August 1990), in FBIS-CHI, 10 August 1990, p. 7; "Vietnamese Official on Sino-Indonesia Ties", *Xinhua* (9 August 1990), in FBIS-CHI, 10 August 1990, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> "China Mends Fences with Non-Communist Southeast Asia", *Inter Press Service* (14 August 1990).

Tiananmen Incident. As such, once diplomatic ties with ASEAN countries had already been consolidated pen-on-paper, the next most important task was to further the progress through building on the mutual interests that had in the first place sparked warm relations in the 1980s as well as tackling the many challenges that had prevented relations from growing.

### 5.7. Stacking the Building Blocks and Facing the Continued Challenges in Sino-ASEAN Relations

Chapter Four discussed in detail the factors that encouraged improved relations between China and ASEAN countries – especially in issues of economics and trade – beginning from Deng's reform initiative in the 1970s. These included:

- a) The changing geo-political climate, in which the Sino-American *rapprochement* of 1972 opened the door for the re-establishment of contacts between Beijing and Southeast Asian capitals;
- b) The increasing need for cooperation between China and ASEAN to contain Vietnam's expansionist designs; and
- c) The growing sense of Third World solidarity – particularly in the area of economic development – in the face of western domination.

Despite these factors, however, Chapter Four also elaborated on the challenges that continued to plague this budding relationship, and had prevented it from fully blossoming. These were:



- a) Competition resulting from the similar way in which China and Southeast Asian countries were developing their national economies and seeking foreign investment;
- b) China's relations with revolutionary Communist parties in the region;
- c) Sensitivities related to the question of the treatment of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia;
- d) Historical animosities dating back to the Middle Kingdom's Dynastic period, in which Southeast Asia was perceived as inferior and merely constituting part of China's vast tribute system;
- e) Unresolved territorial disputes, particularly the potential for conflict over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea; and
- f) Growing uncertainties at the end of the Cold War, especially with regards to dealing with the possible power vacuum caused by the United States' withdrawal from direct involvement in the Asia-Pacific.

Although the basis for improved relations had already been founded, the continued progress of this process depended on both sides' ability not only to strengthen the factors encouraging cooperation, but also to deal with the challenges hampering cooperation from developing even further. These topics were briefly touched upon earlier in this Chapter, but the continuance of this section will provide a more elaborate discussion of them.

### 5.7.1. Dealing with The Changing Geo-politics at the Turn of the Decade

The Tiananmen Incident could not have happened at a worse time for the Chinese leadership. While trying to repair the tarnished image of the country's Communist state structures, their efforts were being undermined by the rapid collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Moreover, the growing trend of western liberalism-based human rights advocacy coincided with the rise of the United States as the unchallenged Superpower in the world. As a result, China's struggle to counter western criticisms was clearly an uphill battle; one in which China's opponent was powerful and its natural allies were incapable of providing significant assistance. Isolating itself from participating in the international system was not a feasible alternative, as China had made tremendous progress in opening up to the world and developing its national economy. And neither was conceding to western pressure possible considering the preservation of the country's dignity in the eyes of its own people and the international community. The only way out for the Chinese, therefore, was to encourage the creation of a multi-polar post-Cold War system through developing alternative poles of power in the form of the Third World and/or East Asian regionalism.

Fortunately, the strengthening of ties with ASEAN provided not only the means to develop Third World solidarity and East Asian regionalism, but also the basis for Beijing's much-desired multi-polar international order. Although Sino-ASEAN relations had originally been built upon improved Sino-American relations, the freezing of the latter after Tiananmen did not pose an impediment to the progress of

the former. If anything, the event pushed the two sides even closer. The ASEAN countries may have been staunchly anti-communist and friendly with the United States, but they were by no means the Americans' allies the way Western Europe and Japan were. Having faced similar experiences as the Chinese vis-à-vis the West's human rights campaign and growing dominance in the world economy, Southeast Asia positioned themselves independently from Washington, especially as its rapid economic growth provided them the potential bargaining power to do so.<sup>99</sup> The ASEAN countries were recognized as leaders of the Third World, and their organization had become a force to be reckoned with in international affairs. As a result, China's invitation to develop a multi-polar post-Cold War international system fell on good ears as these countries were also seeking an alternative international relations structure that could prove more beneficial in the long run.

Between China and Southeast Asia, there was a general understanding on how the post-Cold War era was shaping as well as their place in it. From their perspective as part of the Third World

...the world still appear[ed] to be a hostile and insecure place... [they were] also concerned about being ignored by the West in economic terms, but pressured by it politically, demonstrating that the North-South argument of the Cold War years [had] survived, even intensified, in the new era.<sup>100</sup>

Far from serving the interests of China and Southeast Asia, the United States' growing power posed potential problems that needed to be countered by the creation of a multi-polar power configuration based on notions of non-interference, peaceful co-existence and regional strength. As such, both China and Southeast Asia had more

<sup>99</sup> Van Ness, "China and the Third World... *op.cit.*", p. 162.

<sup>100</sup> Rosemary Foot, "Thinking Globally from a Regional Perspective: Chinese, Indonesian, and Malaysian Reflections on the post-Cold War Era", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 18:1 (June 1996), p. 29.

to gain by cooperating towards this goal than they had prior to the Tiananmen Incident and the unraveling of the Cold War balance of power. Most importantly, creating multi-polarism through encouraging regionalism among the ASEAN countries served China's interest the most, as it avoided possible encirclement resulting from the United States growing influence in the Asia-Pacific and the rest of the world in general.

### 5.7.2. The Vietnam Factor

As Chapter Four discussed, China and the ASEAN countries shared similar views on their policies towards Vietnam. China's continued friction with Vietnam since the 1970s (which actually resulted in military confrontations, notably China's seizing of the Paracel Islands in 1974 and invasion of northern Vietnam in 1979) favoured the ASEAN countries' position on Vietnam as they also feared Hanoi's expansionist ambitions in the region. Although ASEAN was not entirely comfortable with the PLA's aggressive maneuvers in the South China Sea, anxiety towards Vietnam's intentions proved to be a greater factor in providing a common platform for Beijing and regional capitals to initiate some form of cooperation. With the departure of the United States from Indo-China, the Chinese wanted to ensure that Soviet influence over Vietnam did not expand. Meanwhile, the ASEAN countries viewed engagement with China as a means not only to prevent the strengthening of Vietnam through Soviet assistance, but also to tie down the Chinese from actually having expansionist designs of their own.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Martin Stuart-Fox, *A Short History of China and Southeast Asia: Tribute, Trade and Influence* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003), p. 108.

In the period after Tiananmen, however, the strategic cooperation provided by such common perceptions of Vietnam became somewhat threatened by the world's shifting constellation of power as well as Beijing's attempt to gather support from its neighbours. Vietnam's involvement in Cambodia had been the source of recent hostilities between the Chinese and Vietnamese governments. Therefore, when Vietnam finally withdrew its troops from Cambodia in November 1989, an opening was created for warmer relations to develop between Hanoi and Beijing.<sup>102</sup> Even though official normalization of ties between the two countries would not take place until 1992, efforts were stepped up to embrace Vietnam as yet another partner in China's attempt to encourage regional cooperation and Third World solidarity in the face of growing western hegemony in international affairs. As in China's diplomacy towards ASEAN countries, Beijing took the initiative in developing Sino-Vietnamese bi-lateral relations by offering Hanoi financial aid in December 1990.<sup>103</sup> The offer was eventually not taken by the Vietnamese; nevertheless, the event indicated the potential for warmer relations in the near future. Affirming China's commitment to interact in a good-neighbourly manner, Premier Li expressed that "China and Vietnam [would] gradually improve their bi-lateral relations in the process of the settlement of the Cambodian issue".<sup>104</sup> The improving Sino-Vietnamese relations, however, came at the cost of possibly shaking the common platform that had underlain Sino-ASEAN cooperation.

<sup>102</sup> "Vietnam Withdrew Its Troops from Kampuchea", *Japan Economic Newswire* (5 November 1989).

<sup>103</sup> "Vietnam Turns Down Chinese Offer of Aid", *The Independent (London)* (12 December 1990).

<sup>104</sup> "China Committed to Normalizing Ties with Vietnam", *Japan Economic Newswire* (13 December 1990).

The ASEAN countries recognized this potential and were quick to adapt to these new developments. They, especially Indonesia, increased their participation in the Cambodian peace process so as not to allow the outcome becoming heavily influenced by entities outside of the region.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, these countries began to see Vietnam in a different light and approach the latter as a potential partner not only in resolving the Cambodian conflict, but also in developing Southeast Asian regionalism as a whole.<sup>106</sup> Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia and subsequent willingness to cooperate in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict in Indo-China demonstrated a departure from its earlier expansionist ambitions. With the fleeing of Soviet aid in the post-Cold War era, the Vietnamese economy was in dire need of foreign assistance. Therefore, rather than have Vietnam fall into China's sphere of influence (if Hanoi was to turn its dependency from the Soviets to the Chinese), the ASEAN countries saw an opportunity to bring Vietnam into their lines through economic cooperation. Even though relations between China and the ASEAN countries had improved drastically since the Tiananmen Incident, there remained deep-seated fears over China's long-term intentions in the region, especially when considering the Middle Kingdom's continued Great Power ambitions.<sup>107</sup> As such, ASEAN's simultaneous engagement with China and Vietnam (instead of playing one against the other) became perceived as the safest approach towards achieving greater peace and stability in the region.

<sup>105</sup> "Stresses Settlement of Cambodia Issue", *Xinhua* (8 August 1990), in FBIS-CHI, 8 August 1990, p. 11.

<sup>106</sup> *Vietnam would become a member of ASEAN in 1995.*

<sup>107</sup> "China Mends Fences... *op.cit.*"

Overall, the Vietnam factor remained a source of improved relations between China and the ASEAN countries despite the changing geo-political climate and Beijing's warming relations with Hanoi. While in the past, efforts to halt Vietnam's expansionist ambitions had provided a strategic reason for China and ASEAN to cooperate, the sudden warming of ties between China and Vietnam did not necessarily result in China and ASEAN no longer having a common platform on which to sustain their evolving relationship. Among China, Vietnam and the ASEAN countries, the need to find a peaceful solution to the Cambodian conflict provided a new issue on which all sides could concentrate their efforts in creating a regional environment that was not only conducive to the development of their respective national economies, but also a real challenge to the United States and the West's growing dominance in international affairs.

### 5.7.3. Extending Third World Solidarity

Much has already been discussed in this Chapter about China's approach towards the Third World in the post-Tiananmen period. In the face of difficulties resulting from western ostracism, coupled with the Eastern Bloc's incapacity to provide much needed support throughout the ordeal, the Chinese viewed engagement with Third World countries as the most feasible – and dependable – source of alleviation. It needs to be highlighted, nonetheless, that Beijing's Third World diplomacy following the Tiananmen Incident differed significantly from its approach in the past. In the 1960s and 1970s, Beijing supported revolutionary movements in many developing countries as part of its effort to radically change the shape of the international system.

Recently freed from the shackles of western colonialism, most of the Third World was seen as a potential hotbed for world revolution overthrowing the capitalist order. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, China's harnessing of the Third World's anti-colonial, anti-imperialist sentiments was no longer sustained through inciting revolutionary movements bent on changing these countries' political ideologies. Instead, China became "a champion of state sovereignty and defender of non-interference in the internal affairs of those same Third World countries".<sup>108</sup> Although the goal of creating a basis of support to counter western dominance in international affairs remained the same, the shifting geo-political climate after the fall of the Eastern Bloc forced China to approach the Third World differently as a means to achieving this.

Moreover, the emphasis of China's Third World diplomacy in the post-Tiananmen period shifted towards issues of economics and human rights, as they posed the most pressing concern at the time. This somewhat differed from the ideological politics that had underlain China's intervening tendencies in the past. As this author has noted earlier, Beijing's changing policies towards the Third World have always been conducted in response to its perceived needs in dealing with the greater powers in international relations. At a time when the world was undergoing dramatic balance-of-power shifts resulting from the thawing of the Cold War, China's re-identification of itself as a Third World country was carried out with a view to ensuring that a multi-polar world order evolved instead of one that was dominated by the United States and its western allies. As such, its approach towards the ASEAN countries – which were

<sup>108</sup> Van Ness, "China and the Third World... op.cit.", p. 164.

regarded as leaders of the Third World – cannot be perceived merely as a last resort, but an actual calculated, tactical move to sustain a “damage control” foreign policy geared towards strengthening a regional environment that was conducive not only for the spreading of human rights thinking based on “Asian values”, but also for increased cooperation in the area of economics.

#### 5.7.4. Developing an Asian Perspective on Human Rights

Human rights were never an issue in Sino-Southeast Asian relations until 1989. It was raised the last time during the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung. And even then, the rhetoric of cooperation superseded actual cooperation to improve human rights conditions in the Third World, and particularly, in the region.<sup>109</sup> However, with the West’s cornering of China on issues of human rights in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident, the need for allies in spreading Chinese advocacy on human rights became apparent. In 1991, China would publish Human Rights in China, which was regarded as the country’s white paper on this issue. However, the realization of this would not have happened if not for the increasing support China had received in its human rights diplomacy – particularly from Southeast Asia – as elements within this white paper clearly showed a predominance of ideas based on cultural relativism as proposed by the region’s view on “Asian values”.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Chen, “Tactical Alliance... op.cit.”, p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> “Why China Publishes the White Paper on Human Rights”, Beijing Review, 34:45 (11-17 November 1991), p. 20-1.

Even though there is no single pan-Asian set of values, the concept of “Asian values” proposed by Southeast Asian leaders such as Mahathir Muhammad and Lee Kuan Yew emphasized regional commonalities in:

- a) stressing duties and responsibilities over rights;
- b) preferring consultation and consensus over contention and litigation in efforts at problem-solving;
- c) respecting authority;
- d) believing in strong family ties;
- e) applying punishment as a deterrent to and retribution for crimes.<sup>111</sup>

Thus, in their efforts to create an Asian perspective on human rights, these leaders noted that there were significant differences between such a perspective and that of the West. While western perceptions of human rights attributed greater importance to an individual’s civil and political rights, the Asian view focused on the individual’s economic rights, or in other words, his/her potential to acquire an appropriate standard of living.<sup>112</sup> Considering the widespread poverty in the region, it was understandable that governments stressed the need to achieve economic freedoms ahead of political ones. The Asian perspective also viewed that in order to achieve a common good, there had to be strict limitations (applied by the government) on individualist demands for rights. This somewhat reflected the values of respecting authority and believing in strong family relations. Most importantly, however, the Asian approach to human rights called for greater respect towards governments’ sovereignty in formulating and implementing human rights policies. This meant that interference from foreign countries and international bodies would not be tolerated whatsoever. As such, the

<sup>111</sup> Mauzy, op.cit., pp. 215-216.

<sup>112</sup> Chen, “Tactical Alliance... op.cit.”, p. 9.

development of foreign trade should not be conditional on human rights circumstances in particular countries.<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, Southeast Asia's view on human rights did not differ by much from those coming from the Third World in general. The conflict between "Asian values" and western liberalism very much embodied the debate between first generation and second generation rights existing since the UN first adopted its Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.<sup>114</sup> However, Southeast Asian countries' identification of their perspective as being distinctively "Asian" clearly provided it with a broader appeal in the region. To say the least, it was successful in getting the support of the Chinese, who wanted to utilize the concept as a means to further develop strong regionalism instincts among their neighbours to the south. Different from its approach during the Mao period, post-Tiananmen China portrayed itself as a "developing country with its own Asian culture, rather than resorting to traditional Marxist-Leninist doctrines on political freedom".<sup>115</sup> In doing so, it paved the way for a realization of increased peaceful co-existence with the anti-communist countries of Southeast Asia. In turn, the environment created by such a policy would then become conducive for relations to spread into other fields, including economics, science and technology.

<sup>113</sup> Mauzy, *op.cit.*, p. 220.

<sup>114</sup> First generation rights include freedom of speech, assembly and the right to take part in government through freely chosen representatives. Second generation rights refer to the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable to an individual. Chris Brown, "Human Rights", in John Baylis and Steve Smith, eds., *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 600.

<sup>115</sup> Chen, "Tactical Alliance... *op.cit.*", p. 10.

### 5.7.5. The Economics Factor and the Building-up of Multi-lateral Ties

Complementarities between China and Southeast Asia indicated that greater regional cooperation could indeed result in enormous economic profits.<sup>116</sup> However, this relationship was also prone to challenges and problems, as both sides developed their economies not only through a similar approach (focusing on exports of electronics and textiles based on cheap labour and intermediate technological expertise), but also on a heavy reliance on foreign direct investment. Thus, as both China and Southeast Asia's economies grew bigger, the likelihood for competition became apparent, as they would be pegged against each other in efforts to vie for financial assistance from industrialized countries.

Fortunately, the concern described above was a non-issue in the period after Tiananmen. With the sanctioning of China, Southeast Asian countries – especially ASEAN members – saw that they no longer needed to compete with their giant northern neighbour for foreign investment, particularly those coming from the United States and its economic allies. At the time, it was not known how long the West would impose such sanctions on China. And considering Beijing's defiance against international calls for democratization and improved human rights conditions, it appeared rather unlikely that western investment would return to the Mainland within the foreseeable future. Although the imposition of sanctions signified that the Chinese were in a disadvantageous position, the situation was greeted among

<sup>116</sup> "Views Importance of ASEAN Relations", *Xinhua* (8 August 1990), in FBIS-CHI, 8 August 1990, p. 14-15.



Southeast Asian countries with a sigh of relief, as there was now an opportunity for them to attract funds that had previously gone to China. When we look in hindsight, the economic uncertainties overshadowing China's post-Tiananmen environment were not wholly harmful (especially if one was to make the observation not from the Chinese perspective); they made a fresh beginning possible for the development of a Sino-Southeast Asian economic relationship that was based mostly on cooperation, and not competition.

The increasing Sino-Southeast Asian cooperation was attributed not only to fortuitous situations such as the one described above, but also to the rhetoric used by Chinese leaders on occasions both at home and abroad. For example, Premier Li Peng pronounced, in a speech on the eve of China's normalization of ties with Indonesia, that "China [stood] ready to expand exchanges and co-operation with ASEAN countries in the economic, trade, scientific-technological, cultural and other fields on the basis of equality and mutual benefit".<sup>117</sup> Such words of confidence were also present in Foreign Minister Qian Qichen's statement supporting ASEAN's promotion of trade exchanges, economic regionalization, and cooperation.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, it would be naïve to accept these declarations at face value, as they were peppered with niceties commonly used in the diplomatic circle. Nevertheless, the intention underlying them was clear and firm: China was ready to put the past behind them and look forward to a strong, cooperative relationship with Southeast Asia in the years to come.

<sup>117</sup> From excerpts of Li's speech at the state banquet held in his honour by President Suharto in Jakarta on 7 August 1990, which was printed in "A New Era for Sino-Indonesian Relations", *Beijing Review*, 33:34 (20-26 August 1990), p. 8.

<sup>118</sup> From excerpts of Qian's interview with Chinese weekly magazine *Outlook*, which was re-printed in "Qian Qichen on the World Situation", *Beijing Review*, 33:3 (15-21 January 1990), p. 10.

The ASEAN countries responded to Chinese calls for cooperation by inviting Foreign Minister Qian to attend the organization's annual Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in 1991. The event was groundbreaking considering that it was China's first opportunity to participate in a multilateral "track-one" dialogue with its neighbors to the south. Furthermore, China's acceptance into the ASEAN circle – albeit as a guest – was a significant achievement in Beijing's foreign policy when remembering that it had not even established diplomatic relations with some ASEAN members just a year earlier. During the meeting, Qian welcomed the growing cooperation in the field of economics, but stated that China was also eager to engage the ASEAN countries in issues of politics, science, technology, and security.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, the inclusion of China in the 1991 AMM provided the initial grounds for China's relations with these countries to develop not only along bi-lateral connections, but also within an institutionalized multi-lateral setting encompassing multiple regional issues and concerns. The following year, the Chinese proposed the creation of an ASEAN-China Consultative Relationship as a means to coordinate China's interests with those of ASEAN. Since then, China's presence would become permanent not only in the AMM, but also in other consultations such as the ASEAN-China Joint Committee on Economy and Trade Cooperation (JCETC), ASEAN-China Joint Committee on Science and Technology (JCSC), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which deals with security issues.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Lee Lai To, "China's Relations with ASEAN: Partners in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?", *Pacific Review*, 13:1 (February 2001), p. 64.

<sup>120</sup> *ASEAN Selayang Pandang* [An Overview of ASEAN]. Jakarta: Sekretariat Nasional ASEAN, 1998.

Outside of the ASEAN structure, China continued to cooperate with ASEAN countries in advancing other regional initiatives, particularly those related to trade and economy. In the same year that China was invited to the AMM, it joined the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Although the Chinese rhetoric for joining APEC revolved around issues of trade and economics, it also treated participation in the body with a view to enhancing its image as a country committed to international cooperation and regional stability.<sup>121</sup> At the very least, the sight of China's leader standing head-to-head alongside those of the region – and particularly the United States – proved invaluable for Beijing's post-Tiananmen public relations campaign. APEC provided the Chinese with a forum to further their interests and engage other countries; considering China's size and potential economic strength, its presence and voice during deliberations never went unheard. Nevertheless, on numerous occasions, the support of ASEAN countries was crucial in ensuring that the United States and its economic allies in the region did not dominate the agenda of these deliberations.<sup>122</sup> All in all, the inclusion of Chinese officials in APEC served the purpose of slowly breaking down the West's efforts to exclude China from the international community.

However, in spite of China's attempt to garner support from the Asian members of APEC, it recognized that the United States' position in the institution remained powerful considering the extent to which many Asian countries were tied to the Americans for trade and investment. Therefore, while at the same time it was involved in APEC, China also threw its support behind a distinctively "Asian" approach to economic cooperation in the form of an East Asian Economic Caucus

<sup>121</sup> Denny Roy, *China's Foreign Relations* (London: MacMillan Press, 1998), p. 95.

<sup>122</sup> Van Ness, "China and the Third World... *op.cit.*", p. 161-2.

(EAEC) that excluded the United States. The originator of this proposal, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad, had often challenged the West's growing hegemony in international relations; for years, it was his intention to create a grouping of Asian economies (not only Southeast Asian) that was self-reliant and independent from the influences of the United States and other rich, industrialized countries in the West. The EAEC, in Mahathir's words, "constitute[d] a realistic approach to counter the adversary and protectionist stance... jeopardizing the multilateral trading system".<sup>123</sup> Although not wanting to completely push the West away, the Chinese recognized the value in supporting such a proposal, especially considering their cornered position at the time. This sentiment was affirmed by Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, in a meeting with his ASEAN counterparts in Kuala Lumpur: "China supports the efforts made by ASEAN in strengthening regional economic cooperation, maintaining the resources of ASEAN countries, and forming a new international political and economic order".<sup>124</sup>

Overall, China's effort to enhance regional economic cooperation through approaching the ASEAN countries bore many fruits. It not only instilled some trust and confidence among these countries – thus preventing the organization from becoming a political and economic bloc containing China – but also furthered Beijing's attempt to engage the rest of the Asia-Pacific following the West's post-Tiananmen isolation of China. Through cooperation with ASEAN (as an institutional entity), the Chinese were successful in stepping up their level of interaction beyond

<sup>123</sup> As quoted in Gu Zhenqiu, "ASEAN Ready for Closer Co-operation", *Beijing Review*, 34:31 (5-11 August 1991), pp. 11-12.

<sup>124</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meet Chinese Foreign Minister", *Xinhua News Agency* (20 July 1991). [Emphasis added]

just the consolidation of bi-lateral ties with each member state. Engagement with ASEAN also provided the grounds for increasing China's involvement in multi-lateral cooperation in the region and beyond. However, in spite of the growing trust and confidence between China and ASEAN countries, the latter continued to hold suspicions towards the former's long-term ambitions. As a result, while the Chinese were definitely on their way to becoming more involved in multi-lateral forums for cooperation (and in the process, ending their post-Tiananmen diplomatic isolation), they also needed to ensure that lingering problems and challenges vis-à-vis their relations with each one of the Southeast Asian countries were dealt with in a timely and accommodating fashion.

#### 5.7.6. Overcoming Historical Animositities and Sensitivities Related to Communist Party-to-Party Relations and the Treatment of Overseas Chinese

The historical animosities between China and Southeast Asia dated back as far as the Chinese Dynastic era. During this period, the region's inferior role within China's feudal-like international relations system meant that the responsibility for ensuring peaceful relations rested in the hands of the former through the payment of tribute to the Middle Kingdom. However, with their independence from colonialism following the Second World War, the Southeast Asian countries demanded such relations to be founded on an equal footing. In the 1970s and 1980s, China's economic reform and openness towards the world were often propagandized in reference to bringing back the glory days of its Dynastic era; this certainly did not bode well with the region's

already negative perception of China's growing power. Therefore, in Beijing's post-Tiananmen effort to encourage regionalism based on trust and confidence, it needed to recognize that relations could no longer be framed within a system of interactions that epitomized China's superior position and ability to interfere in the region's domestic concerns.

China's desire to do away with the region's fear of a revival of Chinese hegemonism was visible in its leaders' constant stressing of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence as the basis of the country's modern foreign policy perspective.<sup>125</sup> Through encouraging peaceful co-existence and guaranteeing non-interference in domestic politics, the strategy was intended to assure Southeast Asia that China neither sought nor planned on seeking a sphere of influence in the region. In the words of Premier Li, China "respected and supported the ASEAN stand of a peaceful, free and neutral Southeast Asia".<sup>126</sup> This pronouncement referred specifically to Beijing's support for ASEAN's concept of Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), which was often regarded as the basis on which a framework for regional political cooperation was being built. In addition to this, China's appeasement efforts were furthered by statements backing the creation of a nuclear weapons free zone (SEANWFZ) in the region.<sup>127</sup> Even though China had been a member of the nuclear club since 1964 (and had no intention of abandoning its nuclear program), it supported ASEAN's proposal primarily with a view to restricting the United States' military maneuvers in the region. Although China would later demonstrate objections to certain clauses

<sup>125</sup> "Warmly Congratulate the Re-Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and Indonesia", *People's Daily* (4 July 1990).

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> "Sino-Singapore Ties Enter... *op.cit.*."

within the SEANWFZ treaty<sup>128</sup>, its precarious situation in international affairs after the Tiananmen Incident meant that it needed to at least display a spirit of cooperation when approaching the matter. In sum, Beijing's show of respect towards ASEAN's establishment of a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality as well as a nuclear weapons-free area was crucial in demonstrating China's willingness to advance mutually beneficial causes in the Asia-Pacific and treat regional countries as equals.

The Chinese backed up their intentions not only with words, but also with action. While Beijing in the past (during the Dynastic period as well as in the modern era prior to the Tiananmen Incident) was comfortable with allowing the onus on Southeast Asia to strengthen regional cooperation, its post-1989 "damage control" foreign policy showed a different face. It no longer sat back and waited for the Southeast Asian countries to come to Beijing with offers of stronger relations. Instead, it took its diplomacy to the region by playing the initiative role in pushing for increased regional cooperation. This was somewhat demonstrated by the surge of official visits to countries in the region. For example, even though diplomatic relations between China and Indonesia had already shown indications of moving towards normalization in the latter parts of the 1990s, the leaders in Beijing made sure that such progress became concrete by dispatching Premier Li to Jakarta. The same could also be said with regards to the normalization of diplomatic relations with Singapore as well as the warming of ties with Malaysia and Thailand. Considering that there were still existing challenges and problems hampering the full progress of Chinese engagement in the region, the physical presence of Chinese leaders and

<sup>128</sup> *ASEAN Selayang Pandang... op.cit.*, p. 182-183.

officials in regional capitals went a long way in affirming China's goodwill and peaceful intentions.

During their visits, the Chinese leaders never failed to address issues that were of most concern to the host countries. One of these was, indeed, the cessation of party-to-party ties between the CCP and revolutionary communist groups in the region. This was a crucial issue considering that recent hostilities between China and Southeast Asian countries had been caused by Beijing's supposed interference in domestic politics through supporting the activities of such groups. During his trip to Kuala Lumpur, Premier Li avowed that the relationship between his party and various communist parties in the region was limited strictly to moral, and not material, assistance. He further explained that "there [was] no need to have common views and unanimity of beliefs, so we can maintain contacts with various political parties, for example, socialist democratic parties and national parties".<sup>129</sup> Such a statement embodied China's willingness to forego its backing for revolutionary movements in the region; it appealed greatly to Malaysia, as it was staunchly anti-communist. A similar approach was also used in China's engagement with Indonesia; Li made it clear that neither Indonesia nor other ASEAN countries should worry about the influence of communism in the region.<sup>130</sup>

Fortunately for the Chinese, their efforts to sever ties with regional communist parties came at a time when these parties were themselves already losing a tremendous amount of local support. For years, the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) had been

<sup>129</sup> "Chinese Premier on China's Policies... *op.cit.*"

<sup>130</sup> Weng Wenzhang, "Indonesia: Improving Relations with China", *Beijing Review*, 33:8 (19-25 February 1990), p. 8.

banned and its roots completely annihilated by the military. In Singapore, there had not been any attempts to spread communism, as the country's Internal Security Act was extremely robust on combating such a potential.<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) ended its armed struggle against the local government in November 1989.<sup>132</sup> The event was welcomed not only by the Malaysians, as the Thais had also been affected by the group's insurgency. This development was followed a month later by the surrender of the North Kalimantan Communist Party (NKCP).<sup>133</sup> Although Beijing may have not had a tremendous role in directly pushing these groups to lay down their arms, the fact that it had ceased any material assistance whatsoever may have caused a burden that was too hard for these groups to sustain on their own. All in all, the domestic and regional conditions at the time pointed towards the development of a Sino-ASEAN relationship that would be entirely free from the problems that had previously been caused by Beijing's relations with local revolutionary movements. By the end of the 1980s, only the Philippines (of all ASEAN members) continued to struggle with communist insurgency in its territory.

Southeast Asia's suspicion of potential Chinese interference in domestic politics was not limited to issues concerning Beijing's relations with local communist parties. It also came in the form of the Mainland's ties with the overseas Chinese population. Disturbed by China's ambition to attract overseas Chinese investment from the region, most Southeast Asian countries (except Thailand) viewed this connection as a

<sup>131</sup> "Communist Party of Malaya Ends 41-Year Insurgency", *Japan Economic Newswire* (30 November 1989).

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> "Communists in Borneo Ready to Make Peace", *Japan Economic Newswire* (8 December 1989).

potential threat to their national security, especially when considering the strong grip that this minority group had on the region's economy. Therefore, although not wanting to sever its ties with the ethnic Chinese population in the region, Beijing realized that it was important to separate these people from those living on the Mainland, and recognize them as nationals of their host countries, and not of the People's Republic.

With regards to the ethnic Chinese population in Indonesia, the above-mentioned distinction was affirmed during the signing of the 1990 memorandum normalizing Sino-Indonesian diplomatic ties. According to the agreement, the two countries would not allow dual nationality to the ethnic Chinese population, as this would compel those who had gained Indonesian nationality to work towards the development of their newfound country.<sup>134</sup> It was expected that these people would not only perform their duties, but also enjoy the rights given to them as Indonesian citizens. In a sense, China's agreeing to Indonesia's demand to end policies of dual-nationality re-emphasized the former's commitment to neither use their ties with the ethnic Chinese minority for their own gains, nor manipulate them for the purpose of intervening in Indonesia's domestic politics.

A similar approach was also agreed upon in Singapore. The Chinese government, as represented in Premier Li's words, not only abjured "any special relationship or responsibility for ethnic Chinese"<sup>135</sup>, but also commended the Singaporeans for their

<sup>134</sup> "Dual Nationality Issue Discussed", *Xinhua* (8 August 1990), in FBIS-CHI, 8 August 1990, p. 12-13.

<sup>135</sup> "China Mends Fences... *op.cit.*".

successes in "nation-building"<sup>136</sup>. Li's decision to applaud Singapore's progress in nation-building was clearly tactical, as the country's leaders had always been concerned over their ability to build a distinctively Singaporean nation despite having a population that was predominantly ethnic Chinese. Chinese citizens remained welcome in Singapore, yet they are regarded differently from their host country's citizens. Nonetheless, it was hoped that those of Chinese citizenship would in the end cooperate in a friendly manner with the local peoples in the course of nation building; this, in turn, would serve as a tie to promote further relations between China and Southeast Asia.

#### 5.7.7. Finding Solutions to Territorial Disputes

In addition to animosities caused by the factors described in the previous section, the lack of mutual trust and confidence between China and Southeast Asia also stemmed from unresolved territorial disputes, particularly in the South China Sea. Competing claims over the Paracel Islands had resulted in military conflict between China and Vietnam in 1974. And as the Chinese military moved southward towards the Spratly Islands, a sense of uneasiness grew among other claimants to this archipelago, which included ASEAN members, Malaysia and the Philippines. The Chinese argue that their sovereign claim over the area was based on historical evidence, and thus, incontestable.<sup>137</sup> They had proven a willingness to defend such claims through the

<sup>136</sup> Excerpts from Premier Li's speech at the welcoming banquet held in his honour by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, printed in "China and Singapore: Friendly Neighbours", *Beijing Review*, 33:34 (20-26 August 1990), p. 9.

<sup>137</sup> Harlan W. Jencks, "China's Evolving Interests in the Western Pacific: Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and ASEAN", in *After Tiananmen Square: Challenges for the Chinese-American Relationship* (Cambridge: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1990), p. 69.

use of force. And considering the strength of the Chinese military in comparison to others in the region, efforts to solve the problem clearly had to be pursued through cooperative multi-lateral consultations.

In 1989, China was preparing to move into Vietnamese-occupied parts of the Spratly Islands when a shortage of funds and the deterioration of China's diplomatic environment following the Tiananmen Incident prevented this plan from coming to fruition.<sup>138</sup> Although the Vietnamese may not have had the strength to resist the Chinese navy's maneuvers, Chinese instigation of an inter-state military conflict would have only further damaged the country's already bruised image in the international community. The West's imposition of economic and military sanctions meant that not many resources could have been dedicated to the achievement of this expansionist plan. In addition to this, aggressive movements in the South China Sea did not bode well with Chinese intentions to embrace Southeast Asia (especially ASEAN) within its "damage control" foreign policy framework. As a result, Beijing felt that the pursuit of its interests in the area needed to be carried out through means other than the use of military force.

Recognizing the problems and difficulties facing attempts to determine sovereignty rights over the Spratlys, there was a growing sense between China and the other claimants that cooperation could be achieved by first setting aside all claims to sovereignty rights for a certain period of time. The Chinese approached this view by downplaying the significance of these territorial disputes as an issue in their relations

<sup>138</sup> John W. Garver, "China's Push Through the South China Sea: The Interaction of Bureaucratic and National Interests", *The China Quarterly*, 132 (December 1992), p. 1015.



with the region; they also showed "more conciliatory gestures" towards coming to a settlement on this issue.<sup>139</sup> Thus in 1990, China proposed discussions on potential joint development of the disputed territory. According to this proposal, the disputing countries would work hand-in-hand to exploit the area's seabed and marine resources, which in turn, would relieve regional tensions and mutually benefit each participant's economies.<sup>140</sup> In practice, China pursued this goal by becoming involved in its first track-two dialogue on the issue: the Indonesian-hosted "informal" workshop on "Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea".<sup>141</sup> Overall, China successfully steered the process of resolving territorial disputes in the South China Sea away from the use of military force towards one that was based on cooperative consultations – at least for the time being – as it tried to promote a regional environment conducive to the furtherance of its post-Tiananmen foreign policy.

#### **5.8. The "Adaptation" Process in China's Policy towards Southeast Asia**

As previous sections in this Chapter have discussed, Chinese foreign policy shifts in the period following the Tiananmen Incident in 1989 were mostly the consequence of responding to unfavourable conditions within the international environment. Most importantly, China's changing attitude towards Southeast Asia – particularly the region's ASEAN members – was conducted with a view to dealing with the pressure brought about by the harsh criticisms and imposition of economic and military

<sup>139</sup> Wang, "In Search of Stability... *op.cit.*", p. 73.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73-4; "Reaffirms Spratlys Claim", *Zhongguo Xinwen She* (13 December 1990), in FBIS-CHI, 13 December 1990, p. 15.

<sup>141</sup> Lee, "China's Relations with ASEAN... *op.cit.*", p. 64.

sanctions by the United States and the West. At a time when China was in dire need of friendship, Southeast Asia became the focus of China's efforts to counter the United States' confrontational foreign policy and growing predominance in the post-Cold War power configuration. This was demonstrated by the level of importance attributed to efforts in embracing the region and preventing it from becoming a bloc containing China. Although relations between China and ASEAN countries had become amicable prior to 1989 (considering the animosities existing during the 1960s and 1970s), the Tiananmen Incident and its aftermath clearly served as a catalyst in further pushing the two sides to increase their efforts in building regionalism and cooperation in many issues. Not only were relations with these countries used to provide a form of safety net onto which the Chinese could fall back in the face of western challenges, they were also cultivated with the aim of mending China's image in the eyes of the world as well as regaining its Great Power potential in international affairs.

The necessary steps taken to ensure China's continued openness to the world were predominantly conducted while keeping in mind its domestic economic development program. Although the external environment had appeared unfavourable for the future of Chinese involvement in international affairs, the leaders in Beijing held onto the belief that China could not turn its back against the world and return to a policy of isolationism akin to the Mao era. This view was stressed early (and with semblances of a united voice) in the post-Tiananmen period when the Fourth Plenary Session of the Thirteenth CCP Central Committee issued a communiqué proclaiming that China "must not return to the old, closed-door path" and adhere "unswervingly and

consistently [to] the policy of reform and opening to the outside world".<sup>142</sup> Realizing that China's economic development had become reliant on the growth of the global economy, the leaders viewed that the country's survival rested on its continued pursuit for reform and increased participation in international affairs.

However, considering the adverse conditions faced by the Chinese, there was much work to be carried out in order to develop an environment that was conducive to economic reform, yet at the same time, did not compromise China's position vis-à-vis the United States and the rest of the West. In a sense, although the domestic determinant of Chinese foreign policy (in the form of the desire to continue on the path towards economic reform and increased international participation) remained constant, there was a definite need to pursue such a goal through an alternative means. Thus, shifts were systematically conducted on the external front by re-focusing China's foreign policy strategy towards the Third World in general and the ASEAN countries in particular (at least for the time being) until conditions normalized between China and the western world.

In reference to Chapter Two's discussion on the nature of foreign policy shifts, the changes in China's post-Tiananmen perception and conduct towards Southeast Asia were in general formulated and implemented through a process of "adaptation", and not "learning". It is important to remember that the process of "learning" in foreign policy-making requires changes to its external, internal and leadership determinants. On the other hand, "adaptation" refers to foreign policy shifts caused by changes to

<sup>142</sup> "Communique of the Fourth Plenary Session... *op.cit.*", p. 10.

only one or two of these determinants. As such, China's changing attitude towards Southeast Asia cannot be deemed a result of "learning", as it did not comprise a transformation in its foreign policy's internal determinant. Instead, it was a consequence of adapting to changes in the external environment as well as the leadership's perception of these changes.

While the transformation of Chinese foreign policy was clearly a response to shifting external conditions, it needs to be stressed that this was mainly a means to accommodate the country's strict adherence to the economic policies that had been in place since the late 1970s. In other words, although there were dramatic shifts to the external factor influencing Chinese foreign policy, its domestic determinant remained constant throughout the period. Indeed, there were some efforts among certain elements within the leadership to respond to the changing external environment by also altering the domestic determinant to foreign policy; this was reflected in the demands for China to return to its former isolationist self and an economy based on Stalinist autarky. However, such demands comprised a minority voice, and did not constitute the government's official perspective on foreign policy. Therefore, it is safe to argue that China's changing attitude towards Southeast Asia was mainly instigated by external stimuli, and not by a transformation in its foreign policy's domestic determinant. If anything, the shifting foreign policy was in fact a means to ensure the consistency of China's desire to remain on the path towards reform and openness to the world.

Once the consistency of the internal factor has been established, it is then important to observe the role of the third foreign policy determinant (the leadership's perception of the changing external environment) in influencing Beijing's reassessment of its policy towards Southeast Asia. During the 1970s and 1980s, this factor remained constant when we take into account the predominance of Deng Xiaoping within China's leadership circle. Deng had initiated China's road to reform and openness to the world, and his perception of the country's external environment provided the guide on which Chinese foreign policy was developed. However, in the period following the Tiananmen Incident, Deng's direct presence in the foreign policy-making process was diminishing as a result of his age and retracted – yet, still somewhat influential – position in the hierarchy and structure of China's state leadership. Although he had preserved the continuance of his economic reform legacy prior to his exit into semi-retirement by placing like-minded officials in strategic positions within the government, the domestic crisis in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident allowed his political rivals to gain some grounds within the decision-making circle.<sup>143</sup> Along with this development there was also a growing disagreement among the leaders in Beijing on how to continue the pursuit of economic reform in the face of challenges from the outside.

<sup>143</sup> Lee Lai To, "Domestic Changes in China since the 4 June Incident and Their Implications for Southeast Asia", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 13:1 (June 1991), p. 21.

### 5.9. The post-Tiananmen Debate over the Direction of Chinese Foreign Policy and Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour in 1992

The challenge to Deng's predominance came mostly from the faction of "conservative reformers" within the ruling elite. In the post-Tiananmen period, this faction was represented by Party elders Chen Yun and Yang Shangkun, Premier Li Peng as well as the Politburo Standing Committee members Song Ping and Yao Yilin. In addition to emphasizing tradition and history in their perspective on Chinese politics, these leaders were not as confident with Deng's reform policies as they were with more orthodox ideas of planned economy and central planning.<sup>144</sup> With regards to Chinese foreign policy, the conservative reformers were not comfortable with China's relations with the United States, as the latter was accused of playing a part in the "peaceful evolution" campaign that led to the Tiananmen Incident. Consequently, it was their belief that China should re-orient its foreign policy away from the United States (and the western world in general) and develop relations with the remaining Eastern Bloc and the Third World.<sup>145</sup>

The influence of these leaders was significant not only because of their high positions within China's leadership hierarchy, but also because of their control of the Party's Central Propaganda Department. Therefore, in theory, they had the ability to manipulate the country's media into disseminating ideas on politics, economics and

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27; Zhao Suisheng, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour: Elite Politics in Post-Tiananmen China", *Asian Survey*, XXXIII:8 (August 1993), p. 741-2; "President Yang Shangkun 24 May 'Secret' Speech", *Handelsblatt* (14 June 1989), in FBIS-CHI, 16 June 1989, pp. 9-11.

<sup>145</sup> Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 42.

foreign policy that were favorable to their cause.<sup>146</sup> Because of the conditions at the time, such views were tolerated by Deng as there was need to respect other leaders's ideas and accept certain concessions in his policies. However, despite the differences in opinion between Deng and the conservative reformers, both sides were careful not to over blow such division. As Premier Li once commented,

...this new leadership is capable of being responsible for all affairs within China. Naturally, the thinking and writings of Comrade Deng Xiaoping... still have a positive influence on us and are still useful to us.<sup>147</sup>

The Chinese leadership was already in a crisis following the Tiananmen Incident; adding fuel to the flames would have only resulted in the government's further loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the general public both at home and abroad. Nonetheless, it was obvious that this particular faction of the ruling elite was attempting to influence a foreign policy outcome that would further their perspective on China's relations with the Third World and Southeast Asia as well as its position in the world vis-à-vis the United States.

Deng's supporters in the government remained plentiful; however, the most important one of them was Jiang Zemin, who succeeded Zhao Ziyang as the Party's Secretary General. Jiang was a strong believer in emphasizing ideological correctness in policies of reform and open-door. As well, as Shanghai's former Party leader, he possessed the skills to deal with foreigners and create external stability.<sup>148</sup> From an objective point of view, the choice of him as Zhao's successor greatly benefited China's efforts not only to maintain its reform policy and openness to the world, but

<sup>146</sup> Zhao, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour... *op.cit.*", p. 743.

<sup>147</sup> "Premier Says Communists Ready to Decide Economics Strategy", *Associated Press* (10 December 1990).

<sup>148</sup> Lee, "Domestic Changes... *op.cit.*", p. 21.

also to approach the United States for a resumption of economic ties. Unfortunately, Jiang's appointment created some misgivings within the ranks primarily because of his previously junior status in the Party. Moreover, Jiang did not have a strong basis of support in the military, which had gained considerable power in Chinese politics since the Tiananmen crackdown.<sup>149</sup> As a result, the early part of Jiang's tenure in office was somewhat conditional on Deng's protection and guidance in spite of the latter's supposedly "retired" status from Chinese politics.

Recognizing the challenge from the conservative reformers, Deng was quick to defend not only the goals, but also the means to achieve economic reform. This meant that although the United States and the West may have influenced the student movement in Tiananmen, China should not forego relations with these countries in its effort to modernize the economy and raise the people's standard of living. In July 1989, Deng announced that China was "capable" of realizing the goals of economic reform.<sup>150</sup> Later on, he argued that the government should "adhere to the policies of reform and openness pursued in the past decade ... [as]... those who adhere to these policies [would] eventually win success".<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, Deng's calls for a resumption of openness towards the world (including the West) did not make a great impact, as the leaders in Beijing continued to quarrel on whether economic reform would be better served through engaging the Third World or the West. The resistance among the conservative reformers to resume ties with the United States was so strong that Deng told visiting former American President Richard Nixon "[t]he United States

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>150</sup> "Deng's Talks on Quelling Rebellion in Beijing", *Beijing Review*, 32:28 (10-16 July 1989), p. 15.

<sup>151</sup> "No Change in Reform Policy - Deng", *Beijing Review*, 32:29 (25 September-1 October 1989), p. 5.

can take a few initiatives; China cannot take the initiative".<sup>152</sup> It would in the end be during a 1992 tour of the southern parts of the country that Deng finally reasserted his views on Chinese foreign policy.

Deng's tour of Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Zhongshan, Shunde and Shanghai in January-February 1992 was specifically targeted towards the people of these southern areas, as they had benefited immensely from the economic reform and open-door policies launched in the 1970s. The aim here was to end Beijing's political and ideological stalemate, which had slowed down the progress of economic reform after the Tiananmen Incident. In addition to this, Deng wanted to provide the new leadership with principles emphasizing support for the goals and means in continuing the reform movement.<sup>153</sup> The lack of coverage by the government-controlled Chinese media demonstrated the conservative reformers' opposition to Deng's strategy; however, as the rhetoric used by Deng gained public support in the southern regions, it became apparent that his approach to carrying out economic reform and openness would once again prevail. The political maneuver was quickly supported by Jiang as well as other upper echelon leaders of the Party; those who continued to have differences in views merely paid lip service to Deng's remarks during the tour in order to avoid being purged.<sup>154</sup>

Deng's comments and observations during the Southern Tour gave the impetus not only to accelerate the pace of economic reform and openness to the world, but also to resume ties with the United States and the West as a means to do so. Indeed, the

<sup>152</sup> As quoted in Fewsmith, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>153</sup> Zhao, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour... *op.cit.*", p. 745-746.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, p. 753.

appeal to mend relations with the western world was not explicit. Nevertheless, when considering Deng's belief that progress in economic reform had stagnated during the period in which China was busily engaging the Third World, his calls for a return to the policies that he had implemented since the 1970s indicated a preference towards re-engagement with the West. And in doing so, Deng signaled the possibility of a Chinese foreign policy that had been in place prior to the Tiananmen Incident; one that no longer focused on Southeast Asia as China's main counterpart in furthering its economic development and openness to the international community.

#### 5.10. Conclusion

Chapter Five built on the earlier Chapters of this dissertation by delving further into the nature of relations between China and Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident. The harshness of western criticisms, the outbreak of violence, and the subsequent persecution of dissidents made the Chinese leaders realize that the international environment had somehow turned unfavourable towards the country's pursuit of economic reform and the open-door policy, which had been in place since the late 1970s. And to make things worse, the sense of uneasiness vis-à-vis the international environment increased as the United States and the West's economic and military sanctions mounted against China. As a result, the growing belief among the leadership was that Beijing needed to develop an alternative means to maintain its path towards reform and openness in the form of stronger relations with the Third world, and in particular the gathering of ASEAN countries in this group.

The road towards greater cooperation with ASEAN countries proved to be a challenging effort despite the fact that relations had already improved prior to 1989. There remained stumbling blocks in the form of historical animosities, economic competition, and unresolved territorial disputes. However, as much as there were challenges, there were also numerous points of agreement on which stronger cooperation could be developed. Thus, as efforts to deal with these challenges became intensified, the road opened up towards the cultivation of a solid relationship between China and its southern neighbours. This condition not only allowed China an alternative means to continue with its economic reform and open-door policies, but also a source of support in the creation of a strong sense of regionalism needed to counter the United States' seemingly confrontational foreign policy and growing predominance in post-Cold War international affairs.

Nevertheless, as the latter parts of the Chapter revealed, the push for a re-orientation of focus towards the Third World and Southeast Asia was simply a process of adaptation in China's foreign policy decision-making. Even though the external stimuli as well as the leaders' perception of these factors changed during the period, the internal determinant remained constant on the need to continue economic reform and openness towards the world. China's enhanced engagement with the Third World was deemed a temporary solution to the problems it was currently facing in the international scene; there was an expectation that China would once again look towards the United States and the western world for assistance in its economic development program. Most importantly, the move to approach the Third World was predominantly held by a particular faction within China's ruling elite whose voice

became heard at the consent of China's most influential leader at the time, Deng Xiaoping. However, when Deng re-asserted his view (during the 1992 tour of southern China) on a resumption of economic reform and open-door policies to the conditions prior to the Tiananmen Incident, it became apparent that the Chinese would once again approach the West for assistance in its efforts at modernization.

The re-orientation of Chinese foreign policy (once again) did not necessarily mean that relations with the Third World – particularly the ASEAN countries – would loosen. This cooperation gave China a dependable source of relief during its dire times and provided a basis to prevent similar circumstances from re-appearing in the long run. In a world that was becoming more dominated by the United States, China still needed the support of the Third World in ensuring multi-polarity within the international balance of power. Nevertheless, a loosening of ties and the shift of focus away from the Third World and the ASEAN countries would mean that China no longer needed to allow concessions in their approach towards these countries. While the regional trust and confidence achieved during China's post-Tiananmen diplomacy blitz needed to be preserved, the challenges that had previously existed could once again come to the surface. This, as the next Chapter will discuss, would be observed in China's treatment of issues of economics and territorial disputes in the period after Deng's Southern Tour in 1992.



## Chapter Six:

# **Beijing's Return to the International Community and Its Impact on The Sino-Southeast Asian Connection, 1992-1995**

### 6.1. Introduction

The previous Chapter discussed in detail the development of ties between China and Southeast Asia, especially the region's ASEAN countries, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident in June 1989. The significance of this development was particularly observed because these ties had historically been tumultuous and full of challenges. During China's Dynastic period, Southeast Asia's inferior role within the Middle Kingdom's tribute system had underlain feelings of animosity and fear over possible Chinese intrusion in regional countries' domestic politics. In modern times, such a lack of trust and confidence was worsened by the common perception that the Communist government in Beijing had masterminded the rise of revolutionary movements throughout the region. Although conditions had slowly begun to improve following China's more pragmatic approach to foreign policy (which was induced by its economic reforms and greater international openness) in the late 1970s, there

remained numerous issues and challenges preventing the relationship between China and Southeast Asia from becoming even warmer.

The Tiananmen Incident, however, provided the catalyst for increased interaction between the two sides. The West's cornering of China through imposition of sanctions and trade embargoes forced the Chinese to look for alternative means of survival in the uncertain post-Cold War environment. The ASEAN countries were seen as having the potential to provide such means not only because of their growing economic strength, but also because of their leadership status within the Third World. Most importantly, the ASEAN countries did not take part in the West's human rights campaign against China; instead, they viewed the post-Tiananmen situation as an opportunity to strengthen their ties and cooperation with the region's largest nation. Recognizing this fortuitous condition, Beijing was in turn quick to approach its southern neighbours for moral and material support in an attempt not only to weather the storm caused by western sanctions and the United States' growing predominance in international politics, but also to re-establish its image as a responsible member of the international community.

From observing this trend, it was apparent that the rapid development of post-Tiananmen Sino-Southeast Asian cooperation was largely determined by the condition of relations between China and the West, particularly the United States. Even though China's interactions with ASEAN countries had already shown signs of amity towards the latter parts of the 1980s, the growing antagonism between Beijing and Washington further deepened the sense of urgency in Chinese approaches

towards Southeast Asia. This was more so when considering that it was not known for how long western sanctions would persist. Nevertheless, because Southeast Asia's growing significance in Chinese foreign policy had primarily stemmed from the deterioration of ties between China and the United States, it was somewhat expected that the nature of Sino-Southeast Asian cooperation would change as soon as Beijing and Washington were able to overcome their differences.

At the beginning of 1992, China's most prominent political figure, Deng Xiaoping, went on a tour of the country's southern provinces in an effort to push for economic reforms and increased openness to the world. As the architect of China's economic modernization, Deng did not view his "retired" official status as an obstacle to preventing the calamitous post-Tiananmen conditions from undercutting the economic progress that had already been achieved since the launch of his reform policies in the late 1970s. The main concern was that the ongoing leadership crisis – especially with the rising prominence of conservative leaders – was seriously hampering the country's progress towards greater economic potential and political status in international affairs. Therefore, Deng felt that a drastic measure was needed in order to demonstrate to the rest of the Chinese leadership and the public in general that efforts had to be stepped up to return China back to its pre-Tiananmen economic modernization momentum. Although Deng's southern tour was carried out mainly for domestic purposes – as it was aimed at re-invigorating the Chinese leadership's view on economic reform and openness to the international community – its impact would in the end be felt also in the international arena.

Chapter Six elaborates the impact of Deng's southern tour on China's foreign policy. In particular, it discusses how the shift in Chinese foreign policy perspective affected the manner in which relations were carried out with the United States and countries in Southeast Asia. Deng's tour of the southern provinces was seen as a powerful call for China to resume the economic reform and open-door policies that had been in place before the Tiananmen Incident derailed their progress. By silencing the opposing views of conservative leaders such as Chen Yun and Li Peng, Deng sparked a shift in the entire Chinese leadership's view of the world and China's place in it. In addition, he made sure that his reform legacy would continue by intervening in the leadership struggle and securing the rise to power of Jiang Zemin, who shared Deng's ideas on market-oriented economics and more peaceful relations with the world's Superpower. In sum, the overall change to the leadership determinant in foreign policy-making was once again prompting an adaptation process in China's perception and conduct in international relations.

This Chapter pays special attention to how the above-described development impacted on China's perception towards Southeast Asia, and in particular the ASEAN countries. Although Beijing still needed these countries' friendship to ensure the creation of a multi-polar post-Cold War balance of power as well as a safety mechanism in case similar unfavourable conditions re-appeared again in the future, a return to pre-Tiananmen reform and open-door policies meant that China's survival in international affairs would no longer center on its ties with the ASEAN countries. Despite wanting to maintain amicable and cooperative relations with the region, Beijing was pursuing a foreign policy platform that attributed less importance on

giving concessions to the capitals in the region as a means to secure ties and cooperation. Thus, the full return of China to the international community pointed at the possibility of a resurfacing of the problems and challenges that had plagued the Sino-Southeast Asian relations in the past.

Chapter Six begins with a discussion of Deng's southern tour briefly outlined in the previous Chapter and its significance in determining the direction of Chinese foreign policy. However, an extensive elaboration of the issue is not essential considering that the affair was carried out primarily for domestic purposes. As well, as Chapter Two previously explained, the importance of domestic issues in this dissertation's analysis would be kept to a minimum. Nevertheless, Chapter Five's pivotal argument remains centered on an understanding of how Deng's southern tour caused a transformation in China's perception towards Southeast Asia. Consequently, it is important that the international implications of this particular leader's actions are emphasized. Deng's southern tour not only forged a sense of unity in the leadership's perspective of the world and China's place in it, but also instigated a general shift towards increasingly recognizing the importance of re-building Sino-West (and in particular, Sino-American) relations as a means to enhance the country's economy and international status.

The Chapter's inclusion of a discussion on China's relations with the United States (particularly since 1992) is important because it provides a basis of argument for later discussions on Sino-Southeast Asian relations. With Deng's call to resume the reform and open-door policies as they had been carried out before the June Fourth Incident,

Beijing was for the first time willing to go public with its intention to re-establish ties with Washington. This was a significant turning point in the relations between the two countries, especially when taking into account that the United States' post-Tiananmen human rights rhetoric had prevented the Chinese from taking an active approach towards building ties and cooperation. Although Deng's southern tour was primarily aimed at settling the domestic condition vis-à-vis the Chinese leadership struggle, its effects would also be felt abroad, and particularly with regards to concerns associated with Sino-American relations.

And considering that China's relations with Southeast Asia were conditional on how Beijing and Washington interacted with each other, any shift in the latter would certainly induce some form of transformation in the former. Chapter Six highlights these trends by elaborating the factors that underwent changes as well as those that remained constant. In particular, it discusses how the improving Sino-American relations impacted on the Chinese approach to issues such as post-Cold War security, territorial disputes, and economic competition. Thus, in doing so, the Chapter illustrates that the process of adaptation in Chinese foreign policy-making following Deng's southern tour precipitated a shift in China's perception of Southeast Asia as well as its policies towards the region.

## 6.2. The Significance of Deng's Southern Tour in China's Foreign Policy

In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident, Deng was quick to argue that the rebellion could not in any way be attributed to a failure in his reform and open-door policies. If anything, Deng pointed out that the tragedy had taken place because these policies had not been implemented to their fullness. In a speech to Chinese military leaders just days after the Incident, Deng pointed out that the principles underlying his reform policies had not been implemented thoroughly "as the basic concept to educate the people, educate the students and educate all the cadres and Party members."<sup>1</sup> The resulting situation has allowed an opportunity for "evil influences from the West"<sup>2</sup> to hijack and undermine the people's struggle to modernize. The fervour in Deng's words was obvious, as he defended the purity of his economic reforms. Nevertheless, Deng was also careful not to shake the foundation of the Chinese state by overly criticizing certain factions in the government. And to demonstrate this, he concurred with the government's line on the dangers of "peaceful evolution" from the West, and particularly the United States.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, the Chinese leader recognized how important it was for him to assume the balancing role in China's ruling circle despite his supposed retirement from politics.

Although Deng was strongly protecting the survival of his legacy, he also acknowledged that some room was needed to allow voices of dissent to be spoken, especially considering their growing influence after Tiananmen. The reformist former

<sup>1</sup> "Deng's Talks on Quelling Rebellion in Beijing", *Beijing Review*, 32:28 (10-16 July 1989), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> "Watchful Against 'Left' Deviation", *Beijing Review*, 35:16 (20-26 April 1992), p. 4.

Party Secretary General Zhao Ziyang – who prior to the Incident had been regarded as Deng's heir to carry out economic reforms – was already being blamed for allowing the Tiananmen demonstration to evolve into a mass-scale anti-government movement. Thus, it was no longer in Deng's interest simply to side with the reformist faction in the government and suppress the views of those who had challenged Zhao's approach to reform and openness. Nevertheless, it was not without concern that Deng uttered claims such as the following:

The question now confronting us is not whether the policies of reform and opening up are correct or not or whether we should continue with these policies. The question is how to carry out these policies, where do we go and which area should we concentrate on?<sup>4</sup>

By allowing debate to open up at the leadership level on the course and direction of economic reforms and openness to the world, there was an increasing possibility that the implementation of such policies could be further bogged down by in-fighting among China's third generation leadership. As well, Deng was running the risk of his policies potentially becoming watered down by the growing influence of more conservative views within this new leadership.

Deng relinquished his last official position in the Chinese government when he resigned from the Party's Central Military Commission (CMC) in November 1989. However, he did not close the possibility of returning to politics by declaring that despite his lack of official status, he would speak out at "critical moments".<sup>5</sup> The Tiananmen Incident had provided leverage for the conservative faction in the government, and as much as Deng could tolerate dissent among the ranks, he was not

<sup>4</sup> "Deng's Talks on... *op.cit.*", p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Zhao Suisheng, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour Elite Politics in Post-Tiananmen China", *Asian Survey*, XXXIII:8 (August 1993), p. 742.

going to allow this development to jeopardize the economic progress that had already been achieved over a decade of reforms and greater openness. The foreign policy shift towards the Third World (and particularly, Southeast Asia) in the post-Tiananmen period, as the previous Chapter has elaborated, was sufficient to secure alternative means of sustaining the national interest. It allowed China an opportunity to lessen its dependence on the United States and the West as well as to re-establish its leadership role in the developing hemisphere and among the countries in the region. However, Deng recognized the limitations of such a foreign policy perspective, as it did not harness the ability to lift the Chinese economy beyond its current mediocrity and back to its pre-Tiananmen potential.

Unfortunately, the domestic political climate at the time was not favourable to viewing the United States in a different light, especially when considering the West's continued efforts to isolate China from the international community through harsh criticisms and various forms of sanctions. Although the leadership as a whole believed that a complete departure from Deng's reform policies was neither wanted nor possible, not every leader shared Deng's more optimistic approach towards the West, and in particular, the United States.<sup>6</sup> The resistance to engage the United States was so strong that Deng, as previously mentioned in Chapter Five, declared that the United States had to be the side taking the first initiative in re-building ties and cooperation because "China [could] not take the initiative".<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Deng was not going to simply sit back and expect conditions to change without assuming the

<sup>6</sup> Lee Lai To, "Domestic Changes in China since the 4 June Incident and Their Implications for Southeast Asia", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 13:1 (June 1991), p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> As quoted in Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 43.

lead in efforts to resume pre-Tiananmen conditions. And when Deng's public appearances to address the issue received little coverage from the Chinese media – which was largely controlled by the conservative faction in the leadership – a major move appeared necessary to re-assert his perspective on the values of reform and openness.

In January-February 1992, Deng along with his entourage left Beijing for the southern parts of the country and visited, among others, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Shunde, Wenzhou, Zhuhai, and Zhongshan. The choice of destination was clearly strategic as these areas had been the ones profiting the most from China's economic reform and openness.<sup>8</sup> Boasting the achievements of his policies, Deng used the occasion to attack those who had been and were critical of such approaches to development. Indeed, the manner in which this was carried out was subtle and non-confrontational when considering the delicateness of the situation at hand. However, Deng did not shy away from making a strong case against any effort to curtail the progress of China's modernization. In one instance, he criticized the conservatives' questioning of the economic reform and openness policies by stating that:

We should be bolder than before in conducting reform and opening and have the courage to experiment. We must not be like women in bound feet.<sup>9</sup>

Through making such statements, Deng not only launched a pre-emptive attack against efforts to return China to an economic plan based on leftist, orthodox interpretations of Marxist theories, but also signalled the need to end the prolonged

<sup>8</sup> "Deng the Whirlwind" Rejuvenates Wenzhou", *Beijing Review*, 35:24 (15-21 June 1992), p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> From excerpts of Deng's speeches during the southern tour, as printed in "Gist of Speeches Made in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai", *Beijing Review*, 37:6-7 (7-20 February 1994), p. 10.

policy and ideological debates in Beijing since the Tiananmen Incident.<sup>10</sup> As well, the declarations made during the tour served the purpose of providing a set of guidelines and principles for the new generation of Chinese leaders, as these people would be the ones counted on to maintain the progress of the reform movement.

Needless to say, the coverage of Deng's activities in the south of China was kept to a minimum by the media in Beijing. For example, in *Beijing Review*, which was one of the country's leading media publications, reports and analysis of Deng's southern tour did not appear until April 1992.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, it was not until two years later that excerpts from Deng's actual speeches were finally printed in this publication. However, some coverage did surface finally in the south after the Hong Kong media began reporting on the event.<sup>12</sup> While this may have occurred because of the conservative leaders' dominance of the country's propaganda machine,<sup>13</sup> there was also a need to prevent the public – both at home and abroad – from perceiving that the Chinese leadership was in crisis and disarray. Such a belief would have only caused more harm to China's already fragile political situation.

Despite the lack of immediate coverage from the government-controlled press, Deng's southern tour attracted a huge amount of attention from the people, especially those living and working in the areas visited by the prominent leader. The wave of

<sup>10</sup> Zhao, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour... *op.cit.*", p. 748.

<sup>11</sup> "Watchful Against 'Left' Deviation... *op.cit.*", p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Fewsmith, *op.cit.*, p. 57; "Deng's Shenzhen Remarks on Stock Markets Cited", *Wen Wei Po (Hong Kong)* (27 February 1992), in FBIS-CHI, 27 February 1992, p. 23; "Deng's Southern Tour Remarks Showing 'Effects'", *Wen Wei Po (Hong Kong)* (27 February 1992), in FBIS-CHI, 27 February 1992, pp.23-24.

<sup>13</sup> *The conservatives' control of the country's information means could be seen in their dominance in the CCP Central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Culture, and major newspapers in Beijing.* Zhao, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern China Tour... *op.cit.*", p. 743.

support for Deng's appeal to strengthen reform and openness was rapidly spreading and gaining momentum<sup>14</sup>; as a result, the leadership in Beijing had no alternative but to address appropriately these developments.<sup>15</sup> Of course, the reformists, such as newly appointed Party Secretary General, Jiang Zemin, were the ones benefiting the most from Deng's actions. While other political elites were busy manouvering their positions on economic reform in order to secure their political status or escape from being purged, Jiang made his way to Shanghai to meet Deng secretly in February 1992.<sup>16</sup> The results of this meeting's discussion were then relayed to the upper echelons in the capital city. And although the support for Deng's strategy was not immediate among certain factions within the state leadership, local regional leaders were quick to back Jiang's cue to carry out Deng's directive to resume the policies of reform and international openness that had been in place prior to the Tiananmen Incident.

The success of Deng's southern tour in reviving efforts to bolster his approach to economic reforms was so huge that it immediately silenced the ideological debate that had clouded the direction of China's economic development since the Tiananmen Incident. Even Deng's strongest opponent, Chen Yun, had to recognize the power of this movement and publicly expressed his support for the former's initiatives.<sup>17</sup> This was an important turning point in the leadership struggle as Chen was considered to be "the second most powerful man in China" after Deng; Chen's support for economic reform signified a removal of the barriers erected by those proposing

<sup>14</sup> "Deng's Southern Tour Remarks Showing... *op.cit.*", pp.23-24

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 753.

<sup>16</sup> Fewsmith, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> "Chen Yun Backs Bolder Reform Drive", *Beijing Review*, 35:19 (11-17 May 1992), p. 5.



central economic planning.<sup>18</sup> Before long, other politicians in Chen's camp would also convey similar views on the matter. Indeed, it was difficult to distinguish whether these people had actually become convinced of the need to strengthen reform or were simply paying lip service to Deng's views. But considering China's history of political purges – which had recently cost former Party chief Zhao Ziyang his position – no leader in Beijing was going to jeopardize his/her status by challenging the increasingly popular movement to push for greater reforms and openness to the world.<sup>19</sup> And to a certain extent, the absence of vocal opposition in the aftermath of Deng's southern tour benefited the Chinese leadership's image as a whole. It demonstrated to the public in general – especially those abroad – that there was unity within the Chinese leadership to restore the country back to its pre-Tiananmen path towards modernization and greater international status.

The full embracing of Deng's directive during his southern tour became official in March 1992 when the Enlarged Politburo Plenary Session issued a communiqué outlining the need to hold "one center" of economic development as well as step up the progress towards reform and greater international openness.<sup>20</sup> This was then followed by the decision of the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee, which had traditionally been "the bastion of conservatism", to back and intensify Deng Xiaoping's post-Southern Tour reform drive.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the opposition to Deng's reform movement had finally been suppressed, and it was not long before every single branch of the media in the country highlighted the

<sup>18</sup> "Has Chen Yun Really Changed His Tune?", *The Straits Times*, 28 May 1992, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> "Student Back Deng on Reform", *Beijing Review*, 35:36 (7-13 September 1992), p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Zhao, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour... *op.cit.*", p. 752.

<sup>21</sup> "Propaganda Department to Publicize Deng Line", *The Standard (Hong Kong)* (14 April 1992), in FBIS-CHI, 14 April 1992, pp. 25-26.

importance of Deng's southern tour in lifting China out of its post-Tiananmen difficulties. A movement that had initially captured the attention of only those living in the southern coastal parts of the country was now evolving into a nationwide push to re-establish China's progress towards achieving economic power and international recognition. The military was obvious in its support for this movement<sup>22</sup>, while at the same time, certain elements within the academia provided scholarly analysis supporting Deng's Southern Tour remarks and its implications towards China's foreign policy<sup>23</sup>.

In October 1992, the rejuvenated reform movement reached a climax with Party Secretary General Jiang Zemin's remarks during the Fourteenth National Congress of the CCP, in which he emphasized not only the significance of Deng's views on economic modernization, but also the need to go beyond approaching the Third World in implementing these views.<sup>24</sup> Jiang also hammered the final nail in the coffin of opposing views by stating that "the Party members, leading cadres in particular, must be on the alert for Right tendencies, but also and *mainly* for 'Left' tendencies."<sup>25</sup> Such an attack on the "Leftists" was very much in tune with Deng's view that the Chinese leadership should "shelve" ideological conflict among them and in its place, focus on "the central task of economic construction".<sup>26</sup> In a way, the path towards

<sup>22</sup> "Army Praises Deng's Southern Tour Remarks", *Jiefangjun Bao* (13 May 1992), in FBIS-CHI, 28 May 1992, pp. 25-6.

<sup>23</sup> An example of this was a : "Noted' Scholar on Deng's Southern Tour Talks", *Zhongguo Tongxun She* (9 August 1992), in FBIS-CHI, 10 August 1992, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> From the full-text of Jiang's report of the Fourteenth National Congress of the Party, as printed in "Accelerating Reform and Opening-Up", *Beijing Review*, 35:43 (26 October-1 November 1992), p. 9-32.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>26</sup> "Reasons for Deng's 'Opposition to Leftism' Noted", *Tzu Ching*, Number 19 (5 April 1992), in FBIS-CHI, 14 April 1992, pp. 26-7.

modernization, which had been questioned after the Tiananmen Incident, was once again resumed with intense fervour.

Indeed, the domestic emphasis of Deng's southern tour can be observed in the fact that he addressed mainly issues concerning the direction of China's economic reform at home. Not much was actually said about China's foreign policy, let alone its relations with the United States. The exception was the argument that China needed to step up efforts to open its doors to the international community.<sup>27</sup> However, the fact that Deng was forced to undergo a trip to southern China in order to prove the value of his ideas was indicative of his disapproval over the manner in which the country's modernization plan had been carried out domestically and internationally since the Tiananmen Incident. While Deng was never in favour of political reforms that could erode the Communist Party's authority (as demonstrated by his consent for the military to suppress the student demonstration in 1989), he had become impatient with the government's lately-adopted "austerity programme and balanced approach to economic development" and wanted to accelerate the pace of China's direction towards a market economy.<sup>28</sup> In a sense, although Deng did not directly criticize the government's strategy on approaching the Third World and Southeast Asia for moral and material support, there was a genuine concern that such an approach could not provide optimal gains for China's struggle to achieve economic power and greater international status. And despite not wanting to give the appearance of softening to the United States, Deng's call to bring back the pre-Tiananmen reform plan emphasized the value of engaging the Americans and their western allies as it was

<sup>27</sup> "Student Back Deng on Reform... *op.cit.*", p.4.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Y.S. Cheng, "China's Foreign Policy in the Mid-1990s", in Joseph Y.S. Cheng, ed., *China in the Post-Deng Era* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998), p. 221.

argued that the economic success of Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea and those in Southeast Asia was primarily attributed to their engagement with these countries.<sup>29</sup>

As a result, Deng's appeal forced the Chinese leadership to re-gauge its approach to opening the country up to the international market (which was dominated by the West) and to perceive the United States (despite its seemingly anti-China human rights rhetoric) in a different light. If China was going to enhance its status as a Great Power, it was not going to achieve this by being in the company of the Third World and/or Southeast Asia (despite the latter's growing economic capacity); China needed to engage the more influential countries of the world, especially the United States. Even prior to his ascension to power in the 1970s, Deng's notion of pragmatism in policy-making had always been reflected in his famous saying: "a cat, whether it is black or white, is good as long as it is able to catch mice".<sup>30</sup> In the aftermath of Deng's southern tour, the Chinese people became familiar once again with this saying, as it was used to stress the need for Chinese foreign policy that was more pragmatic and less bogged down by ideological concerns.<sup>31</sup>

The events surrounding Deng's southern tour demonstrated the glaring division within the Chinese leadership on the issue of economic reform and openness to the rest of the world. However, rather than dwell on the details of this division, it is more fruitful to understand the impact that Deng's actions created in changing the leadership's

<sup>29</sup> "Gist of Speeches... *op.cit.*", p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> As quoted in Zhao, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour... *op.cit.*", p. 742.

<sup>31</sup> "Song Ping Stresses Better Party Building". *Xinhua Domestic Service* (8 August 1992), in FBIS-CHI, 10 August 1992, pp. 17-8.

perception of the world and China's place in it. In the previous Chapter, it was noted that the shift in Chinese foreign policy after Tiananmen was caused by mainly changes in the international environment and the leaders' understanding of this. Thus, to continue with such an approach to studying the decision-making process in Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia, it is important to observe the manner in which the interaction of the leadership and external determinants once again induced an adaptation in the Chinese' conduct abroad. Deng's call for bolder reforms forced the Chinese leadership to reassess its relations with the United States and its western allies, and in doing so opened the possibility for a re-adjustment of China's position vis-à-vis relations with Southeast Asia, and in particular the ASEAN countries.

### 6.3. The Mending of Sino-American Relations

Although Deng's southern tour did not become big news among the Chinese media until months after the event had actually taken place, the reports abroad were immediate and provided an optimistic picture of China's return to the international community. For example, Deng's southern tour was highly praised in Hong Kong, where uncertainties resulting from the Tiananmen crackdown had been causing grave concerns over the area's possible future.<sup>32</sup> And considering how important international trade was for Hong Kong's survival, Deng's southern tour somewhat raised better hopes for a smooth transition of power from the British to the Chinese when the area would be due for reunification with the rest of the Mainland in 1997. It was therefore understandable why the local media gave such prominence to the event; Deng's assurances of a continued adherence to market-oriented economic policy

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 748.

would allow the Hong Kong people to carry out business (and their livelihood in general) without much obstacle in spite of the change in government.

Beyond the Asia-Pacific, the western media was also supportive of Deng's moves to re-strengthen China's economic potential. The Independent (London) reported that Deng's actions reflected a view that China was not only back on course, but also ready to accelerate its participation in the international economy.<sup>33</sup> Recognizing the significance of this development, The Financial Times (London) then named Deng its 1992 "Man of the Year" and in the process, encouraged the western public to increase their support for the Chinese leader's attempt to raise his country's participation in the international economy.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile in the United States, The Christian Science Monitor called Deng's southern tour the "most important policy statement since the June 1989 crackdown" and highlighted his efforts to rally the country to embrace market-driven economic policies and greater international openness.<sup>35</sup> Although voices critical of the Chinese government's human rights record remained very much alive, these media headlines clearly demonstrated that there was a growing effort abroad to bring China out of the isolated position that it had been assuming since the Tiananmen Incident. In general, the positive responses to Deng's southern tour were paving the way for the creation of an external environment that was more conducive to improved relations between China and the West, and in particular with the United States.

<sup>33</sup> "Peking Signals Return to Economic Reforms", The Independent (London) (24 January 1992), p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Cheng, "China's Foreign Policy... *op.cit.*", p. 221.

<sup>35</sup> "China's Deng Rallies for Reform", Christian Science Monitor (10 March 1992), p. 3.

Indeed, much politicking was still required in Beijing before cooperative dialogues with Washington could fully resume. Although there was a growing perception that China's economic modernization could only be achieved through improved relations with the United States<sup>36</sup>, the Chinese leadership in general still used the West as a scapegoat for its problems at home. The playing of the "peaceful evolution" card, which first came about immediately after the Tiananmen Incident, remained a convincing means to warn the people about the dangers of capitalist and western influences on the Chinese society.<sup>37</sup> And although the occurrence of this was lessening following Deng's attacks on the 'Left' deviation in domestic politics, there was still a need to remain alert against the possibility of the 'Right' deviation, as this could shake the ideological foundation of the country. As a result, while recognizing the need to engage the United States and its western allies, such a process had to be carried out without giving the appearance that the Chinese government was softening its stance against these countries, let alone succumbing to their pressures.

Riding on the wave of support for increased economic reform and international openness instigated by Deng's southern tour, Jiang Zemin provided the impetus for a rebuilding of Sino-American relations towards the end of 1992 when he stated that:

China is ready to enter into cooperation with President-elect Bill Clinton and the new US administration on the basis of the three Sino-US joint communiqués and will work together to improve and develop Sino-US relations.<sup>38</sup>

The timing of the statement could not have been better, as it was released just when the United States government was undergoing a change of administration; the election

<sup>36</sup> "U.S. Viewed as Leading Foreign Investor", *Zhongguo Xinwen She* (10 December 1993), in FBIS-CHI, 14 December 1993, pp. 5-6.

<sup>37</sup> "Watchful Against 'Left' Deviation... *op.cit.*", p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> "Jiang: Improve Sino-US Relations", *Beijing Review*, 35:49 (7-13 December 1992), p. 5.

of a new American President to power was seen by the Chinese leader as providing an opportunity to generate the right kind of climate for improved relations between Beijing and Washington. Despite noting that there remained substantial differences separating the two sides, Jiang hoped that these could be put aside in favour of developing discussions based on mutual respect, equality and common interests.<sup>39</sup> Coming immediately after Deng's directive and Jiang's subsequent pronouncement during the Fourteenth National Congress of the CCP that the Chinese government would step up economic reforms and opening up to the world, such warm remarks towards the United States was undoubtedly setting off a second wave of transformation in post-Tiananmen Chinese foreign policy-making; one that would result in a significant improvement in the relations between Asia's largest nation and the world's Superpower.

However, the movement towards warming bi-lateral relations was difficult not only on the Chinese side, but also on the Americans'. The trend of democratization at the end of the Cold War had swept across the world and the sight of students on television being persecuted by the Chinese military was not making it easy for western governments to sympathize with the Communist regime in China. Most leaders in the West were comfortable with exploiting such sentiments for their own political purposes, and as a result, any appearance of being soft on the Chinese government would generally be regarded as an unwanted loss of votes. Therefore, during his presidential campaign Bill Clinton had criticized former President George Bush for carrying out an "indulgent" Chinese policy and had promised the American people

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*; "Column Discusses Jiang Zemin Interview", *Ta Kung Pao* (24 May 1993), in FBIS-CHI, 24 May 1993, p. 5.

(and the western public in general) to pursue a tougher stance in efforts to further push for democratic change in China.<sup>40</sup> In his view, the achievement of this goal needed to be carried out through, among others, linking China's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to its improved human rights conditions and increased responsibility in the international community; favourable trade terms would only be granted to the Chinese if there were better respect for human rights in China and Tibet, greater market access for American goods, and responsible conduct on weapons proliferation.<sup>41</sup> And although Clinton would later win the presidential election primarily on issues of domestic economy, his proposed policy towards China had become the key foreign policy issue in his campaign's platform.

Observing the manner in which events were unfolding in the United States, the leaders in Beijing could not but remain cautious in their approach towards the United States.<sup>42</sup> However, having decided to bolster economic reform and opening up to the world, China was no longer in the position to retract itself from encouraging better relations with the United States. As the Chinese leaders felt more secure about their status in the domestic sphere (in particular, with Jiang Zemin's rise into a position of *primo inter pares* within the ruling circle and the waning influence of the conservative faction) there was a lesser need to continue a policy that emphasized contradictions among potential enemies.<sup>43</sup> In its place, China made concerted efforts to win the support of Clinton and other Democrats in Washington by providing

<sup>40</sup> "Initial Framework of Clinton's China Policy", *Beijing Review*, 36:46 (15-17 November 1993), p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000* (Washington: Brookings Institute Press, 2003), p. 162.

<sup>42</sup> "PRC to Adjust 'Overall Strategy' toward US", *Hsin Pao* (21 May 1993), in FBIS-CHI, 24 May 1993, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Cheng, "China's Foreign Policy... *op.cit.*", p. 222.

assurances of cooperation not only in the economic field, but also in issues of regional security. Through a policy based on "enhancing trust, reducing troubles, strengthening cooperation, and avoiding confrontation"<sup>44</sup>, the Chinese leaders made it known to their American counterparts that they were ready to enter a new (and more productive) phase in their approach towards rebuilding the two countries' troubled bilateral relations.

Fortunately, the keeping up of a positive outlook on Sino-American relations would eventually become fruitful, as the newly-elected American President softened his previously hard line China policy within just the first year of his term in the White House. Recognizing China's continued economic potential, it was simply nonsensical for the Americans to close their trade links with Asia's largest country. For Clinton, economics played an important role in determining the direction of his policies both at home and abroad, especially when considering how successful the "It's the Economy, Stupid" slogan had been during his run for office in 1992. Therefore, despite not wanting to upset the views of those who had voted him in for his tough stance on China, Clinton was looking at the possibility of further enhancing the United States' economic power through engaging the Chinese on more normal terms.<sup>45</sup> Clinton's Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, reaffirmed this view when he pointed out that despite the differences existing between the two countries, the Communist government's market-oriented reform would not only lead the Chinese people towards the path of liberal economic policies, but also enhanced social prosperity, which in

<sup>44</sup> "China's Diplomacy in 1993", *Beijing Review*, 37:3 (17-23 January 1994), p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> Suettinger, *op.cit.*, p. 155.

turn, could induce better human rights conditions.<sup>46</sup> With such remarks, it was becoming apparent that the road map to de-linking trade issues from human rights was slowly being drawn by the leaders in Washington; in return, the response in Beijing (despite certain reservations) could not have been warmer.

In May 1993, after lengthy debates between the legislative and executive branches of the United States government, President Clinton was provided with the means to extend MFN status to the Chinese for one more year.<sup>47</sup> Of course, in order to appease those who wanted Washington to exercise a hard line stance against the government in Beijing, the extension of MFN status was made conditional on a number of issues including improved human rights conditions and greater accountability for the Tiananmen Incident and its violent aftermath.<sup>48</sup> Although many stipulations had to be attached to the process of extending China's MFN status in trade with the United States, the event was groundbreaking as it demonstrated the American government's ability to reassess China's significance in the international economy (and more so, in potentially enhancing the American economy) and to actually take the necessary steps to accommodate such a reassessment. President Clinton may have been strong against China's human rights violations prior to his arrival in the White House; however, once in power and having recognized the sensitivity of the issue at hand, he became more realistic in his approach towards avoiding further deterioration of relations between the Chinese and his people.

<sup>46</sup> "Initial Framework... *op.cit.*", p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Suettinger, *op.cit.*, p. 163-4.

In turn, the extension of China's MFN status opened up channels for increased dialogues between the two countries, especially in areas of trade and economics. Among others, efforts were stepped up to discuss the possibility of China's re-entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). China was actually one of the initial founders of GATT, but withdrew from the world trade body as it adopted an economy based on rigid autarky following the Communists rise to power in 1949; its recent interest in GATT was mainly a product of the rising appeal for market-oriented economics brought about by Deng's reform and opening-up policies. From Beijing's perspective, inclusion in this multilateral forum would greatly enhance its effort to play a larger role in the international economy<sup>49</sup>, and to attain this goal the Chinese leaders were willing to adjust the country's system of exchange, markets and business laws according to GATT's free market guidelines.<sup>50</sup> In general, China's re-entry was supported by Japan and Southeast Asian countries, which believed that such a development would only further enhance the region's economic potential. However, the largest obstacle came from the United States' claim that the Chinese economy continued to be over-protectionist and was not liberalized enough.<sup>51</sup> As such, increased dialogues and discussions had to be set up between Beijing and Washington to overcome these differences in opinion. And as more countries (including members of the European Community) opened their arms to welcome China into GATT, the pressure fell on the Americans to adopt a more flexible approach towards the Chinese.

<sup>49</sup> "Jiang Zemin Views Inclusion in GATT", *South China Morning Post* (29 May 1990), in FBIS-CHI, 30 May 1990, pp. 78-9.

<sup>50</sup> "World's Third Largest Economy Excluded from GATT", *Inter Press Service* (27 May 1993).

<sup>51</sup> "China Better Placed for GATT Re-Entry", *Agence France Presse* (19 September 1993).



was regarded as a domestic issue, and thus, the United States' practice of making trade conditional on human rights was seen as a form of intervention in China's internal politics and an impingement on its sovereignty. As an article in *Beijing Review* outlined, the problems facing China's progress towards achieving economic power (which included trade imbalance, intellectual property rights protection, re-entry into GATT, and western sanctions) could only be overcome "if Washington does not link them with non-economic issues".<sup>56</sup> Therefore, in spite of welcoming recent developments in Sino-American relations, the Chinese leaders felt that it was also crucial to continue pushing for greater concessions from the United States on the issue of unconditional MFN trading status.

Fortunately for the Chinese, their rapidly growing economy – especially since Deng Xiaoping's call for bolder reform and openness during his 1992 southern tour – provided the leverage necessary to press for more concessions from Washington. Between 1991 and 1993, China's nominal Gross National Product (GNP) rose by almost 60 percent and the value of its foreign trade increased by more than 44 percent.<sup>57</sup> International confidence in the Chinese economy was also boosted by statistics indicating a rise of nearly 450 percent in foreign direct investment (FDI).<sup>58</sup> Far from being the isolated and troubled country in the aftermath of the Tiananmen violence, post-leadership struggle China was demonstrating to the United States and the rest of the world that its demand for greater participation in the international economy should be treated with more attention and cooperation. Beijing was

<sup>56</sup> James C. Hsiung, "China's Omni-Directional Diplomacy: Realignment to Cope with Monopolar U.S. Power", *Asian Survey*, XXXV:6 (June 1995), p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> Suettinger, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

redoubling its playing of the "China card" by making the claim that the Chinese people would not be the ones hurt from their country's isolation; instead, the suffering would mostly be felt by their potential partners abroad.<sup>59</sup> To a certain extent, such statements created a huge impact on foreign perceptions of China's significance in the post-Cold War global economy. American businesses benefiting from ties with China were increasingly paying a hefty price for their governments' antagonism towards the Chinese leadership, and to make things worse, the United States was increasingly mired in economic difficulties despite its leadership's efforts to stimulate the country's business sectors.<sup>60</sup> Thus, by mid-1994, the pressure from trade and business lobby groups had become so intense that President Clinton was left with no choice but to announce that "China's human rights record would no longer be the criterion for MFN trading status with the United States".<sup>61</sup>

Needless to say, the Chinese leaders warmly welcomed Clinton's decision and the occasion was seen as "the crowning feat" in Beijing's post-Tiananmen "damage control" foreign policy.<sup>62</sup> Having suffered isolation from the international community following the events in June 1989, China was more confident than ever in its status as a growing power following its ability to persuade the United States into agreeing a resumption of ties on Chinese terms. Because the deterioration of Sino-American relations had been caused mostly by the United States' harsh criticisms over China's human rights record, the de-linking of human rights from the annual extension of China's MFN trade status was perceived as an indication of the former's desire to

<sup>59</sup> "From Seattle to Jakarta... *op.cit.*", p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Hsiung, "China's Omni-Directional Diplomacy... *op.cit.*", p. 581.

<sup>61</sup> Roy, "China's Foreign Relations... *op.cit.*", p. 97.

<sup>62</sup> Hsiung, "China's Omni-Directional Diplomacy... *op.cit.*", p. 580.

remove human rights issues from its foreign policy-making process and to enter a new phase of bi-lateral relations. Such development promised a greater possibility for the two countries not only to normalize and stabilize their relations, but also to pursue broader discussions on numerous issues beyond just trade and economics. Indeed, there remained a number of outstanding challenges such as the Taiwan issue and China's security role in the Asia-Pacific. However, the breakthrough provided by the United States' more flexible approach on the issue of MFN renewal had generated a diplomatic climate that was more conducive to overcoming these challenges. And because of the influence that these two countries commanded on regional and international affairs, the entering of a new phase of amity and cooperation would soon also impact on how they interacted with the rest of the world.

#### 6.4. Deng's Southern Tour, Sino-American Relations, and Their Impact on Sino-Southeast Asian Relations

The development of ties and cooperation between China and Southeast Asia in the period after the Tiananmen Incident was greatly attributed to the former's unconfident perception of the world. Troubled by domestic crises and faced with western criticisms and economic sanctions, the Chinese looked for alternative means of survival in the uncertain post-Cold War international climate through engagement with Southeast Asia, particularly the ASEAN countries. The unfavourable changes in China's external environment, coupled with shifts in the leadership's perception and response to these developing conditions, was inducing a process of adaptation in the country's foreign policy decision-making. However, an adherence to efforts in

modernizing the Chinese economy prevented the changes in foreign policy from driving the country back to its isolationist stance characteristic of the Maoist period. Instead, China sought to maintain its existence in international affairs by befriending the ASEAN countries. At the time, this approach appeared to be the most strategically plausible as these countries were not only capable of aiding the pursuit of China's economic goals, but were also leaders of the Third World, which comprised the majority of the world's population. Most importantly, the ASEAN countries shared the Chinese view on human rights issues and were supportive of Chinese efforts to counter the West's campaign of human rights and democracy. By engaging these countries, China not only found a substitute for the losses suffered from the deterioration of Sino-American cooperation, but also ensured a means to re-establishing its status and image in the international community.

Nevertheless, from the onset, there was a sense of temporariness in China's engagement with Southeast Asia. This did not necessarily mean that the Chinese were imposing a time limit to their evolving cooperation with the region, especially when considering the indefinite length of western sanctions. However, it was apparent that the diplomatic warmth surrounding Sino-Southeast Asian relations was somewhat conditional on how China interacted with the West, and in particular, with the United States. In April 1990, Deng Xiaoping stated that China should expect extremely difficult conditions in the next three to five years, but would once again resume rapid economic development after the storm has been weathered.<sup>63</sup> Such a pronouncement demonstrated that despite the suffering caused by unfavourable

<sup>63</sup> John W. Garver, "Chinese Foreign Policy: The Diplomacy of Damage Control", *Current History*, 90:557 (September 1991), p. 242.

conditions resulting from the Tiananmen crackdown, Chinese foreign policy's ultimate goal would rest solely on the country's return to international acceptance and normalized relations with the West, especially the United States. At the same time, it was well known that such a goal could never be achieved by sitting back and waiting for the Americans to supposedly come to their senses. Instead, the pursuit of active diplomacy had to be carried through resorting to alternative means of maintaining China's existence in international relations. In doing so, China would increase its bargaining leverage for when the time ever arrives for dialogues on Sino-American relations to finally resume. In a sense, despite recognizing the value of building regional cooperation with countries in Southeast Asia – as it was a mutually beneficial mechanism to ensure a multi-polar post-Cold War world – such an approach was somewhat simply a means to in the end normalize China's relations with the United States.

Of course, the improvement of Sino-American relations since the granting of unconditional MFN trading status to the Chinese in 1994 did not directly translate into a deterioration of relations between China and Southeast Asia. As mentioned above, the support of countries in the region was still needed to further develop a multi-polar international balance of power, to pressure the West for the creation of a fairer international economic order as well as to guarantee a "safety net" in case conditions similar to those in the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident re-appeared. However, considering how important the United States was (and had been prior to the Tiananmen Incident) to China's modernization plans, more efforts were being carried out to enhance the resumption of ties and cooperation with the Americans. To a

certain extent, relations with ASEAN countries were no longer attributed the same level of significance, as Beijing re-shifted its foreign policy focus back to Washington. Despite wanting to maintain the achievements made in the last few years of engagement with the Third World and the ASEAN countries, China had reached a position in which it no longer needed to bend over backwards just to secure its ties with these countries. Without the diplomatic niceties that exuded China's befriending of Southeast Asia during its time of turbulence and calamity following the Tiananmen Incident, the problems and challenges that had previously plagued Sino-Southeast Asian relations were once again in danger of surfacing.

#### 6.4.1. The Continuance of Amity and Cooperation

Before elaborating on the changing factors and issues that followed the transformation of China's approach towards Southeast Asia, it is essential to first highlight those that remained constant. As noted earlier, the shifting focus of China's foreign policy as a result of improved relations with the United States did not necessarily mean a foregoing of ties with countries in the region; it simply meant a lessening of significance in Beijing's decision-making process. At a time when China was stepping up efforts to modernize its domestic economy, ties with the economically powerful United States appeared more beneficial than those with the Third World in general. However, the preservation of links with ASEAN countries remained important considering their well-developed sense of regionalism and leadership status in the developing hemisphere. Thus, continued support from these countries would go far in aiding China's effort to create a multi-polar world to challenge the United

In addition to growing talks on issues concerning GATT, China and the United States also increased their bilateral interactions through other multilateral means such as APEC. Towards the end of 1993, President Clinton extended an invitation to President Jiang Zemin to attend the APEC meeting in Seattle, thus providing the Chinese leader with an occasion to visit the United States and break the deadlock in relations since the Tiananmen Incident. Jiang seized this opportunity to further consolidate his status within China's ruling circle, and considering that it was his first trip overseas as the President of the People's Republic, he ensured the appearance of having an optimistic outlook on Sino-American relations by making the following remarks:

I hope through my meeting with President Clinton we will enhance our mutual understanding, together look towards the 21<sup>st</sup> century and handle Sino-U.S. relations from a long term perspective to put Sino-U.S. relations on a normal track and have a new start.<sup>52</sup>

Although the APEC meeting mostly comprised multilateral discussions, the event provided an opportunity for China's and the United States' top leaders to carry out a summit that had for long been anticipated by not only the peoples of the two countries, but also the rest of the world.<sup>53</sup> The summit, in which both leaders pushed for further efforts to mend bilateral ties and cooperation, culminated a year in which China and the United States had significantly increased multi-level interactions on

<sup>52</sup> "Jiang Zemin Looks for 'New Start' in Sino-U.S. Ties", *Agence France Presse* (17 November 1993). [Emphasis added]

<sup>53</sup> The Chinese media described the Sino-US bilateral meeting in Seattle as a genuine step forward in demonstrating to the Americans of the value of mending relations between the two countries in spite of obvious ideological differences. Such publications were most likely directed towards further shaping the Chinese people's view on the leadership's goal of furthering reform through resuming foreign openness, particularly with the US. "Liaowang on Seattle, Sino-US Meetings", *Liaowang*, Number 42 (29 November 1993), in FBIS-CHI, 14 December 1993, p. 4; "Decision to Send Jiang to Seattle Meeting Viewed", *Ching Pao*, Number 12 (5 December 1993), in FBIS-CHI, 14 December 1993, p. 3.

numerous issues of concern.<sup>54</sup> Symbolically, Jiang's participation in the APEC meeting was a great chance for the Chinese government to repair and enhance its image in the eyes of the world, and the sight of its leader among those of other member countries in this evolving economic forum demonstrated an increased acceptance of China's return to the international community. Adding to the significance of the occasion, the summit between Jiang and Clinton further consolidated the view that the Americans – who were the most influential of these APEC participants – were finally ready to normalize their relations with the Chinese and do away with their efforts to isolate China from international affairs.

The Chinese, however, were not going to be satisfied with the achievements made during the Seattle summit, as they viewed that there were still a number of issues preventing them from fully engaging the rest of the world (particularly the United States) on a more levelled playing field.<sup>55</sup> The most important of these issues was to push for a de-linking of trade and economics from human rights concerns. More specifically, Beijing wanted its MFN trading status with the United States to no longer be conditional on the Americans' perception of human rights conditions in China. Since the Tiananmen Incident, China's relations with the United States – and for that matter, the rest of the world in general – were dominated by human rights concerns; as much as Beijing would like to push them to the bottom of its foreign policy agenda, these conditions have created an unfavourable external environment for developing economic relations based on fairness, equality, and mutual benefits. Human rights

<sup>54</sup> "From Seattle to Jakarta: The Sino-US Relations", *Beijing Review*, 37:46 (14-20 November 1994), p. 7; "Li Peng Discusses Sino-US Ties, Hong Kong", *Wen Wei Po (Hong Kong)* (2 November 1993), in FBIS-CHI, 3 November 1993, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Qimao Chen, "New Approaches in China's Foreign Policy: The Post-Cold War Era", *Asian Survey*, XXXIII:3 (March 1993), pp. 238-9.

States' growing predominance in the post-Cold War era. Furthermore, the continued development of mutual trust and confidence was essential for the purpose of establishing a peaceful external environment that was conducive to China's economic progress. As such, despite Southeast Asia's lessened significance in China's foreign policy, cooperation continued to be upheld in issues that were of particular interest to the Chinese.

#### 6.4.1.1. China's Third World Identity

As the previous Chapter discussed, in the period immediately following the Tiananmen Incident, Chinese leaders frequently stressed the need to enhance Third World solidarity through increasing the country's involvement in the process. In their view, increased cooperation among developing countries was a key to constructing a fairer international system in the face of increased American hegemony and unipolarity.<sup>64</sup> At a time when human rights concerns were dominating the conduct of international relations in general, China's befriending of the Third World was strategically advantageous as both sides shared a common view challenging the West's universalist approach. Also, as one of the founders of NAM, China was hoping that its renewed interest in the Third World would somehow restore its leadership role within this grouping of countries. In doing so, the Chinese wanted to take advantage of the grouping's growing influence in multi-lateral forums such as the United Nations (UN) to further their cause and pursue their interests. In sum, China's

<sup>64</sup> "The Non-Aligned Movement... *op.cit.*", p. 4.

approach towards the ASEAN countries was framed within a "damage control" diplomacy that was centred on increased cooperation with the Third World.

To a certain extent, such renewed interest in the Third World reflected a departure from views that had predominated prior to the Tiananmen Incident. As China aspired to become one of the world's economic giants, Deng's reforms as well as his people's increased connection with the West had led the country to slowly shed away its Third World status. According to Peter Van Ness, China in the era of Deng had wanted desperately "to escape from being Third World".<sup>65</sup> However, as the United States and the rest of the West turned their backs against the Chinese following the Tiananmen violence, Beijing was left with no choice but to go back to its old friends in the Third World. By invoking calls for greater Third World solidarity, China was aiming to re-establish its international image and garner support for its efforts to counter western criticisms and sanctions. Thus, in a time of need, the Chinese government was falling back "on old symbols in the vain hope that they will still have some political usefulness".<sup>66</sup>

The re-establishment of ties and cooperation with Southeast Asia and the rest of the Third World was mostly significant in furthering China's human rights diplomacy. The former's emphasis on economics and national development in approaches towards human rights suited the Chinese' interest; it provided the means to enhance efforts to challenge western views, which focused mainly on political rights and the

<sup>65</sup> Peter Van Ness, "China As A Third World State: Foreign Policy and Official National Identity", in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds., *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 212.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p. 214.

individual. In a speech made during the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, Vice-Foreign Minister Liu Huaqiu applauded the developing countries' efforts to put forward alternative perspectives on human rights issues through their adoption of regional-based guidelines such as Africa's Tunis Declaration, South America's San Jose Declaration, and most importantly, Southeast Asia's Bangkok Declaration.<sup>67</sup> Even though the granting of unconditional MFN trading status by the United States had opened the possibility of relations between China and the West (particularly the United States) to no longer center on human rights concerns, Beijing still valued the countering of western notions of human rights, as it allowed a constant means to not only challenge the United States and western countries' hegemony in international relations, but also increase its leverage in dealing with these countries, especially when talking about issues of trade and economics.

In addition to gaining support in its human rights diplomacy, China also approached Southeast Asia and the Third World with a view to constructing a more favourable global economic order. Although Beijing stressed the importance of participation in market-oriented economics, it considered that efforts had to be maintained to prevent the United States from achieving a complete domination of the system.<sup>68</sup> Unlike the situation during Mao's era, China in the 1990s had no desire to overthrow the prevalent international economic system; yet, it strived to make changes within the system to allow for the development of conditions that were conducive to furthering the rights of developing countries, especially in helping the Chinese modernize their economy. Even though the country's economy was growing at a rapid rate since the

<sup>67</sup> "Proposals for Human Rights Protection and Promotion", *Beijing Review*, 36:26 (28 June-4 July 1993), p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> "China's Diplomacy... *op.cit.*", p. 13.

coming of the second wave of economic reforms and openness generated by Deng's southern tour, the leaders still regarded China as a developing country, and subsequently wanted the rest of the world to treat it as such. For example, in its request to re-enter GATT, China insisted on a "developing nation" status within this trade body because of the benefits that came with such status.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, while statistics were pointing at China becoming less of a "Third World" country, the Chinese maintained these credentials mostly as a means to achieving a foreign policy that better served their interests.

China's Third World diplomacy has always been conditional on its interaction with the world's powerful nations. Beijing may have improved its ties and cooperation with the United States following Deng's directive in 1992 to strengthen economic reform and openness to the international community. However, it had no intentions of pursuing this to the detriment of relations with Southeast Asia and the rest of the Third World. The maintenance of friendly cooperation with the Third World – which centred on Beijing's association with ASEAN countries – remained a crucial means to dealing with pertinent issues such as increasing its leverage vis-à-vis relations with the United States, creating a multi-polar international balance of power, and developing a safety net in case similar unfavourable conditions should re-appear in the future. As such, there was still a common view shared between China and Southeast Asia to uphold the values of bi-lateral and multi-lateral engagement based on Third World solidarity, even if these relations were no longer as significant as before in securing China's survival in the international system.

<sup>69</sup> "China Better Placed... *op.cit.*".



#### 6.4.1.2. Party-to-Party Relations and the Treatment of Overseas Chinese

In developing a strong sense of regionalism to balance the growing predominance of the United States in world affairs, China needed to demonstrate continued efforts in cultivating a stable and long-term relationship with its neighbours to the south. It was obvious that the warmth surrounding Beijing's Southeast Asian diplomacy in the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident had mostly come from a sense of desperation in the face of western ostracism. However, the need to maintain such warmth was crucial because a deterioration of relations would only generate more uncertainties in China's external environment, even as it entered a new phase of friendship with the West and the United States. Although the region was no longer perceived with the kind of significance that had prevailed prior to Deng's southern tour, Beijing kept up an appearance of cooperation and amity through increasing its participation in regional institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and stressing the need to maintain ties based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. When considering that the Sino-Southeast Asian relationship had historically been plagued by a lack of trust and confidence resulting from the region's fear of Chinese intrusion in domestic politics, Beijing's practical abandoning of its ideological approach on foreign policy – which meant that it no longer supported revolutionary movements in the region – was generating significant drive in the furtherance of normalized relations. By emphasizing the need for equality, mutual respect, mutual benefit and common development in economic relations, China was

increasing its assurances of non-intervention in Southeast Asia's domestic politics.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to this, such efforts were strengthened by Beijing's approach towards lingering issues such as Communist Party-to-Party relations and the treatment of overseas Chinese in the region.

Having ceased ties with regional Communist parties as part of its approach to embrace the Southeast Asian countries after the Tiananmen Incident, Beijing had no intention whatsoever of changing its stance on the matter. With the end of the Cold War, a continued emphasis on ideological confrontation had become not only outdated, but also disadvantageous in its efforts to approach the staunchly anti-Communist Southeast Asian governments. As well, the achievement of China's Great Power aspirations required that it carried out a foreign policy that was more appropriate for a "responsible" state; it compelled the Chinese to forego the policy of supporting revolutionary movements around the world, and particularly in Southeast Asia. Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen reaffirmed this view by stating that "all Asian countries should treat each other as equals and live together in amity on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence".<sup>71</sup> Although the Chinese continued to adhere to Communist ideals within their domestic sphere, it approached the rest of the world with a view to accommodating differences in political systems and mainly focusing on economic issues.<sup>72</sup> Thus, there was greater recognition among the Chinese leadership and the public as a whole that foreign policy priorities should shift away from the advocacy of class struggle towards the movement of the

<sup>70</sup> "Qiao Shi in Manila: Meets Philippine Leaders and Speaks on Sino-ASEAN Relations", *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (11 August 1993).

<sup>71</sup> "China Ready to Take Part in Asian Security Dialogues", *Beijing Review*, 36:32 (9-15 August 1993), p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> Cheng, "China's Foreign Policy... *op.cit.*", p. 226-7.

country in the direction of reform and modernization. As such, it was in China's interest that its cessation of ties with Southeast Asian Communist movements were upheld, as it built close cooperation with regional governments on the basis of mutual respect for peaceful co-existence and common economic benefits.

In stressing their non-interventionist stance in the region, China's approach to relations with local Communist movements was very much tied in with its view on the treatment of overseas Chinese in these countries. Although the concern over ethnic Chinese people's association with local Communist movements had dwindled since the end of the Cold War and China's cutting of ties with these movements, Beijing's close links with the overseas Chinese community in Southeast Asia was increasingly perceived as a front for the creation of a Greater China community.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, in order to counter such arguments, the Chinese government had to reassure its Southeast Asian counterparts that such close links were in no way a precursor to interventionist policies in the near future. In a speech to the Thai government, the Chairman of the Chinese National People's Congress, Qiao Shi stated, as follows:

The Chinese government cares about overseas Chinese and protects their legitimate rights and interests, but overseas Chinese should abide by the laws of their resident countries.<sup>74</sup>

During the same trip to the region, Vice-Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan reaffirmed this view by claiming that:

<sup>73</sup> Arguments supporting this view can be found in many publications including: Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997) and Sterling Seagrave, *Lords of the Rim: The Invisible Empire of the Overseas Chinese* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1995).

<sup>74</sup> "Qiao Shi in Bangkok: Overseas Chinese Policy Outlined, Talks with Prime Minister", *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (6 August 1993).

We do not consider ethnic Chinese Indonesians as citizens of China, and for commercial purposes, they are treated as Indonesians.<sup>75</sup>

While not wanting to push away the support of the overseas Chinese in the development of China's economy – particularly in generating much needed foreign direct investments – these statements showed Beijing's respect towards the sovereignty of the countries in which these people were residing.

On the surface, the Southeast Asian governments welcomed these statements as an indication of China's peaceful intent in the region. As Malaysia's Mahathir explained, the region should perceive the relations with China as "a great opportunity, not a threat".<sup>76</sup> However, beyond this – as this Chapter will elaborate – there were some reservations primarily regarding the links between the Chinese government in Beijing and the overseas Chinese community's domination of the region's economies. At a time when Southeast Asia was itself looking for investments to further develop its economies, the possibility of overseas Chinese capital going to the Mainland was causing a considerable amount of concern among local economic planners. Nonetheless, much effort was being carried out – at least from China's perspective – to generate assurances about Beijing's respecting of regional governments' sovereignty on the issue of overseas Chinese.

China's constant approach on Communist Party-to-Party relations and the condition of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia was carried out in the hopes of maintaining the ties that had been developed with the region since the Tiananmen Incident. For the

<sup>75</sup> "Qiao Shi in Jakarta at Start of ASEAN Visit: Speaks of Shared Experiences", *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (23 July 1993).

<sup>76</sup> "China a Great Opportunity, Not a Threat", *New Straits Times* (Malaysia) (24 January 1995), p. 12.

most part, the warming of relations in the early 1990s had occurred during a time when the Chinese were desperate to find alternative means to sustain its involvement in international affairs. Therefore, while cooperation with ASEAN countries in general was perceived as important in efforts to keep up a peaceful environment that was conducive to China's economic modernization, such cooperation was very much dependent on the status of Beijing's relations with Washington. Consequently, as conditions began to improve vis-à-vis Sino-American ties following the Chinese' second wave of economic reforms and international openness in 1992, there was no doubt that such developments were inducing dramatic changes in China's approach towards Southeast Asia, particularly the ASEAN countries.

#### 6.4.2. Potential Challenges

As the Chinese economy resumed its path towards greater reform and openness, the impact of its growth was perceived as a threat among countries in Asia, especially those in Southeast Asia. Increased economic power meant that the Chinese were now capable of dedicating more funds towards its already gigantic military. In turn, this development was perceived as a potential threat as it would allow Beijing to exercise greater influence over the region in issues involving not only economics, but also politics. When considering that relations between China and Southeast Asia had historically been dominated by concerns over the former's hegemonistic attitude (especially during China's Dynastic period), it was somewhat understandable that as the Chinese gained more economic power, regional countries were becoming increasingly worried about the possible return of a Middle Kingdom mentality among

the leaders in Beijing. And to make things worse, the rapid modernization of China was occurring at a time when the international environment was in general troubled by the uncertainties that followed the end of the Cold War. The world's Superpower, the United States, was slowly retracting its involvement in Asia and in doing so, left behind a power vacuum that was waiting to be filled by any of the aspiring Great Powers in the region, including China. Overall, the shifting conditions in Chinese foreign policy and external environment were generating a considerable sense of unease among the Southeast Asian countries over China's possible rise as the region's hegemonic power.<sup>77</sup>

The development of Sino-Southeast Asian relations in the post-Tiananmen period was based on a common platform that centred on the need to cooperate in issues of human rights and economic development. By engaging with its southern neighbours, China was securing itself a means to not only ensure that its economic progress proceeded, but also to counter the United States' growing predominance in international affairs. However, as relations between China and the United States improved towards the end of 1992, the common platform on which Sino-Southeast relations had been built was rapidly losing its *raison d'être*. As human rights issues became less of a concern in Beijing's interactions with Washington (as signified by the granting of unconditional

<sup>77</sup> Such growing uneasiness towards the rise of China as an economic and military giant in the region has been noted by numerous scholars in their studies of Southeast Asia's security relations with its northern neighbour. These studies include as follows: Joseph Y.S. Cheng, "China's ASEAN Policy in the 1990s: Pushing for Regional Multipolarity", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 21:2 (August 1999), pp. 176-204.; Allen S. Whiting, "ASEAN Eyes China: The Security Dimension", *Asian Survey*, XXXVII:4 (April 1997), pp. 299-311. In newspapers and magazines, similar sentiments were also voiced by journalists in their reports and analyses of speeches made by regional leaders on the matter. These included as follows: "Southeast Asia: Nervous Neighbours Seek Defense Ties", *Inter Press Service* (26 January 1994); "China-Burma: Red Star over Rangoon Worries Southeast Asia", *Inter Press Service* (10 January 1995); "China: How Do You Handle a Waking Dragon?", *Business Week* (14 August 1995), p. 54.

MFN trading status to China in 1994), China no longer needed to attribute as much significance to Southeast Asia's role in ensuring the survival of China's economy. While association with the ASEAN countries and the Third World had sustained China's economic needs during the latter's time of need, the prospect of developing closer cooperation with the United States appeared more enticing when considering the Americans' predominance in the post-Cold War international system's market-oriented economics.

The loosening of the Sino-Southeast Asian relationship as a result of the weakening of its underlying common platform was exacerbated by the fact that there had been lingering challenges and problems even during the relationship's period of intense cordiality. At the time, these problematizing issues had been swept under the carpet in order to allow the necessary conditions for cultivating a greater sense of amity and cooperation within the region. On some occasions, the Chinese had even gone as far as allowing certain concessions in order to ensure the continuance of such amicable ties. However, as the status of relations with Southeast Asia, particularly the ASEAN countries, became less crucial in Beijing's pursuit of its national interest, the need to allow greater concessions no longer made any sense. And most importantly, the problems and challenges that had before prevented relations from further evolving were now in danger of returning to the surface and causing more difficulties for both sides to meet eye-to-eye.

#### 6.4.2.1. Security Concerns in the Asia-Pacific

The post-Cold War environment in the Asia-Pacific was highlighted by the increasing level of uncertainty mainly caused by the decreasing physical presence of the United States and Russia. What these Superpowers left behind was a power vacuum that was waiting to be filled by the region's aspiring Great Powers. Historically, China had always maintained such ambitions; however, the crises following the Tiananmen Incident had debilitated its capabilities and had forced it to concentrate more on domestic issues. Therefore, as improved relations with the United States allowed the Chinese to enhance their image and raise their economic power in the international system, the outlook appeared more positive for a resumption of China's striving towards Great Power status. In turn, as the Chinese economy resumed its path towards increased levels of modernization, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) found itself in a better position to demand a substantial injection of funds to their coffers.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, with the increasing influence of military leaders in China's foreign policy decision-making process since the Tiananmen Incident,<sup>79</sup> it was becoming more likely that segments from the country's growing income would be

<sup>78</sup> For more analyses on the Chinese military's modernization program, consult: Dennis Woodward and Santo Darmosumarto, "PLA Strategic Doctrine and Capabilities" in Marika Vicziany, David Wright-Neville and Pete Lentini, eds., *Regional Security in the Asia Pacific: 9/11 and After* (Sydney: Edward Elgar, 2004); You Ji, *The Armed Forces of China* (St. Leonards, New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1999); John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China's Strategic Seapower: The Politics of Force Modernization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Elizabeth Speed, *Chinese Naval Power and East Asian Security* (Working Paper No. 11) (Vancouver: Institute of International Relations, University of British Columbia, 1998); You Ji and You Xu, "In Search of Blue Water Power: The PLA Navy's Maritime Strategy in the 1990s," *Pacific Review*, 4:2 (1991), pp. 137-149; David Shambaugh, "China's Military in Transition: Politics, Professionalism, Procurement and Power Projection," *The China Quarterly*, 146 (June 1996), pp. 265-298; Yuan Jing-dong, "China's Defense Modernization: Implications for Asia-Pacific Security," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 17:1 (June 1995), pp. 67-83.

<sup>79</sup> Garver, "China's Push ... *op.cit.*" p. 1026.

dedicated to providing the PLA with the means necessary to realize its much-needed and overdue modernization program.

Although China's defense expenditure was (and continues to be) nowhere near that of the United States, Japan or any of the powerful countries in Western Europe, it experienced an expansion of about 30 percent between 1989 and 1994.<sup>80</sup> In 1993, just a year after it resumed economic reforms and international openness, the PLA budget totaled 42.5 billion Yuan, which was 5.5 billion Yuan more than the amount spent in the previous year.<sup>81</sup> These figures did not include other funds dedicated to research and development, military pensions or purchases of foreign equipment. As well, the profits generated from Chinese sales of equipment to foreign countries were not factored into the calculation of the military's bulging coffers. As a result, some analysts were quick to suggest that the PLA's actual budget could have been more than twice its published levels.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, there were other analysts who argue that these statistics did not portray the real picture of China's military development, as it did not take into account factors such as inflation, the magnitude of the PLA organization and China's defense needs (considering its vast territory). Although nominal figures of the PLA budget may have increased since the end of the 1980s, real figures have remained the same; in a sense, "China spent only a little more than 1.2 percent of the GDP on its armed forces at present as compared to 4.7 percent in

<sup>80</sup> David B.H. Denoon and Wendy Frieman, "China's Security Strategy: The View from Beijing, ASEAN and Washington", *Asian Survey*, XXXVI:4 (April 1996), p. 426.

<sup>81</sup> Bilveer Singh, "China Gives S.E. Asia Two Causes of Anxiety", *Business Times* (Singapore) (9 June 1993), p. 23.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

1978".<sup>83</sup> Indeed, it was difficult to clearly determine the growth of the PLA's budget, as much of the information required to make a precise assessment was never fully disclosed by the Chinese government. However, judging from the 1993 acquisitions of in-flight refueling capability, jet fighters, and advanced missile systems,<sup>84</sup> the growth of the Chinese economy was clearly allowing the military leaders the means (if not, the confidence) to make necessary adjustments within the PLA organization in order to realize aspirations of modernizing China's power projecting capabilities in the region.

The anxiety caused by China's military modernization program was further exacerbated by Southeast Asian countries' lack of trust and confidence towards the former's strategic designs. Such sentiments ran deep not only because of China's hegemony during its Dynastic period and frequent intervention throughout the height of the Cold War, but also because of its recent aggressive moves in the region. In 1974, the Chinese navy took over parts of the Paracel Islands from the Vietnamese by force, and in 1979, Vietnam once again found itself on the receiving end of China's military offensive when the PLA overran its northern borders. Most recently, China's venture into Southeast Asia also came at the expense of the Vietnamese when the PLA Navy finally occupied the remaining parts of the Paracel Islands and began making assertive moves in the Spratly Islands.<sup>85</sup> At the time of these aggressions, the ASEAN countries were not too worried about the PLA's actions, as it served their

<sup>83</sup> Shaoguang Wang, "Estimating China's Defense Expenditure: Some Evidence from Chinese Sources", *The China Quarterly*, 147 (September 1996), p. 895.

<sup>84</sup> Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>85</sup> For more elaborate accounts on China's long conflict with Vietnam, especially in the disputes over territories in the South China Sea, consult the following publications: Marwyn S. Samuels, *Contest for the South China Sea* (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1982) and; Martin Stuart-Fox, *A Short History of China and Southeast Asia: Tribute, Trade, and Influence* (Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003).

purpose in checking Vietnam's potential expansionism. However, as Vietnam was slowly drawn into ASEAN in the post-Cold War period, the Chinese military's encroachment southward became increasingly too close for comfort. During the period immediately after Tiananmen – when Beijing was conducting its maximum effort to win the friendship of Southeast Asian countries – the growth of the Chinese military had not caused much concern, especially when taking into account the military sanctions imposed by the West; the Chinese were deemed too weak and too embroiled in domestic crisis to pose a threat in the region. However, as such an unfavourable climate showed signs of improvement towards the end of 1992, the sense of threat that had always rested in the back of Southeast Asian leaders' minds was rapidly coming to the surface again. And when considering that "no ASEAN member has had a positive record with China sufficient to outweigh the negative memory",<sup>86</sup> the resumption of China's military modernization (which was driven by its growing economic potential) and its aggressive moves in the region were clearly heightening the level of uncertainty in the region's post-Cold War security environment. The situation became so severe that by 1995, the ASEAN countries were increasingly feeling the need to unite in developing a new consensus on "discreet diplomatic confrontation" with Beijing.<sup>87</sup>

Southeast Asia's deep-seated distrust towards China was also intensified by the presence of outstanding problems such as territorial disputes and the inexistence of a regional mechanism to deal with these disputes and other security issues in general. As this Chapter will further discuss in the next section, China's dispute with ASEAN

<sup>86</sup> Allen S. Whiting, "ASEAN Eyes China: The Security Dimension", *Asian Survey*, XXXVII:4 (April 1997), p. 303.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p. 299.

countries over claims to the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea was the largest source of conflict in the region. During the "honeymoon period" of the Sino-Southeast Asian relations following the Tiananmen Incident, China had agreed to shelve issues of sovereignty in the conflict area in favour of achieving mutual benefits over the exploration of the area's natural resources.<sup>88</sup> In addition to this, Beijing downplayed the significance of this particular issue, as it tried to find other issues on which they could better relate with the region such as human rights and economic development. However, as the Chinese slowly re-gained their confidence in foreign policy decision-making through the re-establishment of their status in international affairs and improved relations with the United States, there were growing indications that they had no intentions of settling for anything less than full sovereignty over the disputed territory.<sup>89</sup> Such a development was raising an alarm in the region, as Chinese claims over the Spratly Islands overlapped those of ASEAN countries, Malaysia and the Philippines, as well as Vietnam, which was becoming closer attached to this regional grouping. The confrontation would reach its peak in 1995 when the Chinese navy would occupy a section of the Spratly archipelago called Mischief Reef, which had previously been under the control of the Philippines.<sup>90</sup> Considering that there was neither the presence of any official multi-lateral mechanism nor Superpower intervention in dealing with the issue and proposing a possible solution, the potential flaring up of regional conflict resulting from this dispute appeared evermore looming.

<sup>88</sup> Wang, "In Search of... *op.cit.*", p. 73.

<sup>89</sup> "Region Wary of China's Creeping Aggression", *Inter Press Service* (17 November 1995).

<sup>90</sup> Mark J. Valencia, "How to Carve Water", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 159:23, (6 June 1996), p. 32.



Since the end of the Cold War, the ASEAN countries had been trying to develop ways to engage China and check its hegemonistic potential. In the year previous to the Mischief Reef incident, the annual ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference, which had been the meeting place for discussion on regional security issues, was transformed into an institutionalized forum and renamed the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Unlike in Europe, there had been a lack of an official and permanent institution to discuss security matters in the Asia-Pacific; the ARF was thus created with a view to filling this void. By involving influential players such as China, Japan, Russia, the United States and the European Union (EU) in the process, the forum was expected to provide a means to not only exchange views and information on political and security concerns covering the region and beyond, but also suggest ways to deal with such issues.<sup>91</sup> In order to maintain the sense of regionalism within this forum, the ASEAN countries assumed the role of determining the direction of discussions, and in doing so, practically had the capability of raising particular issues that were of most concern to them. Moreover, with the future entry of Vietnam and Laos into ASEAN, the creation of a multi-lateral dialogue forum based on the ASEAN membership would do well in addressing the issues that were pertaining to the region.<sup>92</sup>

Although the ARF was created with a view to engaging China (instead of containing it), its loose structure and informality allowed the Chinese to in turn accept and support such a regional security framework. Nevertheless, the most valued qualities of the ARF – namely its informal structure and code of conduct – were also its

<sup>91</sup> *ASEAN Selayang Pandang* [An Overview of ASEAN] (Jakarta: Sekretariat Nasional ASEAN, 1998), p. 173.

<sup>92</sup> Sukhumband Paribatra, "From ASEAN Six to ASEAN Ten: Issues and Prospects", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 16:3 (December 1994), pp. 243-258.

weakest point, as it was devoid of concrete conflict resolution mechanisms to deal with the many security issues in the region, including the territorial disputes in the South China Sea.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, although the ARF provided the means to build regional confidence as well as the basis for an engagement of China through multi-lateral means, it was unable to solve the more sensitive issues that were troubling Sino-Southeast Asian relations. To a certain degree, it was most likely because of this exact reason that China was opened to participating in this forum in the first place, as it believed that its interests would remain guarded despite the ASEAN countries' effort to challenge and internationalize them.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the creation of ARF gave the Southeast Asian countries a way to lessen the uncertainties surrounding the post-Cold War climate; however, it was not wholly capable of diminishing the sense of threat emanating from China's growing military capabilities and potentially aggressive actions.

In order to ameliorate the situation, China constantly assured its southern neighbours that its intentions in the region were peaceful and non-confrontational. It attempted to counter the growing "China threat" view by stating that the Chinese economy and military were nowhere near what proponents of such views were claiming.<sup>95</sup> Foreign Minister Qian Qichen explained this by stating that:

...China's limited defensive power is entirely for the defense purposes and its military expenditure accounts for a very small proportion of the national budget.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Andrew Mack and Pauline Kerr, "The Evolving Security Discourse in the Asia-Pacific", *The Washington Quarterly*, 18:11 (Winter 1995), pp. 123-137.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Vatikiotis, "The First Step", *Far Eastern Economic Review* (3 June 1993), p. 18.

<sup>95</sup> For an overview of the "China Threat" argument, consult: Bernstein and Munro, *op.cit.*

<sup>96</sup> "China's Position on Asia-Pacific Security", *Beijing Review*, 37:37 (8-14 August 1994), p. 22.

Although the Chinese acknowledged their leaders' desire to upgrade the military's capabilities, this move was defended by the argument that in estimating China's threat potential, foreign countries need to take into account the severity of the PLA's difficulties and limitations; military modernization was carried out simply as a means to provide the country with sufficient defensive mechanisms to thwart possible encroachment on its territories.<sup>97</sup> Fearing that the ARF could possibly turn into a movement to contain China, Qian argued that the forum should be based on the principle that

...no country shall seek hegemony or spheres of influence, nor shall it organize and join any military bloc directed against other countries or interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.<sup>98</sup>

In stating its opposition against hegemonist attitudes of any kind, China looked to strengthen multi-lateral and bi-lateral cooperation that was based on common interests and mutual benefits in an effort to seek peaceful solutions to security issues in the region. Recognizing the need to maintain peaceful external conditions for its domestic economic modernization, the Chinese were careful to prevent uncertainties in the region's security environment from further developing. However, as the following section will discuss, the PLA's aggressive moves in the South China Sea did not embody whatsoever their diplomatic rhetoric on the creation of regional security through confidence building measures.

<sup>97</sup> Chen, "New Approaches... *op.cit.*", p. 245-7.

<sup>98</sup> "China Ready to Take Part... *op.cit.*", p. 9.

#### 6.4.2.2. Territorial Disputes

Of all potential military flashpoints in the Asia-Pacific, much attention in the 1990s was focused on the territorial disputes in the South China Sea.<sup>99</sup> The issue was not simply a matter of jurisdictional disagreement, as it involved the maintenance of regional peace and security as a whole. In 1971, the Philippines Navy launched an abortive attack on Nationalist Chinese troops on Itu Aba Island of the Spratly grouping. Three years later, Communist China and Vietnam (at the time, South Vietnam) engaged in a brief clash over the Paracel Islands, in which the latter was pushed out of parts of the disputed area.<sup>100</sup> China continued to maintain a "hard" approach towards Vietnam in the years following, and in 1988, violent confrontation once again erupted between the two countries. As a result of this action, six more islands were added to China's growing territorial possessions, and by the end of the conflict, the Paracel Islands became completely under Beijing's control.<sup>101</sup> Since then, skirmishes occurred frequently and claimants manouvered their patrol ships in a dangerous game of brinkmanship, as seen during the near-conflict between China and the Philippines over the Mischief Reef in 1995. Considering the claimants' history of resorting to military force in settling the issue, the need to alleviate such tensions was never more crucial. Unfortunately, although efforts to address the issue had been strong, no dramatic improvements were made by the mid-1990s. As a result, the

<sup>99</sup> A reading of academic publications in the region usually indicate other possible inter-state flashpoints as the Indian sub-continent, the Korean Peninsula and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Michael D. Wallace and Charles A. Meconis, *New Powers, Old Patterns: Dangers of the Naval Buildup in the Asia Pacific Region* (Working Paper No. 9) (Vancouver: Institute of International Relations, University of British Columbia, 1995).

<sup>100</sup> Zhan Jun, "China Goes to the Blue Waters: The Navy, Seapower Mentality and the South China Sea", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 17:3 (September 1994), p. 188.

<sup>101</sup> William J. Dobson and M. Taylor Fravel, "Red Herring Hegemon: China in the South China Sea", *Current History*, 96:611, p. 259.

growing uncertainty was contributing to fears of violent confrontations in the near future, as countries increase their military presence in the area.

There were at least two factors that contributed to Beijing's strategic interest in the South China Sea, namely nationalism and economics. As the Chinese economy showed signs of resuming its path towards greater power and opening up to the international markets, this development was supported by a new brand of nationalism, which was somewhat filling the ideological vacuum left by Communism's tarnished image following the Tiananmen Incident.<sup>102</sup> The growth of these ideas stressed the need to not only preserve China's territorial integrity in the region, but also re-claim its past maritime glories. Furthermore, there were economic factors influencing Beijing's conduct on the issue. While the benefits of China's economic modernization were providing the means to expand the military's expenditure, this was justified on the grounds that it would lead to further economic advantage through occupation of territories in the South China Sea. Such a view was part of Deng Xiaoping's "Four Modernisation" program, in which China's maritime frontier was expanded through developing its ports (particularly those in the country's southern parts) and expanding its commercial fleet.<sup>103</sup> Such an ambitious agenda officially symbolized Beijing's aspiration to become a "maritime" state, and put greater emphasis on the development of strategies that would assert China's influence over its littoral waters, particularly the South China Sea.

<sup>102</sup> Michael Leifer, "Chinese Economic Reform and Security Policy: The South China Sea Connection", *Survival*, 37:2 (Summer 1995), p. 44-45.

<sup>103</sup> Samuels, *op.cit.*, p. 5-6.

Following the Tiananmen Incident, China paused its military manouvers in the South China Sea. In part, this policy resulted from a lack of funds to conduct such operations; however, when taking into account the unfavourable external environment at the time, Beijing's decision was primarily an effort to prevent tensions from jeopardizing the development of relations with ASEAN countries.<sup>104</sup> Shortly after the adoption of this policy, Premier Li Peng proposed the creation of discussions on joint development of the disputed area, which eventually materialized in a "quasi official academic seminar" in July 1991.<sup>105</sup> The shift in China's approach towards the issue was warmly welcomed in Southeast Asia, as it opened channels for similar efforts to take place, such as Indonesia's "Workshop on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea" initiative.<sup>106</sup> As a whole, the development was perceived as an indication of China's willingness to cooperate with the region in taking serious steps towards ending the prolonged territorial disputes, and in general, improving the regional security environment.

Unfortunately, China's change of heart would prove to be temporary, as it resumed efforts to consolidate its control over the disputed area just a year later. With the promulgation of Beijing's 1992 Law on Territorial Waters, conditions once again appeared to be heading in the negative direction. The Law outlined China's non-negotiable sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands and provided the military with the mandate to carry out "immediate eviction of foreign military vessels or vessels owned by foreign governments and used for non-commercial purposes" from

<sup>104</sup> Garver, "China's Push... *op.cit.*", p. 1015.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1015-1016.

<sup>106</sup> Whiting, *op.cit.*, p. 307.

its claimed territories.<sup>107</sup> Most importantly, the claims outlined by Beijing's latest declarations included areas belonging to Indonesia, which had worked hard to mediate between China and other claimants in Southeast Asia. As such, the resumption of China's "creeping assertiveness" was rapidly disrupting efforts to establish peace in the region. As its economy improved and its relations with the United States showed signs of normalization, the Chinese military was itching to pick up where it had left off in 1989. As previously mentioned, these aggressive maneuvers would eventually climax in the PLA's seizure of the Philippines' Mischief Reef in 1995. To the ASEAN countries, who had always harboured deep-seated distrust towards its giant northern neighbour, China's action was seen as

...another step in the 'long trend' of Chinese statements toward, and behaviour in the South China Sea. Beijing's refusal to sign the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) while expressing verbal support had provided an earlier basis of mistrust of its peaceful protestations. Likewise, its signature of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) was followed by successive nuclear tests, furthering skepticism over PRC assurances on the South China Sea.<sup>108</sup>

The ASEAN countries, during a session of the ARF that year, were heavily critical of China's recent efforts to enact its 1992 Law on Territorial Waters, as was demonstrated by its taking over of Mischief Reef. It was the first time that these countries acted in unity in the face of a looming security threat and proposed concrete measures to solve the territorial disputes. As a response, however, the Chinese government simply snubbed ASEAN's initiative by refusing to partake in any discussion pertaining to the issue.<sup>109</sup> Even though Southeast Asia had noted the need to strengthen regional cooperation, China was increasingly appearing as a stubborn

<sup>107</sup> As quoted in: Garver, "China's Push... *op.cit.*", p. 1017.

<sup>108</sup> Whiting, *op.cit.*, p. 307.

<sup>109</sup> "China Snubs Initiative on Spratlys", *Courier Mail* (31 July 1995).

actor in international relations; consequently, this only injured its image as a responsible aspiring Great Power. Therefore, far from its desire to build regional confidence and trust, Beijing's belligerent actions in the period following its resumption of economic reforms and international openness had actually provoked the ASEAN countries to initiate a containment bloc against the Chinese. Unwilling to budge from its stance on the issue of sovereign rights over the Paracel and Spratly Islands, China had indirectly heightened the sense of insecurity predominating in the region.

In sum, by the mid-1990s, China's ability to control the region's maritime territories had expanded in conjunction with its military's financial confidence. Even though the new additions to the PLA's firepower were not entirely state-of-the-art weapons, its growing presence in the South China Sea was causing increased feelings of uneasiness among the ASEAN countries. As the Chinese military's modernization program emphasized the development of high-tech electronic communication and weapon systems, it was believed that such use of technologies would result in the entire South China Sea becoming more accessible to Chinese warships; in the end, the ASEAN countries would soon fall within China's striking distance.<sup>110</sup> And when considering that efforts to resolve the disputes had not yielded sufficient results, the potential for a flaring up of conflict appeared imminent. Although the Chinese military's increased capabilities may have been intended for the purpose of protecting China's maritime territories, its increasing presence and aggressive moves in the South China Sea (coupled with its unwillingness to settle for anything less than full

<sup>110</sup> Zhan, *op.cit.*, p. 189.

sovereignty over the disputed territories) were undoubtedly instilling fears among the Southeast Asian countries as well as exacerbating the uncertainties surrounding the region's post-Cold War security environment as a whole.

#### 6.4.2.3. Economic Competition

In addition to concerns over security, the relationship between China and the ASEAN countries have always been troubled by economic issues. As the previous Chapter discussed, these challenges existed even when ties and cooperation were at their warmest in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident. At the time, the development of relations was mainly fueled by China's desperate need to find ways to secure its economic survival and path towards modernization. The ASEAN countries were aware of this situation and in a sense, grabbed the opportunity to approach their powerful northern neighbour when it was supposedly in its weakest moment. In doing so, these countries took advantage of the prevailing cooperative environment to achieve certain concessions from the Chinese. Nevertheless, it was obvious that the budding cooperation was actually standing on loose ground. Both sides were developing their economies not only through similar liberal economic approaches, but also on a heavy reliance on foreign domestic investment. Therefore, as the economies grew stronger, the potential for competition was becoming more likely, as they would be pegged against each other in efforts to gain assistance from industrialized countries. Thus, as long as the West continued with its economic sanctions on China, the ASEAN countries were in a better position to demand cooperation from the Chinese. However, when the West finally softened towards Beijing, and the latter

was able to resume its economic reforms and international openness, Southeast Asia was rapidly losing its leverage in dealing with China's growing economy. The sense of competition that had highlighted the relations before Tiananmen was once again coming to the surface.

The largest economic challenge facing China and Southeast Asia was the competition for foreign direct investment. Just months after Deng had undergone his tour of the southern provinces and re-invigorated China's economic reforms and international openness, regional newspapers indicated that the ASEAN countries were in danger of losing out to the Chinese in the race to attract foreign investment.<sup>111</sup> Much of this had to do with the fact that these countries were suffering severe infra-structural problems in their economies. As well, the resumption of Beijing's opening-up policy was proving to be a strong magnet for investors, as the Chinese magnified its most obvious advantage (namely its huge population) with promises of greater political stability and economic reforms.<sup>112</sup> China's enormous population not only provided the means to offer foreign investors the advantage of cheap and abundant labour, but also the possibility of creating new markets for products, especially when considering that investors had become "more keen to access the domestic market rather than merely seek a production base for exports".<sup>113</sup> Therefore, when we consider the limited supply of foreign funds dedicated to the Asia-Pacific, the steady rise of China's economic potential in 1992 was immediately causing significant shortages to the remaining countries in the region.

<sup>111</sup> "China Vies with ASEAN for Japanese Investment", *Japan Economic Newswire* (30 December 1992).

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> "ASEAN Falling Behind China and India in Race for Investments", *The Straits Times* (13 April 1994), p. 36.

As a whole, foreign investment in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand fell significantly in 1992; in contrast, the Chinese experienced a 380 percent increase that same year.<sup>114</sup> Such trends developed primarily as Japan – the main investor in the region – reduced its investment in the ASEAN countries and re-directed these funds to China. Coming at a time when Japanese companies were cutting down their investment in Europe and the United States, the rise of China as Japan's main trading partner in the region was causing severe anxiety among the ASEAN countries.<sup>115</sup> In addition to this, analysts indicated that Taiwan was also changing its investment preferences in favour of increased ties with Mainland China. Until 1991, Taiwan had been most ASEAN countries' main investor; yet, by the end of 1992, it had dramatically reduced its economic links with these countries. Following on Japan's cue, Taiwan rode on the wave of China's recently found popularity by tripling its investment there.<sup>116</sup> This was a significant achievement in China's "damage control" diplomacy when considering that the political climate between Taiwan and the Mainland was still very much unstable. All in all, the year 1992 marked a turning point in the Chinese economic revival in the post-Tiananmen period, as it was successful in diverting foreign funds away from the ASEAN countries and into its domestic market.

There was not much that the ASEAN countries could have done to turn the tide around when considering that they had simply been beaten by the Chinese in

<sup>114</sup> "China Looms As S.E. Asia's Biggest Rival for Investment", *Business Times (Singapore)* (14 April 1993), p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> "China Vies with ASEAN... *op.cit.*."

<sup>116</sup> "China Looms... *op.cit.*", p. 3.

projecting a more attractive image to potential foreign investors. However, the most sensitive issue concerned the growing amount of investment into China from the overseas Chinese population in the region. The ethnic Chinese had started to increase their investment in Mainland China since 1989 – when it had seemed like the rest of the world was scurrying with their money out of the country – and by 1993 had accounted for almost 80 percent of all direct investment in the expanding Chinese economy.<sup>117</sup> Some regional leaders, such as Malaysia's Mahathir, attempted to shed a positive light on this trend by indicating that the success of Beijing in attracting overseas Chinese investment should not be seen simply as a threat, but as an opportunity to increase the region's engagement with China.<sup>118</sup> However, underneath the surface of such statements, there was definitely an increasing sense of threat felt by China's rapid economic growth and ability to divert away much needed domestic investment. The concern was magnified by the fact that the overseas Chinese community controlled a significant majority of the region's economies. For example, in Indonesia, the ethnic Chinese only comprised 2 percent of the country's population, yet owned 70 percent of private domestic capital and dominated almost 30 percent of the economy.<sup>119</sup> When we consider that the issue of overseas Chinese in general had been one of the factors troubling Sino-Southeast Asian relations in the past, the competition between China and ASEAN countries for overseas Chinese investment was once again rapidly developing into another thorn in the side of improving relations.

<sup>117</sup> "Neighbours Uneasy As China Flexes Economic Muscle", *The Times* (18 January 1994).

<sup>118</sup> "China and Southeast Asia: Trick or Treat?", *The Economist* (10 July 1993), p. 28.

<sup>119</sup> "Neighbours Uneasy... *op.cit.*"



Indeed, there were a number of people who preferred to view China's growing economy in a more positive light. With China's increasing participation in regional initiatives such as the ARF, the ASEAN countries were looking to enhance cooperation through encouraging regional interdependence. In doing so, the negative effects of competition would be replaced by the increasing possibility of mutual economic benefits. In the period immediately following the Tiananmen Incident, such shared beliefs were embodied in efforts to establish an East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC). However, the weakness of this attempt was in fact that its foundation was centred on the notion of excluding the United States and the West from the region's economic development; therefore, as China improved its relations with these countries, the desire to realize such an attempt was no longer present. In 1993, the drive for greater cooperation was pursued through more institutionalized means, as China and ASEAN members set up joint committees within the body to boost collaborations on trade and technology.<sup>120</sup> Much effort was also put into the informal development of economic zones like the "Golden Rectangle" (involving China, Thailand, Laos and Burma) as well as the Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia and Hong Kong-Taiwan-China "growth triangles".<sup>121</sup> All in all, these developments pointed at the possibility of the entire region heading towards a direction of common economic development through increased cooperation and interdependence. By entangling China in such economic interdependence, the Southeast Asian countries

<sup>120</sup> "China, ASEAN Take Cooperation A Step Forward", *Agence France Presse* (14 September 1993).

<sup>121</sup> "New Economic Zones Take Shape Amid Concerns of Chinese Expansion", *The Associated Press* (17 November 1993).

were also hoping that the process would serve to deter China's aggressive designs in the region.<sup>122</sup>

Nevertheless, despite efforts to increase economic cooperation between China and the ASEAN countries, these had not been able to entirely rid the region of its sense of competition. Indeed, such competition was at times given a positive spin, as Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir exemplified when stating that "we can help each other and prosper through competition, through competing with each other".<sup>123</sup> However, for the most part, increased competition was perceived negatively among the Southeast Asian public in general. When we take into consideration the region's uncertain political and security climate at the time, the maintenance of such a competitive attitude proved to be more of a debilitating factor rather than a supporting one in developing the relationship between China and Southeast Asia. The Chinese military's aggressive actions in the South China Sea was posing a serious threat to the region's security environment, and as conditions worsened, the fear was that such confrontation would spread into economic issues. Thus, since its resumption of economic reforms and international openness, China had unwillingly generated conditions that were not entirely conducive for its increased cooperation with the rest of the region.

<sup>122</sup> "S.E. Asian Investments 'Safe Despite Chinese Encroachment'", *The Straits Times (Singapore)* (1 October 1993), p. 19.

<sup>123</sup> "China A Great Opportunity... *op.cit.*", p. 12.

#### 6.4.2.4. The "Taiwan Problem"

While issues of security and economics composed the main challenges impeding the growth of Sino-Southeast Asian relations in the 1990s, efforts to deal with these challenges were further complicated by the presence of another factor, namely the "Taiwan problem". This so-called problem referred to:

...a situation where foreign countries, particularly those already having diplomatic relations with Peking, deal with Taipei in a way which [treated] the Republic of China (ROC) as a political entity separate from mainland China.<sup>124</sup>

The question of Taiwan in China's ASEAN policy did not become a concerning matter until 1988 when leaders in Beijing began to perceive Taiwan's expanding influence in the region. And although the relations between Taiwan and the ASEAN countries mainly concentrated on issues pertaining to trade and economics, the possibility that these relations could evolve into cooperation at the political level was too dangerous for the Chinese to simply ignore as it threatened to undermine their claimed sovereignty over Taiwan. During the opening of Beijing's post-Tiananmen "blitz" diplomacy towards the ASEAN countries, the Chinese leaders made it a priority that their Southeast Asian counterparts provided assurances of maintaining a "one China" policy that recognized Beijing as the sole government of China. Generally uninterested in the PRC-ROC conflict and wanting to maintain the climate of cooperation at the time, influential ASEAN leaders such as Indonesia's Suharto and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew came through with statements indicating the region's

<sup>124</sup> Chen Jie, "The 'Taiwan Problem' in Peking's ASEAN Policy", *Issues and Studies*, 29:4 (April 1993), p. 96.

desire to keep its relations with Taiwan to issues concerning trade and economics.<sup>125</sup> As such, the "Taiwan problem" had played a factor in determining the direction of Sino-Southeast Asian cooperation even in its early beginnings.

In 1992, the external environment created by China's resumption of economic reforms and openness to the international market allowed the possibility for changes in the relationship between China and Taiwan. Although conditions at the political level remained antagonistic, significant strides were made on the economic front. As previously discussed, Taiwanese direct investment on the Mainland dramatically increased and provided the latter with a much-needed injection of funds to further strengthen its participation in the international economy. The progress of this trend was essentially to the detriment of Southeast Asia's interests, as the reallocation of Taiwanese funds to China meant that there was less to go around in the region. Nonetheless, regional leaders kept up a positive view on the situation as they recognized that the development of PRC-ROC ties in trade and economics remained problematic because of the challenges posed by their lack of complementarities at the political level. In addition to this, it needs to be taken into account that China's economic links with Taiwan were established indirectly through Hong Kong; therefore, as uncertainties loomed over the future of Hong Kong after its return to China in 1997, Taiwanese investors were quick to realize that an over-dependence on the Mainland could prove disadvantageous.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>125</sup> "People's Daily' Congratulates Restoration of Sino-Indonesian Diplomatic Relations", *Xinhua News Agency* (4 July 1990); "People's Daily' Congratulates Establishment of Sino-Singapore Diplomatic Relations", *Xinhua News Agency* (4 October 1990).

<sup>126</sup> Gerald Chan, "Sudpolitik: The Political Economy of Taiwan's Trade with Southeast Asia", *The Pacific Review*, 9:1 (1996), p. 97.

At the beginning of 1994, Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui visited the ASEAN countries as part of his "go south" or "*sudpolitik*" approach to foreign policy. Although the visit was carried out under unofficial terms, it was apparent that Lee was looking at the possibility of developing relations with Southeast Asia as a means to decrease Taiwan's growing economic reliance on China.<sup>127</sup> Not only was the region a source of comfort in lessening Taiwan's dependence on Chinese markets, it also had the potential to provide Taiwanese investors with the advantages similar to those found in Mainland China. Although the Southeast Asian countries were individually smaller markets compared to China, the region as a whole was capable of generating a potentially strong market and source of raw materials when considering its significantly large populations and growth momentum. Furthermore, since 1992, certain ASEAN countries, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, had developed new incentives to attract foreign direct investment, which in turn allowed potentially greater benefits for Taiwanese investors.<sup>128</sup> And considering that Taiwan shared compatible ideologies and political systems with these countries, the prospect for mutual benefits through increased economic ties appeared evermore enticing. Although the "go south" approach did not necessarily mean that Taiwanese investment would entirely be pulled out of China, the potential economic losses were significant enough for the leaders in Beijing to launch protests against the ASEAN countries' welcoming attitude towards Lee's visit.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, China's misgivings towards Southeast Asia's warming relations with Taiwan were not entirely focused on

<sup>127</sup> During the trip, which became known as Lee's "vacation diplomacy", the Taiwanese President met with heads of state of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. These countries were some of the ones affected the most by Taiwan's diversion of direct investment to China since 1992. "Diplomacy by Taiwan Upsets China: Beijing Protests to Manila, Bangkok", *The Washington Post* (19 February 1994), p. A24.

<sup>128</sup> Xiangming Chen, "Taiwan Investments in China and Southeast Asia: 'Go West, But Also Go South'", *Asian Survey*, XXXVI:5 (May 1996), p. 459.

<sup>129</sup> "Diplomacy by Taiwan... *op.cit.*", p. A24.

economic issues, as the continuation of this section will elaborate on the political ramifications of these relations, particularly vis-à-vis China's claimed sovereignty over Taiwan.

What ensued from Lee's visit was beyond the region's expectations; in the first half of 1994, Taiwanese investment in the ASEAN countries registered a whopping 680 percent increase compared to the previous year.<sup>130</sup> Considering that there could only be a certain amount of funds available for foreign direct investment, the injection of funds into Southeast Asia was most likely to be to the detriment of China's economic development. However, the culpability did not necessarily rest on the ASEAN countries, as their effort to attract investment from Taiwan was facilitated by the former's "flexible diplomacy", which allowed foreign countries to establish links with Taipei without first having to sever diplomatic relations with Beijing.<sup>131</sup> Although the Mainland Chinese were obviously not delighted with facing the prospect of increased Taiwan-Southeast Asian interactions, they had little grounds on which to complain against such trends, as the ASEAN countries continued to recognize Beijing's status as the only official Chinese government. As a Philippine politician argued in defense of his country's approach towards developing ties with Taiwan, "it was all about trade and investment".<sup>132</sup>

Indeed, it would be naïve to think that Taiwan's "flexible diplomacy" and "go south" approach towards Southeast Asia were carried out purely for economic purposes. The strength of Taiwan's foreign policy rested on the ability to use its economic strength

<sup>130</sup> "Taiwanese Investors Spread Their Wings", *Business Times (Singapore)* (12 October 1994), p. 17.

<sup>131</sup> Chen, "The 'Taiwan Problem'... *op.cit.*", p. 106-7.

<sup>132</sup> "Diplomacy by Taiwan... *op.cit.*", p. A24.

as a means to increase its bargaining power for international political recognition. In Central America, the Taiwanese strategy was proven successful as it had managed to win the political support of a number of small countries in the region. Therefore, while the short-term goal of Taipei's ASEAN policy may have been to increase economic cooperation with the countries in the region, its ultimate ambition was to be recognized as an independent state.<sup>133</sup> When considering this argument, it was understandable that Beijing became extremely cautious about the direction in which Taiwan's relations with the ASEAN countries were heading. Although these countries continued to stress their adherence to Beijing's "one China" policy, the growing Taiwan-Southeast Asian economic connection (if China was to not respond in a forceful manner) was perceived as a threat that could in the long run undermine China's sovereign claim over Taiwan. Therefore, to add to the challenges confronting Sino-Southeast Asian relations in the aftermath of Deng's southern tour, the competition for Taiwanese investment between China and the ASEAN countries had no longer become just an issue of economics, as it also embodied a concern that the Chinese were particularly sensitive about: the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the People's Republic China.

### 6.5. Conclusion

This dissertation has noted two events in Chinese politics that marked turning points in Beijing's relations with Southeast Asia: the Tiananmen Incident in 1989 and Deng's southern tour in 1992. In Chapter Five, it was discussed how China's

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<sup>133</sup> Chan, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

approach towards countries in the region became more amicable and cooperative as a response to western efforts to isolate the Chinese from international affairs in the period immediately following the Tiananmen Incident. China's changing attitude towards Southeast Asia during this time was obvious even though relations had already shown signs of improvement even before the Tiananmen crackdown. The aftermath of the June Fourth Incident, however, provided a catalyst for greater cooperation between the two sides; most importantly, it forced the Chinese to become the more proactive side of the two in maintaining the steady development of ties. During the 1989-1992 period, China's efforts to breakdown western ostracism and sustain a post-Tiananmen "damage control" diplomacy mostly centred on its growing relations with neighbours to the south. And as part of these efforts, Beijing was swift and persistent in its approach; this included allowing certain concessions on pertinent issues such as Communist party-to-party ties, the treatment of overseas Chinese, regional security, territorial disputes and economic competition.

Chapter Six builds on the discussion provided by Chapter Five by elaborating on the second wave of foreign policy shifts that resulted from Deng's southern tour in 1992. Although Deng's visit to China's southern coastal provinces was generally aimed at settling the leadership struggle within the domestic sphere, its consequences were also felt abroad, particularly in causing changes to China's perception towards the United States and Southeast Asia. Deng's actions re-invigorated the Chinese leadership's resolve to guide China back towards the path of economic modernization and international openness before the Tiananmen Incident had somewhat derailed its progress. As a result of this, China's approach towards the United States became

more proactive, as the former looked to breakdown the latter's human rights campaign through engagement instead of self-imposed isolation. In turn, China's less antagonistic and more cooperative stance towards the United States meant that its foreign policy focus was once again shifted back to the western world in general, as these countries were more capable of aiding China's economic modernization compared to Southeast Asia and the Third World. And although the lessening significance of Southeast Asia in China's foreign policy did not directly translate into a deterioration of relations, the potential for disruption became greater as the problems and challenges that had previously been swept under the carpet during the two sides' most friendly period (1989-1992) were once again allowed some room to re-surface.

Nevertheless, there were a number of issues that remained constant in the Sino-Southeast Asian relations after 1992; this included China's continued support for Third World solidarity, its cessation of ties with Communist movements abroad, and its non-interventionist stance on concerns related to the overseas Chinese community in Southeast Asia. During Beijing's initial contacts with the region's capitals in the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident, these issues played a role in providing a basis for greater cooperation. By identifying itself as a developing nation, China approached the Southeast Asian countries with a view to securing their support (because these countries were considered to be leaders of the undeveloped/developing Third World) in maintaining its existence in international relations as well as challenging the United States' domineering posture in the post-Cold War balance of power. As such, a continued adherence to amicable and cooperative relations with the

Third World (even after ties with Washington had been resumed) remained essential, as it provided the Chinese with the backing necessary to maintain a policy that challenged the creation of any forms of hegemony, particularly those imposed by the West. To a certain extent, Beijing's constant approach towards issues of Communist party-to-party relations and overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia was also geared towards similar goals. As China consolidated its pragmatic approach to foreign policy-making, assurances were maintained with regards to its non-interventionist intentions in the region. In doing so, Beijing further emphasized its opposition to hegemonism through strengthening its relations with Southeast Asia on the basis of the principles of peaceful co-existence and mutual economic benefits, of which the Third World was a major proponent.

While there were certainly conditions that remained constant between 1989 and 1995, the changes in Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia following Deng's southern tour (and the subsequent re-invigoration of economic reforms and international openness) were more felt in issues of regional security and territorial disputes. As the Chinese economy resumed its rapid growth following improved relations with the United States, countries in the region began to fear that such development would result in the Chinese military becoming stronger and more aggressive. Although Beijing continued to express its peaceful intentions in the region, the modernization of the Chinese military was posing a long-term threat to the security of the Southeast Asian countries, especially when these countries were generally incapable of competing with the Chinese in modernizing their armed forces. Such fears were further augmented by the fact that China's conduct in disputed areas

in the South China Sea was becoming more aggressive. Before 1992, China had been more willing to allow concessions in their approach towards settling territorial disputes in the region. However, as conditions with the United States improved and the significance of the ASEAN countries in China's foreign policy lessened, the Chinese military's increasingly aggressive movements in the South China Sea demonstrated that Beijing was no longer willing to accept anything short of full sovereign rights over the entire disputed area.

In addition to security factors, the potential challenges emanating from Southeast Asia's lessening importance in Chinese foreign policy-making were visible in issues of trade and economics. When the West began imposing sanctions on China in 1989, the competition for economic resources between China and Southeast Asia was not obvious. Considering that Southeast Asia was also receiving investment from the West, the latter's seclusion of China meant that funds that had originally been committed to the Chinese were then diverted to other countries in the region; as such, there was not really a competition between China and Southeast Asia for such funds. However, as relations between Beijing and Washington improved and western sanctions were slowly lifted, the potential for rivalry once again resurfaced, as China and Southeast Asian countries were pitted against each other in efforts to secure economic investments from the United States and the rest of the West. The competition for investment was not exclusive to funds from the West; it also included those coming from Taiwan as well as the overseas Chinese in the region. And to make matters worse, the competition for funds from Taiwan and the Chinese community in Southeast Asia instigated the potential for further problems as they

encompass issues which were sensitive to both sides: China's claimed sovereignty over Taiwan and China's possible intervention in Southeast Asia's internal matters, respectively.

The second wave of economic reforms and international openness instigated by Deng's southern tour in 1992 ushered in a shift in China's foreign policy towards the United States. The improvement in Sino-American relations, in turn, caused changes to Chinese approaches towards Southeast Asia, as these two sides' relationship was very much determined by how Beijing interacted with Washington. Although Sino-Southeast Asian relations never truly deteriorated as a result of the events following Deng's southern tour, the ASEAN countries' significance in Chinese foreign policy-making decreased as Beijing realized that it had achieved in part the goals of its post-Tiananmen "damage control" foreign policy, which was to restore China's image in the eyes of the world and to resume the economic progress that had been accomplished prior to the June Fourth Incident. China's approach towards the ASEAN countries had rested on similar views on human rights and equality in the economic sphere against the West's domination. However, as human rights became a non-issue in China's economic dealings with the United States, and as the latter provided increased means for the former to re-join the international economy, there were less grounds for maintaining Sino-Southeast Asian relations as it was during China's dire times in the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident. As these conditions developed, China's willingness to bend over backwards in its conduct with Southeast Asia also lessened. Consequently, the challenges and problems that had always existed between Beijing and the Southeast Asian capitals were potentially



resurfacing and causing impediments to the further development of relations. In 1995, growing rivalry between China and the ASEAN countries was marked by the latter's increased sense of threat resulting from the former's aggressive moves in the South China Sea. In a sense, the relations that had carefully been built since 1989 were once again entering a tumultuous period akin to conditions in the past.

## Chapter Seven:

# Conclusion

This dissertation's study of Sino-Southeast Asian relations focused on the period between 1989 and 1995. It took as a starting point the Tiananmen Incident on 4 June 1989, and as an end the ASEAN countries' joint-statement in 1995 opposing China's aggressive moves in the South China Sea. While the Tiananmen Incident had provided the catalyst for a speeding-up of relations between China and its southern neighbours, the event in 1995 presented these relations with its lowest point since the end of the Cold War. Within this period, it was observed that Chinese foreign policy towards the ASEAN countries underwent shifts that were brought about by changes in the international environment as well as the Chinese leadership's response to such changes. Indeed, early parts of the dissertation discussed the development of ties between China and Southeast Asia from a historical perspective; however, this was simply a means of providing the study with a theoretical foundation, some background analysis, and a basis of argument with which to compare and contrast the conditions before and after 1989. As such, the dissertation in general observed and analyzed the issues and concerns related to the changes that took place vis-à-vis the Sino-Southeast Asian relations during the 1989-1995 period.

### 7.1. Major Findings

As noted in Chapter One, and later elaborated in Chapter Five, the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident dealt a major blow to China's image abroad. At a time when trends in international relations pointed to the increasing prominence of values such as democracy and human rights, the Chinese government's brutal crackdown of the student-led, pro-democracy demonstration and the subsequent persecution of 'dissident' Chinese citizens spurred an outcry of anger within the international community. Almost immediately after the media broadcast scenes of the military-civilian confrontation on the streets of Beijing, the international public (particularly westerners) demanded that the Chinese government assume responsibility for the numerous deaths and casualties during the Incident. The demands from these people, in turn, pressured western governments into responding to the crisis using not only harsh condemnations, but also military and economic sanctions.

When considering the conditions described above, it could be said that the Tiananmen Incident was a turning point in China's relations with the United States – and subsequently with the ASEAN countries – as it forced the Chinese government to turn the focus of its foreign policy away from the West and towards alternative directions. The search for new friends began in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; unfortunately, these countries were themselves undergoing dramatic domestic turmoil, and resultantly, were unable to provide the Chinese with the much-needed material and moral support. Confronted with this problem, the Chinese then looked towards the Third World, where in the past it had always been regarded as an influential player

until the economic reforms led by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s steered China away from its association with this grouping of countries.

Among the Third World countries, China's foreign policy focused on its relations with the ASEAN countries, as these countries not only had the ability to support China in its anti-hegemonist approach towards the post-Cold War international order, but also the means to provide the Chinese with much-needed investment and trade channels to break down the economic sanctions imposed by the West. As such, China's approach towards the ASEAN countries in the post-Tiananmen period was framed within its Third World policy, even if such policy this time around differed from those in the past (in which China supported revolutionary movements to topple western-aided governments in developing countries). By approaching Southeast Asia, China secured a means to further its human rights diplomacy (through emphasizing the notion of 'Asian values'), proceed with its economic modernization goals, and challenge the United States' growing predominance in the international arena (through building regional multi-polarism in the Asia-Pacific).

What made this trend interesting was that China's embracing of Southeast Asia was a departure from its typical treatment of the region, as in the past the Chinese were more inclined to allow the Southeast Asian kings and princes to assume the onus of maintaining these relations. China had always regarded itself as the centre (the Middle Kingdom) on which the rest of the world revolved; thus, the development of Sino-Southeast Asian relations progressed only as far as the Southeast Asian leaders would work on them. Matters changed, however, when the Chinese government

faced crisis both at home and abroad. Immediately after the Tiananmen Incident, the Chinese carried out a "blitz diplomacy" aimed at ensuring Southeast Asia's friendship and support. This included appeasing regional leaders by sending high-profiled envoys to their capitals, speeding up the process of diplomatic normalization (which had started since before the Incident), and agreeing to shelve disagreements in order to allow for the development of stronger bonds. In a sense, both China's rekindling of its Third World status and rapprochement towards the ASEAN countries were part of a policy that would not have occurred had China not been cornered by the western world as a result of its harsh crackdown of protesters in 1989.

The improvement in relations between China and Southeast Asia was, from the beginning, conditional on how the former related to the West, particularly the United States. At a time when the Sino-American relations were at a low point following the Tiananmen Incident, conditions allowed greater interactions between Beijing and Southeast Asian capitals to take place, as historical problems and unending challenges were swept under the rug to allow room for cooperation in areas such as human rights, security, and economics. This situation then raised some questions. What if conditions improved between China and the United States? Would Sino-Southeast Asian relations revert back to its former state? Indeed, as Chapter Five elaborated, despite efforts from both sides, the development of Sino-Southeast Asian relations after Tiananmen was always complicated by certain outstanding issues such as the potential for economic rivalry as well as conflict over resources in the South China Sea. However, the need to survive in the international scene and to challenge the United States' predominance forced the Chinese to shelve these issues. Therefore, it

was somewhat natural to assume that as soon as conditions vis-à-vis China's relations with the United States improved, there was a greater potential for these outstanding issues to surface once again and complicate China's relations with Southeast Asia.

By the end of 1992, relations between China and Southeast Asia were no longer as warm as the conditions immediately after the Tiananmen Incident. The conditions had changed, as China's relations with the United States improved and the path towards resuming pre-Tiananmen economic reforms and international openness appeared more visible. This event was spurred by Deng Xiaoping's tour of the southern provinces, in which he called for a resumption of pre-Tiananmen reforms and international openness. Although Southeast Asia had stood by China during its time of need, the latter pragmatically decided that the future of its economic modernization relied more on stronger ties with the West instead of with the Third World and the ASEAN countries. This did not necessarily mean that China became more antagonistic in its approach towards the region; it was just no longer willing to bend over backwards in order to appease its southern neighbours. In the post-Tiananmen period, China sought in Southeast Asia an alternative means to sustain its existence in the international system throughout its most dire times. Yet once the storm had been weathered, Chinese foreign policy was again expected to resume the path on which it was traveling before the Incident derailed its progress.

## 7.2. Theoretical Implications

In Chapter Two, the dissertation introduced a variation to Zhao Quansheng's "Micro-Macro Linkage Approach" to Chinese foreign policy analysis by arguing that the influence of internal determinants in the decision-making process was secondary to that of external determinants. This argument was put forward with the intent of using the approach to analyze the conditions during the period between 1989 and 1995. Based on a Realist reading of the issues at hand, the internal determinants of Chinese foreign policy were actually restricted to how the Chinese leadership perceived and responded to the external environment. As such, in observing and analyzing China's changing attitude towards Southeast Asia in the post-Tiananmen period, it was more fruitful to emphasize the changes to China's external environment, as these impacted on how the leaders perceived China's position in the world, and in turn, formulated the country's foreign policy towards the region. The internal determinant undeniably was important in the process; however, in this case, it did not undergo a transformation, as the Chinese leaders strived to continue the economic reforms that had been in place since the late 1970s. Therefore, the emphasis of this dissertation's analysis was on how the leadership re-oriented China's foreign policy to accommodate the furtherance of China's modernization and Great Power aspirations in the face of an extremely challenging external environment.

In looking at the situation through such a framework of analysis, it was concluded that the changes in China's post-Tiananmen perception and conduct towards Southeast Asia were in general formulated and implemented through a process of "adaptation",

and not "learning". A process of "learning" would have required shifts in Chinese foreign policy's internal, external, and leadership determinants. It is important to stress that although a process of "learning" did occur in the late 1970s (in which China's national interest was re-oriented towards modernizing its economy and opening its doors to the international system), its domestic determinant remained constant since then. The country had embarked on a national quest to modernize the economy, and even the strongest critics of economic reform and openness realized that to turn China back to its isolationist, autarchic self would be suicide. In other words, the evolution of Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia in the post-Tiananmen period was largely a process of "adaptation" in which the changing trends were induced by shifts to the external and leadership determinants of foreign policy-making, but not by a transformation of the internal determinant (the national interest in pushing for greater economic modernization). Further shifts in 1992, which resulted from changes to the Sino-American relationship's environment, merely demonstrated just how much China's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia was based on responding to external stimuli, and not internal ones.

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In analyzing China's relations with Southeast Asia during that period, the dissertation also opened up a discussion of other related issues concerning China's foreign policy behaviour. In particular, it provided an assessment of the post-Tiananmen leadership crisis, the involvement of the military in foreign policy-making, the growth and political manipulation of neo-nationalist tendencies, the re-orientation of China's

Third World policy, the conceptualization of an Asian-based human rights diplomacy, the development of a strategy to settle territorial disputes in the South China Sea, the management of economic competition/rivalry, the treatment of overseas Chinese in the region (particularly as this issue concerns Communist Party-to-Party relations and regional economics), and the "Taiwan" problem. Most importantly, the dissertation's discussion of these issues was framed within the larger scope of analysis, which sought to explain the pattern of relations between China and Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident.

Although the study of Chinese foreign policy is by no means an easy task to accomplish, this dissertation proved that no matter how difficult the process may entail, the goals that had been set out at the beginning of this research project were eventually achieved. Yet, at the same time, it needs to be understood that the path towards re-appraising and analyzing the many issues and events in China's relations with Southeast Asia was littered with numerous analytical "black boxes". This dissertation did not pretend to open every single one of these "black boxes", as this was almost logically impossible. However, what it promoted to do was to draw attention to certain aspects of China's foreign relations (that is, its relations with Southeast Asia at the dawn of the post-Cold War era), which for long have unfairly been relegated to analysis of a second-degree in spite of its great significance to the field of Sinology as a whole.

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