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# ІСТОРІЯ, ФІЛОСОФІЯ, НАУКА ТА КУЛЬТУРА КИТАЮ

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## MAO'S CHINA, THE SOVIET UNION, AND THE COLD WAR: A REINTERPRETATION

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The article attempts to demonstrate, although both China and the former Soviet Union have been under the long-time rules of Communism, they have very different cultural traditions and historical backgrounds, which decide their different political institutions and socialist developments, their contrasting reactions to the Cold War, and their various measures in adapting to the post-communist era.

During his reign in China, Chairman Mao Zedong chose to completely close the country to international fluence, for achieving his imperial ambition of becoming an emperor-like ruler. The situation continued until the death of Mao, when China began to open-door and reaching global societies. On the other hand, the Soviet Union since the death of Joseph Stalin started to evolve into a more liberal and tolerant country, while engaging in more contacts with the West and the rest of the world.

The end of the Cold War was in fact a contribution made by the socialist states as exemplified by China and the former Soviet, because they increasingly found that their ideologies could not have sustained the survival of communist authoritarianism, so they must throw the system out of the history and reconcile with the whole world.

The end of the Cold War was thanks to the changing political landscape of like a process of internal disintegration (like the Soviet Union) and transformation (as China), which had little to do with mutual competition between the capitalist West and the socialist bloc.

The Cold War was neither an US project for painstakingly achieving global hegemony which involved mainly one character of the American, nor an episode of competition co-directed by the two superpowers while others were merely marionettes or onlookers. The end of the Cold War was much credited with Khrushchev's de-Stalinization, Gorbachev's glasnost, Mao's closed-door, and Deng's open-door.

To conclude, the demise of the Cold War in the early 1990s was a victory of the Western democracy, as claimed by many scholars before, in reality, it is not historically correct.

**Keywords:** Mao Zedong, China, Communism, the Soviet Union, the West, the Cold War.

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## КИТАЙ ЗА ПРАВЛІННЯ МАО, РАДЯНСЬКИЙ СОЮЗ І ХОЛОДНА ВІЙНА: ПЕРЕОСМИСЛЕННЯ

*Цзе Лі*

У статті зроблено спробу продемонструвати, що хоча як Китай, так і колишній Радянський Союз тривалий час перебували під правлінням комуністичних режимів, вони мають дуже різні культурні традиції та історичне минуле, які визначають їхні відмінні політичні інститути та соціалістичний розвиток, їхню контрастну реакцію на Холодну війну та різноманітні заходи адаптації до посткомуністичної епохи.

Під час свого правління в Китаї Мао Цзедун вирішив повністю закрити країну для міжнародного впливу, щоб досягти своїх імперських амбіцій стати правителем-імператором. Така ситуація зберігалася до смерті Мао, коли Китай почав відкривати двері та налагоджувати контакти з глобальними суспільствами. З іншого боку, після смерті Йосипа Сталіна Радянський Союз почав перетворюватися на більш ліберальну та толерантну країну, одночасно установлюючи більше контактів із Заходом та рештою світу.

Припинення холодної війни фактично є результатом дій соціалістичних держав, таких як Китай і колишній Радянський Союз, тому що вони все більше почали усвідомлювати, що їхні ідеології не змогли забезпечити існування комуністичного авторитаризму, тому вони повинні викинути цю систему з історії і примиритися з усім світом.

Кінець Холодної війни відбувся завдяки мінливій політичній атмосфері – процес внутрішнього розпаду (як у Радянському Союзі) та трансформації (Китай), яка не мала нічого мало спільного зі взаємною конкуренцією між капіталістичним Заходом і соціалістичним блоком.

Холодна війна не була ані проєктом США для поступового досягнення глобальної гегемонії, що мала переважно американський характер, ані епізодом змагання двох супердержав, у якому інші були лише маріонетками чи глядачами. Закінченню холодної війни приписували десталінізацію Хрущова, гласність Горбачова, політику закритих дверей Мао та відкритих дверей Дена.

Підсумовуючи, багато вчених раніше стверджували, що завершення Холодної війни на початку 1990-х років було перемогою західної демократії, що є невірним з історичної точки зору.

**Ключові слова:** Мао Цзедун, Китай, комунізм, Радянський Союз, Захід, Холодна війна.

### **Mao Zedong, China, and the Soviet Union**

The ups and downs of the relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the former Soviet Union after 1949 are a long story to tell. Immediately after the establishment of the PRC, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Chairman Mao Zedong decided to move China lean to one side of the Soviet socialist camp, and to model the Chinese modernizing track totally on the template of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). After the death of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and the ascent of Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev, the years of 1953–1957 were the golden period of the Sino-Soviet alliance, but the seed of hostility had been sowed in the past mutual distrust. Khrushchev's secret speech in heralding de-Stalinization during the 20th Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Congress in February 1956, and his policy of peaceful coexistence with the West, all deepened Mao's dissatisfaction with the USSR.

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When Nikita Khrushchev spoke for more than four hours in February 1956, about terrible things done by Stalin: terror, deportations, and summary executions, and the most important one of cult of personality. The speech reverberated throughout the socialist world and China in particular. Many suspected that because Mao feared the potential unrest in the socialist countries and Khrushchev might have insinuated the cult of personality of Stalin to him in China as well. In fact, what Mao's fear was Khrushchev's incrimination of his imperial emperor's status in China, and the absurdity of being an emperor in a socialist atheistic world. There was a big fear that Mao was irate: Khrushchev seemed to undermine Mao's ambition of turning China into an imperial kingdom, in which an emperor could do whatever he liked.

Since then, Mao pushed for his radicalism: He isolated China from both the West and the Soviet camp, and pursued the destructive policies at home. The normalization process only took place in the 1980s, when China's post-Mao new leader Deng Xiaoping replaced Maoist extremism by launching pragmatic moderation route, which signalled not only the end of animosity for both sides, but also the end of the Cold War in a broader sense.

The discord of the PRC and the former Soviet Union since 1949 has been a thorny issue for scholarly debates. Odd Arne Westad explains that the Sino-Soviet estrangement was due to Stalin's having harboured a mission of controlling China (1998: 166-67). Lai Sing Lam credits the Sino-Soviet tension to the US attempts at driving a wedge between the two countries (2011: 238). Others argue that personal and cultural factors such as values and beliefs contributed to the collapse of the compact. For example, Chen Jian insists that China's disagreement with the USSR was a function of Mao's effort to maintain China's revolutionary momentum, thus Mao felt no need to make peace with the outside world (2001: 65). Shuguang Zhang blames both sides' failure to overcome the misperceptions derived from their culturally bound ethnocentrism. According to Zhang, Khrushchev showed little tolerance of difference, and Mao overreacted to Khrushchev's challenge as a threat to his power at home (2010: 371).

In fact, Chinese leader Mao Zedong represented the very dark side of Chinese civilization; his personality was the combination of the most brutal forms of all imperial Chinese dictators. In Mao's mind, the happiness of the Chinese and an orderly society were not his concern, but the constant suffering of people and a wretched state were the most conducive to his rule as being a communist emperor. In contrast to the perceptions of many previous scholars, the article considers that during his almost thirty years reign, what Mao wanted for China was not a "revolutionary Utopia" nor a "heaven on earth", but *a kingdom of hell*.

Traditionally, in the mind of Chinese, their country is the centre of the whole cosmos (the so-called "Middle Kingdom"). The culture and civilization of China are also presented as the most important in the world. Other nations only exist in the margin of China, and other non-Chinese people only live as appendages. Their civilizations sometimes are not considered by Chinese as "culture", they mostly are regarded as a kind of alien custom or barbarous practice.

There are three core values of China-Confucianism, Legalism, and Taoism. Taoism is not related to politics and secularism, although it is an essential supplement to the Chinese civilization, it is viewed as merely an adornment of the mainstream values and philosophical approaches. On the other hand, Confucianism

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best represents the long-standing Chinese tradition of highly unified and centralized concept of state governance, imperial inwardness. Legalist ideology places great emphasis on violence and brutality, which are the golden means of keeping power. Both are the two sides of a coin, while Confucianism defines the legitimacy of absolute autocracy, Legalism perpetuates the most coercive methods in maintaining the autocracy. Confucianism and Legalism are complementary; they work together to provide theories and practical guidelines to all the ruling elites and rebels throughout the past, and to shape Chinese dynastic succession as being a unique phenomenon of “ultra-stable formation” (*chaowending jiegou*) [Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng 1984, 14].

Both the teachings of Confucianism and Legalism instil the temptation of tyranny and the obsession with an emperor-like dictator into Chinese mentality. Chinese are inherently both authoritarian and submissive; they would always want to escape from freedom, and the kind of dictatorship and tyranny established throughout its long history rested on deep popular support. Besides, since the modern time China had experienced the imperial invasion and its territories were being carved up by great western powers. The humiliation and suffering all increase Chinese victimization psyche and their isolation tendency, and most importantly, thus intensify the need to call for strong charismatic leaders to rule the Middle Kingdom.

On the contrary, though Russia is comparatively less liberal and democratic to the West, but as a whole it has a long tradition of being open-minded to European culture since the imperial age. After shaking off the Mongol yoke and the creation of a united Russian state in the 15th century, the fate of Russia and the fate of Europe became inseparably linked. When in the early 18th century, Peter the Great found the new imperial capital St. Petersburg, on the shores of the Baltic Sea, he did not actually open Russia’s window to Europe. That window had been opened much earlier. The Russian intelligentsia in the 18th and 19th centuries used the French language as the main means of communication within their own circle. Thanks to the free flow of educated people between Russia and the rest of Europe, Russian art, literature, and philosophy have been an integral part of the general European culture.

Tsar Nicholas II, acting under great pressure following the upheaval of 1905, reluctantly established an elected parliament (the Duma), permitted a kind of Western-liked political reform, and allowed the Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin’s market-oriented economic reorganization to operate first time in the nation’s history.

The success of Bolshevik revolution in October 1917 and the founder of the Soviet state Vladimir Lenin, were also highly inspired by a German citizen and Jewish thinker Karl Marx and his works – a typical Western origin. While Stalin and his reign were widely regarded by the Soviet people as a temporary and unnatural deviation from the Russian tradition, the increasing political liberalization and the growth of civil society in the post-Stalin decades gradually pushed the Russian back to the right track of pre-1917 time. The legacy of vibrant aristocratic culture, the democratizing and modernizing tendencies from the Tsarist era, notwithstanding a serial of tests of wars, revolutions, and terrors, represented a solid historical foundation that endured in the Soviet age, and are revived for building a new Russia on the ashes of Communism after 1991.

By comparing with China, Russian culture as a whole has been and continues to be essentially European, its every political transformation and industrialization is

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earlier and more Western-oriented than those of China. While Russian understands that the path to the advancement of a nation lay in collaborating as well as challenging the authorities, Chinese are more prone to submitting to emperors and party leaders. The fragile sprouts of democracy borne during the imperial period might evolve Russia slowly toward Western-style politics and society in the future to come. Conversely, the Confucian and Legalist cultural background, long years of communist rule, relatively homogeneous population, and its intrinsic mindset of obedience, all may doom China to a permanent self-sufficing and autarkic society immune to any liberal influence from outside.

### **Mao Zedong and the Soviet Leaders**

Mao Zedong was one of the most complex figures in Chinese history ever. His career could be illustrated as the life of a typical Chinese emperor. He was born in the late 19th century China, when revolutions, wars, and famines ruthlessly swept the country. He revolted against his father at a young age and marked himself as an iconoclast for his whole life. He had been ill-treated and completely beneath contempt in the eyes of many people before his rise to power. The bloodshed, treachery, and reprisal he had witnessed all shaped his special worldview profoundly.

Before 1949, Mao already had one dream in mind: To rule China and to become an emperor. There are two major things assisting Mao to attain the goal: Violence and revolution. From his early writings, he saw it as convenient to “create terror” and apply “the use of military action to develop insurrection” in China, where most of the population were peasants [Mao Zedong 1954, 21]. For Mao, violence is a necessary component of revolution. He employed violence more instrumentally and more cunningly than his counterparts. Under his rule, violence had become an enduring feature of the Chinese political landscape.

Mao extravagantly and purposefully employed violent practices and coercive measures. He wield violence throughout his life as part of its open-ended project to shape a new, revolutionary society. Violence was the permanent feature of Maoism. Mao’s war and violence are both civil and class war in nature, its aggravation and bitterness were constantly reaching armed clashes on the streets.

There were two kinds of revolutions in China under Mao: The domestic political and social movements or mass campaigns such as the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and the international campaigns or conflicts such as the Korean War (1950–1953) and the Sino-Soviet split. He launched the domestic revolutions first of all to reshuffle the entire structure and personnel of the CCP, and uncovered power contenders. Although Mao always declared himself a true Marxism-Leninism believer, but what he did domestically were largely the imperial methodologies to save and consolidate his power in a Byzantine-like political environment.

Mao was convinced that everyone in the Party was potentially dangerous. His technique in purging his colleagues was very simple but highly effective: First, to exploit their loyalty in carrying out his policies, then blame and betray them when necessary. Although many of his close-colleagues and comrades-in-arms had opposed him, but Mao always forced those people to adopt his mandate to rule. After disastrous effects occurred, he immediately purged and disregarded them. All the party members could be his would-be scapegoats. In addition, domestic revolutions for Mao were the best ways to organize the mass killing of his own



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citizens and achieve the impossible future that defined his very essence. He was a dictator who killed vast numbers of people on his own continent. He chewed up the lives of human beings in the name of a transformative vision of Utopia. Mao treated nobody as equal, and everyone was his enemy. China and the Chinese are only the figures on his chessboard. He dreamed and tried himself to be the emperor and even God in China and this was the only goal he kept in mind after 1949.

The pragmatists inside the CCP would like to adopt a relatively liberal economic policy and downplayed the centralized characteristics of Stalinism. They opted for gradual and balanced development modelled on Nikolai Bukharin's idea during the New Economic Policy period, and even the introduction of market economic elements. However, Mao Zedong rejected those proposals. Many people previously assumed that Mao was ideologically anti-bourgeois, and he feared those technocrats might lead China into the path of capitalism. In fact, Mao wanted to create an exploitative economic system based on imperial China, which could crush any people any time at emperor's will.

The concept of collectivization in the PRC during the 1950s and 1960s was *not* inspired by Stalin's 1930s program or by any principles from orthodox Marxism, but from Mao's ambition to turn the People's Republic into an imperial China again. In Mao's thinking, economy was not designed for modernization or national development, but it was simply a means of turning everything in China into a personal possession of an emperor (Mao) under the heaven.

From the late 1950s onward, both the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution resulted in huge traumatized social consequence, the latter in particular was a de-facto civil war targeting on the Party and the Chinese people. Mao once boosted his favourite slogan of "there is great chaos under heaven and the situation is excellent" (*tianxia daluan, dadao tianxia dazhi*) by confiding to his wife Jiang Qing [Mao Zedong 1954, 394], and those words best defined the anomaly of the Cultural Revolution, which was the most extreme form used by Mao to isolate China: Fratricidal fighting, mutual annihilation, and the total insanitary. The widespread chaos and disorder meant two great importance for him: First, during the great mayhem he was the only one manager and such chaotic situation satisfied his emperor fantasy. Second, in international level, the violence and the Red Guard's radicalism made the world hated or feared China more, so China could be more isolated, which served his interest.

Mao did not understand Marxism and socialism, he might probably never read a single word of *Da Kapitals*. But Mao's imperial ambition was a perfect match with Marx's utopian ideal, which was a theoretical weapon for Mao and none of the imperial Chinese emperors had this before. Mao embraced absolute egalitarianism in China, but he was the only exception that could be absolute superior to all the Chinese. And the image of communism for Mao was the Chinese traditional heaven or paradise.

There are two Chinese classics of Mao's favourite readings – "Water Margin" (*Shuihuzhuan*), a novel lauds about the hooliganism and mutiny, and "Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government" (*Zizhi tongjian*), a book preaches the political trickery in ancient China. Though Mao was definitely not able to dominate the world, although he dreamed this constantly, he could still have identified China with plots and scenes in these two books. Mao finally replayed those fictional stories in a real

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China via the Cultural Revolution. He enjoyed watching China being turned into a mental hospital-like theatre on which everybody was playing an insane role for one audience of him. Back then, China became too dependent on the ideas and obsession of a single man.

For many people outside China, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution were both a laughingstock, for many Chinese, those were black holes of their memories. But for Mao, these revolutions were his most euphoric moments and the peak time of his happiness, and they had little relevance to economic and social betterment. They were the showcase of his imperial ambition to demonstrate his emperor's egoism. From the founding of the PRC in 1949 to the year of his death in 1976, Mao had gradually realized his dream of building his heaven on the earth: A closed country ruled by an omnipotent emperor. *A psyche of closed-door* was perpetually rested on Mao's body.

Mao Zedong's indigenous tyranny of communism kept both the Soviet bloc and the West at bay, and he looked for support to neither side, while grinding the country to destitution. He was in fact powerless in the world, and he was only powerful in his own turf of China, but he thought he was the man who would get the mandate to rule the world.

On the other hand, in the nineteenth century, as many Russians who had fought Napoleon Bonaparte were profoundly influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution and wanted to establish a civilized European regime in Russia. Since then, the succeeding Tsars initiated a serial reforms of modernization modelled on the West. Under Stalin, thousands of Soviet soldiers engaging the Second World War in Western Europe saw with their own eyes that the living standards in defeated Germany and the Soviet satellite countries were much higher than in the victorious Soviet Union. Resulted from the defeat of Nazism by the Allied powers, the borders of the communist system were moved much deeper into the heart of Europe, as the independent countries of Eastern Europe were swallowed by Moscow. This expansionist source of Soviet conduct from the imperial Russian tradition, which had been accentuated by the victory of Great Patriotic War, ironically endowed the Soviet regime with more a European flavour. Conversely, Mao only used the victory of Korean War to further isolate China for his own goal. Besides, Stalin's terror was deeply rooted in the mind of the Soviet people and served as an enduring alert to the subsequent party leaders for not repeating such deadly episode in the country.

Except Stalin, the Soviet leaders since Lenin's New Economic Policy period all tried to pursue a gradualist, persuasive, and non-confrontational strategy. Even during the High Stalinism in the 1930s, Soviet economic institution was far less radical and was operated as a normal mechanism, which was unthinkable for Mao, who favoured more forceful and dictatorial policies of building a Utopia on earth. While Mao was indifferent and even hostile to modernization, the Soviet Union after Stalin, as an emerging industrial society, was creating a professional middle class and a more pluralistic political life, similar to that of other developing nations. Politically, the CPSU was more tolerant of dissents, the Soviet leaders were more willing to experiment the political changes and to cast away the incompatible Stalinism.

In terms of foreign policies, although the Soviet practice was often criticized as hegemonic or socialist imperialist, but with the exception of Stalin, from Lenin

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to Gorbachev, they tended to seek détente with the West and would have favoured more tolerance, greater openness to the outside world, and more intercourse with international societies.

All the elements above were poised for transforming the social system in the country. Beginning with Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet communists, with more cosmopolitan outlook and far-sight than the Chinese counterparts, were more conciliatory and moderate, and were following civilized and humanitarian aspirations to rebuild the state and construct a new world order. In the 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev took the course of far-reaching political liberalization both at home and in other socialist countries, notwithstanding the Soviet state was dissolved in 1991.

Almost every Soviet reform program and leader with innovative thinking was denounced by the Chinese communists, such as “revisionist” accorded to Khrushchev by Mao and “traitor of Communism” for Gorbachev described by the post-Mao CCP. Deng Xiaoping’s modernizing program after Mao had not made China followed the West, but firmly kept the country in the way of “politics in control, liberation in economy”. Deng was not an innovative communist reformer compared to Khrushchev, Dubcek, and Gorbachev. His economic policies aligned with traditional Chinese self-sufficiency, and his insistence in political high-handedness demonstrated that he was more a Maoist disciple than a new-born democrat.

#### **The Communists, the West, and the Cold War**

As Lorenz Luthi demonstrates, the PRC led by Mao Zedong was more active in bringing about the breakup of the Sino-Soviet alliance than the Soviet leaders (Lorenz Luthi, 2008: 8). Beijing controlled the pace of the relationship’s deterioration and its eventual collapse. And the Sino-Soviet relations would have been far less confrontational should Mao have died earlier, or should he have been removed from the power, although both scenarios did not become a reality [Lorenz Luthi 2008, 61]. In fact, Mao Zedong, from the beginning of his revolutionary youth to his dead bed, never trusted the Soviet Russian, which has a totally alien culture compared to traditional Chinese like him.

When Khrushchev ordered the withdrawal of Soviet know-hows from China in the late 1960s, plus the shrinking of trades between China and the Soviet bloc, it was part of Mao’s deliberate intention and provocation against the Soviet Union. Soviet’s withdrawal from China’s modernization program not only legitimate Soviet’s faults and imperialism, but also satisfied Mao’s imperial isolation ambition to close the door and welcome no more guests into China when he was in charge. His self-reliance was only an excuse for his emperor-like ego.

Under Mao’s rule, he used the Soviet Union as a symbol to discredit his opponents. At first, the PRC second-in-command Liu Shaoqi was reviled as “China’s Khrushchev”, and later Lin Biao, Mao’s official designated successor, was branded as a traitor for “seeking a Soviet protection”. Even at the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, Deng Xiaoping was being portrayed as China’s “New Khrushchev”. It is highly suspectable that Mao would have a genuine feeling to “lean to one side” and follow the path of the USSR unquestionably after 1949.

The Soviet Union for Mao was more a stepping-stone than a model. It was Stalin’s coercion which submitted Mao temporarily, but after the Soviet dictator died, Mao would fear nothing and was aspired to rebel. Besides, at the beginning



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of the PRC, Mao needed Stalin to consolidate his power and to legitimate the communist rule in China. Mao also desired Soviet aid and cash to build his war-torn nation, but nothing more.

For Mao Zedong, anti-Soviet was like anti-West, it was two sides of the same coin. Mao's psyche of anti-Soviet was anti-imperialism extension, an ancient Chinese tradition in guerrilla rebellion against the officials. Mao was a life rebel, whether in his youth or late years. In fact, Mao never knew what ideology about, it was only a weapon to fight. Mao's ideological empty talks were all smokescreen for his secret ambition. When Mao refused Khrushchev's proposal of establishment of joint submarine fleet in China in 1959, he concerned not about Soviet's infringement on his country's sovereignty, which Mao had little in mind. In fact, he felt his imperial project was under threat by foreign intervention, which might put his emperor rule in China under watchful eyes of Russians.

On the other hand, Mao belittled the capitalist West as well. Chen Jian argues that during the first major military conflict between the PRC and the West in the 1950 Korean War, although the Chinese casualties were heavy, but Mao was happy about such huge loss as a way of legitimizing his revolution and demonstrating his intransigence towards the imperial West [Chen Jian 2001, 193]. Chen also feels that the Korean War was not a burden that Stalin forced China to accept, on the contrary, Mao would actively like to use the war to create a momentum at home, in order to mobilize the Chinese to pursue the perpetual Utopia of continuing revolution. During the Korean War, Mao was willing take the risk to achieve his ambition, by defeating the American superpower without much help from Moscow and fanaticizing the Chinese upon the victory to buttress his power. Through the opportunity of the war, Mao not only satisfied his emperor-ego in maximum, but also closed China to the West at one stroke.

After the Korean War, Mao continued the triumphant pursuit by inventing the quarrels with the new Soviet leadership in the wake of Stalin's death in 1953, and the label of "revisionism" seemed to be the best weapon for Mao to curse the Soviet Union and shut China away from not only the USSR but also other socialist states. However, although Mao rejected the Soviet camp and the West, he wooed the Third World and exploited racism to stir the hatred of Whites among the developing nations to serve his purpose [Sergey Radchenko 2009, 22].

The Third World policy was also part of Mao's imperial and closed-door project. In his mind, an isolated China with a one-man rule was only valid and legitimate in the context of imperialist (both the Soviet Union and the West) encirclement, and the support from many underdeveloped countries in the world such as North Korea, Vietnam, and Cuba, which were inferior to the PRC economically.

Such vision was rooted in a long tradition of China's tribute system in ancient time. The tribute system is a paternalist one-way and top-down relationship in which benevolence comes from the centre and is gratefully received by the benighted border peoples, once referred to as barbarians – this system was once called "a benevolent civilizing mission". The system is a master-disciple relationship, in which the peripheral states should contribute ritual articles to imperial China, and Chinese emperors might return the favour to them by means of mutual marriages, money, and even sacrificing some territories. The imperial China would not have the tribute system dealt with the countries whose cultural and economic levels were

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superior to its own, such as the Roman empire in Europe, in order to demonstrate China's advanced level in the world. Besides, the tribute system reflected the diplomatic thinking of imperial China: Using barbarians to control barbarians (*yiyi zhiyi*). Mao applied this tradition to the PRC and relied on the poor Third-World states to balance the two superpowers.

When Mao turned his sights on national liberation movements in Asian-African-Latin American nations, he knew little about those national liberation movements, and had little sympathy with the economic difficulties in those countries. His concept of liberation by socialism, proletarian union, and anti-imperialism was merely ideological rhetoric. The money he had invested in those countries were tens of millions, but he thought it was deserved as his Chinese centrism and cultural superiority, which had nothing to do with Marxist internationalism. The Third World was only to serve Mao's exploitation or bargain chip to buttress his imperial ambition. Exporting revolution is the modern tributary system in Mao's mind, without the Third World, his program was not complete.

While Mao did give away much money and invest a lot to the Third World, but he finally found that he virtually had no friends at all, as the Third World wanted Chinese cash but not its revolution. Particularly during the Cultural Revolution, many socialist confidants of China, like Enver Hoxha, Kim Il-sung, and Nicolae Ceaușescu, all distanced from him and alarmed over the madness of Red Guards which might be imported to their regimes and shoot their own feet.

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, except the Third World, Mao had successfully isolated China from the Soviet bloc and the West, the Cultural Revolution was only a culmination of such Mao's closed-door program and the launch of his imperial fantasy. From this point of view, the Cultural Revolution was not a diplomatic disaster, but it actually was a diplomatic victory for Mao, as Mao's mission of China's international relations was the complete isolation from the whole world.

Mao did not want contacts with the West throughout his whole life, even the 1972 Sino-US rapprochement proved to be short-lived. Open-door not only would strengthen his party rivals of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, who favoured this policy, and it would also fundamentally put his closed-door in danger. Mao's isolation did not result from containment policies of both the Soviet Union and the West during the Cold War. This is more a myth than a fact. In reality, Mao genuinely wanted isolation; his cunning let him make a perfect excuse to fulfil his imperial ambition: It was the revisionists (the Soviet Union) and imperialists (the West) which made China inward. An excuse could cheat the ignorant Chinese at that time. He matured such strategic defensive in his early essay of "On the Protracted War" (*Lun chijiuzhan*), which elucidates that when the enemy advances with superior force; it is best for the defence to carry out a withdrawal [Mao Zedong 1954–1956, 223].

Almost all of Mao's disputes with others, whether in international and domestic level, they were just hyperbolic rhetoric, including the faith of Marxism, and lacked any substance. What he kept in mind was how to destruct any elements or opponents (both external and internal) which might destroy his imperial ambition. Mao's ideological empty talks were all smokescreen for his secret ambition of becoming a sole king in China.

However, even the Soviet Union and the West really hoped China to be self-isolated, as this was a great relief for the Soviet leaders who struggled for years to

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stem the tide of Chinese subversion of international communist movement, and took the troublemaker of Mao's China out, in order to establish détente with the West. And the West also thought China was aggressive and provocative in disseminating communist thoughts in the West and it constituted a threat to the world peace.

Under Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet suggestion to Mao of accepting the policy of peaceful coexistence with the US, which also endangered Mao's imperial program and closed-door policy, as he would like to imagine himself as the only one holy emperor in the whole cosmos, and he could not accept that many emperors living side by side with him. It is neither the insistence on ideological correctness nor the strong personalities of two leaders had a destructive effect on the Sino-Soviet partnership. In Chairman Mao's world, he was the emperor and liked to have two kinds of people around him: The slaves and the enemies. He would have no friends at all. Mao once described that "countries with a high scientific and technological level are overblown with arrogance"; while China was being "blank and poor" (*Yiqiong erbai*), and it was the best place in the world to plant the revolutions [Michael Kau and John Leung 1986, 60].

Nonetheless, it was Mao who vigorously implemented policies that destabilized the Sino-Soviet alliance and barred the West from communicating with China, eventually led to the country's self-imposed isolation from the world and its economic impoverishment step by step. Mao's communist faith had nothing to do with that of Marx and Lenin, he just wanted a great kingdom of China, in which he established his sole rule and perpetuated it to the last. It was a tradition of Confucianism rather than Marxism. The extreme conviction that China's national interest was its duty to spread world revolution aggressively and the policy of withdrawing the PRC from a putrid world into the splendid isolation of a solitary model society, both are the two sides of true Maoism.

By contrast, the death of Stalin prompted the Soviet Union to keep the option of intercontinental cooperation alive. Although the Soviet practice was often criticized as being hegemonic or socialist imperialist, but with the exception of Stalin, from Lenin to Gorbachev, they tended to seek détente with the West and would favour more tolerance, greater openness to the outside world, and more intercourse with international societies. The post-war Soviet leadership was even trying to lead the course of political and social thaw in the socialist bloc. In the 1980s, Soviet *perestroika* finally triggered the force that had been longing for change. Mikhail Gorbachev was hedging tough questions from popular audiences about their own ruling party elites, and warning those elites who did not trust *perestroika* might need to choose between survival and death. This put all those socialist countries in the Soviet bloc on to the road of radical political and economic reforms, culminating in most of them in social and political revolutions that ultimately smashed the existing communist regimes and ended the Cold War.

During the Cold War, the PRC was indeed a concern for the American, but it was never a big threat to the US, as the Soviet Union had been. The American never drove a wedge on the Sino-Soviet relations, if such a wedge existed and it should have been created by Mao, not by someone else. However, the US did try to approach more with the Soviet Union during the Cold War in the game of China-Soviet-US triangular relations, and the potential Western cooperation with the Soviet Union would automatically isolate China and remove a big obstacle. In

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fact, the US government understood perfectly about what was inside of Mao's mind: The US-Soviet alliance would make him more nervous, and the Chairman might therefore be increasing China's self-isolation rather than finding more allies in the world to respond. Such isolation could eventually made China die of suffocation, or let it find a way out of isolation to embrace the world community again, either way, the Cold War would end.

Every American president bore no willingness to approach Mao, only Mao tried that contact reluctantly. In 1972 the ailing Chairman was persuaded by the domestic pragmatists, such as Premier Zhou Enlai, who saw Chinese situation during the Cultural Revolution was deeply in trouble and the country needed an outside factor to initiate a change, to invite the American President Richard Nixon to come to the PRC. However, Mao was reluctant in dealing with the US, for him it was more a political concession than a vision of re-embracing the world. The 1972 Sino-US rapprochement proved to be short-lived. For the West, China was a minor player and sometimes a lone island in the Cold War theatre, and keeping the troublemaker of Mao shut off from the world was the best interest of them.

Though the West always showed passivity towards China, but they were constantly active in engaging with the Soviet Union, although in a negative term. From Lenin to Stalin, the Western bloc led by the US spent a lot of efforts to exacerbate Soviet weakness and undermine its power: A costly arm race with the Soviet military; denying the Soviet state of trading with other capitalist nations; funding the dissent movements in Eastern Europe; and large military assistance to the Afghan resistance force after the Soviet invasion of this country in 1979.

When Gorbachev ascended, the new Soviet leader repudiated the Brezhnev doctrine in foreign policy and launched the profound political and social reconstruction. He wanted the Soviet Union to become an integral part of the West. The West shifted to trust the Gorbachev administration and support the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe to follow the Soviet liberalization.

On the other hand, the West had no illusions about Mao, who seemed to be alien and a maverick. The PRC was too poor and too fractious, and was not on par with the Soviet strength. By contrast, the Soviet Union was a part of the Western civilization; the West had certain expectation towards the Soviet government led by Gorbachev, which might reduce tension during the Cold War, fulfil the demands of the West, and change the circumstances of the world. For both ideological enemies, the West would like to team up with the Soviet state while turning a blind eye to Mao's regime.

### **The End of the Cold War**

As John Lewis Gaddis demonstrates, many people saw the Cold War as a contest of good versus evil (1997: 282-87). There is a conventional historical view: October Revolution of 1917 triggered a confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States that would last much of the twentieth century. Each side aimed to transform the other and the American-Soviet competition over markets, ideologies, and territories, their global conflicts shaped the international system; all of them formed the whole story of the Cold War.

In reality, as this paper shows, the end of the Cold War was not one power defeating another. The termination of the Cold War did not present the victors and the losers, as the end of this historical drama was like a process of internal disintegration (like

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the Soviet Union) and transformation (as the PRC), which had little to do with mutual competition between the capitalist West and the socialist bloc.

The collapse of the USSR was not conditioned by Western or any other direct pressure. Soviet politicians and citizens increasingly saw their country's technological development and standard of living in the mirror of superior Western achievements, derived from the greater knowledge of the West made possible by increased travel and information obtained from modern media. The unsustainable financial squandering on military built-up, foreign involvement or imperial overstretching such as the war in Afghanistan, all became the bleeding wound which shredded the Soviet state. It is reasonable to presume that even if the West had not been providing an alternative and more successful model of modern society, the devastated and unreformable Soviet system could have died of a chronic suicide sooner or later.<sup>1</sup>

Under Mao, China had no friends in the world and was ruled by a man with sheer lunacy. But China was also free of intervention from neither the Soviet Union nor the West. Once Mao died, the new leader Deng Xiaoping could take this advantage to rebuild China's diplomatic relations, to start the modernization process, to embrace the world, and thus to conclude the Cold War.

The communist camp, including China, the Soviet Union, and other socialist regimes, knew too well that due to their economic and technological gap compared to those in the West, all Marxist nations had no prospect of winning the Cold War competition. The West also feared the capability of the Soviet Union and China to annihilate the world through massive use of nuclear weapons, and to instigate the fanatical communist revolution across the developing countries. Sinatra Doctrine was also adopted by the West to give up the contest with the socialist bloc.

The Cold War was neither an US project for painstakingly achieving global hegemony which involved mainly one character of the American, nor an episode of competition co-directed by the two superpowers while others were merely marionettes or onlookers. The confrontational theory might only apply to Stalin's era (1945–1953). The end of the Cold War was much credited with Khrushchev's de-Stalinization, Gorbachev's *glasnost*, Mao's closed-door, and Deng's open-door.

The US and Western policy in the Cold War was defensive not aggressive, they lacked the ability and willingness to contain the socialist bloc, less to undermine it. But the West indeed served as a factor of inducement to the East during the Cold War, when the citizens and intellectuals in the communist world witnessed the liberal ideas and economic advancement from the reference point of the prosperous Western society, they impelled the socialist regimes to renounce Marxism and march towards democratization. However, inducement is not equal to the peaceful evolution; the latter implies a more active measure with more destructive effects involved. Western peaceful evolution triggering the downfall of Communism at the end of the twentieth century is a myth imagined by the West, or a propaganda trick invented by the dispirited communists.

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<sup>1</sup> As Rachanko indicates, when Nikita Khrushchev unified other socialist countries to blame China in the late 1950s, it indeed had very bad consequences: First, it signalled the split within the socialist camp; second, it encouraged the dissent movement in the socialist bloc, heralded the Prague Spring and the Solidarity Movement in Poland. As a result, the West did not need to do anything and just waited for seeing the internal collapse of the socialist bloc, then the end of the Cold War came. See Sergey Radchenko, 2009: 29



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To conclude, the Cold War started its ending in 1976 when Mao departed, and it was formally over in 1985 while Gorbachev beginning to dig the grave. All crises happened from 1985 to 1991 were only to put the final nails into the coffin, but the decisive moment was in 1985. The end of the Cold War was largely attributed to the “own efforts” of the communists: Without internal and inherent troubles, the socialist dictatorships would not have found a way to reach the West, to change themselves, and to save the world.

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