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## The Sino-Soviet Cooperation before the Birth of the Alliance System: the Origin of its Cold War Strategies in East Asia

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### Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, a growing body of research has utilized novel historical documents to re-examine the Sino-Soviet alliance of 1950. This scholarship has fostered a common belief<sup>1</sup> that the coalition initiated offensive strategies and ultimately triggered a “hot war” in the Far East. According to this interpretation, the alliance provided the shield under which Moscow opened a second front of the Cold War in Asia, taking the serious risk of sanctioning North Korea’s invasion of South Korea<sup>2</sup>. Proponents of this view argue that the coalition emerged directly from the Cold War rivalries in Manchuria shortly after the end of the Second World War (WWII). During this period, the Soviet armed forces encouraged Chinese communists to consolidate their power, while the United States provided various forms of support to the Nationalist Government of China<sup>3</sup>. Given that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was determined to “lean to one [Soviet] side” well before 1950, it is argued that Washington had no realistic chance of securing rapprochement with the CCP during the 1940s<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, since the formation of the Sino-Soviet alliance was considered almost inevitable, previous studies tend to focus on the Sino-Soviet conflicts of interest over specific issues (such as Soviet interests in Manchuria) rather than analyzing their grand strategy<sup>5</sup>.

However, this plausible view remains to be critical re-examination. First, the historical perspective that foresees the Chinese communists’ final victory in the civil war is heavily shaped by hindsight, ultimately reflecting a narrative history written by the victors. Second, while many scholars depict the

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the “Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance” of 1950 is simply described as the “Sino-Soviet alliance,” while the “Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance” of 1945 is termed the “former Sino-Soviet alliance”.

<sup>2</sup> A typical argument is shown in Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years*, Oxford University Press, 1996, chs.5-6; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, Harvard University Press, 1996, chs.1-2; Shen Zhihua, *Lengzhan zai yazhou [The Cold War in Asia]*, Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2013 (in Chinese); Wada Haruki, *The Korean War: An International History*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. The alliance is called “the greatest antisystemic [sic] power assembled so far during the capitalist era” or “a geopolitical earthquake of great consequence, which would open a new chapter in the Cold War” by Odd Arne Westad, “Introduction,” in Idem, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963*, Stanford University Press, 1998, p.2; Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World: The Kremlin’s Cold War Bid for Global Power*, Cambridge University Press, 2024, ch.3. Phrases inside parentheses in quotations are written as the original, and those in square brackets are added by the author in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Yang Kuisong “Meisulengzhan de qiyuan ji dui zhongguogeming de yingxiang [The Origin of the US-Soviet Cold War and Its Influence upon the Chinese Revolution],” *Lishi yanjiu bianjibu, Lishi Yanjiu [Historical Study]*, May 1999, pp.5-22 (in Chinese); Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2001; Niu Jun “Yijiusiwunian zhi yijiusijiunian de Meisuguo gongguanxi [The US-Soviet-KMT-CCP relations from 1945 to 1949],” *Lishi yanjiu bianjibu, Lishi Yanjiu [Historical Study]*, Feb 2002, pp.84-103 (in Chinese); Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: the Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950*, Stanford University Press, 2003; Niu Jun, *Zhanhou dongya zhixu [The Post-War Order in East Asia]*, Shijiezhishi chubanshe, 2021 (in Chinese).

<sup>4</sup> The most typical study is as follows: Michael M. Sheng, *Battling Western Imperialism: Mao, Stalin, and the United States*, Princeton University Press, 1997. This interpretation has been supported by many scholars. For example, see Niu Jun. “The Birth of People’s Republic of China and the Road to the Korean War,” in Melvin P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol.1, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp.221-241.

<sup>5</sup> One of the radical arguments is as follows: Moscow allowed Pyongyang to invade the south to restore its interests lost in the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1950. Shen Zhihua and Danhui li, *After Leaning to One Side: China and its Allies in the Cold War*, Stanford University Press, 2011.

Sino-Soviet alliance as an offensive coalition directed against the Western bloc, a close analysis of the treaty-making process suggests otherwise: the coalition was essentially defensive in nature. It was not intended to wage perpetual struggle but rather to respond only to crises directly related to the potential re-invasion by the former enemy (Japan). The treaty's primary goal was to set the diplomatic stage for the overall peace treaty with Japan by shifting the status of the allied power from Taipei (Nationalist China) to Beijing (the People's Republic of China [PRC]), rather than to construct an anti-Western security arrangement<sup>6</sup>. Third, Moscow expected the CCP to assume leadership in advancing revolutionary movements across Asia<sup>7</sup>. This Sino-Soviet "burden-sharing" fundamentally differed from the alliance itself: the former emphasized the division of responsibilities, often involving challenges to the status quo and even armed struggles, whereas the latter focused on a defensive security posture. Previous scholarship has yet to fully explain how these two distinct dimensions, the burden-sharing arrangement and the defensive alliance, intersect and influence one another.

To review the aforementioned issues, it is essential to return to the basics by distinguishing between two types of international relations. The first is the "formal" sovereign-state system, which encompasses diplomatic and treaty-based interactions between governments and serves as the primary arena of great power politics. The second is the "informal" sphere of relations, managed primarily by political groups operating below the level of sovereign states. This latter sphere is exemplified by inter-party connections among communist movements, which often extended to overthrowing existing regimes through revolutionary struggles, including the use of armed force<sup>8</sup>. After the end of WWII, this informal sphere weighed more heavily in East Asia, where a series of decolonization struggles and civil wars left the sovereign-state system underdeveloped. By contrast, the formal system was largely shaped and manipulated by external great powers such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union.

From 1946 to 1949, the Soviet Union strategically navigated the Chinese Civil War by exploiting both types of international relations. It adhered to the former system of Allied Powers (e.g., the Yalta Agreement or the former Sino-Soviet alliance) to carefully maintain the status quo of great power politics, while simultaneously using inter-party relations to virtually undermine that status quo internally. This latter informal strategy was flexible, responding to local conditions without a firmly prearranged policy<sup>9</sup>. Even so, by 1949, this strategy cohered around three distinct geographic and political spheres: The first was Manchuria, where the CCP successfully established its main revolutionary base areas. The second sphere extended into the major cities of Southern China, where communists adopted a dual approach, combining armed struggle with peaceful capitulations and the administration of cities; crucially, this local conflict had to be separated from great power politics to circumscribe Anglo-American military intervention. The third and final sphere comprised the

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<sup>6</sup> See Matsumura Fuminori, "San Francisco kowa joyaku to Chuso domei (1949-52) [The Sino-Soviet Policy toward Japan, 1949-1952: the Eastern Bloc's Struggle for Overall Peace Treaties with Japan and Germany] (1)-(3)," *Journal of the Faculty of International Studies Utsunomiya University*, No.44-46, 2017-2018 (in Japanese).

<sup>7</sup> Shen Zhihua, *Lengzhan de qi yuan [The Origins of the Cold War]*, Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2013 (in Chinese); Shimotomai Nobuo, *Asia reisen shi [Asian Cold War History]*, Chuokoronshinsha, 2004 (in Japanese).

<sup>8</sup> The origins of contemporary Chinese foreign policy can be illustrated on the basis of these two types of international relations. See Matsumura Fuminori, "Gendai Chugoku gaiko no sokei (1949-54nen): niju kosei karamita shiron [Origins of China's Diplomacy (1949-1954): An Asymmetrical Combination of the Party's and Government's Foreign Policies]," *Ritsumeikan Kokusai Kenkyu [The Ritsumeikan Journal of International Studies]*, Vol.31-5, Mar 2019, pp.125-142 (in Japanese).

<sup>9</sup> As to Soviet policy toward China from the end of the Second World War to 1946, see Matsumura Fuminori, "*Taikoku Chugoku*" no Hokai: Marshall Mission kara Ajia reisen he [The Fall of the "Great Power China": from the Marshall Mission to the Asian Cold War], Keiso shobo, 2011, ch.3 (in Japanese).

neighboring border areas, which served as the main stage for the “Sino-Soviet burden-sharing arrangement,” in which the CCP was expected to play a major role by connecting with foreign comrades beyond China’s borders.

The three spheres of strategy carried several key implications. First, Moscow restricted its engagement with local communists to “informal” cooperation, deliberately withholding any “formal” alliance commitments until the latter established a new central regime that emerged with effective control over its national territory. This approach was specifically intended to avert great power conflicts over China. This policy followed a precedent on the Korean peninsula: immediately after the establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Soviet armed forces withdrew. Joseph V. Stalin showed no intention of concluding a formal alliance with Pyongyang, even while defending the latter’s “right to establish the unified independent nation.”<sup>10</sup> Moscow appeared to estimate that Pyongyang would become a potential ally only once it had unified the peninsula under its authority<sup>11</sup>. This measure allowed Moscow the necessary flexibility to prevent great powers from intervening in the peninsula until that goal was achieved.

During the Cold War era, the broad, Moscow-led alliance system was notably absent in East Asia, where most local communist movements operated without the backing of unified nation-states. As previously noted, even when the Kremlin eventually agreed to a formal alliance with Beijing, the Sino-Soviet treaty constituted a defensive commitment. It possibly even reflected a Soviet intention to prevent the two superpowers from militarily intervening in Chinese affairs. A key treaty clause evidences this defensive objective: immediately after Washington declared it would not be militarily engaged in Formosa (Taiwan) in early January 1950, Moscow accordingly stipulated the early withdrawal of its troops from Manchuria on the draft of the Sino-Soviet treaty, which strongly suggests that the Kremlin anticipated a reciprocal disengagement: American forces refraining from involvement in Formosa, and Soviet forces disengaging from Manchuria<sup>12</sup>.

Since the communist bloc failed to establish a “formal” multilateral alliance in East Asia, the “informal” ties stood as the core of the strategy. Unlike the conventional treaty system, this informal approach was responsive to constantly fluctuating circumstances, though it had begun to take a more definite shape around 1949. Under this system, the CCP, not Moscow, was primarily responsible for assisting its communist neighbors in advancing revolutionary struggles. However, this assistance was only of secondary importance to Asian comrades, for whom self-reliance was paramount. This formula (where each Asian communist force independently waged struggles, even if informally backed by foreign aid) deeply reflected the Chinese communist experience during the 1946-1949 civil war<sup>13</sup>. The

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<sup>10</sup> Telegramma I.V.Stalina Kim Ir senu [A telegram from I.V. Stalin to Kim Il Sung], October 12, 1948, Chaoxian Zhanzheng: Eguo dangan yuanjian [The Korean War: Original Russian Archive](hereafter KW)-1, 112 (in Russian), in the Center for Cold War International History Studies of East China Normal University (hereafter CCECN).

<sup>11</sup> Prior to the Korean War, Mao Zedong told Kim Il sung that they “could conclude the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance between China and Korea (after its unification) following the example of the Sino-Soviet treaty.” Shifirtelegramma N.V. Roshchina Filippovu [A ciphered telegram from N.V. Roshchin to Filippov], 14 May 14, 1950, RGASPI, f.558, op.11, d.334, l.56 (in Russian). Following this telegram, Stalin informed Mao that he also found it “totally right” to do so “after the unification of Korea.” Shifrovannaya telegramma A.Ya. Vyshinskogo N.V. Roshchinu [A ciphered telegram from A Ya Vyshinskii to N.V. Roshchin], May 16, 1950, RGASPI, f.558, op.11, d.334, l.57 (in Russian). These two telegrams are owned by the CCECN.

<sup>12</sup> Matsumura Fuminori, “Domei to Bungyo no aida: Chu-so kankei karamita higasi-asia reisen no kozo [The Sino-Soviet Relations Between Alliance and Power-Sharing: the Cold-War Structure in East Asia],” *The Historical Science Society of Japan, Rekishigaku Kenkyu [the Journal of Historical Studies]*, No. 1036, June 2023, pp.14-20 (in Japanese).

<sup>13</sup> Matsumura Fuminori “Mijukuna Chu-so bungyo Taisei (1949-1954nen): Sekairoren Asia renrakukyoku wo

strategy's primary goal was to insulate local conflicts from entanglement in great power politics, particularly the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. Nevertheless, Beijing ultimately functioned as the last stronghold for defending its foreign comrades when they were mired in a serious crisis, as dramatically illustrated by the Korean War<sup>14</sup>.

This "informal" strategy can be considered an outgrowth of the three-sphere structure that emerged between late 1948 and early 1949, as argued above. Its foundation lay, first, in the secure communist control of Manchuria; second, in the formulation of military operations in Southern China aimed at extending communist rule nationwide; and third, in cultivating ties with foreign communists across the border. Subsequently, the Sino-Soviet communist parties elaborated this strategy by engaging in their first in-depth discussions on the problems of Asian revolution. This paper aims to examine how both parties designed and refined the strategy across these three spheres.

### 1. The first sphere: revolutionary base areas in Manchuria

From late 1947 to the following March, the Northeast Democratic Allied Army (later renamed the Northeast Liberation Army) seized control of virtually all of Manchuria except for several major cities during its winter offensive. The remaining cities, such as Mukden, were captured six months later following the Liaoshen campaign. How the Soviet Union was engaged in this process of Chinese communist expansion remains to be fully elucidated and is not the central topic of this paper; however, it is necessary to briefly sketch its involvement below to provide context.

Prior to the end of WWII, Moscow made a formal alliance with the Chinese Nationalist Government led by Jiang Jieshi and advised it to "democratize" the regime by incorporating various elements, including the CCP. Stalin, however, simultaneously asserted that Manchuria was "the Soviet zone" where his army advanced to fight against Japan, insisting that "the Anglo-American and other foreign armies must not enter" the region<sup>15</sup>. Even as the Soviet army claimed a series of industrial projects in Manchuria as its war trophies, it failed to persuade Nationalist China to accept this position and eventually began to evacuate the area late in February 1946<sup>16</sup>.

Despite the formal alliance with the Nationalists, the local Soviet army maintained clandestine contacts with Chinese communists to substantially allow the latter to advance its armed forces. In

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tegakarini[The Immature System of the Sino-Soviet Burden-Sharing in Asian Revolutionary Movements: Re-considering the Asia-Pacific Bureau of the World Federation of Trade Unions],” the Japan Association for Asian Studies, *Aziya Kenkyu* [*Asian Studies*], Jan 2015, Vol.61, Issue.1, pp.38-54 (in Japanese).

<sup>14</sup> As is well known, Stalin left the final responsibility to Beijing by suggesting that “both Chinese and Korean comrades jointly make a final decision” on the North Korean invasion of the South (Shifrovannaya telegramma A.Ya. Vyshinskogo Mao Tsze-dunu [A ciphered telegram from A. Ya. Vyshinskii to Mao Zedong], May 14, 1950, KW-4, 574).

<sup>15</sup> Stalin told his position to Jiang Jinguo. Zapis’ besedy I.V. Stalina s Tszyan Tszingo [Minutes of Meeting between I.V. Stalin and Jiang Jinguo], 30 December 30,1945, Russko-kitayskie otnosheniya v XX veke. T. 4: Sovetsko-kitayskie otnosheniya. 1937-1945. Kn. 2 [Russian-Chinese Relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Vol.4: Soviet-Chinese Relations, 1937-1945, Book.2]. Ed. S.L. Tikhvinskiy. Moscow, Pamyatniki istoricheskoy mysli Publ. 2000 [hereafter SKO, IV-2], no.829, pp.329, 338 (in Russian).

<sup>16</sup> According to a report compiled by the first Far East department of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter MFA) a couple of years later, since Manchuria “had stood as a stronghold for attacking the Soviet Union for many years,” Moscow insisted that “the Soviet Union had the right to fully exploit war trophies it seized from the Japanese army.” Since June 1946, however, talks over “war trophies” between Nationalist China and the Soviet Union had halted because the local “politico-military situation changed.” F.A. Fedenko, Bopros o promyshlennom oborudovanii v Man'chzhupii (Spravka) [A problem of industrial facilities in Manchuria (information)] 11 October 11, 1949, Russko-kitayskie otnosheniya v XX veke. T. 4: Sovetsko-kitayskie otnosheniya. 1946- fevral' 1950. Kn. 2 [Russian-Chinese Relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Vol.4: Soviet-Chinese Relations, 1946-Feb.1950, Book.2]. Ed. S.L. Tikhvinskiy. Moscow, Pamyatniki istoricheskoy mysli Publ. 2005 [hereafter SKO, V-2], pp.392-396 (in Russian).

September 1945, Rodion Y. Malinovsky, in command of the Transbaikal Front, dispatched a delegate to Yan'an with a seemingly neutral directive: "both the Jiang [Jieshi's] Army and the Eighth Route Army must not enter Northeast before the Soviet Red Army withdraws." However, he simultaneously explained that "the Red Army would evacuate soon and not intervene in Chinese internal affairs," thereby informally authorizing local communists to advance into the Northeast, though not on behalf of the Eighth Route Army itself<sup>17</sup>. The following March, as the Red Army retreated from Manchuria, it informed the Northeast Bureau of the CCP Central Committee (NB) that the latter could march into the entire area being evacuated, specifically mentioning Mukden and Sipingjie.<sup>18</sup> While Chinese communists achieved fleeting dominance over northern Manchuria, the Nationalist forces immediately regained momentum, capturing Sipingjie and Changchun, among other cities.

Even after Soviet troops pulled out from Manchuria in May 1946, Moscow secured various forms of assistance for the CCP. The extensive railway restoration project in northern Manchuria exemplified this support<sup>19</sup>. With the Soviet Director of the Chinese Changchun Railway (CCR) Administration and his staff remaining in Harbin, Moscow further dispatched construction crews, engineers, and senior railway experts, fully restoring the northern railways by spring 1947. Moreover, the Kremlin escalated its support and decided to aid the recovery of railroads throughout the entire Northeast in May 1948, following the Chinese communists' winter offensive. The following month, Minister of Transport Ivan V. Kovalev arrived in Manchuria as the Soviet plenipotentiary, accompanied by 50 workers, 52 engineers, 220 experts, and others<sup>20</sup>. That November, the Soviet MFA agreed to send an additional "200 Soviet railroad workers to practically support marshaling railway operations."<sup>21</sup> The NB of the CCP appreciated this Soviet support for organizing the railway police, restoring railroads, and transporting troops<sup>22</sup>. Moscow remained willing to dispatch additional engineers and workers even later<sup>23</sup>.

Beyond the railway project, Soviet experts were ready to visit China to assist with broader recovery efforts<sup>24</sup>. The CCP sought to "invite Soviet experts immediately" to accelerate production in industrial

<sup>17</sup> The editorial team of the Biography of Peng Zhen ed., *Peng Zhen Nianpu [A Chronology of Peng Zhen]*, Vol.1, Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2012 (hereafter PZN), p.296 (14 Sep.1945); Yang Kuisong, *Zhonggong yu Mosike de guanxi 1920-1960 [The Relations of the CCP and Moscow from 1920 to 1960]*, Dongda tushu gongsi, 1997, pp.531-532 (in Chinese).

<sup>18</sup> A telegram from Pengzhen to the CCPCC, PZN-1, p.410 (16 Mar.1946). Actually Mao Zedong expressed his gratitude to the Soviet Politburo member by noting that "the Red Army" returned them the "Manchurian cities such as Harbin" and even supported their "reconstruction." *Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong]*, February 5, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.435, p.80.

<sup>19</sup> Then Chen Yun, the chief of the Financial and Economic Committee of the Northeast Bureau, reported in the senior board meeting of the Bureau that "the state-owned industries gained the highest position in the Northeast economy" in which "the most improved industry is marked by the railway" and "the integration of rail transport is essential for" industries. "Dongbei caijing wenti [The Northeastern financial and economic problems]", October 8, 11, 1948, *Zhonggongzhongyang wenxian yanjiusuo ed., Chen Yun Wenji [Selected Works of Chen Yun]*, Vol.1, Zhongyang wenjian chubanshe, 2005, p.644 (in Chinese).

<sup>20</sup> Shen Zhihua, *Sulian zhuanjia zai Zhongguo (1948-1960) [Soviet Experts in China from 1948 to 1960]*, Zhongguo guoji guangbo chubanshe, 2003, pp.34-40 (in Chinese).

<sup>21</sup> Pis'mo Gromyko na imya Molotova [A letter from A. Gromyko to Molotov], 23 November 23, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.379, p.483.

<sup>22</sup> Informatsiya I.Ya. Malinina I.V.Stalinu, dekabrya [Information from I. Ya Malinin to I.V. Stalin], 25 December 25, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.390, p.492.

<sup>23</sup> Telegramma Terebin [A. Ya.Orlova] F.Kuznetsovu [A telegram from Terebin to F. Kuznetsov], January 10, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.401, p.13.

<sup>24</sup> When Lin Biao, the commander of the Northeastern Field Army, asked to send "a group of at least 100 Soviet experts" in management fields, Molotov responded that they could not dispatch "such great number of the Soviet personnel" but no more than "10" (*Zapiska V.M. Molotova na imya I.V.Stalina [A Memorandum from V.M. Molotov to I.V. Stalin]*, October 6, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.354, p.464). Apart from this, Chen Yun requested "5 to 6 [Soviet] experts" to

centers like Anshan and Benxi, and even intended to “demand the Soviet Union to return large machinery it carried away from Northeast [China] after entering the area.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the quantity, variety, and route of freight imported from the Soviet Union were decided specifically in advance<sup>26</sup>. In addition, Mao Zedong appreciated Soviet assistance by noting that its military aid in Manchuria actually accounted for “a quarter” of its whole support and that they “received weapons free.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the Council of Ministers of the USSR approved both the opening of a current account for the “democratic regime in Manchuria” in the Gosbank of the USSR and the provision of a million rubles to the latter<sup>28</sup>.

Despite the diverse forms of assistance from Moscow, its relationship with the CCP remained strictly informal. This attitude was clear when Wang Shijie, Foreign Minister of Nationalist China, bitterly complained in February 1948 that “the Soviet news reports” were sympathetic to “the People’s Liberation Army.” N.T. Fedorenko, the Soviet ambassador to China, immediately reassured him that Moscow remained supportive of Nationalist China, both “morally” and “physically,” by confirming its “faithfulness to the Sino-Soviet treaty of 1945.”<sup>29</sup> However, a couple of months later, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (B) (hereafter AUCP Politburo) issued directives that underscored its dual strategy. It ordered that the “Position of the USSR embassy in China be self-restraint and strictly official in the relationship with the Chinese government and its agency,” but simultaneously instructed the ambassador to influence the Chinese leadership by “securing relations with progressive activists within the government groups.” Furthermore, it warned officials to “Be particularly careful of receptions and meetings with democratic and progressive elements by bearing in mind the illegal position of democratic and progressive organizations at present” and “cautiously clarify their plans and tasks” in conversations with them<sup>30</sup>. This nuanced directive can be interpreted as a strategy aimed at subtly undermining the foundational power of the existing Nationalist government. Moscow’s acute sensitivity to its informal contacts was also evident in its

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help with “crafting the two-year plan of economic development in Manchuria”. Here, Moscow was bound to deal with these two demands simultaneously (Dokladnaya zapiska N.T. Fedorenko na imya A.A. Gromyko [A Report from N.T. Fedorenko to A.A. Gromyko], December 22, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.389, p.491). In January, Molotov noted in a telegram to the CCP that “the Soviet government had already agreed to accept the [CCP’s] request to invite experts.” Thus, the Chinese communists made a list of 328 Soviet experts (including 22 in the industrial field, 66 in the military industry, 38 in financial and industrial colleges, and 14 in aeronautical machine repair), Zhongyang wenjian yanjiushi ed., *Chen Yun Nianpu (xiuding ben)* [A Chronology of Chen Yun (revised version)], Vol.1, Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2015 (hereafter, CCY), pp.688-689 (January 6, 1949, in Chinese).

<sup>25</sup> A drafted reply telegram from Chen Yun to Gao Gang, CCY-1, p.690 (January 10, 1949).

<sup>26</sup> For example, on New Year’s Day in 1949 the Soviet authority inquired Chinese communists of freight planning bound for Northern and Central China in the annual year beforehand. CCY-1, p.687 (January 1, 1949).

<sup>27</sup> Zapis’ besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong, February 4, 6, 1949], SKO, V-2, no.433, 437, p.69, 86. According to Political Affairs Division of the Pacification Office (the National Government), the Soviet army and the Chinese communists (Lin Biao and Xiao Hua) made a secret agreement on February 15, 1946. Some clauses stated that the Chinese “Communist Army approves the Soviet Army’s extended stay in Northeast to encourage the establishment of a Northeast self-government”; “The Soviet Army approves of giving all military demands to the [Chinese] Communist Army to satisfy its operational ability”; “Japanese weapons obtained by the Soviet Army will be transferred to the [Chinese] Communist Army in three separate phases” (“Zhonggong panluan ziliao [Materials of the Chinese Communists rebellion]” 1946, *Fawubu diaochaju tewu ziliao* [The Special Collection of the Investigation Bureau of the Ministry of Justice], Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica in Taipei [hereafter AIMH], 530-01-22-135, in Chinese).

<sup>28</sup> The Kremlin considered contributing funds for the international conference attendance fee for the “delegate of the Chinese liberated areas.” Pis’mo V. A. Zorina na imya A.N. Kosygina [A letter from V.A. Zorin to A.N. Kosygin], October 27, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.366, p.473.

<sup>29</sup> Zapis’ besedy N. T. Fedorenko c Van Shitsze [Minutes of Meeting between N. T. Fedorenko and Wang Shijie], 5 February 5, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.273, p.387.

<sup>30</sup> Dipektivny Politbyuro TsK VKP(b) [Directives of the Politburo AUCP], May 10, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.307, pp.420-421.

order for local consuls to “cease all of official consular activities in Chinese liberated areas.”<sup>31</sup>

Looking ahead to the military operation in South China, the CCP designated Manchuria as its key defense production center, where Soviet assistance would be essential. Ren Bishi, the Secretary-General, informed A.I. Mikoyan, a Politburo member, that they “focus heavily on Manchuria in their national economic programs to turn it into the national defense forge. It needs to manufacture automobiles, aircraft, tanks and other types of weapons.” To realize this goal, they hoped to secure Soviet assistance in the form of a “Sino-Soviet joint economic association” and “loans from the USSR.” In exchange, the CCP offered Moscow “concessions”: they were willing to discuss “joint exploitation” or give the USSR “a special concession” if “rare mineral resources such as uranium, magnesium, molybdenum and aluminum found near Mukden, Jinzhou and in Jehol province” were of interest to Moscow.”<sup>32</sup>

With the railway system in Manchuria providing momentum, the CCP sought to extend its success. Having “fundamentally restored” rail transportation in Manchuria, the CCP prioritized the rapid repair of “over 3,000 km of railways in North China,” specifically north of the Yangtze River. To address this expansion, the CCP and Soviet plenipotentiary Kovalev jointly crafted the “1949 annual plan” for railway operations, which included a new request to the Soviet Union for material aid such as steam trains and automobiles<sup>33</sup>.

While Manchuria (the first sphere) stood virtually as the CCP’s secure base and a Soviet sphere of influence, Moscow had to deal even more cautiously with local communists when their movements extended beyond this initial sphere.

## **2. The second sphere: governance in major cities in South China**

### **(1) Perceptions of the situation**

When crafting strategies for the second sphere, Chinese communists and Moscow closely assessed the rapidly evolving politico-military situation. In late March 1948, following his winter offensive, Mao Zedong reported to Stalin that if the war continued for another year (until the next spring), the armies of Jiang Jieshi and the CCP would be roughly balanced quantitatively. He projected that the annihilation of all the KMT [Chinese Nationalist Party] armies might be possible around July 1951<sup>34</sup>. However, as the military situation quickly turned favorable by the year’s end, Mao’s assessment to the Kremlin accelerated: the CCP “could fundamentally overthrow the power of the Nationalist Party” around late 1949. He argued that after the Xuzhou and Beiping campaigns, the Nationalist Party would “no longer hold the standing army.” The political climate was also deteriorating for the GMT, with

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<sup>31</sup> Given that “we have not established diplomatic and consular relationship with democratic organizations of government in Chinese liberated areas,” Moscow allowed Soviet consuls and vice-consuls in “Beiping, Tianjin, Harbin, Mukden and Manzhouli station” to merely “keep informal relations” with them only when “local democratic organizations” appealed to them or the MFA gave “special instructions.” Shifitelegramma I.V. Stalina A.Ya. Orlovu, [A ciphered telegram from I.V. Stalin to A.Ya Orlov, February 16, 1949], SKO, V-2, no.445, p.99.

<sup>32</sup> Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s chlenami politbyuro TsK KPK [Minutes of Meeting between A.I. Mikoyan and members of the Politburo of the CCPCC], February 2, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.430, p.55-56. Responses of Mikoyan and Stalin to this issue remains to be seen.”Sidalin zhi Migao yang dian [A Telegram from Stalin to Mikoyan],” February 3, 1949, Shen Zhihua ed., *Eluosi jiemi dang'an xuanbian: Zhongsu guanxi* [Selections of Russian Declassified Archives], Vol.1, Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 2015, pp.401-402 (in Chinese).

<sup>33</sup> Telegramma Mao Tzeduna I.V.Stalinu [A Telegram from Mao Zedong to I.V. Stalin], January 8, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.399, p.10.

<sup>34</sup> Dokladnaya zapiska F. Kuznetsova I.V. Stalinu [A Report from F. Kuznetsov to I.V. Stalin], March 30,1948, SKO, V-1, no.287, p.402-403.

“Decomposition and split is taking place inside,” making their supremacy “quite difficult to be retained.” Mao noted that the “Liberal bourgeoisie is all further swayed, finding a way out for us.” Around next summer, we will convene a Political Consultative Conference consisting of representatives of various democratic parties, groups, and people’s organizations and establish the democratic coalition government.<sup>35</sup> The internal CCP assessment mirrored this confidence. In early January 1949, the Politburo of the CCPCC stated that the “power balance between classes has drastically changed in China. The broad mass of people has broken off from the influence and control of the Nationalist Party in droves and taken our side”. The “representatives of democratic parties and people’s groups” are rushing to liberated areas. The “strategic fronts of the whole Nationalist Party north of the Yangtze River have already decayed,” leaving the party mired in “massive confusion and breakdown.”<sup>36</sup> Mao further expressed his confidence to the Kremlin, noting that even if the KMT formed a coalition government, the CCP would “not fear it” since “no democratic statesmen would join it,” and confidently predicted that by “at least late in July or early in August,” the People’s Liberation Army’s 1.500.000 regular troops would “move across the Yangtze River.”<sup>37</sup>

Mao asserted that the Nationalist Party “was about to be eradicated in any case,” citing two main grounds. First, its front was fundamentally fractured: Mao noted that Jiang Jieshi’s army under Tang Enbo remained in the Shanghai-Nanjing area, Chen Cheng was establishing a base on the island of Formosa (Taiwan), and the troops of Hu Zongnan and Bai Chongxi were stationed in the Xian and Hankou areas, respectively.” Given this dispersion, Mao concluded, “members of the Nationalist Party will fail to organize a strong front.”<sup>38</sup> Second, U.S. military intervention was becoming implausible. Mao observed that the “barefaced invasive policy of the U.S. government has already failed.” Americans now intended to shift from active support for the Nationalist Party to supporting local Nationalist and South Chinese juntas, aiming to exploit their forces to resist the People’s Liberation Army. Additionally, they sought to “intrude into” the upcoming Political Consultative Conference and the democratic coalition government by “organizing and sending their lackeys,” to form an opposition group and “undermine the people’s revolutionary front from inside.” This “latest intrigue” was evident in their “instigating and induction activities” aimed at “the right wing of the Democratic League” and “the leader of the Revolutionary Committee of the Nationalist Party.”<sup>39</sup> Mao pointed out that although Americans seemed to “count on Li Zongren, Shao Lizi and Zhang Zhizhong [soft-liners of the KMT],” the KMT’s disintegration had compelled Britain, the USA, and France to declare a non-intervention policy to China<sup>40</sup>. Mao thus implied that the U.S. army had no dependable foundational Chinese

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<sup>35</sup> Telegramma Mao Tszeduna na imya I.V.Stalina [A Telegram from Mao Zedong to I.V. Stalin], December 30, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.393, p.495-497.

<sup>36</sup> “Muqian xingshi he dang zai yijiusijunian de renwu [The Current Situation and the Party’s Missions in 1949]” (The document passed the Politburo meeting on January 8, 1949), Zhongyang dang’an guan ed., *Zhonggong Zhongyang wenjian xuanji* [Selected Documents of the CCPCC], Zhonggong Zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1992 [hereafter SDCCP], Vol.18, p.16 (in Chinese).

<sup>37</sup> Telegramma Terebin (A.Ya.Orlova) F.Kuznetsovu; Telegramma Mao Tszeduna I.V. Stalinu [A Telegram Terebin (A.Ya Orlov) to F. Kuznetsov; A Telegram from Mao Zedong to I.V. Stalin], January 10,1949, SKO, V-2, no.401, 402, pp.11-14.

<sup>38</sup> Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], 31 January 31,1949, SKO, V-2, no.427, p.41.

<sup>39</sup> Telegramma Mao Tszeduna na imya I.V. Stalinu [A Telegram from Mao Zedong to I.V. Stalin], December 30, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.393, pp.496-497.

<sup>40</sup> Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], January 31, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.427, p.41.

regime and was left with no choice but to plot indirect political penetration<sup>41</sup>. He expanded this perception globally, noting that “the atmosphere in the East is relatively thin and the atmospheric pressure in the West is heavy,” indicating they were “breaking through the part in which the imperialist power is relatively weak in the East.”<sup>42</sup>

By contrast, Moscow feared U.S. military intervention and was consistently concerned about the latter’s political and economic penetration into China. In May 1948, the Politburo directed local embassies to “carefully follow American’s activity in China,” focusing on several fields: “American’s cooperation and assistance with Jiang Jieshi in struggling against democratic elements in China,” the “forms and scales of penetration of American capital in China,” the “preparation for the military bridgehead against the USSR in China,” and the “collaboration (the essence, forms and methods of the collaboration) with Chinese government and organizations of the Nationalist Party in restraining interests of the USSR in China and the Far East, organizing political campaigns antagonistic to the Soviet Union, and resorting to other measures.”<sup>43</sup> In response to this external threat, the CCP had to rally a number of neutrals by marshaling a unified front instead of establishing one-party rule, in order to confront the Nationalist Party and its upholders, such as the Anglo-Saxons. Stalin explicitly advised Mao that various opposition political parties, which represented the middle class and opposed the Nationalist party’s inner circle, would “still survive long” in China. The CCP was thus “forced to draw them into the joint struggle against Chinese reactionaries and imperialist powers by securing the leadership, i.e., the leading position.” He stressed that the “Chinese national-democratic government” had to win some of these groups over to itself in order to “extend the foundation of the government among the population and isolate imperialists and their agents of the Nationalist party.”<sup>44</sup>

In January 1949, as Chinese communist forces were about to seize Beiping, Stalin suggested to Mao that “it might be better” to “convene the Political Consultative Conference and form the democratic coalition government [...] immediately after the liberation of Beiping.” Stalin’s urgency stemmed from his fear that members of the Nationalist Party might “hold the initiative in establishing the coalition government with the cooperation of Americans,” incorporate “some democratically oriented Chinese political activists” in their project, and “thereby prevent [communists] from uniting northern national-liberation forces in China.”<sup>45</sup> In contrast to Mao, who sought to establish the whole national regime, Stalin appeared to favor forming the new regime rapidly on the basis of Manchuria and North China, gradually chipping away at the existing government in the south. This caution may have been influenced by the Kremlin’s ongoing bitter struggle to deter the U.S., Britain, and France from integrating the three zones of West Germany, a struggle that included the bold, half-year-long Berlin blockade. This could prompt Stalin to be excessively scared of Political maneuvers led by Western

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<sup>41</sup> Then the CCPCC presumed that the US was “shifting to a two-pronged policy”: “on one hand, [it] supports the military remnants of the Nationalist Party,” but “on the other hand, [it] plots to undermine the revolution from inside” by manipulating “its pawns.” “Muqian xingshi he dang zai yijiusijiunian de renwu” [The Current Situation and the Party’s Missions in 1949],” SDCCP, Vol.18, p.17-18.

<sup>42</sup> “Zai Zhonggong qijie erzhong quanhuishang de zongjie [An overview at the Second Plenum of the CCP’s Seventh CC],” March 3, 1949, Zhonggong Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and Zhongyang dang’anguan eds., *Jiandang yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian [A Selection of Important Documents since the Founding the Party] (1921-1949)*, Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2011 [hereafter, SID], Vol.26, p.197 (in Chinese).

<sup>43</sup> Dipektivny Politbyuro TsK VKP(b) [Directives of the Politburo AUCP, May 10, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.307, p.420.

<sup>44</sup> Telegramma I.V. Stalina Mao Tszedunu [A Telegram from I.V. Stalin to Mao Zedong], April 20, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.295, p.412.

<sup>45</sup> Telegramma I.V. Stalina Mao Tszedunu [A Telegram from I.V. Stalin to Mao Zedong, January 6, 1949], SKO, V-2, no.396, pp.7-8.

Powers<sup>46</sup>. In any case, Stalin was significantly more wary of the U.S. strategic approach to China than Mao.

## (2) The localization of struggles

With the birth of the new Chinese regime in sight, leaders of the Sino-Soviet parties were bound to discuss its establishment in greater detail. Initially, Mao Zedong had a confidential plan to visit Moscow, but issues like diplomatic affairs and the alliance treaty seemed to be excluded from the agenda, as Zhou Enlai was not scheduled to join the visit<sup>47</sup>. However, in response to rapidly fluctuating situations inside and outside China, Mao's visit was repeatedly delayed and finally canceled in January 1949. Instead, Mikoyan secretly came from Moscow to Xibaipo in Shijiazhuang city, offering the CCP cadres a rare opportunity for intensive talks<sup>48</sup>.

Before and after Mikoyan's visit, both parties discussed a wide range of issues in detail. Crucially, their discussion was still predicated on the need to isolate the Chinese Civil War from the great power politics.

Above all, the Soviet Union adamantly refused to ally with local communists who had not yet unified their nations in East Asia. Even in Europe, its vital battleground for the Cold War, Moscow abstained from arranging a multilateral alliance system corresponding to NATO<sup>49</sup>. This refusal was even more pronounced for the divided nations in the Far East. On the Korean peninsula, even though Kim Il-sung craved a Soviet-Korean "treaty of friendship and mutual assistance," T. F. Shtykov, the Soviet ambassador to [North] Korea, refused by noting that "it is inexpedient to conclude the treaty under the current circumstances in which the nation is divided into two parts." He argued that such a treaty "could be exploited by the South Korean reactionaries to confront the [DPRK] government" in efforts to retain the separation of the nation.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, about six months prior, well before the U.S. military withdrawal from the peninsula, "the Soviet army completely evacuated from North Korea" in line with its earlier proposal for "the simultaneous retreat of foreign troops [from the peninsula], leaving the Korean people opportunities to establish their own government by themselves."<sup>51</sup> This Soviet action was likely aimed at separating local struggles from the US-Soviet rivalry<sup>52</sup>. This policy

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<sup>46</sup> In the early months, even as Stalin demanded the Western Powers to cease the integration of their zones in Germany, he stated clearly that he might not oppose "the integration of the three zones without the establishment of the Western Government". Zapis' besedy I.V. Stalin s U.B. Cmitom, U. Robeptcom i I. Shaten'o [Minutes of Meeting between I.V. Stalin, W. B. Smith, F. Roberts and Y. Chataigneau], August 2, 1948, *Sovetsko-amerikanskie otnosheniya. 1945-1948* [Soviet-American Relations, 1945-1948], Ed. G. N. Sevoc't'yanov. Moscow, Mezhdunarodnyy fond Publ. 2004, no.281, p.607 (in Russian).

<sup>47</sup> Shifrtelgramma A.I. Orlova v TsK VKP(b) [A Ciphred Telegram from A.I. Orlov to the CC of AUCP], April 22, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.296, pp.412-413.

<sup>48</sup> Stalin noted that "it is quite essential for you [Mao] to stay in China at present", suggesting to "dispatch a responsible member of the Politburo [AUCP] to you in Harbin or any other spots." Shifrtelgramma I.V. Stalina Mao Tzedunu [A Ciphred Telegram from I.V. Stalin to Mao Zedong], January 14, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.409, p.22.

<sup>49</sup> The Soviet government formally criticized the formation of NATO by claiming that "All of treaties of friendship [cooperation] and mutual assistance between the Soviet Union and people's democratic states have a biliteral character and are directed only against the possibility of Germany's re-invasion." Thus "it is absolutely impossible to interpret the treaties as antagonistic to the United States, Great Britain, or France to any degree". Memorandym pravitel'stv SSSR o cevepoatlanticheskome dogovope [A Memorandum of the USSR on the North Atlantic Treaty], March 31, 1949, *Sovetsko-amerikanskie otnosheniya.1949-1952* [Soviet-American Relations, 1949-1952], Ed. G. N. Sevoc't'yanov. Moscow, Mezhdunarodnyy fond Publ. 2006, no.10, pp.36-37 (in Russian).

<sup>50</sup> Shifrtelgramma T.F. Shtykova [A Ciphred Telegram of T.F. Shtykov], January 19, 1949, KW-1, 114-115.

<sup>51</sup> N. Fedorenko, Koreya (Spravka) [N. Fedorenko, Korea (Information)], January 31, 1949, KW-1, 130-131.

<sup>52</sup> After the US army withdrew from the peninsula in late June 1949, the Soviet ambassador Shtykov reported to Moscow that he "finds it possible and expedient for our friends to develop and offer all kinds of assistance and

extended to other Asian leaders: Ho Chi Minh, then waging the Indochina War, secretly visited Moscow around the time the Sino-Soviet alliance was concluded. He “jokingly” suggested to Stalin at the banquet that “you concluded the treaty with Chinese comrades. Why don’t we conclude the treaty as well during my stay here?” Stalin, however, failed to respond to the suggestion directly<sup>53</sup>.

In January 1949, Stalin refused Mao’s planned visit to Moscow, fearing that enemies would exploit his presence to discredit the CCP as a force dependent on the Soviet Union<sup>54</sup>. Mikoyan covertly met cadres of the CCP instead, but gave no pledge to ally with them. On the contrary, he boldly suggested, “If the Chinese Communist Party [...] finds the immediate retreat of [the Soviet] army [from the Port Arthur] expedient, the USSR is ready to move forward on it.” The Korean peninsula, where Soviet forces had already withdrawn in the absence of an alliance, served as a precedent for this policy. Caught off guard by the idea, however, Chinese comrades dismissed it, noting that “it ought not to retreat the Soviet troops from the Liaodong [peninsula] and abolish the base in the Port Arthur at present because it would only swell the USA.”<sup>55</sup>

Seeking to retain the backing of the Soviet army in Manchuria, Chinese communists were more earnest than Moscow over another measure aimed at separating local struggles from international politics: preventing great powers from mediating the Chinese Civil War. On January 9, the Nationalist Government in Nanjing requested governments of the U.S., U.K., France, and the USSR to mediate a cease-fire in China. Stalin initially intended to persuade Nanjing to “inquire of the other side [CCP] upon the acceptance of the USSR’s mediation” before “giving its [Moscow’s] agreement on the mediation.”<sup>56</sup> The idea, however, unexpectedly implied that the CCP might become the villain for refusing a peaceful settlement, which could prompt great powers to intervene ostensibly to maintain the existing regime. Fearing this possibility, Mao rarely refuted Stalin’s view, noting that the idea would cause a situation where “the U.S., Britain, and France could find it necessary to engage in the mediation and the Nationalist Party would gain the cause to insult us to be belligerent elements.” He stressed that the “U.S.A., Britain and France, especially the U.S.A., extremely aspire to mediate a cease-fire in China” to retain Nationalist authority. Mao urged Moscow to reply to Nanjing that “the USSR finds it unacceptable to engage in the mediation [...] under the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.”<sup>57</sup> Stalin sent Mao a reply cable to calm him down, explaining that they have no intention to “enforce” their advice and that Mao and the latter “accept or refuse” it. While declining the proposal “directly and bluntly” might “hand an important weapon such as the banner of peace over to the Nationalists” and provoke Washington to manipulate European and American public opinion by trumpeting that “the only means to achieve peace in China is organizing the military

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leadership to the partisan movement in southern Korea”. In this message, he hoped to localize the struggle on the peninsula. Telegramma T. Shtykova I.V. Stalinu [A Telegram from T. Shtykov to I.V. Stalin, September 15, 1949], KW-3, 340.

<sup>53</sup> Wu Xiuquan, *Zai waijiaobu banian de jingli* [My Career in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Eight Years] (1950.1-1958.10), Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1983, p.13 (in Chinese).

<sup>54</sup> Stalin was concerned that “Your [Mao’s] visit to Moscow in these conditions would be exploited by enemies to discredit the Chinese Communist Party as supposedly passive forces dependent on Moscow.” Telegramma I.V.Stalina Mao Tszedunu [A Telegram from I.V. Stalin to Mao Zedong], January 10,1949, SKO, V-3, no.403, p.16.

<sup>55</sup> Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], 6 February 6.1949, SKO, V-2, no.437, p.82.

<sup>56</sup> For Stalin, the CCP should have sought “direct negotiations with the Nationalist Party in the absence of any foreign mediators.” Telegramma I.V.Stalina Mao Tszedunu [A Telegram from I.V. Stalin to Mao Zedong], 10 January 10, 1949, SKO, V-3, no.403, pp.15-16.

<sup>57</sup> Telegramma Mao Tszeduna I.V.Stalinu [A Telegram from Mao Zedong to I.V. Stalin], January 12, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.407, pp.18-19.

intervention of great powers.” Stalin suggested Mao could opt for another choice: “admit[ing] the desire to restore peace” and advancing “negotiations between parties involved without foreign mediators.”<sup>58</sup> Both views soon converged. The Soviet government finally declined the mediation in the hope that “the unification of China would be fulfilled through direct negotiations between parties involved without foreign interference.”<sup>59</sup> Just ahead of that, Mao deliberately affirmed in his cable to Stalin that “you and I have completely agreed on the basic direction (the disruption of peace talks with the Nationalist Party and the continuation of revolutionary wars to the end).”<sup>60</sup> His assertion was likely aimed at nipping the bud of the possibility that great powers, including Moscow, could set restrictions on his warfare<sup>61</sup>.

### **(3) A combination of military and non-military tactics**

While Chinese communists had to avert foreign interventions carefully, their final goal of the civil war was the establishment of a new regime. How to expand the local government nationally was becoming a realistic issue. In January 1949, even as Stalin urged Mao to form a new coalition government, the latter was concerned about losing the CCP’s initiative. Mao noted that the coalition government could be established “even after the seizure of Nanjing, Wuhan, Shanghai, and a series of other cities, spring or next winter.” He asserted that “American imperialism and KMT have already totally lost credibility among people in China and therefore they have lost any substantial initiative.” In this scenario, he argued, if they were to form a coalition government, “it would not yield great influence.”<sup>62</sup> If we “establish the coalition government with those people [soft-liners of the KMT] on behalf of the latter, this matches with the desire of the USA government,” but would “damage the position we now take.” Thus, the CCP chose to “delay forming the coalition government” and “demand the unconditional surrender of the Nanjing government.” Mao’s “basic principle” was to let “Americans and Nationalists play all of their cards before we play our cards in the final moment.”<sup>63</sup> Mao even further downplayed the U.S. influence in China than Stalin did. Consequently, the CCP leaders virtually overlooked advice by Mikoyan, who also encouraged them to organize the new regime swiftly<sup>64</sup>. They were determined to “wage the war thoroughly” by raising eight conditions

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<sup>58</sup> Shifirtelegramma I.V. Stalina Mao Tszedunu [A Ciphred Telegram from I.V. Stalin to Mao Zedong], January 14, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.409, pp.21-22.

<sup>59</sup> Zapiska B.M. Molotova I.V. Stalinu [A Memorandum from B.M. Molotov to I.V. Stalin], January 17, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.414, pp.26-27.

<sup>60</sup> Shifirtelegramma Mao Tszeduna I.V. Stalinu [A Ciphred Telegram from Mao Zedong to I.V. Stalin], January 14, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.410, p.23. In fact, Stalin previously noted that as “the Nationalist Party would reject peace talks under the conditions raised by the CCP,” the latter consequently “could continue to wage the triumphant liberation war” (Telegramma I.V. Stalina Mao Tszedunu [A Telegram from I.V. Stalin to Mao Zedong], January 11, 1949, *ibid*, no.405, p.17). The phrases “[the continuation of war] to the end” was, however, exaggerated by Mao.

<sup>61</sup> When Australia proposed mediation by the United Nations, the CCP fully declined it by asserting that “any foreign governments or organizations of the United Nations absolutely lack the right to interfere in internal affairs of China.” “Zhonggong Zhongyang fayanren guanyu renhe waiguo zhengfu huo lianheguozuzhi wuquan ganshe zhongguo neizheng de tanhua [A Statement of the CCPCC’s spokesman on any foreign governments and organizations of the UN lacking the right to interfere in internal affairs of China],” February 13, 1949, SID, Vol.26, p.120.

<sup>62</sup> Telegramma Terebin F.Kuznetsovu [A Telegram from Terebin to F. Kuznetsov]; Telegramma Mao Tszeduna I.V. Stalinu [A Telegram from Mao Zedong to I.V. Stalin], January 10, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.401, 402, pp.11, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Telegramma Mao Tszeduna I.V. Stalinu [A Telegram from Mao Zedong to I.V. Stalin], January 12, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.407, pp.19-20.

<sup>64</sup> Mikoyan explained that if they prolonged the new regime until June to July 1949, “the revolutionary power would decay, the Chinese Communist Party would not enjoy great authority among people, and its appeal to the nonpartisan mass could not be as powerful as the resolutions of the [Nanjing] governmental authority”. Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], January 31, 1949, SKO,

unacceptable to Nanjing for peaceful settlement<sup>65</sup>.

When seizing South China, the CCP faced tough tasks less in military operations than in the governance of major cities, an area where it lacked experience. Mao told Mikoyan openly that “[a]t present, the pure military operations are gradually shifting to the peaceful offensive in the Nationalist major centers”. The recent “peaceful capture of Beiping” was a case in point. He projected, “[W]e will not wage the massive operations in Nanjing, Hankou, Shanghai and Guangdong” because, while “Formally, we have not yet won [...] but actually, the war is ending.” The CCP had to prepare to “confidently advance on southern China and seize its broad and economic central areas in the coming two to 3 months.” Nevertheless, Mao admitted, “[i]n the last two decades, we have had a few experiences in working among urban residents”<sup>66</sup>. He explained the shift in tactics: “[W]hen we captured territories north of the Yangtze, we seized the rural village first and the city later, usually resorting to the siege so far”. Now, however, “we are bound to capture major cities” directly when crossing the Yangtze to advance southward<sup>67</sup>. He highlighted the political challenge: “The communist party enjoys infinite influence in the rural village, lacking rivals there. But it is not the case in the city: even as the communist party enjoys strong influence among students here, the Nationalist Party is more powerful among workers than the communist party.”<sup>68</sup>

The governance of cities gained momentum late in January 1949 when communists bloodlessly advanced on Beiping. This strategy was best represented by the instructions of Peng Zhen (Secretary of the Beiping City Committee) to the cadres responsible for seizing and governing the city<sup>69</sup>. Mao explained that the peaceful surrender of Beiping occurred because “a few bigots” isolated themselves there after the fall of Tianjin. He touted the “peaceful settlement” as the people’s hope, noting that we have “legitimate reasons (compatible with the law of the Nationalist Party) to settle problems across the nation by complying with the Beijing-typed settlement” in the future<sup>70</sup>. In fact, the CCPCC calculated that “such places as Nanjing, Wuhu, Zhenjiang, Suzhou, Wuxi, Hangzhou, Shanghai, and more are already highly likely to be peacefully settled in a way that the Beijing problem was resolved.”<sup>71</sup> The CCP still naturally took the possibility of armed struggle into account and arranged

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V-2, no.427, p.37.

<sup>65</sup> “Zhongyang guanyu jieshi baxiang heping tiaojian de zhishi [The CC’s Directions How to Interpret 8 Conditions for Peaceful Settlement],” January 15, 1949, SDCCP, Vol.18, p.30.

<sup>66</sup> Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], February 5, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.435, pp.79-80.

<sup>67</sup> Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], February 6, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.437, p.86.

<sup>68</sup> Mao gave an example: after V-J Day, “200 thousand of 500 thousand workers in Shanghai were under the control of the communist party, leaving 300 thousand under that of the Nationalist Party”. Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], January 31, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.427, p.40.

<sup>69</sup> He indicated three aspects of the city governance. The first was to “hold the government in our grip [...] and eradicate the enemy”. The second was to “establish the democratic institutions”: only after round-table talks and extraordinary meetings of representatives were held in sequence could the conference of representatives be convened via the referendum. The last was to deal with “issues of industry and commerce”: “the productive power has to be liberated so that cities can serve peasants and exchange of materials can take place between cities and rural villages.” (Peng Zhen, “Zhangwo dang de jiben zhengce, zuohao ruchenghou de gongzuo [Grasp the Fundamental Policy of the Party and Conduct Well Business after Advancing on the City],” January 6, 1949, SID, Vol.26, pp.17-18). After that, Liu Shaoqi also explained secrets in governance of cities because “our cadres (including the member of the CC) are unfamiliar with operations among workers and know little of the circumstances of workers” (“Guanyu chengshi gongzuo de jige wenti [Several Problems in Governing Cities],” March 12, *ibid*, p.174).

<sup>70</sup> “Beiping wenti heping jieju de jiben yuanyin [Fundamental Reasons for Peaceful Settlement in Beiping],” February 1, 1949 (drafted by Mao and published on the “People’s Daily” two days later), SID, Vol.26, pp.99-101.

<sup>71</sup> “Zhonggong Zhongyang guanyu junshi xingshi he zhunbei dujiang nanjin ganbu de zhishi [The CCPCC’s Directions

three ways of struggle, flexibly responding to each local situation: the first was the Tianjin way of “devastating the enemy by armed combat”; the second was the Beiping way of “forcing enemy armed forces to employ the peaceful settlement”; and the last was the Suiyuan way of “deliberately maintaining part of the Nationalist Army [...] and incorporating those troops into the People’s Liberation Army [...] in the long term.”<sup>72</sup>

Chinese communists still had to carefully avert the intervention of the Western powers, creating a peculiar risk for governance in southern cities. While subverting existing local governments was an “internal affair,” doing so could cause the great powers to lose their “diplomatic” status and privileges. Therefore, even as the CCP sought the initiative in depriving the Nationalist Government of its political foundation and undermining the prerogatives of the Western powers, it had to avoid a military clash with foreign armies carefully.

Mao stated that operations in the south were aimed at “destroying the reactionary armed forces of the Nationalist Party.” As their local armies and governments were toppled, “imperialist political rule” and its “economic and cultural rule” could also be overthrown accordingly<sup>73</sup>. Mikoyan also indicated that, as “landowners and the Nationalist Party are foreign imperialist agents,” not only the former had to be eradicated, but also the “imperialist positions in the nation” had to be undermined<sup>74</sup>. However, Zhou Enlai found it essential to “pursue an independent policy without provoking foreign powers.” He intended to protect the “life and asset” of diplomats but deprive them of the “right to conduct their activity.”<sup>75</sup> The CCP speculated that if it refused to recognize representatives of “imperialist governments,” including Washington as “formal diplomats,” it “could hold a leading position in diplomacy and no longer be bound by any disgraceful diplomatic traditions.” As its basic policy, the CCPCC sought to secure its initiative by intentionally delaying diplomatic recognition<sup>76</sup>. The CCP’s hard-and-fast rule was not to provoke the U.S. armed forces but to surely counter their attack. Zhou explained that “whenever Americans disturb order, confront troops or authority, or repress them, the use of force is indispensable.” He concluded, “[W]e need not provoke Americans, but if they confront us, we will conduct a decisive counterattack against them<sup>77</sup>.”

The second sphere, located between internal and foreign affairs, exactly bridged the gap between the first sphere (the local government in Manchuria) and the third sphere (foreign communists). Here, Chinese communists arranged a set of conditions to wage the civil war by securing their initiative as

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for Cadres regarding the Military Situation and the Preparation for Crossing the Yangtze and Advancing on the South ],” February 3, 1949, SID, Vol.26, pp.105-106.

<sup>72</sup> Mao’s report at the Second Plenum of the CCP’s Seventh CC. Zhonggong Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi ed., *Mao Zedong sixiang nianpu (1921-1975) [A Chronology of Mao Zedong Thought (1921-1975)]*, Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2011, p.639 (March 5 to 15, 1949, in Chinese).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, pp.640-643.

<sup>74</sup> Zapis’ besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], February 5, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.434, p.76.

<sup>75</sup> Zapis’ besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], February 1, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.428, pp.45-46.

<sup>76</sup> “Zhongyang guanyu waijiao gonzuo de zhishi [The CC’s directions on diplomatic operations],” January 19, 1949, SDCCP, Vol.18, p.44. Mikoyan failed to respond clearly to the diplomatic policy of the CCP in Xibaopo. After a few months, however, Stalin told Mao that “it is required to restore official relationship only with capitalist governments which will officially refuse to support the Guangdong and Nanjing groups of the Nationalist Party” (Telegramma I.V. Stalina Mao Tszedunu [A Telegram from I.V. Stalin to Mao Zedong], April 19, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.467, p.120). This message might have required the CCP to ascertain whether the Western powers intended to modify the existing treaty system, instead of who took the initiative.

<sup>77</sup> Zapis’ besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Chzhou En’laem [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Zhou Enlai], February 1, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.428, p.45.

well as by carefully averting the intervention of the great powers.

### 3. The third sphere between foreign aid and self-reliance

The third sphere deeply reflected the Chinese communist experience in the second sphere. Immediately after the birth of the Cominform in Europe, its establishment was reportedly mirrored by a similar organization in the Far East. The Northeastern FASCOM of the Nationalist Government President reported that a Far Eastern Conference was held at the headquarters of the Northeast Democratic Allied Army in Harbin from November 24 to 27, 1947. Approximately 170 members of the Soviet, Chinese, Mongolian, Korean, Japanese, Indian, Myanmar, and Vietnamese communist parties allegedly assembled and decided to set up a Far Eastern Cominform in Vladivostok<sup>78</sup>. This information, however, remained uncertain in many respects and disappeared soon after<sup>79</sup>.

The “Sino-Soviet burden-sharing arrangement,” in which the CCP was tasked with leading neighboring communist movements, was formally proposed by Mikoyan during his secret January 1949 visit to China. This meeting was the first serious discussion of the idea between the two leaderships. Mikoyan stated that, according to Moscow’s view, the CCP was “bound not to join the Cominform” but rather to “organize the bureau of communist parties of East Asian nations under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.” This bureau was initially to involve three parties (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) and gradually incorporate others<sup>80</sup>. This arrangement was based on the premise that the revolutionary paths of Russia and European people’s democratic states were “not suited for China.” The key distinction was that while the Russian Revolution lacked an anti-imperialist character, the long-term imperialist oppression in China meant its revolution, and those of its neighbors, had a distinct anti-imperialist character.<sup>81</sup> The project thus positioned the CCP as the new center for advancing “anti-imperialist” struggles in East Asia, because China was seen to share revolutionary conditions with its neighbors. By handing off the regional leadership role, the plan indicated the Soviet Union’s intention not to become directly involved in local struggles, thereby avoiding confrontations with the Western powers.

Chinese communists faced a dilemma here. Given that the regional leadership project was too heavy to undertake alone, they definitely sought massive Soviet support. To secure it, however, they had to accept the Soviet idea partially. Moreover, neighboring revolutionary struggles were seen as more similar to the Chinese experience than to the Russian Revolution.

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<sup>78</sup> The CCP was represented by Zhou Enlai, Li Lisan and Linbiao. A Telegram from the Northeastern FASCOM to the Foreign Minister etc., January 14, 1948, “Sulian xiangguan ziliao dianbao huicun [The Collection of Related Materials and Telegrams of the Soviet Union]”1947, Waijiaobu [The Foreign Ministry], AIMH, 11-30-16-09-007.

<sup>79</sup> Then, a newspaper in Shanghai reported that Siamese Communists also attended the conference, according to a British Communist cadre. It also referred to Reuters news, noting that even though Japanese Communists could not secure their passports to join the conference, communists among Japanese captives informally participated (*Xinwenbao*, November 30, 1947, in Chinese). And an official of the Public Security Intelligence Agency of Japan noted that “the Far Eastern working committee of the Cominform’ was organized (in Harbin?) by Chen Shaoyu [Wang Ming], a leader of the internationally oriented members of the CCP, and representatives of 8 nations, including Russians, Koreans, and Japanese”. As Chen was disgraced from the party in spring 1949, however, “the Far Eastern Cominform was said to fall through and cease activities accordingly” (Toyokichi Tsuboi, <Senzen-Sengo> *Zainichi Douhou no ugoki: Zainichi kankokujin (Chousen) kankai siryo* [<Before and After the War> *The Trend of Compatriots in Japan: Materials Related to Koreans in Japan*], Jiyuseikatusha, 1975, p.72, in Japanese).

<sup>80</sup> Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], February 3, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.432, p.63.

<sup>81</sup> Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], February 5, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.434, p.76.

Thus, Mao Zedong initially tried to impress Mikoyan as one of the staunch members of the Soviet-led bloc. He stated that “China has to stand in the anti-imperialist camp under the leadership of the Soviet Union” and “we have no middle course.” Zhou additionally emphasized that “basic problems will be decided in Moscow.”<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, Mao showed his intention to accept the burden-sharing arrangement, though modestly. In his telegram to Stalin in the summer of 1948, when he was still scheduled to visit Moscow, he proposed discussing a series of issues, including “the association of revolutionary forces in the East and relations between communist parties in the East (and the others).”<sup>83</sup> When Mikoyan formally raised the burden-sharing idea half a year later, Mao cautiously responded that “it remains premature to organize the bureau of communist parties of Asian states, similar to the bureau of communist parties in Europe,” citing his poor communication with various Asian communist parties. He suggested, “We can come back to this issue when we seize southern China and our position is reinforced.” Mao further offered a modest starting point: “It is expedient to initially organize the bureau consisting of representatives of communist parties not of all Asian nations but of some of them, for example, representatives of Chinese, Korean, Indochinese and Philippine communist parties.” He suggested informing the Japanese and Korean parties first<sup>84</sup>. Mao obviously postulated that the Russian and Chinese revolutions were different from each other in their characteristics<sup>85</sup>.

When encouraging neighboring communists to advance their struggles, the CCP had no option but to refer to its own experience, in which it depended mainly on “self-reliance” even while informally receiving “foreign aid” in the absence of a military alliance with a great power. In May 1949, Mao implied that local struggles should advance primarily through their own efforts, noting in his telegram to Moscow that “it might be premature to organize the [Eastern] Cominform because the establishment of the Cominform could be assumed as the formation of the military alliance at a time when wars are taking place in China and Indochina as well as Korea is in a state of tension.”<sup>86</sup> Ahead of the showdown with the Nationalist Party, Mao indicated to Stalin that it was essential to “augment its own forces and secure its independence from outside assistance.”<sup>87</sup> When discussing the linkage between governance in cities and the rural economy, Mao frankly told Mikoyan that “[w]e are glad the USSR gives us earnest support and assistance, but we cannot conquer [the war] only by expecting outside assistance,” underscoring that the principle of self-reliance was indispensable for nation-building<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], February 4, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.433, pp.68, 72.

<sup>83</sup> Mao added that “it is necessary to reach agreement so that our political course can fully accord with the USSR.” Telegramma A. Ya.Orlova F.Kuznetsovu [A telegram from A. Ya Orlov to F. Kuznetsov], July 28, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.337, pp.451-452.

<sup>84</sup> Mikoyan accepted this suggestion. Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], February 3, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.432, p.63.

<sup>85</sup> Mao said that “while the socialist revolution took place in Russia, our revolution is new democratic”. The industry accounts for only 10% of the Chinese economy. In order “not to provoke national bourgeoisie, now we will not confiscate private industrial capital and its enterprises.” And “therefore our transitional period [to socialism] will be longer than the USSR.” Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s Mao Tszedunom [Minutes of Meeting Between A.I. Mikoyan and Mao Zedong], February 6, 1949; Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s chlenami politbyuro TsK KPK [Minutes of Meeting between A.I. Mikoyan and members of the Politburo of the CCPCC], February, 1949, SKO, V-2, no.437, 439, pp.83-84, 93.

<sup>86</sup> Shifritelegramma T.F. Shtykova A .Ya. [A Ciphred Telegram from T.F. Shtykov to A. Ya. Vyshinskomu], May 15, 1949, KW-2, 238.

<sup>87</sup> Mao naturally added that “this, of course, does not mean it [outside assistance] is not necessary for us” (Dokladnaya zapiska F. Kuznetsova I.V. Stalinu [A Report from F. Kuznetsov to I.V. Stalin], March 30, 1948, SKO, V-1, no.287, p.402).

<sup>88</sup> Zapis' besedy A.I. Mikoyana s chlenami politbyuro TsK KPK [Minutes of Meeting between A.I. Mikoyan and

Whilst Chinese communists sought Soviet protection by participating in the Moscow-led bloc, they were simultaneously expected to share the burden in East Asia. The golden mean between these two seeming extremes was generated by the CCP's own experience: only with "informal" assistance to neighboring communists could the CCP expect each of them to struggle "mainly" on the basis of self-reliance, thereby avoiding a commitment to a formal alliance. The prototype of the Cold War strategy in East Asia arose from this formula, in which each local communist force individually confronted the Western powers, though informally backed by the CCP (or sometimes Moscow)<sup>89</sup>.

## Conclusion

According to a previous study, Chinese communists were determined to "lean to one (Soviet) side" when consolidating their power to rule over Manchuria immediately after the end of WWII. This alignment allegedly led to the offensive Sino-Soviet alliance and finally caused the risky war on the Korean peninsula. However, the view that the Eastern bloc somewhat symmetrically confronted the Western world, a perspective suitable for understanding the Cold War in Europe, is not necessarily appropriate for East Asia. Both the CCP and Moscow always devoted much effort to separate local conflicts from great power politics when extending Chinese communist rule to the second and third spheres beyond Manchuria. The core of their strategy lay in the "informal" struggle in the absence of a "formal" alliance system. This formula was further extended to China's neighbors. Consequently, the Cold War conflict was asymmetrical in East Asia: the Western powers were challenged individually by each local communist force that had not achieved national unification yet, with Moscow deliberately taking a backseat. Actually, in the Korean War, Beijing joined the war on the front lines even while receiving Soviet "informal" aid, lacking the Sino-Soviet "formal" commitment to waging the war. This strategy originated from the formula that was devised well before the Sino-Soviet alliance was formed.

The asymmetrical structure of the Cold War in East Asia can be more vividly demonstrated by comparing the alliances of both blocs. In the Western camp, the U.S. successively arranged a series of bilateral alliances in the region to pursue the policy of "dual containment": Washington aimed to contain not only Communist expansion but also its local allies' use of force<sup>90</sup>. This alliance system still exists today, offering the U.S. nuclear umbrella to local allies to prevent the latter from possessing nuclear weapons. In stark contrast, however, the Eastern bloc lacked a multilateral "formal" alliance system, relying instead on its "informal" strategies in the region. This policy even allowed its key local ally, Beijing, to develop nuclear weapons. To understand the essence of the short-lived Sino-Soviet Alliance, nothing is more crucial than understanding the "informal" strategies that appeared well before the conclusion of their "formal" alliance.

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members of the Politburo of the CCPCC], February 1949, SKO, V-2, no.439, p.93.

<sup>89</sup> As to this big picture, see Matsumura Fuminori, "Chu-So domei niokeru Peking no jiritsu katei: gendai higashi Asia kokusaiseiji no genfukei [Rising and Independent Positions of Beijing in the Sino-Soviet Alliance: the Fundamental Structure of Contemporary International Politics in East Asia]," *The Society of Modern and Contemporary China Studies* (Japan) ed., *Gendai Chugoku kenkyu [Modern and Contemporary China Studies]*, Vol.52, March 2024, pp.21-38 (in Japanese).

<sup>90</sup> Victor D. Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia*, Princeton University Press, 2016.