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NEW CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC ACHIEVEMENTS (1949-1979)

Abstract

China is a powerful and influential country in the world and one of the major players in global politics nowadays, which has achieved significant success in the fields of economics and international affairs by the thoroughly calculated steps. Together with it, China's opinion and attitude to various international issues are worthy of consideration for every state. It is noteworthy that the foundation of all those achievements was laid thanks to Zhou Enlai's farsightedness. While the first task of the New China 1949, i.e., the People's Republic of China, was to gain world recognition, he made the greatest effort and worked very hard for China to achieve the above status. In those difficult times, Zhou not only saved China but actually forced the world to recognize it and look up to it. Zhou had to act in the difficult reality of the struggle of powers, but with his diplomatic prudence and consistency, he did not get used to such struggle. On the contrary, he set an example of how tactics could be a better servant than force if a person can think of them.

This article presents the concrete achievements, tactics used and steps taken that laid the foundation for the Chinese Diplomatic School.

Keywords: New China, diplomacy, foreign policy, Zhou Enlai.

Establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. The arrival of the Chinese Communist government to power in 1949 ended the civil war, which had been going on since 1927, between the government of Chiang Kai-shek (aka Jiang Jieshi) and the Communist guerrilla movement. From the earliest days, Zhou Enlai worked in two capacities, namely, in the position of Prime Minister of the State Administration Council of China and the position of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.¹

1949 was a period when China was still facing serious problems due to its internal confrontation and civil war, the New Chinese diplomacy was taking its first steps and lacked a sufficient number of qualified personnel. At that time, Zhou brought in motion the principle of "starting everything all over again, yet differently", i.e., the vast majority of old diplomats were replaced by the diplomat cadres, selected from those who have come over the side of the new government from the opposition, as well as professionals from the government and military structures and trained graduates. After retraining them, Zhou developed a new model of diplomacy with the credible, professional, politically aware, well-disciplined, and tightly united diplomatic team.

Many Foreign Ministry officials wrote that Zhou Enlai actually trained a diplomatic contingent as well as created and developed a new style of diplomacy. He used to say: "China's new foreign policy should not be limited to working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but, at the same time, we should conduct official, semi-official as well as the people's diplomacy".²

¹ Even when Zhou Enlai had handed over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China to Marshal Chen Yi (1958-1972), he remained the de facto ruler of China's foreign policy. Until the end of his life, he was traveling and visiting foreign countries on regular basis. Zhou remained in power until 1976, i.e., until his death, and as mentioned before, in fact, he was always defining the foreign course of the country and, despite many obstacles, was achieving splendid results.

² The term "people's diplomacy", also known as "public diplomacy", was introduced by Zhou Enlai in China in the 1950s, which meant the conduction of diplomatic relations with those countries with whom he had no diplomatic relations at that time. Public diplomacy was focused mainly on the interests of the people and played an important role in establishing and strengthening friendly relations between them. In 1954, the People's Association for Foreign Relations of China (中国人民对外友好协会 CPAFFC) was

In the early 1950s, during his first appearance at the Foreign Ministry, Zhou Enlai stressed in his speech that the new Chinese diplomacy should be “independent and self-confident”. In this respect, Zhou introduced the new principle – “inviting guests after tidying up the room”, and he announced that all the diplomatic or consular missions abroad have to get rid of their diplomatic statuses, and the restoration would depend on whether extra demands will be made to China or not, and, above all, whether the new China be recognized solely, and the equality be preserved or not. In case these countries continued their cooperation with Chang Kaishi’s Taiwan, they would terminate the diplomatic agreements with them. It can be said that Zhou Enlai personally taught future diplomats everything, starting from political ideas or resolutions ending with professional skills, that included ideological training, organizational activities, specific work styles or methods, etc. The negotiations were also constantly held with foreign countries to strengthen the new Chinese statehood and expand the future bilateral relations with other countries.

Zhou Enlai taught colleagues about unitedness, how to avoid splitting and conflicts, urged them “to stand firm on their positions” and “to care of the constant enhancement of their qualifications”. He worked selflessly, and he often had to receive guests even at the hospital when he was ill. The Prime Minister taught the Chinese diplomats to be always modest and cautious and by no means arrogant and impulsive; he demanded from them to treat people equally fairly and, at the same time, to maintain poise. Zhou Enlai requested from them to have responsible and honest approaches to work, to strive for perfection in it that much to not allow even small untidiness or superficiality, and, in all these, Zhou Enlai himself remained exemplary for his pupils. Although he was demanding towards diplomats, he was also inspiring and encouraged them to express their views courageously and act freely. Prime Minister Zhou was giving great importance to the principle of involvement of representatives of all generations in various jobs and in foreign relations the priority was given to training young people, including female employees (“Renmin Ribao” 1977).

In the first years of New China’s formation, the Foreign Ministry still did not have relevant specialized divisions for different countries. Zhou Enlai himself was getting familiar with the detailed information about any particular country in which he had to visit or planned to meet with the country representatives.

Zhou realized that the new China inevitably needed new diplomacy that could consolidate the achieved victory by which the independence of the People’s Republic of China was attained. It was clear that without international recognition and support, the victory of the Chinese revolution and the power maintenance would have been impossible. This, on the other hand, meant that without all that has been mentioned, China would again become dependent on others and thus will pose a serious threat to its statehood. Therefore, the timely action, right, and consistent foreign policy was essential for the country, and the task of the New Chinese diplomacy was concluded – to establish allied relations with the Soviet Union and to pursue a policy of “self-empowerment” within the framework of cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, which had to be concluded through appropriate diplomatic acts. On September 30, 1950, Zhou made a report on China’s international status and announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with around twenty countries.

Stages of New China Foreign Policy. The name of each stage of the New China foreign policy defined the main process taking place in the country by a particular period:

The first stage (1949-1959) – the process of the New China’s “struggle for rising up”: since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the New China has been pursuing a foreign policy, in particular, so-called diplomatic relations “from the clean sheet of paper” and was acting according to the country’s fundamental interests, that of national independence and sovereignty. More precisely postulated as follows:

- Protection of the hard-won independence;
- Non-interference in the domestic politics of the politically sovereign country;
- Creating an economically independent country that would not be dependent on foreign funding.

This was the main part of the New China foreign policy, based on which its foreign problems were gradually resolving; the concession of these interests was inadmissible.

established, which still operates in China and its main goal is to promote the friendship and mutual understanding of the Chinese people with the peoples of all countries of the world as well as to stimulate exchange and cooperation in the political, economic, trade, scientific, technical and cultural fields (<https://cpaffc.org.cn/>).

Zhou Enlai developed a policy of refraining temporarily from establishing diplomatic relations with certain countries because their attitudes towards the issue of Taiwan were unacceptable by China. Therefore, he envisaged the establishment of relations only in the sphere of trade or other with those countries.

At the beginning of this stage, Enlai acted on the principle of “standing on one side”, i.e., focusing on the Soviet Union and the socialist camp, which he considered to be the first and necessary condition for the restoration of the country and entering the great arena of international politics. Soon China began to work closely with the Soviet Union in various fields.

During the reception of the Indian delegation in December 1953, Zhou first initiated the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”. In 1954, he had led a Chinese delegation to the Geneva Conference, where he held talks with stakeholders in order to resolve relations in Indochina and introduced them to the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”. As a result, North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia gained independence and international recognition. At this stage, China also began to resolve territorial issues; it established friendly and cooperative relations with Asian and African countries.

In April 1955, Zhou Enlai’s principle of “seeking the common ground for cooperation”, literally, “seeking the common ground, regardless of the differences or problems”, became the main guide for resolving various dissimilarities in relations, which brought China the diplomatic success. Zhou Enlai himself was saying the following about the unique principle of diplomacy: “Different countries in the world have different political systems and different ideologies, it is very difficult to reach the harmony, and in order to exist together on earth, we have to go beyond our varied perceptions and thoughts” and “find a touch point”. In this manner, Zhou Enlai discovered shared points between countries thanks to the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, and this is the strategic value of “seeking the common ground for cooperation” (Qian 1989). As for the specific diplomatic negotiations, in order to reach a general agreement, first of all, it takes diligence and desire and then patience, compromise, pragmatism. Zhou Enlai was able to find common ground even in case of any serious disagreement; he used to temporarily set aside a dissenting opinion in the relevant situations.

The second stage (1960-1969) – the process of “balancing” New China: in a difficult world reality, China was no longer afraid of threats and demonstrations of force; it defended its sovereignty and dignity. China continued to “fight for and maintain the independence of oppressed countries or nations”; it resolved the problems of historical borders with some neighboring countries; established and developed friendly relations with Asian and African countries and Latin America. New progress has been made in China’s relations with Western Europe and Japan. The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France in 1964 marked a breakthrough in the normalization of relations with Western European countries. China’s reconciliation with Western Europe during this period was also due to the conflict between Khrushchev and Mao Zedong.

This period is marked by the beginning of a “Cultural Revolution” in China in 1966, which was periodically hindering Zhou Enlai’s foreign relations. During the “Cultural Revolution”, diplomatic work was severely damaged. Zhou Enlai, who was in extremely difficult conditions, strongly opposed the attempt of the “Gang of Four”³ to control foreign affairs and made every effort to protect Foreign Ministry personnel, who were being persecuted by them. Thus, the employees managed to pursue diplomatic activities. Since 1968, thanks to Zhou Enlai, the diplomatic relations were gradually restored and returned to normal phase (Qian 1989 - <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/69112/75843/75873/5166888.html>).

Since 1968, China has declared that the fight against “US imperialism” and “Soviet revisionism” has become a central issue in the foreign policy of the People’s Republic of China. As a result, relations between China and the Soviet Union broke down in almost every area. The Soviet Army’s invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was perceived as a potential interference in China’s internal affairs. At the official reception, which took place on October 30, 1968, Zhou Enlai declared that “everything is expected of them, including the invasion of China”. Earlier, in addition to disagreements and incidents on other issues, China made a territorial claim to Russia, which irritated the USSR, and this led to a tightening of the latter’s positions.⁴

The third stage (1970-1979) – the process of New China “standing squarely on its feet”: in the 1970s, in the wake of the international situation’s cardinal changes, China intensified its cooperation with

³ 四人帮 - “Gang of Four”, the group during the Cultural Revolution, in which Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, Jiang Qing, Yao Wenyuan were united.

⁴ Russia occupied the territory of China in its time (the territory includes current areas of Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Kamchatka, Sakhalin, Blagoveshchensk, etc., the total area is 1.5 million sq. km.).

developing countries. It supported them in the “struggle against imperialism, colonialism, hegemony, racism and expansionism”; actively assisted and participated in the quest of achieving a new international order in developing countries. However, amid strained relations with the Soviet Union, China began to look for new ways to enter the international arena and started the process of sorting out Sino-USA relations. As a result of successful “ping-pong diplomacy”⁵, relations with the United States have eased. China and the United States have begun active cooperation in economic, political, cultural, and other fields.

In October 1971, China regained its legitimate place in the UN, established diplomatic relations with multitudes of countries, and developed friendly and partnering relations in various fields. The international status and role of the People’s Republic of China have been growing day by day, and China soon became the influential force in the international arena, disregarding which was no longer possible.

Zhou Enlai worked hard to sort out relations with Japan; he received numerous delegations focused on discussing various issues, with whom he conducted intensive negotiations. In 1971, Prime Minister Zhou introduced three principles for the restoration of diplomatic relations between China and Japan:

- The Government of the People’s Republic of China is not the only legitimate government representing China;
- Taiwan is an integral part of the territory of the People’s Republic of China;
- “Japan-Taiwan Agreement” is illegal; it shall be annulled.

Japan recognized these three principles, based on which in 1972, the relations between Japan and China were sorted out. Zhou Enlai condemned the aggression against China with varied forms at different times and places, among them, so-called attempts to establish “two China”, “one China and one Taiwan” or “one China and two governments”. This struggle is still ongoing in modern China (Geng 2014).

By the end of 1976, the last year of the Cultural Revolution, China had established diplomatic relations with all developed countries except the United States. In 1976, the volume of trade with them far exceeded the trade turnover with the socialist countries.

The beginning of the third phase, in the 1970s, proved to be crucial, as relations between China and the USA have warmed up. And with the normalization of Sino-US relations, China has fulfilled its core mission of establishing diplomatic relations with the vast majority of countries.

As long as the USA did not relinquish its position on the Taiwan issue and did not refuse to recognize Taiwan, the establishment of diplomatic relations was delayed. In 1973, China proposed to the United States “three principles for the establishment of Sino-USA diplomatic relations”:

- To resolve the diplomatic relations between the United States and Taiwan;
- To cancel the USA-Taiwan Mutual Defense Agreement;
- To withdraw USA troops from Taiwan.

However, it was only during the presidency of James Carter when the US government realized that the normalization of Sino-US relations also fitted to the strategic interests of the US and saw the need to show courage and accept the “Three Principles”. Already in January 1979, US-China diplomatic relations have been established. The United States has recognized the government of the People’s Republic of China as the only legitimate authority in the country; however, this was agreed with one condition that the USA will maintain the informal relationship with Taiwan (Geng 2014). The parties agreed to resist each attempt of any country’s hegemony. Although Zhou Enlai continued his activities, in fact, till 1976, only after his death, the baton was passed still to his worthy successor and accomplice, Deng Xiaoping.⁶

⁵ Creative methods of diplomacy, including “ping-pong diplomacy” and “panda diplomacy”, have been employed in the international relations of China in times of Zhou Enlai. He, despite the twenty years of tension between the countries, took an extraordinary step to sort out relations with the USA, later on, it was called “ping-pong diplomacy”. Namely, Zhou invited the USA national table tennis team to China for a demonstration match in Beijing. The team was personally hosted by Zhou Enlai. This was followed by a historic visit to China by Henry Kissinger and, later on, in 1972, the President of the United States of America. Overall, this was seen as a success for Chinese diplomacy in sorting out Sino-USA relations, followed by other important international events – the establishment of diplomatic relations with about 110 countries from 130 independent countries in the 1970s, which was Zhou’s next success.

⁶ As far back as the twenties of the last century, in France, fate made two members of the Chinese diaspora meet each other; they were Zhou Enlai, who was the leader of the Chinese Communist Movement at that time, and Deng Xiaoping. The close friendship began between them in France, which played an important role in the future life and work of Deng. By becoming friends with Zhou Enlai, he acquired the permanent patron, teacher, and mentor. Zhou rescued his friend from many difficult periods of his life. Deng, in his time, worked with Zhou Enlai on the New China creation plans. Under Enlai’s influence, Deng joined the Chinese Socialist Youth Union in 1922 and the European branch of the Chinese Communist Party in 1924. Thus, with the support and influence of Zhou, Deng Xiaoping first started working in a party and as a professional revolutionary, and later on, he became the major reformer of the People’s Republic of China.

Deng Xiaoping, for his part, was focused on economic reforms and began pursuing an “open door policy”. During this period, the international situation in China underwent serious changes. If one would have compared the power of the USA with that of the USSR, the one of the USA would enjoy the advantage. The Soviet Union’s military threats against China were relatively small. However, China needed a peaceful international environment to carry out large-scale reforms. To this end, Deng Xiaoping made major changes to his diplomatic strategy and refused to use the rigid or ideological foreign policy as an orientation point for any social system, emphasizing diplomacy as the determinative of the country’s successful economy, New World political and economic harmony or order.

Summary of the New China Foreign Policy Achievements. The New China, which had lost hope by experiencing a crisis on every side, had to take care of rebuilding everything, to maintain the country’s security and territorial integrity that would have been unimaginable without diplomatic relations with foreign countries and without China entering the international arena. In the 1970s, thanks to Zhou Enlai, it gradually achieved success. It is noteworthy that the latter has contributed to the formation of a new model of the professional, reliable diplomatic team and diplomatic mechanism.

The sorting out the Sino-USA relations proved to be strategically important, after which China regained its legitimate place in the UN and became one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and thus one of the main responsible countries for international peace and security in the world, as all UN members have to obey the decisions of the UN Security Council’s permanent members.

Here is a paragraph from the resolution, on basis of which the expulsion of Taiwan from the UN and the adoption of the People’s Republic of China took place: “The General Assembly, in accordance with the UN Charter’s principles, recognizes that the Government of the People’s Republic of China is China’s sole legal representative to the United Nations; China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council; it recovers the People’s Republic of China in its rights and recognizes the representation of its government as its only legal representative in the UN; it will also seize Chang Kaish’s position in the UN and all related agencies in the accelerated manner”⁷ (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/192054#record-files-collapse-header>).

According to the UN resolution, Taiwan’s expulsion was supported by 75 UN member states, with 17 abstaining and 35 opposing. Among those 35 members who opposed was the United States also, which offered to reserve a seat for Taiwan at the UN, but this offer was not supported by other UN members, including Western Europe and Latin America, the entire socialist camp, and the Arab world. India, Turkey, Iran, and Canada also supported Taiwan’s expulsion from the UN.

China’s area of diplomatic activity is growing rapidly, and the country’s foreign policy is reaching the pinnacle of its success, already covering almost the entire international arena. Diplomatic relations are being established with the vast majority of countries, which is the result of Zhou Enlai’s correct, purposeful and effective policy and proves his success and significant contribution to China’s foreign policy. In the process of sorting out and restoring relations, some were indeed used to call Zhou Enlai for harsh actions, but his words – “What is the use of diplomacy if we will not refrain from letting each other become destroyed?” (Zhang 2006) – are still considered as the backbone of China’s foreign policy. Thus the principle of the Zhou Enlai – “Seeking the common ground for cooperation” – is not losing its relevance.

This principle is still genuine and practical in terms of its effectiveness. For example, after Biden was elected as the president, China voiced its position, namely, readiness to sort out relations with the United States. According to Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Le Yucheng: “This year marks the 50th anniversary of the historic visit of former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to China, which is also regarded as ‘Ping-Pong Diplomacy’...” “...By then, our noble peoples showed extraordinary wisdom and courage in order to ‘the ice to melt’...” “...and today also, the same vision and courage are required from us in order ‘the ice to melt’ between the two countries again” (<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202101/28/WS6012cdf1a31024ad0baa5d41.html>). The new US administration, in turn, is looking for new ways to negotiate (<https://www.voanews.com/usa/white-house-says-us-seeks-new-approach-china>), and such an attitude of China seems strange to many experts. However, as mentioned above, the approach “What is the use of diplomacy if we will not refrain from letting each other become destroyed?” (Zhang 2006) remains China’s call and foreign course slogan, i.e.,

⁷ Resolution 2758 (XXVI). Restoration of the Lawful Rights of the People’s Republic of China in the United Nations. 1976 Plenary Session, 25 October 1971.

the renowned principle – “seeking the common ground for cooperation” initiated by Zhou Enlai does not lose its relevance.

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