

Re-sourcing History The Cold War in Asia



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Teaching and Research Specialisms: Chinese history

Source 1:

Li Binghong, "Zhong Su youhao tongmeng huzhu cujin shijie chijiu heping" (The Sino-Soviet Alliance for Friendship and Mutual Assistance promotes enduring world peace), ca. 1950, *Chinese posters.net* <https://chinese posters.net/themes/soviet-union.php> [accessed 12 May 2020].

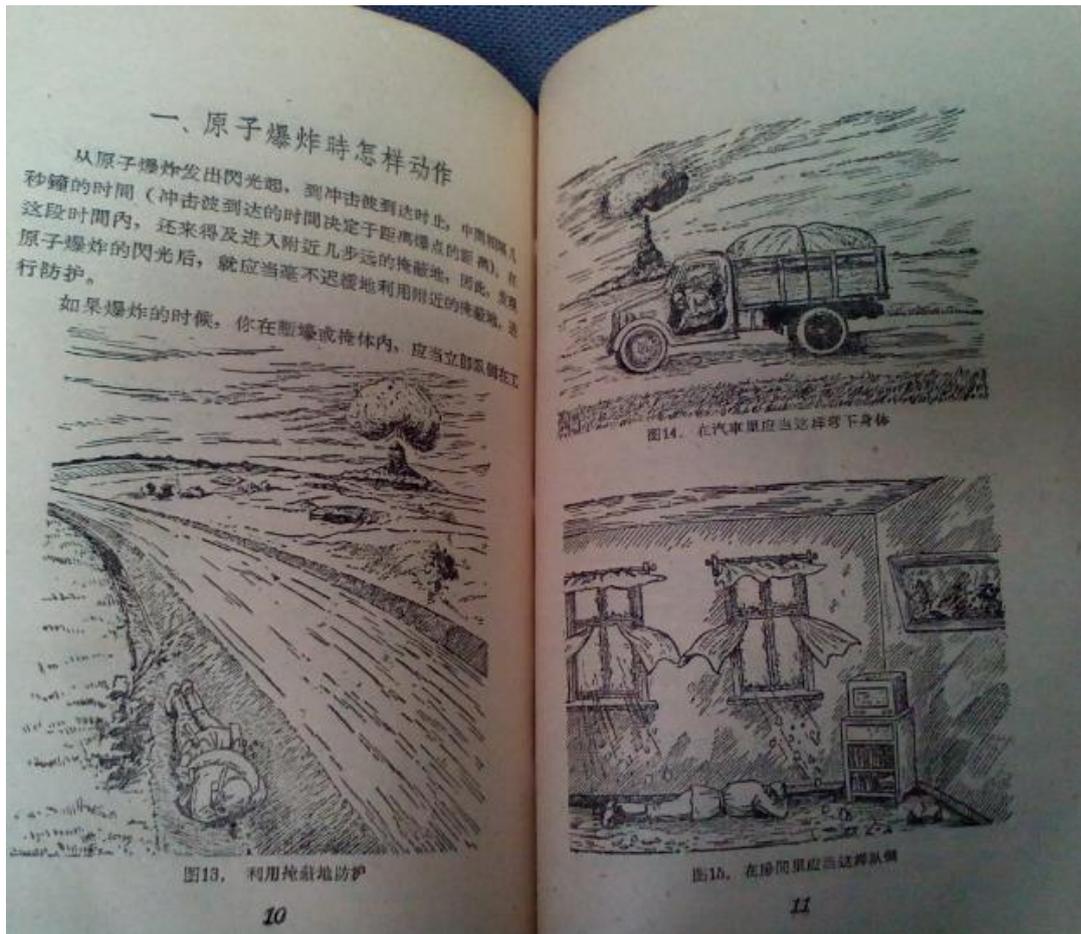
Commentary:

When Mao Zedong announced the foundation of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, this not only implied that China would now become a socialist state. Within the new international order of the Cold War, this also positioned China clearly in the Eastern Bloc as an ally of the Soviet Union. The conclusion of the Sino-Soviet Alliance for Friendship and Mutual Assistance confirmed this within a treaty framework. This propaganda poster from the year 1950 was designed to communicate this treaty and the friendship with the Soviet Union to the Chinese population. It celebrates the leaders of the two countries (Stalin and Mao Zedong), their perceived cultural distinctiveness and their purported commitment to peace (the peace doves). But while both leaders are depicted in the same size, Stalin is in the middle of the picture, and he shows the way, while Mao Zedong is (merely?) holding a copy of the treaty.

This points to a major problem in the Sino-Soviet friendship: The friendship was not an alliance among equals, but a hierarchical one in which the Soviet Union saw itself as the "older brother" and leader. Even Lenin had already said in 1902 that the socialist world revolution would be led by the Soviet Union: "The fulfilment of this task ... would make the Russian proletariat the vanguard of the international revolutionary

proletariat. And we have the right to count upon acquiring this honourable title, already earned by our predecessors, the revolutionaries of the seventies, if we succeed in inspiring our movement, which is a thousand times broader and deeper, with the same devoted determination and vigour.” (Lenin, What Is to Be Done? [1902], p. 15 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf> [accessed 12 May 2020]). Many local communist cadres in China therefore complained about what they perceived as Soviet arrogance and even “imperialist” behaviour from the very beginning. By the late 1950s, this inequality in the friendship would lead to a rift between the two socialist states, and soon the official line in China would be that the Soviet “revisionists” were just as bad as the American “capitalists”.

Source 2:



Yuanzi wuqi ji qi fanghu (Nuclear Weapons and Protection against Them). 1958. Junshi zhishi congshu (Collections of Military Knowledge). Guangzhou: Keji weisheng chubanshe., pp.10-11, SASS Collection, University of Erlangen.

“1) How to act during a nuclear explosion

Starting from the flash emanating from a nuclear explosion until the time when the shockwave reaches [you], only a few seconds pass. (The time of the arrival of the shockwave depends on your distance from the place of the explosion). Within this time, you can still get to shelters that are close by. Therefore, after you have discovered the flash of a nuclear explosion, you should immediately use nearby shelters and protect yourself.

If, at the time of the explosion, you are in a trench or a bunker, you should immediately lie [at the bottom of the fortifications and protect yourself.]

Picture 13: Using a shelter to protect yourself.

Picture 14: In a car, you should crouch like this.

Picture 15: In a room, you should lie down like this.”

(Translation by Elisabeth Forster)

Commentary:

The explosion of two US atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 shocked the world. While wars had been destructive before, nuclear weapons, the international community agreed, presented a threat on an entirely unprecedented scale. While global policy makers scrambled to find ways to prevent a nuclear third world war, and while the Cold War superpowers (the Soviet Union and the United States) soon found themselves locked in a nuclear arms race, the Chinese political leadership devised a twofold strategy: On the one hand, China hurried to build its own atomic bomb. In 1956, Mao Zedong said at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: "Not only are we going to have more airplanes and artillery, but also the atomic bomb. In today's world, if we don't want to be bullied, we have to have this thing." (Mao Zedong, "Talk by Mao Zedong at an Enlarged Meeting of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Politburo (Excerpts)", *Wilson Centre Digital Archive* <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114337> [accessed 12 May 2020]).

On the other hand, Mao Zedong played down the threat posed by nuclear weapons, saying that the A-bomb was a "paper tiger" that could not win wars. His idea was that superior weaponry could not win wars, but that it depended on the support of the people whether a group would win or lose a war. The *Little Red Book*, a collection of Mao Quotations, read: "The atom bombs and hydrogen bombs in the hands of the U.S. imperialists will never cow those who refuse to be enslaved. The raging tide of the people of the world against the U.S. aggressors is irresistible. Their struggle against U.S. imperialism and its lackeys will assuredly win still greater victories." (Mao Tse Tung, *Quotations from Mao Tse Tung*, quoted from *Marxists Internet Archive* <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch06.htm> [accessed 12 May 2020]).

This propaganda booklet, distributed to the Chinese population in the late 1950s, represents the "paper tiger" approach. It claims that, as long as you avoid, say, the glass splinters created by the shockwave of a nuclear explosion from scratching your face, you will be fine. The dangerous effects of radiation were completely glossed over in this rhetoric. Meanwhile, however, the Chinese state strongly supported nuclear weapons research and in 1964, the country successfully tested its own first nuclear weapon.

Source 3:

Shijie zhishi (World Knowledge) 22, no. 10 (September 9, 1950): 3, SASS Collection, University of Erlangen.

Commentary:

In the Cold War era, the People's Republic of China claimed to be a peaceful nation. This was a self-identification it shared with the whole Eastern Bloc. The Eastern Bloc said about itself that it was the "peace-loving camp", whereas the Western Bloc was particularly proud of being "free". In this Cold War logic, "peace-loving" and "free" were seen as contradictory – something we would probably not agree with today. In the Eastern Bloc, this proclaimed "peace-loving" nature manifested itself through an international organization, the World Peace Council, which held regular international congresses, organized campaigns and printed propaganda materials. These were the activities the Eastern Bloc called the World Peace Movement. The World Peace Council was controlled by the Soviet Union and China was a member of the Council.

China's peacefulness claim conflicted with the fact that China also engaged in many military ventures, for example, the Korean War (1950-53). However, surprisingly,

China and the other members of the World Peace Council claimed to be peaceful, not *in spite* of conflicts like the Korean War, but *because of it*. The reason was a specific understanding of “peace”, which becomes evident from the source. In the cartoon, we see peace doves shooting projectiles at an American plane. The banner reads: “Protect peace, resist American planes violating our country’s [i.e. China’s] territorial airspace!” The context for this is the Korean War, in which American planes were reported to have crossed the border between Korean and China into China.

Why do the doves – symbols of peace – shoot down planes – clearly an act of violence? The reason is the idea, supported by the source, that peace could be *created* by fighting those who breached it (in this case, the American planes crossing the border into China). Of course, this idea of peacefulness means that you can be peaceful and still fight wars. This was the understanding of peacefulness held by China and the World Peace Council, and – if you look at the UN Resolution enclosed in this booklet – by the Western Bloc as well. In other words, when we try to understand why China and the Eastern Bloc called themselves peaceful, we first need to understand what China, the World Peace Council and the rest of the world meant when they used the word “peace”.

Source 4



UNITED NATIONS
SECURITY
COUNCIL



GENERAL

S/1511
27 June 1950

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

RESOLUTION CONCERNING THE COMPLAINT OF AGGRESSION UPON
THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA ADOPTED AT THE
474TH MEETING OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON 27 JUNE 1950

The Security Council,

Having determined that the armed attack upon the Republic of Korea by forces from North Korea constitutes a breach of the peace,

Having called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, and

Having called upon the authorities of North Korea to withdraw forthwith their armed forces to the 38th parallel, and

Having noted from the report of the United Nations Commission for Korea that the authorities in North Korea have neither ceased hostilities nor withdrawn their armed forces to the 38th parallel and that urgent military measures are required to restore international peace and security, and

Having noted the appeal from the Republic of Korea to the United Nations for immediate and effective steps to secure peace and security,

Recommends that the Members of the United Nations furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area.

United Nations Security Council, "Resolution Concerning the Complaint of Aggression upon the Republic of Korea Adopted at the 474th Meeting of the Security Council on 27 June 1950", 27 June 1950, S/1511, United Nations Archives, Official Document System <http://undocs.org/S/1511> [accessed 12 May 2020].

Commentary:

This is the resolution through which the Security Council gave the members of the United Nations the mandate to enter the Korean War on the side of South Korea on 27 June 1950. Korea had been occupied by Japan during the Second World War. Similarly to Germany, it was after 1945 divided into two parts along the 38th parallel – North Korea, in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union and under the leadership of Kim Il-sung, and South Korea, in the sphere of influence of the United States and under

the leadership of Syng-man Rhee. This was part of the emerging global Cold War. North Korea became socialist and South Korea capitalist. Both sides agreed that Korea should soon be united again, but they disagreed on whether this should be under Kim's or under Rhee's leadership.

Nobody knows how precisely the Korean War started. But the United Nations later told the story that, on 25 June 1950, North Korean troops crossed the border into South Korea and attacked. A meeting in the Security Council was held immediately, calling – as the source above reminds us – “for an immediate cessation of hostilities”. The United Nations also sent a commission to Korea to investigate what had happened. Two days later, on 27 June, the Security Council discussed the matter again and decided that North Korea's actions had indeed “constitute[d] a breach of peace”.

This formulation is important, because it triggered an article in the United Nations Charter, which stated that “[t]he Security Council shall determine the existence of any ... breach of the peace” (Chapter VII, Article 39, *Charter of the United Nations* <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/index.html> [accessed 12 May 2020]). As a response, the Security Council “may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security”, i.e. it could take military action. (Chapter VII, Article 42, *Charter of the United Nations* <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/index.html> [accessed 12 May 2020]). In other words, if a breach of peace had occurred, the United Nations Security Council could give its member states the mandate to attack the country that had perpetrated the “breach of peace”. This is exactly what happens in the source. The resolution states: “[The Security Council r]ecommends that Members of the United Nations furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea [i.e. South Korea] as may be necessary to repel the armed attack”. This “assistance” was military intervention.

When the Security Council discussed on 27 June 1950 if North Korea's actions were a “breach of peace”, some nations actually argued against military intervention. For example, the Yugoslavian delegate to the United Nations recommended that the conflict should be solved through mediation instead. But his suggestions could not win over the majority of the delegates from the other countries. Therefore the United Nations entered the war on South Korea's side, and soon afterwards China would enter the war on North Korea's side. The war would then drag on for four years, until 1953, causing huge destruction and loss of life. In 1953 an armistice was agreed on and the border between North and South Korea was back at the 38th parallel.

Source 5

“Slogans

1. American imperialism is the first enemy of the people of the world!
2. American imperialism is the common enemy of the people of Asia!
3. American imperialism is the evillest enemy of world peace!
4. Resolutely oppose the aggression of American imperialism against our fatherland’s territory, Taiwan.
5. Resolutely oppose that American imperialism is militarily threatening and provoking our country!
6. We will certainly liberate Taiwan!
7. Resolutely oppose the aggression and occupation of South Korea by American imperialism!
- (...)
20. Long live world peace! “

Kouhao (Slogans), June 1960, A22-2-901, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
Translation by Elisabeth Forster.

Commentary:

What you see above are slogans that people chanted at a mass rally held in 1960 in Shanghai, which was part of a “propaganda week on opposing American aggression, upholding [the intention of] liberating Taiwan and protecting world peace”. These mass rallies were well planned, with invitations to participants sent out in advance, schedules being worked out and speech drafts discussed. According to this mass rally’s schedule, first speeches were given, then the slogans were chanted by the participants and this chanting was “led” by a designated person. After the mass rally followed a demonstration.

What is front and centre in these slogans are not only the international alliances of the Cold War, but also mainland China’s policy towards Taiwan. Socialist (i.e. mainland) China considered the capitalist United States to be their enemy. But China in the 1960s also saw itself as the leader of the Asian and African nations, with whom, the propaganda stated, it shared the legacy of suffering under imperialism. China considered itself as a forerunner of a successful fight against, and liberation from, imperialism.

The Taiwan question was made part of this story. Historically speaking, Taiwan had been conquered in the 17th century by the Chinese Qing Dynasty. From 1895 to the end of the Second World War it was a Japanese colony, after which it had been returned to China. However, in 1945 a civil war broke out between the Chinese Communist Party and their rivals, the Nationalist Party (also known as GMD, KMT, Guomindang). The Nationalist Party lost this civil war and retreated to Taiwan by 1949. Mainland China under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party became socialist and part of the Eastern Bloc, and it announced that it would conquer Taiwan soon. Taiwan under the Nationalist Party became capitalist and part of the Western Bloc. The Western Bloc was, of course, led by the United States, who supported Taiwan militarily against mainland China. It was this situation that was referred to in the slogan “4. Resolutely oppose the aggression of American imperialism against our fatherland’s territory, Taiwan.” “Aggression of American imperialism” was Chinese Communist Party parlance for the United States’ support of Taiwan. “[O]ur fatherland’s territory” referred to the idea that Taiwan was part of China. “6. We will certainly liberate

Taiwan!” expressed the intention that mainland China would one day reconquer Taiwan.

Since these slogans about Taiwan were chanted together with the slogans about Korea and the Asian and African nations, the people who participated in the mass rally of 1960 must have developed the viewpoint that the United States was threatening large parts of the world, and that China was at the forefront of fighting what they called “American imperialism”. By doing so, the story went, China would contribute to “world peace” (“20. Long live world peace!”).