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**The Burmese Communist Party in the State-to-State
Relations between China and Burma**

Oliver Hensengerth

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I. Introduction

When the Cultural Revolution started in China in 1966, Beijing abandoned its pragmatic approach in foreign affairs and pursued a revolutionary foreign policy instead to the extent that Beijing's leadership actively and openly supported communist movements throughout Southeast Asia. China's bilateral relationship with Burma, almost free of any disturbances at that time, collapsed. The years 1966-1968 marked the closest ever relationship between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Burmese Communist Party (BCP). But beginning in 1968, after having passed the high-water mark of the Cultural Revolution of June 1967, China tried to re-establish the status quo ante. State-to-state relations again prevailed over revolutionary struggle. After Mao's death and the victory of the reform movement in the inner party struggles, the concept of revolutionary struggle was utterly abandoned. Hence it is possible to argue, that the Cultural Revolution was an anomaly in China's foreign relations, after which Beijing returned to the emphasis of orderly foreign affairs.

In order to elaborate a pattern of the BCP in its relations with Burma and China in the course of history, this study will examine the relevant events in chronological order. First, it will introduce the ideological environment surrounding the founding of the BCP and from there will go on to analyse the formation of the so called "China connection" of the Burmese communists. A major concern of this period is the BCP approaching the CCP ideologically and establishing it as a single source of supply, thus becoming utterly dependent on Beijing's policy-making, especially against the backdrop of the ideological schism between the Soviet Union (SU) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Thus, I shall argue, Moscow's decision to endorse Mao's tactics in the early 1950s in combination with China's own strategic interests in Burma and the later Soviet-Chinese dichotomy led in the final analysis directly to the BCP's dependency on China's view of the strategic environment.

The vast majority of the books and articles that have been written on communism in Southeast Asia and Burma in particular analyse the topic from the viewpoint of counter-insurgency movements and in the context of the Cold War and thus have to be read carefully. In addition, what can be found in the works on the relations between China and Burma, including the Burmese Communist Party, often neglects to trace back the ideological lines that were followed by the BCP and finally brought the party into accord with Maoist conceptions. This study aims to fill the gap by searching for the ideological origins and analysing of the triangular relationship BCP-China/CCP-Burmese government.

II. The BCP's Ideological Development: From Being Rightist to Being Leftist to Being Maoist

1. Ideological roots and the Dohbama Asiayone

Various dates have been given by various scholars about the founding date of the BCP. The fixing ranges from 1939 to 1943.¹ However, in order to trace the BCP's ideological roots back as far as possible, it is safe to place the foundation of the Communist Party in the year 1939 and thereby accept the official founding date set by the BCP itself. What was formed in this year was the nucleus of a communist movement, taking shape out of an amalgamation of nationalist trends based on writings by Mazzini, Garibaldi, Voltaire, Rousseau, Sun Yat-sen, Nehru, Upton Sinclair, John Strachey, John Reed, writers of Ireland's Sinn Féin Movement, Nietzsche, Mussolini, Hitler etc.² A group of persons, mainly from Rangoon University, who called themselves Thakins, among them Aung San, who was to become one of the leading figures in the independence movement, incorporated these influences into their political views and channelled them into their organization, the Dohbama Asiayone (We Burmans Association or Our Burma Association). Also, Marxist reading occupied more and more space in the Thakins intellectual examination of how to free a country from foreign rule. The Dohbama Asiayone was founded in 1930 by Thakin Ba Sein and Thakin Kodaw Hmaing. The term Thakin, master, was a respectful form of address used by the British, and was used in turn by the members of the Dohbama Asiayone to make clear that they would not be submissive to British authority.

According to Fleischmann, the nationalism of the Dohbama Asiayone marked the beginning of a "second step nationalism" as it superseded the Buddhist-sponsored nationalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century with the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA, founded in 1906) at the forefront. This earlier type of nationalism, according to Fleischmann, had created a feeling of "Burmese-ness" through religion and under the protective shelter of the Sangha, which was "clean" of British influence and hence could present a dilute form of Burmese culture.³ Smith however says, that the nationalist Buddhist societies, of which the

¹ van der Kroef even suggests two different dates as possible founding dates and hence is inconsistent with the dates he himself suggests: see *Communism in Southeast Asia*, p. 18 for 1943 and "Communism in Burma: Its Development and Prospects," p. 47 for 1939. Trager for example does not mention an exact year, but mentions that communist ideas attracted the younger nationalists from the mid-1930s onwards and then suggests 1942-43 as the founding date of the BCP (Trager, *Burma: From Kingdom to Republic – A Historical and Political Analysis*, p. 169).

² Bečka, Jan, *The National Liberation Movement in Burma during the Japanese Occupation Period (1941-1945)* (Prague: Oriental Institute (= Dissertationes Orientales, No. 42), 1983), p. 35, quoted in Fleischmann, *Die Kommunistische Partei Birmas: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, p. 3.

³ Fleischmann, *Die Kommunistische Partei Birmas: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, pp. 1-3.

YMBA was the most influential, in part replaced the Sangha, whose authority over traditional fields such as education was in decline without official British sanction.⁴

Indeed, decline of monastic discipline was rapid after the abolishment of the royal court and the controlling system for the monasteries around the office of the *thathanabaing*.⁵ A Western-type education now provided vocational opportunities in that it opened the way into university and into the colonial governmental bureaucracy, while the traditional education with its emphasis on social ethics “lost out primarily because it came to lead nowhere vocationally or professionally.” The Sangha, as provider of the traditional system of learning and education, hence largely lost its integrative social influence and function.⁶ One of the first movements endeavouring to bridge Burmese tradition and European modernity was the YMBA. Organized by primarily Western-educated members, it was concerned with “refashioning valuable elements of the Buddhist tradition into an articulate movement in the new context of Western concepts and learning,”⁷ but in later years took on a political outlook and finally decided to merge with various nationalist organizations.⁸ The YMBA started to organize schools with a mixed curriculum consisting of Western teaching and lessons in Buddhist scriptures.⁹ This confirms Smith’s view that the function of the Sangha of being traditionally concerned with education was superseded by the YMBA. In the face of the decline of the Buddhist Sangha, it indeed seems doubtful as to whether or not the Sangha was itself powerful, organized and morally authoritative enough to provide proper education and to support the nationalist movement effectively, although, even if the Sangha as a whole was not actively involved, it might have provided impulses.

Sources of supply for the literature favoured by the Thakins as the representatives of the new nationalism consisted of Tun Pe, a newspaper publisher, who also acquired Marxist readings; Dr Thein Maung, who brought Marxist literature from London in 1932, where he attended the Round Table Conference on Burma’s future; the Burma Book Club, in which leftist literature was offered; and finally, and most importantly, the Nagani (Red Dragon) Book Club, opened in December 1937 by Thakins Nu, Thant and Than Tun, which offered

⁴ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-54. For the system of royal control of the Sangha established by the king around the *thathanabaing* including a separate monastic jurisdiction for the Sangha see *ibid.*, pp. 54-56.

⁶ Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, pp. 168-172 and Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, pp. 268-269.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-180.

⁸ Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, pp. 279 and 282-283.

⁹ *Ibid.*, *A History of Burma*, p. 279. For a description of the educational system in colonial Burma see Christian, *Modern Burma: A Survey of Political and Economic Development*, pp. 175-187.

leftist literature such as *Das Kapital* in Burmese translation.¹⁰ Also, Oo Kyaw was important for sending Marxist literature to Burma: after having finished high school in Burma and having passed the London Matriculation in Ceylon, he went to London for further studies. He was strongly influenced by Bengali revolutionaries and the India-based League Against Imperialism and, while travelling throughout Europe, he contacted several communist groups.¹¹

The glue which unified the members of the Dohbama Asiayone was a general nationalist cause with the achievement of independence as its glorious end. While lacking a clearly defined ideology, the “historic success” of the amalgamated movement “was to bring together and organize in ten short years the different and largely unpoliticised sections of the community, including students, peasants and workers.”¹² Hence, looking at the Communist Party emerging from the movement nine years later, the ideological roots of the BCP were not so much – or not only – the communist ideology itself, but a nationalist agenda for freeing the country from foreign rule. Embodied in British rule, “capitalism and imperialism appeared indistinguishable,” hence the Thakins came to believe that freedom can only be gained through “destruction of both – a conviction which found harmonious expression in Marxism.”¹³

2. Early foreign contacts

The inaugural meeting of the BCP took place on 15 August 1939. The number of the participating persons is unclear, though Aung San seems to have participated. He admittedly wandered between different parties,¹⁴ a behaviour which emphasized the then still fluid lines between groupings and ideologies among some of the Thakins. However, one group of the Thakins, the communists, delivered an ideologically clear programme: Burma was defined as a “semi-colonial and feudal country which had to pass through two revolutionary stages,” “national liberation” and “socialist revolution,” and hence “the BCP called for the commence-

¹⁰ Fleischmann, *Die Kommunistische Partei Birmas: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, pp. 1-2.

¹¹ Lintner, *The Rise and the Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, p. 5.

¹² Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 54.

¹³ Thompson and Adloff, *The Left Wing in Southeast Asia*, p. 82. “According to their temperament, training, and religious beliefs, these Thakins were converted to a nationalist brand of either socialism or communism.” Thakins Aung San, Nu and Mya were attracted by socialism, and “each was to choose a different method of applying his particular form of socialism to Burma.” They later were to become leaders of Burma. Thakins Soe, Than Tun and Thein Pe (later Thein Pe Myint) found communism more appealing, while Soe attached to it the most fanatical interpretation (*ibid.*, pp. 82-83.). The latter three Thakins later founded the BCP and, soon after independence, went underground.

¹⁴ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 57.

ment of the armed struggle.”¹⁵ Moreover, according to the BCP’s former chairman Ba Thein Tin, this meeting was the first occasion that the decisions were made for a “broad-based communist movement and a national anti-imperialist front.”¹⁶ He thus emphasized 1939 as the founding date.

The decision making process of founding the BCP seems opaque. Taylor, relying on Thein Pe’s recollections, argues that early contacts with the Communist Party of India (CPI) were the medium which facilitated the founding of the BCP.¹⁷ Fleischmann however says that it was most probably a decision made in Burma itself without external initiative in order to achieve a concurrent position with Moscow in the face of the looming war which was thought might also affect Burma.¹⁸ At this time, the Burmese communists did not seem to have direct contacts to the Comintern via its offices in Shanghai or Calcutta.¹⁹ However, indirect contacts via communists in both of the cities most probably made up for the lack of direct contacts. In addition, since the contacts between the CPI and the Burmese communists were relatively frequent, Fleischmann’s thesis is not too convincing. Also, since prior to 1937 Burma was administered as a part of India, the CPI also had activities in Burma. The first contact between Indian and Burmese communists had been established during Thakin Thein Pe’s studies in Calcutta from 1936 to 1938, where he met radical members of the Bengal Students’ Federation.²⁰ On his return to Burma in 1938, he was accompanied by B. N. Dass, a Bengali communist, who helped Burmese communists to establish Marxist study groups across Burma.²¹ Via Thakin Ba Tin (aka H. N. Ghoshal), a Bengali born in Burma, and the Bengal Province Committee of the CPI, Indian and Burmese communists maintained close contacts. According to Taylor, the BCP’s founding was finally initialled in mid-1939 with the CPI representative Niranda (or Purandu) Dutt arriving in Burma on invitation by Thakin Thein Pe, who then in accordance with the Comintern, tried to bring together two Marxist study groups in Rangoon, one being Burmese, the other being Indian.²²

¹⁵ Bečka, Jan, *The National Liberation Movement in Burma during the Japanese Occupation Period (1941-1945)* (Prague: Oriental Institute (= Dissertationes Orientales, No. 42), 1983), p. 42, quoted in Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 56.

¹⁶ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 56. Smith makes this argument relying on personal correspondence with chairman Ba Thein Tin in June 1988.

¹⁷ Taylor, “The Burmese Communist Movement,” p. 99, quoted in Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁸ Fleischmann, *Die Kommunistische Partei Birmas: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, p. 16.

¹⁹ Thomson, “Marxism in Burma,” p. 23.

²⁰ Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, p. 27.

²¹ Robert H. Taylor, *Marxism and Resistance in Burma, 1942-1945* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1984), p. 6, quoted in Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, p. 27.

²² Taylor, “The Burmese Communist Movement,” p. 99, quoted in Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, pp. 56-57. For other suggestions of who was primarily involved in the establishment of the BCP –

Contacts with China during this time seemed not to have existed. In the interview with Virginia Thompson on 18 April 1947, Thakin Than Tun said that direct contacts did not exist. Though he mentioned Yan'an as a model for Burma, Than Tun said "he only had reports from people who had been there and reports he read in the newspaper. No direct contact."²³ Relations between the BCP and the CCP seemed so far "to lie wholly in the realm of ideological sympathy."²⁴

3. The war-time alliance: Georgi Dimitrov and the united front strategy

As we have seen, the BCP adopted a strategy of an anti-imperialist movement against Britain in 1939. However, five years earlier, the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in Moscow from 25 July to 20 August 1935 decided on a global shift in communist policy to formation of a national united front against fascism²⁵, while the Burmese communists still followed their anti-imperialist programme. The new Comintern line, dubbed the Dimitrov line after the Bulgarian communist Georgi Dimitrov, then secretary general of the Comintern, called for a "people's front" to struggle against fascism, a "unity of action of the workers [...] all over the world" for a "successful defence but also counter-attack against fascism." Such a powerful united front of the proletariat, it was hoped, would also exert influence "on all other strata of the working people, on the peasantry, on the urban petty bourgeoisie, on the intelligentsia," in short on all societal groups "with faith in the strength of the working class." Dimitrov urged for "joint action with Social-Democratic Parties, reformist trade unions and other organizations of the working people against the class enemies of the proletariat," i. e. "the ruling bourgeoisie," which seeks "more and more salvation in fascism" and, in the face of a "general crisis of capitalism," is "preparing for an imperialist war of plunder" in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, where national united fronts should counter the attack. Thus emerges a national "anti-fascist people's front on the basis of the proletarian united front," which takes the form of a "fighting alliance between the proletariat, on the one hand, and the labouring peasantry and basic mass of the urban petty bourgeoisie [...] on the other."

Purandu/Niranda Dutt or Nandu Das Gupta – see the references for Patricia M. Milne (Dutt accompanied Thakin Thein Pe from Calcutta back to Burma) and John H. Badgley (Nandu Das Gupta was sent to Rangoon by order of the Comintern) in Fleischmann, *Die Kommunistische Partei Birmas: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, p. 19, note 9; Patricia M. Milne, *Selected Short Stories of Thein Pe Myint*, Translated, with Introduction and Commentary by P. M. Milne (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper No. 91, 1979), p. 2 and John H. Badgley, "Themes and Schisms in Burmese Communist Literature," in *Asia*, No. 22, Summer 1971, p. 73.

²³ "Virginia Thompson's Notes of her Interview with Thakin Than Tun," 18 April 1947.

²⁴ Thompson and Adloff, *The Left Wing in Southeast Asia*, p. 110.

The success of the working class in the united proletarian front can only be secured through a national alliance with other anti-fascist forces in an anti-fascist people's front.²⁶ Fascism appeared as capitalism in a state of crisis (and imperialism was a necessary stage in capitalist development), embarking on an imperialist war to divide the world into imperialist spheres in order to overcome this crisis.

Applied to Southeast Asia, according to van der Kroef, the new strategy would mean both a "co-operative posture" towards socialist and non-Marxist organizations pursuing a nationalist course, and a "softening" of the anti-colonial line towards those colonial powers who "would in time be aligning themselves against the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis."²⁷ This argument is problematic, because the "co-operative posture" did not mean a "softening" of the anti-colonial line, but rather a suspending of it until after the victory over fascism. In China, it took until September 1937 for the new strategy to materialize in a second united front between the Chinese communists and the Guomindang against the Japanese. During these two years a conflict took place between the interest of the "Soviet motherland" and a "national section within the international communist movement," and showed that the communist policy concerning China "was in fact two policies, the one emanating from the center of international communism in Moscow, the other from the local Chinese leadership" now concentrated in Shaanxi, where Mao, emerging as the CCP's pre-eminent figure, had been able to establish the rural base area Yan'an in 1935. The factional struggle dominating the CCP was between Mao's conception of a broad united front consisting of a class alliance, encompassing all national elements including the national bourgeoisie, directed against the "imperialist lackey" Chiang Kai-shek and Japan, and the Comintern's strategy of a national alliance including Chiang against Japanese fascism. The Comintern line was supported by the "Returning Students" or the "Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks" headed by Wang Ming, who had replaced Li Lisan as head of the CCP in 1930.²⁸

In Burma, the national united front conception in its anti-fascist appearance found its expression in the Anti-Fascist Organization (AFO), founded in August 1944 by the leaders of

²⁵ For a detailed background study of the shifts in global communist policy see the two chapters on Comintern and foreign policy between 1923 and 1941 in Isaac Deutscher's work *Stalin: A Political Biography*, pp. 386-460.

²⁶ Dimitrov, "The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International," report at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, August 1935, pp. 39, 58-59, 64, 66, 91.

²⁷ van der Kroef, *Communism in South-east Asia*, p. 20.

²⁸ see Thomson, *Communist Policy and the United Front in China 1935-1936*, passim (citation p. 100). Equally important, the same factionalism meant a struggle between the Comintern's urban-based strategy and Mao's peasant-based strategy of revolution.

the Communist Party, the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) and the Burma National Army (BNA) in Pegu,²⁹ when the Burmese anti-imperial resistance decided to change sides and turned against the Japanese. On 19 August 1945, the AFO was renamed AFPFL. The inaugural meeting shows the peculiarity of the Burmese political landscape in that the anti-fascist resistance consisted solely of left wing parties, as opposed to China, for instance, where the united front of 1937 was an issue between the CCP and Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang. Already in July 1941, though six years after the 1935 Comintern Congress but three years before giving birth to AFO, the BCP had reacted to the Dimitrov Line with Thakins Soe and Than Tun drawing up the Insein Manifesto while being interned in jail in Insein, hence revising their position of 1939 of combating imperialism: against "the prevailing opinion of the Dohbama movement," the Manifesto:

identified world fascism as the major enemy in the coming war and called for temporary cooperation with the British and the establishment of a broad allied coalition that should include the Soviet Union. The national liberation struggle [... against imperialism] would be resumed after the defeat of fascism.³⁰

The mainstream Dohbama initially ignored this move and followed Aung San, who was still adhering to the Japanese Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere rhetoric,³¹ thus following the original anti-imperialist line of the Dohbama Asiayone, which, until the founding of AFPFL/AFO, pursued independence from the British through cooperation with Japan.

Since the majority of the Thakins were still pursuing an anti-imperialist rather than an anti-fascist line at the beginning of the Second World War (as opposed to the communist's Insein Manifesto), their majority collaborated with the Japanese, initially in the Japanese-sponsored Burma Independence Army, later named Burma Defence Army and then Burma National Army³², and after the proclamation of independence on 1 August 1943 through the new Japanese-sponsored government. During the 1930s, the Japanese General Staff had contacted the Thakins through a number of Japanese agents, who were introduced into Burma to "gather

²⁹ Bečka, Jan, *The National Liberation Movement in Burma during the Japanese Occupation Period (1941-1945)* (Prague: Oriental Institute (= Dissertationes Orientales, No. 42), 1983), pp. 333-334, quoted in Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 60.

³⁰ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 61.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³² For the organization and the name changes of the Japanese-sponsored army see Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence*, pp. 7-13. See *ibid.* for a short but comprehensive analysis of the Japanese occupation 1941-1945.

information” and to “recruit allies” as part of the conquest preparations.³³ During the Japanese-sponsored war-time government, the communists assumed different roles: Thakin Than Tun was minister for Land and Agriculture, but could not be said to be particularly pro-Japanese. Thakin Soe went underground and organized resistance in the Delta, and Thakins Thein Pe and Tin Shwe made their way to India in July 1942 to contact the British Burma government in exile, which had taken refuge in Simla.³⁴ Thus, the communists spread across different levels of operation. Owing to his prominent position in the government, Thakin Than Tun passed on Japanese Intelligence and published and circulated BCP material. Hence, the BCP gained substantial organizational experience under conditions of war.³⁵ Thakin Thein Pe became the link between British Intelligence and the AFPFL, and the overall result of the BCP’s contacts with the British resulted in British training and arms supply for the AFPFL.³⁶ Hence, as Lintner points out, the

Burmese Communists were, ironically, the first to contact the Western Allies at a time, when Aung San and the non-Communists were still siding with the Japanese, as in British Malaya where the Communists also co-operated with the colonial power against the Japanese.³⁷

Interestingly, from 1939 to 1941, the BCP stayed within the anti-imperialist framework of the Dohbama Asiayone, until fascism became apparent in Burma itself. The question of whether to continue the fight against British imperialism or to turn against Japanese fascism and its imperialist war – as was also the Indian communists’ dilemma – became even more severe, when Britain and the USSR became allies. At that point, the BCP had to make the decision between more benign (British) and more malignant (Japanese) capitalists. As a result, in 1941, the communists elaborated the above mentioned Insein Manifesto, with which they turned to anti-fascism, while the majority of the Dohbama Asiayone still followed an anti-imperialist line. In the words of an official party history: “After the Hitlerites treacherously attacked the Soviet Union, the CPB changed its tactics and directed its blows

³³ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁵ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 61.

³⁶ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 61 and Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence*, pp. 13-14.

³⁷ Lintner, *The Rise and the Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, p. 7.

against the fascists [...] the CPB worked untiringly to oppose the Japanese fascists and actively prepared for armed struggle against the Japanese fascists.”³⁸

The AFPFL hence emerged as an anti-fascist coalition, but almost from the beginning had serious problems of maintaining unity. The factional problem was carried into independence and contributed to the instability of the political system. Thakin Nu, first prime minister of independent Burma, got to the heart of the problem when he desperately tried to create unity among AFPFL members and to suppress the factional struggle: Speaking on the Third All-Burma AFPFL Congress in January 1958, he declared that “henceforth, the AFPFL no longer was a coalition but a unitary party, wherein all affiliates must recognize the party ideology while accepting a subordinate status within its organization.”³⁹ However, between 27 April and 5 May 1958, the AFPFL split into two factions, and on 28 October of the same year, U Nu handed government business to the military-led caretaker government headed by General Ne Win.

4. Violent struggle instead of united front and the Calcutta Conference

On 4 January 1948, Burma gained independence under an AFPFL government with U Nu as its head. In March 1948, the BCP decided to turn to armed struggle in order to overthrow U Nu’s government by revolution.⁴⁰ This terminated the national united front of AFPFL and was due to a shift in communist policy: On 22 September 1947, when Cominform was established, spokesman Andrei Zhdanov divided the world into two camps, one being “imperialist”, the other being “anti-fascist.” Trying to create a coherent schism, the new doctrine made clear that “those who were not with the Soviet Union were against it.” Applied to Asia, it meant that those governments that did not decide between the camps were deemed “imperialist lackeys” and “enemies of the popular cause.”⁴¹ This meant a turn from cooperation during the anti-fascist resistance to aggression and a resumption of the anti-imperialist line. In China,

³⁸ *A Short Outline of the History of the Communist Party of Burma*, pp. 1-2, official party document dated June 1964 and printed in Beijing, quoted in Lintner, *The Rise and the Fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB)*, p. 7.

³⁹ Ministry of Information, *Burma Weekly Bulletin*, n.s. VI, no. 41 (6 February 1958), p. 376, quoted in Silverstein, “Burma,” p. 124. For the challenge of factionalism within AFPFL after independence see also “Mr. Bowker to Mr. Bevin,” 24 March 1948, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, pp. 19-21 (note: the pagination of the *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* used throughout this dissertation follows the pagination of the whole volume and not the pagination of the original documents).

⁴⁰ As will be discussed later, the Burmese communists split into two parties in 1946, one led by Than Tun, subsequently known as the White Flags, the other led by Soe known as Red Flags. I will refer to the White Flags of Than Tun as the BCP. In case Soe’s Party is mentioned I will make this explicit by using the term Red Flags. On all other occasions, the White Flags are dealt with.

⁴¹ McVey, *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings*, pp. 7 and 9.

Zhdanov's two-camp thesis found a direct expression in the "lean to one side" policy after 1949, while the pre-colonial Burmese government, emerging from negotiations with Britain, pursued a neutralist foreign policy.

In February 1948, one month before the BCP started its insurgency, BCP leader Than Tun had attended the "Conference of Youth and Students of Southeast Asia Fighting for Freedom and Independence" in Calcutta (henceforth Calcutta Conference). The new communist two-camp dogma gave the conference a more radical outlook. However, it is not clear when the communists in Southeast Asia first became aware of the new doctrine. What can be said with certainty is that the two-camp dogma was introduced at the conference to the non-communist participants who were still pursuing the previous cooperative national united front scheme.⁴² As van der Kroef noticed, it remains controversial as to whether the communist insurgencies, which erupted or intensified in Malaya, the Philippines, Thailand and Burma shortly after the conference were "a direct causal factor" of it. As we have already seen in Burma and China, the realization of the Comintern's directives were not fulfilled without resentment or delay. The local communists remained sufficient scope for individual local actions.

McVey also doubts whether the conference can be said to have influenced the commencement of the communist insurgencies in Burma (March), Malaya (June) and in Indonesia (September), and whether the decision of the Communist Party of India two days later to adopt a militant line against Nehru's government can be linked to the Calcutta Conference.⁴³ Whatever the case, due to a lack of convincing evidence what is agreed is only that the militancy of most of the speeches and the adoption of the resolution for a seizure of power "by the peasants and workers by any means ... provided potent impulses" to Southeast Asian communist parties for the adoption of a strategy of "violent confrontation against any government, colonial or independent, they did not control."⁴⁴

The conference also mirrored Moscow's increasing admiration for the successes of the Chinese communists under Mao. This is apparent in the fact that the participating Chinese communists were lifted from observer status to delegate status. As regards strategy, the conference "hewed to the 'united front from below' attitude towards the bourgeois nationalists rather than the 'Maoist' interpretation then slowly coming into acceptance in the Soviet Union." The

⁴² Ibid., p. 10.

⁴³ McVey, *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings*, p. 1.

⁴⁴ van der Kroef, *Communism in South-east Asia*, p. 29.

conference called for a complete break with the United States and its allied colonial powers in Southeast Asia, namely the British, Dutch and French. True freedom could only be achieved through “bitter struggle” as opposed to independence through negotiation and the maintenance of friendly relations with the former colonial country, which would only lead to puppet governments and colonial status in disguise. While the conference condemned any compromise with the national bourgeoisie (Mao) or colonial powers (AFPFL) on the way to independence, it must be remembered that

that the opportunity and incentive for Communist rebellion were already present in the countries where revolt occurred. It thus seems unlikely that the two-camp message lit the revolutionary spark in Southeast Asia, though it may well have added extra tinder which caused it to burst into flames.⁴⁵

For Burma in particular, McVey showed that the BCP’s decision to denounce its former support for the agreements between AFPFL and the British government towards independence was made before the conference took place. Accounts, which claim Indian communist influence in the BCP’s decision to rise up against the government also claim that H. N. Ghoshal (Thakin Ba Tin) attended the meeting of the CPI Central Committee in December 1947.⁴⁶ Ghoshal is supposed to have written the so-called Ghoshal thesis, which made the BCP eventually turn against the national united front concept. The Indian communists had adopted their militant line on this Central Committee meeting in December 1947 “in response to their interpretation of the two-camp doctrine.” Returning from India, Ghoshal developed a thesis, which dealt with the Burmese situation in “two-camp terms.” Under the influence of the thesis, the BCP stopped supporting the AFPFL-Britain agreements and denounced Burmese independence as a “sham.” On 14 March 1948, the BCP adopted the Ghoshal thesis at a mass

⁴⁵ McVey, *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings*, pp. 11, 15, 24.

⁴⁶ McVey, *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings*, p. 20. The claim that Ghoshal attended the Central Committee meeting was also made by Fleischmann (Fleischmann (ed.), *Documents on Communism in Burma 1945-1977*, p. 123.), but contradicted by Lintner. Than Tun did not participate in the Central Committee meeting either, but, according to Lintner, went to Calcutta in February 1948 after Ghoshal’s return to Burma. Equally, Lintner contradicts statements that Ghoshal attended the two meetings in Calcutta in February 1948. He had been excluded from the Burmese delegation to the conference after rifts had occurred between himself and the BCP leadership on the grounds of an interview he gave in Bombay to the CPI’s *People’s Age*, criticizing the BCP’s “‘rightist’ [i. e. broad based united front] mistakes” and urging for correction of this “deviation.” The interview was influenced by the Communist Party of India, which had started to advocate a more militant line, which found its expression in the differences between the “moderate” CPI secretary P. C. Joshi and the “far more militant” B. T. Ranadive. The differences were finally sorted out on the CPI’s second congress in favour of Ranadive (Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, pp. 27-29 and 88, notes 10 and 11.).

rally in Pyinmana. Later in the same month the BCP started its uprising.⁴⁷ Thakin Ba Thein Tin said that the BCP's decision to go underground was "solely" the BCP's and also "unrelated" to contemporaneous uprisings in Southeast Asia.⁴⁸ Thus, it could be likely that the decision to go underground was not imposed from outside Burma, but was influenced by the Indian example. On the whole it can be noted, that the founding of the BCP is due to Indian assistance, while it remains vague whether or not the decision to go underground roughly a decade later is due to the BCP's own decision. As McVey argues, there is no "trustworthy" evidence showing that the uprisings were ordered from abroad [i. e. Moscow]. But she suggests that "the adoption of the two-camp doctrine by the Burmese communists took place well before the Calcutta Conference and apparently along lines suggested by the Communist Party of India."⁴⁹

5. The national united front disbanded and the Communist Party split

As noted above, the AFPFL/AFO was founded in 1944 in accordance with the Dimitrov Line in resistance to the Japanese occupation, hence in resistance to fascism, after the Thakins had realized that the independence granted by Tokyo was in fact an independence in name only. As a result, the AFPFL became the focal point for the leftist parties. When AFPFL took power in the new British-sponsored post-war government, the Executive Council, with the communists having been allocated one seat instead of the two they had requested, the older conservative politicians (who had assumed office under the provisions of the constitution of 1937, which administratively separated Burma from British India, and under the Japanese occupation) had already vanished from the political scene in Burma.⁵⁰ Thus it emerged that the principal political opponents including AFPFL government and communist opposition were constituted of left leaning parties only.

In February 1946, the BCP split into two factions, subsequently known as the Red Flag communists or Communist Party (Burma) and the White Flag communists (or Burma Communist Party, BCP). The Red Flags were led by Thakin Soe and assumed a radical line, while the White Flags, led by Thakin Than Tun, maintained the moderate cooperative strategy endorsed by Georgi Dimitrov in 1935 and stayed within the AFPFL after the war. The split was brought about at the second party congress, held from 20-21 July 1945 in Rangoon. On this occasion,

⁴⁷ McVey, *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings*, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁸ Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ McVey, *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings*, p. 21.

⁵⁰ For a short account of the development of Burmese self-government from 1923 to 1948 see Silverstein, "Burma," pp. 82-87.

the BCP advocated a line of peaceful transition to socialism, a strategy later known as “Browderism”, named after the chairman of the Communist Party of the United States, Earl Browder. Again, this idea might have arisen through the influence of the CPI. As Thakin Thein Pe (Thein Pe Myint) stated, the idea of peaceful development was “prevalent” in the CPI, “which had great influence over the Burmese Communists.”⁵¹ In the eyes of the BCP, the victory over fascism had also “weakened” and “isolated” imperialism so that independence could be achieved by peaceful means.⁵² This moderate line – or “right-wing opportunism” – was attacked by Thakin Soe at a BCP plenum in February-March 1946 and finally led to Thakin Soe founding his own party and going underground in the Irrawady Delta to launch a guerrilla war against the British.⁵³

This split was already planted, as we have seen, when it became apparent, that Soe and Than Tun applied a different level of radicalism to communism when it came to put the ideology into practice (see note 13). Five months after the split, on 3 July 1946, Soe’s radicalism led Sir Henry Knight, then governor of Burma, to declare the Red Flags and the closely associated Red Flag Labour Unions and Red Flag Cultivators Unions unlawful.⁵⁴

On 2 November 1946, only four months after the communist split, Than Tun’s communists were expelled from AFPFL. The AFPFL’s Supreme Council meeting was the last meeting attended by the communists. During the meeting, the communists accused the AFPFL of “kneeling before imperialism” and being more concerned with taking office than settling the September-October strikes satisfactorily, with the result, that imperialists and capitalists now were “praising” the league. In his further comments, Than Tun made clear that communist membership in AFPFL had been an alliance of necessity and that from now on any agreement upon further action could not be reached.⁵⁵ From the BCP’s point of view, AFPFL took increasingly a posture of protecting the “British exploiters and capitalists” and was deemed a lackey of Britain, and a feeling of frustration spread among the communists, who intended to abolish British imperialist rule in Burma by force rather than negotiation.⁵⁶ AFPFL’s sub-

⁵¹ Thein Pe Myint, “Critique of Communist Movement in Burma,” p. 231.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁵³ Lintner, *The Rise and the Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁴ “Governor of Burma to Secretary of State for Burma,” 3 July 1946, in Tinker (ed.), *The Struggle for Independence*, pp. 872-873.

⁵⁵ “AFPFL and Communists Part as Friends,” Extract from *The Burman*, 3 November 1946, in Tinker (ed.), *The Struggle for Independence*, pp. 105-106.

⁵⁶ “Mr. Bowker to Mr. Bevin,” 24 March 1948, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, p. 16. See also “AFPFL and Rightists: Statement of the Communist Party in Connection with the Affiliation between the

sequent statement accused the communists of having put their party first instead of sticking to the rules of a coalition and of having tried “to upset AFPFL’s apple-cart by making amendments here and making changes there.”⁵⁷ Attempts of reconciliation between AFPFL and the White Flags in 1947 failed.⁵⁸

The split within the communists and the increasing disagreements between AFPFL and the BCP marked the starting point for the disintegration of the national united front, which finally collapsed in 1947/1948 in the wake of the events in Calcutta. On 4 November 1946, the British authorities in Burma expected an increase in communist activity, noting that the communists had “staged a walk out from AFPFL Supreme Council meeting.”⁵⁹

Beginning in April 1947, the BCP took an increased radical posture in that it first boycotted the general elections to the Constituent Assembly, but then contested twenty-eight seats of which it won only seven. The AFPFL won the remaining 248 seats. Here the BCP turned away from the cooperative process towards independence and showed the first signs of an insurgency movement. This attitude became stronger during its increased contacts with the international communist movement, for example during the British Empire Communist Conference in London in 1947, and in 1948 during the Calcutta Conference and the CPI’s second congress. The Ghoshal thesis of March 1948, which denounced cooperation, finally marked the beginning of the insurgency. With regard to strategy, the party leadership around Thakin Than Tun and Thakin Ba Thein Tin adopted the Maoist strategy of building base areas in the countryside at first and from there to proceed to the cities, instead of executing the orthodox communist strategy based on the urban proletariat.⁶⁰

In the wake of this increased uncooperative behaviour, the government in Rangoon became more and more concerned about the changes in the BCP’s policy, and on 27 March 1948, the

AFPFL and CPB,” 18 November 1947, in Fleischmann (ed.), *Documents on Communism in Burma 1945-1977*, pp. 69-71.

⁵⁷ “Statement by AFPFL (Extract),” 3 November 1946, in Tinker (ed.), *The Struggle for Independence*, pp. 106-108.

⁵⁸ See “Sir Hubert Rance to the Earl of Listowel,” 19 November 1947 and “R. E. McGuire to Sir Gilbert Laithwaite (Extracts),” 19 November 1947, in Tinker (ed.), *The Struggle for Independence*, p. 819 and pp. 819-820. See also “Announcement of the AFPFL on the Breakdown of Negotiations with the CPB,” in Fleischmann (ed.), *Documents on Communism in Burma 1945-1977*, pp. 67-68. For a short summary of the events leading to the BCP seeking readmission see Thompson, “Burma’s Communists,” pp. 104-105.

⁵⁹ “Sir Hubert Rance to Lord Pethick-Lawrence,” 4 November 1946, in Tinker (ed.), *The Struggle for Independence*, pp. 110-111.

⁶⁰ Lintner, *The Rise and the Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, pp. 11-14. For a full text of the Ghoshal thesis see Ba Tin [aka H. N. Ghoshal], “On the Present Political Situation in Burma and Our Tasks,” in Fleischmann, Klaus (ed.), *Documents on Communism in Burma 1945-1977*, pp. 83-126.

co-founder of the Dohbama Asiayone and now home minister Kyaw Nyein ordered the arrest of the BCP leadership. By April 1948, all BCP leaders had left Rangoon and had taken refuge in the countryside. Subsequently, the Central Committee adopted the Maoist line of rural guerrilla strategy as opposed to mobilizing the urban proletariat, because it was claimed that Burma as a “semi-colonial, semi-feudal” country was not yet ripe for a proletarian revolution.⁶¹ It seems that the BCP employed a mixture of Mao’s strategy, elaborated in the CCP’s base area in Jinggang Shan between 1927 and 1934, which implied establishment of a secure rural base area that cannot be invaded, a peasant-based revolution as opposed to an urban proletarian strategy, mobilizing the peasantry in the base area through land reform, a strategy of encircling the cities from the countryside with an own army and through guerrilla warfare – and this all in the context of China’s state as a semi-colonial country – and the Indian leftist line of violent struggle on a narrow class basis against British imperialism, hence neither pursuing a national united front nor Mao’s united front of a broad class alliance.

6. Imposing Maoism

At the end of the 1940s, two lines were competing with each other for leadership in the international communist movement: the Indian “leftist” line of a narrow class basis and the Maoist “rightist” line of a broad class alliance in a united front. In May 1951, the CPI adopted the latter concept under the leadership of Ajoy Ghosh. Hence it left the leftist line advocated by Ranadive behind and adopted principles “fundamentally similar to that of Mao and Liu [Shaoqi].”⁶² After Mao’s victory in China, “Stalin was obliged to admit that Mao’s strategy had worked in China and that it might have direct relevance for other parts of Asia.” However, apart from assistance given to the Vietnamese, it is uncertain to which extent this line could be imposed by Moscow on other Asian communist parties or if Moscow was even able to “entrust” the CCP with appropriate guidance and support, and whether the CCP had the means to ensure adherence to the new line.⁶³ The talks between June and August 1949 between Liu Shaoqi and a number of Soviet leaders, among them Stalin, which were partly about how to promote an Asian revolution, and the Vietnamese one in particular, already showed Stalin’s confidence in the strength of the way the Chinese revolution had taken: during the talks it was agreed that the CCP should take the primary responsibility for supporting the Vietminh. This was confirmed at a meeting between Mao and Stalin in December 1949.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Lintner, *The Rise and the Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, pp. 13-14.

⁶² Smith, “China and Southeast Asia: The Revolutionary Perspective, 1951,” p. 109.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶⁴ Chen, “China and the Vietnam Wars,” p. 153.

However, it was not until the second half of 1951, that the CCP was able to impose its line and discipline on the Southeast Asian communists, presumably with Stalin's approval.⁶⁵ After the uprisings of the communist movements in Indonesia, India and Burma had turned out to be unsuccessful, they were to be abandoned for the "foreseeable future," in order to "wean Indonesia, Burma and India away from their post-imperial associations with the West." A peaceful communist strategy was hence to be adopted. "Thus was born what, by 1955, would be recognizable as China's Bandung Strategy." Since in Vietnam communism was only successful in the North, the implication for Vietnam of this moderate approach was to accept the "temporary" Korean solution of partition on the Geneva Conference of 1954, by which the Korea and Indochina problems were sorted out for the time being.⁶⁶ Chen wrote that Chinese acceptance of a partition of Vietnam was reached on the basis of three considerations: first, after the end of the Korean War, Beijing felt the necessity to concentrate on domestic issues and thus wanted to avoid an escalation in Indochina. Second, the Korean example showed that an US intervention in Indochina should be avoided for reasons of safeguarding national security. Third, a conciliatory posture was hoped to bring about a better foundation for the acceptance of Beijing's new strategy of peaceful coexistence and also to lift the US trade embargo.

Since these concerns were congruous with wishes in Moscow after Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 for less confrontation, both sides agreed on a strategy to "maintain 'realistic expectations'" on the Geneva Conference and hence convinced the Vietminh that the achievement of an entirely communist Vietnam by means of the current war was an unrealistic desire. For now it was necessary to be satisfied with the North, which was under firm communist control, and to gain the South after elections would be held in 1956. The elections were supposed to start the process of reunification and were anticipated by the North to endorse communist rule over the whole of Vietnam.⁶⁷ In the event, the elections did not take place. South Vietnam's president Ngo Dinh Diem refused, with US backing, to allow the elections to take place for the fear of a communist victory according to the US domino theory.

⁶⁵ Smith, "China and Southeast Asia: The Revolutionary Perspective, 1951," p. 108.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁶⁷ For these consideration on the Chinese side see Chen, "China and the Vietnam Wars," pp. 158-162. For a discussion of US contemplations of an intervention to prevent a communist take-over in Indochina see Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, pp. 145-147 and 157-163 ("American intervention in Vietnam can be seen [...] as something which not only involved China but, in the way the [Eisenhower] Administration presented the case, it gave enough indication that China was considered to be the sufficient cause of the Vietminh 'rebellion,' which

Hence, strategic considerations concerning domestic reforms, national security and securing communist victories in non-communist countries in the long run finally brought about a settlement of both the Korean War and the Indochina conflict and ended with the partition of Vietnam and Korea which were both sought to be temporary as long as a communist take-over in the southern parts was deemed unrealistic.

III. The “China Connection”

1. Initial contacts

We have seen that the Burmese communist movement emerged out of nationalist feelings aroused through British rule. It remains unclear as to whether the decision to form a communist party and the proper act of foundation was due to foreign influence, although most observers agree that the CPI gave ideological and/or practical assistance. What is agreed is that the Burmese communists did not have relations with the Chinese communists at that time. Thakin Nu's and the BCP's attempts to get in touch with the CCP failed.⁶⁸ On 6 May 1949, the *New York Times* reported that the Chinese communists had signed a mutual defence pact with Soviet-sponsored North Korea and had also “pledged aid to Burmese Communists in ‘the joint struggle against American and British imperialism.’” Two days later, the *New York Times* reported that Burma's government “had doubled the guard on the China-Burma border to stop any attempts of Burmese and Chinese Communists from joining forces.”⁶⁹ Later, however, Premier U Nu affirmed the nationalist attitude of the Burmese communists and noted that “[h]e had been told that when the Burmese Communists tried to get help in China, the Chinese Communists demanded complete obedience in return. There the matter ended.”⁷⁰

The first firmly established contacts between the BCP and the CCP happened in 1951, when Yebaw Aung Gyi went to China to establish a BCP committee, via which the BCP and CCP should keep contact, and which, in the following years, developed the authority to issue directives *vis-à-vis* the Central Committee of the BCP. After that, more groups of BCP members went to China. Often they stayed there for several years and received ideological training and instruction. However, apart from ideological support, Fleischmann notes that before the mid-

might therefore be dealt with at its source.” Thus, the Vietminh troops were regarded as “agents” of Beijing with Beijing aiming at domination of Southeast Asia (p. 134)).

⁶⁸ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 57.

⁶⁹ *New York Times*, 6 May 1949, “China Reds Reported in North Korea Pact,” p. 7, and 8 May 1949, “Burma Acts to Stop Link with Red China,” p. 30.

⁷⁰ *The Nation*, 27 December 1950, p. 1, quoted in Fleischmann, *Die Kommunistische Partei Birmas: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, p. 172.

1960s, Beijing extended neither material nor military support.⁷¹ According to Brimmel, in late 1949/early 1950, the BCP sent two members of its Central Committee to Beijing for consultation.⁷² From then on, “the BCP was increasingly tied to the Chinese party.”⁷³ Beginning in 1950, Beijing maintained contacts with the BCP’s insurgency. In providing financial, psychological and strategic advice, the CCP was the BCP’s “strongest patron.”⁷⁴

2. Mao’s foreign policy and Southeast Asian communist movements

As Smith has already argued (see section II.6.), the Bandung policy, which followed the settlement of the Korean and Indochina conflict, did not imply abandonment of the communist insurgencies. An interesting approach to the changes in China’s foreign affairs is given by McKinney, who refers to Mao’s “On Contradiction” and argues that the concept of peaceful coexistence has to be seen in the context of the theory of contradiction, hence periods of peaceful coexistence are an aspect of communist class struggle.⁷⁵ Michael Yahuda also asserts that Mao’s strategic thinking was intensely concerned with contradictions: “Mao’s universe was one of constant change in which balance and harmony were by definition temporary and relative whereas imbalance and struggle were enduring and absolute.”⁷⁶ Being always on the search for the current principal contradiction, in the different stages of the revolution the targets necessarily shifted. Hence, the handling of foreign affairs was a state of “constant flux.”⁷⁷ These concepts provided the theoretical underpinning of shifting targets and shifting united front alliances, as could be seen in the official statements when China opened its doors to the United States in 1971 as well as in China’s alignment with “reactionary leaders” in Third World countries.⁷⁸

While McKinney neglects the necessity of orderly foreign affairs as a means of securing vital national interests of territorial integrity and independence,⁷⁹ Yahuda’s analysis gives us interesting insights into the theoretical underpinning of foreign affairs. However, it seems that

⁷¹ Fleischmann, *Birma zwischen der Sowjetunion und der Volksrepublik China*, pp. 10-11.

⁷² J. H. Brimmel, *Communism in Southeast Asia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 193-194, quoted in Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia: Peking’s Relations with Revolutionary Movements*, p. 193.

⁷³ Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia: Peking’s Relations with Revolutionary Movements*, p. 193.

⁷⁴ Bert, “Chinese Relations with Burma and Indonesia,” p. 475.

⁷⁵ McKinney, *An Interpretation of Neutralism in Burma’s Foreign Policy 1948-1958*, p. 285 (The “communist concept of peaceful coexistence has not implied an end to the struggle between communist and non-communist states. [...] the] theory of contradiction has remained basic to communist thought. Communists have viewed periods of peaceful coexistence as a fundamental and necessary aspect of the class struggle in world politics”).

⁷⁶ Yahuda, *Towards the End of Isolationism: China’s Foreign Policy After Mao*, p. 87.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88. See also Mao, *On Contradiction*, *passim*.

⁷⁸ Yahuda, *Towards the End of Isolationism: China’s Foreign Policy After Mao*, pp. 88-89.

⁷⁹ For an early account of China’s national interests published in 1975 see Löwenthal, “Chinas Perzeption der internationalen Konstellation und seine nationalen Interessen,” pp. 159-161.

theory, especially since the 1970s, has been mainly used to justify moves in the politico-strategic sphere *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union and the United States. Until the 1970s, it can be argued that theory did play a more important role in foreign affairs but in the final analysis was subjugated to the defence of national interests. In addition, the degree to which theory was put in place was subjugated to political infighting in that it depended on whether the CCP's "right wing" or "left wing" was dominating the political decision making process. As Gurtov wrote:

The ways in which ideology, as it is expressed in foreign policy doctrine, and practicality ('realistic' judgment of alternatives) interact is ... an important theme to trace. As is widely accepted, China's policy toward a single state or on a particular situation may be only partially reflected in a general doctrinal pronouncement. Doctrine and policy (intentions) simply cannot be equated; but neither can doctrine be dismissed as irrelevant to understanding policy.⁸⁰

3. China's Burma policy in the period of revolution, 1949-1954

The core concepts of China's foreign affairs during this period were marked by the "lean to one side" policy, a "revolutionary enthusiasm"⁸¹ and the rejection of a "third way" between the socialism of the USSR and the imperialism of the US. According to Domes and N  th, the core success of the Sino-Russian friendship treaty of 1950 was the ideological recognition of the new Chinese leadership by Stalin. Leaning towards the SU made China a member of the Socialist camp as opposed to the imperialist-capitalist camp under US supremacy. To the latter camp also belonged the new countries of Africa and Asia, which had emerged or were in the process of emerging from colonialism and adopted a neutralist foreign policy, notably India under Nehru, Burma under U Nu and Indonesia under Sukarno. Through the "lean to one side" policy and its attached rejection of a third way, Beijing adopted Stalin's confrontational policy towards the West and also towards the new neutralist countries, for all countries without a socialist government were deemed to belong to the adversary camp. While these new countries considered themselves neutralist, China deemed them imperialist lackeys, and their particular foreign policy approach as opening the doors to US neo-colonialism.⁸²

⁸⁰ Gurtov, *China and Southeast Asia: The Politics of Survival – A Study of Foreign Policy Interaction*, p. 1.

⁸¹ Bert, "Chinese Policy Toward Burma and Indonesia: A post-Mao Perspective," p. 963.

⁸² Domes and N  th, *Geschichte der Volksrepublik China*, pp. 37-38. For the notion of the Second World states as imperialist lackeys see also Klein, "China and the Second World," p. 162. The general context is establishment of the NATO, Korean confrontation, SEATO, and most countries recognizing Taiwan instead of Beijing.

Regarding Burma, Beijing attacked the government in Rangoon as a reactionary bourgeoisie and a lackey of the United States which should be overthrown by revolution. This was in line with China's policy towards pro-Western and neutralist Asian countries.⁸³

In the face of these policy objectives, Burma assumed a neutralist role in world affairs. Burma's internal situation of a pro-Chinese BCP and a pro-Western Karen insurgency gave the country "a strong disposition" not to become entangled in bloc rivalry and "to reduce or, preferably, eliminate any pretext for direct involvement from either quarter."⁸⁴ Rangoon's continued concern over possible Chinese involvement in supplying the BCP led the U Nu government to become the first non-communist government to recognize the new government in Beijing on 16 December 1949. A Burmese put Rangoon's concern over China into the formula "when China spits we swim down the Irrawady."⁸⁵ Against the background of colonial experience and the Cold War, independent foreign policy making free from "foreign dictation" became the symbol and the test for independence⁸⁶:

Any suspicion that the government had accepted this dictation of another country or group of countries or that it had succumbed to pressure would immediately put the government in trouble. This is one reason why the Union of Burma steadfastly refuses to join either bloc in the Cold War.⁸⁷

Examples of Burma's independent course within the East-West schism and the Sino-Soviet conflict are Burma's withdrawal from the non-aligned movement in the Havana meeting in September 1979 when it came to be too closely associated with the Soviet Union; Burma's voting behaviour in favour of the US-sponsored UN resolution calling for a halt to the North Korean invasion of the South in 1950 and the opposition to the US-sponsored resolution of 1951 branding China as aggressor in Korea; and Burma's refusal to join the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and thus to establish military ties with one of the blocs.

"Revolutionary enthusiasm" materialized in Beijing through support for the global communist strategy of taking power through insurgency. The Korean War, major external

⁸³ Bert, "Chinese Policy Toward Burma and Indonesia: A post-Mao Perspective," pp. 963-964.

⁸⁴ Than Han, *Common Vision: Burma's Regional Outlook*, p. 15.

⁸⁵ Liang, *Burma's Foreign Relations: Neutralism in Theory and Practice*, p. 68.

⁸⁶ McKinney, *An Interpretation of Neutralism in Burma's Foreign policy 1948-1959*, p. 4.

event of this period, is fundamental for an understanding of the early years of the PRC's foreign policy. Mao entered the Korean War on 18 October 1950 with a volunteer army of 400,000 members⁸⁸ after North Korea had invaded the South on 25 June 1950. As Chen Jian argues, this did not happen only for pragmatic reasons of stopping the US-led troops of the United Nations, which had intervened on 27 July, from entering the PRC after crossing the border river Yalu; ideology also played a pre-eminent role in the form of the CCP's "revolutionary nationalism," which sought to revitalize China by abolishing traditional societal and statist institutions through revolution and allocating the country a more prominent role in international politics. Attached to this was a "sense of responsibility toward an Asian-wide or worldwide revolution," and the desire to maintain the momentum and the dynamics of the domestic transformation by further mass mobilization. The rationale for this mass mobilization was the emphasis of external threats to the Chinese revolution and in this context the call to prepare for a long-term confrontation and an inevitable war with the United States as China's principal enemy. The threat to the national security thus offered Beijing a means for mass mobilization. The successes in the Korean War convinced Mao, that "mass mobilization was an effective way to maintain and enhance China's security status," for the mass mobilization of the Chinese people at the home front had strengthened the ruling basis of the regime.⁸⁹

At the same time, the confrontational policy was extended beyond Korea in that Beijing supported communist insurgency movements across Southeast Asia. Liu Shaoqi made this policy line clear at the Asia-Pacific Regional Peace Conference in Beijing in 1952.⁹⁰ Hence, the decision to join the Korean War was part of a global strategy, designed by the Soviet Union and strongly supported by China, of encouraging communist movements in countries with a non-communist government.⁹¹

Burma's neutralist foreign policy towards China became moulded into a non-confrontational policy strategy. During the early 1950s, Rangoon hoped that Beijing's preoccupation with internal reconstruction and external issues in Korea, Taiwan and Indochina would "oc-

⁸⁷ James Barrington, "The Concept of Neutralism: What lies Behind Burma's Foreign Policy," in *The Atlantic*, Vol. 209, No. 2, February 1958, p. 127, quoted in McKinney, *An Interpretation of Neutralism in Burma's Foreign policy 1948-1959*, p. 4.

⁸⁸ The Chinese People's Volunteers (Zhongguo Renmin Zhiyuanjun) (see Wu, *Zai waijiaobu ba nian de jingli* [Eight Years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 1950-October 1958: Memoirs of a Diplomat], p. 72).

⁸⁹ Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*, 213-223. For the concept of the inevitable war see also North and Paasche, "Communist Strategy in China," p. 173.

⁹⁰ Tajima, *China and South-east Asia: Strategic Interests and Policy Prospects*, p. 5.

copy its resources and prevent flagrant intervention in Burma.”⁹² This finally seemed to come true when Beijing moderated its revolutionary rhetoric and increasingly focussed on friendly relations,⁹³ while subversive messages continued to be broadcast from Beijing.⁹⁴

Burma’s neutralist position met considerable concern on the part of Britain.⁹⁵ In the neutralist and, after Bandung, non-aligned countries, the democratic institutions sponsored by Western ideas of governance brought to power politicians who were critical of the policies of the West and convinced by the necessity of a neutral/non-aligned position in international relations. It was argued that Britain’s concern over Rangoon’s foreign policy line led to the fear that democracy in Burma was threatened “simply because it has failed to sustain the policy which the West favors,” hence anti-communism and endorsements of military alliances with the West such as SEATO with the aim to “enlist these nations on [... the non-communist] side in the cold war.”⁹⁶ The overall objectives of Burma’s foreign policy making can be summarized as follows: independence from bloc affiliations; friendly relations and cooperation with all countries, especially with its neighbours (thus including Communist China); freedom of action for foreign policy objectives in the international system; establishment of a more equitable and reasonable world order in which Burma could pursue its national interests and preserve its internal situation; and advocacy of the principles of coexistence in inter-state relations.⁹⁷

As mentioned in section II.6., Beijing decided on a shift from a revolutionary foreign policy to a policy of peaceful coexistence in the early 1950s, which ushered in the Bandung period of

⁹¹ Domes and N ath, *Geschichte der Volksrepublik China*, p. 39.

⁹² Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia: Peking’s Relations with Revolutionary Movements*, p. 193.

⁹³ William C. Johnstone, *Burma’s Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 161, quoted in Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia: Peking’s Relations with Revolutionary Movements*, p. 193.

⁹⁴ *The New York Times*, 8 July 1951, quoted in Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia: Peking’s Relations with Revolutionary Movements*, p. 193.

⁹⁵ For the issue of British assistance to Burma concerning communist insurgencies and the irritations on the British side over Burma’s neutralist orientation involving communist countries see the following correspondence between British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin and British Ambassador to Burma James Bowker in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*: “Mr. Bevin to Mr. Bowker,” 14 April 1948, p. 21; “Mr. Bowker to Mr. Bevin,” 26 May 1948, pp. 22-24; “Mr. Bevin to Mr. Bowker,” 16 June 1948, p. 38; “Mr. Bowker to Mr. Bevin,” 18 June 1948, pp. 39-41; “Mr. Bevin to Mr. Bowker,” 28 June 1948, pp. 41-42; “Mr. Bevin to Mr. Bowker,” 18 July 1948, pp. 52-53. The irritations were partly due to U Nu’s 15 Point Programme for Leftist Unity, in which he propagated Marxist doctrine, by which Britain feared that Burma would turn communist. U Nu subsequently moderated the Programme and the way it would be applied in a speech. An English translation of the Programme is enclosed in “Mr. Bowker to Mr. Bevin,” 26 May 1948, pp. 23-24. In spring 1950, the government in Rangoon assured London that it will not let Burma “go Communist” (Trager, *Burma: From Kingdom to Republic – A Historical and Political Analysis*, p. 113).

⁹⁶ Fitzgerald, “East Asia After Bandung,” p. 117.

⁹⁷ Than Han, *Common Vision: Burma’s Regional Outlook*, pp. 18-19.

non-alignment. Four years earlier, at a meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions in Beijing in November 1949, Liu Shaoqi:

stressed the need in Asia ‘to create, wherever and whenever possible, people’s armies [...] and supporting bases’ under the leadership of local communist parties. He twice mentioned the Burmese rebellion immediately after that of the Vietnamese and before those of Malaya, the Philippines, Indonesia, and other areas, a priority that would be repeated in Peking’s propaganda 18 years later. The various organs of Chinese propaganda denounced the ‘reactionary’ government in Rangoon, praised the revolutionary struggle of the Burmese communists, and urged the overseas Chinese in Burma to lend this struggle their support.⁹⁸

Four years later, however, U Nu’s government was praised for its independent course. Returning from the Geneva Conference on Indochina and Korea, China’s prime minister Zhou Enlai paid a state visit to Burma, and, on 29 June 1954, together with U Nu issued a joint statement endorsing the five principles of peaceful coexistence (Panch Sheela) a way of life also agreed upon with India a day earlier.⁹⁹

4. The “Bandung years” (1954-1967)

In 1953, a number of events led to a change in China’s “revolutionary enthusiasm” in foreign affairs. Stalin’s death on 5 March led to a change in Moscow’s foreign policy approach, which tended to adopt a less confrontational perspective and view the communist scene as less monolithic. Also, as in Indochina, Beijing’s strategy of supporting and expanding world revolution in Korea had failed with the result that the war could not successfully be continued. Thus, on 26 November 1951, the parties concerned convened in Panmunjeom and agreed to a ceasefire line, and on 27 July 1953 a truce was eventually signed.¹⁰⁰ Also, as shown above, the Geneva Conference in July 1954 finally brought the Indochina Conflict to a halt. Additionally, the five principles of peaceful coexistence were agreed upon with India and developed at the Bandung Conference in 1955, which sought to establish the non-alignment movement of the Third World. For China, one aim of the conference was to enable Beijing to

⁹⁸ Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia: Peking’s Relations with Revolutionary Movements*, p. 193.

⁹⁹ For the full texts of the joint statements with Burma and India see “Joint Statement by the Prime Ministers of India and China,” and “Joint Statement by Mr. Chou En-lai, the Prime Minister of China and Mr. U Nu, the Prime Minister of Burma,” in Ambekar, G. V. and V. D. Divekar (eds.), *Documents on China’s Relations with South-east Asia (1949-1962)*, pp. 7-9 and p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ On Korea see Smith, “China and Southeast Asia: The Revolutionary Perspective,” pp. 104 and 110.

act more independently from Moscow. On the whole, the Bandung Conference worked for the participating countries “to regain their personality and international dignity [...] vis-à-vis the West,”¹⁰¹ to contribute to the ongoing détente between the communist and non-communist parts of the world¹⁰² and against this background to pursue an agenda of cooperation for the solution of common social and economic problems.

Regarding Burma, the Bandung Strategy came to be the cornerstone of Chinese foreign policy for almost the whole of the next decade, since the change in China’s moderate foreign policy approach in 1957, when according to Mao “the East wind is prevailing over the West wind,”¹⁰³ did not affect Beijing’s cordial relations with Rangoon to a large extent. The new approach of 1957, however, saw an increase in Chinese aid to the BCP, which subsequently stepped up its campaign against the government and set up the National Democratic United Front in 1959 together with several other insurgency organizations; but by supplying the BCP unofficially while simultaneously pursuing friendly relations with Rangoon, Beijing “was given a leverage on the Burmese political scene without provoking a major rupture with the Burmese government, which was too much afraid of the P.R.C. to quarrel with it except in extreme situations.”¹⁰⁴ At Bandung, China moved closer to the new countries of Africa and Asia that had decided not to get entangled in the superpower competition after having emerged from colonialism. It hence marked a significant turn in Beijing’s foreign policy line

¹⁰¹ Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955*, p. 38.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 2. See also “Supplementary Speech by Premier Chou En-lai at the Asian-African Conference,” 19 April 1955, in Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955*, pp. 52-56.

¹⁰³ Passage of Mao’s speech at the Moscow meeting of the Communist and Workers’ Parties on 18 November 1957. Excerpts of the speech are quoted in “Statement by the Spokesman of the Chinese Government” of 1 September 1963, in *Peking Review*, 6 September 1963, p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ Liang, *Burma’s Foreign Relations: Neutralism in Theory and Practice*, p. 79. In the second half of the 1950s, however, the conflict situation in Vietnam intensified. Both the US and China increased military aid to the South and the North respectively. Until 1962, Beijing refrained from actively supporting the Vietnamese communists’ aim of resuming the armed struggle in the South. In the beginning of the 1960s, however, Beijing encouraged Communist Parties in Southeast Asia and their armed struggle. The new assertive line mirrored Beijing’s understanding of its central role in promoting revolutionary movements in the Third World in the face of increasing differences with Moscow. The radicalization in foreign policy was paralleled by a domestic radicalization of China’s political and social life and Mao’s wish to create “dynamics for such radicalisation,” which were created by stressing the external threat of the inevitable confrontation and using it as a rationale for internal mass mobilization. At the same time, inner-party conflicts over this line materialized in particular between Mao and Wang Jiaxiang, the head of the CCP’s International (or External) Liaison Department (Zhong-Gong Zhongyang Duiwai Lianluobu). While the latter favoured reconciliation of (US) imperialists, (USSR) revisionists and (Indian) reactionaries and reduction of support for revolutionary movements (a concept called *sanhe yishao*), Mao stressed the opposite, i. e. the need to fight against the first three and to increase support for the latter (for China’s involvement in Vietnam from the late 1950s to the early 1960s and after and the conflict between Mao and Wang see Chen, “China and the Vietnam Wars,” pp. 162-166. For the conflict between Mao and Wang and a study of the International Liaison Department see also Kampen, “Die Abteilung für internationale Verbindungen des Zentralkomitees der kommunistischen Partei Chinas und die chinesische Außenpolitik seit 1951,” pp. 55-57).

from revolutionary enthusiasm towards a global pursuit of the principles of peaceful coexistence.

Already in autumn 1951, Chinese propaganda had advised the communist parties in Asia to employ a strategy of peaceful coexistence and possibly build coalition governments with the non-communist parties. Stalin's successors pursued this policy line generally towards both the West and the new states in Asia and Africa that pursued a neutralist foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the superpower competition.¹⁰⁵ China's "conciliatory Bandung policy," which now followed, was "calculated to increase Chinese influence in the Third World by appealing to neutrals."¹⁰⁶ It replaced the "lean to one side" policy which tended to regard the communist bloc as a monolithic unity under the guidance of the Soviet Union. In establishing friendly relations with Burma, Beijing "paid tribute to Burma as a neutral state resisting imperialist ties and influence."¹⁰⁷ The new approach gave birth to a "policy of rewarding Burma for not establishing military ties with the West and refraining from blatantly challenging Chinese positions and interests."¹⁰⁸

This policy was echoed by the BCP at a time when it was suffering crucial defeats at the hands of Rangoon's government troops. In 1951, the BCP held a Central Committee meeting to search for ways out of the crisis. During this meeting a united front line was suggested, named PCG (Peace and Coalition Government), which was supposed to enter in a coalition with the Burmese government against the Guomindang forces which had retreated into Burma across the Yunnan border in 1949/1950. The PCG line was meant to imitate the national united front between the CCP and Chiang Kai-shek between 1937 and 1945 and was intended to bring about a firmer footing for the BCP which it could use to turn against the government. As a conciliatory gesture, the BCP handed confiscated land back to the previous landowners in the Pyinmana area, where the party had its headquarters and where it was able to win substantial popular support through a land reform which it now abandoned. As a result, many BCP soldiers, who were sons of peasants, became disillusioned and left the army. Rangoon, however, did not accept the BCP's offer of a united front, and the BCP lost almost half of its armed force. Hence, the BCP's armed uprising had failed.¹⁰⁹ This failure resulted in the

¹⁰⁵ Domes and N  th, *Geschichte der Volksrepublik China*, p. 41.

¹⁰⁶ Bert, "Chinese Policy Toward Burma and Indonesia: A post-Mao Perspective," p. 964.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 964.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 964.

¹⁰⁹ Lintner, *The Rise and the Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, pp. 15-17.

adoption of the moderate “1955 line” to abandon armed struggle for the time being (see below). Meanwhile, in 1953, the BCP was formally outlawed.

According to Lintner, after their defeat, the Burmese communists sought military assistance from China. Already in 1950, a base area was set up in Katha district in upper Burma to link up with China. The plan was, with aid being funnelled across the border, to advance from upper Burma down to Mandalay. With this in mind, the first group led by Aung Gyi went to Yunnan in 1951, followed by Thakin Ba Thein Tin, then vice chairman, and a third group. A total number of 143 cadres found their way to China. They were given political training in Sichuan and Beijing. Some were even sent to Moscow for further studies. Military aid, however, was not granted. Beijing was not willing to give up its good relations with Rangoon in favour of the BCP. As Badgley observed, the BCP’s failure in Burma is partly due to Rangoon’s “persistent” and “actively neutral” foreign policy.¹¹⁰ During Liu Shaoqi’s visit to Burma from 20 to 26 April 1963, a joint communiqué was signed. Paragraph nine of the communiqué noted, that the “international situation is favourable to the [anti-imperialist] struggles of the peoples of still dependent countries.” Apparently, because of China’s cordial relations with Burma and the fact that Burma had ceased to exist as an imperialist lackey in China’s world view during the Bandung years, the BCP was not addressed (this pattern changed during the Cultural Revolution). During the visit, Liu and Ne Win emphasized the five principles for peaceful coexistence and the Bandung spirit in relations between China and Burma, and Burma expressed the hope that an agreement between China and India to settle the border disputes could be reached on this basis.¹¹¹

This obvious interest in good relations reflects China’s “desire to encourage and maintain Burma’s relative isolation from international affairs, and particularly its lack of dependence on the superpowers.”¹¹² The new policy targeted minimization at first of US and, in the 1960s, Soviet influence in Burma:

¹¹⁰ Lintner, *The Rise and the Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, p. 19 and John H. Badgley, “Burma’s Radical Left: A Study in Failure,” in *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 10, No. 2, March-April 1961, p. 47 quoted in *ibid.* For the same analysis see also Martin, *Southeast Asia and China: The End of Containment*, p. 32.

¹¹¹ “Sino-Burmese Joint Communiqué,” in *Peking Review*, 3 May 1963, p. 10-11. The communiqué was signed on 25 April 1963.

¹¹² Bert, “Chinese Relations with Burma and Indonesia,” p. 474. The non-alignment policy was also officially endorsed by the Ne Win government after 1962: see “Excerpt from the speech delivered by Gen. Ne Win at the Central School of Political Science” on 21 August 1964, in *The Burma Socialist Programme Party: Foreign Policy of the Revolutionary Government of the Union of Burma*, p. 27.

Through the border agreement [of 1960] and a Burmese pledge of continued non-alignment, China hoped to secure its southern flank and to hold Burma up as an example of the relative autonomy small states bordering China could enjoy if they remained nonaligned. This contrasted sharply with the deadlocked border dispute with India.¹¹³

By putting the new Bandung spirit into practice, China realized that friendly state relations serve the national long-term interests better than revolutionary struggle. The boundary agreement and the joint statement on the five principles with Burma were followed by similar agreements with Nepal, Afghanistan, Mongolia and Pakistan. The most important effects of the treaties were to show China's ability in handling sensitive issues with its neighbours peacefully in the face of Chinese-Indian military clashes in 1958 and 1962: despite the Panch Sheela agreed with India, the relationship remained spoiled. Interestingly, China appeared to approach the new moderate foreign policy line carefully. The overall pattern of establishing new contacts shows that before Beijing entered into negotiations on boundaries, trade, or consular officers (hence before the establishment of diplomatic ties) friendship treaties were signed with the respective countries.¹¹⁴

In September and October 1963, the BCP took up peace negotiations with Rangoon. The talks were the second attempt after the 1956 negotiations and, once again, failed. Beijing appeared to be the driving force behind this attempt to settle things between the communists and Ne Win's military government. The negotiations of 1956 and 1963 paralleled the implementation of the five principles and the Bandung strategy and were part of the BCP's "1955 line". This line was, as mentioned above, a direct consequence of the failure of the PCG line and thus marked a second attempt of the communists to gain political ground without sole recourse to the military. The 1955 line was supposed to turn the BCP into a legalized opposition party similar to the CPI in order to gain a stronger footing among the population. It made the concept of a peaceful communist strategy and negotiations with the government possible, while armed struggle still remained a possibility and was in fact carried on between the negotiation processes. However, the attempt to settle the insurgency issue peacefully ultimately did not succeed. The government demanded surrender. The BCP denounced the abandonment of the armed struggle as "revisionist" when the entire People's

¹¹³ Bert, "Chinese Relations with Burma and Indonesia," p. 474.

¹¹⁴ Rohde and Whitlock, *Treaties of the People's Republic of China, 1949-1978: An Annotated Compilation*, p. 3.

Comrade Party (PCP), along with BCP cadres, surrendered in 1957 in accordance with the line of “peaceful transition” to socialism adopted by the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death,¹¹⁵ and as a direct consequence of U Nu’s offer of amnesty. Later, as China drew closer to the Cultural Revolution, the BCP abandoned the 1955 line and adopted the “1964 line” of violent struggle alongside Mao’s slogan that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”¹¹⁶ At the height of the Cultural Revolution, the 1955 line was attacked as “revisionist.”¹¹⁷

During this period, Burma changed its outlook completely. Bert identifies two stages in Burma’s foreign policy, which are “seemingly unrelated to the varying emphases” of China’s foreign policy.¹¹⁸ In the first one and a half decades of its independence, Burma was a country with “varied and diverse foreign relations and a relatively open cultural, political, and economic system.” With the advent of the Ne Win government in 1962, Burma became a country “sealed off from almost all outside contacts” with the exception of the “diversity of trade, which continued, and Ne Win’s regular travel abroad.”¹¹⁹ From the Chinese point of view, this was a rather comfortable shift, for after being “sealed off,” Burma maintained “scrupulously correct relations with China.” It was “beneficial to China” in that Burma became “more dependent on the Chinese than ever, no longer being able to count on outside contacts and involvement to counter Beijing’s influence. [After 1962,] China became the major aid supplier.”¹²⁰

IV. Conclusion: Communism, Burma and China’s Foreign Policy

At the end of the 1970s, Takashi Tajima wrote that:

in the light of the historical development of China’s external affairs it now seems certain that it is the pursuit of her national interests – in other words the element of ‘nationalism’ – which is the fundamental purpose of her foreign policy. In noting this, however, one should certainly not deny the motivation of the element of ‘ideology’ – the target of accomplishing a world revolution – as long as China

¹¹⁵ Lintner, *The Rise and the Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, p. 17.

¹¹⁶ Thein Pe Myint, “Critique of Communist Movement in Burma,” pp. 244-247.

¹¹⁷ The purges of 1967 in the ranks of the BCP, which were supposed to clean the party of “revisionist elements” can be seen in this context (except the assassination of party leader Thakin Than Tun, who was assassinated by a party member who feared for his own life during the purges). See Fleischmann, *Birma zwischen der Sowjetunion und der Volksrepublik China*, p. 11 and p. 43, note 13.

¹¹⁸ Bert, “Chinese Policy Toward Burma and Indonesia: A post-Mao Perspective,” p. 964.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 965.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 964.

remains a socialist country led by a Communist Party with the avowed aim of the liberation of the whole human kind written into its constitution.¹²¹

What Tajima seemingly did not take into account was that at the start of the 1970s China had already returned to orderly foreign affairs and continuously diminished the role of ideology. The isolation from both superpowers was seen as a threat to national security, and the question of which superpower was to be chosen was eventually decided in favour of the United States. Instrumental in the Sino-US rapprochement was, among other factors, the Brezhnev Doctrine, which Beijing perceived as security threat. Furthermore, the death of Lin Biao in a plane crash removed the main advocate of a Sino-USSR rapprochement and the main opponent of the Zhou Enlai faction, which was supported by Mao. Ping-pong diplomacy was eventually initiated; in 1971, Taiwan lost its seat in the UN security council to Beijing; in 1972, Nixon visited China; and in 1973, Beijing was successful in persuading Hanoi to accept a (temporary) division of Vietnam in the Paris Peace Accords. In 1974, Mao returned to ideas of Bandung by pronouncing a theory of Three Worlds, with China situated in the Third World and claiming to be its leader. The difference between this and Bandung, however, was that the hostility towards the United States had disappeared and a front to isolate the Soviet Union was being pursued. The Three Worlds theory in some way framed the new foreign policy of declining support for communist insurgencies and rapprochement with the US with an official theory. The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US on 1 January 1979 coincided with the victory of the reformist CCP faction in December 1978 and, interestingly, with the final breakdown of relations between China and a Soviet-leaning Vietnam. The transitional period of 1978/79 further strengthened the decline of ideology for the pursuit of the national interest. Beijing's leadership almost completely stopped its active support for communist insurgency movements and abandoned them entirely throughout the 1980s. In terms of strategy, Beijing moved to re-establish the five principles of peaceful coexistence of the Bandung years for state-to-state relations and especially for the settlement of interstate disputes, as Deng Xiaoping made clear on his visit to Burma from 26 to 31 January 1978. The Burmese side considered Deng's visit as a sign that countries with different political and social systems could coexist peacefully on the basis of mutual respect and understanding, and thus could be able to develop their friendship and cooperation.¹²² This

¹²¹ Tajima, *China and South-east Asia: Strategic Interests and Policy Prospects*, p. 1. The paper was published in 1981, but written from 1979 to 1980.

¹²² Liang, "Zhonggong de waijiao xin gongshi" [The CCP's New Diplomatic Offensive], p. 17. Deng mentioned especially the border clashes between Vietnam and Cambodia, which among other reasons led to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia on 23 December 1978 and the overthrow of the Pol Pot government on 7 January 1979.

was exactly the idea of Bandung. The Bandung spirit was revitalized. Beijing, however, did not completely renounce support for Communist Parties in Southeast Asia at that time. The BCP was still regarded as a kind of stopcock in the event that state relations between Beijing and Rangoon worsened dramatically.¹²³ However, even this residual interest ceased to exist in the course of the 1980s.

Concerning the period up to 1977, Sutter's definition hits the mark. He argues that Beijing realized that the pragmatic conduct of foreign affairs "devoid of ideological encumbrances" turned out as the most efficient way to secure national interests. At the same time, however, Beijing's leaders "remained committed to Maoist ideology and have promoted the spread of international communist revolution." This led to a:

continuing contradiction – and a source of dynamism – in Chinese foreign policy. The interaction and frequent conflicts between the pursuit of China's vital interests and the concurrent drive for world revolution have given Chinese foreign policy an unpredictable changeable quality.¹²⁴

This "changeable quality" of pragmatism and Maoist ideology contrasts sharply with the post-1978/1979 period.

The BCP, having emerged from the independence movement entered the independence period as an enemy of the new state, although, where state relations prevailed over party relations, the BCP remained a crucial point in the relations between Rangoon and Beijing. Being not only a matter of trust but also a relevant strategic issue, bilateral relations were influenced by the extent to which Beijing took notice of the BCP. The ambiguous position is that Beijing, on the one hand, held on to pragmatic foreign policy – at least for most of the time – but, on the other hand, employed a revolutionary rhetoric. While pragmatism was mainly employed for state-to-state relations, revolutionary rhetoric focussed mainly on party relations. However, since rhetoric was subjected to pragmatism, party relations were subjected to state relations. This was done, because China's national interests did not primarily consist of ex-

This was eventually followed by Beijing's "punishment expedition" against Vietnam from 17 February to 18 March 1979.

¹²³ Bert, "Chinese Policy Toward Burma and Indonesia: A post-Mao Perspective," p. 980: "Great powers try to avoid ruling out specific courses of action they might some day want to follow, and they do not like to appear to be apologizing."

¹²⁴ Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Policy after the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1977*, p. 4.

porting and promoting revolution, but, first of all – viewed against the background of the traumatic events of imperialism – of ensuring its national security and territorial integrity. Thus, with the exception of the core years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-8), pragmatism prevailed over rhetoric, and state-to-state prevailed over party-to-party relations.

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