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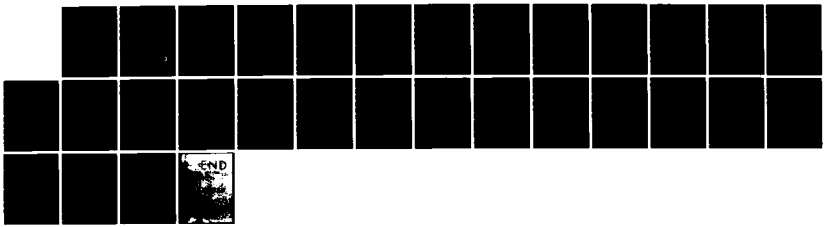

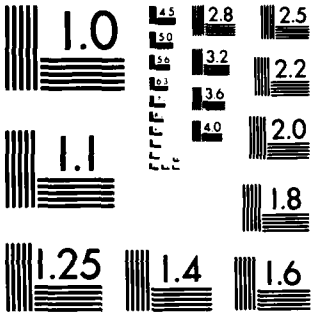

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CHINA IN THE EVOLVING INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Jonathan D. Pollack

December 1983

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Jonathan D. Pollack

December 1983

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CHINA IN THE EVOLVING INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM*

Jonathan D. Pollack

The Rand Corporation

December 1983

"It is becoming increasingly difficult to predict the past," an author of the *Soviet Encyclopedia* is alleged to have once remarked. Equivalent hazards confront those seeking to project China's long-term future. It would have required clairvoyance of a very high order (not to mention considerable intellectual courage) for anyone a decade ago to anticipate the remarkable changes in Chinese foreign policy during the 1970s. The ironic transpositions of the past decade find the cast of characters assigned new roles, but the *mise en scene* (in particular Indochina) is largely intact. Whether China's leaders have fully pondered these ironies is impossible to judge. At minimum, a decade which began with the United States invading Cambodia and ended with China invading Vietnam--followed less than a year later by an American Secretary of Defense inspecting Chinese tanks and planes--conveys the tortuous, unpredictable logic of history.

Will comparable surprises occur in the 1980s? The possibility seems rather remote. China, having suffered grievously by its vulnerability, isolation, and internal dislocation of the 1960s, will

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not lightly discard the political breakthroughs of the past decade. A degree of consensus on the objectives of economic development has been achieved; many "ghosts and demons" from China's past have been exorcised; and China's involvement in the international system as a whole has grown enormously, with major gains for Chinese security and prestige. No Chinese leader would want to undo achievements realized at such severe political, economic, and psychic cost.

Such a perspective, however, may lead observers astray. Depending on the historical verdict, the explanation of past events is either overly rationalized or defies all comprehension. Since the vicissitudes of political life and the whims of aging leaders cannot be fully anticipated, they will be relegated to a residual category. Like the prediction of earthquakes, they remain a lurking, unseen presence about which one can worry obsessively but prepare for only minimally.

For purposes of analysis, I have assumed that no extreme political convulsions within China will occur. The major external issue for China in the 1980s will concern the character of Peking's relations with both the global system and the Asian regional system. There will be two principal tests in the coming decade. First, will China's international beliefs and practices prove compatible with the policies of states whose assistance and cooperation China now solicits? Second, will China's adversarial relations remain predictable, or might the political and military pressure directed against China shift markedly? In Maoist terms, will the contradictions between China and the outside world prove antagonistic or nonantagonistic? The prospects for stability in China's foreign policy will depend on three principal factors: (1) the directions of the international system as a whole, (2) its manifestations in China's areas of more immediate interest in East Asia, and (3) China's capacity to resist or deflect pressures for change in its internal and external policy objectives.

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The prevailing characteristics of global politics in the early 1980s seem somewhat paradoxical. There is an undeniable heightening of the Soviet-American rivalry, including a degree of ideological repolarization. Yet this trend is counterbalanced by a substantial

restiveness and fractionation of power within various alliance systems. A nationalistic resurgence within the advanced industrial states (manifested in political, economic, and to a lesser extent military terms) illustrates the problematic nature of imposing a Soviet-American gloss on all contemporary conflicts and crises.

At the same time, there has been a substantial diffusion of political and military power to states previously less central to great power competition. The emergent powers seek to deflect pressure exercised against them within their spheres of interest, while still soliciting economic and military assistance from the major powers. Although the case of Iran under the Shah illustrates the superficial nature of many national power calculations, not all political systems are as weakly institutionalized or vulnerable to destabilization.

Under such circumstances, the lines of international demarcation have become far more blurred. Although the possibility of heightened political-military confrontation exists in certain regions (notably, Southwest Asia), regional states will try to prevent the major powers from turning local areas into global battlegrounds. For smaller states buffeted by larger states, stability and prosperity will depend heavily on their ability to defuse great power rivalries or balance the competing forces at work in their region. As Robert Scalapino has argued, the contemporary international system is marked increasingly by alignment rather than alliance; loose, informal coalitions seem a more effective tool of diplomacy than binding, formal commitments between states.[1]

Past assertions of a Soviet-American condominium now seem a dim and distant memory. The shared fate of both superpowers is occasionally recognized in Moscow and Washington, but it remains to be seen whether either state can reverse its present setbacks or sustain efforts to enhance its power and position. The seizing of momentary opportunities (for example, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan) or the building of new political and economic relationships (notably, the burgeoning ties between the United States and China at the end of the 1970s) are both

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[1]Robert A. Scalapino, "China and Northeast Asia," in *The China Factor*, ed. Richard H. Solomon (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), p. 203.

understandable in this context. By any measure, the United States and the Soviet Union will remain powers distinct from all others. Moscow (both accretively and protectively imperial) and Washington (resurgently if reactively imperial) confront difficult choices in the costs and benefits of their global commitments. The pressures for reappraisal and retrenchment could grow substantially over the coming decade.

If the character of a given international era is revealed by the national styles, forces, and capabilities at work in the international system, the 1980s will reflect a retreat from grand visions into more particularistic and narrowly nationalistic politics. The growing tensions within the Atlantic Alliance, although indicative of the perennial conflicts between greater and lesser powers, seem a harbinger of future trends. At the same time, such stresses have heightened unilateralist urges in both Washington and Moscow, potentially resulting in dramatic departures from prevailing policies. The vocal and intermittently strident attacks on Japan and Western Europe voiced in the United States fuel the restiveness and discontent with American policy aired within these societies. Mounting trade imbalances with Japan are linked to protectionist sentiment within the United States. Similarly demands by American officials for more equitable burden-sharing within the NATO alliance and greater support for American policy toward the Soviet Union have resulted in growing calls for redefining the United States' defense commitment to Western Europe in both the conventional and nuclear areas.

Both Washington and Moscow will increasingly view power management within their spheres of influence as a difficult and potentially intractable issue. Yet, the more worrisome situations for the Soviet Union and the United States will remain in critical "gray areas" (most notably, the Persian Gulf) where both powers assert vital interests, if not primacy. Somewhat less worrisome but still highly complicating opportunities for meddling in rival spheres of influence continue to exist in both Eastern and Western Europe. A Soviet-American confrontation or outright armed conflict, however, is neither imminent nor likely. Yet the paradoxes of power remain evident: the possession of military capacities vastly beyond those of any other state or coalition of states has produced neither security nor stability for the two global powers.

A remarkably resilient international state system continued to flourish in the 1980s. Reports of its demise or decline remain greatly exaggerated. The world's political systems and institutions are no doubt more permeable than in the past. Despite the transcendent character of many contemporary issues and the ineffectual response of the state system, the nation persists and endures as the inescapable unit of analysis in world politics.

The striking transformation in China's international behavior conveys the limits of the globalist labels attached to the contemporary international system. It is meaningful to speak of the "third world" in aggregate terms when this category encompasses bedfellows as strange as China, both Koreas, Saudi Arabia, Angola, and Bangladesh? Similarly, while China continues to profess identification with the "new international economic order," the character of China's support for this objective seems far different. Strategic imperatives and the opportunity to acquire technology and economic assistance from the West now find China dealing eagerly with the "capitalist world system," discarding much of Peking's past support for the collective needs and interests of all developing countries.[2] For example, China's growing demands on international lending institutions such as the World Bank place China in direct competition for funds with other developing countries.[3] Reports of Chinese low-enriched uranium fueling South African power reactors--although stoutly denied by the government of the People's Republic of China--make almost laughable Peking's claims about its "natural constituency" in the third world.[4] At the same time,

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[2]On these issues, see Samuel S. Kim, "Whither Post-Mao Chinese Global Policy?", *International Organization,* Vol. 35, No. 3 (Summer 1981), pp. 443-465; idem, "The Sino-American Collaboration and Cold War II," *Journal of Peace Research,* Vol. 19, No. 1 (1982), pp. 11-20; and idem, "The Political Economy of Post-Mao China in Global Perspective," in *China's Changed Road to Development,* Neville Maxwell and Bruce McFarlane, eds. (Oxford: Pergamon Press, forthcoming).

[3]Michael Weisskopf, "China Has Heavy Demands on World Bank," *Washington Post,* October 19, 1982.

[4]George Lardner, Jr., and Don Oberdorfer, "China Was Source of Atomic Fuel for South Africa, U.S. Believes," *Washington Post,* November 19, 1981.

Armand Hammer, the quintessential example of what the Chinese have described as the forces of economic appeasement in the West, has begun to do very substantial business with China. The irony of his presence in Peking may be lost upon the Soviets and the Chinese but not upon the president of Occidental Petroleum.

If the political and diplomatic reemergence of the People's Republic of China in the 1970s was characterized by classic balance of power calculations, thereby providing China with much needed breathing space, Chinese actions in the 1980s will further accentuate national power interests. China's behavior will be one among a number of competing nationalisms, although still cloaked in the protective garb of proletarian internationalism, "the global struggle against hegemonism," and the pursuit of a new international economic order. The evaluation of China's power and international role will depend largely on the legitimacy ascribed to these policy goals. Although the Chinese continue to insist that their intentions are magnanimous and unselfish, Chinese behavior will serve global interests only when these correspond to Chinese interests.[5] Other states (notably, regional powers along China's periphery) have a divergent view, an issue to which we will return.

China's increased search for wealth and power nonetheless constitutes a stabilizing, even conservative influence in contemporary international politics. The Chinese are very uncomfortable with any implication that they have become a *status quo* power: to do so unequivocally defies Marxism-Leninism as a philosophical system and neglects the People's Republic of China's unresolved boundary disputes with a number of its neighbors. Yet Peking's acceptance of the existing state system is no longer at issue. Although the Chinese in some respects still resist formal participation in institutions and political

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[5]For several Chinese assessments which address this issue, see the articles by Pei Monong (Deputy Director of the Institute of International Studies), "The International Situation and Development Prospects in East Asia," *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], March 27, 1981 in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report--China [FBIS-China]*, April 8, 1981, pp. A1-A4; and "A Brief Discussion of the Strategic Relationships in Opposing Soviet Hegemonism," *Renmin Ribao*, July 8, 1981, in *Renmin Ribao*, in *FBIS-China*, July 9, 1981, pp. C1-C3.

arrangements favored by the West, they no longer dispute the general legitimacy of this international order.[6] Peking's preoccupation with its internal economic reconstruction and the enhancement of Chinese national power heightens the People's Republic of China's stake in the existing framework of political and economic relations. To disrupt or challenge this framework in any but the most modest of ways would pose severe risks to China's development objectives.

In a certain sense, there has been a logical progression in Chinese policy over the past several decades. In the 1960s, in words if not in deeds, China espoused revolutionary change within societies as a means of effecting a global political transformation. Lin Biao's countryside versus city analogy, conveyed in his paean to people's war of September 1965, embodied such thinking in its purest form, furnishing Secretary of State Dean Rusk and others with considerable ammunition in their assertions of Chinese revolutionary expansionism. (In an audacious display of selective recall, Deng Xiaoping in late 1980 professed ignorance of Lin's geographic metaphor!)[7] In the early and mid-1970s, as China's international isolation ceased and Peking vastly expanded its diplomatic dealings, the internal political characteristics of other governments in all but a handful of cases were no longer deemed an issue. Calls for a redistribution of global economic power, embodied in Deng's address to the United Nations General Assembly of April 1974, presupposed an existing international regime in urgent need of reform, but this was not linked to changes within societies, only to economic relations between them.[8] By the close of the 1970s, with China increasingly committed to long-term relationships with the noncommunist industrialized world, Peking repeatedly indicated that the revolution

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[6]Chinese writings concede this point implicitly rather than explicitly; in both word and deed this conclusion seems inescapable. See, for example, the compendium of papers presented by Chinese participants to the meeting of the Trilateral Commission in Peking, May 20-23, 1981 (n.p., n.d.).

[7]See the transcript of Deng's interview with Earl Foell, Chief Editor of the *Christian Science Monitor*, appearing in *Renmin Ribao*, November 24, 1980, in *FBIS-PRC*, November 24, 1980, pp. L18-L23.

[8]Deng Xiaoping, Speech at Special Session of U.N. General Assembly, April 9, 1974, in *Peking Review*, no. 15 (April 12, 1974), Supplement, pp. 1-6.

was not for export, castigating the Soviet Union for its growing role in wars of national liberation.[9]

Thus, China's development objectives and security needs underscore the increasingly statist conception of the international system espoused by Peking. Numerous Soviet commentaries in recent years even argued that China had begun to serve as "accomplice and junior partner in American imperialism's global strategy." Yet the Sino-Soviet-American triangle in the 1980s is far more complicated.[10] Despite China's grandiose united front rhetoric of the late 1970s, in operational terms Peking still maintained substantial political independence and freedom of action. The Chinese resisted any suggestions that they consummate a formal alliance with the West entailing explicit rights and obligations for the contracting parties. They consistently preferred limi security arrangements and informal political alignments to bi ng, formal commitments. Practical parallel actions could then b ıdertaken through a division of labor among the "forces opposing hegemc v' .n relation to specific Soviet behavior deemed threatening to others. It was not a call for a frontal military confrontation with the Soviet Union, and especially not one involving China.

Similarly, the Chinese did not want to mortgage their security planning and defense efforts to the caprices of Western policy. China asserted that no single nation had the capacity to "frustrate the war schemes of the hegemonists." Yet this commitment to a collective good failed to address burden-sharing within the security coalition. In their most blatantly self-serving form, Chinese descriptions of Soviet global challenge (and the steps the West should take to combat it)

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[9]See Peng Pingshan, "Lenin and the National Liberation Movement--Commemorating the 110th Anniversary of Lenin's Birth," *Hongqi* [Red Flag], no. 8 (April 16, 1980), in *FBIS-PRC*, May 12, 1980, pp. C3-C8.

[10]I have addressed this issue in a number of publications. See, in particular, "Chinese Global Strategy and Soviet Power," *Problems of Communism* 30, no. 1 (January-February 1981), pp. 54-69; "Sino-Soviet Competition in the 1980s," in *Mainland China's Modernization: Its Prospects and Problems*, ed. Robert A. Scalapino and Carl G. Rosberg (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of International Studies and Institute of East Asian Studies, 1981), pp. 246-265; and *The Sino-Soviet Rivalry and Chinese Security Debate* (The Rand Corporation: R-2907-AF, October 1982).

verged on the strategic principle of "let's you and him fight." Since the early 1970s, the Chinese have consistently argued that China is the least likely target among the world's major powers for Soviet aggression. As Zhou Enlai observed at the Chinese Communist Party's Tenth National Congress in August 1973, China, though "an attractive piece of meat coveted by all," was "too tough to chew," let along "devour." Subsequent events bear out Zhou's assessment: any clashes along the heavily armed Sino-Soviet border over the past decade have been brief and limited.

Sino-Soviet relations reflect a situation of neither war nor peace, with both Moscow and Peking avoiding actions that might lead to a heightened confrontation or full-scale hostilities. If Chinese blood has been shed, it has been principally in Vietnam; if Soviet blood has been shed, it has been principally in Afghanistan. Throughout the late 1970s, Chinese strategic analysts continued to assert that the principal focus of Soviet power was directed against Western Europe or against "targets of opportunity" elsewhere far more vulnerable to pressure, intimidation, or outright occupation than China.[11] There have been some indications of leadership debate over this pivotal issue, somewhat reminiscent of Chinese debates over United States strategy that appeared in the mid- and late-1960s.[12] The predominant view, however, sees the Soviet Union as a beleaguered if not enfeebled military power, faced with increasingly difficult choices and constraints on the use of its power. In this view, China contributes much of its share to global security simply by preoccupying Soviet forces in the Asian theatre. At the same time, Moscow and Peking have engendered a degree of normalcy in their bilateral dealings, since neither benefits by high levels of military tension.

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[11]See, in particular, Special Commentator, "The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union for World Domination," *Renmin Ribao*, January 11, 1980, in *FBIS-PRC*, January 15, 1980, pp. C1-C6.

[12]For relevant examples, see Qi Ya, Zhou Zirong, and He Linfa, "The Focus Has By No Means Moved from Europe Eastward," *Shijie Zhishi* [World Knowledge], no. 10, (May 16, 1981), pp. 3-6 in Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS), no. 78792, August 20, 1981, *China Report*, no. 212, pp. 5-11; and Qi Ya and Zhou Zirong, "Does the Soviet Union Have a Global Strategy?" *Renmin Ribao*, May 20, 1981, in *FBIS-China*, May 21, 1981, pp. C1-C6.

Despite their renewed attacks on the "hegemonism" of both the Soviet Union and the United States, the Chinese do not seem particularly troubled by a world of two superpowers. To the extent that the United States and the Soviet Union expend the bulk of their energies on regions and issues other than those directly involving Chinese interests, China benefits by such competition. At the same time, Peking remains closely identified with the emergence of independent centers of political and military power. A global diffusion of power diminishes the opportunities for any state to exercise its power with impunity against others. As an increasing number of states (including China) develop more modern defense capabilities, any potential hegemonic power must rethink the costs and risks of expansion or aggression. Indeed, as the complexities of the American-Soviet competition grew markedly in the 1970s, China was increasingly the object of solicitation rather than criticism, coercion, or isolation, a trend almost certain to grow in the 1980s.

China is now one of the biggest boosters of the international system. The dominant great power rivalries provide China with breathing space, international leverage, and significant new opportunities to enhance its industrial, scientific, and defense potential. The issue for the coming decade is whether China will be able to continue to utilize the international system at such marginal cost, or whether expectations that China do more and related conflicts of interest will severely limit strategic cooperation. The unabashed nationalism evident on China's part in recent years can be practiced by all states. Expectations of greater mutuality of benefit and interest may increasingly mark China's relations with other nations. Some of these possibilities will be weighed further in a later section.

CHINA AS AN ASIAN STATE

It is a virtual truism that China remains a regional rather than a world power. China's strategic, economic, and technological relations with the West may be justified on the basis of global imperatives, but these relations are rooted in China's immediate political and military environment. The exercise of Chinese power (as distinct from Peking's

broader international strategies) is regional rather than global in scope. The consequences of growth in Chinese economic and military capacities will continue to be felt along China's periphery, not elsewhere. By virtue of its size, geographic position, historic role, and the absolute dimensions of its military effort, China's centrality in Asia overrides the endless examples of Chinese backwardness and vulnerability.

The smaller states of Asia will always live in the shadow of Chinese power, but the terms of this relationship remain problematic and uncertain. In previous decades, with the People's Republic of China convulsed by internal turmoil and largely isolated from the outside world, calculations about China were more short-term than long-term. The pervasiveness of the United States's political and military presence throughout East Asia further eased anxieties about Chinese power. The same assumptions no longer hold. The retrenchment in the American military presence in Asia after the Vietnam conflict, while potentially reversible, is unlikely to be altered dramatically in the near future. At the same time, the Soviet Union's political and military presence in Asia has increased enormously, as indicated by the growth of Soviet forces deployed in the region and Moscow's alliance obligations to Hanoi. The erosion of America's dominance in economic terms has been even more pronounced. The remarkable economic growth in various neo-Confusian cultures--felt initially in Japan, but now extending to South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, to name the more prominent examples--has transformed the face of Asia. These societies, long on entrepreneurial and management skills but woefully short of natural resources, must rely on continued access to foreign capital, markets, and resources to sustain their export-oriented economies. It is little wonder that Japan and the East Asian "four tigers" place such importance on the unhampered movement of goods and resources through vital international waterways.

Unburdened of the dogmatic self-reliance of the Maoist era, China in the late 1970s undertook far-reaching political and economic changes of its own. In political terms, China normalized ties with virtually all the noncommunist states of east Asia, and even began limited economic relations with Taiwan and South Korea.[13] Total foreign trade

[13]Andrew Tanzer, "Taiwan's China Links," *Far Eastern Economic*

grew from 27.25 billion *yuan* in 1977 to 73.5 billion *yuan* in 1981, a nearly threefold increase in only four years.[14] China also initiated new commercial practices previously unthinkable for any Chinese government, including the establishment of export processing zones and joint venture arrangements, as well as the solicitation of foreign capital and technology for the development of China's offshore oil reserves.[15] The success of the modernization program depends critically on these endeavors, in particular generating substantial earnings of foreign exchange through export of energy resources.[16]

Leaders in Peking are also trying to come to terms with the consequences of well over a decade of political turmoil and societal upheaval. The human and material costs of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath--a generation of ill-trained or untrained students, a severe retrogression in scientific and technological capabilities, and stagnation or damage to the industrial, transportation, and communications infrastructure--may be unparalleled for a society not involved in major armed conflict. In a March 1982 conversation with American physicist Li Zhengdao, Party Chairman Hu Yaobang bluntly conveyed a "never again" mentality: "In the past 142 years since the Opium War, the Chinese people have suffered inordinate hardship and suffering . . . to build a strong and prosperous China. The Cultural Revolution was the last time we shall endure such suffering; the ten years of internal chaos made China even poorer. The people today will no longer accept such poverty. This is a very profound lesson. We can no longer pursue stupid and divisive policies which only bring about poverty."[17] The People's Republic of China nonetheless remains severely

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Review, June 5, 1981, pp. 53-54; Jaehoon Ahn and John Sharkey, "Peking, Seoul Quietly Build Trade Link," *Washington Post*, March 14, 1982.

[14]*China Business Review* 9, no. 4 (July-August 1982), p. 57.

[15]For an exhaustive exploration of these developments, see A. Doak Barnett, *China's Economy in Global Perspective* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1981).

[16]For a wide-ranging official defense of the entire range of these policies, see Editorial Department, "On Questions Regarding Our Country's Economic Relations with Foreign Countries," *Hongqi* [Red Flag], 8 (April 16, 1982), in *FBIS-China*, May 11, 1982, pp. K4-K16.

[17]Zhu Mingzhi and Zhou Cipu, "Hu Yaobang Says We Must Not Go Against the Wishes of the People," *Ban Yue Tan* [Bi-Weekly Talks], 7 (April 10, 1982), in *FBIS-China*, April 20, 1982, p. K10.

disadvantaged in relation to its more developed noncommunist neighbors, all of whom built, trained, and prospered while China burned. Except for textiles, certain light industrial goods, and surplus labor for international construction projects, China still cannot compete seriously with its more advanced neighbors.

Given the disparities in industrial and technological development and China's acute shortages of trained manpower and managerial expertise, there will continue to be striking discontinuities between China's developmental prospects and needs and those in noncommunist Asia. China will remain a largely agrarian society well beyond the end of this century. The awesome tasks of feeding, clothing, and housing China's billion people will continue to set limits on Chinese economic interactions with the outside world. Except for industrial and urban development in China's coastal regions, comparisons between China's economic needs and those of its noncommunist neighborhoods seem overly facile.

The degree of technological, institutional, and managerial innovation permitted in relation to the outside world constitutes a critical issue for the Chinese leadership. Peking has openly sought Asian as well as Western entrepreneurial involvement in its modernization program. Mutual and complementary interests exist, provided that satisfactory arrangements can be implemented for the involvement of foreign capitalists in China's development. Yet, has China fully considered the political and economic transformation under way within Asia? Is Peking prepared to break unequivocally with the rigidities of a highly centralized, overly bureaucratic planning process? Will the Chinese be willing to accept diversity and inequality between and among regions and economic sectors? To what degree will leaders in Peking accommodate to the economic and commercial practices of the newly industrializing societies of Asia, even if such accommodation puts Marxist values at risk? The absence of clearcut answers--and growing anxieties about the People's Republic of China's reassertion of its sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997--accounts for a continued wariness on the part of many of Peking's neighbors about their long-term relations with China.

Beyond these problems, issues of territorial sovereignty and claims to ocean-based resources lurk as a potential crisis. A Chinese map of China serves as a pointed reminder of the disputed, unresolved claims between the People's Republic and a number of its near neighbors. In view of China's past willingness to undertake coercive military actions in support of such claims, unilateral moves by Peking cannot be excluded. The depiction of China as a reactive, defensive power is credible principally in relation to the superpowers. Assertions of Peking's vulnerability and weakness ignore China's role as Asia's strongest and largest indigenous military power, a role underscored by the People's Republic of China's repeated willingness to employ force when its leaders have judged key security interests at risk. The prospect of China strengthening its defense industrial base through Western assistance fuels lingering suspicions in Asia that the United States ultimately wants China to supplant American power in East Asia, enabling the United States to concentrate its defense resources elsewhere.

Since the extent of American involvement in China's defense modernization remains highly uncertain, leaders in Peking continue to plan on the basis of their own capabilities and doctrines. Through an incremental but steady effort, China's strategic planners and military commanders have begun to devote increasing attention to the long-term directions of Chinese military power.[18] For such a large and varied defense structure, the only meaningful long-term strategy is to maximize China's autonomy from external control--technologically, doctrinally, and organizationally. The gradual development of an externally oriented, independent defense structure (notably in both strategic weapons and in naval forces) will be far more pronounced by the end of the 1980s. Other Asian states as well as the superpowers will pay careful need to such developments. Although Peking is very unlikely to embark on what Liddell Hart terms an "acquisitive approach" to grand

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[18]Jonathan D. Pollack, "The Evolution of Chinese Strategic Thought," in *New Directions in Strategic Thinking*, ed., R. J. O'Neill and D. M. Horner (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp. 137-152; idem, "The Men But Not the Guns," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 18, 1981, pp. 26-29.

strategy, China's military efforts will lend growing credibility to Chinese power and policy goals.

Not surprisingly, Chinese pledges of defensive intent are greeted with suspicion in many Asian capitals. Even allowing for Chinese claims, Chinese actions are often offensive in execution (for example, the assertion of maritime claims or the cross-border operations against Vietnam). The troubled dealings with Vietnam offer telling examples in this regard. The war both of words and arms bespeaks a mentality of confrontation and conflict for which both Peking and Hanoi bear significant responsibility.[19] Both sides have demonstrated few compunctions about employing highly coercive strategies (Vietnam in Kampuchea and China against Vietnam) to counter one another's power. The continuing warfare in Southeast Asia, where communists continue to do battle with other communists, makes past claims of proletarian internationalism almost laughable.

Indeed, a severe case of nationalistic frustration and even jealousy may have helped prompt China's highly coercive actions toward Vietnam. Among the three major Asian communist parties, only the Vietnamese have successfully realized their ultimate goal: unification of the national polity under a single communist government. According to Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, following President Nixon's visit to Peking in 1972, Mao Zedong admonished Premier Pham Van Dong that "if China's broom could not reach to Taiwan, then Vietnam's broom could not reach to Saigon."[20] The corollary to such sentiments is obvious: as the larger, more important state, China was entitled to consummate its revolution first.

At the same time, China's effort to justify its highly punitive actions against Vietnam has always seemed somewhat contrived and self-serving. The Chinese have insisted that their actions had nothing to do with regional power rivalries or the creation of a Chinese sphere of influence in Southeast Asia but were simply an unselfish performance of the People's Republic of China's anti-hegemonic duty.[21] Yet China's

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[19]See *The Third Indochina Conflict*, David W. P. Elliott, ed., (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981).

[20]The Foreign Minister has made this claim in interviews with various foreign newsmen. Though the wording has varied slightly on occasion, the image seems too pithily Maoist to have been concocted by the Vietnamese.

[21]See, for example, Deng Xiaoping's interview with *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 30, 1980.

consistent assertion that Vietnam needed to be "taught a lesson" resonates all too closely with both traditional and modern instances of relations between superior and subordinate powers. China also claims that the unreasonable conduct of Vietnam and Albania were solely responsible for the People's Republic of China's abrupt cancellation of all economic and advisory assistance to both states in the spring of 1978. Yet Chinese actions evoke memories of 1960, when the Soviet Union supposedly had no alternative to removing all Soviet advisors from China.[22] China's depiction of Vietnam as the Soviet Union's accomplice and henchman bears comparison with American assertions in the mid-1960s that Hanoi was a cat's paw for Chinese "revolutionary expansionism." Neither view gives much credence to Hanoi's capacity to make its own decisions, even if the Vietnamese sought to gain significant external support for their actions.

Chinese strategy towards Vietnam has aimed at Hanoi's international isolation and economic and military exhaustion. It has increased rather than decreased Vietnam's dependence upon Soviet power, providing Moscow with new opportunities to exercise its influence in the region. In an interview with a visiting Dutch reporter in March 1982, Nguyen Co Thach candidly acknowledged this possibility. While arguing that "the Russians are our most loyal friends," he conceded that "we are economically dependent on them" and agreed that such economic dependence would lead to political dependence. He also argued that "up to now we have not given the Russians permission for a base in Vietnam . . . but that does not mean that it will never happen. . . if the Chinese persist in their attempts to destroy our country, we would perhaps in the long run have no other choice."[23] Yet, this development could lead to the

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[22]Compare John Gittings, *Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 129-143; "On China's Forced Cessation of Aid to Albania," July 7, 1978, in *Peking Review*, no. 29 (July 21, 1978), pp. 20-23; and "Time Will Tell the True from the False," *Renmin Ribao*, July 22, 1978, in *Peking Review*, no. 30 (July 28, 1978), pp. 26-29.

[23]For Nguyen's interview, see Amsterdam *De Volkskrant*, March 6, 1982, in *FBIS-Asia and Pacific*, March 17, 1982, p. K5. His pessimistic evaluation is a far cry from the supposed 1979 observation of a Vietnamese diplomat to Western observer that "we defeated French imperialism and American imperialism, so we certainly can survive Soviet friendship."

outcome that all states in the region want to avoid: the outright repolarization of Southeast Asia, with the local nations serving as the grass upon which the international elephants will trample.

China's strategy towards Vietnam presumed that Hanoi's leaders would respond only to pressure and punishment. The Vietnamese, in turn, viewed Peking as only the most recent power seeking to bring them to heel. In Vietnam's more optimistic calculation, the People's Republic of China had neither the resources nor the stamina to stay the course. In this view, Peking ultimately must concede the existence of an independent, unified, powerful Vietnam owing no obligations or deference to China, and the dominant power in Southeast Asia. According to Hanoi, the noncommunist states of the region as well as the major Western powers will ultimately accept this state of affairs, since they will appreciate the value of a strong Vietnam serving as a buffer against the expansion of Chinese or Soviet power in the region.

If China's original long-term strategy succeeds, Peking could achieve a decisive say in the affairs of Southeast Asia. The ASEAN states already are the object of solicitation (mixed intermittently with pressure and intimidation) by both the Chinese and Vietnamese. Despite pledges of support for the tripartite anti-Vietnamese coalition, China never disassociated itself from the Pol Pot forces in Kampuchea; on various occasions it has argued that the Khmer Rouge (as a supplanted legitimate government) should be reinstalled in power once the Vietnamese are expelled or withdraw.[24] Moreover, although the People's Republic has tried to persuade the Southeast Asian states that it has neither political nor military designs on the region, Peking remains unwilling to sever its ties with the communist parties of Thailand, Malaysia, and Burma. According to China, such ties are maintained for "moral" reasons and to assure that the Soviet Union does not seize control over these guerrilla movements.[25] Even if this point is

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[24]See, for example, Vice Foreign Minister Han Nianlong's speech to the U.N. Conference on Kampuchea, July 13, 1981, in *FBIS-China*, July 14, 1981, pp. E7-E10.

[25]Henry Kamm, "China's Aims in Asia: to 'Contain' Soviets," *The New York Times*, April 21, 1981.

conceded to the Chinese, many Southeast Asians express understandable misgivings about China's long-term intentions in the region.

Some elements in the Chinese leadership, however, may entertain doubts about the wisdom of the long-term policy towards Vietnam. Irrespective of geographic proximity, Hanoi seems no more likely to prove pliant and accommodating to China than to France or the United States. At the same time, the militarization of the Sino-Vietnamese border and the enhanced Soviet military presence in and around Indochina have created new and potentially serious security problems for the People's Republic of China. The tacit limits sought by Peking along the Sino-Soviet border have found few if any parallels in China's actions to the south. Some leaders in Peking may question the gains for Chinese security in indefinitely maintaining a major combat front, which may account for efforts late in 1982 and early in 1983 to hold out the prospect for improved Sino-Vietnamese relations pending a satisfactory resolution of the Cambodian conflict.

The costs of China's long-term strategy toward Vietnam therefore remain considerable. By refusing to view Hanoi other than as Moscow's surrogate, Peking contributed substantially to fulfilling such a prophecy. The logic of the "struggle against hegemonism," as defined by the Chinese, permits no compromise on Sino-Vietnamese relations. Might this risk the loss of the war as well as an occasional battle? No matter which side's staying power proves greater, Moscow could ultimately be the major beneficiary of such a debilitating competition, a development that leaders neither in Peking nor Hanoi can welcome.

Hanoi is not the only powerful, independent-minded regional communist power with which China must deal. Notwithstanding China's long and close ties to North Korea, there are immediate comparisons one can draw with Vietnam. Despite Kim Il-song's great suspicions of the Soviet Union, he is no more likely than Le Duan to prove pliant and yielding to Chinese policy preferences when they differ from his own. North Korea's vocal denunciations of American policy in Northeast Asia, a region where China had begun to express indirect support for the American presence, provide ample testimony to this fact. Even as China continued to provide declaratory support for Pyongyang, Kim's long-term

goal of reunification of the Korean peninsula was threatened by China's accommodation with Japan and the United States. As noted earlier, the logic of economics (as opposed to Asian communist solidarity) even led China to undertake indirect trading ties with South Korea, although these relations have since been reduced.

China will also face decisions about several athletic competitions with revealing foreign policy overtones. The People's Republic of China must decide whether to participate in the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Summer Olympics, both awarded to South Korea. Will a Chinese decision to participate be viewed in Pyongyang and elsewhere as evidence of Chinese nationalistic goals overriding the concerns of a long-time ally and fellow socialist state? Would China's attendance at the games be construed as Chinese acquiescence to the indefinite division of certain states, so long as this does not impinge upon the unity of all China? Peking's handling of this sensitive issue will reveal a good deal about the cross-pressures on its international conduct in the 1980s.[26]

The political and economic revolution of post-Mao China has also been unsettling to leaders in Pyongyang. Chinese attacks on one-man rule and the cult of personality, two issues with which Kim Il-song is intimately familiar, suggest how domestic developments can impinge upon foreign relations. Kim Il-song's greatest fear--that his political independence will be compromised by great powers pursuing their own interests at his expense--has no doubt been conveyed to Deng Xiaoping. Even if the People's Republic of China has good reasons for preserving the *status quo* in Korea, it cannot run an overly great risk of

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[26]Reports on China's possible participation in the Games of 1986 and 1988 are few and ambiguous. In December 1981, officials from the All-China Sports Federation noted to a Japanese correspondent that "we are not yet ready to decide our policy on the Seoul sports events." *Kyodo*, December 9, 1981, in *FBIS-China*, December 9, 1981, p. D1.

Comments made by several Chinese officials in a Sino-Japanese conference during October 1982 were slightly less equivocal. Huan Xiang, advisor to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, offered no predictions but did note that China would not undertake any actions "perpetuating the split of Korea." At the same time, however, Wang Bingnan, president of the People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, acknowledged that Chinese and South Korean athletes had already competed against one another in various international athletic competitions, an implicit acknowledgment that the Chinese might well decide to send teams to the Games. *Asahi Shimbun*, October 8, 1982.

alienating the North Korean leadership. Deng has tried to steer a careful course, reassuring Japan and others of China's interest in stable, mutually beneficial relations with noncommunist Asia, while still paying heed to the concerns and sensitivities of a proud, nationalistic leadership in Pyongyang, but he can hardly incur the risks of doing more. To push the North towards genuine accommodation with the South would be anathema to Kim Il-song, since it would confirm Kim's worst suspicions of the willingness of various "dominating forces" to sacrifice his vital interests.[27]

Like Vietnam's leaders, Kim Il-song has the capability to act independent of China. It remains extremely unlikely that Pyongyang would grow so alienated from China that it would rush into the embrace of Soviet power; nor does China face a moment of decision akin to its break with the Vietnamese in 1978. Indeed, Sino-North Korean relations appeared to improve significantly during 1982. Yet, a future deterioration cannot be excluded, especially with the likelihood of a succession to Kim Il-song before the end of the decade. If North Korea became another Vietnam for Peking, China's worst strategic nightmare might come to pass, with Moscow making major gains in its long-term effort to encircle and pressure China from an increasing number of geographic points.

Chinese leaders, yet again, may have to ask if they are prepared to live with a powerful, regional communist power on their borders that acts in defiance of Chinese interests and preferences. China in the 1980s will therefore need to confront the limits of its strategic vision in several respects. In both the communist and noncommunist world, the number of independent powers continues to grow. The time may not be too far distant when the Chinese will have to concede that the security of Asia derives from far more than the machinations of one or more hegemonic powers. The long-term prospects for peace and stability in Asia will increasingly depend on how China is prepared to interact with the outside world, irrespective of how others approach key international

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[27]On these issues, see Donald Zagoria, "North Korea: Between Moscow and Beijing," in *North Korea Today - Strategic and Domestic Issues*, ed., Robert A. Scalapino and Jun-Yop Kim (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, Korea Research Monograph No. 8, 1983), pp. 351-371.

questions. How does China fit within the international system of the 1980s, and what are the possible consequences for China's internal political and economic transformations?

LEADERSHIP AND FOREIGN POLICY

Any assessment of Chinese foreign policy in the 1980s must consider not only China's effect on the international system but also the international system's effects on China. Although external considerations compelled the Chinese to reorient the direction and goals of their foreign policy, such changes were repeatedly linked to the domestic political agenda. More than any other Chinese politician since 1949, Deng Xiaoping has employed China's international position and problems as a resource in domestic political debate.[28] In Deng's view, China's isolation and estrangement from the international system had left China economically, militarily, and diplomatically vulnerable. From the perspective of China's economic well-being as well as its security, international circumstances no longer allowed for such estrangement and equivocation.

Yet the political vision of Deng Xiaoping and his designated successors depend critically on a beneficial relationship between the international system as a whole and China's domestic development. Deng's call for "a long-term peaceful international environment" is not an empty slogan; it represents an inescapable fact. Nothing would be more certain to unsettle China's development efforts in all its facets than a prolonged siege mentality akin to the Cultural Revolution, or major warfare involving the People's Republic. The calculations underlying Chinese planning in the 1980s assume a relatively tranquil if not benign international environment. Deng himself has acknowledged that major armed conflict would prove extremely dislocating.[29]

Nevertheless, Deng is not the only Chinese politician offering a vision of China's future. A range of contentious issues is likely to

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[28]On this issue, see Pollack, *The Sino-Soviet Rivalry and Chinese Security Debate*.

[29]See in particular Deng's Report on the Current Situation and Tasks, January 16, 1980, in Hong Kong *Cheng Ming*, 29 (March 1980), in *FBIS-PRC* Supplement, March 11, 1980, pp. 1-27.

emerge in the event of major internal or external changes, or with Deng's passing. The key questions on China's present political agenda--administrative reform, China's overall economic strategy, resource allocation, and China's economic and technological dealings with the outside world, to name some of the central concerns--are directly linked to considerations of personal power and institutional prerogatives. This phenomenon is hardly unique to China, but it is a particularly acute concern in the Chinese case.

Deng's bold effort to steer China on a different course, although already yielding important results, requires leadership and policy stability. In view of the dimensions of such change and its consequences for the allocation of political power, others want to see if Deng or his political allies stumble and fall. No sensible Chinese politician could possibly wish a return to the personalized, nihilistic policies of the Cultural Revolution, but not all leaders have an equal stake in present policies, or an equally sympathetic view of China's involvement in the international system. If such policies are found wanting or detrimental to Chinese interests, Deng's grasp on the reins of power cannot possibly remain as secure.

Although Deng must hope for the best, he maintains a wary eye on the issues most sensitive to Chinese sensibilities and interests. Foremost among such questions is the relationship to the West, and to America in particular. The role of the United States in China's development--epitomized by the United States's commitment to a "secure, strong, and prosperous China"--is crucial. Deng has chosen to downplay the importance of the United States in the context of growing strains in Sino-American relations, but such statements contradict earlier statements acknowledging the vital importance of such ties. As an astute *Chinese* politician, Deng remains all too aware of the dangers of appearing beholden to any external power, especially one charged with continuous intervention in China's internal affairs since 1949.

Given Deng's highly ambitious policy agenda, the role of foreign powers in China's development remains a heated and contentious issue. As the depths of China's economic and societal problems have become more evident, looking beyond China's borders for explanations of underdevelopment might prove highly tempting. Deng knows better: the

United States should be judged neither savior nor villain in China's development. The determination to act independent of any outside power, although reflective of nationalistic pride and assertiveness, has a more negative potential as well. The models, methods, and the money of the West cannot always be insulated from their broader societal and cultural effects. Although some in China may judge the consequences of modernization harmful to Chinese values, those contemptuous of the West have yet to suggest an alternative to the isolation and nativism that such attitudes breed. Deng understands China's compelling need to come to terms with the international system, yet achieving this goal remains elusive and troublesome.

CHINA'S SEARCH FOR AN INTERNATIONAL ROLE

After following a tortuous, highly conflictful external course for nearly two decades, China in the early 1980s is seeking integration in the existing international system. Peking's relations with most other nations have been normalized; China has become a regular participant in international politics and economics; and China is now subject to the same expectations as others within the international system. The unprecedented access of the outside world to China in recent years has stripped the People's Republic of much of its international mystique; it has become a nation-state much like any other nation-state.

Yet Chinese foreign policy in the 1980s continues to labor under the weight of substantial political and historical baggage. The People's Republic of China has long been cast as the aggrieved, reactive, or manipulated power. At the same time, it has all too often been embroiled in its internal political drama. As a result, those who most need to understand China's emergence as an autonomous, more powerful state--the Chinese leaders themselves--have often failed to do so. In the 1980s, China has unparalleled opportunities to assess both the context and the consequences of its growing power within Asian and world politics. Still, the Chinese approach this task with substantial ambivalence. There is the continuing dilemma between a highly normative conception of the People's Republic of China's international role, as opposed to an objective appraisal of the exigencies and opportunities now confronting China. There is the additional conflict between the

goals of patriotism and the goals of internationalism, though various Chinese writings assert that the two concepts are inseparable.[30] And there is an ongoing tension between the assertion of China's "principled stand" and full recognition of the perceptions, needs, and rights of other states.

Thus, China's leaders have only begun to consider the consequences of the emergence of the People's Republic of China as a more powerful state. By virtue of its continental dimensions, its billion people, and its inherent power potential, China has already achieved international influence out of proportion to its material or military accomplishments. At the same time, China's policy vacillations of the past three decades guarantee that China will not and cannot be taken for granted. In Deng Xiaoping's felicitous phrase, China remains "a very nonaligned state," beholden to few and capable of a wide variety of international actions.[31]

Despite its self-characterization as a nonaligned, third-world state, China is a member of neither the nonaligned movement nor the Group of 77, even as the People's Republic of China has joined the World Bank and other institutions sponsored by the advanced capitalist states. As Samuel Kim has suggested, China is better viewed as the charter member of the "Group of One."[32] The combination of such Olympian detachment with Peking's status as the world's third intercontinental nuclear power affords China a unique position within global politics. Beyond the flexibility and opportunity afforded the People's Republic of China, it is not yet clear what such international standing buys China.

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[30]For discussions of this issue, see Li Dai, "Independence and China's External Relations," *Shijie Zhishi*, no. 19 (October 1, 1981), pp. 2-4 in *FBIS-China*, November 19, 1981, pp. A1-A5; Commentator, "Patriotism in the Socialist Era," *Beijing Ribao* [Peking Daily], November 5, 1981, in *FBIS-China*, November 25, 1981, pp. R1-R5; and Wang Zhen, "Study History, Display Patriotic Spirit," *Hongqi*, no. 2 (January 16, 1982), pp. 2-5, in JPRS, no. 80431, March 30, 1982.

[31]Deng offered this characterization to a visiting Yugoslav delegation in December 1981. See *FBIS-PRC*, January 6, 1982, p. K12.

[32]Kim, "Whither Post-Mao Chinese Global Policy?", op. cit. China's success in blocking the reelection of U.N. Secretary General Waldheim is also notable in this respect. See Michael Parks, "China Carving Itself a Key Role in Foreign Affairs, Third World," *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1981.

In a certain sense, China's power may be more negative than positive. By virtue of its size, independence, and power potential, it constrains others from acting without appropriate consideration for China's sensibilities and interests, but it does not guarantee that China will have its own way internationally. Yet such indirect influence accords with Peking's depiction of the principles underlying its international conduct.[33]

Lost in this process is a more candid, long-term sense of the international position and role of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese are still unwilling to discuss in any detail their preferred orientation in relation to the structure of the contemporary international system. A best-educated guess would be a modified European role, with China carrying out policies politically and militarily independent of both superpowers, yet with a sensitivity to the interests of both Moscow and Washington. Such a policy would permit a degree of flexibility within an overall division of labor, with China constituting an "intermediate force in the international class struggle." China (like the Western European states) would ultimately constitute an additional "pole" within the international system.[34] The consequences of such a power position in China's spheres of regional interest are much less clear. These represent a second order consideration in Peking's thinking that Chinese writings have yet to ponder fully.

Unavoidably, those managing China's international fortunes will remain China-firsters; no one should expect anything less. If such a role is inevitable, the pivotal issue concerns China's capability for an informed and differentiated view of the world. At the same time, the outside world needs a more complex and accurate view of China. Such interactions will not be easy, and arriving at understanding may be slow, but no reasonable alternative exists. With luck, a degree of

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[33]See Premier Zhao Ziyang's three part characterization of Chinese foreign policy conveyed to Joao Bernardo Vieria, head of state from Guinea-Bissau, April 19, 1982, in *FBIS-PRC*, April 20, 1982, p. I3.

[34]Guo Fengmin, "Fundamental Ideas Underlying the Foreign Policy of European Nations," *Gubji Wenti Yanjiu*, [Studies in International Problems], (October 1981), in JPRS, no. 79743, December 28, 1981, *China Report*, no. 2, 5-21.

foresight, and realistic expectations on the part of both Peking and the outside world, China's relationship with the international system will remain imperfect but far better than in the past. As leaders in Peking recognize, nonantagonistic contradictions remain contradictions, but they offer a far better solution than the alternative.

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