

Bringing Geography Back

in:

Buffer Thinking in Chinese Foreign Policy

Yu-Hua Chen

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Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Part
Comintern	Communist International
CMC	Central Military Commission
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
FMA	Foreign Ministry Archive
HEU	Highly Enriched Uranium
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
KMT	Kuomintang
KVA	Korean Volunteer Army
NAA	National Archives Administration
NAJUA	Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army
NEBDA	Northeast Border Defense Army
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
MPR	Mongolian People's Republic
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PVA	People's Volunteer Army
TFC	Third Front Construction

UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WWII	World War II

CH 1 Introduction

1.1 China's Puzzling Behavioral Consistency

One fundamental assumption widely accepted by the majority of International Relations (IR) scholars is that state behavior will change in accordance with variances of polarity in the international system. The anarchical nature of the world causes states to rely on their own power to protect themselves from attacks by others. Due to this need for survival, states pay close attention to power dynamics in the international system. As a result, changes of power distribution among states in the system thus influence how the states define their interests in the system, and this in turn affects how they interact with one another. As Kenneth Waltz said, "A structural change is a revolution...It is so because it gives rise to new expectations about the outcomes that will be produced by the acts and interactions of units whose placement in the system varies with changes in structure."¹ In other words, the relationship between state behavior and the change of polarity in the system is constantly responsive.

This assumption that state behavior and changes of polarity is constantly responsive is evident in many seminal works in the field of international relations. In the realism school of thought, IR polaritists, such as Waltz, Hans Morgenthau, Karl Deutsch, David Singer, and Robert Gilpin, have long been debating which type of polarity of the international system would best inhibit states' war-prone behavior.² Power transitionists in the same school, such as Abramo Organski, Jacek Kugler, Charles Doran, and Graham Allison, have pointed to the possibilities of military

¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1st ed. (McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 70.

² *Ibid.*, CH 8; Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2006), CH 21; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Karl W. Deutsch and J. David Singer, "Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability," *World Politics* 16, no. 3 (1964).

conflict between a rising power and an established power in the system.³ Liberalists who promote the constraining effect of international institutions/regimes on state behavior also agree that power of those mechanisms has something to do with structural change in the system.⁴ As Robert Keohane put it, “Regimes can be viewed as intermediate factors, or intervening variables, between fundamental characteristics of world politics such as the international distribution of power and the behavior of states.”⁵ While constructivists generally do not share the same ontology with the scholars mentioned above, Alexander Wendt would not be able to deny the validity of this assumption if states are situated in the Hobbesian or Lockean culture of anarchy.⁶ Thus, this assumption has been an essential component in the development of theories across different schools of IR thought.

History provides scholars of IR with countless cases confirming the validity of that assumption. Athens and Sparta had been enjoying a peaceful relationship in the Greek Peninsula and resisted the invasion from Persia together in the 490 BCE. The growing power of Athens, however, changed how these two city-states perceived and interacted with one another, which ultimately led to a devastating war in 430 BCE. The US-Britain rivalry, moreover, stemmed from implacable territorial and commercial interests in the Western Hemisphere and lasted more than a century. The rise of Japan, Russia, and Germany and the challenge they mounted to Britain’s dominance on all fronts in the 20th century, made Britain decide to unilaterally accommodate the US to eliminate the possibility that the US would be another adversary. And today, faced with an increasingly powerful and influential China, Australia, one of the most loyal allies of the US, is adjusting its current alliance policy. In early 2019, Australia’s Minister of Defense Christopher Pyne stated that “There is no gain in stifling China’s growth and prosperity... We are not interested in containing China.”⁷ It seems, therefore, that states in the West and East, past and present, big and small, are not immune to forces of structural change

³ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); Charles Doran, "Power Cycle Theory, the Shifting Tides of History, and Statecraft: Interpreting China's Rise," *The Bologna Center Journal of International Affairs* 15, no. 1 (2012).

⁴ Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables," *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982); Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984); G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁵ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, p. 64.

⁶ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁷ Please see the full text of the speech of Christopher Pyne on January 29 2019 here: <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/cpyne/speeches/fullerton-forum-keynote> (accessed March 20 2019).

in the international system, and have constantly turned their friends into foes or enemies into allies over the centuries.

However, it is not the case in how contemporary China interacts with Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia.

On October 18 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping solemnly addressed hundreds of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members in the Great Hall of the People at the Nineteenth National Congress of the CCP. In the address, he showed his determination to unify an island approximately 150 kilometers away from the Chinese coast, Taiwan:

We have a firm will, full confidence, and sufficient capability to defeat any form of Taiwan independence secession plot. We will never allow any person, any organization, or any political party to split any part of the Chinese territory from China at any time or in any form.⁸

Annexing Taiwan is a policy goal that China has been trying to achieve for several decades. Since the CCP established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, China has regarded this island as a territory awaiting for ultimate unification. Although the government of the Republic of China (ROC) has ruled this island for seven decades, China's policy toward Taiwan is still aimed at bringing Taiwan under its control.

This policy goal is not merely CCP propaganda but rather, a policy objective that China has been planning assiduously for decades. China first made concrete plans to seize Taiwan by military means was in 1949, and it has never reneged on this plan. As recently as June 2015, for instance, China launched a four-month military exercise called Stride 2015 at the Zhurihe military training base in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. In preparation for the exercise, China built replicas of major buildings and structures of Taipei, such as the Taiwan Presidential Office, highway interchanges, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Taipei First Girl's High School, to enable the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to simulate how to take over Taiwan's capital more realistically. The prospect of an intervention by foreign forces has been a significant factor in deterring China from launching this military operation to date.

⁸ Please see the full text of Xi's remark on the Taiwan issue at the 19th Party Congress here: http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/18/content_5232659.htm (accessed January 18 2018).

Evidence suggests that China has also been contingency planning for a scenario in which foreign forces, particularly the US, intervene in its military plan against Taiwan.⁹

The rationale behind China's policy goal of annexing Taiwan is worth pondering for a number of reasons. Although China's official position nowadays is that Taiwan has been part of China since ancient times, the CCP did not consider Taiwan part of China nor believe that it should become part of China in the 1920s. In the 1930s, the CCP even supported the Taiwanese in establishing their own state. Second, Taiwan is not China's Jerusalem. The island has never held any sacred religious meaning for Chinese people. Most importantly, the relatively small territorial size of Taiwan makes China's obsession with annexing it even more puzzling, especially compared with China's attitude toward other disputed territories. For example, China concluded a border agreement with Russia in July 2008, under which Beijing officially ceased its sovereignty claim over an enormous territory in the northeast of China; Beijing had previously regarded this territory as having been taken by the Russian Empire under the Treaty of Peking and the Treaty of Aigun during the 19th century. The size of the territory is approximately 28 times that of Taiwan. If China could manage its territorial sovereignty flexibly in this case, why not in the case of Taiwan? Why is annexing Taiwan so important to China?

China's behavior toward Taiwan is not the only case departing from above assumption.¹⁰ North Korea, another peripheral state to China, is a similar case in point. The international community has been trying to curb North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons since the 1990s. Yet, at 10:57 on February 12 2013, the China Earthquake Network Center detected a 4.9 magnitude earthquake in North Korea. An hour later, North Korea announced that it had successfully conducted an underground nuclear test at the Punggye-ri nuclear test site in Kilju County, which was only approximately 150 kilometers away from the Sino-North Korean border. This nuclear test by North Korea was in violation of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 1718, 1874, and 2087. It also directly challenged the international non-proliferation regime which China has been adhering to since 1992. As a result, China issued an official statement five hours after the test. On the surface, China's statement condemned this

⁹ Wang Hongguang, "Kangzhan Yuebing Wangpai Zhuangbei Qiangxian Puguang: Wang Hongguang Zhongjiang Xiangjie 抗战阅兵王牌装备抢先曝光: 王洪光中将详解 [The Revelation of the Best Military Equipment in the Anti-Japanese War Military Parade: A Detailed Introduction by Former Lieutenant General Wang Hongguang]," *Sohu Junshi*, August 30 2015; Roger Cliff, Mark Burles, Michael S. Chase, Derek Eaton, Kevin L. Pollpeter, *Entering the Dragon's Lair: Chinese Antiaccess Strategies and Their Implications for the United States* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007).

¹⁰ Thomas J. Christansen, "Chinese Realpolitik," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 5 (1996).

nuclear test. In reality, however, the statement simply repeated the same diplomatic rhetoric it had produced in responses to the previous two North Korean nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009: China firmly opposes nuclear testing, China's position is that the Korean Peninsula should be de-nuclearized, and the concerned parties should peacefully solve this crisis through negotiation and dialogue.¹¹

In addition to the official statement, there were some indications that China still strongly supported North Korea in many ways after the nuclear test. Given that China has been the main provider of food and energy to North Korea for decades, the international community was expecting China to use this leverage to put pressure on North Korea. However, China's behavior toward North Korea defied these expectations. Although China agreed to comply with the UNSC's request to issue Resolution 2094 imposing economic sanctions on North Korea, in reality it continued to support North Korea economically. According to a report released by the Korea International Trade Association, trade between China and North Korea grew 10.4 % in 2013, nearly double the growth rate of 2012.¹² And, this report only included the official trade record between the two sides.

In the following years, top Chinese leaders continued to send a message to the world that Sino-North Korean relations would not change in any significant way. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi indicated on March 8 2015, that "Sino-North Korean relations have a very firm foundation. They should not and will not be influenced by any temporary event."¹³ Moreover, Liu Yunshan, a member of the Standing Committee of the CCP Politburo, visited North Korea to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Korean Worker's Party in October 2015. The Chinese government seized Liu's visit as an opportunity to promote the intimate relationship between China and North Korea, describing it as being like "lips and teeth" since ancient times.¹⁴

North Korea's existence has been highly valued by China in this way since the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–53), in which China suffered enormous casualties and losses in order to ensure North Korea's survival. China's consistent economic assistance, diplomatic support, and military protection of North Korea have been the key reason why North Korea has been

¹¹ Please see the official statement of the Chinese government here:

http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2013-02/12/content_2331595.htm (accessed January 18 2018).

¹² Scott Snyder, "China-North Korea Trade in 2013: Business as Usual," *Forbes*, March 27 2014.

¹³ "Wang Yi: Zhongchao Guanxi You Laogu Jichu Buying Ye Buhui Shou Yishi Yishi Yingxiang 王毅: 中朝关系有牢固基础 不应也不会受一时一事影响 [Wang Yi: The Sino-North Korean Relations Had A Very Firm Foundation. It Should Not and Will Not Be Influenced By Any Temporary Event]," *Xinhuanet*, March 8 2015.

¹⁴ Please see the Chinese official website reporting this trip:

<http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/cnleaders/liuyunshan/lys201510chx/yw.htm> (accessed January 18 2018).

able to survive until today, and has indirectly contributed to the development of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Puzzlingly, the policy goal of maintaining the existence of North Korea has obviously put China's northeast region at risk of nuclear accidents and made China suffer a lot of criticism from the international community that it is not being a responsible great power. Why is maintaining the existence of North Korea so important to China?

Let us shift our focus to Mongolia, another corner of Northeast Asia wherein China has been working to upgrade its relations. On August 21 2014, Xi paid a two-day state visit to Mongolia. This was not the first time a top Chinese leader had visited Mongolia, but it was the first time that the General Secretary of the CCP had visited Mongolia and not combined the trip with visits to other Central Asian countries. The increasing value that China was placing on this small state to its north was also apparent in the diligence with which China arranged Xi's visit. Xi met the Mongolian President and Prime Minister, delivered a speech at the State Great Khural of Mongolia, and even wrote a personal letter to the Mongolian people, which was widely published in Mongolian media. What highlighted this visit was China's emphasis on the importance of the neutrality of Mongolia in the Sino-Mongolian Joint Declaration. The declaration stated:

Both signatories emphasize that they will not conduct any activity undermining the other party's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity; will not sign any treaty undermining the other party's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity; will not join any alliance or camp undermining the other party's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity; will not participate any activity of the alliance or camp mentioned above which is against the other party; will not allow any third state, organization, or group to conduct activities undermining the other party's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity on its territory.¹⁵

China's emphasis on Mongolia's neutrality is very puzzling if one traces the chronological history of Mongolian neutrality as a theme in China's policy. The concept of Mongolian neutrality first appeared in the Sino-Mongolian Friendship and Cooperation Relationship Treaty of 1994. The concept then was confirmed at least four times since 1994 as it appeared in the joint statements of 2003, 2005, 2006, and 2011 between China and Mongolia. By

¹⁵ Regarding the text of "the Joint Declaration on the Sino-Mongolian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership," please visit the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/yz_676205/1206_676740/1207_676752/t1184719.shtm (accessed January 18 2018).

reiterating this special status of Mongolia to China every few years, China seems to need to ensure its northern territory would be continuously free from any sort of military or political threat. As Xi said in his speech to the State Great Khural during his visit, “We can have peace of mind only when the door of our house is stable.”¹⁶ In addition, the content of Mongolian neutrality has evolved into a much more specified and sophisticated form in the 2014 joint declaration while the treaty of 1994 simply stipulated the concept in this way:

Both of the signatories will not participate in any military and political alliance against the other party; will not sign any treaty undermining the national sovereignty and security of the other party; none of the parties will allow a third state to use its territory to undermine the national sovereignty and security of the other party.¹⁷

Given that Mongolia lacks the leverage to force China to agree to such a statement, the implication of this statement appears to be more reflective of China’s desire for Mongolia to be a neutral state with strict terms, than of Mongolia’s own wishes. During the Cold War, the Soviet forces stationed in Mongolia posed a significant military threat to China. However, along with the Sino-Soviet rapprochement of the 1980s, the Soviet Union gradually withdrew its forces from Mongolia. The last Russian troops left Mongolia in December 1992. The statement in the joint declaration that the territory of Mongolia should be a neutral area would be understandable if it were announced in the Cold War era. Why did China need to emphasize the importance of Mongolian then and still today? More specifically, why is the policy goal of neutralizing Mongolia so important that China had to pursue such a goal for more than two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union?

Why is annexing Taiwan, maintaining the existence of North Korea, and neutralizing Mongolia so critical to China? Certainly, each question may have an answer in its own right. Put the three questions together, however, and an interesting puzzle emerges—the behavior of China toward certain neighboring states presents a very strong behavioral consistency.

This puzzle presents an obvious abnormality for IR theories. The power distribution in Northeast Asia has changed many times in the past sixty years, from the unipolarity of US superiority in the 1950s, to bipolarity of the Soviet-American confrontation in the Cold War

¹⁶ "Xi Jinping Delivers an Important Speech at the State Great Hural of Mongolia," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC*, August 22 2014.

¹⁷ Regarding to the text of “the Sino-Mongolian Friendship and Cooperation Relationship Treaty,” please visit the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/tytj_674911/tyfg_674913/t5725.shtml (accessed January 18 2018).

era, to the return of US hegemony in the 1990s, then to the emerging bipolarity of the Sino-American rivalry after the 2000s. From a theoretical perspective, the effects of the polarity transformations in this region should have pushed China to alter its policy goals toward North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia fundamentally. Yet, China still upholds those policy goals to date.

What makes this behavioral consistency toward the three states more intriguing is the fact that China's behavior toward certain powerful states does follow what IR theories tell us. In 1950, China built a military alliance with the Soviet Union through the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance. During the Korean War and wars against Taiwan in the 1950s, China completely leaned on the support of the Soviet Union to fight against the US. After the balance of power between the US and the Soviet Union gradually shifted, China changed its position and formed a semi-alliance with the US and against the Soviet Union in the 1970s. From the 1980s to the 1990s, China pursued a much more independent foreign policy under the Deng Xiaoping era in which US power prevailed in the international system. Along with the decline of the material power of the US and China's own increased power, China interacted with its neighbors in a much more assertive and aggressive way in the Xi era. It unilaterally announced an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea, built and then militarized disputed islands in the South China Sea, and embarked on its colossal the Belt and Road Initiative. US Secretary of Defense James Mattis described this behavior of China as an effort to revive the Chinese order of the Ming Dynasty.¹⁸

To sum up, these three long-held policy goals of China are worth examining in both empirical and theoretical terms. The core research question of this thesis is: What explains China's strong behavioral consistency toward North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia, as exhibited in China's policy goals of maintaining the existence of North Korea, annexing Taiwan, and neutralizing Mongolia?

1.2 Thesis in Brief

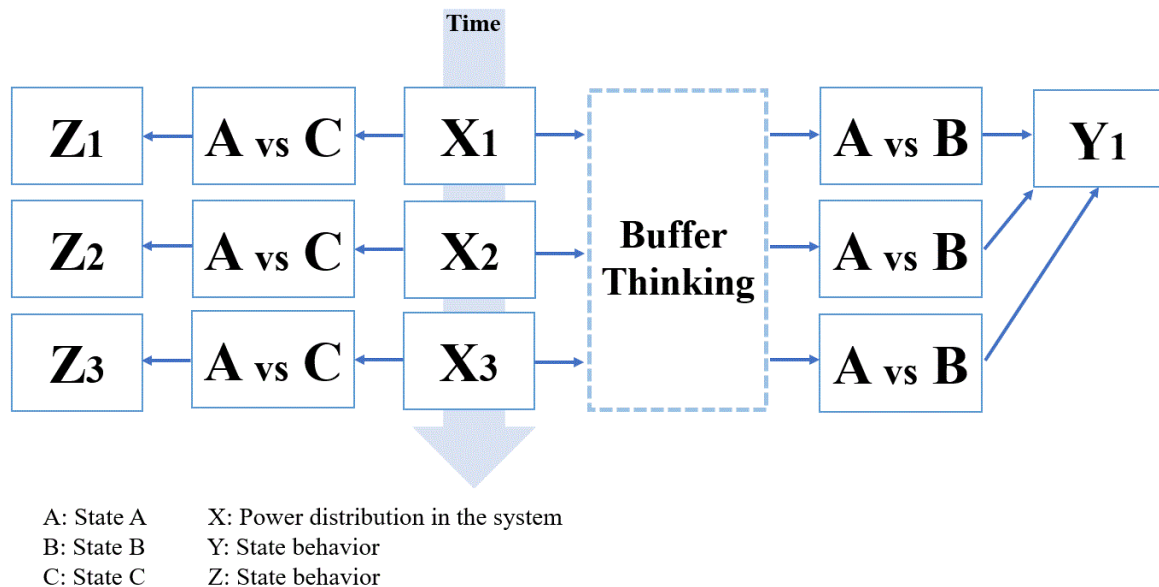
This thesis attempts to look into China's foreign behavior through the concept of buffer state, and will offer a geopolitical argument to the question raised above. It will demonstrate how

¹⁸ Hiroyuki Akita, "Time's Up for Soft China Policy," *Nikkei Asian Review*, February 8 2017.

China's behavior toward three of its peripheral states has been driven by what I term "buffer thinking." Buffer thinking is a geopolitical mentality, which I developed from the concept of buffer state: "secure this territory against my rival now, otherwise the rival may launch a military attack from it against me in the future once the rival has occupied the territory." This thinking appears when Chinese leaders are conceiving of ways to fend off potential military threats from a specific neighboring territory with great power. This way of thinking generates various types of behavior, ranging from military actions to a grand strategic retreat. The core purpose of those types of behavior is to create an extra safe space beyond China's borders in the rivalry. To Chinese leaders, the security perimeter of China has included the three neighboring states for many decades. This suggests that, when it comes to how to better defend China, what dominates Chinese leaders' thinking is not a narrow concept of border defense but a broader concept of "buffer states defense."

Chinese leaders' historical memory of how a foreign rival invaded China via such territory further strengthens this mentality. Once Chinese leaders have established buffer thinking toward a specific state on China's periphery, it is very difficult for leaders to abandon this thinking. In this way, buffer thinking is like "glue," firmly sticking a part of China onto an old polarity while the power configuration of the international system enters into new power patterns. Thus, the effect of the change of the polarity on state behavior is "territorially conditional" in the case of China. As illustrate in Figure 1, the same structural force X generates two different outcomes for State A's behavior toward State B and C. While State A's behavior toward State C can vary according to alternations of X as what it is expected from IR theories, State A's behavior toward State B stays the same due to the effect of buffer thinking. This thesis therefore argues that buffer thinking is an intervening variable that mediates the effect of variation of the power distribution in the system. This is the reason why China's behavior toward the three states is less responsive to polarity changes.

Figure 1: Buffer Thinking as an Intervening Variable



It is important to note that buffer thinking is not simply China’s desire to have a buffer state against its rival, but a defensive mindset emerges only after a rivalrous relationship has taken shape. Also, it is not simply a perception of a rival’s military threat, but a unique synthesis of the sensitivity to the geographical location of a buffer state, traumatic historical memories of a buffer state, and estimations of potential military threats from a rival.

By applying the concept of buffer state in the field of geopolitics, this thesis aims to “bring geography back in” to the fields of China Studies and IR. In response to the question of what drives China’s foreign behavior, scholars in China Studies usually cite historical legacy, Chinese nationalism, belief systems, factionalism, civil-military relations, and the structural force of the international system (Please see Chapter Two). Geopolitical imperatives based on geography have not attracted much attention in this intellectual debate especially in the English-speaking world. As this thesis will show in the following chapters, buffer thinking plays a much bigger role than has been recognized in the making of China’s foreign policy. Without including China’s buffer thinking, the discussion of the rationale behind China’s foreign behavior will be incomplete.

The goal of bringing geography back also has profound significance for the field of IR as a similar research gap to that of China Studies exists in IR. Geopolitics, a discipline concerning geography or space factors, was very popular and influential in the first half of the 20th century. It, however, lost its appeal to scholars after the 1940s mainly due to the accused connection

between this field and Nazi ideology. Although policymakers worldwide have never stopped thinking in geographical or spatial terms when making decisions, IR scholars have often prioritized other factors over geography in their analysis over the decades. This thesis, therefore, enriches the discussion in this field by exploring the importance of geography factors, which have been relatively neglected.

Treating buffer thinking as an independent variable, this thesis will detail how such thinking influenced a series of decisions made by the Chinese government toward Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia over a period of decades. The remainder of this chapter will give an overview of each chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Two will provide a detailed examination of the China Studies, IR, and geopolitics literature in relation to whether it sheds light on the puzzle at the center of this thesis. Adopting three levels of discussion, this chapter first provides a holistic view of how scholars in the fields of IR as well as China Studies have approached the question of what drives China's foreign policy. The focus then turns to the field of geopolitics. While the concept of buffer state is a promising approach to understand China's behavioral consistency, no work applying this concept has yet targeted the case of China systematically. In particular, no attempt has been made to detail when and how China started to view Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia in a buffered way, or how such a view influences China's behavior.

Chapter Three sets out the research design section of this thesis. While IR scholars, political scientists, and geopoliticians have been discussing the concept of buffer state for decades, few works have proposed a methodology to study how *buffered states* perceive their buffers. To fill this methodological void, this chapter will detail how this thesis operationalized the concept of buffer state to generate the independent variable of this thesis. In addition, this chapter will justify its rationale of selecting North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia as case studies, explain why Tibet, Nepal, and Vietnam are not suitable case studies for this thesis, and what advantages this case selection offers for the thesis. Finally, Chapter Three will identify the sources to be used in this thesis with some caveats about sources for studying China's decision-making.

This thesis begins to delve into China's buffer thinking from Chapter Four with the case of Taiwan. The chapter shows that the CCP's early perspective of Taiwan had nothing to do with geopolitics. As a party trying to manage its survival in the 1920s–40s, the way the CCP's view of Taiwan's value varied in accordance to the CCP's political needs. As a result, CCP's Taiwan policy has gone through three distinct phases—Taiwan-omitting, supporting Taiwanese

independence, and Taiwan-incorporating. June 1946 was the earliest point at which a rivalrous relationship was established between the CCP and the US. Stimulated by the Kuomintang-US military cooperation in Taiwan after the surrender of Japan, the CCP gradually began to perceive the geopolitical value of Taiwan to the security of the Chinese mainland. The vivid historical memory of how the Japanese Empire annexed Taiwan and then invaded China, further justified the necessity of securing this island. This chapter shows that the geopolitical mentality of “take Taiwan now, otherwise the US may use it to undermine the security of China’s coastal areas” was a crucial factor in inspiring to China launch military actions against Taiwan in 1954, 1958, and 1996.

Chapter Five shifts the discussion focus of the Sino-US buffer system from Taiwan to North Korea. As in the case of Taiwan, the CCP perceived almost no geopolitical value in the Korean Peninsula when the survival on the Chinese mainland was at stake during the Chinese Civil War (1927–49) and the Anti-Japanese War (1937–45). For the CCP, the issue of Korean independence served the CCP’s overarching goal of taking power in China through a lens of minority nationality. It was the outbreak of the Korean War, the approaching United Nations Command led by the US to be more precise, that made the geopolitical value of North Korea emerge in the minds of Chinese leaders. In their eyes, the US as imitating the Japan Empire’s strategy of invading China. Along with China’s buffer thinking toward Taiwan, the thinking “save North Korea now, otherwise the US may use it to undermine the security of China’s northeast” drove the leaders to send Chinese troops to confront US troops on the Korean battlefield in October 1950. This perception of the value of North Korea continued even after the Cold War ended. This chapter also demonstrates that China’s buffer thinking toward North Korea offers a sound explanation for why China protected North Korea diplomatically and militarily in the two North Korean nuclear crises after the Cold War.

The Sino-Soviet buffer system centering on Mongolia is the theme of Chapter Six. The CCP did not perceive any geopolitical value in the Mongolian territory in the first four decades after the party was established. The evidence presented in this chapter shows that the CCP perceived the value of Mongolia through a lens of minority nationality, which reconciled the Soviet Union’s geopolitical interests and Chinese nationalism and, at the same time, weakened the support base of the ROC government. This perspective persisted until 1964, a critical year in which China officially identified the Soviet Union as a hostile rival with the potential ambition of invading China. Due to this rivalry, Chinese leaders believed Mongolia was one potential military base from which the Soviet Union might launch an attack. The historical memory of

how the Russian Empire encroached upon the Qing Empire strengthened this geopolitical anxiety. One variation in the case of China's behavior toward Mongolia is that despite being driven by the same geopolitical mentality toward Taiwan and North Korea, China did not militarily intervene when its rival took over the buffer state. Instead, China retreated from the Sino-Mongolian border after it failed to make Mongolia politically neutral. This chapter also proves that China's effort to neutralize Mongolia contributed to the Soviet military withdrawal from Mongolia in the 1980s, as well as and the conclusion of the Sino-Mongolian Friendship and Cooperation Relationship Treaty in 1994.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings and elucidating its academic contributions to the fields of IR and geopolitics. Finally, it outlines four paths for further research.

CH 2 What Drives China's Foreign Behavior?

To reiterate, the central aim of this thesis is to determine why there is a strong consistency in China's behavior toward certain neighboring states, as exhibited in China's policy goals of maintaining the existence of North Korea, annexing Taiwan, and neutralizing Mongolia. This chapter will review the existing literature in the fields of International Relations (IR), China Studies, and geopolitics to ascertain whether it sheds light on this question. Specifically, the chapter will look at the determinants of China's foreign behavior as identified by scholars, and whether or not these determinants explain the puzzle of China's behavioral consistency. Second, after establishing the linkage between the concept of buffer state and Chinese approaches to North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia, this chapter will then delve into the literature on buffer states in geopolitics to see whether this concept can help us answer the question. While the research in these three fields has provided different insights into China's puzzling behavioral consistency toward its peripheral states, they have failed to develop a comprehensive theoretical explanation that holds across a number of cases.

2.1 Drivers of China's Foreign Behavior

To investigate the long-term consistency in China's behavior toward its neighbors, it is first necessary to understand the logic driving such behavior. The question posed in this thesis is in fact part of a broader theoretical question in the field of China Studies—what drives China's foreign behavior? Scholars of IR and China Studies have identified a vast number of factors

and offered a range of arguments in relation to China's foreign behavior. To help readers grasp the various scholarly approaches to this theoretical question more easily, the discussion below is structured in accordance with Kenneth Waltz's classification, which entails three levels of analysis: leader, state, and system.¹

There are three points to bear in mind regarding Waltz's categorization. First, the factors below are not necessarily mutually exclusive and, in fact, may overlap or reinforce one another. For example, the history China's foreign interventions from the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries played an important role both in shaping Chinese leaders' perceptions of how the world functions, and also in laying the foundation of contemporary nationalism for ordinary Chinese people. Second, this thesis acknowledges the complexity of a world in which any individual event may be caused by multiple factors simultaneously. Finally, Waltz's categorization may not be the best way to classify the literature on the determinants of China's behavior. Since Waltz's categorization is quite familiar to scholars of IR, it serves the purpose of helping readers to grasp the various factors identified by scholars in the two fields.²

Leader Level

In seeking to explain why a specific foreign decision is made, IR scholars have often focused their analysis on people with decision-making power in the government. Scholars in China Studies are no exception. In this field, Mark Mancall, John Fairbank, Chen Jian, Lorenz Luthi, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Andrew Kennedy have all attempted to explain either China's foreign or military policy from the leader level. Factors they identify include Chinese leaders' worldview, ideology, strategic culture, and psychological characteristics.

At this level, explaining how China engages with the external world in terms of the impact of the legacy of China's history on Chinese leaders has been widespread. Generally speaking, scholars who have taken this approach share an assumption that the history of China's self-

¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

² Scholars in the field of China Studies have adopted more than one way to talk about factors influencing China's foreign policy. Please see: Alastair Iain Johnston, "Zhongguo Waijiao Zhengce Yanjiu: Lilun Qushi Ji Fangfa Bianxi 中国外交政策研究:理论趋势及方法辨析 [Trends in Theory and Method in the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy]," *Shijie Jingji Yu Zhengzhi 世界经济与政治 [World Economics and Politics]* 8(2006); Wang Dong and Li Kan, "Meiguo Zhongguo Waijiao Yanjiu De Liubian: Fangfa, Yiti, Yu Qushi 美国中国外交研究的流变:方法、议题与趋势 [Study of China's Foreign Policy in the U.S.: Methodologies, Topics and Trends]," *Meiguo Yanjiu 美国研究 [American Studies Quarterly]* 3(2013).

perception of being at the center of Asian economic, political, and cultural affairs prior to the mid-19th century, has shaped the worldview of Chinese leaders and this worldview has been influencing the way they handle contemporary foreign affairs. For example, in the article “The Persistence of Tradition in Chinese Foreign Policy,” Mancall investigates why communication between the US and the Soviet Union was successful during the Cold War but communication between China and the Soviet Union failed in the 1960s.³ He attributes this to a series of assumptions by Chinese leaders about the world order they inherited from China’s unique history. One important assumption of Chinese leaders, Mancall argues, is that the world order should be hierarchical and China should be at the top of it. He further reasons that Nikita Khrushchev’s concept of peaceful co-existence with the US conflicted with this assumption, which explains the Chinese and Soviet polemics in the 1960s.

In a similar fashion, Fairbank develops the concept of Chinese assumptions about the world order into a more systematic theory in *The Chinese World Order*. Fairbank constructs a pattern of China interaction with other countries in the Qing Dynasty based on what he termed “a traditional Chinese world order.”⁴ In this graded and concentric hierarchy, China regarded itself as the center, and China’s manner of interacting with a country was largely determined by a country’s location within these concentric circles. Fairbank further argues that because the People’s Republic of China (PRC) inherited a set of institutionalized attitudes and historical precedents toward other countries from this order, it was difficult for China to accept the current international order based on the concept of egalitarian nation-states.

Among scholars who have argued that history has a major influence on Chinese decision-makers, the argument posed by Chen is perhaps the most advanced. Rebutting a prevalent realist model explaining China’s foreign policymaking, Chen emphasizes the role of ideology in this process.⁵ He argues that the idea of continuous revolution held by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders, Mao Zedong in particular, was at the heart of China’s revolutionary foreign policy under Maoist China. The “central kingdom mentality” of China’s desire to be at the center of the world was one critical element of this idea. Moreover, Chen argued that it was the gap between China’s idea of centrality on the world stage and its weak

³ Mark Mancall, "The Persistence of Tradition in Chinese Foreign Policy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 349(1963).

⁴ John Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, ed. John Fairbank (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

⁵ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

status in actuality that caused CCP leaders to feel a constantly sense of insecurity, which in turn led them to believe that a huge domestic mobilization was necessary.

Luthi also takes Chinese leaders' ideology as the foundation of his argument about the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s.⁶ From his perspective, the theoretical ambiguity of Marxism-Leninism was the very reason the Sino-Soviet alliance could initially be established but was also the reason the alliance collapsed. To be more specific, China and the Soviet Union genuinely worked toward the same ideological goal, the realization of a communist society, which Marxist-Leninist theory clearly outlined. However, the theory was ambiguous about the means of achieving such a goal and this provided both China and the Soviet with room to pursue different long-term domestic and foreign policies, and also caused short-term political dissonance. In other words, ideological disagreement was the fundamental cause of Sino-Soviet economic, military, and foreign policy conflicts.

In addition to worldview and ideology, Chinese leaders' preferences and assumptions about addressing security threats is another important factor in understanding modern China's strategic policy. Johnston concludes in his influential work *The Seven Military Classics* that "the parabellum paradigm" was the dominant strategic thinking among Chinese leaders in the Ming Dynasty.⁷ This paradigm was a hard realpolitik strategic culture which encouraged leaders to accept the mindset that the best way of dealing with security threats is to eliminate them by force. The weaker the opponent, the more likely leaders in Ming China used force. Johnston further indicates that the parabellum paradigm still influences China's security policy today.

The power of the belief system of individual leaders is emerging as a new area of analysis in the field of China Studies. Explored by Robert Jervis in his work *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, the importance of decision-makers' belief systems has been broadly accepted by scholars in IR since the 1970s.⁸ However, this approach has not been used to explain China's foreign behavior in China Studies as broadly as in the IR field. Kennedy's work is vital in this regard. He examines the conviction among Chinese leaders that China had the ability to accomplish specific military and diplomatic challenges against a materially

⁶ Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁷ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Culture Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁸ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), CH 1-3.

advantaged opponent, which he called “national efficacy beliefs.”⁹ From his perspective, the efficacy beliefs that Mao possessed—a strong sense of martial efficacy and a weak sense of moral efficacy—contributed to a series of decisions made by China from the 1950s to the 1960s, including the decision to enter the Korean War (1950–53), become involved in the Vietnam War (1955–75), and shy away from the world nuclear disarmament conference.

The literature arguing for factors at the leader level is vibrant, but it does not offer much in response to the puzzle that drives this thesis. First and foremost is the limitations of the available sources. Probing the rationale behind China’s behavior from the level of analysis indeed has its potentials. However, to make a strong case that leaders are the primary influence of such behavior, it is necessary to access archival documents regarding the kind of values that Chinese leaders hold, the ways that Chinese leaders think, and how Chinese leaders made decisions about given events. Without such documents, it is extremely difficult to produce a solid argument that leaders’ values and ideologies explain China’s long-term behavioral consistency towards specific states. Given that the Chinese government only allows the declassification of documents dated before 1966, only cases predating the mid-1960s can be examined in this manner. Since this thesis also aims to explain the behavioral consistency of China in the contemporary era, the literature is only of limited help.

Second, one assumption shared by those studies outlined above seemingly runs counter to the aim of this thesis. To some extent, works examining factors at the leader level all operate under the assumption that decision-makers of China, Mao in particular, have a lot of liberty to make any given decision. However, as shown in Chapter One, the agency of Chinese leaders has been significantly constrained. China’s policy goals toward North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia have not changed for decades, across at least four generations of Chinese leaders. This phenomenon implies that the leaders probably did not have enough agency to do so due to certain factors. Thus, this thesis is interested in uncovering the factors constraining the policy decisions of Chinese leaders.

State Level

The most popular approach to understanding constraints on Chinese leaders’ ability to make policy decisions has been to focus on *Innenpolitik*. Since the 1990s, IR scholars have been

⁹ Andrew Bingham Kennedy, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru: National Efficacy Beliefs and the Making of Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

trying to methodologically unpack the black box called state and then theorize how its unique domestic characteristics affect its foreign behavior. Political institutions, economic structures, national character, preference of key domestic actors, and partisan politics are factors that scholars have examined at this level. This research trend also influenced scholars in the field of China Studies. Among all of the factors, the two most popular in China Studies are domestic politics and Chinese nationalism. The common ground between these two groups of scholars is that they both agree there is a strong causation between what happens inside China and China's external behavior. The difference between the two, however, is the question of which unit should be the primary analytical unit observed by researchers. While experts who consider domestic politics to be the more dominant focus on political elites at the top; on the other hand, scholars who emphasize the role of Chinese nationalism place much more importance on the ordinary Chinese people.

In terms of domestic politics, China's decision to participate in the Korean War in 1950 is a case that scholars often use to explain how Chinese leaders exploited an external crisis to serve their specific domestic needs. Yang Kuisong, for example, discovered a connection between the initiation of the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries and Mao's decision to get involved in the Korean War¹⁰ He maintains that the Korean War offered Mao a great opportunity to eliminate potential political enemies to the nascent CCP regime in China, such as bandits, tyrants, the Nationalist agents, and the bourgeoisie. Under the name of mobilization to "resist America, assist Korea," the CCP executed, imprisoned, and controlled more than a million people. The evidence of such a connection between the domestic campaign and the war is that a directive to suppress counterrevolutionaries, which Mao personally oversaw on October 10, was issued only two days after China's decision to participate in the war. Thomas Christensen's work shares a similar perspective to Yang's on China's participation in the Korean War, but Christensen links it into a much broader context.¹¹ He indicates that Chinese leaders tend to use force if they encounter a situation in which China's strategic situation will worsen domestically or internationally if China chose to do nothing. He terms this logic "windows of vulnerability and windows of opportunity." Mao's final decision to fight for North Korea, he contends, was largely driven by this logic. For the Chinese leaders at that moment,

¹⁰ Yang Kuisong, "Reconsidering the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries," *The China Quarterly* 193(2008).

¹¹ Thomas J. Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force," in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006).

if China let US troops station in North Korea, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) would be tied down by US troops along the Sino-North Korean border, a situation which would significantly weaken the Chinese government's ability to control its domestic stability. Thus, fighting a war against the US in the short term would be less painful than fighting a larger war later. Taylor Fravel's works documented the other side of the coin—how domestic politics cause China to cooperate with the outside world. He argued that internal instability, such as the failure of social movements in China Proper and ethnic revolts in the frontier regions, is a primary factor leading China to make territorial concessions to neighboring states.¹²

Rivalry within the CCP, or so-called factionalism, is another essential way of understanding China's foreign behavior from the state level. Established by the pioneering work of Andrew Nathan, this factionalism model was used in the field of China Studies after the 1970s as a way to pry into elite rivalry within the CCP.¹³ Kenneth Lieberthal is the towering figure of this type of approach. In one study, he categorizes the CCP leaders as three groups (nativist, eclectic modernizers, and all-around modernizers) and then creates a dynamic picture of how rivalries among these groups affected a series of China's foreign policy decisions, such as "leaning to one side" in the 1950s, the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, and the Sino-American rapprochement in the 1970s.¹⁴ In a following work with Michael Oksenberg, he also discovers that the key to understanding China's energy policy is each CCP leader's personal interests, encompassing their background and previous positions, which strongly influenced the formulation process and consequences of the energy policy.¹⁵

Many scholars have observed that the growing influence of the PLA since the 1990s has generated considerable impact on the civilian-military relationship in China's decision-making system. The decision-making system of China was institutionalized after the Deng Xiaoping era. The result of this transformation is that the paramount leader in China is not paramount anymore, but "the first among equals" in the Standing Committee of the CCP Central Politburo. Notwithstanding the fact that Jiang Zemin still had the final say on the most important security

¹² M. Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2005); M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹³ Lowell Dittmer, "Chinese Informal Politics," *The China Journal* 34(1995); Andrew J. Nathan, "A Factionalism Model for CCP Politics," *The China Quarterly*, no. 53 (1973); Tang Tsou, "Chinese Politics at the Top: Factionalism or Informal Politics? Balance-of-Power Politics or a Game to Win All?," *The China Journal* 34(1995).

¹⁴ Kenneth Lieberthal, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," in *China's Foreign Relations in the 1980s*, ed. Harry Harding (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984).

¹⁵ Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

issues, compared to Mao and Deng, his freedom to make decisions was significantly constrained by decision-making institutions controlled by multiple professional bureaucrats. Because of this institutional transformation, most scholars believe Jiang was pressured by the military a number of times during his tenure. The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–96 is one case in which scholars frequently examine how the changed civilian-military relationship affected policymaking. Michael Swaine, Jianhai Bi, and You Ji all pointed out that Jiang's hawkish policy toward Taiwan during this crisis was the result of the pressure from the military.¹⁶

On the other hand, studying China's foreign behavior from the angle of Chinese nationalism has become prevalent in recent decades.¹⁷ The fundamental assumption shared by scholars arguing from this standpoint is that Chinese people are proud of China's glorious history in which it was the center of Asian economic, cultural, and political affairs in the past. At the same time, they are ashamed of the history of the period between the First Opium War (1839–42) and the surrender of Japan at the end of World War II (WWII, 1939–45), in which China experienced a painful political incursion, economic exploitation, and military aggression by foreign powers. This sharp contrast between pride and stigma creates parrotic nationalism grounded on the so-called "the century of humiliation" in the minds of Chinese people. The Patriotic Education Campaign, which the Chinese government initiated after the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989, further strengthened this nationalism. Although an authoritarian government like China is theoretically immune to this kind of domestic pressure, the scholars tend to agree that Chinese peoples' nationalism is a factor that nowadays increasingly constrains or even pushes China's foreign behavior toward other countries.

Susan Shirk takes this argument the farthest, positing that the main driver of China's foreign policy since 1989 has been domestic nationalism. Chinese leaders, she argues, have a deep sense of insecurity as they fear a mass protest by a vast number of discontented people rising up

¹⁶ Michael D. Swaine, "The Role of the Chinese Military in National Security Policymaking," (Washington, D.C.: RAND, 1998); Bi Jianhai, "The Role of the Military in the PRC Taiwan Policymaking: A Case Study of the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995-1996," *Journal of Contemporary China* 11, no. 32 (2002); You Ji, "Making Sense of War Games in the Taiwan Strait," *ibid.* 6, no. 15 (1997).

¹⁷ Allen S. Whiting, *China Eyes Japan* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1989); Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2004); "Tears of Rage: Chinese Nationalist Reactions to the Belgrade Embassy Bombing," *The China Journal* 46(2001); Zhao Suisheng, "Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: The Strident Turn," *Journal of Contemporary China* 22, no. 82 (2013); Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2007); Robert S. Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (2009).

against the CCP regime, united by nationalism. As a result, whenever an external crisis involving the US, Taiwan, and Japan in particular have occurred, the Chinese government had no choice but to act aggressively in order to demonstrate its toughness to the domestic audience. Shirk argues that “In the face of daily reports about violent protests, Communist Party leaders will never make international considerations a priority.”¹⁸

Some scholars have noted that Chinese nationalism is evolving. From the discourse on Chinese nationalism inside China, Christopher Hughes observed a new version of Chinese nationalism emerging after 2008.¹⁹ The new nationalism exhibits several geopolitical traits very similar to the political thought of Germany and Japan before WWII, such as arguing for lebensraum, calling for a revival of military spirit, and worshipping strong leaders. He terms this new version of nationalism “*geopolitik* nationalism,” and predicts that if the marriage between nationalism and geopolitics gains more traction in China, Chinese leaders will have less room for compromise on issues related to Taiwan and Japan.

State level variables can only shed limited light on the research question driving this thesis, mainly due to the narrow case selection of studies. Scholars approaching China’s foreign behavior from the state level usually choose China’s policies toward the US, Japan, or Taiwan as case studies. In particular, there is a vast body of work related to Taiwan from the perspective of both domestic politics and Chinese nationalism. The popularity of Taiwan as a case study may be a result of the fact that the Chinese government has been publicly open with its military plan of taking Taiwan, and sources are therefore readily available. Nevertheless, there have been relatively fewer studies on North Korea except for the case of the Korean War. Works on Mongolia at this level, on the other hand, are few despite the fact that China once claimed that Mongolia was part of Chinese territory.

In terms of China’s behavioral consistency toward Taiwan, one may argue that Chinese nationalism is *the* factor that prevents China from changing its state policy toward Taiwan. As Shirk puts it, “The roots of the Chinese fixation on Taiwan are purely domestic, related to regime security not national security...Every statement or action China’s leaders make about Taiwan is aimed at first the Chinese audience.”²⁰ However, the position of this thesis is that

¹⁸ Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise*, p. 8.

¹⁹ Christopher Hughes, "Reclassifying Chinese Nationalism: The Geopolitik Turn," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 71 (2011).

²⁰ Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise*, pp. 185 & 87.

Chinese nationalism is *one* important factor contributing to China's obsession with incorporating Taiwan. Chinese people have been living in an environment for decades in which there has been a pervasive message indicating that Taiwan was historically a part of China and that unification with Taiwan is the holy mission of China. It is therefore unsurprising that the Chinese people would pressure the Chinese government over this issue. However, as Chapter Four will show, Chinese nationalism did not actually play a major role in China's decisions to attack Taiwan in the three Taiwan Strait crises in 1954, 1958, and 1996.

System Level

When it comes to identifying constraints on China's intention or ability to change its policy goals towards Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia, system level factors would appear to have the most potential because the three states posed severe military threats to China during the Cold War. Scholars most often apply the realist research paradigm when working at the system level. For realists, the structural force of the international system, constituted by anarchy and power distribution among states, is the primary factor shaping state behavior in the system. The logic of this paradigm is as follows: the international system is anarchical and there is no night watchman to regulate or control how states interact with each other. Given that survival is the primary goal for every state, maximizing relative power, especially military power, against others is the only way that a state can ensure its own survival. Different power distributions in this system, such as unipolarity, bipolarity, or multipolarity, also considerably influence how states ally or conflict with each other in this system.

Robert Ross, Andrew Nathan, Andrew Scobell, and John Mearsheimer are all scholars who have emphasized the impact of anarchy on China's foreign behavior. Nathan and Ross argue that the key driver of China's foreign policy is China's sense of vulnerability, originating in its geographical location in Asia, sharing borders with a number of powerful rivals and potential foes.²¹ This unique location means that Chinese leaders cannot rule out the possibility that war may come from any direction. Driven by this sense of vulnerability, the ultimate goal of China's foreign policy is to maintain a secure geopolitical environment by defensive and deceptive means. Nathan and Scobell reiterate the validity of this argument in a following book fifteen years later. By rebutting the arguments that China's foreign policy is driven by

²¹ Andrew J. Nathan and Robert S. Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

nationalism, culture, or the century of humiliation, they contend that China's foreign policy has been very rational and self-interested and is based on the potential threats emanating from its borders.²² Holding the same realist notions, Mearsheimer reached a different conclusion. Instead of adopting defensive behavior, he believes the effect of anarchy would propel China to act offensively to pursue a safe geopolitical environment in which there is no peer competitor. In order to achieve this goal, China would aim to become a regional hegemon in the future, dominating the Asia-Pacific region and pushing the US out in much the same way as the US pushed European powers out of the Americas in the 19th century.²³

Many scholars who adopted this research paradigm also point to changes of power configuration in the international system as driving the external behavior of China. Resting on the assumption that wealth is power, Nicolas Kristof, Aaron Friedberg, Randall Schweller, Pu Xiaoyu, and Hugh White all hold the position that China's growing economic power provides China with increasing capabilities and willingness to change the established international order. Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kristof predicts that so long as China's economic growth continues, China will undoubtedly seek a more powerful role in the Pacific, perceiving an emerging power vacuum after the strategic retrenchment of Russia and the US.²⁴ Kristof's argument did not gain much traction in the field of China Studies at that time.²⁵ After the US financial crisis from 2008–09, however, more and more scholars increasingly favor this kind of argument. For instance, Friedberg argues the Sino-American rivalry is deeply rooted in the shifting structure of the international system.²⁶ Schweller and Pu also discovered that China undermining of the Western-led order varied in tandem with China's rising material power.²⁷ White, on the other hand, contends that "China is now too strong to accept a subordinate role under American leadership."²⁸ The closing power gap between China and the US further gives momentum for the IR scholarship to research into whether the US and China are slowly sliding

²² Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, *China's Search for Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

²³ John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to U.S. Power in Asia," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 4 (2010); *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), CH 10.

²⁴ Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Rise of China," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 5 (Winter 1993): p. 59.

²⁵ For works which disagreed with the linkage between the shifting of global power structure and an aggressive China, please see: David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order," *International Security* 29, no. 3 (2005); David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Zhang Feng, "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 2 (2011).

²⁶ Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).

²⁷ Randall Schweller and Pu Xiaoyu, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline," *International Security* 36, no. 1 (2011).

²⁸ Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why America Should Share Power* (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2012).

into the so-called Thucydides' Trap, which poses that a war between an established power and a fast-rising power for the leadership of the world is highly likely.²⁹

But anarchy and power structure only tell us half of a story about why there is strong behavioral consistency in China's North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia policies as explained in Introduction. One possible argument that could be derived from these two variables is that China has felt insecure due to military threats posed by North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia for decades. To create a secure geopolitical environment, China has to maintain the existence of North Korea, try to take Taiwan, and neutralize Mongolia. However, this argument does not hold water if one carefully considers what constitutes a threat.

Capability and intention are two essential components of a threat, and neither of them currently exist in any of these dyads. North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia have not posed a military threat to China for decades either in terms of intention or capability. The three countries do possess a certain degree of military capability, but not one of them has ever aimed to invade China after the end of the Cold War. Even if they had that intention, they are obviously not powerful enough to make China feel threatened. None of the great powers such as the US, Russia, and Japan have military forces stationed on the territories of these three states either.

Of the three, perhaps Taiwan is the only case that realists can further argue. The US has trained and equipped Republic of China (ROC) forces since the Chinese Civil War (1927–49) and defended Taiwan against invasion by communists after the ROC retreated from the Chinese mainland in 1949. But the US began to withdraw its military forces deployed in Taiwan after the joint communique of 1972 with China. After 1979, there has not been a single US military deployment in Taiwan. In terms of intention, the ROC government officially renounced its plan of military roll back to the Chinese mainland in 1991. Although the US was once an ally of Taiwan during the Cold War, it never supported any plans of the ROC government to retake the Chinese mainland. Realists may say that states can never be sure about others' intentions so they must always prepare for the worst-case scenario. As Mearsheimer wrote, "Intentions can change quickly, so a state's intentions can be benign one day and hostile the next."³⁰ Although North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia do not present any military threat to China now, China, as it operates in an anarchical environment, must always be ready for an unexpected

²⁹ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*

³⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 31.

attack in the future. Thus, China's long-held policy goals could be explained from the viewpoint of preparing for the worst.

However, if the argument above was correct, then why doesn't China always prepare for the worst-case scenario against great powers? From the 1950s to 1960s, China had military conflicts with the US on the Korean Peninsula, over the Taiwan Strait, and on the territory of Vietnam. Nevertheless, Mao and Richard Nixon still shook hands with each other in the 1970s. Deng then opened China to embrace the international order led by the US in the 1990s. Until recently, Xi Jinping's China openly rivaled with the US for the dominance of Asia. The same flexibility can also be seen in China's behavior toward Russia. When the PRC was established in 1949, China comprehensively leaned toward the Soviet Union and agreed Mongolia, which was *de facto* controlled by the Soviet Union, to be independent from China. However, China had military conflicts with the Soviet Union in the 1960s and then China dramatically shifted its position, claiming that the Soviet Union had taken Mongolia and northeast China from China. The Sino-Soviet rapprochement took place in the 1980s. After 2000, China officially ceased all territorial claims over Russia, with which China is gradually building a comprehensive strategic partnership. From these cases, it is apparent that China can demonstrate great flexibility in its behavior toward great powers across time while the "intentions can change quickly" remains a constant. So the real question is why does China need to prepare for the worst-case scenario against much weaker small states at its borders? If the fates of all the states in the international system are supposedly affected much more by the acts and the interactions of major powers as argued by Waltz, it is necessary to seek the missing piece that help us to answer why China is more concerned about these three small states than its two powerful rivals.

In summary, scholars in IR and China Studies have generally approached the question of what drives China's foreign behavior from leader, state, and system levels. Factors they have identified include leaders' worldviews, leaders' ideologies, leaders' strategic cultures, leaders' psychological characters, domestic politics, nationalism, anarchy, and the power structure of the international system. While those factors all possess a certain degree of explanatory power in some cases and in some timeframes, none of them have provided a satisfactory answer to the question posed by this thesis. Therefore, it is necessary to search for possible factors from another field.

2.2 Geography as an Explanation

Geography shows great potential as an explanation for China's behavioral consistency. From a geopolitical point of view, North Korea has been at the center of the Sino-US rivalry from the Korean War until today. Due to North Korea's geopolitical position, China has long been describing its relationship with North Korea as "lips and teeth." China is the teeth while, North Korea is the lips. This metaphor is from an ancient Chinese historical story recorded in *Zuo Zhuan*. In 655, Gong Zhiqi, an important adviser to the King of Yu, strongly opposed the king's idea to allow the troops of Jin to have passage through Yu in the name of invading Yu's neighbor, Guo. Gong used the metaphor "lips and teeth" to describe the geopolitical relations that closely bound the fates of Yu and Guo together: "If the lips are gone, the teeth will feel cold. (*chuen wang chi han* 唇亡齿寒)," meaning that , after Jin conquered Guo, Yu would face Jin's military threat directly. In other words, the metaphor of "lips and teeth" characterizes a strong geopolitical connection between two territories in the eyes of Chinese—one territory is a security screen for the other. As a result, both Western and Chinese scholars on China usually conclude that China's years-long sheltering policy toward North Korea is to maintain a "buffer state" against the US, keeping the US and its allies away from the Sino-North Korean border.³¹

While scholars widely recognize that North Korea as a buffer state of China, what most scholars have not noted is that North Korea is not the only state which China views in this "lips and teeth" way. As a matter of fact, China also describes Mongolia and Taiwan as its lips at times. For instance, He Guoqiang, a member of the Standing Committee of the CCP Central Politburo, used the term "lips and teeth" to describe the relations between China and Mongolia when he met Mongolian Prime Minister Sanjaagiin Bayar and Mongolian Speaker of the State Great Hural Damdiny Demberel in 2009. He said:

³¹ Please see: Shen Dingli, "North Korea's Strategic Significance to China," *China Security* (2006); Andrew Scobell and Mark Cozad, "China's North Korea Policy: Rethink or Recharge?," *Parameters* 44, no. 1 (2014); Andrew Scobell, "The View from China," in *Asia in Tipping Point: Korea, the Rise of China, and the Impact of Leadership Transitions*, ed. Glibert Rozman (Washington, DC: Korea Economic Institution, 2012); "China and North Korea: From Comrades-In-Arms to Allies at Arm's Length," (Carlisle, Penn.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004); Samuel S. Kim, "The Dialectics of China's North Korea Policy in a Changing Post-Cold War World," *Asian Perspective* 18, no. 2 (1994).

China and Mongolia are amicable neighbors which are connected by mountains and rivers and are like lips and teeth.³²

People's Daily also used the same metaphor to characterize the relationship between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan Island. An editorial published on June 3 1993 commented:

Taiwan and the mainland are lips and teeth. Their fates are connected to each other. Compatriots on both sides of the strait always defend the territory of the sacred motherland together.³³

Since “lips and teeth” is the common feature linking China’s perspectives on North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia together, the remainder of this chapter will investigate the literature on buffer states to see whether it can help to shed light on the research question of this thesis.

2.3 Buffer States

Geopolitics is the field that contains the most relevant literature on buffer states. Aimed at understanding state behavior from a geographical perspective, geopolitics as a discipline originated in the 19th century, flourished in the early 20th century, and faded away after World War II (1939–45). The central theme of this field is to explore the relationship between state and geography, or space in a broader sense.

The IR field has previously included geography as a variable for some analysis. Many works in IR do take geographical factors into consideration to explain state behavior. The most relevant discussion which incorporates geography factors into the analysis of state behavior in the field of IR is the offensive-defensive realism debate, which lists geography as one of many factors with the potential to alter states’ external behavior, such as waging wars or choosing alliances.³⁴ Although it is not the most marginal, geography is usually not the primary research

³² Liu Jiansheng and Huo Wen, "He Guoqiang Fenbie Huijian Mengguguo Zonli He Guojia Dahulaer Zhuxi 贺国强分别会见蒙古国总理和国家大呼拉尔主席 [He Guoqiang Meets the Prime Minister of Mongolia and the Chairman of the Mongolian State Great Hural]," *People's Daily*, June 27 2009.

³³ "Taidu Shi Yitiao Weixian De Daolu 台独是一条危险的道路 [The Independence of Taiwan Is a Dangerous Road]," *ibid.*, June 3 1991.

³⁴ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security* 25, no. 3 (2000); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987);

variable examined in this intellectually rich debate. Robert Ross' article of 1999, "The Geography of the Peace," in *International Security* was a breakthrough as it placed geography at the center of analysis, examining the question of how geography pacified the structural effects of the bipolarity of East Asia. In 2001, John Mearsheimer argued that geography is one factor determining a state's strategy for countering a threatening power in a multipolar system. Jack Levy and William Thompson also found that a land-based hegemonic power more easily triggers balancing behavior among great powers. Despite those efforts, works attempting to explore the relationship between geography and state behavior are still very sporadic and unsystematic in this field.

The most telling difference between geopoliticians and IR scholars is their research method preference. Specifically, geography is often than not methodologically treated as an intervening variable with a moderate or even inconsequential effect on dependent variables in IR works,³⁵ while towering figures in geopolitics like Friedrich Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellen, Karl Haushofer, Alfred Mahan, Halford Mackinder, and Nicolas Spykman all prioritize geographical factors over others. For example, Mahan, in his influential book *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, discusses six elements that allowed one state to have the potential of being a sea power, three of which relate to geography.³⁶

In the eyes of geopoliticians, the relationship between states and geography is a very interactive one. On the one hand, geography can condition state behavior. Geopoliticians usually support the notion that the chance of success for any state to realize its goal of foreign policy largely depends on a series of its own geographic features such as territorial shape, topography, location, resources, climate, and distance to others. To apply IR jargon to this idea, states do have choices, but their agency (the act of pursuing their interests and goals) is largely conditioned by geography.

On the other hand, states are also able to rearrange or create a favorable geographical setting to advance their interests. When the world was primitive and relatively empty, polities (the

John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security* 15, no. 1 (1990); Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 162; Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): pp. 186-99; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Charles L. Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann, "What is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure it?," *International Security* 22, no. 4 (1998): pp. 64-6.

³⁵ Jeffrey Taliaferro called geographic proximity as a structural modifier. Please see: Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," p. 131.

³⁶ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 2003), CH 1.

forerunner of states) tried in multiple ways to make their surrounding environment safer in order to protect their survival. Those polities, for example, kept swamps, marshes, deserts, rivers, and mountains as complete as they were. By doing so, they fortified themselves behind those natural barriers in case of enemy invasion. If there was no natural barrier in place, the polities sometimes created one. The Holy Roman Empire's creation of "march states" as military outposts to guard their frontiers is one example of this kind. This strategy of defending borders from the frontiers was the origin of the concept of buffer state.

Though the discussion on buffer states is very academically rich, up until now there is no consensus among scholars on what buffer states are. The term buffer state was first applied in the 19th century when Britain referred to the status of Afghanistan in the Britain-Russian rivalries over Asia called the Great Game. After more than a century, scholars on buffer states are still trying to define what a buffer state really is from different points of view. George Hall, for instance, defines buffer states in terms of power hierarchy in world politics. He categorizes states as two distinct tiers: salient powers, which possess the bulk of national power in material form such as land, population, gross national product, and military budget, and the minor states group, which do not possess extensive material power but have semi-permanent alliances or come under the influence of stronger powers in the meantime.³⁷ Buffer states, in the eyes of Hall, are part of the minor states group. By contrast, Trygve Mathisen, Martin Wight and Spykman define buffer states in a more functional context.³⁸ For them, buffer states bear a strong resemblance to wasteland zones which historically were built to maintain peace by keeping two expanding powers spatially apart. There are also scholars who focus more on the unique, sandwiched position of buffer states, and they consider buffer states to those states that are geographically located between two or more rival powers or camps.³⁹ Taking together the power, function, and geography perspectives, a current definition of buffer state can be generated—a buffer state is a relatively weak state that is geographically located in a place with

³⁷ George M. Hall, *Geopolitics and the Decline of Empire: Implications for United States Defense Policy* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1990), CH 1.

³⁸ Trygve Mathisen, *The Functions of Small States in the Strategies of the Great Powers* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1972), p. 107; Nicholas J. Spykman and Abbie A. Rollins, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy, I," *The American Political Science Review* 33, no. 3 (1939): pp. 404-10; Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (London: Leicester University Press and Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1979), p. 160; Nicholas J. Spykman, "Geography and Foreign Policy, II," *The American Political Science Review* 32, no. 2 (1938): p. 227.

³⁹ John Chay, "Korea, A Buffer State," in *Buffer States in World Politics*, ed. John Chay and Thomas E. Ross (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1986), p. 2; Tanisha M. Fazal, *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 70; "State Death in the International System," *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): p. 321; Rajan Menon and Jack L. Snyder, "Buffer Zones: Anachronism, Power Vacuum, or Confidence Builder?," *Review of International Studies* 43, no. 5 (2017): p. 5.

strategic importance for two or more stronger rival states and that directly contributes to matters of key national security for either one of them.⁴⁰

In the literature on buffer states, the discussion mainly centers around the causal relationship between the sandwiched geographical position of buffers and their lifespan. The most common type of buffer system consists of one buffer state and two buffered states rivaling for control over the buffer. While scholars on buffer states all agree that a buffer system has something to do with the lifespan of the buffer within it, they differ in the nature of the effect of this system on the buffer, whether it is positive or negative. Specifically, there is a debate as to whether buffer states have a shorter life span than non-buffer states, and, if so, what factors can reduce the negative effect on the lifespan of buffers.

Intuitively, buffer states should outlast non-buffer states because states will endeavor to keep buffers around them to avoid sharing a border with a more powerful state.⁴¹ From a realist perspective, states usually regard their neighbors as natural enemies, so having a common border would increase the likelihood of border skirmishes, which potentially can escalate to large-scale military conflicts. Many political scientists' works have confirmed this positive correlation between spatial contiguity and state violence behavior.⁴² As a logical extension, therefore, states should prefer having a buffer state in areas of geostrategic importance so as to maintain a physical distance between themselves and potential/current opponents. Having a small friend standing on the doorstep of your house is always better than seeing a strong guy with a gun there. As a result, because they are maintained by their neighbors, buffer states should have a privileged life compared to non-buffer states.

However, most scholars on buffer states tend to agree that a buffer system negatively affects the lifespan of buffer states. Regarding the question of precisely what factor shortens the

⁴⁰ This definition is not satisfactory as it fails to include the subjective element of the buffer state. This thesis will provide a refined definition of buffer states. Please see Chapter Three.

⁴¹ Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); "Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994); "The 19th Century International System: Changes in the Structure," *World Politics* 39, no. 1 (1986).

⁴² John O'Loughlin, "Spatial Models of International Conflicts: Extending Current Theories of War Behavior," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 76, no. 1 (1986); Giacomo Chiozza, "Is There a Clash of Civilizations? Evidence from Patterns of International Conflict Involvement, 1946-97," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 6 (2002); Patrick J. McDonald, "Great Powers, Hierarchy, and Endogenous Regimes: Rethinking the Domestic Causes of Peace," *International Organization* 69, no. 3 (2015); John R. Oneal et al., "The Liberal Peace: Interdependence, Democracy, and International Conflict, 1950-85," *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 1 (1996); Erik Gartzke, "The Capitalist Peace," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2007).

lifespan of buffers, scholars have looked at both factors related to *buffered states* and factors related to *buffer states*.

In regard to the former, scholars first draw attention to the balance of power between the two buffered states. To create a sustainable buffer system, it is vital that the two buffered states within it should have approximately equal strength because, as Spykman points out, "Since buffer states separate two or more powers that desire to expand, there is a constant tendency for those powers to encroach on the territory of the buffer states."⁴³ If one side is strong enough to disregard the interests of the other, the buffer state will crumble and eventually be absorbed by the stronger side. Similar to the discussion of the balance of power in IR, Mathisen, Olav Knudsen, and John Chay's works furthered this idea and explored how the sense of threat, the balance of interests, and the balance of intention between two buffered states affected the survival of buffer states.⁴⁴

In addition, some scholars have attributed the demise of a buffer state to a geopolitical prisoner dilemma in the buffer system.⁴⁵ In a buffer system, the two rivaling powers both have a strong incentive to dominate the buffer state. In the meantime, however, they both fear that if the other side controls the buffer state first, it will gain an inordinate advantage in any future conflict between them. Driven by this fear, the best solution to this geopolitical dilemma is to absorb the buffer state before the other side does. In other words, it is the uncertainty regarding the rivals' intentions toward the buffer, caused by this unfortunate geographical setting, that leads to buffers being conquered.

Scholars have also approached the question of the shortened lifespan of buffers by analyzing the innate factor of buffer states to understand how those factors could produce different outcomes. Factors identified by scholars have included topography, location, transportation network, military strength, and foreign policy. Sypkman, for example, argues that when the transportation network in a buffer state is more developed, transforming the buffer from a barrier to a military highway, the temptation to control this highway becomes almost irresistible to its powerful neighbors.⁴⁶ Mary Gear echoes Sypkman's argument, indicating that political

⁴³ Nicholas J. Spykman and Abbie A. Rollins, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy, I," p. 409.

⁴⁴ Trygve Mathisen, *The Functions of Small States in the Strategies of the Great Powers*, pp. 107-10; John Chay, "Korea, A Buffer State."; Olav Fagelund Knudsen, "Easten Europe: The Buffer Effect of A Cordon Sanitaire," *ibid.*, ed. John Chay and Thomas E. Ross.

⁴⁵ Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, p. 166; Tanisha M. Fazal, "State Death in the International System."; *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation*.

⁴⁶ Nicholas J. Spykman and Abbie A. Rollins, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy, I," p. 408.

buffers will enjoy a longer life if they become natural buffer states with barrier-type terrain, underdeveloped transport conduits, and a populace largely indifferent to the rest of the world.⁴⁷

Also, how buffers handle their relations with strong neighbors matters. Brandon Valeriano and John Van Benthuyzen use 18th and 20th century Poland as a case study to prove that, rather than location alone, location combined with a territorial dispute with a powerful neighbor was the main cause which led buffer states to be conquered.⁴⁸ Tornike Turmanidze distinguishes buffer states from quasi-buffer states, which are buffer states allied with a powerful neighbor, and argues that the quasi-buffer states seem to have more chances of survival if they choose the right side in the great power confrontation.⁴⁹ Efraim Karsh's case study on Finland demonstrated that it was Finland's mistaken policy of neutrality before WWII which made the Soviet encroachment on Finland inevitable.⁵⁰

Perhaps the root of this ill-fated destiny of buffer states is the very reality that they are simply too weak to defend themselves. History has provided numerous examples of a state's relative weakness being a source of temptation to a powerful neighbor with ambition. Accordingly, for any buffer system to be sustainable for long, it is necessary for buffer states to have a certain degree of resistance to military or political encroachment by powerful neighboring states. Buffers are viable only when they possess enough power to maintain independence. Chay and Ross maintain, "The excuse provided by the powers was that since the buffer was so weak it could no longer function as a buffer and therefore threatened the power's security."⁵¹

To sum up, the rich discussion on buffer states in the existing literature above does shed some light on the research questions of this thesis. It is clear from the literature that having a buffer state is a very common solution across time and space when two rivaling great powers are seeking a way to manage their surrounding geopolitical environment. Once small powers are caught in the middle of great power rivalries, they will be regarded by the great powers as an extended layer of national defense. Given that the disappearance of small powers is usually the prologue of a rival's invasion, having a buffer, therefore, is a means to strengthen the defense beyond state borders. In this sense, it is not difficult to understand why some research describes

⁴⁷ Mary Barnes Gear, "Role of Buffer States in International Relations," *Journal of Geography* 40(1941): p. 88.

⁴⁸ Brandon Valeriano and John Van Benthuyzen, "When States Die: Geographic and Territorial Pathways to State Death," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 7 (2012).

⁴⁹ Tornike Turmanidze, *Buffer States: Power Policies, Foreign Policies and Concepts*, Global Political Studies Series (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009).

⁵⁰ Efraim Karsh, "Geographical Determinism: Finnish Neutrality Revisited," *Cooperation and Conflict* 21(1986).

⁵¹ John Chay and Thomas E. Ross, "Introduction," in *Buffer States in World Politics*, ed. John Chay and Thomas E. Ross (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1986), p. 5.

North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia each as buffers of China, providing a physical barrier for strengthening the national security of China.⁵² Therefore, the concept of buffer state is a potentially viable explanation for China's long-held policy goals toward North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia.

While the literature mentioned above points us in a promising direction to unravel China's behavioral consistency, it has not yet covered three essential questions related to the central question of this thesis: When did China start to view the three states as buffers? How did this view influence the making of China's North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia policy? And, more importantly, why does China need buffer states even when its rivalrous relationship with other great powers has dissolved? Those questions are the key to make looking into China's foreign behavior through this buffer state lens substantive and meaningful. Unfortunately, there is also a gap in the current literature about how a buffered state creates, maintains, and fights for its buffer states.

The same research gap is apparent in the IR literature. In the field of IR, a vast number of works recognized North Korea, Mongolia, and Taiwan as buffer states of China in both Chinese and Western academic circles.⁵³ In addition to the term "buffer state", some works use a different

⁵² Please see footnote 50.

⁵³ Regarding North Korea please see: Andrew Scobell, "China and North Korea: From Comrades-In-Arms to Allies at Arm's Length."; "The View from China."; Andrew Scobell and Mark Cozad, "China's North Korea Policy: Rethink or Recharge?."; Shen Dingli, "North Korea's Strategic Significance to China."; Toshi Yoshihara and James Holmes, "China, a Unified Korea, and Geopolitics," *Issues & Studies* 41, no. 2 (2005). Regarding Taiwan please see: Alan M. Wachman, *Why Taiwan? Geostategic Rationales for China's Territorial Integrity* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), p. 13; Robert S. Ross, *Chinese Security Policy: Structure, Power and Politics* (Abingdon: New York, 2009); Zhang Wenmu, "Sea Power and China's Strategic Choices," *China Security* 2, no. 2 (2006): p. 25; Zhu Xichang, "Luen Taiwan De Diyuan Zhanlue Diwei 论台湾的地缘战略地位 [On the Geostategic Status of Taiwan]," *Forum of World Economy & Politics* 3(2001); Zhang Wenmu, "Zhongguo Diyuan Zhengzhi De Tedian Jiqi Biandong Guilv (Xia) 中国地缘政治的特点及其变动规律 (下) [Characteristic Geopolitics of China and Its Law of Changing (III)]," *Pacific Journal* 21, no. 3 (2013); Lu Junyuan, "Diyuan Zhanlue Zhong De Taiwan Jiqi Dui Daguo Anquan De Zuoyong 地缘战略中的台湾及其对大国安全的作用 [Taiwan in the Geostategy and Its Security Function to Great Powers]," *Taiwan Studies* 1(1996); Gao Zichuan, "Shixi 21 Shijichu De Zhongguo Haiyang Anquan 试析 21 世纪初的中国海洋安全 [The Analysis of Chinese Maritime Security in 21st Century]," *Contemporary International Relations* 3(2006). Regarding Mongolia please see: Li Narangoa, "Mongolia and Preventive Diplomacy: Haunted by History and Becoming Cosmopolitan," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 2 (2009); Lu Junyuan, "Mengguguo Diyuan Texing Jiqi Guojiguanxi 蒙古国地缘特性及其国际关系 [On Mongolia's Geopolitical Features and Its International Relations]," *Human Geography* 15, no. 4 (2000); Huang Jiakui, "Menggu Daxuan Ho De Zhengju He Dangqian Zhongmeng Guanxi 蒙古大选后的政局和当前中蒙关系 (On the Political Situation after Mongolia Election and Present China-Mongolia Relationship)," *Journal of Inner Mongolia University of Finance and Economics* 4(2012); Liu Shumei, "Zhong Er Mei Ri Yu Mengguguo Guanxi De Fazhan Jiqi Yingxiang 中俄美日与蒙古国关系的发展及其影响 [The Development and Influence of China, Russia, the US, Japan-Mongolia Relations]," *Contemporary International Relations* 4(2009); Zhang Xiujie, "Mengguguo De Guojia Anquan Zhanlue Ji Zhongmeng Anquan Zhanlue Guanxi 蒙古国的国家安全战略及中蒙安全战略关系 [Mongolia's National Security Strategy and the Sino-Mongolian Security Strategy Relationship]," *Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies* 11(2005); Alan M. Wachman, "Mongolia's Geopolitical

term with the same meaning of buffer state to describe the geopolitical importance of North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia to the Chinese mainland such as buffer, bulwark, screen, bridgehead, or springboard. But there is a lack of in-depth discussion of when and under what conditions China starts to view them as buffer states, how such a view influenced relevant policy outcomes, and why such a view persists is still obvious. Ross's article is exemplary in this regard:

A strategic buffer encouraged patience and observation as the potential adversary mobilized its forces. For the United States, the Taiwan Strait and the Western Pacific shield US forces from the risk of a decisive Chinese attack on US forces. On the Korean peninsula, North Korea is a land buffer shielding Chinese forces from an immediate escalation of a US–North Korean conflict that could threaten Chinese territorial security.⁵⁴

Although Ross clearly identified North Korea and Taiwan as two buffers in the Sino-American rivalry, he did not explain how this concept influenced either Chinese or American policymaking. Alan Wachman's *Why Taiwan* offered the most lucid explanation of when China views Taiwan as a buffer, but the book did not cover a detailed description of how such a view influenced the making of China's Taiwan policy.⁵⁵

2.4 Conclusion

The existing literature in IR, China Studies, and geopolitics all provide a certain degree of help to the inquiry of this thesis. The relevant literature of IR and China Studies are helpful for narrowing down its level of analysis to the system level, since it is security concerns that tie China's perspectives on these three states together. In addition, the literature in geopolitics offered this thesis a promising way to answer the research question—employ the concept of buffer state. However, at the same time, the works on buffer states lack a comprehensive study on China's behavior from the perspective of a buffered state. This research gap further highlights the necessity and importance of understanding China's behavioral consistency via

Gambit: Preserving a Precarious Independence While Resisting "Soft Colonialism", *EAI Fellows Program Working Paper Series* 18(2009).

⁵⁴ Robert S. Ross, *Chinese Security Policy: Structure, Power and Politics*, p. 13.

⁵⁵ Alan M. Wachman, *Why Taiwan? Geostrategic Rationales for China's Territorial Integrity*.

the concept of buffer state. In other words, solving the puzzle of China's behavioral consistency through the concept of buffer can contribute to all three fields. The next chapter will illustrate how the concept of buffer state will be operationalized in this thesis.

CH 3 Research Design

This chapter will outline the research design of this thesis in three sections. The first section will illustrate how the concept of buffer state will be operationalized to examine China's foreign behavior. Building on the foundations of the current literature on buffer states, I propose the term "buffer thinking" to describe the manner in which a buffered state views its neighboring buffer states. The second section will explain the rationale behind the case selection for this thesis. Why are cases like Tibet, Nepal, and Vietnam not suitable for studying China's buffer thinking? And, conversely, what are the benefits of selecting North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia as case studies? Finally, the third section will identify the primary materials that will be utilized for the examining China's buffer thinking in this thesis.

3.1 Buffer Thinking

As discussed in Chapter Two, scholars have generally defined buffer states from three different perspectives: geography, power, and function. Each aspect presents one essential element in the making of a buffer state. A buffer state can be defined as a relatively weak state that is geographically located in a place with strategic importance for two or more stronger rivaling states, and in the meantime directly contributes to matters of key national security for either one of them. Based on this definition, there have been and continue to be many states in the world that can be called buffer states. For example, Belgium was a classic example of a European buffer state between the United Kingdom and Germany from the 19th to 20th century. Finland, with its strategic importance to the Soviet Union, was regarded by Moscow as a critical buffer state during the Cold War era. Uruguay was a buffer state between Brazil and Argentina in Latin America, and Mozambique was a buffer state of South Africa in Africa. As for buffer

states in Asia, Korea is most commonly noted to by scholars for its role as a buffer state between the Japanese and Qing Empire. Afghanistan is another well-known buffer state that existed between the British and Russian Empire in the 19th century. Also, Thailand functioned as a buffer state between the British and French Empire at the end of the 19th century.¹

Although the literature on buffer states shows that their existence is a universal phenomenon across time and continents, some conceptual gaps still need to be addressed before it can be used in research. From the literature examined in Chapter Two, it is clear that buffer states appear amidst a rivalry between two powerful states, and states should prefer having a buffer state in areas of geostrategic importance. However, two questions remain ambiguous in the literature:

1. What is meant by a rivalrous relationship?
2. What does it mean to view a state as a buffer?

These two questions are critical to this thesis as it attempts to pinpoint when China started to regard North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia as buffers, and how such a view influenced China's foreign policy. Without solving these two questions in advance, a project on the concept of buffer states cannot proceed.

The first question is relatively easy to address. Few works in International Relations explain the nature or content of state rivalry in detail, though the scholarship has been using the term rivalry to characterize the relationship between two states for decades. The most relevant body of literature defining rivalry is that which deals with the concept of "enduring rivalry" in political science. Scholars of enduring rivalry have generally argued that a rivalry between states means that the states are in conflict over specific issues in which diplomatic or military means are employed to resolve such issues.² Although the meaning of rivalry still varies slightly between scholars, one essential component in a relationship of rivalry is states' perception of imminent military threat from their opponents. State A cannot but view state B as its rival when state B represents an imminent military threat toward state A. In other words,

¹ For more buffer states around the world, please refer to these two books: John Chay and Thomas E. Ross; Tanisha M. Fazal, *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation*.

² D. Scott Bennett, "Security, Bargaining, and the End of Interstate Rivalry," *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1996): pp. 160-1; Eric W. Cox, *Why Enduring Rivalries Do--or Don't--End* (Boulder, Colo.: FirstForumPress, 2010), pp. 3-4; Paul F. Diehl and Gary Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry* (Ann Arbor: University Of Michigan Press, 2000), CH 2; Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, "The Initiation and Termination of Enduring Rivalries: The Impact of Political Shocks," *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (1995): pp. 32-9.

the emergence of rivalry between two states cannot conceptually be separated from the imminent military threats one poses to the other. In this sense, the moment that one state starts to perceive a real possibility of its opponent using military force to threaten its own national security, is when we can safely assume their relationship has become rivalrous.

To address the second question, it is first necessary to unpack the constituent elements of buffer states. When debating what makes a buffer state, most scholars have focused on the *objective* elements that constitute a buffer state (geography, function, and power). They seldom consider in detail the potential *subjective* elements. This lack of attention to subjective elements is quite common in the current scholarship on buffer states. For example, Tanisha Fazel defined a buffer state as “A state geographically located between two other states engaged in a rivalry.”³ Hans Morgenthau described buffer states as “Weak states located close to powerful ones and serving their military security.”⁴ Brandon Valeriano and John Benthuyesen argued that “The essential attribute of a buffer state is to stand at the center of a strong pattern of securitisation, which separates rival powers.”⁵ Conceptualizing buffer states in this way seems to suggest that as long as a weak state is strategically located in the middle of a rivalry between its powerful neighbors, the state can be automatically referred to as a buffer state without question. However, the emergence of buffer state status is empirically more complicated than what they described.

As a matter of fact, a buffered state’s subjective perception of the territory between itself and its rival is a necessary element that causes the buffered state to refer to that territory as a buffer. Take North Korea as an example. Right after the end of World War II (WWII, 1939–45) in 1945, the US and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were arguably rivals; the CCP and the Kuomintang (KMT), supported by the US, engaged in military conflict throughout the Chinese mainland right after the end of WWII. At that time, the US had military forces stationed in the south part of the Korean Peninsula. This situation meant that North Korea fitted the objective standards of being a buffer state between the People’s Republic of China (PRC), established by the CCP, and the US before the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–53). However, for CCP leaders at that time, this situation did not automatically make the north part of the peninsula, controlled by Kim Il Sung, a buffer state between China and the US. As Chapter Five will show in detail, the CCP had not seen the Korean Peninsula as having essential geostrategic meaning for the defense of China since the establishment of the CCP in 1921. The peninsula, for the

³ Tanisha M. Fazel, *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation*, p. 70.

⁴ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, p. 189.

⁵ Brandon Valeriano and John Van Benthuyesen, "When States Die: Geographic and Territorial Pathways to State Death," p. 1167.

CCP, was nothing but a symbol of how an oppressed nation fought against foreign imperialism. It was the US forces marching toward the Sino-Korean border during the Korean War that dramatically changed the CCP's original perspective to that of a buffered view, in which the territory of North Korea was seen as a critical shield protecting China's northeast. In other words, the formation of a rivalry between two states does not necessarily mean that either of those states will consider the state between them as a buffer. What matters is a buffered states' subjective perception of whether a territory possesses the status of buffer state.

It is also important to point out that this subjective perception of buffer state status can sometimes be wholly unilateral. Nicholas Spykman, who has published many studies on buffer states, uses the term "no man's land or two man's land" to describe buffer states.⁶ This term implies that an agreement between two buffered states is a necessary element to make a particular territory a buffer. Empirically, however, this is not always the case. Once again, North Korea serves as an excellent example. China has perceived North Korea as a critical buffer protecting its geopolitical security against the US from the Korean War until today. Yet the US does not regard North Korea as a buffer in the same way that China does. To the US, whether China would dominate North Korea has nothing to do with US American continental security but more about its security interests in East Asia. As early as 1947, the US Secretary of State Dean Acheson approved one interdepartmental report on Korea, which specified that "The US had little strategic interest in maintaining troops or bases in Korea...nonetheless, control of all Korea by the Soviet Union or Soviet-dominated forces...would constitute a strategic threat to US interests in the Far East."⁷ These distinct views of the value of North Korea between China and the US illustrate the very fact that any given territory acting as a buffer state does not need to be recognized as such by two rivaling states simultaneously. It follows that even if only one state in a rivalry views a territory as containing critical geostrategic meaning (it would feel vulnerable if the territory is controlled by its rival), that territory can still be seen as a buffer. A mutual consensus between two rivals on how to manage a territory between them should not be a criterion for determining the territory's buffer state status.

This unilaterally subjective perception of buffer state status closely relates to the second question of how the concept of buffer state can be operationalized in this thesis. The literature

⁶ Nicholas J. Spykman and Abbie A. Rollins, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy, I," p. 408.

⁷ Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Volume II, the Roaring of the Cataract 1947-1950* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 46.

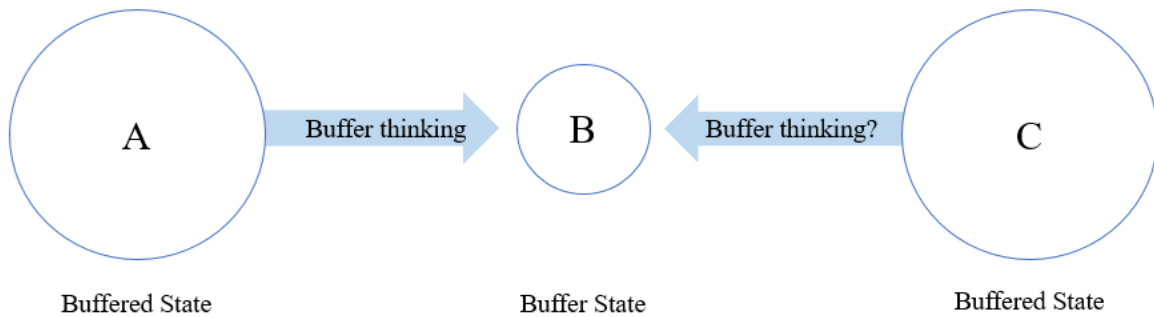
suggests that buffered states in a buffer system will face a geopolitical prisoner dilemma in which both will want to take the buffer first. Figure 2 illustrates this predicament. In Figure 2, a buffer state, B, is geographically located between the two rivaling states, A and C. The territory controlled by B provides several significant geostrategic advantages to A, such as extending A's strategic defenses and providing more time and space to mobilize or defend, blocking C's potential invasion route of A, and quarantining hazardous cultural or ideology influences from C. Considering the loss of B (if C occupies B or imposes militarily stations on B) would place A at a great disadvantage in terms of its defense against C in the future; taking B before C acts in the same way is the best course of action for A when facing this geopolitical dilemma. In other words, A's behavior toward B will inevitably be driven by a geopolitical mentality that "if C takes B, C will definitely use B as an invasion route to attack me in the future. So I should take B first before C does." Chancellor of the German Empire Theobald Von Bethmann-Hollweg's speech to the Reichstag at the beginning of World War I in August 1914 shows one good example of such a mentality:

Gentlemen, we are now (acting) in self-defense; and necessity knows no law! Our own troops have occupied Luxembourg, and possibly, have already entered Belgian territory. Gentlemen, this is against the rules of international law. It is true that the French government has informed Brussels that it is willing to respect Belgium's neutrality, as long as the opponent will respect it. We knew, however, that France stood ready to invade. France would wait but we could not! A French attack upon our flank on the Lower Rhine might have become fatal. Thus, we were compelled to disregard the justified protest of the Luxembourg and of the Belgian governments. The wrong—I speak frankly—the wrong which we thereby commit, we shall try to make good again as soon as our military object is attained. Whoever is threatened, as we are, and fights for his highest possession, may only consider how he is to hew his way through.⁸

Figure 2: A Buffer System

⁸ Michael Greenfield Partem, "The Buffer System in International Relations," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 27, no. 1 (1983): p. 11.

A Buffer System



Motivated by its own geostrategic vulnerability in relation to B in a rivalry against C, at some point A would inevitably regard the territory controlled by B as an extra layer of national defense against C in a buffer system. In other words, once A shows such a geopolitical mentality, that is the moment we can safely assume A subjectively regards B in a buffered way. Therefore, I term this geopolitical mentality “buffer thinking.” This term is encapsulated by the logic of secure this territory against my rival now, otherwise the rival may launch a military attack from it against me in the future once the rival has occupied the territory.

Lastly, although this thesis will utilize the concept of buffer state to explain China’s behavior consistency, it does not intend to distinguish the nuanced differences among the terms of buffer state, buffer zone,⁹ buffer area,¹⁰ buffer space,¹¹ strategic buffer,¹² or buffer etc.¹³ While the term buffer state has been relatively rigorously discussed in the academic literature on this topic, the definitions of the other terms are quite ambiguous. Some studies suggest that there should be a polity on a given territory. Some of them imply an assumption that only land matters and maritime zones do not. The common ground of these ambiguous terms is that they all refer to a given territory which is not controlled by either of the parties in a rivalry and it serves to separate the two rivaling opponents. Given that the target of this thesis is to understand China’s

⁹ Rajan Menon and Jack L. Snyder, "Buffer Zones: Anachronism, Power Vacuum, or Confidence Builder?."

¹⁰ Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 152.

¹¹ Mohammad Reza Hafeznia, Syrus Ahmadi, and Bernard Hourcad, "Explanation of the Structural and Functional Characteristics of Geographical Buffer Space," *Geopolitics Quarterly* 8, no. 40 (2013).

¹² Robert S. Ross, *Chinese Security Policy: Structure, Power and Politics*, p. 13.

¹³ Stephan De Spiegeleire, "Of Buffers and Bridges: Some Geodetic Thoughts on European Stability in the Post-Cold War Era," in *Zwischeneuropa: Historic Experiences and Security Alternative* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 1994).

foreign behavior via the concept of buffer state, how to define and distinguish those terms is outside the scope of this thesis.

Based on the discussion in this section, the research procedure of this thesis in each case will unfold in three interlinked steps in the following three chapters. It will firstly examine China's early view of the territories of Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia before China established any rivalry with its rivals, the US and the Soviet Union. Then it will show how China's buffer thinking toward these territories takes shape amidst its respective rivalries with the US and the Soviet Union. Finally, this thesis will examine the explanatory power of buffer thinking in a series of military and diplomatic actions that China took toward North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia.

3.2 Case Selection Rationale

As explained in Chapter Two, the term "lips and teeth" is the link that enables us to connect China's perspectives on these three states together and hence make the concept of buffer state look promising in explaining the behavior of China. However, some might argue that, geopolitically speaking, these three states are not the only three buffer states of China. Tibet, Nepal, and Vietnam are also likely candidates for being buffer states of China. In response to this potential query, this section will elucidate the rationales of why Tibet, Nepal, and Vietnam were not selected as case studies.

Firstly, Tibet can hardly be considered an independent state actor in the international system. China's buffer thinking is a product of geopolitical anxiety resulting from a concern that a rival of China may use the territory in between as an invasion route to undermine China's geopolitical security. For the concept of a buffer state to work properly, the existence of the following three units are a prerequisite: China, a rival, and a territory free from the control of either side. If either side of the rivalry controls the territory, the territory cannot be considered to be a buffer. Historically speaking, Chinese control over Tibet has been off and on in the past centuries. From the early 1910s, Tibet operated as an independent state actor in the international system. However, the PRC incorporated Tibet in 1951, and the Chinese government has exercised substantive control over it as a part of Chinese territory until today. In this sense, theoretically, Tibet cannot be considered to be a buffer.

Secondly, Nepal lacks the subjective constituent elements of being a buffer state. The founder of modern Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah, once described Nepal as “a yam between two stones” to characterize its geopolitical situation.¹⁴ Sandwiched between India ruled by Britain and China, Nepal’s geopolitical environment is very similar to that of Mongolia. However, what makes the case of Nepal different from North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia is that there is no evidence that China perceives any military threat from Nepal nowadays. Moreover, China did not engage in a strategic rivalry with India over Nepal, and, interestingly, China frequently consults with India over affairs relating to Nepal. As Kunda Dixit argues, “Beijing is happy to let India handle Nepal, as long as the Americans and Europeans don’t use Nepal to support Tibetan nationalists.”¹⁵ Indeed, the question of why China does not subjectively perceive Nepal as a buffer state today needs to be answered. In any case, this lack of subjective perception is the major reason this thesis does not account Nepal among the buffer states of China.

Thirdly, Vietnam is not a buffer state of China anymore. During the Vietnam War (1955–75), Vietnam could be regarded as a buffer state between China and the US. Chinese scholars often compare China’s perceptions of the Korean and Vietnam War.¹⁶ Indeed, in the early 1960s, Chinese leaders viewed Vietnam in much the same way as they viewed North Korea. They believed that the true intentions of the US behind this war were to invade China via Vietnam much the same as its intentions behind the Korean War. That was why the Chinese government also referred to the Sino-Vietnamese relationship as being like “lips and teeth” at that time.¹⁷ However, along with the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations after the mid-1960s, the war was further complicated by structural factors such as the Sino-Soviet rivalry over Vietnam and the Sino-American rapprochement. After the war, Sino-Vietnam relations have evolved into an entirely different context from that of Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia. In 1979, the two sides had a war against each other over the Cambodia issue. After the Cold War, the relationship between China and Vietnam has mostly centered on a series of territorial and

¹⁴ Fauzia Atique, "Nepal's Foreign Policy," *Pakistan Horizon* 36, no. 4 (1983): p. 97.

¹⁵ Kunda Dixit, "Nepal: Dictated By Geography," *World Policy Journal* 30, no. 36 (2013): p. 38.

¹⁶ Zhang Baijia, "Kangmei Yuanchao Yu Yuanyue Kangmei: Zhongguo Ruhe Yingdui Chaoxian Zhanzheng He Yuenan Zhanzheng 抗美援朝与援越抗美: 中国如何应对朝鲜战争和越南战争 [Resist the US to Aid Korea' and 'Aid Vietnam to Resist the US': How Did China Deal with the Korean War and the Vietnam War]," *World Economics and Politics*, no. 3 (2005); Li Danhui, "Zhongsu Guanxi Yu Zhongguo De Yuanyue Kangmei 中蘇關係與中國的援越抗美 [The Sino-Soviet Relations and China's Aid Vietnam to Resist the US]," *Contemporary China History Studies* 3(1998).

¹⁷ "Zhongguo Zhichi Yuenan Renmin Tongyi Zuguo De Douzheng 中国支持越南人民统一祖国的斗争 [China Supports Vitanamese Struggle for the National Unification]," *People's Daily*, December 23 1961.

maritime disputes. In other words, China's geopolitical anxiety over Vietnam has faded away substantially nowadays.

One might argue that Taiwan is not a state so it cannot be a buffered state in theoretical terms. This argument is groundless. To determine whether a political entity is a state or not, the standard stipulated in the Convention on Rights and Duties of States is what most scholars refer to. According to this standard: "the state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; and d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states." Taiwan satisfies each of these stipulations. In fact, the Republic of China on Taiwan has been functioning as a *de facto* independent state in the international system since 1949, despite the PRC's claim of sovereignty over Taiwan. What makes the case of Taiwan unique is that it is the only case among the three that China wants to annex into its territory. This uniqueness, however, does not change the fact that Taiwan is an island controlled by its own government and is situated in between a US-China rivalry. Therefore, Taiwan along with North Korea and Mongolia are the principal (and perhaps the only) states that currently function as buffer states on China's periphery.

More importantly, there are two important advantages in choosing these three states to investigate the buffer state concept. First, selecting North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia greatly minimized the potential issue of unrepresentativeness may raise in research centering on the concept of buffer state. Methodologically, social scientists have long been struggling with the reliability of their research. Given that the empirical samples social scientists collect are relatively more limited than those of natural scientists, the arguments they want to make from small-n research usually faces the problem of being unrepresentative of the entire population. However, as explained above, Nepal, Vietnam, and Tibet are all not suitable candidates due to their respective limitations. Only North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia fit the criterion of being a buffer state of China today. By including all of the potential cases, in other words, the risk of the findings being the unrepresentative are minimized.

Second, arranging the case selection in this manner also makes it easier to gauge the explanatory power of China's buffer thinking. Social scientists can benefit both from a "most-likely" or "least-likely" research design for examining the power of the theories they intend to

expound.¹⁸ The former “most-likely” design means cases that a theory is expecting to explain very well, while the latter “least-likely” cases are ones in which a theory is assumed to perform very poorly (the theory is still valid though). The explanatory power of a theory cannot be said to be powerful if it performed badly in most-likely cases, but can be regarded as powerful if it explained least-likely cases well. In this thesis, each case selected shows different geopolitical features of China’s buffer states. Mongolia is the clearest case of a Chinese buffer among the three because it borders both with Russia/the Soviet Union and China on land. This is the most typical form of a buffer state. Taiwan is the least likely case among the three as it does not share a land border with China and the US, but connects to the two strong neighbors by two water bodies. Due to this unique geographical setting, Taiwan is not a traditional type of buffer state. North Korea is somewhere in between. Although North Korea shares a land border with China, it would not present any direct military threat to North America even if China absorbed North Korea. The buffer state status of North Korea, as discussed above, is mainly shaped by China’s own perception of the North Korean territory. Therefore, instead of counting on the homogeneous cases only, including three different types of buffer states makes it possible to evaluate the explanatory power of buffer thinking with methodological rigor.

Finally, some may wonder whether it is appropriate to treating both maritime (Taiwan) and land neighbors (North Korea and Mongolia) as similar. Intuitively, the answer is no. Theoretically speaking, all other things being equal, a state's threat perception would decrease when its geographical distance from the rival decreases. Power projection becomes much more difficult when there is a body of water separating two rivaling states. However, the case of Taiwan is a different story. The Taiwan Strait is only around 100 kilometers wide. Such a small body of water cannot function as a meaningful and effective physical barrier to prevent the US from projecting its navy and air force powers from the island to China. It is because of this geographical proximity of Taiwan to the Chinese coast that makes Chinese leaders worry about a possible US invasion from the island, as CH 4 will show. Moreover, the frequency with which Chinese leaders discuss about great power threats from Taiwan is noticeably higher than in the other two cases. Based on these reasons, it is appropriate to treat Taiwan as equivalent to North Korea and Mongolia.

¹⁸ Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in *Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975); Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge & London: Mit Press, 2005), pp. 120-3.

To make a coherent and cogent argument, this thesis will delineate a specific analytical timeframe. The analysis will span the time from which that the CCP established the PRC under the leadership of Mao Zedong in 1949, to the time that Hu Jintao took power in the 2000s. Within this timeframe, this thesis will examine the explanatory power of China's buffer thinking in a series of important events occurring between China and North Korea, China and Taiwan, and China and Mongolia respectively. The events selected are all large-scale military conflicts or significant diplomatic episodes, as I assume China's buffer thinking to be more obvious during major events. The assumption behind this selection manner is that the true reasons why Chinese leaders think a certain geographical area is vital to China are more likely to appear in a high level of confrontation. As a number of cognitive psychology studies have found, people's reasoning complexity would increase when the stakes of the issues being confronted are high.¹⁹ This supports the prediction that arguments Chinese leaders use during high-level confrontations are more trustworthy than that of low-level confrontations, as the amount of time and efforts the leaders would spend on internal debating, gather information, and filtering out priorities increases.

Certainly, it is the expectation of this thesis that China's buffer thinking can be and will be a valid explanation for China's behavior beyond the Hu era. However, due to the limitations of time and space as well as available primary materials, this thesis will not go beyond Hu's era. In addition, this thesis acknowledges the possibility that China's buffer thinking may evolve into a different form in the future due to the complexities of world politics.

3.3 Data Set

The main task of this thesis is to establish a causal relationship between China's behavioral consistency and its buffer thinking. Key to this task will be investigating of the decision-making process of the Chinese government in the selected events. With that goal in mind, this section

¹⁹ Mary Frances Luce, James R. Bettman, and John W. Payne, "Choice Processing in Emotionally Difficult Decisions," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 23, no. 2 (1997); Shelly Chaiken, Akiva Liberman, and Alice H. Eagly, "Heuristic and Systematic Information Processing within and beyond the Persuasion Context," in *Unintended Thought*, ed. John A. Bargh and James S. Uleman (New York: Guilford Press, 1989); Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Paperbacks, 2007), p. 23.

will identify the primary materials to be used in this thesis, where they are from, and the feasibility of accessing those materials.

The National Archives Administration (NAA) and the Foreign Ministry Archive (FMA) in Beijing are the two main locations that collect relevant sources on the decision-making process of the Chinese government. The NAA and the FMA in Beijing store almost all of the important documents on decisions made by Chinese leaders since the 1920s. In accordance with the Archive Law of the PRC, archived materials should be opened to the public upon the expiration of thirty years from the date of their formation.²⁰ The Chinese government embarked on archive declassification in 1999, and the FMA officially opened to the public the first wave of declassified archives dated before 1966 in 2004. However, the FMA was shut down by the Chinese government in 2012 for unknown reasons. After it reopened in December 2016, almost all documents made available were from the International Organizations Division and the Protocol Division of the Foreign Ministry, which bear little relevance to the decision-making process. In addition, foreign researchers are normally not allowed to visit the NAA.

As an alternative, this thesis acquired primary materials from archives at municipal and provincial levels. Jiangsu Provincial Archives and Shanghai Municipal Archives are two archives with a rich store of documents regarding foreign policy at these two levels.²¹ Although most archives stored at these levels are documents which the CCP Central issued to lower-level administration agencies, the documents are still very valuable in many ways. For one thing, they sometimes include a copy of how a relevant decision was made by top Chinese leaders. For another, from the documents at hand, it is still possible to sometimes infer how Chinese leaders viewed a given issue. Most importantly, the Chinese government puts relatively fewer restrictions on foreign researchers' access to these archives. Hence, archives at municipal and provincial levels are one important channel for delving into China's foreign and military decisions.

Open sources published by the Chinese government are also a crucial means to look into how a specific decision is made. The Chinese government has published a vast number of books containing primary materials on foreign and military policy. For instance, the 18 volumes of

²⁰ Please see Chapter IV of the Archives Law of the PRC: http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/12/content_1383932.htm (accessed January 18 2018).

²¹ Jiang Huajie, "Zhongguo Dalu Diqu Dangan 中国大陆地区档案 [Archives in the Chinese Mainland Area]," in *Lenzhanshi Yanjiu Dangan Ziyuan Daolun 冷战史研究档案资源导论 [Introduction of Archival Sources on Cold War History Studies]*, ed. Yao Baihui (Beijing: Shijiezhishi Chubanshe, 2015).

The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee, 1921–1949 and 50 volumes of *The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee, 1949–1966* published by the Chinese government, both contain a considerable amount of information about the CCP's foreign and military decisions since 1921. China researchers also frequently utilize Chinese leaders' writings, diaries, and autobiographies to investigate how a certain decision is made, as Chinese leaders like Mao and Deng Xiaoping usually circumvented the restrictions of the bureaucratic system to make a decision. Therefore, sources such as *The Selected Military Writings of Mao Zedong* and *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* are widely referenced by researchers on China when they are making their arguments. In addition, Shen Zhihua collected a large number of declassified documents on Sino-Soviet relations from Russia and translated them into Chinese in the 12 volumes of *Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives* in 2014. Those 12 volumes, published by the Orient Publishing Center in Shanghai, have a great number of the most recent telegrams between leaders in Beijing and Moscow regarding military and diplomatic issues.

This thesis also takes into account that one has to be very cautious when using sources published by the Chinese government. The Chinese government frequently deletes or adds specific information to the sources to suit its political needs. For example, Mao outlined China's borders in his article "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" of 1939, in which he wrote: "China's current borders are...neighbors with Taiwan."²² This article was first published in *The Selected Works of Mao Zedong* in 1944. However, the Chinese government deleted the sentence "neighbors with Taiwan" in a later version of *The Selected Works of Mao Zedong* after the CCP changed its official position on the sovereignty of this island (Please see Chapter Four). Thus, in analyzing such documents in this thesis, it was deemed to necessary to check the earliest version of the source. Also, the Wilson Center's History and Public Policy Program, the Central Intelligence Agency's Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, the National Security Archive at Washington D.C., and the Office of the Historian at the US State Department all provide voluminous digital archives on Cold War history. These online archives are useful for not only verifying the authenticity of the Chinese sources but also acquiring relevant information about Chinese foreign and military policy during the Cold War.

²² Liu Xiaoyuan, "Zhongguo Gongchandang Guojia Jiangyuguan De Yuanyuan Yu Fazhan, 1921-1949 中国共产党国家疆域观的渊源与发展, 1921-1949 [The Source and Development of the CCP's National Territorial Perspective, 1921-1949]," *Twenty-First Century* 160(2017): p. 24.

Regarding sources for events in more contemporary periods, this thesis took into consideration that changes over time that have occurred in the decision-making apparatus of China. From the Jiang Zemin period onward, China's decision-making apparatus has gradually transformed from a personal style to a much more institutional style. As part of this transformation, the power to make foreign and military policy was no longer the exclusive domain of a small group of top CCP leaders, but came to be shared by multiple competing agencies. Although top CCP leaders still have the final say on critical military and foreign policies, they usually need to work with relevant formal and informal policymaking agencies to acquire policy consensus. Therefore, instead of solely paying attention to the top CCP leaders, this thesis pays attention to those multiple agencies and utilizes them as sources of data. This helps to provide a more accurate picture of how a certain policy is made.

Leaders' statements and policy papers from these agencies were collected as part of the data set utilized in this thesis. Among all of the policymaking agencies of China, the most important is the CCP Central Politburo, especially the CCP Central Politburo Standing Committee. Members of this committee make the final call on all important decisions regarding China's foreign and military policy. The second level of agencies targeted was a series of small groups on foreign or military policy. Among these, the Central Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group, which is responsible for debating, coordinating, and recommending policies to the Politburo, and the Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs, which is responsible for giving suggestions to the Politburo about affairs related to Taiwan. The People's Liberation Army is undoubtedly an essential player in the making of China's military policy, though its role has been substantially narrowed to professional military affairs by decades of institutional reform. Finally, with regard to China's North Korea policy, the outputs of the International Department (formerly the International Liaison Department) were also included as this is the main channel through which China has communicated with North Korea from the Cold War until today.

In addition, interviews were conducted with Chinese scholars from influential think-tanks or key universities, which is an increasingly effective means to understand China's policy toward the outside world. Chinese officials are, generally speaking, the best interview for finding out how a specific decision is reached. In practice, however, conducting interviews with Chinese officials is not feasible given the political culture and environment of China. A viable alternative is to interview Chinese scholars at important and influential think-tanks or key

universities in China.²³ Given that many of such institutions are administered to a certain extent by relevant government agencies, personal connections between researchers at those institutions and actual policymakers are often strong (Please see Figure 3). From this perspective, researchers at these government-affiliated institutions may have a deep understanding of how a given policy is formulated. More importantly, they have greater freedom to express their opinions on China's foreign policy relative to Chinese officials.

Figure 3: Key Think-Tanks in China²⁴

Name	Administered by
China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations	Ministry of State Security
China Institute of International Studies	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	State Council
Development Research Center of the State Council	State Council
Academy of Military Science	Central Military Commission
Shanghai Institutes for International Studies	Wang Daohan's Office Foreign Ministry Jiang Zemin's Office Shanghai City Government
Institute of Taiwan Studies	Chinese Academy of Social Science Taiwan Affairs Office Central Committee Leading Group on Taiwan Affairs State Council Ministry of State Security
International Strategy Research Institute	Central Party School

²³ G. E., "The Brains of the Party," *The Economist*, March 10 2014; Bates Gill and James Mulvenon, "Chinese Military-Related Think Tanks and Research Institutions," *The China Quarterly*, no. 171 (2002); Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China* (Solna: Stockholm International Peace Research Institution, 2010); David Shambaugh, "China's International Relations Think Tanks: Evolving Structure and Process," *The China Quarterly*, no. 171 (2002).

²⁴ The information in this table is from footnote 22.

Finally, newspapers circulated in China are one meaningful lens through which this thesis will examine how Chinese leaders perceive or want Chinese people to view a given event, especially for the period during the Cold War. Newspapers such as *People's Daily*, *Jiefang Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, and *PLA Daily* will be drawn upon in the analysis. In summary, this thesis will rely on declassified archives, memoirs, telegrams, manuscripts, interviews, and newspapers as its main primary materials.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has paved the groundwork for delving into China's buffer thinking. It discussed the procedure of generating the independent variable of this thesis, justified the case selection rationale, and identified relevant sources material. Based on this groundwork, the next three chapters will examine the explanatory power of China's buffer thinking through the respective cases of Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia. Each chapter will unravel China's behavioral consistency in three steps: China's early view of a specific territory, when and how China established buffer thinking towards such territory, and how such thinking affected certain policy outcomes.

CH 4 The Case of Taiwan

The long-held position of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is that Taiwan has been a part of China's territory since ancient times. In backing up this position with military threats and drawing diplomatic red lines against the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan since 1949, China¹ has apparently been sending a message to the world that the Taiwan issue has everything to do with China's sovereignty. This implies that China's behavior toward Taiwan has been driven by a desire to protect China's sovereignty. This chapter aims to challenge this widely accepted held impression by demonstrating that China's buffer thinking toward Taiwan is the key driver of its behavior toward Taiwan in this regard. It argues that this thinking is the main factor that drove China to launch military action against Taiwan in 1954, 1958, and 1996.

This chapter will begin by showing that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s first view of the island was of a minority nationality. It will then detail the process in which how this view gradually transformed into a geopolitical rationale over a three-phased policy evolution when a US-CCP rivalry began taking shape. Through an examining of the explanatory power of buffer thinking against other competing explanations, this chapter argues that such thinking not only changed the timing in which China initiated its military plan of taking Taiwan but it also altered the order of the plan in the First Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1954–55. The outbreak of the Second Taiwan Crisis of 1958 was a continuation of the first crisis in terms of the buffer thinking. The Sino-American rapprochement of the 1970s did not fundamentally alter China's view of Taiwan, which ultimately led China to initiate a military plan of annexing Taiwan—not just only military drills—in 1995–96.

¹ For clarification purposes, in this chapter and beyond Taiwan refers to the ROC government and China refers to the PRC government. Chinese leaders refers to government officials in the PRC.

4.1 The CCP's Early View of Taiwan: Minority Nationality

The very first view held by the CCP regarding Taiwan was of a minority nationality. In such a view, the CCP did not think that people in China and people in Taiwan shared national homogeneity, nor that Taiwan should be a part of China's territory. It took the CCP more than twenty years to arrive at its Taiwan policy as we know it today, moving through three phases: Taiwan-omitting, supporting Taiwanese independence, and Taiwan-incorporating. The value of this island to the CCP, however, was in no way geopolitical in the first two phases.

Before the Anti-Japanese War (1937–45), Taiwan was a very peripheral concern for the CCP, if not wholly omitted from its considerations. Compared to China's heavy focus on Taiwan nowadays, the term Taiwan barely appeared in CCP policy discourse in the first few years after its founding. The best example of such an omission was "The Manifesto of the Second National Congress" of the CCP in 1922, which was the first time the CCP explicitly outlined its vision of China's future territorial makeup.² In this manifesto, the CCP advocated to the uniting of each province in China proper and the establishment a Chinese Federal Republic with Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Taiwan did not appear in this vision. More importantly, in this manifesto the CCP used nine thousand words to list all sorts of economic exploitation and political oppression that foreign countries had conducted in China since the Opium War of 1839, but it did not mention the profound event of ceding Taiwan to the Japanese Empire.

This omission was not a coincidence but more of a reflection of a traditional Chinese view of Taiwan—people in Taiwan were not Han Chinese and the island was external to China proper. Due to China's long-held land power worldview, rulers on China were not particularly interested in bringing Taiwan, which was approximately 150 km away from China's coast, under its control. The first time that China officially annexed the island was in 1684 in the Qing Dynasty. In 1683, Shi Lang, a naval commander of the Qing Empire, defeated Ming loyalists who fled to Taiwan in 1662 and planned to take this island. While the commander believed that Taiwan could function geopolitically as a screen to protect China's southeast coastal area, the Kangxi Emperor opposed the idea of annexing Taiwan after the victory. The nationality

² "Zhongguo Gongchandang Dierci Quanguo Dahui Xuanyan 中国共产党第二次全国大会宣言 [The Manifesto of the Second National Congress of the CCP]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1921-25 中共中央文件选集: 1921-25 [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1921-25]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 111.

difference and the lack of interaction between China and Taiwan in the past were two major reasons that the emperor was against this idea. He argued:

Taiwan is a place beyond the sea. It has no relations with us. The reason we invaded Taiwan was because the people on it, who have not been civilized yet, keep harassing our people along the coast...Taiwan is no bigger than a ball of mud. We will gain nothing from having the island and we will lose nothing if we do not take it.³

Two official documents of the CCP in the early period revealed that the CCP first perceived Taiwan through a lens of minority nationality. The first one is “The Resolution on Nationality Problem” of 1928, in which the CCP listed “Taiwanese in Fujian” as one of the minority nationalities in China:

The Sixth National Congress of the CCP thinks that the issue of minority nationality (Mongolians in the north, Hui, Manchu, Koreans, Taiwanese in Fujian, Miao, Li in the south, Xinjiang, and Tibet) in China has a significant meaning for the revolution.⁴

The second one is the Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic of 1931, in which the CCP declared:

Every race (Han, Manchu, Mongolians, Hui, Tibetans, Miao, Yao, Li, and Taiwanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese inside China), and religion is equal before Soviet laws.⁵

These two documents both echo the two reasons argued by Kangxi regarding the relationship between China and Taiwan. Compared to China’s current policy of refraining from calling the people in Taiwan “Taiwanese,” the CCP at the time apparently regarded people from Taiwan as a unique group called Taiwanese, who were neither Taiwanese aboriginals nor Han Chinese. Second, there was an obvious implication for the CCP that Taiwan was not and should not be a part of China’s territory. In the constitutional categories of races in China, the CCP grouped Taiwanese together with Koreans and Vietnamese, rather than putting Taiwanese with

³ *Qingshilu* 清实录 [The Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty]. vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1985), p. 155.

⁴ "Guanyu Minzu Wenti De Jueyi 关于民族问题的决议 [Resolution on the Nationality Problem]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1928 中共中央文件选集: 1928* [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1928], ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 388.

⁵ "Zhonghua Suweiai Gongheguo Xianfa Dagang 中华苏维埃共和国宪法大纲 [The Outline of the Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1931 中共中央文件选集: 1931* [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1931], ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 772.

Mongolians and Tibetans, whom the CCP claimed to unite with the future Chinese Federal Republic. Grouping Taiwanese in this manner suggested that the future arrangement of Taiwanese would be different from Mongolians and Tibetans in the eyes of the CCP.

It is important to point out that although Taiwan fell into the category of minority nationality policy, the CCP had not yet specified its Taiwan policy in this period. Fighting for the liberation of weak nationalities inside and outside China was one of founding goals of the CCP but not every nationality seemed to carry the same weight to the CCP. While Mongolians, Tibetans, and Koreans were three nationalities frequently mentioned in all documents related to minority nationality work, references to Taiwanese people were missing from the documents most of the time, implying the Taiwan issue was marginalized in the CCP's policy priorities.

It was Japan's military action against China from 1931 that drove the CCP's Taiwan policy into its second phase: supporting Taiwanese independence. In order to counter the Japanese invasion of China, the CCP built three united fronts against Japan: an alliance with the Kuomintang (KMT), an alliance with foreign countries, and an alliance with people inside Japan and people colonized by Japan. Taiwanese emerged on the CCP's radar in the third united fronts as they, like Koreans, were under the colonial rule of Japan. Consequently, the policy of supporting Taiwanese independence was formulated. The most frequently cited evidence of this support of the CCP is the conversation between Mao Zedong and Edgar Snow in July 1936. Referring to the case of Korea, Mao's position on Taiwan was unambiguous:

It is the immediate task of China to regain all lost territories, not merely to defend our sovereignty south of the Great Wall. This means that Manchuria must be regained. We do not, however, include Korea, formerly a Chinese colony, but when we have re-established the independence of the lost territories of China, and if the Koreans wish to break away from the chains of Japanese imperialism, we will extend them our enthusiastic help in their struggle for independence. The same thing applies for Taiwan.⁶

Mao's support for Taiwanese independence cannot be argued as having been a careless mistake. This is firstly because Mao's position on Taiwan was congruent with multiple CCP official documents that were issued later. For instance, without any revision, the CCP emphasized the importance of Mao's conversation with Snow twice at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth

⁶ Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1973), p. 110.

Central Committee in 1938.⁷ Second, Mao was not the only CCP leader who supported Taiwanese independence at the time. Zhou Enlai, for instance, shared the same view as Mao. He extended his support to the Taiwanese who were fighting against Japanese rule in his “Nationality Supremacy and State Supremacy” of 1941:

Since we opposed aggression from the other nations, we should sympathize with independence-liberation movements of other nation-states. We will not only assist the anti-Japanese movements of Korea or Taiwan, or anti-German, anti-Italian aggression movements of the Balkan and African nations, but also sympathize with the national liberation movements of India and various South Asian countries.⁸

The importance of Taiwan grew significantly in the CCP’s policy priorities in this period. To the CCP, Taiwan had become a matter of concern equal to Korea and Vietnam after the establishment of an alliance with people under Japanese colonial rule. This change was reflected in the fact that whenever the CCP mentioned the mission of building an anti-Japanese alliance with weak nationalities outside China in relevant policy papers, Taiwanese were named together with Koreans and Vietnamese, which was a sharp contrast to ten years earlier.⁹ This policy on Taiwan also explains why the CCP used the phrase “current China’s borders...neighbor Taiwan” in 1939, the first time the term Taiwan appeared in the CCP’s policy discourse on China’s borders.¹⁰

1942 was the year that the CCP’s policy toward Taiwan entered into the Taiwan-incorporating phase. In 1942, the CCP suddenly switched its position on Taiwan from “Taiwan should be independent” to “Taiwan should be a part of China.” Evidence for this changed position can be seen in a column in *Xinhua Daily* in March 1942.¹¹ Instead of using the long-embraced “Taiwan Independence Movement” title, the column used “Taiwan Restoration Movement,”

⁷ "Lun Xin Jieduan 论新阶段 [On the New Stage]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1936-38 中共中央文件选集: 1936-38 [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1936-38]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), pp. 565-6 & 69.

⁸ Frank S. T. Hsiao and Lawrence R. Sullivan, "The Chinese Communist Party and the Status of Taiwan, 1928-1943," *Pacific Affairs* 52, no. 3 (1979): p. 453.

⁹ "Zhonggong Kuodade Liuzhong Quanhui Zhengzhi Jueyian 中共扩大的六中全会政治决议案 [The Political Resolution of the Enlarged Sixth Plenary Session of the CCP]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1938 中共中央文件选集: 1938 [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1938]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 752.

¹⁰ Liu Xiaoyuan, "Zhongguo Gongchandang Guojia Jianguyuguan De Yuanyuan Yu Fazhan, 1921-1949 中国共产党国家疆域观的渊源与发展, 1921-1949 [The Source and Development of the CCP's National Territorial Perspective, 1921-1949]," p. 24.

¹¹ *A Partnership for Disorder: China, the United States, and Their Policies for the Postwar Disposition of the Japanese Empire, 1941-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 163.

implying that the CCP had abandoned its minority nationality view of Taiwan and wished to bring Taiwan into its vision of future China.

Alan Wachman and Liu Xiaoyuan both argued that such a policy *volte face* resulted from the CCP's power struggle against the KMT for control over China.¹² During the Anti-Japanese War, the most powerful Taiwanese organization against Japan in Taiwan was the Taiwan Revolutionary Alliance, which was established in 1941 under the leadership of Xie Nanguang, Zhang Bangjie, and Li Youbang. Given that the ROC did not regard Taiwan as belonging to China at the time, one key objective of the alliance was to make the ROC government ruled by the KMT recognize that Taiwan was a part of China and would become a part of China after the defeat of Japan. Accordingly, the strategy of the CCP was to weaken the supporting base of the KMT in Taiwan by accepting the wish of the majority of Taiwanese before the KMT did so.

After 1943, the CCP's view of Taiwan had substantively departed from minority nationality and started to overlap with that of the KMT. The first time the KMT clearly outlined its vision of China's future territorial makeup was in Chiang Kai-shek's *China's Destiny* of 1943, in which Chiang ultimately listed Taiwan as one of the key fortresses guarding the defense of China.¹³ While the CCP harshly criticized Chiang's Han-centered chauvinism of the book by pointing out Mongolians, Tibetans, Miao, Yao, and Yi should not have been grouped into what Chiang called the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua Minzhu* 中华民族), it did not include Taiwanese in the criticism.¹⁴ In other words, bringing the island into China's territory was something the two parties both agreed on. From then, the term Taiwanese gradually disappeared from the list of weak nations outside China that the CCP claimed to fight for.¹⁵

It is important to note, however, that although the CCP agreed that Taiwan should be a part of China after 1943, this did not mean that the CCP perceived Taiwan as possessing important

¹² Alan M. Wachman, *Why Taiwan? Geostategic Rationales for China's Territorial Integrity*, pp. 96-8; Liu Xiaoyuan, *A Partnership for Disorder: China, the United States, and Their Policies for the Postwar Disposition of the Japanese Empire, 1941-1945*, pp. 155-63.

¹³ Chiang Kai-shek, *Zhongguo Zhi Mingyun* 中國之命運 [*China's Destiny*] (Liming Wenhua: Taipei, 1976), pp. 1-10.

¹⁴ "Ping Zhongguo Zhi Mingyun 评中国之命运 [on China's Destiny]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1943 中共中央文件选集: 1943* [*The Selected Documents on the CCP Central Committee: 1943*], ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), pp. 506-10.

¹⁵ "Zhonggong Zhongyang Jinian Kangzhan Bazhounian Kouhao 中共中央纪念抗战八周年口号 [The CCP Central Committee's Slogan for the Eighth Anniversary of the Anti-Japanese War]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1945 中共中央文件选集: 1945* [*The Selected Documents on the CCP Central Committee: 1945*], ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 177.

geopolitical value to China as it did to the KMT. The value of this island to the CCP was more related to its role in the CCP's political struggle against the KMT. It was only after the US became involved in the Chinese Civil War (1927–49) following the surrender of Japan that the geopolitical value of Taiwan to the security of the Chinese mainland gradually emerged in the minds of the CCP leaders.

4.2 The Formation of China's Buffer Thinking toward Taiwan

Ideologically, the US was the CCP's natural enemy because the CCP claimed from the outset to oppose capitalism and overthrow the oppression which international imperialism imposed on the Chinese people. However, the flexibility and practicality of the CCP during the Chinese Civil War and the Anti-Japanese War deferred the establishment of a rivalrous relationship between the two. Instead, the CCP had tried many ways to gain friendship from the US during this period. As a result, the CCP's perception that the US was a hostile rival threatening its survival was established as late as June 1946, and China/the CCP's buffer thinking toward Taiwan gradually took shape amidst this rivalrous relationship.

The CCP had noticed the potential role the US could play in its power struggle against the KMT as early as 1935. The conventional wisdom about the timing with which the US became substantively involved in China's domestic politics is that it dates from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. However, soon after Mao gained power within the CCP following the Zunyi Conference in 1935, he tried to convey to US President Franklin Roosevelt via Snow a message that the CCP hoped to build a working relationship with the US.¹⁶ Considering the US was the most powerful state in the world at the time, the CCP leaders clearly understood how critical it would be to have the US as a friend in their fight against the KMT after World War II (1939–45). A hostile US would greatly threaten the survival of the CCP in the post-war period, as Mao's statement in 1940 noted:

¹⁶ Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, p. 94.

The most difficult, dangerous, and dark possibility of Chinese politics is that, after defeating Japan, the US financially and militarily arms the pro-US and Britain people in China and turns China from a Japanese colony into a US colony.¹⁷

Accordingly, rather than following its ideology faithfully, the CCP tailored its US policy under an international united front in order not to destroy the possibility of CCP-US cooperation. To this end, the CCP had to conduct its relations with the US at the expense of its ideological purity. This delicate policy maneuver can be seen in the CCP's "On Policy" of 1940:

Although the CCP is against any imperialism, it has to distinguish the Japanese imperialism, which is encroaching upon China, from other imperialism, which are not encroaching upon China...[It] has to distinguish the US and Britain of the past, which jeopardized China's war against Japan, from the US and Britain now, which have given up that policy and are aiding China's war against Japan.¹⁸

Many examples showed the CCP put a lot of effort into establishing contact with the US in this period. For example, the CCP attempted to make direct official contact with the US to circumvent the constraint the KMT put on the CCP. Zhou, as the CCP's representative in the ROC government in Chongqing, repeatedly invited American Foreign Service officers to send a small group of American officers to build airfields for the war against Japan in areas controlled by the CCP.¹⁹ Also, the CCP Southern Bureau suggested the CCP Central to occupy areas where the US might land after Japan's surrender so as to increase the possibility of US-CCP cooperation in the post-war period.²⁰ Nothing could better characterize this effort of the CCP than Mao's conversation with John Service in 1945:

Communist policy toward the United States is, and will remain, to seek friendly American support of democracy in China and cooperation in fighting Japan. But regardless of American action, whether or not they receive a single gun or bullet, the

¹⁷ Niu Jun, "Hezuo Zhongli Duikang: 1944-1946 Nian Zhonggong Dui Mei Zhengce Zai Tantaoh 合作中立对抗: 1944-1946 年中共对美政策再探讨 [Cooperation-"Neutralizing"-Confrontation: A Reexamination of CCP's US Policy from 1944-1946]," *Sichuan Daxue Xuebao 四川大学学报 [Journal of Sichuan University]* 1(2016): p. 6.

¹⁸ "Lun Zhengce 论政策 [On Policy]," in *Mao Zedong Xuanji 毛泽东选集 [The Selected Works of Mao Zedong]*, ed. Mao Zedong (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1991), p. 764.

¹⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Second Secretary of Embassy in China (Davies)," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, China*, ed. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 168.

²⁰ Niu Jun, "Hezuo Zhongli Duikang: 1944-1946 Nian Zhonggong Dui Mei Zhengce Zai Tantaoh 合作中立对抗: 1944-1946 年中共对美政策再探讨 [Cooperation-"Neutralizing"-Confrontation: A Reexamination of CCP's US Policy from 1944-1946]," p. 9.

Communists will continue to offer and practice cooperation in any manner possible to them. Anything they can do—such as intelligence, weather reporting and rescue of airman—the Communists consider an obligation and duty because it helps the Allied war effort and brings closer the defeat of Japan.²¹

The watershed of the CCP's changed perception of the US from a potential ally to a potential enemy was 1945. In April 1945, the CCP's US policy suffered a major setback. While the CCP hoped that Patrick Hurley, who managed the negotiation between the KMT and the CCP in the post-war period as Roosevelt's special envoy, would recognize its power and status in China, Hurley made it very clear at a press conference in 1945 that the ROC government under the leadership of Chiang would be the only party that the US would work with diplomatically and militarily.²² Evidently, Hurley's statement was widely interpreted by the CCP as a sign showing US hostility toward Chinese communists was growing as assessments that the US might be a threat to the CCP in the future started to appear. In August 1945, CCP Central alerted party members to the possibility of a China version of "the Scobie danger," in which the Chinese communists might be killed and disarmed by the ROC government forces backed by Britain and the US in the post-war period.²³

Driven by the worry that the US would side with the KMT in the post-war period, the CCP pushed a more nuanced united work toward the US in the following years. For example, the CCP carefully distinguished the American targets of its propaganda machine, separating ordinary Americans citizens from American policymakers, and pro-CCP American policymakers from anti-CCP American policymakers. In the meantime, CCP Central also reminded its forces to avoid military conflicts with the US forces receiving Japan-occupied territories in China at that time as much as possible so as not to further ignite the CCP-US conflict.²⁴

²¹ "Report by the Second Secretary of Embassy in China (Service)," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Far East, China*, ed. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2010), Vol. VII, Document 224.

²² "Transcript of Press and Radio News Conference by the Ambassador in China (Hurley)," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Far East, China*, ed. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2010), Vol. VII, Document 226.

²³ "Zhongyang Guanyu Riben Touxing Hou Wodang Renwu De Jueding 中央关于日本投降后我党任务的决定 [The CCP Central's Decision On the Mission of Our Party After the Surrender of Japan]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1945 中共中央文件选集: 1945 [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1945]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), Vol. 15, p. 230.

²⁴ "Zhongyang Guanyu Duidai Meijun De Fangzhen He Ying Zhuyi Shixiang De Zhishi 中央关于对待美军的方针和应注意事项的指示 [The CCP Central's Instruction On the Principles and Matters Regarding How to Treat

In theoretical terms, a rivalrous relationship between the CCP and the US became established in June 1946. As indicated in Chapter Three, the moment that A starts to recognize the possibility of B's military invasion is the moment that a rivalrous relationship between the two sides is established. In hindsight, June 1946 was the time that the CCP formally identified the US as a rival threatening its own survival. After US forces landed in China, military conflicts of various scale between CCP and US-KMT forces occurred throughout the Chinese mainland. The conflicts were taken by the CCP as evidence that its previous assessment of US intentions was correct. On June 1 1946, the CCP predicted in a cable sent to its field officers that a nationwide civil war against the KMT supported by the US was unavoidable.²⁵ Two weeks later, the CCP started to prepare its military deployments for the resumption of the Chinese Civil War.²⁶

The buffer state status of Taiwan in this US-CCP rivalry gradually took shape in the minds of CCP leaders in the years following 1946. As discussed in the last section, the CCP did not initially perceive the geopolitical value of Taiwan. However, the increase in US military activities in Taiwan after the outbreak of the second stage of the Chinese Civil War made the CCP acknowledge that the island posed a potential military threat to the security of the Chinese mainland. Indeed, the US not only sent the American Liaison Group to train the ROC's 204th and 205th Divisions in Taiwan but also started to build a series of military bases in Taiwan.²⁷ Kiyoshi Hasegawa, the former Taiwanese Governor-General, was sent to Taiwan by the US to oversee the construction and training there. In the eyes of CCP leaders, Taiwan became an important logistical base where the US was supporting the KMT's fight against the CCP on the Chinese mainland. As a result, the geopolitical value of Taiwan became another reason that for the CCP to incorporate this island into China's territory in future. An editorial published in

US Forces)," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1945 中共中央文件选集: 1945 [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1945]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), pp. 390-2.

²⁵ "Zhongyang Guanyu Zhongyuanjun Xuqiu Jingji Zijiu Yu Zhuenbei Tuwei Gei Zhengweisan Deng De Zhishi 中央关于中原军须求经济自救与准备突围给郑位三等的指示 [The CCP Central's Instruction to Zheng Weisan and Others that the Zhongyuan Forces Needs to Economically Save Itself and Be Ready to Break A Siege]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1945 中共中央文件选集: 1945 [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1945]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 181.

²⁶ "Zongcanmoubu Dashiji 总参谋部大事记 [The Chronology of the PLA General Staff Department]," ed. China People's Liberation Army Historical Reference Series Editorial Oversight Board (Beijing: Lantain, 2009), p. 212.

²⁷ Shin-Shan Henry Tsai, *Maritime Taiwan: Historical Encounters with the East and the West* (Armonk, New York; London, England: M. E. Sharp, 2009), p. 104.

People's Daily on March 15 1949 marked the debut of China/the CCP's buffer thinking toward Taiwan:

The colonial rule of US imperialism over China, which was through its lackey, KMT reactionaries, is about to vanish. The US is therefore eager to directly take a territory from China, Taiwan, as its future military springboard to invade the Chinese mainland...The US is trying to occupy Taiwan as the Japanese Empire did in 1895.²⁸

Taiwan has therefore had the status of buffer state between China/the CCP and the US since March 1949. Due to the CCP-US rivalry, the nature of the CCP's view of Taiwan was transformed from non-geopolitical to geopolitical. Annexing Taiwan as part of China's future territory was not only about weakening the KMT's support base in Taiwan, but also about the geopolitical security of the Chinese mainland, which the CCP would later control. Annexing Taiwan would ensure that foreign threats were kept away from China's southeast coastal areas, which might otherwise be used by a foreign enemy against China, as had been the case in Japan's use of the island in the past. The following three sections will examine the explanatory power of China's buffer thinking toward Taiwan in three military conflicts between China and Taiwan.

4.3 Buffer Thinking in Action

Since the ROC government retreated to Taiwan in 1949, the military conflicts between China and Taiwan over the islands off the southeast coast of the Chinese mainland have never ceased. Those conflicts were much smaller in scale and had nothing to do with China's plan to take Taiwan or Taiwan's plan of fighting its way back to the Chinese mainland. However, in July 1954 China launched a massive military action against the islands controlled by Taiwan off Zhejiang and Fujian, known as the First Taiwan Strait Crisis.

Scholars are still debating China's rationale behind this military action for two important reasons. First, China should not have launched this military action in 1954. China originally

²⁸ "Zhongguo Renmin Yidingyao Jiefang Taiwan 中国人民一定要解放台湾 [Chinese People Must Liberate Taiwan]," *People's Daily*, March 15 1949.

planned to take Taiwan in the winter of 1949.²⁹ However, due to the lack of air force, navy, and experience and training in amphibious warfare, China decided to seek help from the Soviet Union and hence postponed the plan to 1950.³⁰ After the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–53), the plan was postponed again. When the Korean War ended in 1953, China still faced the same constraints in materializing the plan. This was one important reason why the general course of China's policy toward the world after the war was to avoid engaging in another war with another state, especially the US. Mao, for example, praised Su Yu's careful handling of the situation when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) spotted US warships unexpectedly appearing on the waters of the Zhoushan Islands in June 1954.³¹ In other words, China had not fully finished its preparations for seizing Taiwan at the time.

Second, China's course of action during this crisis did not faithfully follow the military plan it had previously set for taking Taiwan. Zhang Zhen, the Head of the Combat Operation Command in the PLA General Staff Department, was the key person who designed China's plan for seizure of Taiwan. According to his plan, China should take the small islands off the Chinese coast held by Taiwan one at a time, from the north to the south, from the weak to the strong, and finally Taiwan Island.³² In other words, the plan consisted of three sequential phases: taking the islands off Zhejiang, taking the islands off Fujian, and taking Taiwan Island (Please see Figure 4). Under this plan, Zhejiang's Yijiangshan Islands, which were located at a critical strategic spot in the Dachen Islands, would be taken in the first phase, while Fujian's Jinmen and Mazu Islands would be taken in the second phase. Nevertheless, China attacked those islands simultaneously in the First Taiwan Strait Crisis.

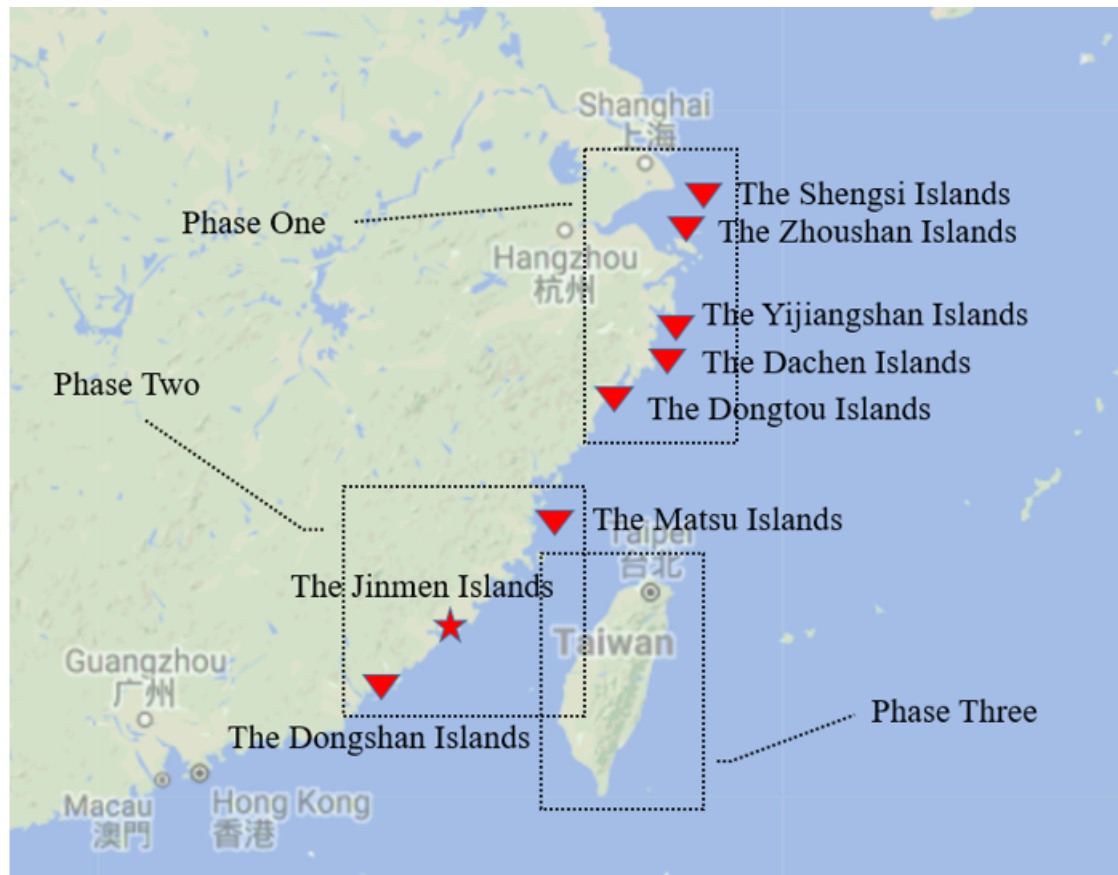
Figure 4: Zhang Zhen's Plan for Taking Taiwan

²⁹ Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen Hueyilu: Shang* 张震回忆录: 上 [The Memoirs of Zhang Zhen: I] (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2003), p. 382.

³⁰ "Liu Shaoqi Zhi Sidalin Han: Zhuanjiao Mao Zedong De Dianbao 刘少奇致斯大林函: 转交毛泽东的电报 [Liu Shaoqi's Letter to Stalin: Pass on Mao Zedong's Cable]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian* 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives], ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 2, p. 95.

³¹ "Dui Su Yu Guanyu Zhoushan Quendao Nanbu Haimian Faxian Meijian Chuli Baogao De Pingyu 对粟裕关于舟山群岛南部海面发现美舰的处理报告的评语 [About the Comment on Su Yu's Report of Detecting American Warships Appearing in the Southern Waters of the Zhoushan Islands]," in *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao* 建国以来毛泽东文稿 [Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC], ed. Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi 中共中央文献研究室 [Documents Research Office of the CCP Central Committee] (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1992), Vol. 4, p. 495.

³² Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen Hueyilu: Shang* 张震回忆录: 上 [The Memoirs of Zhang Zhen: I], pp. 489-501.



The argument put forward in this section is that China’s buffer thinking toward Taiwan, spurred by the US-Taiwan mutual defense treaty, was the main cause of this unexpected military action by China. Since 1953, Taiwan had been promoting a US-Taiwan mutual defense treaty to the US and hoped to put Taiwan and the offshore islands held by Taiwan under US military protection.³³ The US originally regarded this security treaty as unnecessary and risky, but it began to change its position as early as 1954. This changed position was the very cause of Chinese leaders’ decision to take Taiwan earlier than previously scheduled. More specifically, Chinese leaders calculated that if China chose not to expel US forces from Taiwan at this moment, Taiwan would become a potential “disease of the heart” to the security of the Chinese mainland in the longer term. On the other hand, if they initiated the plan to take Taiwan, they might at best be able to deter the US from signing that treaty, or at least secure China’s coastal areas by taking a few more islands held by Taiwan. The editorials in *People’s Daily* during the crisis clearly reveal this geopolitical mentality:

³³ The official name of the treaty is the Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of China.

For years, [the US] has been actively supporting the Chiang Kai-shek group, using Taiwan as a colony and military base of US imperialism, attempting to use Chiang in Taiwan as a tool for invading the PRC...When US warmonger James Van Fleet was conducting his evil scheme in Taiwan, he once claimed that the US and Chiang are going to sign so-called "a bilateral mutual security agreement." Now, Chiang and US Ambassador to Taiwan Karl L. Rankin have both confirmed this risky plan, which would make the US an enemy of the entire Chinese people...This plan reflects that, driven by the current situation, Washington's policy is not limited to defending Taiwan.³⁴

Taiwan is the first line of China's national defense and is a strategic island shielding China's southeast coast. It is inseparable to China's security. Now, the US is turning China's first line of defense into its first line of invasion. It proves that US occupation of Taiwan is not for the security of the US but threatening China's security and preparing for an invasion of China.³⁵

This buffer thinking toward Taiwan held by Chinese leaders was not just propaganda as it appeared in many conversations between Chinese and foreign leaders during the crisis, in which Chinese leaders tried to explain the geopolitical rationale of China behind this military action. For example, Zhou reported the impending military action against Taiwan to a Soviet leader Georgy Malenkov on July 29 and said:

Chiang Kai-Shek and the US government are planning to sign a mutual defense treaty, but the Americans have not made up their mind yet...Based on these facts, the CCP Central has decided to place the issue of liberating Taiwan back on agenda, and take powerful measures to sabotage the plot of signing the treaty between the US government and Chiang Kai-Shek group of signing a treaty.³⁶

Mao's conversation with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in October 1954 showed the same logic:

³⁴ "Yidingyao Jiefang Taiwan 一定要解放台湾 [Taiwan Must Be Liberated]," *People's Daily*, July 23 1954.

³⁵ Chiang Yuanzhuang, "Taiwan Shi Zhongguo Anquan Suo Buke Queshaode 臺灣是中國安全所不可缺少的 [Taiwan Is Inseparable to the Security of China]," *ibid.*, February 2 1955.

³⁶ "Malinkefu Yu Zhou Enlai Huitan Jiyao: Chongxin Jiang Jiefang Taiwan Tishang Yicheng 马林科夫与周恩来会谈纪要: 重新将解放台湾提上议程 [Summary of the Meeting Record between Malenkov and Zhou Enlai: Putting the Liberation of Taiwan Back on the Schedule]," in *Zhongguo Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 5, p. 101.

We have more than thirty islands, which are just a few kilometers away from the Chinese mainland. Three of them are big islands. Those islands are occupied by the US and Chiang so our ships cannot pass and neither can foreign ships. The American aircraft fly into our inland airspace and drop special agents...The US deployed defense lines to South Korea, Taiwan, and Indo-China. Those places are far away from the US but very close to us. That makes it very hard for us to sleep tight.³⁷

Why, then, did China attack the Jinmen Islands? Instead of following Zhang's original plan, China attacked small islands off Zhejiang and Fujian at the same time, which made the Jinmen Islands suffer unexpected bombardment on September 3 1954. The traditional explanation of this bombardment is that China's military action against the Jinmen Islands was just a political strategy—China neither intended nor was it capable of taking over the islands.³⁸ China's true intentions were twofold: to hide its true military targets (the small islands off Zhejiang) and to remind the international community that the Taiwan issue was unsettled.

This traditional explanation, however, raises more questions than it answers. First of all, it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, for China to hide its real intentions of taking the islands off Zhejiang simply by bombarding the Jinmen Islands. Taiwan's intelligence reconnaissance plus the US' air and sea supremacy together would mean that any Chinese military movement would be easily discovered. Second, making the Taiwan issue an international matter was exactly what China had opposed. China had long held a stance that the Taiwan issue was a domestic matter and it refused to allow foreign involvement. Shelling the islands would attract more international attention than otherwise. Third, was it worthwhile for China to conduct such a costly feint, which included mobilizing forces, expending munitions, and in particular the human cost of casualties caused by Taiwanese counterattack from the Jinmen Islands? Would

³⁷ "Heping Gongchu Wuxiang Yuanzhe Ying Tuiguang Dao Suoyou Guojia Guanxi Qu 和平共处五原则应推广到所有国家关系去 [The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence Should Be Promoted in the Relations with All States]," in *Mao Zedong Waijiao Wenxuan* 毛泽东外交文选 [*The Selected Works of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy*], ed. The PRC Foreign Ministry and the Central Documentary Research Office (Beijing: Central Documentary Press and World Knowledge Press, 1994), pp. 164-5.

³⁸ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Strait Talk: United States-Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), CH 1; Yang Kuisong, "Mao Zedong Yu Liangci Taihaiweiji: 20 Shiji 50 Niandai Zhonghouqi Zhongguo Dui Meiguo Zhengce Biandong Yuanyin Ji Quxiang (Xu) 毛泽东与两次台海危机: 20世纪 50年代中后期中国对美国政策变动原因及趋向 (续) [Mao Zedong and the Two Taiwan Strait Crises (II)]," *Shixue Yuekan* 史学月刊 [*Journal of Historical Science*] 12(2003); He Di, "Taihaiweiji He Zhongguo Dui Jinmen Mazu Zhengce De Xingcheng 台海危机和中国对金門馬祖政策的形成 [The Taiwan Straits Crises and the Formation of Chinese Policy on Jinmen and Matsu]," *Meiguo Yanjiu* 美国研究 [*American Studies Quarterly*] 3(1988); Gordon Chang H. and He Di, "The Absence of War in the U.S.-China Confrontation over Quemoy and Matsu in 1954-1955: Contingency, Luck, Deterrence," *The American Historical Review* 98, no. 5 (1993).

it not have been much easier for China to concentrate on seizing the islands off Zhejiang since those islands were not yet under US military protection?

This section argues that China's buffer thinking toward Taiwan not only changed the timing of China's initiation of its military plan of taking Taiwan, but also altered the order of the plan. Understanding how Zhang perceived the security relations between the small islands off the Chinese coast and Taiwan is the key to explaining China's puzzling military action against the Jinmen Islands. For Zhang, the small islands off the Chinese coast, including the Shengshi Islands, the Zhoushan Islands, the Taizhou Islands,³⁹ the Dongtou Islands, the Mazu Islands, the Jinmen Islands, and the Dongshan Islands, formed an island chain which constituted Taiwan's defense perimeter.⁴⁰ Destroying this arc was a necessary step in order to take Taiwan. In addition, in 1951, Zhang had assessed that the Jinmen and Mazu Islands would be the places most likely to become the forward bases of a US-Taiwan invasion of China.⁴¹ Therefore, considering that taking the Jinmen Islands was already a part of Zhang's plan and that Taiwan and the US were about to finalize the treaty, China decided to integrate the two phases of attack into one. By inflicting military pressure on the Jinmen islands, China aimed at compelling Taiwanese forces on the islands to retreat, or at least preventing the US from including the islands in the security treaty.

The argument offered in this section is supported by China's following course of behavior toward the Jinmen and Mazu Islands during the crisis. The timing of China's military action against the islands off the Chinese coast was closely related to the concluding process of the US-Taiwan security treaty, which was finalized in December 1954 and came into force in March 1955. Peng Dehuai ordered the PLA to take over the Yijiangshan Islands, the Nanji Islands, and the Beiji Islands as soon as possible at a Central Military Commission (CMC) meeting on November 29 1954, based on the prediction that Taiwan and the US were about to conclude the treaty.⁴² In mid-December, the CMC further altered the mission of the PLA from seizing the Yijiangshan Islands to taking any islands with weaker defenses.⁴³ When the PLA

³⁹ The Dachen Islands and the Yijiangshan Islands are part of the Taizhou Islands.

⁴⁰ Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen Huiyilu: Shang* 张震回忆录: 上 [The Memoirs of Zhang Zhen: I], p. 399.

⁴¹ "Dui Jiangfei Suwei Fangongdalu De Pouxu 对蒋匪所谓反攻大陆的剖视 [An Analysis of Chiang's Plan of Fighting back to the Chinese Mainland]," in *Zhang Zhen Junshi Wenxuan: Shang* 张震军事文选: 上 [Selected Military Works of Zhang Zhen: I] (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2004), p. 570.

⁴² *Su Yu Nianpu* 粟裕年谱 [The Chronicle of Su Yu]. (Beijing: Contemporary China Publishing House, 2006), p. 550.

⁴³ Xu Yan, *Jinmen Zhizhan: 1949-1959* 金门之战: 1949-1959 [The Jinmen War: 1949-1959] (Shenyang: Shenyang Renmin Chubanshe, 2010), p. 125.

occupied the Dachen Islands on February 13, Su submitted a report on taking the Jinmen Islands to the CMC after three weeks, in which he predicted that the Taiwanese forces on the Jinmen Islands might retreat if China attacked the Mazu Islands.⁴⁴ Based on this prediction, Mao instructed Peng on March 14 that the PLA should let the enemy on the Mazu Islands or other islands retreat if that happened.⁴⁵

4.4 The Unfinished Business: Jinmen in 1958

China ceased its military action against the Jinmen Islands in April 1955 after the US threatened to use nuclear weapons. Puzzlingly, China initiated another round of military action on the Jinmen and Mazu Islands in 1958, which scholars call the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. Regarding China's rationale for taking military action this time, the current scholarship has offered a wide range of explanations. From the perspective of China's buffer thinking toward Taiwan, however, this military action was a continuation of the 1954 episode.

After the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, a prevalent assessment among Chinese leaders was that the probability of the US using Taiwan as a route to invade China was very high. Strictly speaking, the US-Taiwan mutual defense treaty was a defense-oriented treaty *per se* because it would only be triggered when the two signatories were under attack. Also, the treaty not only adhered to the Charter of the United Nations (UN) and but also stipulated that any response to an armed attack should be reported to the UN Security Council and be terminated after the Council's response. However, Chinese leaders' geopolitical anxiety over Taiwan was not pacified by those factors. Evidently, a scenario in which the US supported the ROC in order to use Taiwan as a base to fight back to the Chinese mainland still loomed large in the minds of Chinese leaders after 1955. Liu Shaoqi, for example, expressed his anxiety over Taiwan at the Eighth National Congress of the CCP in September 1956:

⁴⁴ *Su Yu Nianpu* 粟裕年谱 [The Chronicle of Su Yu], p. 567.

⁴⁵ Wang Yan, ed. *Peng Dehuai Nianpu* 彭德怀年谱 [The Chronicle of Peng Dehuai] (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1998), p. 592.

Our territory, Taiwan, is still occupied by American imperialists. This is the biggest threat to our national security.⁴⁶

At the same conference, Chen Yi spoke about China's foreign policy:

Since after the PRC was established, the US has been threatening and invading China from these three fronts: Korea, Indochina, and Taiwan. The US is still occupying our territory, Taiwan, and intervening in our liberation of the offshore islands.⁴⁷

Peng stated at a military conference on PLA logistics issues on January 20 1958:

Taiwan is still waiting for liberation...But modernized, fully-armed imperialist troops are standing at the door of our country. The danger of our country being invaded is still very high.⁴⁸

Driven by this geopolitical anxiety, China ceaselessly worked on its plans of taking Taiwan after the cease-fire in 1955. To iterate, China's plan of taking Taiwan consisted of three phases: taking the islands off Zhejiang, taking the islands off Fujian, and then taking Taiwan Island. China completed the first phase during the military action of 1954-55, so the Jinmen and Mazu Islands located near Fujian were naturally the next targets in this sequence. The following evidence showed that China orderly addressed three key issues regarding how to successfully take the two islands: logistics during wartime, air control, and sea blockade.

For China, building a railway was the most effective way to solve the logistics problem for the planned military action against the Jinmen and Mazu Islands. Peng visited Xiamen in September 1955 to study how to take those islands, and subsequently decided to construct the Yingtan-Xiamen Railway connecting Fujian and Jiangxi.⁴⁹ Seven divisions of railway forces

⁴⁶ Liu Shaoqi, "Zai Zhongguo Gongchandang Baquan Dahui De Zhengzhi Gongzuo Baogao 在中国共产党八全大会的政治工作报告 [A Political Work Report at the Eighth National Congress of the CCP]," in *Zhongong Duitai Zhengce Ziliao Xuanji Shang: 1949-1991 中共对台政策资料选集上: 1949-1991 [Mainland China's Policy toward Taiwan: Selected Works I 1949-1991]*, ed. Guo Li-Min (Taipei: Lifework Press, 1992), p. 150.

⁴⁷ Chen Yi, "Muqian Guoji Xingshi He Women De Waijiao Zhengce 目前国际形势与我们的外交政策 [The Current Interational Situation and Our Foreign Policy]," in *Zhongong Duitai Zhengce Ziliao Xuanji Shang: 1949-1991 中共对台政策资料选集上: 1949-1991 [Mainland China's Policy toward Taiwan: Selected Works I 1949-1991]*, ed. Guo Li-Min (Taipei: Lifework Press, 1992), p. 152.

⁴⁸ Peng Dehuai, "Ba Wojun Jianshecheng Youliangde Xiandaihuade Geming Junduei 把我军建设成优良的现代化的革命军队 [To Build Our Army into An Excellent and Modernized Revolution Army]," in *Peng Dehuai Junshi Wenxuan 彭德怀军事文选 [The Selected Military Works of Peng Dehuai]* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1988), p. 606.

⁴⁹ Wang Yan, *Peng Dehuai Nianpu 彭德怀年谱 [The Chronicle of Peng Dehuai]*, pp. 602-3.

and a hundred thousand workers were mobilized to construct this 700km railway, which was completed in 1957.⁵⁰ This railway enabled China to ship military equipment and weapons to the Xiamen frontline for the coming military action.

As for control over the air, the most urgent task was to enable Chinese air forces to operate in the airspace over Fujian. From 1955–57, China built seven airfields in total in Fujian.⁵¹ Soon after those airfields were completed, Mao ordered Peng to deploy air forces to Fujian in December 1957.⁵² The first wave of the PLA Air Force was deployed in July the following year, which then engaged with Taiwan's fighters over the airspace of Fujian.

China's navy and artillery were assigned the mission of blockading the waters around the Jinmen and Mazu Islands. While China's fighters were trying to gain control over the Fujian airspace in July 1958, the navy and artillery forces steadily assembled to Xiamen in the meantime. They were in position and ready to fight in August. The day after China controlled the airspace over Fujian, the artillery shelled the Jinmen Islands.⁵³

The meticulous and incessant military preparations of China presented above suggest that the temporary peace over the Taiwan Strait from 1955 to 1958 was just an interlude in China's attempt to secure the Taiwan buffer after the ceasefire of 1955. Instead of viewing this military action of China as a single and independent episode, as is usually argued (please see below), this military action should be viewed as a part of China's continued efforts after 1949 to block a potential US invasion route and enhance coastal security. This buffer thinking of China can be seen in how Chen responded to John Dulles in September 1958 at the UN:

The truth proves that if [we] do not recover the Jinmen and Mazu islands one day, the direct threat that our mainland and coastal areas suffered cannot be defused one day...[US imperialists] attempts to put our islands in the inland sea, such as the Jinmen and Mazu Islands, under its direct military control and then turn the islands into springboards for invading the Chinese mainland. Chinese people will never forget the historical lesson that the Japanese militarism occupied Taiwan and the northeast and

⁵⁰ Ye Fei, *Ye Fei Huiyilu* 叶飞回忆录 [The Memori of Ye Fei] (Beijing: The PLA Publishing House, 1988), pp. 636-7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 640.

⁵² "Kongjun Yao Quanliyifu Wu Jian Reuqin Zhi Di 空军要全力以赴务歼入侵之敌 [The Air Force Has to Do Its Best to Extinguish the Invading Enemy]," in *Mao Zedong Junshi Wenji* 毛泽东军事文集 [The Selected Military Writings of Mao Zedong], ed. Mao Zedong (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House & Central Party Literature Press, 1993), Vol. 6, p. 373.

⁵³ Xu Yan, *Jinmen Zhizhan: 1949-1959* 金门之战: 1949-1959 [The Jinmen War: 1949-1959], p. 151.

used them as springboards to invade the whole of China. Chinese people will never allow US imperialism to copy the same trick of Japanese militarism.⁵⁴

Regarding the motivation behind this military action, scholars have offered various arguments, including: testing US resolve to protect those islands, testing the Soviet Union's support of China, utilizing this crisis to mobilize Chinese people to support the Great Leap Forward, lending China's support to the revolution in the Middle East against the US, and defusing the increasing US-Taiwan military threat to China.⁵⁵ These arguments, however, are either incorrect or only partially correct from hindsight.

Firstly, the argument of testing US resolve is partially correct. China did try to ascertain the determination and range of US military protection of the offshore islands held by Taiwan, but this did not mean that China never intended to seize those islands to defuse its geopolitical anxiety over Taiwan. There is plenty of evidence in this regard. For example, on the question of whether China should land on the islands, Mao indicated that it depends on the response of Taiwan after three days of the bombardment.⁵⁶ Also, in Zhou's report to the Soviet Union briefing China's true purpose behind this action in September 1958, he made it clear "China plans to increase the firepower against the Jinmen and Mazu Islands to strengthen China's request to the US that the US needs to withdraw from the Taiwan region."⁵⁷ Therefore, taking the two islands to inflict military pressure was certainly a part of China's intentions.

⁵⁴ "Chen Yi Waizhang Fabiao Shengming Yanzheng Jinggao Dulesi 陈毅外长发表声明严正警告杜勒斯 [Foreign Minister Chen Yi Issued a Stern Warning to Dulles]," *People's Daily*, September 21 1958.

⁵⁵ For a rich discussion on this, please see: Xu Yan, *Jinmen Zhizhan: 1949-1959 金门之战: 1949-1959 [The Jinmen War: 1949-1959]*; Niu Jun, "Sanci Taiwan Haixia Junshi Douzheng Juece Yanjiu 三次台湾海峡军事斗争决策研究 [Chinese Decision-Making in Three Military Actions across the Taiwan Straits]," *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue 中国社会科学 [Social Science China]* 5(2004); Yang Kuisong, "Mao Zedong Yu Liangci Taihaiweiji: 20 Shiji 50 Niandai Zhonghouqi Zhongguo Dui Meiguo Zhengce Biandong Yuanyin Ji Quxiang (Xu) 毛泽东与两次台海危机: 20 世纪 50 年代中后期中国对美国政策变动原因及趋向 (续) [Mao Zedong and the Two Taiwan Strait Crises (II)]."; Allen S. Whiting, "China's Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan," *International Security* 26, no. 2 (2001): pp. 108-11; Zhang Shu Guang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949-1958* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992), CH 8; Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), CH 6; Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), CH 12.

⁵⁶ Xu Yan, *Jinmen Zhizhan: 1949-1959 金门之战: 1949-1959 [The Jinmen War: 1949-1959]*, p. 158.

⁵⁷ "Andongnuofu Yu Zhou Enlai Huitan Jiyao: Tongbao Zhomei Dashiji Huitan Qingkuang 安东诺夫与周恩来会谈纪要: 通报中美大使级会谈情况 [The Memorandum of Conversation between S. Antonov and Zhou Enlai: Reporting the Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 8, p. 237.

Secondly, the argument that China was testing Soviet support is less likely. The conversation between Nikita Khrushchev and Mao in October 1959 suggested that Khrushchev was quite angry about China's reckless military action because Chinese leaders did not inform him in advance.⁵⁸ So, if Chinese leaders had wanted to test the support of the Soviet Union, why did they not ask for any assistance from the Soviet Union before taking any action, as they did before sending troops to North Korea? In addition, one day before making the final call on the Jinmen bombardment, Chinese leaders were still struggling to find a way to avoid American casualties in the military action.⁵⁹ If Chinese leaders had attempted to gauge the support of the Soviet Union, was not it a good way to engage in a military conflict with the US to an extent?

Thirdly, the way Chinese leaders handled this military action was at odds with the mobilizing argument proposed by Thomas Christensen and Yang Kuisong. The goal of the Great Leap Forward was to realize China's industrial and military modernization. From Christensen and Yang's perspective, a timely international crisis would provide Chinese leaders with a decent excuse to mobilize Chinese people to support the campaign. However, the conversation Zhou had with Soviet officials in September disproves this line of reasoning. Zhou reported that China would only agree to cease the shelling if the US could promise to withdraw from Taiwan and Taiwanese forces would withdraw from the Jinmen and Mazu Islands.⁶⁰ If then the success of the campaign rested on an international crisis, why were Chinese leaders eager to take out the sufficient condition of the success? The best evidence that Chinese leaders saw the shelling and the campaign as two independent events was Mao's speech at the Supreme State Conference in September, in which he stated:

It will be in the US' interests to get rid of places like Taiwan as early as possible. If it stays, then let's let it be trapped there. This really doesn't harm the big picture. We are still doing the Great Leap Forward.⁶¹

⁵⁸ "Heluxiaofu Yu Mao Zedong Huitan Jilu: Guanyu Taiwan Wenti He Zhongyin Guanxi De Zhenglun 赫鲁晓夫与毛泽东会谈记录: 关于台湾问题和中印关系的争论 [The Minutes of the Khrushchev-Mao Zedong Meeting: Polemics about the Issue of Taiwan and the Sino-Indian Relations]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 8, pp. 422-3.

⁵⁹ Ye Fei, *Ye Fei Huiyilu 叶飞回忆录 [The Memoirs of Ye Fei]*, p. 654.

⁶⁰ "Andongnuofu Yu Zhou Enlai Huitan Jiyao: Tongbao Zhomei Dashiji Huitan Qingkuang 安东诺夫与周恩来会谈纪要: 通报中美大使级会谈情况 [The Memorandum of Conversation between S. Antonov and Zhou Enlai: Reporting the Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks]," Vol. 8, pp. 236-7.

⁶¹ "Zai Di Shiwuci Zuigao Guowu Huiyi De Jianghua 在第 15 次最高国务会议上的讲话 [The Speech at the 15th Supreme State Conference]," in *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao 建国以来毛泽东文稿 [Mao Zedong's*

Fourthly, the years-long military preparations of China presented earlier are the best counter-evidence to the argument that this military action was intended to lend support to the Iraqi coup d'état taking place on July 14 1958. In fact, Mao could have bombarded the islands right after the outbreak of the revolution to demonstrate his timely support, but he chose to postpone the timing of bombardment to observe US reaction to the coup.⁶² Thus, rather than showing its support, China exploited this coup that tied up US forces in the Middle East.

Finally, the argument that the US-Taiwan military threat caused China's military reaction is partially correct. This military action was the product of China's buffer thinking toward Taiwan, which was aimed at blocking a possible invasion route for US forces. This means that Chinese leaders cared more about the US' intentions and behavior toward Taiwan and the islands associated with it, and less about what Taiwan was going to do. In the eyes of Chinese leaders, Taiwanese forces alone would not pose too much damage to the security of the Chinese mainland. In other words, as long as Chinese leaders could ascertain that the US would not support Taiwan's plan of fighting back to the Chinese mainland via the two islands, their geopolitical anxiety over Taiwan would be significantly mollified. Indeed, China's course of behavior in this crisis confirms this line of reasoning. China's bombardment of the Jinmen and Mazu Islands quickly switched to a much more periodical and political-oriented mode in October, after Chinese leaders became certain of the US' position toward the islands in September. On September 4, Dulles made a public statement at Newport that the US was bound by the treaty to secure and protect the islands. In the meantime, the US also promised China on September 19 that the US would abandon taking military actions from the islands and would monitor those islands not to take any offensive, provocative actions toward the Chinese

Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC], ed. Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi 中共中央文献研究室 [Documents Research Office of the CCP Central Committee] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1992), Vol. 7, pp. 393-4.

⁶² "Bixu Jianchi Buda Wubawo Zhi Zhang Zhi Yuanze 必须坚持不打无把握之仗之原则 [Must Insist on the Principle of Never Fighting for a War without Any Chance of Winning]," in *Mao Zedong Junshi Wenji 毛泽东军事文集* [The Selected Military Writings of Mao Zedong], ed. Mao Zedong (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House & Central Party Literature Press, 1993), Vol. 6, p. 377.

mainland or other island areas.⁶³ This reassurance seemed to have a causal connection with Mao's decision at the Politburo meetings of October 3 and 4 not to take the two islands.⁶⁴

4.5 Buffer Thinking Revisited: The Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier

China's geopolitical anxiety over Taiwan was greatly pacified during the Sino-American rapprochement in the 1970s. Aimed at reconciling its relations with China, the US shifted its diplomatic recognition of the legitimate representative of China from the ROC to the PRC, terminated the US-Taiwan mutual defense treaty, and withdrew its forces from Taiwan. In the meantime, US Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act to maintain unofficial relations with Taiwan and provide it with an ambiguous security guarantee. Against this background, China initiated a peaceful offensive toward Taiwan in the 1980s under the formula of "one country, two systems." This peaceful offensive, however, was brought to an end by a series of Chinese military actions toward Taiwan from 1995 to 1996, which some scholars called the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis.⁶⁵

In the current scholarship, the most prevalent argument as to why China initiated this crisis is that, angered by Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's pursuit of the Taiwan independence activities, China conducted coercive or what Todd Hall called anger diplomacy.⁶⁶ Through a show of force around Taiwan, China aimed to:

⁶³ "Andongnuofu Yu Zhang Wentian Huitan Jiyao: Tongbao Zhomei Dashiji Huitan Qingkuang 安东诺夫与张闻天会谈纪要: 通报中美大使级会谈情况 [The Memorandum of Conversation between S. Antonov and Zhang Wentian: Report the Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 8, p. 240.

⁶⁴ Xu Yan, *Jinmen Zhizhan: 1949-1959 金门之战: 1949-1959 [The Jinmen War: 1949-1959]*, p. 192. Some scholars mentioned a critical reason that Mao decided to stop the military action was that he noticed that Chinese occupation of the islands may lead to the independence of Taiwan. However, this argument and the argument developed in this section are not mutually exclusive. Please see: Yang Kuisong, "Mao Zedong Yu Liangci Taihaiweiji: 20 Shiji 50 Niandai Zhonghouqi Zhongguo Dui Meiguo Zhengce Biandong Yuanyin Ji Quxiang (Xu) 毛泽东与两次台海危机: 20 世纪 50 年代中后期中国对美国政策变动原因及趋向 (续) [Mao Zedong and the Two Taiwan Strait Crises (II)]," p. 52; Zhang Shu Guang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949-1958*, p. 261.

⁶⁵ In the data base of the International Crisis Behavior, the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis is coded for a crisis that occurred between China and Taiwan in 1962, in which Taiwan tried to conduct its plan of military rolling back to the Chinese mainland. However, such a plan was not realized in the end due to US pressure. Since the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the behavior of China, not Taiwan, the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis refers to the military action conducted by China from 1995–96.

⁶⁶ Richard C. Bush, *Untying the Knot: Making Peace in the Taiwan Strait* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), p. 52; Niu Jun, "Sanci Taiwan Haixia Junshi Douzheng Juece Yanjiu 三次台湾海峡军

1. Create a sense of fear in the Taiwanese electorate that a war between China and Taiwan was ensured if they voted for Lee, who was conducting activities that symbolized Taiwanese independence, or Peng Ming-min, who was promoting the idea that Taiwan does not belong to China.
2. Warn the US not to encourage Taiwanese independence.

However, this argument is dubious if one examines Lee's words and deeds at the time. In fact, Lee's political activities in the international arena could not have been a surprise to China. Lee had been pursuing so-called pragmatic diplomacy to expand Taiwan's international space from 1988. The Taiwanese government officially announced its first presidential election in August 1994. China certainly regarded those activities as unpleasant, but its attitude was rather moderate overall up until July 1995.⁶⁷ Most importantly, Lee never once claimed that Taiwan was not a part of China during his campaign, but maintained a position that Taiwan should unify with China in due course. What Lee was trying to do at the time was to increase Taiwan's leverage to negotiate with China over the unification issue. In this sense, Lee's ultimate political goal did not depart too much from China's political expectations.

Also, one important assumption supporting this argument—China was conducting military drills only—is problematic if one carefully analyzes China's behavior during the crisis. Many military operations taken by China during this crisis apparently crossed the boundary of military drills. For example, by launching missiles into waters within ten-mile vicinities of northern and southern Taiwan, China's artillery could calculate the precise distance and range for the subsequent shot targeting any place in Taiwan. In addition, Chinese aircraft kept flying

事斗争决策研究 [Chinese Decision-Making in Three Military Actions across the Taiwan Straits]."; Robert S. Ross, "The 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Confrontation: Coercion, Credibility, and the Use of Force," *International Security* 25, no. 2 (2000); Allen S. Whiting, "China's Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan," pp. 130-1; John W. Garver, *Face Off: China, the United States, and Taiwan's Democratization* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997), CH 11; Zhou Zhongfei, "Taiwan Wenti Zhong Meiguo Yinsu: Cong Daodan Yanxi Kan Yatai Daguo Guanxi 台湾问题中美国因素: 从导弹演习看亚太大国关系 [The American Factor in the Taiwan Issue: Analysizing Great Power Relations in Asia from the Missile Exercise]," *Shijie Jingji Yanjiu 世界经济研究 [World Economy Studies]* 3(1996); Zhou Zhihui, "Guanyu 1995-1996 Taihai Weiji De Sikao 关于 1995-1996 年台海危机的思考 [About the Thinking on the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995-1996]," *Taiwan Yanjiu Jikan 台湾研究集刊 [Taiwan Research Quarterly]* 2(1998); Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), CH 6; Todd H. Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2015), CH 2.

⁶⁷ Zhou Shuchun and Ding Qilin, "Jiang Zemin Lun Zhongmei Guanxi Deng Qida Wenti 江泽民论中美关系等七大问题 [Jiang Zemin Talks about Seven Important Questions Including Sino-American Relations]," *People's Daily*, March 9 1993.

across the middle line of the Taiwan Strait. Hong Kong media reported that one military drill (from February 1996 to March 1996) alone had cost China almost a quarter of its annual military budget.⁶⁸

Thirdly and mostly importantly, recent scholarly works reveal that China did attempt to take concrete military action against Taiwan *initially*: not just a military drills. In three consecutive articles, Kawasugi Nakamori detailed China's military plan of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis. He showed that China had gradually mobilized and moved its forces to the southeast coast of China from July 1995 in the name of military drills. The forces were scheduled to land on Taiwan via the southern and northern waters around Taiwan in March 1996.⁶⁹ This military plan, however, was secretly passed by Liu Liankun, a PLA general working for Taiwanese intelligence, to the Taiwanese government in December 1995.⁷⁰ Lee then passed this plan to the US via the Secretary-General of the National Security Council, Ting Mao-shih. In the meantime, Taiwan prepared eleven contingency plans to counter every possible military attack from China.⁷¹ The plan passed along by Liu ultimately contributed to the US' decision to assemble two aircraft carrier striking groups to the waters around Taiwan, where the PLA's staging areas were within the striking range of the carriers (please see Figure 5). Since a US intervention would significantly complicate its plan, China altered the military action to a military drill instead.

⁶⁸ Luo Bing, "Zhonggong Yaowu Haozi Sanshi Yi 中共耀武耗资三十亿 [The CCP's Show of Force Costs Three Billion Dollars]," *Dongxiang 动向 [Trend]* 1996, pp. 9-11.

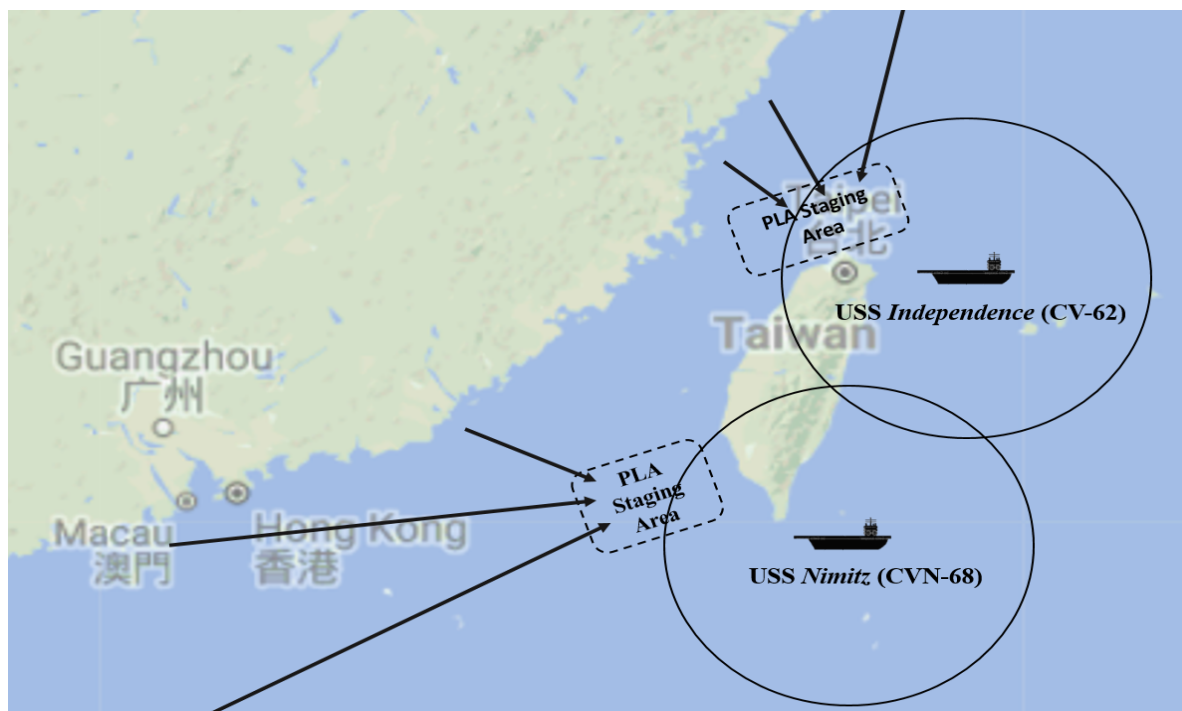
⁶⁹ Regarding the details of this military plan of China, please see: Kawasugi Nakamori, "Weiji Yu Jueze: Zhongguo Taihai Weiji Shiqi De Zhanlue Yu Xitong 1 危机与抉择：中国台海危机时期的战略与系统 1 [China's Strategy and System during Taiwan Straits Crisis 1]," *Hai Lu Kong Tian Guanxing Shijie 海陆空天惯性世界 [NAAS & International Technology]* 85 (2010); "Weiji Yu Jueze: Zhongguo Taihai Weiji Shiqi De Zhanlue Yu Xitong 2 危机与抉择：中国台海危机时期的战略与系统 2 [China's Strategy and System during Taiwan Straits Crisis 2]," *Hai Lu Kong Tian Guanxing Shijie 海陆空天惯性世界 [NAAS & International Technology]* 86(2010); "Weiji Yu Jueze: Zhongguo Taihai Weiji Shiqi De Zhanlue Yu Xitong 3 危机与抉择：中国台海危机时期的战略与系统 3 [China's Strategy and System during Taiwan Straits Crisis 3]," *Hai Lu Kong Tian Guanxing Shijie 海陆空天惯性世界 [NAAS & International Technology]* 87(2010).

Kawasugi Nakamori is probably a pseudonym, but his articles should not be discredited for this reason. The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis is still a relatively contemporary event so there has any declassified document being released yet. The opacity of the Chinese government makes accessing the relevant documents in China more difficult. Considering the limitation on the primary materials and the fact that Kawasugi's articles present an incredibly detailed military plan and action of China during the crisis from the onset to the end, we can reasonably assume with confidence that Nakamori is an insider.

⁷⁰ Pang Jiajun, *Qingbao Zhaji: Taiwan Junqingju Gaoguan Huiyilu 情报札记：台湾军情高官回忆录 [Intelligence Notes: The Memoirs of a Senior Official at Taiwan Military Intelligence Bureau]* (Hong Kong: Xianggang Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 2010), p. 35. Liu was caught by the Chinese government and executed in 1999. Pan latter sentenced three years in prison for publishing this book.

⁷¹ Qi Leyi, *Hanwei Xingdong: 1996 Taihai Feidang Weiji Fengyulu 捍卫行动：1996 台海飞弹危机风云录 [The 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis]* (Taipei: Liming Culture Publisher, 2006), p. 126.

Figure 5: China's Military Plan against Taiwan of 1995–96⁷²



The above questions and episode both make it worth reconsidering why China initiated military action against Taiwan at that time. This section argues that the Sino-American rapprochement did not fundamentally alter China's view of Taiwan as a geopolitical buffer protecting the Chinese mainland against a foreign enemy incursion from the sea. The geopolitical mentality that "if Taiwan is not under China's control, the US may have the ability to launch a military attack on China from Taiwan in the future" was deeply embedded in the minds of Chinese leaders. This mentality was especially evident in Chinese leaders' repetitive description of Taiwan as a potential unsinkable aircraft carrier of the US. Chen Yun, for instance, stated in December 1983:

Not everyone in the world would like to see the Chinese unification. Someone is holding Taiwan firmly and regards Taiwan as its "unsinkable aircraft carrier."⁷³

In 1986, Deng Xiaoping talked to Michael Wallace in a TV interview:

⁷² This figure is modified based on Nakamori's articles.

⁷³ *Chen Yun Nian Pu: Xia 陈云年谱: 下 [The Chronicle of Chen Yun: III]*, ed. Zhu Jiamu, Liu Shukai, and the Documents Research Office of the CCP Central Committee (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2000), p. 343.

In the 1950s, MacArthur and Dulles regarded Taiwan as an unsinkable aircraft carrier in Asia and the Pacific...So long as Taiwan is not reunified with the mainland, its status as part of Chinese territory will not be secure. No one knows when Taiwan will be taken away again.⁷⁴

While the geopolitical value of Taiwan was still a prominent concern for China, the US gradually beefed up its military and diplomatic ties with Taiwan after the Cold War. Militarily, the US adopted a series of measures to strengthen Taiwanese defensive capacity against China. In 1992, the US decided to sell Taiwan 150 F-16 fighter aircraft. In January 1993, it provided Taiwan with 200 Patriot missiles and related equipment. In October, the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations passed a resolution asking the US government to lift the limit of qualitative and quantitative restrictions on US arms sales to Taiwan. Diplomatically, the US announced in April 1994 that the Taiwan Relations Act had a superior legal position to the Joint Communiqué of 1982 with China. "The Taiwan Policy Review" was released in September of the same year, in which the US allowed top Taiwanese officials to transit through US territory during their travels and supported Taiwan to participate in international organizations.

This gradual fostering of US-Taiwan relations in the post-Cold War era stimulated Chinese leaders' geopolitical anxiety over Taiwan. From Jiang Zemin's statement at a meeting of the Taiwan Affairs Office in January 1995, it was clear that Chinese leaders started to become seriously concerned over the increasing links between the US and Taiwan.⁷⁵ As a result, the US' move of issuing Lee with a visa in May 1995 was a critical indicator for Chinese leaders that the US was about to create a new cold war in Asia by using Taiwan to contain China, as it had in the past. China's buffer thinking toward Taiwan demonstrated in how China perceived this move by the US:

The US government brazenly changed its policy that forbade top Taiwanese leaders from visiting the US, which was upheld by every US government in the past seventeen

⁷⁴ Deng Xiaoping, "Da Meiguo Jizhe Maike Hualaishi Wen 答美国记者迈克华莱士问 [Answering the Questions of American Reporter Michael Wallace]," in *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan 邓小平文选 [The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping]* (Beijing: People's Press, 1994), p. 169.

⁷⁵ Jiang Zemin, "Wei Cujin Zuguo Tongyi Daye De Wancheng Rr Jixu Fendou 为促进祖国统一大业的完成而继续奋斗 [The Continuous Struggle For Facilitating the Completion of the Unification of the MotherLand]," in *Jiang Zemin Wenxuan 江泽民文选 [The Selected Works of Jiang Zemin]* (Beijing: People's Press, 2006), Vol. 1, p. 420.

years, that. The truth is that the US will never give up the policy of regarding Taiwan as an American unsinkable aircraft carrier. The US attempts to play the so-called Taiwan card and contain the development, growth, and unification of China.⁷⁶

It was in precisely this context that China made the decision to militarily attack Taiwan. From available sources, it is not fully clear yet who made the decision and when, but the PLA arguably played a very significant role in this decision. Numerous academic works suggest that the PLA's influence on policy outcomes was considerably increased in the Jiang era.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Jiang, unlike Mao and Deng, did not have enough prestige and personal connections with the PLA. Thus, he was quite often under pressure to appease the PLA's demands.⁷⁸ Hong Kong media repeatedly reported that, since 1995, the three most senior military leaders, Yang Shangkun (former Chinese President and the leader of the Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs), Liu Huaqing (Vice Chairman of the CMC and member of CCP Politburo Standing Committee), and Zhang (Vice Chairman of the CMC), had kept pushing civilian leaders to adopt more hawkish means to solve the Taiwan issue.⁷⁹

The three military leaders all held the same perspective: seize Taiwan sooner rather than later, lest the security of China's coastal areas worsen in the future.⁸⁰ Yang had long been a hardliner toward Taiwan. His perspective on Taiwan was very similar to that of Deng—China needed to have full control over Taiwan as soon as possible, otherwise it would be taken away by foreign countries and used against China in the future.⁸¹ As for Liu, Taiwan Island had been a critical component in China's maritime strategy, aimed at safeguarding the national security of

⁷⁶ "Meiguo Jiujing Yaoba Zhongmei Guanxi Yinxiang Hefang? 美国究竟要把中美关系引向何方? [Where does the US Want to Lead the Sino-American Relations?]," *People's Daily*, June 18 1995.

⁷⁷ Li Cheng and Lynn White, "The Army in the Succession to Deng Xiaoping: Familiar Fealties and Technocratic Trends," *Asian Survey* 33, no. 8 (1993); Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Decision-Making Regarding Taiwan, 1979-2000," in *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform*, ed. David Lampton (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001).

⁷⁸ "The Role of the Chinese Military in National Security Policymaking," pp. 41-3.

⁷⁹ Shan Yue, "Jiang Hexin Dui Qiangganzi De Ruanhua 江核心对枪杆子的软化 [The Jiang Core Accommodated the Military]," *Dongxiang 动向 [Trend]* 1995; Luo Bing, "Deng Xiaoping Zai Hu Wu San Yuanlao 邓小平在滬晤三元老 (Deng Xiaoping Met Three Senior Leaders in Shanghai)," *Dongxiang 动向 [Trend]* 1996; Guan Jie, "Zhongguo Dui Meitai Xinzhengce 中共对美台新政策 (The New CCP's Policy toward the US and Taiwan)," *ibid.* 1995.

⁸⁰ Zhang did not speak too much about the Taiwan issue in public during this crisis. His perspective on Taiwan, however, has been discussed in the two previous sections.

⁸¹ "Yang Shangkun Zhuxi Zaici Yanzheng Shengming Taiwan Zigu Jiushi Zhongguo Lingtu 杨尚昆主席再次严正申明台湾自古就是中国领土 [President Yang Shuangkun Firmly States Once Again That Taiwan Is China's Territory Since Ancient Time]," *People's Daily*, October 10 1991; "Yang Shangkun Zhuxi Lun Zuguo Tongyi 杨尚昆主席论祖国统一 [President Yang Suangkun Speaks about The Motherland Unification]," *People's Daily*, November 10 1990.

China.⁸² Believing the future invasion of the US would surely come from the sea, he had been promoting the concept of offshore defense (*jin hai fang yu* 近海防御) for a decade. In his maritime strategy, Taiwan was a part of the offshore defense system that China needed to secure and thereby protecting its coastal areas. Therefore, it is sufficient to argue that the perspectives held by the three senior generals had arguably translated into the making of the decision of the military action taken against Taiwan in 1996.

4.6 Conclusion

This case study shows that China's buffer thinking toward Taiwan has been critical factor influencing China's behavior toward Taiwan since 1949. Before 1949, the value of Taiwan to the CCP was very non-geopolitical. Through the lens of minority nationality, the CCP initially perceived Taiwan's value in its fight against Japan and then in its power struggle against the KMT. However, along with the formation of the CCP-US rivalry after the surrender of Japan, this non-geopolitical perspective gradually changed into a geopolitical one—Taiwan was a critical buffer to the security of the Chinese mainland that could block an invasion route of the US. China's geopolitical anxiety over its southeast coastal areas could only be pacified if it could control this island. As a result, the mentality of “take Taiwan now, otherwise the US may use it against China later” became a significant motivating factor for China to initiate military actions aimed at seizing Taiwan in 1954, 1958, and 1996. The historical memory of how a foreign enemy used this island to harm China's security interests further justified the necessity of taking this island. In the cases of 1954 and 1958, China was worried that the US was taking a similar path to that of the Japanese Empire. In the case of 1996, the memories embodied in the metaphor of an unsinkable aircraft carrier of the US continually reminded Chinese leaders of China's geopolitical vulnerability to the US in the 1950s. Certainly, it is not argued here that China's buffer thinking toward Taiwan was the only factor driving such three military action. The most important insight from these three episodes of conflict, however, is that China's

⁸² Liu Huaqing, "Haijun Zhanlue Yu Weilai Haishang Zuozhan 海军战略与未来海上作战 [The Naval Strategy and Future Warfare on the Sea]," in *Liu Huaqing Junshi Wenxuan: Shang* 刘华清军事文选: 上 [The Selected Military Works of Liu Huaqing: I] (Beijing: The PLA Publishing House, 2008); "Haijun De Diwei He Zuoyong Wenti 海军的地位和作用问题 [The Matter of the Position and Function of the Navy]."; *Liu Huaqing Huiyilu* 刘华清回忆录 [Liu Huaqing's Memoirs], 2nd ed. (Beijing: The PLA Publishing House, 2007), CH 16.

obsession with annexing Taiwan cannot be fully understood without taking its buffer thinking into consideration.

CH 5 The Case of North Korea

For many decades, scholars and policymakers have typically regarded North Korea as a geopolitical buffer for China, fending off potential US influence and invasion of China from the Korean Peninsula. Officials in China also characterize bilateral relations with North Korea as “lips and teeth” at times. However, there have been few scholarly explanations of the geopolitical relationship between China and North Korea in depth. The purpose of this chapter is to delve into three critical questions relating to this geopolitical relationship. First, what was the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’s early view of the Korean Peninsula? Second, when and under what conditions did the CCP form its buffer thinking toward North Korea? Finally, how did China’s buffer thinking toward North Korea affect China’s North Korea policy in the cases of the Korean War (1950–53), the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis of 1993–94, and the Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis of 2002–03?

This chapter argues that the CCP did not perceive the Korean Peninsula geopolitically between the 1920s to 1940s, though they fought with Korean communists. The prevailing view of the CCP at that time was minority nationality. China’s buffer thinking toward North Korea emerged in the minds of Chinese leaders in a policy debate over the question of whether to save North Korea in the second half of 1950, and China’s buffer thinking toward Taiwan also contributed to China’s final decision of sending troops to Korea. Examining the explanatory power of buffer thinking against competing explanations, this chapter contends that this thinking was a critical factor in shaping China’s defense of North Korea in the Korean War, and protecting North Korea diplomatically and militarily in the two nuclear crises.

5.1 The CCP's Early View of Korea: Minority Nationality

Unlike its policy toward Taiwan, the CCP's policy toward Korea did not undergo a fundamental transformation before the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Korea was not really a key concern of the CCP in the first decade of the establishment of the CCP, though it did notice that Koreans were suffering under the colonial rule of the Japanese Empire. The CCP formulated its first policy toward Korea in the 1930s, which focused on providing support for Korean independence. However, for the CCP in this period, the value of an independent Korea to the CCP, like an independent Taiwan, had more to do with the CCP's war against Japan and political struggle against the Kuomintang (KMT), and less to do with the geopolitical security of China.

Before the establishment of the CCP in 1921, contact between Chinese communists and Koreans had already been established. China and Korea had a very close cultural and economic relationship for centuries, in which China regarded itself as the maintainer of order in a self-proclaimed tribute system in Asia and Korea positioned itself as a role model of a tribute state within this system. Because of this layer of relationship, China helped Korea resist the influence and control of foreign powers, especially Japan, many times in history. Therefore, when the Japanese Empire annexed Korea in 1910, a significant number of Koreans moved or were expatriated to China. It was at this moment that a number of Koreans who were fighting for Korean independence joined the CCP or started to provide financial support to assist its revolution against Japanese. For example, Choe Yong Gon, who was North Korean Minister of Defense, joined the CCP in 1926 and held a position as the Party Secretary at the CCP Northeast Region.¹ 1930 was another year in which the number of Koreans joining the CCP increased greatly, as the Communist International ordered the Korean Communist Party (KCP) to disband and merge into the CCP owing to the fierce faction rivalry inside the KCP. Kim Il Sung joined the CCP in this period and in later years became one of the commanders of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army (NAJUA).²

¹ Shen Zhihua, "Tongming Xianglian: Chaoxian Gongchandangren Rongru Zhonggong De Lishi Guocheng (1919-1936) (Shang) 同命相连: 朝鲜共产党人融入中共的历史过程 (1919-1936) (上) [Sharing the Same Fate: The Historical Process of the Korean Communist Party Merging into the CCP (1919-1936) (I)]," *Jianghuai Wenshi* 江淮文史 [Anhui Literature and History] 4(2015): p. 50.

² "Tongming Xianglian: Chaoxian Gongchandangren Rongru Zhonggong De Lishi Guocheng (1919-1936) (Xia) 同命相连: 朝鲜共产党人融入中共的历史过程 (1919-1936) (下) [Sharing the Same Fate: The Historical Process of the Korean Communist Party Merging into the CCP (1919-1936) (II)]," *Jianghuai Wenshi* 江淮文史

Although there was early contact between the CCP and Koreans, the CCP initially did not pay too much attention to Korea. Korea was not a part of the Qing Empire's territory, which made this issue not a matter of importance for the CCP in the 1920s. What the CCP focused on the most at that moment was its own party development in China, especially its power struggle against the KMT. This explains why the CCP did not mention anything about a future settlement for the Korean Peninsula in "The Manifesto of the Second National Congress of the CCP" of 1922.³ Moreover, instead of including the Koreans' objectives into the CCP's founding goals, the involvement of Koreans in the CCP only served to strengthen the CCP's anti-KMT agenda.⁴

This lack of attention to Korea was also reflected in the CCP's lack of a consistent term to refer to Korea. The first time the CCP referred to Korea was in "The Manifesto of the Second National Congress," in which the CCP criticized how the Japanese exploited "Gaoli 高丽" people.⁵ However, Gaoli apparently was not the only term the CCP used at the time when referring to the people of/from the Korean Peninsula. The CCP also used "Chaoxian 朝鲜" and "Han 韩." While Gaoli, Chaoxian, and Han could all translate into "Korea" in English, these three terms contain different meanings in Chinese in terms of history and geography. One letter in which the CCP Central Committee explained its mission in Manchu served as a classic example of this mixed use of terms:

[We] need to think of a special struggle slogan for Gaoli people and Mongolians...The slogan should be as follows...the Chinese, Han, Mongolians and other workers conduct a nationality revolution war together...The slogan for Chaoxian people would be like: The peasants of Chaoxian, Japanese imperialism took your land and expelled you from your home country.⁶

[*Anhui Literature and History*] 5(2015): p. 42; Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), CH 2.

³ "Zhongguo Gongchandang Dierci Quanguo Dahui Xuanyan 中国共产党第二次全国大会宣言 [The Manifesto of the Second National Congress of the CCP]," pp. 99-118.

⁴ "Open Letter to the Korean Communists in Manchuria from the Manchurian Provincial Committee of the Chinese Communist Party," in *Documents of Korean Communism: 1918-1948*, ed. Suh Dae-Sook (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 398-9.

⁵ "Zhongguo Gongchandang Dierci Quanguo Dahui Xuanyan 中国共产党第二次全国大会宣言 [The Manifesto of the Second National Congress of the CCP]," p. 101.

⁶ "Zhongyang Gei Geji Manzhou Dangbu Ji Quanti Dangyuan De Xin 中央给各级满洲党部及全体党员的信 [The Letter Which the CCP Central Committee Issued to Every Branch of and all the CCP Members in Manchu]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1933 中共中央文件选集: 1933 [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1933]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 37.

This lack of attention to Korea did not mean, however, that the Korean issue was not on the CCP's radar at all. To the CCP, what was happening to the Koreans, Mongolians, and Taiwanese had one thing in common from a minority nationality perspective: they were all small and weak nationalities oppressed by Japanese imperialism. In particular, the status of Korea was quite similar to that of Taiwan. Taiwan, which was traditionally considered external to China proper by the Chinese, was colonized by Japan after the Shimonoseki Treaty of 1895. Korea, which inherently was not a part of China's territory, was also colonized by Japan after the Japan–Korea Annexation Treaty of 1910. In this sense, the issue of Korea was still associated with the founding goals of the CCP to some extent.

Owing to this association, the issue of Korea became a higher priority in CCP policy during the Anti-Japanese War (1937–45). In order to counter the Japanese invasion of China, the CCP tried to build three united fronts against Japan in the 1930s: an alliance with the KMT, an alliance with foreign countries, and an alliance both with people within Japan and people colonized by Japan. Koreans, together with Taiwanese, fell into the third alliance. The CCP's calculation was that if Koreans could militarily fight for their independence, this would steer Japan's military power away from China. Driven by this strategic rationale, the policy of supporting Korean independence was hence formalized. As Mao Zedong said to Edgar Snow in July 1936:

It is the immediate task of China to regain all lost territories, not merely to defend our sovereignty south of the Great Wall. This means that Manchuria must be regained. We do not, however, include Korea, formerly a Chinese colony, but when we have re-established the independence of the lost territories of China, and if the Koreans wish to break away from the chains of Japanese imperialism, we will extend them our enthusiastic help in their struggle for independence.⁷

Closer military cooperation between the CCP and Koreans gradually unfolded after the mid-1930s under the policy of supporting Korea's independence. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the CCP and Koreans fought alongside one another against the Japanese forces and later the KMT forces. There were two main Korean groups that the CCP worked with at the time: the Korean Volunteer Army (KVA) in Yanan, which was headed by Kim Tubong and Mu Chong, and the NAJUA in northeast China, which was joined by Kim Chaek, Choe Yong Gon, and Kim Il Sung. Both of these groups were invaluable forces

⁷ Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, p. 110.

in the CCP's war against Japan. The KVA once rescued the Political Department of the Eighth Route Army's Headquarter in a battle against the Japanese forces in the Taihuang Mountain.⁸ And Kim Il Sung and his associates organized guerrilla forces to fight against the Japanese in Jilin for the CCP, which spurred the Japanese to offer a 500,000 Japanese yen reward for his arrest.⁹

This deepened relationship between the CCP and Koreans was not simply based on the reality that the CCP needed Koreans much more at that time, but also on the principle of a long-term *quid pro quo*. During the Anti-Japanese War, the CCP provided military munitions, training, and equipment to Koreans, which the Koreans would need for their own fight for Korea in the future. Also, while Koreans provided necessary manpower for the CCP's fight against Japan and the KMT, it is probably that CCP leaders agreed to return the favor later. This was why the CCP agreed to assist Kim Il Sung's military plan of unifying the Korean Peninsula when he proposed his plan in May 1949.¹⁰

As a by-product of this explicit Korea policy, the CCP gradually standardized its language in reference to Korea in this period. After 1937, Chaoxian became the only term the CCP used to refer to for the most part to the people of/from the Korean Peninsula, and this is the term that China officially uses today. The best example of the use of this term can be seen in the Sixth General Order of Zhu De, in which he commanded the Korean forces to attack the Japanese forces in China's northeast with the CCP and Soviet forces in 1945:

⁸ Liu Xiaoyuan, *A Partnership for Disorder: China, the United States, and Their Policies for the Postwar Disposition of the Japanese Empire, 1941-1945*, pp. 164-8.

⁹ Shen Zhihua, "Chunchi Xiangyi Haishi Zhengzhi Lianyin Zhongchao Tongmeng De Jianli Jiqi Yanxu, 1946-1961 唇齿相依还是政治联姻? 中朝同盟的建立及其延续, 1946-1961 [As Close as Teeth and Lips or a Marriage of Convenience? The Origins and Development of the Sino-Korean Alliance, 1946-1961]," *Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo Jikan 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 [Academia Sinica Modern History Institute Bulletin]* 63(2009): p. 150; "On the Eighty-Eighth Brigade and the Sino-Soviet-Korean Triangular Relationship: A Glimpse at the International Antifascist United Front during the War of Resistance against Japan," *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 9, no. 1 (2015): p. 14.

¹⁰ "Shtekefu Zhi Weixinshiji Dian: Jin Richeng Tongbao Jinyi Zai Beiping Huitan Qingkuang 什特科夫致维辛斯基电: 金日成通报金一在北平会谈情况 [Shtykov's Cable to Vyshinsky: Kim Il Sung Informs the Meeting of Kim Yi in Beiping]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 2, pp. 48-9.

For cooperating with the Soviet forces entering China and Chaoxian to fight and liberate the Chaoxian people, I ordered...Chaoxian people in northeast to accomplish the mission of liberating Chaoxian.¹¹

Most importantly, the CCP leaders apparently did not consider Korea in geopolitical terms during this period, even though the issue of Korea had appeared on the CCP's radar during the Anti-Japanese War. Unlike the KMT, Korea was a "non-geopolitical" issue to the CCP. The Cairo Declaration offers a good example of these two distinct viewpoints. While both the CCP and the KMT supported the declaration, which demanded Japan to return the Pescadores, Taiwan, and Manchuria to the Republic of China (ROC) and also endorsed a free and independent Korea after the defeat of Japan, the rationales behind these moves were worlds apart. For the KMT, Japan's policy toward China had been faithfully following the Meiji Instructions for Decedents and the Continental Policy, both of which indicated a roadmap for how Japan could conquer the world—first, Korea and Taiwan, then Manchuria and Mongolia, then China, and finally the world at large.¹² Korea, being part of Japan's invasion roadmap, was a critical geopolitical buffer to keep a resurgent Japan out of China. Therefore, in the eyes of the KMT leaders, a geopolitically secured China was inseparable from a free and independent Korea.

By contrast, the CCP supported the Cairo Declaration on account of its power struggle against the KMT. During the Anti-Japanese War, what the CCP worried most about was the possibility that the KMT and Japan might agree to eliminate the CCP together. A declaration asking Japan to return every territory it took from China would reduce this possibility significantly. As demonstrated by a cable Mao and Peng Dehuai sent to Deng Xiaoping two weeks after the declaration showed, the CCP leaders had quite a positive attitude towards the declaration because it blocked the potential room for negotiation between Chiang Kai-shek and Japan

¹¹ "Yanan Zongbu Mingling Deliuhaio 延安总部命令第六号 [The Sixth General Order of the Yanan Headquarter]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1945 中共中央文件选集: 1945 [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1945]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 223.

¹² "Ri Qin Manmeng Zhi Yexin 日侵满蒙之野心 [Japan's Ambition to Invade Manchuria and Mongolia]," in *Zhongchao Zhonghan Guanxi Wenjian Ziliao Huibian: 1949-1919 中朝中韩关系文件资料汇编: 1949-1919 [Sino-North Korean and Sino-South Korean Relations Document Compilation: 1949-1919]*, ed. Liu Jinzhi (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2000), pp. 289-92; "Shixian Kailuo Huiyi Xuanyan 实现开罗会议宣言 [Realization of the Cairo Declaration]," in *Zhongchao Zhonghan Guanxi Wenjian Ziliao Huibian: 1949-1919 中朝中韩关系文件资料汇编: 1949-1919 [Sino-North Korean and Sino-South Korean Relations Document Compilation: 1949-1919]*, ed. Liu Jinzhi (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2000), pp. 1026-9.

during wartime.¹³ Mao reiterated this position on the Cairo Declaration in his “On Coalition Government” at the Seventh National Congress of the CCP in 1945.¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, the issue of Korean independence was not mentioned in either the cable or the report.

To sum up, throughout the 1920s to 1940s, the CCP had little, if any, perception of the geopolitical value of the Korean Peninsula to the security of China. The CCP’s conception of Korea in this period was that of a minority nationality. The CCP viewed Koreans as sharing the same fate of the Chinese and other small and weak nationalities, all of whom were fighting for independence against Japan and other imperialists. As a result, the value of Korea to the CCP was more about what role Korea could play for the CCP’s own party development in China, first in the CCP’s war against Japan and second in the political struggle against the KMT. Helping Koreans fight for their independence never ranked as a high priority in the CCP’s foreign policy in this period, and this objective had very limited geopolitical meaning. As Mao repeatedly stated in a speech in 1938, “the Anti-Japanese War can only be considered complete when the Chinese forces reach the bank of the Yalu River.”¹⁵

5.2 Gaining Two Buffers through One Fight

In May 1949, Chinese leaders agreed with Kim Il Sung’s proposal to unify the Korean Peninsula by force in 1950 and promised to provide Chinese troops and military equipment to North Korea.¹⁶ Their assessment was that the US would not intervene. However, to their surprise, the US led the United Nations Command to fight against North Korea after the

¹³ "Guanyu Muqian Guoji Xingshi Xia Dihou Renwu De Zhishi 关于目前国际形势下敌后任务的指示 [The Instruction on the Mission to the Enemy's Rear under the Current International Situation]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1943-44 中共中央文件选集: 1943-44 [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1943-44]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), pp. 138-9.

¹⁴ "Lun Lianhe Zhengfu 论联合政府 [On Coalition Government]," in *Mao Zedong Xuanji 毛泽东选集 [The Selected Works of Mao Zedong]*, ed. Mao Zedong (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1991), pp. 1065-6.

¹⁵ "Lun Chijiuzhan 论持久战 [On Protracted War]," in *Mao Zedong Xuanji 毛泽东选集 [The Selected Works of Mao Zedong]*, ed. Mao Zedong (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1991), Vol. 2, pp. 466, 508, and 09.

¹⁶ "Shtekefu Zhi Weixinshiji Dian: Jin Richeng Tongbao Jinyi Zai Beiping Huitan Qingkuang 什特科夫致维辛斯基电: 金日成通报金一在北平会谈情况 [Shtykov's Cable to Vyshinsky: Kim Il Sung Informs the Meeting of Kim Yi in Beiping]."; "Kewaliaofu Zhi Sidalin Dian: Mao Zedong Tongbao Yu Jinyi Huitan De Qingkuang 科瓦廖夫至斯大林电: 毛泽东通报与金一会谈的情况 [Kobajieb's Cable to Stalin: Mao Zedong Informs the Meeting with Kim Yi]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 2, pp. 53-4.

outbreak of the Korean War, and protected the government of the ROC in Taiwan by neutralizing the Taiwan Strait. To ensure North Korea's survival, China organized the Northeast Border Defense Army (NEBDA) in July 1950 and then dispatched it to the North Korean battlefield under the name of the People's Volunteer Army (PVA) in October.

For Chinese leaders, fighting against a militarily superior opponent was a very difficult decision to make. Regarding this decision, two things are certain nowadays from available sources:

1. A policy debate among Chinese leaders on whether to fight against the US, lasted from the end of June until October 18 1950. An initial decision to send the PVA to North Korea was made at an enlarged Central Politburo meeting on October 5. This decision was re-confirmed twice at emergent Politburo meetings on October 13 and 18.
2. At least nineteen Chinese leaders were involved in this policy debate: Mao, Zhu, Peng, Deng, Zhou Enlai, Gao Gang, Liu Shaoqi, Ren Bishi, Chen Yun, Kang Shen, Peng Zhen, Lin Boqu, Dong Biwu, Zhang Wentian, Lin Biao, Li Fuchun, Yang Shangkun, Nie Ronzhen, and Hu Qiaomu.

However, scholars are still debating what the determining factor was that pushed China to fight against the US in this war. To be sure, it is possible that there is more than one factor behind this decision. The purpose of this section is to explore China's buffer thinking toward North Korea as an explanation.

Chinese leaders did not view North Korea as a buffer state after the rivalrous Sino-American relationship was established in June 1946 (Please see Chapter Four). As documented in the previous section, the CCP did not initially consider Korea as being geopolitically valuable to China. Once the Sino-US rivalry emerged in June 1946, the assessment of CCP leaders on North Korea's brewing military action was that the most likely US invasion route of China would be via Taiwan, and that Japan, not the US, would be the party that might intervene in

North Korea's military action.¹⁷ This assessment did not change even one month before the outbreak of the Korean War.¹⁸

The US' intervention after the outbreak of the Korean War, specifically its landing at Incheon, fundamentally changed the way that Chinese leaders perceived the value of North Korea, from a minority nationality to a buffered perspective. Chinese leaders spent approximately four months debating over whether China should save North Korea, during which time the geopolitical value of North Korea to China gradually emerged: the two states were like lips and teeth. If North Korea was occupied by the US, it would certainly become a US invasion route to China. Multiple sources indicate the buffer thinking logic that "we need to maintain the existence of North Korea now otherwise the US may use it against us later" was a prominent reason that some of the nineteen Chinese leaders involved in this long policy debate believed that saving North Korea was necessary. Mao, for instance, stated at a Politburo meeting on August 4:

If American imperialism won, it [the US] would be smug and threaten us. [We] cannot not help North Korea. [We] have to.¹⁹

In a report to Mao on August 15, Gao, the commander of the NEBDA, stated the importance of fighting against the US in North Korea on the basis of buffer thinking:

The US' invasion of Korea is one part of its entire invasion plan...It is attempting to occupy Korea as a springboard for invading northeast and north China...If American invaders occupy North Korea, there is no doubt they will prepare for the invasion of the northeast and north of our China...Obviously, it is beneficial to us to destroy the enemy outside of our territory.²⁰

¹⁷ "Shteketu Zhi Weixinshiji Dian: Jin Richeng Tongbao Jinyi Zai Beiping Huitan Qingkuang 什特科夫致维辛斯基电: 金日成通报金一在北平会谈情况 [Shtykov's Cable to Vyshinsky: Kim Il Sung Informs the Meeting of Kim Yi in Beiping]."

¹⁸ "Shieketu Zhi Weixinshiji Dian: Jin Richeng Fanghua Jihua 什特科夫致维辛斯基电: 金日成访华计划 [Shtykov's Cable to Vyshinsky: Kim Il Sung's Plan to Visit China]," in *Zhongguo Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhuhua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 2, pp. 407-8.

¹⁹ *Gongchandang Zhongyao Huiyi Jishi: 1921-2011 共产党重要会议纪事: 1921-2011 [The Chronicle of Important Meetings of the Chinese Communist Party: 1921-2011]*, ed. Weiping Zhang Huaxuan Jiang, and Shen Xiao (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2011), p. 264.

²⁰ Dai Maolin and Zhao Xiaoguang, *Gao Gang Zhuan 高岗传 [Gao Guang]* (Xian: Shangxi People's Publishing House, 2011), pp. 239-41.

In hindsight, the opinion that Peng expressed at an enlarged Politburo meeting on October 5 was the most critical in China's decision to defend North Korea. At a Politburo meeting on October 4, the majority of Chinese leaders were still opposed to the idea of fighting against the US. However, the decision was ultimately made after Peng voiced his opinion the next day:

Assisting Korea is necessary. If we lost, the price we would pay at most is winning this liberation war late. But, if we let the US deploy its forces on the bank of the Yalu River and Taiwan, it can find an excuse to initiate an invasion at any time.²¹

The importance of buffer thinking toward North Korea in this decision is further supported by the evidence that this was the only reason that Mao re-confirmed the decision a week later. After the initial decision was made on October 5, Mao immediately asked for military assistance from the Soviet Union to further pacify the anxiety of Chinese leaders who disagreed with this decision. The Soviet Union, however, refused to provide any air cover for the PVA and demanded China purchase Soviet military equipment with cash.²² In response to this lukewarm reception, Mao cabled Joseph Stalin saying that China would still send the forces to North Korea because "If Americans reach China's border, then North Korea will be a 'potential disease of the heart' for us and northeast China will be under constant threat."²³

For Chinese leaders, keeping a buffer around China's border would simultaneously also benefit the internal security of the newly established PRC regime. The NEBDA was mainly composed of the PLA 38th, 39th, and 40th Armies, which were originally deployed in southern China to eliminate remnant ROC forces on the Chinese mainland, and defend against a possible ROC military roll back from Taiwan. If the NEBDA was stationed at the Yalu River to guard against the US forces for a long period of time, China's control and defense of southern China would be weakened in the long run.²⁴

²¹ *Gongchandang Zhongyao Huiyi Jishi: 1921-2011 共产党重要会议纪要: 1921-2011 [The Chronicle of Important Meetings of the Chinese Communist Party: 1921-2011]*, p. 266.

²² Shen Zhihua, *Chaoxian Zhanzheng Zaitan: Zhongsuchao De Hezuo Yu Fenqi 朝鲜战争再探: 中苏朝的合作与分歧 [Rediscover the Korean War: Cooperation and Discrepancy among China, the Soviet Union and North Korea]* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2013), p. 300.

²³ "Luoshen Zhi Sidalin Dian: Mao Zedong Tongzhi Zhongguo Jueding Chubing Chaoxian 罗申致斯大林电: 毛泽东通知中国决定出兵朝鲜 [Roshchin's Cable to Stalin: Mao Zedong Informs China's Decision of Sending Troops to North Korea]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 3, pp. 96-7.

²⁴ *Gongchandang Zhongyao Huiyi Jishi: 1921-2011 共产党重要会议纪要: 1921-2011 [The Chronicle of Important Meetings of the Chinese Communist Party: 1921-2011]*, p. 267.

As in the case of Taiwan, the historical memory of how the Japanese Empire invaded China via Korea strengthened the necessity of maintaining the existence of North Korea to Chinese leaders. Since the Japanese surrender, Chinese leaders had noticed an emerging similarity between US' China policy and the Japanese Empire's China policy, in which the US seemed to replace the previous role of Japan in Asia. The US' act of neutralizing the Taiwan Strait and invading North Korea evoked for Chinese leaders the memory of the Continental Policy of Japan: encroach upon China first via Taiwan and second via Korea. Defending North Korea, was, therefore, premised on avoiding a repetition of this bitter history.²⁵ Wu Xiuquan's speech at the United Nations explicitly indicated this geopolitical anxiety:

Tanaka Giichi, one of the planners of the Japanese invasion, once said: "to conquer the world, one has to first conquer Asia; to conquer Asia, one has to first conquer China; to conquer China, one has to first conquer Manchu and Mongolia; to conquer Manchu and Mongolia, one has to first conquer Korea and Taiwan"...US imperialism invasion of Taiwan and North Korea is literally an imitation of Tanaka Giichi's plan, and follows the old path of Japanese imperialism.²⁶

Most importantly, China's decision to send forces to North Korea had a very close connection with China's buffer thinking toward Taiwan, which is another important factor some scholars have neglected. As discussed in Chapter Four, Chinese leaders started to view Taiwan from a buffered perspective in March 1949. "Taking Taiwan by applying military pressure on the US in the Korean War" was also one critical calculation of Chinese leaders behind this decision, as evidenced in the cable correspondences between Stalin and Mao. On October 1 1950, Stalin formally asked China to save North Korea. Mao's first reply was that most Chinese leaders tended to avoid a direct military conflict with the US. Stalin, however, persuaded Mao by arguing that China needed to demonstrate its power to the US by engaging in this war, and only by doing so could China gain a concession from the US over Taiwan. Otherwise, the US would

²⁵ "Weishenme Women Dui Meiguo Qinlue Chaoxian Buneng Zhizhi Buli 为什么我们对美国侵略朝鲜不能置之不理 [Why We Cannot Turn A Blind Eye to the US Invasion of North Korea]," *People's Daily*, November 6 1950.

²⁶ "Anlihui Taolun Konsu Meiguo Wuzhuang Qintai 安理会讨论控诉美国武装侵台案 [The UNSC Discussion on the Indictment of US Militarily Invasion of Taiwan]," *People's Daily*, November 30 1950. It is necessary to point out that the authenticity of the Tanaka Memorial is very controversial. While most Japanese scholars believe that it is a forgery document, Chinese scholars tend to believe the document is genuine. Despite this controversy, the Tanaka Memorial was quite an influential and effective tool for Chinese and Americans to justify and hence mobilize the support for their wars against Japan at that time. Please see: John J. Stephan, "The Tanaka Memorial (1927): Authentic or Spurious?," *Modern Asian Studies* 7, no. 4 (1973).

hold Taiwan as a military base for itself or Japan in the future.²⁷ Mao agreed with Stalin's assessment and believed this war should start sooner rather than later.²⁸

The above argument of "gaining two buffers through one fight" is further supported by the evidence of how China negotiated with the US over the cease-fire on the Korean Peninsula in the following years. In December 1950, the international community asked China about its terms for stopping the military action on the peninsula. Both Chinese and Soviet officials agreed that US withdrawal from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait should be one of the terms demanded by China.²⁹ In 1951, when Mao started to actively seek a cease-fire on the peninsula, the idea of asking for a concession from the US over the issue of Taiwan came to his mind again.³⁰

Certainly, there could be more than one explanatory factor behind China's decision to save North Korea. Aside from buffer thinking, scholars have applied four main approaches to understanding the motivation behind China's military decision. The remainder of this section will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each approach against an approach that focuses on China's buffer thinking.

The first approach, which was initially developed by Allen Whiting, focuses on China's national security.³¹ China could not tolerate a hostile force occupying Korea because the Chinese capital of Beijing is just few hundred kilometers away from the Sino-North Korean

²⁷ "Sidalin Zhi Mao Zedong Dian: Guanyu Zhongguo Chubing Wenti De Kaolv 斯大林致毛泽东电: 关于中国出兵问题的考虑 [Stalin's Cable to Mao Zedong: The Considerations of China Sending Forces]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 3, p.81.

²⁸ "Luoshen Zhi Sidalin Dian: Mao Zedong Dui Chubing Chaoxian De Taidu 罗申致斯大林电: 毛泽东对出兵朝鲜的态度 [Roshchin's Cable to Stalin: Mao Zedong's Attitude toward Sending Troops to North Korea]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 3, p. 84.

²⁹ "Luoshen Zhimosike Dian: Zhongguo Zhengfu Guanyu Tingzhi Zai Chaoxian Junshi Xingdong De Tiaojian 罗申关于中国政府停止在朝鲜军事行动的条件的电报 [Roshchin's Cable to Moscow: On the Terms of the Chinese Government Stopping Military Actions in North Korea]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 3, p. 152.

³⁰ "Mao Zedong Zhi Kao Guang, Jin Richeng Dian 毛泽东致高岗金日成电: 关于停战谈判问题 [Mao's Cable to Gao Gang and Kim Il Sung: On the Issue of Truce and Negotiation]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 3, p. 312.

³¹ Whiting purposed more than one explanation to analyze the motivation of China's entry of North Korea. Please see Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War*, CH 8.

border. Also, the newly established PRC regime relied heavily on its industrial base in northeast China, which would be within striking range of US forces in Korea. In recent years, more nuanced arguments were developed on the basis of this approach. Thomas Christensen, for example, used the logic of so-called “windows of opportunity and vulnerability” to explain calculations of the Chinese leadership in regard to a series of military actions by China. He argued that Mao and Peng perceived that if China chose not to fight against the US at that time, the security environment of China would only worsen further as the US would attack China from Korea and Taiwan at some later time of its choosing.³²

The arguments of this approach overlap with the buffer thinking argument developed here to some degree, but do not explain why the expulsion of the US forces from North Korea was ultimately Mao’s choice for resolving this security concern. In fact, an option preferred by most Chinese leaders preferred at that time was giving up North Korea and allowing Koreans to fight guerrilla warfare in China’s northeast.³³ Stalin seemed to agree with this decision after having a serious discussion with Zhou and Lin Biao on October 11 in Moscow. Therefore, it must be asked: Why was the land controlled by North Korea so sacred and untouchable to Mao and a few Chinese leaders that made military expulsion of US forces from North Korea was the final decision? Chinese leaders’ historical memory of Japan’s invasion of China via Korea fills this missing piece of the national security arguments.

The second approach focuses on Sino-Soviet Union relations as the key to understanding China’s decision. The argument that Stalin forced Mao to save North Korea is quite prevalent in academic circles.³⁴ Stalin formally asked Mao to send Chinese troops to North Korea on October 1. For Mao, this was a proposal he was unable to refuse because he had just concluded the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance with Stalin a few months previously. In accordance with this treaty, China would gain military protection and economic assistance from the Soviet Union. Thus, if Mao refused to defend North Korea, Stalin might choose not to deliver what he promised in the treaty. Losing the Soviet Union’s support would put China at great risk when facing a hostile US.

³² Thomas J. Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force."

³³ Shen Zhihua, *Chaoxian Zhanzheng Zaitan: Zhongsuchao De Hezuo Yu Fenqi* 朝鮮戰爭再探: 中蘇朝的合作與分歧 [Rediscover the Korean War: Cooperation and Discrepancy among China, the Soviet Union and North Korea], pp. 280-9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

However, this explanation rules out the possibility that China was eager to rescue North Korea even before Stalin's request. A number of documents have revealed that, after US involvement in the war, China kept asking North Korea to provide China with North Korean maps and uniforms and actively expressed its willingness to send 320,000 troops to the North Korean battlefield.³⁵ It was Stalin and Kim Il Sung that had been intentionally keeping China out of this war until October 1950.³⁶ Therefore, it is fair to say that the Soviet Union did ask China to rescue North Korea, but this does not mean China did not want to save North Korea for its own geopolitical imperatives.

The third approach to understanding China's decision is from the CCP's public image among socialist states. Both Chen Jian and Shen Zhihua pointed out that the CCP saw the Korean War as an opportunity and a challenge in terms of the CCP's status in the socialist camp.³⁷ The CCP's image and influence in Asian revolutions would be furthered if China pushed back the Western international order in time. By contrast, the CCP's image would be greatly damaged if the CCP turned a blind eye to the survival of North Korea.

However, at best, the CCP's image is only a contributing factor to China's decision to save North Korea. The only existing evidence that could possibly support this reasoning is one statement made by Mao at an enlarged Politburo meeting on October 4: "You all have your

³⁵ "Shtekefu Zhi Sidalin Dian: Chaoxian Zhengfu Yaoqiu Zhongguo Geiyu Junshi Yuanzhu 什特科夫致斯大林电: 朝鲜政府要求中国给予军事援助 [Shtykov's Cable to Stalin: The North Korean Government Asks for Military Assistance from China]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian* 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [*Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives*], ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol 2, pp. 434-5; "Shtekefu Zhi Sidalin Dian: Qianxian Zhuangkuang He Zhongguo Canzhan Wenti 什特科夫致斯大林电: 前线状况和中国参战问题 [Shtykov's Cable to Stalin: The Situation of the Frontline and the Issue of China's Participation of the War]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian* 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [*Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives*], ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 2, pp. 435-7.

³⁶ "Luoshen Zhi Sidalin Dian: Zhou Enlai's Suggestions to the Korean War 罗申致斯大林电: 周恩来对朝鲜战事的建议 [Roshchin's Cable to Stalin: Zhou Enlai's Suggestions to the Korean War]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian* 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [*Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives*], ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol 3., pp. 51-2; "Shtekefu Zhi Geluomike Dian: Jin Richeng Xuenwen Kefou Qing Zhongguo Jundui Canzhan 什特科夫致葛罗米柯电: 金日成询问可否请中国军队参战 [Shtykov's Cable to Gromyko: Kim Il Sung Is Asking About the Participation of the Chinese Troops]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian* 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [*Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives*], ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai, 2014), Vol. 3, pp. 58-9.

³⁷ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, pp. 87-8; Shen Zhihua, *Chaoxian Zhanzheng Zaitan: Zhongsuchao De Hezuo Yu Fenqi* 朝鲜战争再探: 中苏朝的合作与分歧 [*Rediscover the Korean War: Cooperation and Discrepancy among China, the Soviet Union and North Korea*], p. 307.

points. But, [I] still feel sad that we stand aside and do nothing when others are in danger.”³⁸ As documented above, nevertheless, what most occupied the minds of Chinese leaders during the long policy debate from July to October 1950 were tangible, China-focused, security-related issues, not the CCP’s image.

Finally, a more recent approach to explaining China’s decision focuses on Mao’s psychological character. Andrew Kennedy argued that it was Mao’s optimistic estimation about the outcome of the war against the US, which Mao derived from the experience of the Chinese Civil War (1927–49), that pushed the Chinese leadership to make the final decision.³⁹ In a similar vein, Michael Sheng contended that Mao’s aspiration to be a Lenin of the East motivated him to intervene in the Korean War.⁴⁰

This argument is complementary with the buffer thinking argument developed in this chapter. Mao’s personal character was indeed a critical factor in the decision-making process. Without him, China would have not joined the war. However, it is also true that he still had to gain support from other senior CCP leaders within the party if there was no consensus before the 1960s. This was exactly why the nineteen Chinese leaders held at least fourteen senior meetings from the end of June to October 18—nearly one meeting per week.⁴¹ The frequency and scale of those meetings suggested the limitation of Mao’s personal decision-making power in this matter. Therefore, instead of focusing on the role of Mao in this decision-making process, this chapter focuses on factors with stronger explanatory power because ultimately, these are the factors that convinced other senior CCP leaders who initially disagreed. The buffer thinking held by a number of Chinese leaders, even Stalin, aligns with such thinking.

5.3 Buffer Thinking Revisited

³⁸ *Gongchandang Zhongyao Huiyi Jishi: 1921-2011 共产党重要会议纪事: 1921-2011 [The Chronicle of Important Meetings of the Chinese Communist Party: 1921-2011]*, p. 266.

³⁹ Andrew Bingham Kennedy, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), CH 4.

⁴⁰ Michael Sheng, "Mao's Role in the Korean Conflict: A Revision," *Twentieth-Century China* 39, no. 3 (2014).

⁴¹ Xu Zerong, "Zhongguo Jieru Chaoxian Zhanzheng Zhi Shimo Yu Mubiao 中国介入朝鲜战争之始末与目标 [The Beginning, Ending, and Objectives of China's Intervention in the Korean War]," *Zhuanjiwenxue 传记文学* 77, no. 4 (2000): p. 47.

The origin of the first North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993–94 can be traced back to the alliance relationship among North Korea, China, and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In the 1950s, North Korea began research on a civilian nuclear power program. With assistance and training from the Soviet Union, North Korea gained necessary nuclear know-how and equipment in the 1960s. In 1965, the Soviet Union provided North Korea with a small two-to-four megawatt reactor, which was later placed in Yongbyon and operated in 1967. China's help came in the 1970s (discussed in the next section in more detail).⁴² Although North Korea was outside the bounds of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) at that time, it still signed the Type 66 Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1977. Under this agreement, the IAEA could examine the reactor in 1988 and 1989.

It was the second reactor established in North Korea that raised concerns for the US. In 1982, North Korea started to construct its own reactor at Yongbyon to complement the reactor provided by the Soviet Union. To the US, however, this reactor aroused suspicion for many reasons. First, the size and the design of the second reactor made it suitable for producing the necessary material for nuclear weapons—plutonium—rather than purely civilian use of nuclear power. Second, via its spy satellite, the US noticed facilities associated with developing nuclear weapons, such as nuclear test sites and plutonium reprocessing plants, appearing in North Korea after the commencement of the construction of the second reactor. Third, although North Korea agreed to join the NPT on December 12 1985, in the end it did not sign a followed safeguard agreement or provide a list of nuclear facilities for the IAEA to inspect.

The conflict between North Korea and the US over this nuclear issue was heightened after 1992. While the US was suspicious of the real intentions behind North Korea's nuclear activities, North Korea asserted that the demands of the IAEA violated its national sovereignty and claimed that the IAEA was being manipulated by the US. The conflict between the two sides peaked at two specific moments: 1) March 1993, when North Korea declared its intention to withdraw from the NPT, and 2) May 1994, when North Korea unilaterally unloaded the spent fuel rods from its second reactor and destroyed crucial historical information contained in its rods. The conflict gradually eased after the meeting between former US President Jimmy Carter and Kim Il Sung at Pyongyang in June 1994, and officially ended with the conclusion of the Agreed Framework in October 1994.

⁴² Michael J. Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb: A Case Study in Nonproliferation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 28-9.

Regarding this crisis, the current literature in English usually focuses on two aspects: the rationale of North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons, or US-North Korea interactions during the crisis through the lenses of coercive diplomacy or what Denny Roy called "the Madman Theory."⁴³ In this fruitful academic discussion, however, China's behavior during the crisis has not been studied in great detail. The Chinese literature regarding this crisis has a similar gap: the role of China during this nuclear crisis has mostly been neglected. Chinese scholars usually maintain that China, following Deng's maxim of "keep a low profile and bide our time," viewed this dispute as a matter between the US and North Korea, and left it up to the US to resolve the issue.⁴⁴

In fact, China did act during the crisis and such actions fundamentally affected the outcome of the crisis. In terms of China's perspective, a nuclear-armed North Korea was not in China's best interests as Chinese officials repeatedly stated during the crisis that "China does not want to see the existence of nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, US military action against North Korea or the application of economic sanctions on North Korea could lead to its collapse. The loss of this geopolitical buffer and an ensuing unified Korea with US forces stationed within there was the least desirable outcome for China. This geopolitical mentality was the fundamental driver of China's actions during the crisis. The rest of this section will

⁴³ Victor D. Cha, "What Do They Really Want?: Obama's North Korea Conundrum," *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2009); Mun Suk Ahn, "What Is the Root Cause of the North Korean Nuclear Program?," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 38(2011); Van Jackson, "Making Diplomacy Work: Coercion and Conciliation in the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis," *Comparative Strategy* 31, no. 2 (2012); Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, D. C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); Anne Wu, "What China's Whispers to North Korea," *the Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2005); Hochul Lee, "China in the North Korean Nuclear Crises: Interest and Identity in Foreign Behaviour," *Journal of Contemporary China* 22, no. 80 (2013); Denny Roy, "North Korea and the 'Madman' Theory," *Security Dialogue* 25, no. 3 (1994); Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

⁴⁴ Yang Xiyu, "Chaohe Wenti Yu Zhongguo De Duichao Zhengce 朝鲜核问题与中国的对朝政策 [North Korean Nuclear Issue and China's Policy toward North Korea]," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi 现代国际关系 [Contemporary International Relations]* 1(2017); Xia Lu, "Zhongguo Chaohe Zhengce Zhong De Meiguo Yinsu 中国朝核政策中的美国因素 [The American Factor in China's Policy toward North Korea]," *Shehui Zhuyi Yanjiu 社会主义研究 [Socialism Studies]* 1(2006); Luo Yuan, "Xin Redian: Chaoxian Bandao Heweiji 新热点: 朝鲜半岛核危机 [The New Flashpoint: The Nuclear Crisis in the Korean Peninsula]," *Guofang 国防 [National Defense]* 9(1994); Zhang Liangui, "Chaoxian Bandao He Wenti Zonghengtan 朝鲜半岛核问题纵横谈 [A Discussion on the Nuclear Crisis in the Korean Peninsula]," *Guoji Shehui Yu Jingji 国际社会与经济 [International Society and Economy]* 9(1994); Chou Fa-Hua, "Zhongguo Zai Chaoxian Hewenti Shang De Zhuoyong Jiqi Juxian De Yuanying Fenxi 中国在朝鲜核问题上的作用及其受局限的原因分析 [Cause Analysis of China's Function and Its Limit on the North Korea's Nuclear Issue]," *Dongbeiyi Luntan 东北亚论坛 [Northeast Asia Forum]* 14, no. 2 (2005).

⁴⁵ "Qian Qichen Tan Guoji Xingshi He Woguo Duiwai Zhengce 钱其琛谈国际形势和我国对外政策 [Qian Qichen Speaks About the International Situation and Our Foreign Policy]," *People's Daily*, March 24 1993.

present a detailed explanation of how this buffer thinking of China toward North Korea drove China to protect North Korea through nuanced diplomatic and military means during this crisis.

China still regarded North Korea as its buffer state after a truce was established on the Korean Peninsula in 1953. Chinese officials seldom mentioned the geopolitical importance of North Korea to the security of China from the end of the Korean War to the end of the Cold War. The lack of reference in this period, however, was not because Chinese leaders had changed how they perceived the territorial value of North Korea to China, but mainly because they had not faced a situation where the survival of North Korea was endangered. The cooperation between China and the US in the 1970s also temporarily buried this potential geopolitical rivalry over the Korean Peninsula. Nevertheless, Chinese leaders still believed a US invasion of China would occur eventually at some point. This worry could be seen in Deng's reminder to the most senior Chinese officials in 1989 when he was about to retire:

Regarding the issue of war in the international sphere, the US and the Soviet Union will not wage a war against each other now...However, the developed countries' policy of bullying undeveloped countries remains. China has to secure its position otherwise others will bully us...We are not afraid of war...We will let the invaders be dragged into our territory.⁴⁶

The lessening tension between the US and the Soviet Union at the end of 1989 exacerbated Chinese leaders' concerns that the strategic rivalry between China and the US was about to resume. The vanishing of the primary force driving the US to accommodate China raised concerns for Chinese leaders that China would gradually become the natural target of the US, as was evidenced by the increased discussion of the "looming China threat" in Western scholarship.⁴⁷ Chinese President Jiang Zemin's statement at an enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission (CMC) in January 1993 characterized this concern:

Deng Xiaoping comrade sharply pointed out that "I hope the Cold War ends. But, I feel disappointed now. It is possible that one cold war has just ended but another two

⁴⁶ Deng Xiaoping, "Gaige Kaifang Zhengce Wending, Zhongguo Da You Xiwang 改革开放政策稳定, 中国大有希望 [A Stable Policy of Reform and Opening-Up, China Will Be Very Promising]," Vol. 3, pp. 319-20.

⁴⁷ Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Rise of China.;" Denny Roy, "Hegemon on the Horizon? China's Threat to East Asian Security," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994); David Shambaugh, "China's Security Policy in the Post-Cold War Era," *Survival* 34, no. 2 (1992); Ross H. Munro, "Awakening Dragon: The Real Danger in Asia Is from China," *Policy Review* 62, no. 10 (1992).

cold wars are beginning.” The current international situations proved that Deng’s foresight was totally correct.⁴⁸

It was precisely this background that caused Chinese leaders in the post-Cold War era to revisit the geopolitical importance of North Korea. The most obvious clue to this re-emergence of buffer thinking was the increased reference to the uniqueness of the Sino-North Korean relationship in Chinese officials’ statements regarding North Korea, re-emphasizing that the bilateral relationship was like “lips and teeth” or was built by the older generation of revolutionaries of both sides.⁴⁹ The message China intended to send to the outside world behind those statements was clear—the fate of North Korea and the security of China were so closely linked that China and North Korea must fight side by side against their mutual enemy. If North Korea was gone, then China would feel cold. Driven by this buffer thinking, China tried to maintain the existence of North Korea via nuanced diplomatic and military means after the first North Korean nuclear crisis broke out.

In terms of diplomacy, China helped North Korea avoid a situation in which the international community collectively sanctioned North Korea. From China’s perspective, putting any pressure on North Korea could trigger a regime collapse, so China had to be very firm on the position that no pressure should be put on North Korea. Therefore, China attempted to control the nuclear issue so that it would only be addressed in the IAEA and that the involvement of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) would be blocked. Evidently, this position of China was one important factor making the Board of the IAEA adopt a moderate wording in the 2636 Resolution issued on February 25 1993 to caution North Korea about its nuclear activities.⁵⁰ The language the resolution used was to request “access to two additional sites” rather than “accept the special inspections,” which North Korea had been strongly opposed to. The resolution even offered North Korea one more month to resume its cooperation in the resolution.

⁴⁸ Jiang Zemin, "Guoji Xingshi He Junshi Zhanlue Fangzhen 国际形势和军事战略方针 [The International Situation and the Guideline of Military Strategy]," in *Jiang Zemin Wenxuan 江泽民文选 [The Selected Works of Jiang Zemin]* (Beijing: People's Press, 2006), Vol. 1, p. 279.

⁴⁹ Zhou Bizhong and Ke Yuelin, "Jinricheng Zhuxi Huijian Lipeng Zongli 金日成主席会见李鹏总理 [The President Kim Il Sung Meets with the Premier Li Peng]," *People's Daily*, May 5 1991; He Chongyuan, "Yang Shangkun Huijian Chaoxian Keren 杨尚昆会见朝鲜客人 [Yang Shangkun Meets with Guests from North Korea]," *ibid.*, May 11; "Zhongchao Youyi, Lijiu Mijian 中朝友谊, 历久弥坚 [The Sino-North Korean Relations Remain Unshakable and Become Even Firmer as Time Goes by]," *ibid.*, April 18 1992.

⁵⁰ Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis*, p. 21.

The UNSC was another diplomatic arena in which China tried to protect North Korea. When North Korea announced its intention to withdraw from the NPT on March 12 1993, this issue was ultimately referred to the UNSC by the IAEA. When asked whether China would veto the UNSC's sanction, Chinese Premier Li Peng hinted that China might veto by saying "North Korea is a sovereign country. The international community should listen to their opinion. Bringing this issue to the UNSC will not necessarily help solve this issue smoothly."⁵¹ Then China tried to quell the publicity of this issue in the UNSC by nixing the idea of holding a formal meeting to issue a Presidential Statement on North Korea on April 8 1993.⁵² Similar to the IAEA case, this position of China was the reason why the US did not put sanctions on North Korea or use tougher language in the UN Security Resolution 825.⁵³

The US began to assess available military options against North Korea after the fall of 1993 including going to war against North Korea directly, a pre-emptive strike, and strengthening US forces in South Korea.⁵⁴ On November 15 1993, top US officials met in the White House Situation Room to discuss military options for the first time. After that, the US steadily built up its forces on the Korean Peninsula: Patriot missiles were deployed, the arrival of new AH-64 Apache attack helicopters was sped up, Team Spirit resumed, and a secret discussion of war plans between the US and Japan was initiated. US Secretary of Defense William Perry personally assessed the readiness of US forces in Asia in April 1994. After the briefing of the Cabinet Room on May 19, which was presented by Perry, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff John Shalikashvili, and the Commander of US Forces in Korea Gary Luck, the US was ready for a second Korean War.⁵⁵

To signal that a military strike on North Korea was unacceptable, China demonstrated its determination to fight for North Korea militarily. To China, the steady buildup of US military forces on the Korean Peninsula was an important signal of the increasing likelihood of a US invasion of North Korea. In response, China began its own military buildup in Northeast China

⁵¹ Andrew S. Erickson, "Lipeng Zongli Deng Da Jizhewen 李鹏总理等答记者问 [The Premier Li Peng and Others Answer Questions from Reporters]," *People's Daily*, April 1 1993.

⁵² Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis*, p. 34.

⁵³ Michael J. Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb: A Case Study in Nonproliferation*, p. 117.

⁵⁴ Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis*, pp. 101-7.

⁵⁵ William Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015), CH 14; Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis*, pp. 179-81; "Former Secretary Perry's Meeting with President Kim," (The National Security Archive). <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=5750520-National-Security-Archive-Doc-23-Cable-Amembassy> (accessed July 19 2018).

provinces at roughly the same time. On September 22 1993, the Chinese Minister of Defense Chi Haotian personally inspected the preparation of the Shenyang Military Region, which was mainly responsible for the military warfare on the Korean Peninsula. On the next day, the PLA demonstrated its ability to conduct night-time firing.⁵⁶ In October, Shenyang City issued compulsory conscription. In the following months, two new military subdistricts near the Sino-North Korean border were established in the Shenyang Military Region: the Jinxi Military Subdistrict and the Songyuan Military Subdistrict. According to the doctrine of the PLA, a military subdistrict serves the purpose of the provision of military reserve forces, mobilization, and safeguarding borders. At the peak of the crisis in June 1994, China promised to send approximately 85,000 troops from the Shenyang and Jinan Military Districts to North Korea if a war broke out on the peninsula.⁵⁷

Clearly, this military posture of China was driven by its buffer thinking toward North Korea. The best evidence of this line of reasoning is that when the US was preparing to resolve the nuclear crisis by military means in June 1994, China accordingly strengthened its affirmation that it would never abandon North Korea. On June 7, Jiang emphasized in public when he met a visiting North Korean military delegation that "China and North Korea are cordial neighbors, like lips and teeth. The two parties, the two countries, and the two armies have a traditional friendship."⁵⁸ After a few weeks, the commander of the Shenyang Military Region Wang Ke visited Pyongyang to show his support to North Korea. In a meeting with Kim Il Sung, Wang stated:

The PRC-DPRK friendship was built by Mao Zedong, Comrade Zhou Enlai, and President Kim. This friendship will be further consolidated and developed in the future. China will make unremitting efforts to achieve this goal.⁵⁹

Regarding China's protection of North Korea during this crisis, one prevalent point of view in the current scholarship is that such behavior was mainly driven by concerns about a potential flood of North Korean refugees into China if North Korea collapsed.⁶⁰ According to this

⁵⁶ "Chi Haotian Visits Night Training Equipment Show," *Beijing Central Television Program One Network*, September 22 1993.

⁵⁷ "PRC Promised DPRK 85,000 Troops in Case of War," *Seoul Choson Ilbo*, June 12 1994; "China and North Korea: Comrades Forever?," (Seoul/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2006), p. 5.

⁵⁸ Zhang Rongdian, "Jiang Zemin Huijian Chaoxian Junshi Daibiaotuan 江泽民会见朝鲜军事代表团 [Jiang Zemin Meets North Korean Military Delegation]," *People's Daily*, June 8 1994.

⁵⁹ "Kim Il-song Welcomes Military Delegation From China," *Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service* 1994.

⁶⁰ Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis*, p. 33; Michael J. Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb: A Case Study in Nonproliferation*, p. 114.

argument: A North Korean defeat by the US and its allies was foreseeable should a war occur. A fall of the Kim regime would create millions of North Korean refugees, who would cross the Sino-Korean border and flee into China's northeastern provinces. The economic sanctions imposed by the international community on North Korea would bring about the same result. Those refugees would load a series of social problems and economic burden to China, and hence destroy China's hard-earned opportunity for economic development after the Sino-Soviet rapprochement.

However, this argument is grounded on many questionable assumptions. The first assumption is that China was not able to conduct any preventive measures to control the influx of the refugees. There were, in fact, many options available to China to deal with the influx of refugees at that moment if China wanted to. The simplest way would be to quickly close the bridges joining China and North Korea and greatly tighten control over the Sino-North Korean border to prevent a refugee influx in the event of war. That was how the Chinese government dealt with nuclear crises in the 2000s. In 2006, China did build massive barbed wires fences and concrete walls along the Sino-North Korean border to prevent the influx of refugees in the event of another North Korean nuclear crisis.⁶¹ Building refugee camps inside North Korea was also an available option, which China did opt for in 2017.⁶²

Second, there is a second assumption that North Korean refugees would only move northward. It is true that passing through the Sino-North Korean border is the primary route for North Korean defectors escaping from North Korea. The reason why the defectors chose this path, nevertheless, was not because they preferred China to South Korea but because the 38th parallel was in a military standoff. A war on the peninsula would surely break this standoff. Rather than moving northward, it is possible that North Koreans would move southward or even simply wait for their Korean compatriots during wartime.

A third assumption is that there is no country or international organization that would help China alleviate this humanitarian crisis. The international community, including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the US have been providing food, aid, and medical assistance to people in North Korea for years. International organizations and non-governmental organizations such as the UN's World Food Programme and Food and Agriculture Organization have also been providing humanitarian aid to North Korea. China probably did not have much faith in

⁶¹ Ng Han Guan, "China Erects Fence Along N. Korea Border," *The Washington Post* 2006.

⁶² Reportedly, China built large refugee camps along the Sino-North Korean border in 2017. Jane Perlez, "Fearing the Worst, China Plans Refugee Camps on North Korean Border," *The New York Times*, December 11 2017.

cooperating with the US and its allies over the refugee issue. But, a question that arises here is why did China not even open this option for discussion?

This chapter does not argue that this widely accepted argument was not a contributing factor to China's protection of North Korea during the nuclear crisis of 1993–94; rather, it seeks to point out that the refugee argument alone is not sufficient to drive this protective behavior by China. There were many viable options that China could have adopted to lessen the impact of refugees if that was China's main concern. Without factoring in China's buffer thinking toward North Korea, this explanation is incomplete.

5.4 The Persistence of Buffer Thinking

The first North Korean nuclear crisis was officially ended through the Agreed Framework of October 1994, under which both the US and North Korea agreed to undertake concrete steps to solve the nuclear issue peacefully. North Korea agreed to freeze its three graphite-moderated reactors and related nuclear facilities in exchange for the US organizing an international consortium, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, to finance and supply two light-water reactors to replace the reactors and facilities. The US also agreed to provide North Korea with heavy oil at a rate of 500,000 metric tons annually to offset the energy loss of North Korea on account of this freeze. More importantly, the US promised to provide a formal security guarantee and normalize relations with North Korea while North Korea would remain in the NPT and agreed to strengthen the international nuclear non-proliferation regime.

However, neither the US nor North Korea faithfully implemented the Agreed Framework in the following years due to various domestic and international factors. The US did not complete the construction of the promised light-water reactors for North Korea nor supply heavy oil to North Korea at the rate stipulated in the framework. The formal security guarantee to North Korea did not materialize in the end either. North Korea, for its part, clandestinely embarked on its uranium nuclear program with assistance from Pakistan. To further its nuclear deterrent against the US and its allies, North Korea began developing long-range missiles capable of striking South Korea and Japan.

Both the United States and North Korea defended their own violations by accusing one another of violating the Agreed Framework first, and this action-reaction conflict between the two sides

gradually escalated into a crisis in October 2002. On October 16, the US announced that North Korean officials had already admitted to US Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly that North Korea was covertly conducting a highly enriched uranium (HEU) program.⁶³ This date is usually regarded by scholars as the beginning of the Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis.

This second nuclear crisis was slowly deescalated by China's proactive intervention from the spring of 2003, which contributed to the formalization of a multilateral platform called the Six-Party Talks to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue in August 2003. In hindsight, the talks did not address the root of the nuclear crisis and was ultimately ineffective, but it did help North Korea to avoid a coming war with the US in 2003. Regarding China's rationale of proactive intervention in this crisis, there are three prevalent explanations in the existing literature: China was being a responsible great power, China was avoiding a nuclear domino effect, and China was maintaining a buffer against the US.⁶⁴

The first explanation is closely associated with China's changing perspective of international affairs. Scholars arguing along this line believed that China's perspective of international affairs had changed substantively due to its growing domestic economy and global influence. As a great power sharing a border with North Korea and constituting its main trading partner, China actively or passively acknowledged the necessity of being a responsible stakeholder in preventing North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons. Then Vice Foreign Minister Wang

⁶³ Regarding the exchange between Kelly and North Korean First Vice Minister Kang Sok Ju on October 4 2003 at Pyongyang please see: Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), pp. 34-40.

⁶⁴ Regarding China's rationale behind the talk, the academic discussion is very rich. Sometimes, one scholar proposed more than one explanations. Please see: Zhu Feng, "Liufang Huitan Hou De Chaohe Weiji: Wenti Yu Qianjing 六方会谈后的朝核危机: 问题与前景 [The North Korean Nuclear Crisis after the Six-Party Talks: Problems and Prospects]," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi 现代国际关系 [Contemporary International Relations]* 9(2003): pp. 9-10; Chou Fa-Hua, "Zhongguo Zai Chaoxian Hewenti Shang De Zhuoyong Jiqi Juxian De Yuanying Fenxi 中国在朝鲜核问题上的作用及其受局限的原因分析 [Cause Analysis of China's Function and Its Limit on the North Korea's Nuclear Issue]," p. 23; Lin Limin, "Chaohe Weiji Guanli Yu Zhongguo De Waijiao Jueze 朝核危机管理与中国的外交抉择 [The Management of North Korean Nuclear Crisis and China's Diplomacy Choice]," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi 现代国际关系 [Contemporary International Relations]* 8(2006): p. 34; Bi Yingda, "Zhongguo Dui Liufang Huitan De Zhanlue Sikao Ji Yanbian 中国对六方会谈的战略思考及演变 [China's Strategic Thinking and Policy Evolution towards Six-party Talks]," *Dangdai Hanguo 当代韩国 [Contemporary Korea]* 2(2013): p. 16; Hochul Lee, "China in the North Korean Nuclear Crises: Interest and Identity in Foreign Behaviour.;" Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise*, p. 123-7; Liu Jinzhi, "Zhongguo Dui Chaoxian Bandao Guojia De Zhengce 中国对朝鲜半岛国家的政策 [China's National Policy toward the Korean Peninsula]," *Shijie Jingji Yu Zhengzhi Luntan 世界经济与政治论坛 [Forum of World Economics & Politics]* (2007): p. 83; Liu Changmin, *Lun Chaoxian Hewenti Jiejue Zhong De Guoji Woxuan Yu Tiaoting 论朝鲜核问题解决中的国际斡旋与调停 [On the International Mediation and Reconciliation in the North Korean Nuclear Issue]*, 1 ed. (Beijing: China University of Political Science and Law, 2007), CH 4; Samuel S. Kim, "China's Conflict-Management Approach to the Nuclear Standoff on the Korean Peninsula," *Asian Perspective* 30, no. 1 (2006): pp. 12-9.

Yi's article "Building Friendship and Partnership with Neighboring Countries" of April 2003 is evidence of this evolving conceptual change among the Chinese leadership.⁶⁵

The main deficiency of this explanation is its inability to provide a satisfactory answer to why China only took a more active role in the spring of 2003. The Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis can be traced back to the breach of commitments by both the US and North Korea. However, from 1994 to 2003, the Chinese government did not issue any policy papers or statements indicating a change in how it viewed the issue. The most relevant one is the promotion of "new security concept," which was first advocated by Jiang in 1997. But this concept only vaguely called upon other countries to join China in abandoning a Cold-War mentality. So if China wanted to be a responsible stakeholder, why did it not intervene earlier?

The second explanation builds on China's risk assessment of the potential negative consequences of a nuclear-armed North Korea. China had been the only country with nuclear weapons in Northeast Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This nuclear monopoly status in the region significantly contributed to China's sense of security and is one important reason why China supports the non-nuclear proliferation regime. Some scholars have contended that a nuclear-armed North Korea was unlikely to pose a military threat to China in the short term, but might trigger a nuclear arms-race in the region in the longer term, in which Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan might start to consider acquiring their own nuclear weapons. If that occurred, the secure environment China had been enjoying would be destroyed. Charles Pritchard, a top aide of the George W. Bush government during the negotiation with North Korea, explained this as follows: "The longer-term consequences of failure to resolve the nuclear issue could conceivably move the issue to a higher position on Beijing's list of vital national interests."⁶⁶

Similarly, the timing of China's involvement is a problem that needs to be considered in this explanation. Although Jiang claimed that China was "completely in the dark" regarding the information of North Korea's HEU program in a press conference with Bush, given the close relationship between China and North Korea maintained via party and military linkages, this claim should be taken with a grain of salt.⁶⁷ As mentioned in the last section, China's assistance

⁶⁵ Wang Yi, "Yu Lin Wei Shan Yu Lin Wei Ban 与邻为善 以邻为伴 [Building Friendship and Partnership with Neighboring Countries]," *Qiushi 求是 [Seeking Truth]* 4(2003).

⁶⁶ Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb*, p.90.

⁶⁷ Jiang Zemin claimed that he was not aware of North Korean's nuclear weapons program on a meeting with Bush in October 2002. Please see: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=18> (accessed July 19 2018).

to North Korean nuclear know-how began in the 1970s.⁶⁸ China agreed to train North Korean nuclear scientists and technicians after Kim Il Sung's visit to China in 1975. In 1977, China's Seventh Ministry of Machine Building, which was responsible for China's ballistic missile development, hosted the North Koreans' visit to the Lop Nur nuclear test site. One report of the UNSC in 2017 also confirmed that Chinese firms provided a major portion of North Korean missiles.⁶⁹ Thus, if the potential nuclear domino effect in Northeast Asia was the key factor that propelled China to deal with this nuclear crisis proactively, China could have intervened in North Korea's nuclear weapons program at any given moment. Why wait until the spring of 2003?

Since the timing of China's intervention is a key flaw of the two explanations above, a sound explanation should address this issue well. Due to the considerable increase in the possibility of a US-North Korea military showdown in early 2003, the maintenance of a North Korean buffer against the US on the Korean Peninsula holds more explanatory power than the other two explanations. Nevertheless, most works arguing along this line have glossed over how this factor affected China's behavior during this crisis.⁷⁰ The rest of the section will clarify this causation in detail.

Chinese leaders did not alter how they view North Korea geopolitically after the conclusion of the Agreed Framework. After the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis, both China and North Korea underwent a leadership consolidation or transition period, during which the Chinese leadership continued the perspective that North Korea is a buffer of China on the Korean Peninsula. The clearest evidence of this continuity was that top Chinese leaders such as Jiang and Li Ruihuan still continued using the term "lips and teeth" to denote the Sino-North Korean

⁶⁸ Michael J. Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb: A Case Study in Nonproliferation*, pp. 28-9.

⁶⁹ Regarding this report of the UN, please see:

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/150&referer=https://www.cnbc.com/2017/04/18/w-hy-north-koreas-missile-debris-isnt-just-junk-to-the-west.html&Lang=C (accessed July 19 2018).

⁷⁰ Liu Changmin, *Lun Chaoxian Hewenti Jiejue Zhong De Guoji Woxuan Yu Tiaoting 论朝鲜核问题解决中的国际斡旋与调停 [On the International Mediation and Reconciliation in the North Korean Nuclear Issue]*, p. 234; David Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long Term," *the Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2003): pp. 45-7; Liu Xuelian and Huo Xuhui, "Zhongguo Zai Chaoxian Bandao De Diyuan Anquan Zhanlue Fenxi 中国在朝鲜半岛的地缘安全战略分析 [An Analysis of China's Geopolitical Security Strategy in the Korean Peninsula]," *Northeast Asia Forum 东北亚论坛* 16, no. 5 (2007): p. 50; Chou Fa-Hua, "Zhongguo Zai Chaoxian Hewenti Shang De Zhuoyong Jiqi Juxian De Yuanying Fenxi 中国在朝鲜核问题上的作用及其受局限的原因分析 [Cause Analysis of China's Function and Its Limit on the North Korea's Nuclear Issue]," p. 23; Lin Limin, "Chaohe Weiji Guanli Yu Zhongguo De Waijiao Jueze 朝核危机管理与中国的外交抉择 [The Management of North Korean Nuclear Crisis and China's Diplomacy Choice]," p. 32; Andrew Scobell, "China and North Korea: From Comrades-In-Arms to Allies at Arm's Length."

relationship.⁷¹ Jiang and Kim Jong Il did not visit each other until 2001, but the high-level visits between the two sides were as frequent as in the past.⁷² The lack of a visit by Jiang to North Korea in this period could be interpreted in terms of China's diplomatic principle of non-intervention in the other's domestic affairs—China was allowing Kim Jong Il to consolidate his power at home after the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994.

Further evidence that China still viewed North Korea as its buffer against the US can be seen in how China responded to the historical visit between the US and North Korea in 2000. Normally, Chinese officials do not use the term “lips and teeth” on every occasion they engage with North Korea because the term is superlative descriptor of the Sino-North Korean relationship. When China applies such a term, the context is often one in which North Korea is about to deviate actively or passively from China's preferred trajectory. By emphasizing “if the lips are gone the teeth will feel cold,” China sends a message to the international audience that the existence of North Korea in China's preferred form is something China will not compromise on. The historical meeting between Kim Jong Il and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is one example of this. Only one day before Albright and Kim Jong Il were set to hold their historic meeting, China sent a huge senior military delegation to North Korea for a high-profile celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Korean War. The meeting with Albright paled in comparison. The message of this move was that China would not let the US dominate North Korea. Chi, the Vice Chairman of the CMC, stated in Pyongyang:

China and North Korea are connected by mountains and rivers, like lips and teeth. Peoples and armies in both countries have built a profound relationship by opposing the invasion of powerful countries and struggling to embark on the socialism revolution and construction together.⁷³

Accordingly, this continuity of China's buffer perspective on North Korea is the key to understanding China's behavior during the Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis. The incident

⁷¹ Li Shengnan, "Qingzhu Chaoxian Laodongdang Chengli 50 Zhounian 庆祝朝鲜劳动党成立 50 周年 [To Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Founding of the Workers' Party of Korea]," *People's Daily*, October 7 1995; Gao Xinghua, "Li Ruihuan Jian Chaoxian Keren 李瑞环见朝鲜客人 [Li Ruihuan Meets Guests from North Korea]," *ibid.*, October 24 1996.

⁷² The Center for Strategic and International Studies compiled a dataset about high-level exchanges between Chinese and North Korean officials since 1953. Please see: <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/china-dprk-high-level-visits-since-1953/> (accessed July 19 2018).

⁷³ "Zhongguo Gaoji Junshi Daibiao Dichao: Chi Haotian Yu Jin Yi Zhe Juxing Huitan 中国高级军事代表团抵朝: 迟浩田与金一哲举行会谈 [A Senior Chinese Military Delegation Arrived at North Korea: Chi Haotian Holds Talks with Kim Kim Il Chol]," *People's Daily*, October 23 2000.

of terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 did not make China think of the danger of terrorism at large or the specific danger of the spread of nuclear weapons, but the potential danger of the US using the attacks as an excuse to expand its global hegemony. Jiang stated this worry at a CCP internal conference two months after the attacks:

We should see clearly that the US will never give up its global strategy. The US will further its global strategy under the name of anti-terrorism, thereby to achieve goals which it wanted to achieve but found hard to achieve previously; to strike objects which it wanted to strike but could not strike previously; to control nations which it wanted to control but could not control previously and; to wade in areas where it wanted to wade in but found hard to wade in previously.⁷⁴

Setting the survival of North Korea as a top priority, China's attitude toward this issue had been passive at the very beginning, despite US leaders having tried to motivate or even push Chinese leaders to weigh in multiple times. In order to avoid a collapse of North Korea, China did not exercise any substantive leverage to pressure North Korea, but only repeated the same diplomatic rhetoric: that China supports a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula and adheres to peace and stability on the peninsula. This posture of China did not change fundamentally even after North Korean officials admitted their clandestine HER program to Kelly in October, as it still celebrated its relations with North Korea as "lips and teeth" a week later.⁷⁵

Though Chinese officials did not explicitly state their geopolitical anxiety that, if North Korea was gone, the US would use the Korean Peninsula to invade China in public this time, scholars often agree the potential negative impact on China's security caused by the US military presence along the Sino-North Korean border at the time was the main driving force pushing China to actively intervene in this crisis later.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Jiang Zemin, "Yi Wending, Anquan, Linghuo, Duoyuande Silu Chohua Gongzuo 以穩定, 安全, 靈活, 多元的思路籌劃工作 [Plan Works by Stable, Secure, Flexible, and Diversified Thinking]," in *Jiang Zemin Wenxuan 江澤民文選 [The Selected Works of Jiang Zemin]* (Beijing: People's Press, 2006), p. 367.

⁷⁵ "Qingzhu Jin Zhengri Bei Tuiju Wei Chaodang Zongshuji Wu Zhounian Ji Jiandang Wushiqi Zhounian 慶祝金正日被推舉為朝黨總書記五周年暨建黨五十七周年 [To Celebrate the 5th Anniversary of Kim Jong Il Being Promoted as the General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and the 57th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Party]," *People's Daily*, October 10 2002.

⁷⁶ Lin Limin, "Chaohe Weiji Guanli Yu Zhongguo De Waijiao Jueze 朝核危機管理與中國的外交抉擇 [The Management of North Korean Nuclear Crisis and China's Diplomacy Choice]," p. 33; Mike Chinoy, *Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), p. 165. The first serious debate over the strategic value of North Korea to China among Chinese scholars only occurred after North Korea tested its nuclear weapons in 2006. Regarding the first of China's North Korean policy debates, please see: Xu Jin, "Chaoxian Hewenti: Zhongguo Ying Qiangli Jieru Haishi Zhongli Wuxuan 朝鮮核問題: 中國應強力介

Evidently, the proactive intervention of China did appear only after the Chinese leaders perceived the survival of North Korea as being truly endangered in the spring of 2003. Although there is not yet any available evidence indicating when Chinese leaders decided to intervene proactively, the timings of two rounds of China's intervention did overlap with the two tipping points of the crisis, when a military showdown between North Korea and the US was seemingly imminent. More importantly, the two rounds of intervention both centered around one core objective—preserving North Korea's existence.

The first tipping point of the crisis was March 2003. North Korea withdrew from the NPT and expelled IAEA inspectors in January. In February, North Korea restarted the reactor that had been frozen under the Agreed Framework. In doing so, it could move the 8,000 nuclear fuel rods sealed at Yongbyon into the plutonium reprocessing plant for the production of nuclear weapons-grade plutonium. In response, the US began to reinforce its military deployment around the Korean Peninsula. More military personnel were dispatched to South Korea, 12 B-1 and 12 B-52 long-range bombers were put on alert for rapid deployment to Guam, more reconnaissance aircraft were to be sent, and the USS Carl Vinson was on standby to back up the USS Kitty Hawk in Japan. On March 2, North Korea's fighter jets intercepted a US reconnaissance plane over the Sea of Japan.

Driven by the geopolitical anxiety that the North Korean buffer might disappear if a war occurred, China started its first round the intervention. On the one hand, China showed its commitment to defending North Korea's existence by conducting a massive seven-day military drill along the Sino-North Korea border.⁷⁷ The Shengyang Military Region practiced offense, defense, and rapid deployment exercises in January 2003. The message to the US was clear—China would not sit idly by if the US invaded North Korea. On the other hand, China also exercised its leverage on North Korea to bring it back to the negotiation table. In early March, China symbolically cut off its oil supply to North Korea for three days and then dispatched Vice Premier Qian Qichen to visit North Korea to convince Kim to solve this issue by dialogue. The result of this round of the intervention was a trilateral talk between China, North Korea, and the US in Beijing in April.

入还是中立斡旋 [China's Role in the Nuclear Issue of the Korean Peninsula: Mediator or Contender?], "Guoji Jinji Pinglun 国际经济评论 [International Economic Review] 6(2011): p. 147; "Shades of Red: China's Debate over North Korea," (International Crisis Group, 2009), p. 5.

⁷⁷ Oliver August, "China and US Flex Muscles," *The Times*, January 24 2003.

The failure of the trilateral talk in April heightened the US' determination to solve this issue by military means. In May 2003, US President Bush landed on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln to give a speech announcing the major combat operations in the Iraq War were over, implying North Korea was the next target on the US strike list. Afterward, US forces in South Korea subsequently moved southward, pre-emptively avoiding military retaliation from North Korea. Richard Perle, a chief adviser to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, advocated "President George W. Bush should consider bombing North Korea's nuclear production facilities if diplomatic efforts fail to convince Pyongyang to disarm."⁷⁸

Concern about losing its buffer, China initiated a second round of intervention. China dispatched the previous Director of the International Department Dai Bingguo, who believed the relationship between China and North Korea is like lips and teeth,⁷⁹ to Russia, North Korea, and the US to organize another multilateral talk to avoid impending US military action toward North Korea. Dai told Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and Donald Rumsfeld successively that China opposed war in any circumstances.⁸⁰ Most importantly, the official position of China on this issue added one more critical term later—a security guarantee to North Korea, as announced by Chinese President Hu Jintao in the joint statement between Russia and China.⁸¹ This term marks the beginning of China's position in the Six-Party Talks.

5.5 Conclusion

The CCP first viewed the Korean Peninsula from a minority nationality perspective. From this viewpoint, the peninsula was a piece of land waiting to be liberated by Korean from the Japanese colonial rule. Like the case of Taiwan, the value of Korea to the CCP leaders was associated mostly with the CCP's own fights against the Japanese and the KMT in the early period after the CCP was formed. It was the Korean War that fundamentally changed the way China perceived the peninsula, from non-geopolitical to having geopolitical value. North Korea

⁷⁸ Eric Rosenberg, "U.S. Official Backs Bombing N. Korea," *Times*, June 12 2003.

⁷⁹ Please see footnote 74.

⁸⁰ Dai Bingguo, *Zhanlue Duihua: Dai Bingguo Huiyilu 战略对话: 戴秉国回忆录 [Strategic Dialogue: Dai Bingguo's Memoir]* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2016), pp. 209-17.

⁸¹ "Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Yu Erluosi Lianbang Lianhe Shengming 中华人民共和国与尔罗斯联邦联合声明 The Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation," *People's Daily*, May 29 2003.

became a critical buffer state keeping the US away from the Sino-North Korean border. A crucial factor behind the decision of Chinese leaders to defend North Korea was the belief that it was necessary to “maintaining the existence of North Korea now, otherwise the US may invade China via North Korea later.” The path by which the Japanese Empire invaded China via the peninsula further strengthened the necessity of maintaining North Korea as a buffer. This buffer thinking toward North Korea reappeared in the minds of Chinese leaders after the end of Cold War, and resulted in China’s military and diplomatic protection of North Korea during the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis. Eight years later, when China faced another nuclear crisis wherein North Korea’s survival was endangered again, this geopolitical mentality was still the most persuasive factor driving China’s behavior of intervening in the conflict between the US and North Korea.

CH 6 The Case of Mongolia

This chapter shifts the focus of the discussion from the Sino-US buffer system to the Sino-Soviet buffer system, which centers on the case of Mongolia. The purpose of this chapter is to bridge the causation between China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia and China's Mongolia policies. It argues that China's Mongolia policy since the 1960s can be viewed as a decades-long process in which China attempts to neutralize Mongolia in political, military, and legal domains. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s very first policy toward Mongolia was to support the independence of the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) on the basis of the principle of national self-determination. This policy served two critical political needs of the CCP in the 1920s to 1950s—reconciling Chinese nationalism and the geopolitical interests of Soviet Union and weakening the Republic of China (ROC)'s support base. China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia was formed in the mid-1964 in the context of the Sino-Soviet rivalry. This thinking, combined with China's failure to politically neutralize Mongolia, contributed to the initiation of the Third Front Construction (TFC, *sanxian jianshe* 三线建设). Driven by the same geopolitical rationale, Deng's China actively sought to neutralize Mongolia militarily during the Sino-Soviet rapprochement in the 1980s. The thinking also contributed to the conclusion of the Sino-Mongolian Friendship and Cooperation Relationship Treaty with Mongolia of 1994.

The first section of this chapter will detail the early view of the CCP on the territory controlled by the MPR. The second section portrays the formation of a Sino-Soviet rivalry relationship, and the process in which China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia evolved from this relationship. The three subsequent sections will examine the explanatory power of this thinking through the cases of the TFC in the 1960s, Soviet military withdrawal from Mongolia in the 1980s, and the demise of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

6.1 The CCP's Early View of Mongolia: Reluctant Minority Nationality

In the Qing Dynasty, Mongolia could be separated into five subregions: Northern Mongolia (which was also called Outer Mongolia), Southern Mongolia (which was also called Inner Mongolia), Qinghai Mongolia, Ningxia Mongolia, and Xinjiang Mongolia. The Qing Empire dominated the latter four regions effectively, but its control over Outer Mongolia was relatively weak. When the empire suffered from external pressure and internal turmoil in the mid-19th century, some Mongolians in Outer Mongolia began to seek to break away from Qing control. They gained the most support from the Russian Empire, which attempted to build a series of buffer states along China's northern frontier for its strategic and commercial interests in Inner Asia.¹ However, Russia also suffered its own domestic revolution at the beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, the political status of Outer Mongolia vacillated between Chinese control, autonomy, and independence from the 1910s to the 1920s. Eventually, the MPR was established by the strong support from the Soviet Union in 1924.²

The Mongolian independence issue ranked highly as a priority in CCP policy, but the CCP's initial perception of Mongolia's value and its first policy toward Mongolia was strongly influenced, if not controlled, by the Soviet Union. To understand why this was the case, it is necessary to understand the "patron and client" relationship between the Soviet Union and the CCP.

The CCP's asymmetrical reliance on the Soviet Union was the basis upon which the Soviet Union could exercise its control over the CCP. To foment a communist revolution in China, the Communist International (Comintern), which the Soviet Union designed as a tool to realize a global anti-imperialism revolution, started to reach out to prominent Chinese communist leaders such as Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao in the early 20th century. With the funding from and the guidance of the Comintern, the CCP was officially established in 1921 as a branch of the Comintern in China. Naturally, the survival of this nascent communist party in China

¹ Li Yu-shu, "Cong Menggong Liushi Nian Lai Yanbian Dui Waimeng Xiankung De Tantaoyuan 從蒙共六十年來演變對外蒙現況的探討 [Probe of Changes in Mongolian Communism in Outer Mongolian Current Situation since 1971]," *Mengzang Zhuanti Yanjiu Congshu 蒙藏專題研究叢書 [Research Series on Special Topics]* 9(1985): p. 21; Sergey Radchenko, "Choibalsan's Great Mongolia Dream," *Inner Asia* 11, no. 2 (2009): p. 234.

² The MPR refers to Mongolia hereafter in this chapter.

depended on all kinds of support from the Comintern encompassing funding, equipment, ideological and theoretical guidance, and international political recognition.

An extensive pro-Soviet Union leadership inside the CCP was the main conduit for the Soviet Union to exercise its influence and control over the CCP. Before the rise of Mao Zedong, top CCP leaders such as Chen, Ju Qibai, Li Lisan, Zhou Enlai, Wang Ming, and Bo Gu were all anointed by the Comintern.³ Influential CCP members such as Wang, Zhu De, Nie Rongzhen, Deng Xiaoping, and Yang Shangkun were also recruited and trained in Moscow. The pro-Soviet Union leadership was usually responsible for reconciling and even quelling other CCP members' disagreements and resistance to Comintern directives.⁴

This layer of the relationship between the CCP and the Soviet Union serves as a starting point to understanding how the CCP initially perceived the value of Mongolia. After separating Mongolia from China, the Soviet Union made its geopolitical interests in Mongolia clear in the treaty recognizing the MPR. It stipulated that "The MPR will not allow activities aiming at compromising the security interests of the Soviet Union such as recruiting or shipping enemy's weaponry to occur on its territory."⁵ For most Chinese at that time, the Soviet Union's support of MPR independence and subsequent diplomatic recognition, not only undermined China's sovereignty but also violated the Treaty of Kyakhta of 1915. Accordingly, the Republic of China (ROC) government in Beijing criticized the Soviet Union's *de facto* control over Mongolia as a demonstration of the Soviet Union's territorial ambitions on China. However, the CCP did not view this issue this way. Siding with the Soviet Union, the CCP put pressure on the ROC government to recognize Mongolia. Li Dazhou argued against the ROC Foreign Minister Gu Weijun in 1922 that Mongolians would have a better life if they were under the rule of the Soviet Union.⁶ Zhang Guotao, a vital member of the CCP Politburo, also publicly defended the Soviet Union:

³ Michael H. Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 87.

⁴ Historians of the CCP all pointed out that the CCP leadership sometimes had doubt or even complaints about the line and order the Comintern demanded of the CCP, especially on the issue of joining the Kuomintang under the First United Front. Please see: Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution: 1919-1927* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), CH 4; Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), CH 9; Tony Saich, ed. *The Rise to Power of The Chinese Communist Party: Documents and Analysis* (Armonk, New York & London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), pp. xli-xlii.

⁵ "Laonong Zhengfu Yu Menggu Dinyue Shi 劳农政府与蒙古定约事 [On the Treaty between the Soviet Union Government and Mongolia]," (Institute of Modern History Online Database, Academia Sinica).

⁶ Liu Xiaoyuan, *Reins of Liberation: An Entangled History of Mongolia Independence, Chinese Territoriality, and Great Power Hegemony, 1911-1950* (Washington, D.C.; Stanford, Calif.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 81.

It [Mongolia] has only three options: first, being a colony of Japan and the Russian White Army; second, being a slaughterhouse of the Chinese warlords; third, allowing Mongolians to be independent...To achieve a real independence, it is necessary for Mongolia to build the closest relationship with the new Russia...There is only one decision that Chinese should make immediately: Should we let Mongolia become a colony of Japan, the Russian White Army, or Chinese warlords? Or praise and envy the newly independent MPR, admire new Russia's righteous behavior, and then build a close relationship with Mongolians in practice.⁷

Clearly, minority nationality was the CCP's first view of Mongolia. For the CCP, the correct way to solve the Mongolian independence issue was to follow Vladimir Lenin's principle of national self-determination and federation system. Since Mongolians were very distinct from Han Chinese nationally and economically, they deserved the right of national self-determination. The CCP also upheld a position that Mongolia should be able to freely choose whether it wanted to be a part of the future Chinese Federal Republic or not. Even if Mongolia agreed to associate with China in the future, it would be still outside of China in an administrative sense. Accordingly, the policy of supporting Mongolian independence was formulated in 1922.⁸ The CCP further wrote this position into the draft of the CCP Constitution in 1923 and the 1931 Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic.

In fact, the policy of supporting Mongolian independence did not so much reflect the CCP's own revolutionary ideology as it did the Soviet Union's control over the CCP. While the CCP expended much effort to defend its Mongolia policy, it kept an ironic silence on the fact that the Soviet Union had *de facto* control over Mongolia, which directly contradicted the spirit of national self-determination. The CCP also refrained from mentioning the Russian Empire in the manifesto of 1922.⁹ Certainly, it is hard to prove that the Comintern was behind this policy,

⁷ Sheng Renxue, *Zhang Guotao Yanlun Yu Nianpu* 张国焘言论与年谱 [*Speeches and the Chronological Record of Zhang Guotao*] (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 1985), pp. 129-30.

⁸ "Guanyu Guoji Diguozhuyi Yu Zhongguo He Zhongguo Gongchandang De Jueyian 关于国际帝国主义与中国和中国共产党的决议案 [About the Resolution on International Imperialism and China and the CCP]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1921-25* 中共中央文件选集: 1921-25 [*The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1921-25*], ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), pp. 6-63; "Zhongguo Gongchandang Dierci Quanguo Dahui Xuanyan 中国共产党第二次全国大会宣言 [The Manifesto of the Second National Congress of the CCP]," p. 111.

⁹ This manifesto used a lot of space to criticize the territorial ambition and economic exploitation of imperialist countries such as Japan, the US, and Britain in China since 1839, but it intentionally kept silence on the role of the Russian Empire, which gained more territories from China than any country did in this history. Sarah Paine precisely calculated the size of the territory the Russian Empire gained from China in this period. Excluding Outer Mongolia, the territory Russia took from China equals five times the area of Japan and more than seven times that of Great Britain. Including Outer Mongolia, it exceeds that of India and one-third the size of the US. Please see:

but a policy trend of the CCP became increasingly clear in the following years—whenever there was a conflict between Chinese nationalism and the Soviet Union’s geopolitical interests, the CCP prioritized the latter over the former. In other words, the national self-determination principle was actually a tool that the CCP used to reconcile this conflict and, most importantly, to weaken the support base of the ROC government.

This policy trend continued following the rise of Mao in the CCP after 1935. Historians usually agree that Mao and Moscow held very different visions of how to realize the communist revolution in China in many respects.¹⁰ Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the policy trend of prioritizing the Soviet Union’s geopolitical interests did not change fundamentally in Mao’s era. For example, when Edgar Snow asked about the nature of the relationship between Mongolia and the Soviet Union, Mao immediately corrected him by saying that “The relationship between Outer Mongolia and the Soviet Union, now and in the past, has always been based on the principle of complete equality.”¹¹ Mao’s 1939 article on “The Chinese Revolution and the CCP” also evidenced this.¹²

During the Anti-Japanese War (1937–45), the CCP displayed a puzzling policy shift vis-à-vis Mongolia, by which it abandoned its support of Mongolian independence. The CCP’s new policy on Mongolia appeared in Mao’s “On the New Stage” report at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee in 1938.¹³ In this report, the CCP did not advocate the idea of “respecting the will of Mongolians” any longer, and the idea of the Chinese Federal Republic was replaced by “uniting China together with Han Chinese and other minority nationalities.”

S. C. M. Paine, *Imperial Rivals: China, Russia, and Their Disputed Frontier* (Armonk, New York; London, England: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1996), p. 352.

¹⁰ Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, pp. 23-31; Michael H. Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy*, pp. 134-41; Shen Zhihua, "Wunai De Xuanze: Zhongsu Tongmeng Jianli De Quzhe Licheng (1944-1950) 无奈的选择: 中苏同盟建立的曲折历程 (1944—1950) [The Least Bad Choice: The Tortuous Course of Establishing the Sino-Soviet Alliance (1944-1950)]," *Jindaish Yanjiu 近代史研究 [Modern Chinese History Studies]* 6(2010).

¹¹ Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, pp. 443-4.

¹² In many ways, this article was Mao’s version of the manifesto of 1922 mentioned previously, in which he attempted to explain the Chinese revolution in his own terms. While Mao harshly criticized the way in which the US, Britain, France, and Japan imposed colonial rule on China since the Opium War, the role of the Soviet Union, which inherited a vast privilege from the Russian Empire, was again dismissed in this seventeen-thousand-word article. Please see: Mao Zedong, "Zhongguo Geming Yu Zhongguo Gongchandang 中国革命与中国共产党 [The Chinese Revolution and the CCP]," in *Maozedong Xuanji 毛泽东选集 [The Selected Works of Mao Zedong]* (Beijing: People's Publishing House: 1991), Vol. 2, pp. 621-56.

¹³ "Lun Xin Jieduan 论新阶段 [On the New Stage]," p. 619.

In 1940, the CCP further asserted that Mongolians in Inner Mongolia should build a united country with Han Chinese under the Kuomintang (KMT)'s the Three People's Principle.¹⁴

The Soviet Union's pressure on the CCP, again, is the key to understanding this policy shift. To make China strong enough to trap and stop Japanese military ventures, the Soviet Union asked the CCP to ally with the KMT under Chiang Kai-shek's command in 1935. This order encountered widespread opposition inside the CCP from both pro-Soviet Union members and non-pro-Soviet Union members, but the CCP ultimately obeyed and fought with the KMT under the Second United Front.¹⁵ For this reason, the CCP had to adjust its Mongolia policy in the KMT's favor. Not surprisingly, the CCP immediately returned to its previous position after the Japanese surrendered, when the power struggle against the KMT in the second phase of the Chinese Civil War (1945–49) required the CCP to demonstrate its policy differences from the KMT.¹⁶

It should be emphasized here that the genuine attitude of the CCP toward Mongolian independence might have been less clear than it was on the surface. Much evidence suggests that the CCP may have harbored ambiguous sentiments toward Mongolia. For example, Alan Wachman discovered that maps of China printed on many stamps issued by the CCP to CCP-controlled areas before 1949 paradoxically showed that China's territory still encompassed Mongolia.¹⁷ Those maps might not reflect the CCP's real attitude toward Mongolia, but maps do have a function of conveying an idea of who belongs to a certain community and what

¹⁴ "Guanyu Kangzhanzhong Mengguminzu Wenti Tigang 关于抗战中蒙古民族问题提纲 [An Outline of the Issue of Mongolians in the Anti-Japanese War]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1939-40 中共中央文件选集: 1939-40 [Selection of Documents of the CCP's Central Committee: 1939-40]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), pp. 428-43.

¹⁵ John W. Garver, "The Origins of the Second United Front: The Comintern and the Chinese Communist Party," *The China Quarterly* 113(1988): pp. 131-41; Michael H. Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy*; Wang Shulin, "Gongchanguoji, Sidalin Yu Zhonggong Liujie Liuzhong Quanhui: Yi Kangri Minzu Tongyi Zhanxian Wei Zhongxin De Kaocha 共产国际, 斯大林与中共六届六中全会: 以抗日民族统一战线为中心的考察 [The Communist International, Stalin and the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the CPC: The Study Centering on the Anti-Japanese National United Front]," *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu 中共党史研究 [CPC History Studies]* 10(2015); Zhang Wanjie, "Jimitifu Yu Zhonggong Kangri Minzu Tongyi Zhanxian De Xingcheng: Weirao Zhonggong Dui Jiang Jieshi Fangzhen Sanci Zhuanbian De Kaocha 季米特洛夫与中共抗日民族统一战线政策的形成: 围绕中共对蒋介石方针三次转变的考察 [Georgi Dimitrov and the Formation of the CPC's Policy of Anti-Japanese National United Front: Based on the Investigation of the Three Changes of the CPC's Stand towards Chiang Kai-shek]," *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu 中共党史研究 [CPC History Studies]* 3(2012).

¹⁶ "Lun Lianhe Zhengfu 论联合政府 [On Coalition Government]," p. 1084.

¹⁷ Alan M. Wachman, "Stamped Out!: Carto-philatelic Evidence of the PRC's Constructed Notion of China's Territorial Integrity," *East Asia* 22, no. 2 (2005).

territory is included in the community. In this sense, the CCP might not have fully embraced the policy of supporting Mongolian independence on a psychological level.

The lack of a consistent term to refer to the MPR was another supporting evidence of the equivocal sentiments of the CCP, which implies the CCP had not taken the reality of an independent Mongolia seriously at the time. In 1932, the CCP Central Committee used a politically correct term, “the MPR,” in one internal document.¹⁸ However, in another internal document the following year, the CCP used “the Outer Mongolia People’s Republic” instead.¹⁹ In 1934, this term changed into “the Outer Mongolia Republic.”²⁰ In 1941, the CCP publicly used “Outer Mongolia,” a term implying that the MPR was still a part of China.²¹

Despite the CCP’s reluctance, reconciling Chinese nationalism and the Soviet Union’s geopolitical interests, and weakening the ROC through the principle of self-determination based on a minority nationality perspective continued until the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Mao did harbor a desire to bring Mongolia back under China’s control, but this desire never eclipsed the practical imperative of gaining the Soviet Union’s support. For instance, Mao carefully pried into the Soviet Union’s position on the possibility of reincorporating Mongolia into China in a meeting with Anastas Mikoyan in 1949. However, when Mikoyan refused this possibility, he immediately backed down from the idea, saying “We certainly will not defend the great Han chauvinism policy and will never mention the issue of Mongolian unification again.”²² Also, in his meetings with Stalin in Moscow on December

¹⁸ "Zhongyang Guanyu Zhengqu Geming Zai Yisheng Yu Shusheng Shouxian Shengli De Jueyi 中央关于争取革命在一省与数省首先胜利的决议 [The CCP Central Committee's Resoution on Fighting for the First Victory in One or Several Provinces]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1932 中共中央文件选集: 1932 [The Selected Documents of the CCP's Central Committee: 1932]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 34.

¹⁹ "Zhongyang Gei Manzhou Geji Dangbu Ji Quanti Dangyuan De Xin 中央给满洲各级党部及全体党员的信 [The CCP Central's Letter to Every Branch in Manchuria and all of CCP Members]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1933 中共中央文件选集: 1933 [The Selected Documents of the CCP's Central Committee: 1933]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 37.

²⁰ "Zhongyang Zhi Ge Shengwei Xianwei Shiwei De Yifeng Mimi Zhishixin 中央致个省委县委市委的一封秘密指示信 [A Secret Letter of the CCP Central Committee to every Provincial, County and Municipal Committee]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1934 中共中央文件选集: 1934 [Selection of Documents of the CCP's Central Committee: 1934]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 248.

²¹ "Zhongguo Gongchandang Dui Suri Zhongli Tiaoyue Fabiao Yjian 中国共产党对苏日中立条约发表意见 [The CCP Expresses its Opinion on The Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact]," in *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji: 1941 中共中央文件选集: 1941 [The Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee: 1941]*, ed. The Central Archive (Beijing: The CCP Central Party School Press, 1991), p. 76.

²² "Migaoyang Zhi Sugong Zhongyang Zhuxituan Baogao: 1949 Nian 1-2 Yue De Zhonguo Zhi Xing 米高扬至苏共中央主席团报告: 1949年1-2月的中国之行 [MiKoyan's Report of the Presidium of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: The Trip to China from January to February 1949]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan*

16 1949 and January 2 1950, Mao did not expend too much effort in arguing for the return of Mongolia, but tried to secure Soviet military protection and material assistance for the PRC.²³ This position also explains why Mao summoned Zhou to prepare to recognize the MPR right after Mao met Stalin.²⁴ The continuity of this policy trend after the establishment of the PRC is best summarized by Hu Hua's article in *People's Daily* right before the PRC formally recognized the MPR:

The reactionary government of the KMT, which has been insisting on the great Han chauvinism, does not want to recognize the independence of Mongolia...The independence of Mongolia is the birth of a new country based on the principle of national self-determination...It is very odd that some Chinese even have this suzerain sentiment that Mongolia must belong to China's territorial map. They are indeed poisoned by the great Han chauvinism...The Soviet government made it very clear in exchanged documents that it will respect the independence and territorial integrity of the MPR. The Soviet Union will never seize the opportunity to claim the MPR as its territory.²⁵

6.2 The Formation of China's Buffer Thinking toward Mongolia

As shown in the cases of Taiwan and North Korea, the geopolitical value of a particular territory only became apparent to Chinese leaders when they began to perceive a rivalrous relationship forming around the territory. The case of Mongolia is no exception. The way Chinese leaders perceived the value of Mongolia to China was subordinated to the broader

Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [*Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives*], ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai, 2014), p. 226.

²³ "Record of Conversation between I.V. Stalin and Chairman of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China Mao Zedong on 16 December 1949," *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Wilson Center*, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111240>; "Sidalin Yu Mao Zedong Huitan Jilu: Zhongsu Tiaoyue Wenti 斯大林与毛泽东会谈记录: 中苏条约问题 [The Record of a Meeting Between Stalin and Mao Zedong: Issues Regarding the Sino-Soviet Treaty]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Dangangan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian* 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [*Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives*], ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 2, pp. 265-9.

²⁴ "Telegram, Mao Zedong to CCP CC, 4 a.m., 3 January 1950," (History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Wilson Center). <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112679> (accessed July 19 2018).

²⁵ Hu Hua, "Women Yingbuyinggai Chengren Waimenggu Duli 我们应不应该承认外蒙古独立 [Should We Recognize the Independence of Outer Mongolia or Not]," *People's Daily*, February 24 1950.

context of Sino-Soviet relations. In the Sino-Soviet honeymoon period at the beginning of the PRC's establishment, geopolitical values of Mongolian territory did not exist in the minds of Chinese leaders. When China perceived the Soviet Union as a hostile rival in the 1960s, Mongolia's geopolitical value gradually surfaced: Mongolia was one route the Soviet Union could take to invade China from the north. The task of this section, therefore, is to provide a detailed illustration of how China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia emerged in the minds of Chinese leaders in the context of Sino-Soviet rivalry.

China started to work on its first national defense plan to address the new geopolitical environment it faced after the Korean War (1950–53). After a series of studies at the end of 1953, Chinese leaders concluded that China needed to seize the time to modernize its forces as soon as possible, and that the Soviet Union's assistance was the key to achieving that end.²⁶ From that time, China started to rely on the Soviet Union for military modernization, which included learning from Soviet military knowledge and experiences of modern warfare, hiring Soviet officials to train the People's Liberation Army (PLA), reforming the PLA on the basis of Soviet institutions, attending the Soviet Union's military drills, sending students to study in Moscow, and updating military equipment.²⁷ In February 1955, Peng Dehuai consulted the Soviet Minister of Defense Georgy Zhukov in Moscow on the matter of a proper national defense strategy for China.²⁸ In December, the very first strategic guidelines for China in the PRC's history—active defense (*jiji fangyu* 积极防御)—were formulated at an enlarged Central Military Committee (CMC) meeting.²⁹

Unsurprisingly, these strategic guidelines did not assign any geopolitical significance to the territory of Mongolia. The guidelines required China to deter or delay a surprise attack from

²⁶ Peng Dehuai, "Sinianlai De Junshi Gongzuo Zongjie He Jinhou Junshi Jianshe Shang De Jige Jiben Wenti 四年来的军事工作总结和今后军事建设上的几个基本问题 [A Concluding Report on Military Works in the Past Four Years and Few Basic Issues on the Future Military Construction]" in *Peng Dehuai Junshi Wenxuan 彭德怀军事文选* [The Selected Military Works of Peng Dehuai] (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1988).

²⁷ Regarding the details of the military cooperations between the Soviet Union and China, please see a series of works of Wang Yazhi, Shen Zhihua, and Li Danhui published on *Studies of International Politics* from 2004 to 2005.

²⁸ Wang Yazhi, Shen Zhihua, and Li Danhui, "Huigu Yu Sikao: 1950 Riandai Zhongsu Junshi Guanxi Ruogan Wenti (2-2) 回顾与思考: 1950年代中苏军事关系若干问题 (2-2) [Review and Think: Some Questions Regarding the Sino-Soviet Military Relationship (2-2)]," *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu 国际政治研究* [Journal of International Studies] 3(2004): p. 63.

²⁹ Mao Zedong, "Guanyu Zhaokai Kuoda Junwei Huiyi De Pingyu 关于召开扩大军委会议的评语 [Comments on Calling an Enlarge CMC Meeting]," in *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Junshi Wengao 建国以来毛泽东军事文稿* [Mao Zedong's Military Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC] (Beijing: Military Science Press & CCP Central Archival Manuscript Press, 2010), Vol. 2, p. 292.

imperialism by employing several political and military means simultaneously, including enlarging activities of international united fronts, strengthening fortifications along the Chinese coast, and diversification of industrial construction.³⁰ The perceived threat and the areas China was defending were unambiguous under this military posture—the threat posed by the US and its military from the east and south of China, i.e., the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The north of China was an area of zero military threat in the minds of Chinese leaders during this amicable period in the Sino-Soviet relationship.

On the other hand, Chinese leaders also regarded Mongolia as a socialist brother country at that time. Mongolians assisted the CCP's socialist revolution in China in many ways throughout history. Ideologically, Mongolians, who achieved their own liberation earlier than the Chinese did, served as a good model for the CCP to sell the socialist revolution to other minority nationalities in China. Materially, Mao's insistence on relocating the CCP to a place close to the borders of the MPR to acquire the Soviet Union and the MPR's salvation after the Long March proved to be a correct decision.³¹ The MPR also participated in defeating the Japanese during World War II (1939–45) and repelling the Americans in the Korean War. This socialist comradeship between China and Mongolia was reflected in how an editorial in *People's Daily* described this relationship in 1954:

The friendship between Chinese and Mongolians, which was based on Marxism-Leninism, developed in the wars. It is unbreakable... The fraternal friendship between the two peoples entered into a new era after the establishment of the PRC.³²

In this context, although some Chinese leaders did wish that China could reunite with Mongolia someday, that wish stemmed more from Chinese nationalism than from geopolitical concerns. Liu Shaoqi's two exchanges with the Soviet Union were exemplified this. The first exchange was Liu's report to the Soviet Union three months before the establishment of the PRC. As mentioned previously, the Soviet Union's unwavering offer of support of MPR independence was very clear to Mao in the Mao-Mikoyan meetings of February 1949. Liu, who was writing a report briefing the Soviet Union on China's new policies, carefully asked Stalin again in July

³⁰ "Guanyu Baowei Zuguo De Zhanlue Fangzhen He Guofang Jianshe Wenti De Pingyu 关于保卫祖国的战略方针和国防建设问题报告的评语 [Comments on the Report of the Strategic Guidelines of Defending the Motherland and National Defense Construction]," Vol. 2, pp. 303-4.

³¹ Liu Xiaoyuan, *Reins of Liberation: An Entangled History of Mongolia Independence, Chinese Territoriality, and Great Power Hegemony, 1911-1950*, pp. 89-100.

³² "Menggu Renmin De Guanghui Sanshi Nian 蒙古人民的光辉三十年 [The Glorious Thirty Years of Mongolians]," *People's Daily*, November 26 1954.

whether China should recognize the MPR on the basis of the self-determination principle. Liu hinted that some Chinese raised questions about Mongolian independence.³³ The second exchange occurred with Mikoyan's visit to China in 1956. The new Soviet Union leader Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin and his policies after the death of Stalin. Chinese leaders speculated that this might result in the Soviet Union changing its position on Mongolian independence. By comparing Sino-Mongolian history with Soviet-Ukrainian history, Liu told Mikoyan that the Mongolian secession from China pained the Chinese.³⁴

Sino-Soviet relations gradually deteriorated after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign, the Soviet Union's initiative of peaceful coexistence with the capitalist camp, and the failure of Mao's Great Leap Forward, were three particularly important factors that lead Mao to perceive that his position in the CCP was in peril. To shift this internal tension to an external target, Mao initiated an ideological polemic and diplomatic campaigns against the Soviet Union in 1958. In response, the Soviet Union isolated China from the socialist camp and withdrew all Soviet experts and advisers from China in 1960.³⁵ As this bilateral friction intensified each year, navigating the relationship with the Soviet Union became a national security issue for China.

From a buffer state point of view, a Sino-Soviet rivalry emerged in mid-1964. As defined in Chapter Three, the perception of an impending military invasion is a necessary condition for the formation of a rivalrous relationship between two states. It is not clear when exactly China formally identified the Soviet Union as a hostile rival ready to invade China, as many Chinese leaders frequently expressed their worry about the possibility of a Soviet invasion of China after 1960.³⁶ Nevertheless, two vital meetings among the Chinese leadership in mid-1964 can

³³ "Liu Shaoqi Zhi Sidalin Baogao: Zhonggong De Fangzhen Zhengce 刘少奇致斯大林报告: 中共的方针政策 [Liu Shaoqi's Report to Stalin: The CCP's Policy Principles]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center, 2014), Vol. 2, p. 82.

³⁴ "Waijiaobu Yuandongsi Chengsong De Beiwanglu: Zhongguo Lingdaoren Dui Menggu De Yaoqiu 外交部远东司呈送的备忘录: 中国领导人对蒙古的要求 [The Memo of the Far East Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Chinese Leaders' Demands of Mongolia]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Zhihua Shen (Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center, 2014), p. 340.

³⁵ Shen Zhihua, "Dui Zai Hua Sulian Zhuanjia Wenti De Lishi Kaocha: Jiben Zhuangkuang Ji Zhengce Bianhua 对在华苏联专家问题的历史考察: 基本状况及政策变化 [An Historical Investigation of Soviet Experts in China: Circumstances and Policy Changes]," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu 当代中国史研究 [Contemporary China History Studies]* 1(2002); Chen Jian, "A Crucial Step toward the Breakdown of the Sino-Soviet Alliance: The Withdrawal of Soviet Experts from China in July 1960," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 8-9(1996).

³⁶ "Zhou Enlai Nian Pu: 1949-1976 周恩来年谱: 1949-1976 [A Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai: 1949-1976]," ed. The CCP Central Archival and Manuscript Research Division (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press,

retrospectively be regarded as marking the beginning of this view. The first meeting was a CCP Politburo meeting on May 27 1964, wherein Mao explained the necessity of initiating the TFC (discussed in detail in the following section) and the Socialist Education Movement for China's preparation for a Soviet invasion.³⁷ The second was a military meeting held in July, at which Mao specifically ordered military leaders to pay equal attention to the threat posed by the Soviet Union from the north to the threat posed by the US from the east.³⁸ In hindsight, the two meetings fundamentally altered China's 1957 military posture, pointing to a radical change in how China perceived the nature of its relationship with the Soviet Union from an ally to a potential enemy.

The emergence of this Sino-Soviet rivalry gradually caused Chinese leaders to perceive Mongolian territory geopolitically. In contrast to their previous attitude that linking Mongolian independence to Chinese nationalism only, Chinese leaders now began to associate this territory with the Soviet Union's potential territorial ambitions on China. Mongolia, along with other territories taken by the Russian Empire while China was militarily weak, was taken by the Soviet Union against China's will. Put it differently, Chinese leaders' uneasiness about Mongolian independence was no longer focused on only Chinese nationalism, but also the fact that a potential invader took Mongolia. The geopolitical value added to Mongolia could be seen in many public statements Mao made on Mongolia in 1964.³⁹

However, China's actions, which entailed a changed military posture toward the Soviet Union and diplomatically raising the return of Mongolia, had an unwanted effect of expediting military cooperation between the Soviet Union and Mongolia. Having a wary eye on China, Mongolia formally requested the Soviet Union's military protection to safeguard its

1997), Vol. 2, p. 340; "Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Shilu: Quzhe Yu Fazhan-Tansuo Daolu De Jianxin 中華人民共和國實錄: 曲折与发展-探索道路的艰辛 [Documents of the PRC: Twists and Developments-Trailblazing a Socialist Path]," ed. Li Chen (Changchun: Jilin People's Publishing House, 1994), Vol. 2-2, p. 657; Li Danhui, "Mao Zedong De Anquan Zhanlue Silu Jiqi Zhuanbian 1964-65 毛泽东的安全战略思路及其转变 1964-65 [Mao Zedong's Security Strategic Thinking and its Transformation 1964-65]," *Ershiyi Shiji 二十一世紀 [The Twenty-First Century]* 59(2000): p. 40.

³⁷ Wu Lengxi, *Shinian Lunzhan: 1956-1966 Zhongsu Guanxi Huiyilu 十年论战: 1956-1966 中苏关系回忆录 [Ten-Year War of Words: 1956-1966, a Memoir of Sino-Soviet Relations]* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1999), p. 778.

³⁸ Peng Guangqian, *Zhongguo Junshi Zhanlue Wenti Yanjiu 中国军事战略问题研究 [The Study on China's Military Strategy Issues]* (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2006), p. 92; Li Danhui, "Mao Zedong De Anquan Zhanlue Silu Jiqi Zhuanbian 1964-65 毛泽东的安全战略思路及其转变 1964-65 [Mao Zedong's Security Strategic Thinking and its Transformation 1964-65]," p. 41.

³⁹ Sergey N. Goncharov and Li Danhui, "Ezhong Guanxi Zhong De Lingtu Yaoqiu Yu Bupingdeng Tiaoyue 俄中关系中的领土要求与不平等条约 [Territory Request and Unequal Treaty in the Russia-China Relations]," *Ershiyi Shiji 二十一世紀 [The Twenty-First Century]* 85(2004): pp. 111, 13-4.

independence in December 1965.⁴⁰ In January 1966, the Soviet Union signed a twenty-year defense treaty with Mongolia. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Politburo adopted a resolution of stationing Soviet forces in Mongolia the following year.⁴¹ In 1968, the Soviet forces moved into Mongolian territory, meaning the Mongolian buffer between China and the Soviet Union officially disappeared in the sense of the concept of buffer state.

Evidently, the conclusion of the Soviet-Mongolian defense treaty of 1966 made Chinese leaders very anxious about China's geopolitical vulnerability against Mongolia. To Chinese leaders, the Soviet-Mongolian defense treaty served as a part of the Soviet Union's strategic encirclement of China from the north and west, in the context of an emerging Soviet-US grand alliance targeting China.⁴² Mongolia would be one military springboard for the Soviet Union to launch a military strike on China under the Brezhnev Doctrine. Although the Soviet Union might not seriously consider launch such a strike on or occupy China, the forces deployed in Mongolia was quite threatening in the eyes of Chinese leaders. The statement of Sun Yixian, the Second Secretary at China's Embassy to the MPR at that moment, precisely characterized this geopolitical anxiety:

Beijing is less than 500 kilometers away from the Sino-Mongolian border. They [the Soviet forces] plan to advance to Beijing in a week...Although the military posture of the Soviet forces in Mongolia is defensive in nature, not offensive, there is no question that the Soviet Union certainly regards Mongolia as its forward base to invade China's hinterland in terms of strategy.⁴³

Similar to the cases of Taiwan and North Korea, historical memory fueled this geopolitical anxiety. During the Sino-Soviet split, Chinese leaders kept analogizing what the Soviet Union was doing to the Tsar's expansion into China in the Qing Dynasty. Labelling Brezhnev as a "new Tsar," the assessment that the Soviet Union was on the path of emulating the Russian

⁴⁰ Sergey Radchenko, ed. *New Documents on Mongolia and the Cold War*, Cold War International History Project Bulletin: Inside China's Cold War (Washington D.C: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2007-2008), pp. 364-5.

⁴¹ Ibid., 16: p. 366.

⁴² China's first official comment on the Soviet-Mongolia defense treaty was in early February. Please see: "Sulian Lingdao Tong Shei Lianhe Xingdong 苏联领导同誰联合行动 [Who Do Soviet Leaders Want to Ally With?]," *People's Daily*, February 2 1966.

⁴³ Sun Yixian, *Zai Damo Nabian: Qinli Linbiao Zhuiji Shijian He Zhongmeng Guanxi Bozhe 在大漠那边: 亲历林彪坠机事件和中蒙关系波折 [At the Other Side of the Desert: Witnessing the Lin Biao Plane Crash Episode and the Twists and Turns of the Sino-Mongolian Relations]* (Zhongguo Qingnian Chubanshe: Beijing, 2013), pp. 242-3.

Empire was very prevalent among Chinese leaders. A book edited by the editorial departments of *People's Daily*, *Hongqi Magazine*, and *PLA Daily* together solemnly warned:

The Soviet revisionist new Tsar has completely taken over the old Tsar's expansionist tradition... They have turned a number of East European countries and the Mongolian People's Republic into their colonies and dependencies. They vainly attempt to occupy more Chinese territories, openly copying the old Tsar's policy towards China and clamouring that China's northern frontier was marked by the Great Wall.⁴⁴

As outlined in Chapter Three, buffer thinking is a geopolitical mentality made by one pair of rivals, determine to “secure this territory against my rival now, otherwise the rival may launch a military attack from it against me in the future once the rival has occupied the territory.” What we have seen so far is only the second half of the thinking: China believed that the Soviet would use Mongolia to attack China. Puzzlingly, however, China seemed to sit idly, accepting the process as its rival gradually absorbed the Mongolian buffer from 1966. Why did China's geopolitical anxieties against Mongolia not generate the same corresponding behavior of securing the buffer as it did in the conflicts against the US for Taiwan and North Korea? The following section will answer this question.

6.3 Retreat from the Borderland: Politically Neutralizing Mongolia—In Vain

When it came to the cases of Taiwan and North Korea, what “securing this buffer” means for China was the adoption of offensive military measures to stop the rival from gradually taking over the buffer. However, the Mongolian case did not follow this pattern. While Chinese leaders did acknowledge the Soviet military threat from Mongolia, they did not adopt any offensive military measures to stop the Soviet Union from stationing in Mongolia. How can we explain China's inaction toward securing the Mongolian buffer? The task of this section is to answer this question from the perspective of China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia.

⁴⁴ *Liening Zhuyi Hai Shi Shehui Diguozhuyi: Jinian Weida Liening Dansheng Yibai Zhounian 列宁主义还是社会帝国主义: 纪念伟大列宁诞生一百周年 [Leninism or Social-Emperialism: In Commemoration of the Centenary of the Birth of the Great Lenin]*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1970), p. 44.

In fact, China did react against the Soviet occupation of the Mongolian buffer based on its buffer thinking toward Mongolia. Instead of using force to maintain the existence of the buffer, China launched a grand strategic retreat from the Sino-Mongolian border from 1964 onwards. This was especially embodied in the TFC, the most famous national construction of China in the 1960s. The rationale behind this strategic retreat was less about luring the Soviet forces in deep than keeping an artificial buffer zone between China and the Sino-Mongolian border.

The origin of the TFC was a defense assessment by Chinese leaders for how to properly defend against a surprise attack from an enemy of China. A report of the PLA General Staff Department in April 1964, which analyzed the economic vulnerability of China during wartime, was the formal beginning of the TFC.⁴⁵ Mao agreed with this report in August and a special working group focusing on the study of the TFC was hence established. The purpose of the TFC was to build and reserve enough self-sustaining warring capability for a future war in China's great interior. Military factories, steel mills, oil fields, power plants, coal mines, salt mines, railways, storage houses, universities, research institutions, and food storehouses were all moved to or built in China's western and southwestern areas encompassing Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, Shaanxi, Chongqing, Guizhou, Ningxia, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, and Yunnan. This enormous project lasted more than a decade and cost more than half of China's national investment at its peak during 1966–70.⁴⁶

The Soviet military threat was a critical—if not the main—factor prompting China to initiate the TFC. The conventional wisdom on the rationale behind the initiation of the TFC was an escalated US military threat from Vietnam.⁴⁷ However, there are at least three important

⁴⁵ "Mao Zedong Dui Guanyu Guojia Jingji Jianshe Ruhe Fangbei Diren Turan Qiuji De Baogao De Pishi 毛泽东对关于国家经济建设如何防备敌人突然袭击的报告批示 [Mao Zedong's Instruction on the Report of National Economic Construction on How to Defend Against an Enemy's Surprise Attack]," in *Jianguo Yilai Zhongyao Wenxian Xuanbian 建国以来重要文献选编 [A Selection of Important Documents since the Founding of the PRC]*, ed. CCP Central Institute of Historical Documents (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1992), pp. 130-5.

⁴⁶ Barry Naughton, "The Third Front: Defence Industrialization in the Chinese Interior," *The China Quarterly* 115(1988): p. 365.

⁴⁷ Niu Jun, "1969 Nian Zhongsu Bianjie Chongtu Yu Zhongguo Waijiao Zhanlue De Tiaozheng 1969年中苏边界冲突与中国外交战略的调整 [The Sino-Soviet Border Conflicts in 1969 and the Adjustment of China's Diplomatic Strategy]," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu 当代中国史研究 [Contemporary China History Studies]* 1(1999); Covell Meyskens, "Third Front Railroads and Industrial Modernity in Late Maoist China," *Twentieth-Century China* 40, no. 30 (2015); Yang Dali, "Patterns of China's Regional Development Strategy," *The China Quarterly* 122(1990): p. 236; Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution: The Coming of the Cataclysm 1961-1966* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 396-70; Barry Naughton, "The Third Front: Defence Industrialization in the Chinese Interior.,"; Chen Donglin, "Cong Chichuanyong Jihua Dao Beizhan Jihua: Sanwu Jihua Zhidao Sixiang De Zhuanbian Guocheng 从吃穿用计划到战备计划: 三五计划指导思想的转变过程 [From A Plan for Clothing, Eating, and Living to a Plan for War: The Transition Process of the Guiding

reasons suggesting that China's perception of the Soviet military threat also contributed to its initiation.

First, the timing of the TFC initiation closely overlapped with the timing of Chinese leaders' identification of the Soviet Union as China's geopolitical rival. Much evidence reveals that when Chinese leaders were discussing the TFC, the Soviet military threat to China was often included in the conversation. Mao, for instance, stated at a meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CCP on June 8 1964:

Ted Hill [Chairman of the Communist Party of Australia] said he knew that Khrushchev is a bad guy. We know that, but we do not want to talk about it in public. [We] have to build the first, second, and third fronts to prepare for the war...[We] have to have the third front, have a hinterland in the southwest, be faster.⁴⁸

When Mao discussed the military and strategic affairs of China with senior Chinese leaders on July 2 of the same year, he said:

We have to build the third front in Tianjin and Beijing areas. We cannot focus only on the east side and ignore the north side. [We] have to prepare everything for a possible invasion from our enemy.⁴⁹

Zhou said to senior military leaders at a war preparation meeting on May 21 1965:

Imperialism [the US] and revisionism [the Soviet Union] ally with each other and attack us, and may even launch a nuclear war. These are all the worst-case scenarios. We have to prepare...We could only do this step by step...Do the small and big third fronts.⁵⁰

Moreover, the so-called escalation of US military involvement in the Vietnam War (1955–75) was not realized until mid-1965. The US started to play a chief role in Vietnamese affairs after France left Indochina in 1955. However, the US rather restrained its military presence in

Thinking of the Third Five-Year Plan], " *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu* 当代中国史研究 *Contemporary China History Studies* 2(1997).

⁴⁸ The source of this conversation is from "Long Live Mao Zedong's Thought." However, it should be noted that some scholars questioned the authenticity of this collection. Please see: <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/1968/5-083.htm> (accessed July 19 2018).

⁴⁹ "Zhou Enlai Nian Pu: 1949-1976 周恩来年谱: 1949-1947 [A Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai: 1949-1976]," p. 654.

⁵⁰ "Women Jiang Yingde Jinbu, Yingde Heping 我们将赢得进步, 赢得和平 [We Will Win the Progress, Win the Peace]," in *Zhou Enlai Junshi Wenxuan* 周恩来军事文选 [The Selected Military Works of Zhou Enlai], ed. Wusheng Liu (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1997), pp. 521-6.

Vietnam until August 1964. The first US ground troops arrived in Vietnam in March 1965 due to North Vietnam's Vietcong raid on the US and South Vietnamese forces. Lorenz Luthi and Andrew Kennedy's works both pointed out that the time that Chinese leaders started to seriously think about a possible war between China and the US over the Vietnam issue was no earlier than mid-1965.⁵¹ In other words, by mid-1965, the TFC had already been in process.

Second, the geographical distribution of the TFC implied where China's main threat lay. In November 1964, the CCP Central issued a document asking certain areas to strengthen the construction of the TFC and the preparation for a coming war.⁵² Those areas included Dongbei, Huabei, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, Inner Mongolia, and Shanxi. Geographically, those areas were far away from China's coastline, which supposedly would suffer the first wave of attack of US invasion on China, but next to the Sino-Mongolian and Sino-Soviet borders, which would be front lines of Sino-Soviet military conflicts. So if the Soviet Union had not been one of the potential enemies against whom China intended to defend, which country would have been able to launch a military strike to those areas at that moment?

Furthermore, the pivot of the TFC seemed to follow the military reality. Chinese leaders diverted most of the resources invested in the TFC to the southwestern area of China, especially to Panzhihua city in Sichuan. Scholars usually agree on the importance of Panzhihua to the TFC.⁵³ Mao once emphasized the importance of Panzhihua to his war preparation by saying, "I cannot sleep well if the construction of the Panzhihua steel mill has yet to be properly completed."⁵⁴ Interestingly, the city was only approximately 500 kilometers away from the Sino-Vietnamese border, but very far away from Soviet arms range. If the key purpose of the TFC had been to preserve China's war capabilities against the US in Vietnam, why would China have put the core of the project so close to the Sino-Vietnamese border?

⁵¹ Andrew Bingham Kennedy, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru: National Efficacy Beliefs and the Making of Foreign Policy*, pp. 110-1; Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, p. 316.

⁵² "Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Jiaqiang Yier Xian De Houfang Jianshe He Beizhan Gongzuo De Zhishi 中共中央关于加强一二线的后方建设和备战工作的指示 [The CCP Central's Instruction on Strengthening the Interior Construction and War Preparation on the First and Second Fronts]," in *Jianguo Yilai Zhongyao Wenxian Xuanbian 建国以来重要文献选编 [A Selection of Important Documents since the Founding of the PRC]*, ed. CCP Central Institute of Historical Documents (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1992), Vol. 19, pp. 312-6.

⁵³ Judd C. Kinzley, "Crisis and the Development of China's Southwestern Periphery: The Transformation of Panzhihua, 1936-1969," *Modern China* 38, no. 5 (2012): p. 577; Barry Naughton, "The Third Front: Defence Industrialization in the Chinese Interior," p. 357.

⁵⁴ Chen Donglin, "Cong Chichuanyong Jihua Dao Beizhan Jihua: Sanwu Jihua Zhidao Sixiang De Zhuanbian Guocheng 从吃穿用计划到战备计划: 三五计划指导思想的转变过程 [From A Plan for Clothing, Eating, and Living to a Plan for War: The Transition Process of the Guiding Thinking of the Third Five-Year Plan]," p. 70.

Thirdly, the Sino-American rapprochement process started much earlier than Henry Kissinger's secret visit to China in 1971. Evidence suggested that China started to adjust its position in the China-Soviet Union-US triangle relationship in 1964. On the surface, US imperialism was still the main target of China's propaganda machine. In practice, however, Chinese leaders started to send subtle messages to Washington, hinting China would like to have a cordial relationship with the US. Snow's 1965 interview with Mao was the best example in this regard.⁵⁵

On the other hand, the US also responded to the messages of China positively. Various Russian documents reveal that the Soviet Union was well aware of this budding Sino-American rapprochement in the mid-1960s. In 1966, a report by the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the Sino-American relations assessment indicated that "The US and China are cautiously sounding out each other's intentions and seeking a way to reconcile the disputes and materialize the normalization of relations of both sides."⁵⁶ Brezhnev also expressed his worry about this trend at a plenary session of the Central Committee of the CPSU in December 1966, confessing "Information from all sides made us worry. Chinese officials are making a supreme effort to seek to establish connections with Americans."⁵⁷

Certainly, this section is not to argue here that the US threat from Vietnam had nothing to do with China's decision to initiate the TFC, but it rather emphasizes that for Chinese leaders, the specter of a Soviet invasion of China from the north loomed equally to, if not bigger than, a US invasion of China from the south throughout the 1960s. The rationale behind the initiation of the TFC had an important linkage with the Soviet military threat, and this is where China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia comes in.

In a broader sense, China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia contributed to the initiation of the TFC. As shown in Chapters Four and Five, China's behavior in securing a buffer contains two

⁵⁵ Regarding the content of this interview, please visit: <https://newrepublic.com/article/119916/edgar-snow-interview-china-chairman-mao-zedong> (accessed July 19 2018)

⁵⁶ "Waijiaobu Yuandongsi De Baogao: Guanyu 1966 Nian De Zhongmei Guanxi 外交部远东司的报告: 关于1966年中美的关系 [A Report of the Far East Division of the MOF]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), p. 299.

⁵⁷ "Sugong Zhongyang Quanhui Huiyi Jilu: Bolieziniefu Guanyu Suzhong Guanxi De Baogao 苏共中央全会会议记录: 勃列兹涅夫关于苏中关系的报告 [The Meeting Record of the Plenary Session of the CPSU: Brezhnev's Report on the Sino-Soviet Relations]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), p. 275.

interrelated meanings to the security of China: 1) cutting off a potential rival's invasion route to China; and 2) protecting China's cities and industrial bases behind the buffer. For the latter meaning, while maintaining the existence of North Korea meant keeping the industrial base located in northeastern China safe, expelling US forces out of Taiwan ensured the safety of the industrial base along the Chinese coastline. This logic of "gaining security by keeping a distance from the rival" is also evident in the case of Mongolia. The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region bordering Mongolia was one critical place that Chinese leaders assigned to retreat from the Sino-Mongolian border under the TFC. This retreat was not only in terms of the industrial base but also military and administrative. In 1967, China only deployed around sixty thousand forces from its over two million troops in the region.⁵⁸ In July 1969, China further put this region under the administrative control of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning in the west, and Ningxia and Gansu in the east. In this sense, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region was an artificial buffer zone created by China after the Soviet Union dominated the Mongolian buffer.

How should we explain this dissimilar behavior of China in the case of Mongolia when it faced similar situations in the cases of Taiwan and North Korea? The answer is twofold. On a structural level, China wanted to avoid fighting against two superpowers at the same time. In contrast to the 1950s, in which the Soviet Union supported China militarily, it was very unlikely that China would gain US military support against the Soviet Union as both China and the US were only tentatively developing a mutual relationship in 1966. In this context, a war against the Soviet Union meant that China ran the risk of fighting against two superpowers at the same time in two different theaters. Accordingly, Chinese leaders turned to a strategy at a state level—keeping Mongolia politically neutral in the Sino-Soviet rivalry.⁵⁹

Before the start of the TFC, China attempted to push Mongolia to be politically neutral, if not pro-China, in many ways. Economic aid was one important tool that China used as leverage to sway Mongolia's political loyalty from Moscow to Beijing. Compared to the Soviet Union's lukewarm economic aid to Mongolia in the 1950s, economic aid provided by China was more generous and active. Specifically, China comprehensively assisted Mongolia's livelihood sectors, including textiles, glass mills, farms, roads, and power stations and imported horses and fur from Mongolia. Mongolia was the only socialist country enjoying a high increase in

⁵⁸ "Quofangbu Zhanqing Jianbao "Qingbao Baogao" Ziliao 国防部战情简报"情报报告"资料 ["Intelligence Report" Material of the War Intelligence Brief of the DoD]," ed. Academia Historica of the ROC.

⁵⁹ The Soviet forces in Mongolia had withdrawn from Mongolia in 1956.

trade with China in 1956.⁶⁰ Chinese leaders certainly viewed those economic aids through the lens of the Sino-Soviet rivalry. For example, Yang, a Chinese delegate attending the conference for the 43th anniversary celebration of the Russian Revolution in Moscow in 1960, was enraged by Mongolia's pro-Soviet Union statement at the celebration. He angrily stated, "Shame on Tsedenbal, who said nothing about China's economic aid to Mongolia!"⁶¹

China's labor force was another tool which China used to place pressure on Mongolia's foreign policy allegiance. Given that Mongolia had a significant lack of labor, China sent more than ten thousand Chinese workers to Mongolia per year to assist with Mongolia's economic and social construction.⁶² The workers were all carefully selected per their family backgrounds and political attitudes, and were educated on the importance of the Sino-Mongolian friendship to China's international as well as domestic situation.⁶³ Those politically loyal workers, in fact, were a means for China to pressure Mongolia to adopt a more pro-China foreign policy during the Sino-Soviet rivalry. The furious exchanges between Zhou and Mongolian Prime Minister Yumjaagiin Tsedenbal on 25 and 27 December 1962 showed how China pressured Mongolia via this issue.⁶⁴ The Soviet Union believed this strategy of China toward Mongolia was a part of its strategy to turning other socialist countries against the Soviet Union.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ "Sulian Zhu Zhongguo Dashiguan 1956 Nian Gongzuo Baogao 苏联驻中国大使馆 1956 年工作报考 [A Work Report of the Soviet Union Embassy in China of 1956]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), p. 215.

⁶¹ Yang Shangkun, *Yang Shangkun Riji: Shang 杨尚昆日记: 上 [Yang Shangkun's Diary: I]* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2001).

⁶² Regarding the issue of Chinese workers sent to Mongolia, please see this detailed study: Gu Jikun, "Zhongguo Gongren Fumeng Yuanjian Wenti De Lishi Kaocha: 1949-1973 中国工人赴蒙援建问题的历史考察: 1949-1973 [A Historical Investigation on Chinese Workers to Mongolia for Aid: 1949-1973]," *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu 中共党史研究 [CPC History Studies]* 4(2015).

⁶³ "Guowuyuan Guanyu Chodiao Zhigong Zhichi Menggu Renmin Gongheguo Shengchan Jianshe De Tongzhi 国务院关于抽调职工支持蒙古人民共和国生产建设的通知 [The State Council's Notice on Transferring Some Workers to Support the Development of the MPR]," ed. Beijing Municipal Archives.

⁶⁴ "Qiernianke Yu Cebogemide Huitan Jiyao: Tongbao Zhongmeng Bianjie Tanpan Qingkuang 契尔年科与策伯德米格会谈纪要: 通报中蒙边界谈判情况 [A Note on the Chernenko-Tsebegmid Meeting: Informing the Sino-Mongolian Border Negotiation]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014).

⁶⁵ "Qiernianke Yu Cebogemide Huitan Jiyao: Zhongguo Shitu Lijian Sumeng Guanxi 契尔年科与策伯德米格会谈纪要: 中国试图离间苏蒙关系 [A Note of the Chernenko-Tsebegmid Meeting: China Is Trying to Drive a Wedge between the Soviet Union and Mongolia]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), p. 395.

Territorial concession was another way that China tried to keep Mongolia close.⁶⁶ Although China officially recognized Mongolia's independence in 1949, the border between the two sides was not clearly demarcated until 1962. This situation was partly due to China's wish that Mongolia be incorporated into China soon and partly due to Chinese leaders' resentment that the current tacit border between China and Mongolia was unilaterally assigned by the Soviet Union. In a similar fashion to the economic aid, Chinese leaders viewed the border negotiation with Mongolia from the lens of the Sino-Soviet rivalry. In 1962, when China started to officially respond to Mongolia's 1958 request to demarcate the border, it asked Mongolia not to leak this negotiation to the Soviet Union.⁶⁷ In terms of the result of the border negotiation, China generously gave Mongolia 12 thousand square kilometers of territory from 17 thousand square kilometers of disputed territory.⁶⁸ Given the timing of China's decision to negotiate with Mongolia over this issue and China's significant concession, China's motives were self-explanatory. Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi hinted when he commented on this border-demarcating issue:

In recent years, the Mongolian leadership followed Khrushchev revisionists and opposed China, but we do not withdraw our aid to Mongolia. We are a new China, led by Marx-Leninism and Mao Zedong's thought. We are not Khrushchev revisionists. It is for Mongolian to decide whether it is more beneficial to work with China.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Taylor Fravel argued that the failure of the Great Leap Forward and political unrest in Xinjiang were the main reasons why China began this territorial negotiation with Mongolia in 1962. He developed this argument around 2005. However, the sources newly available after 2005 presented in this section tend to suggest this behavior of China is a product of the Sino-Soviet rivalry. Please see: M. Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," pp. 69-74; M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* CH 2.

⁶⁷ "Qiernianke Yu Cebogemide Huitan Jiyao: Zhongmeng Bianjie Tanpan Wenti 契尔年科与策伯德米格会谈纪要: 中蒙边界谈判问题 [A Note of the Chernenko-Tsebegmid Meeting: The Sino-Mongolian Border Negotiation Issue]," in *Zhongsu Guanxi: Eguo Danganguan Jiemi Wenjian Xuanbian 中苏关系: 俄国档案馆解密文件选编 [Sino-Soviet Relations: The Selected Declassified Documents in Russian Archives]*, ed. Shen Zhihua (Shanghai: The Orient Publishing Center, 2014), p. 401.

⁶⁸ Lan Mei-Hua, *Zedengbaer Shiqi Waimeng Yu Zhonggong De Guanxi (1952-1984) 泽登巴尔时期外蒙与中共的关系 (1952-1984) [The Sion-Outer Mongolian Relations in the Tsedenbal Era (1952-1984)]* (Taipei: ROC Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission, 2000), p. 52; Shen Zhihua, "Shi Yu Yuan Wei: Lengzhan Shiqi Zhongguo Chuli Bianjie Jiufen De Jieguo 事与愿违: 冷战时期中国处理边界纠纷的结果 [Backfire: The Results of China's Dealings with Border Disputes in the Cold War Era]," *Ershiyi Shiji 二十一世纪 [The Twenty-First Century]* 144(2014): p. 55.

⁶⁹ "Chen Yi Fuzhongli Jian Waizhang Juxing Zhongwai Jizhe Zhaodahui Fabiao Zhongyao Tanhua 陈毅副总理兼外长举行中外记者招待会发表重要谈话 [Chen Yi, the Vice Premier and Foreign Minister, Spoke on an International Press Conference]," *People's Daily*, October 7 1965.

Therefore, the impossibility of gaining help from the US plus the failure to keep Mongolia politically neutral in the Sino-Soviet rivalry, led China to ultimately decide to retreat from the borderland.

6.4 Efforts to Militarily Neutralize Mongolia

The Soviet Union began to deploy military forces to Mongolia in 1968 per the Soviet-Mongolia defense treaty in 1966. The forces, however, were moved back to the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s in tandem with the normalization of relations between the Soviet Union and China, known as the Sino-Soviet rapprochement. Regarding the question of how this rapprochement happened, scholars have usually attributed the momentum provided by Mikhail Gorbachev's new thinking toward Asia, which eventually broke the political impasse between China and the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ Compared to the Soviet Union, China was rather passive and cautious as it set three inflexible preconditions for the initiation of the rapprochement: Soviet military withdrawal from Mongolia and the Sino-Soviet borders, Soviet ceasing its support of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, and Soviet stopping the war against Afghanistan. As for the timing of China's response to the rapprochement, Lowell Dittmer indicated it was in the early 1980s.⁷¹

However, this section argues that the literature has not observed China's years-long diplomatic effort aimed at militarily neutralizing Mongolia from 1979 to 1989. This diplomatic effort of China, driven by China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia, centered on two key ideas about making Mongolia militarily neutral between the Soviet Union and China: a complete military withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Mongolia, and a legal promise by the Soviet Union not to militarily use Mongolia again. Broadly speaking, this effort of China also contributed to the realization of the Sino-Soviet rapprochement. In this sense, China was not the passive and slow player that it has been portrayed as in the normalization process. The following will detail how

⁷⁰ Stephen M. Young, "Gorbachev's Asian Policy: Balancing the New and the Old," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 3 (1988); John W. Garver, "The 'New Type' of Sino-Soviet Relations," *ibid.* 29, no. 12 (1989); Sergey Radchenko, "Soviet Withdrawal from Mongolia, 1986-1992: A Reassessment," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 25, no. 2 (2012); Louise do Rosario, "Don't Call Me Comrade," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 143, no. 7 (1989); Sheikh Mutahir Ahmad, "Sino-Soviet Rapprochement: Its Impact on South Asia," *Pakistan Horizon* 43, no. 1 (1990).

⁷¹ Lowell Dittmer, *Sino-Soviet Normalization and Its International Implications: 1945-1990* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1992), CH 14.

China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia drove this diplomatic effort of China during this decade.

The Soviet Union initiated a wave of military argumentation for the Far East in the late 1970s along with an intensifying rivalry against China. After Brezhnev visited the commands of the Far East in April 1978, the Soviet Union established the Far East Theater, which integrated Mongolian Districts with the Transbaikalian District, the Far Eastern District, and the Pacific Ocean Fleet. This new coordination organization seemingly symbolized the Soviet Union's growing recognition of the importance of the Eastern front and the shift of its strategic priorities from the West to the East. According to Japan's White Paper, the Soviet military deployment along the Sino-Soviet borders increased from forty-four divisions to fifty-eight divisions in 1979–89, and its forces in Mongolia were usually maintained at around four to five divisions.⁷²

Although the quantity of Soviet forces in Mongolia increased, the troops were in reality not intended for invading of China but for defending Mongolian and Soviet territory. Based on types of weapon systems and military posture, Western analysts tend to agree that Soviet forces in Mongolia were more defensive-oriented.⁷³ To make their intention clearer, the Soviet Union and Mongolia stipulated the defense treaty between the two sides would adhere to the Charter of the United Nations. In March 1978, Mongolia even issued a governmental statement to China, indicating the Soviet forces stationed in Mongolia were there by the request of Mongolia because China had not yet abandoned its territorial ambition toward Mongolia.⁷⁴

Additionally, Sino-Soviet relations in the 1970s were not as tense as they had been before the 1970s in many respects, even under the influence of the Brezhnev Doctrine. In the 1970s, the Soviet Union firmly opposed China in military and diplomatic arenas but, in the meantime, also welcomed a reconciliation with China and kept reassuring China that its territorial integrity would be guaranteed under the principle of peaceful coexistence.⁷⁵ As for interstate connections, different sorts of scientific, cultural, and academic exchanges between the two

⁷² *Defense of Japan*, (Tokyo: Okurasho Insatsukyoku, 1989), p. 41.

⁷³ The Soviet Union's primary military objective throughout the 1970s was to defend against US military threats from the West. To this end, it deployed two-thirds of its forces in the 500-mile gap between the Baltic and the Alps whereas the remaining one-third of the forces guarded a 4500-mile long border with China. The objective of the Soviet forces against China was to prevent China's military adventurism should the Soviet Union be preoccupied by wars in Europe. Please see: Michael McGwire, *Military Objectives in Soviet Foreign Policy* (The Brookings Institution: Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 163-8; Lowell Dittmer, *Sino-Soviet Normalization and Its International Implications: 1945-1990*, pp. 221-2.

⁷⁴ AP, "China Says Chernenko's Call for Closer Ties Isn't Enough," *The New York Times*, March 4 1984.

⁷⁵ Brezhnev Leonid, "Report of the CPSU Central Committee and the Immediate Tasks of the Party in Home and Foreign Policy," in *Building a New Society: The 25th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, ed. David Laibman Jessica Smith, and Marilyn Bechtel (New York, N.Y.: NWR Publications, Inc., 1977), p. 39.

sides were also taking place on a daily basis throughout this period.⁷⁶ The value of Sino-Soviet bilateral trade gradually recovered from its lowest point in 1970 and reached 2.6 billion US dollars in 1986.⁷⁷

Despite the objective fact that the Sino-Soviet tension had eased, buffer thinking toward Mongolia still lingered in the minds of Chinese leaders. The consensus of Chinese leaders throughout the 1970s was that a Soviet invasion of China was ultimately inevitable because the Soviet Union was an imperialist power with a socialist façade.⁷⁸ The history of how the Russian Empire had encroached on Asia strengthened this threat perception, since the course of the global military expansion of the Soviet Union was very similar to that of the Tsar period, if not indeed superior to it. Mongolia, in this context, was one vital strategic spot from which the Soviet Union would launch its military strike on China and hence capture China's capital easily. In 1978, Chinese Defense Minister Xu Xianqing warned that "the Soviet social-imperialism is our most dangerous and principal enemy."⁷⁹

Driven by the same buffer thinking, Deng's China demonstrated very different behavior from that of Mao in responding to the Soviet military threat from Mongolia. The root of this difference stemmed from Deng's unique worldview—the world was underpinned by three critical pillars (the US, the Soviet Union, and China) rather than "one line" of alliance against the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ To Deng, the nature of relations between China and the two countries remained the same, but an invasion of China was not inevitable if China could actively play the game of diplomacy. Accordingly, instead of continuing to refuse the Soviet's proposal to reconcile, China should take this opportunity to reshape its security environment. Specifically,

⁷⁶ "Sino-Soviet Relations: Impact of Gorbachev's New Thinking," ed. Central Intelligence Agency (1989).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Zhou Enlai, "Zai Zhongguo Gongchandang Di Shici Quanguo Daibiao Dahui Shang De Baogao 在中国共产党第十次全国代表大会上的报告 [A Report on the Tenth National Congress of the CCP]," *People's Daily*, September 1 1973; Hua Guofeng, "Tuanjie Qilai, Wei Jianshe Shehuizhuyi De Xiandaihua Qiangguo Er Fendou 团结起来, 为建设社会主义的现代化强国而奋斗 [Unit, Fighting for Building a Strong Modernized Country of Socialism]," *ibid.*, March 7 1978; Xu Xiangqian, "Tigao Jingti Zhunbei Dazhang 提高警惕准备打仗 [Heighten Alert, Prepare for War]," *ibid.*, July 31; Liu Jixian, "Yi Jianying Nianpu: 1897-1986 叶剑英年谱: 1897-1986 [The Chronicle of Ye Jianying: 1897-1986]," (Central Literature Publishing House: Beijing, 2007), p. 1053; "Mao Zhuxi Guanyu Sange Shijie Huafen De Lilun Shi Dui Makesi Liening Zhuyi De Zhongda Gongxian: Zhisan 毛主席关于三个世界划分的理论是对马克思列宁主义的重大贡献: 之三 [Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism: III]," *People's Daily*, November 11 1977.

⁷⁹ Xu Xiangqian, "Tigao Jingti Zhunbei Dazhang 提高警惕准备打仗 [Heighten Alert, Prepare for War]."

⁸⁰ Deng Xiaoping, "Zai Junwei Kuoda Huiyi Shang De Jianghua 在军委扩大会议上的讲话 [Speaking at an Enlarged CMC Meeting]," Vol. 3, pp. 126-9.

since the Soviet military threat from Mongolia was the most urgent security issue China was facing, China should actively defuse that threat rather than passively preserving its war capability against the Soviet Union through the TFC.⁸¹

From 1979 to 1989, this worldview of Deng further translated into three major waves of diplomatic efforts that attempted to make Mongolia a militarily neutral state. The first wave of diplomatic efforts began in 1979. After China and the US cleared their path to form a quasi-alliance in 1972, the Soviet Union gradually slid into international isolation. Deng capitalized on the Soviet Union's desire to find a way to turn around this disadvantaged position. Specifically, when the Sino-Soviet friendship treaty was about to expire in 1979, China refused the Soviet Union's proposal to continue this treaty but suggested that both sides initiate diplomatic negotiations on how to amend Sino-Soviet relations, to which the Soviet Union eventually agreed.⁸²

China set its priority during the negotiations as the military neutralization of Mongolia. Chinese leaders set two principles at a CCP Politburo meeting on August 29 1979 for the upcoming negotiations with the Soviet Union: 1) Soviet military withdrawal from Mongolia; and 2) Soviet guarantee of no military station and military bases in China's neighboring country.⁸³ Both principles were essential to making Mongolia a neutral state in a military sense. For Chinese leaders, the very existence of the Soviet forces in Mongolia compromised the Soviet Union's sincerity to this rapprochement. Deng's later comments on the Sino-Soviet rapprochement when he met Richard Nixon in September 1979 reflected this geopolitical rationale:

The precondition of the negotiation is removing those obstacles, which are the Soviet Union's expansionism and hegemonism, not just about the Sino-Soviet borders... Can the Soviet forces in Mongolia continue? Certainly, we must raise this issue by asking

⁸¹ A report of ICA estimated in 1984 that if a possible Sino-Soviet rapprochement takes place, what would be welcomed by Beijing is Soviet troop withdrawals from Mongolia. Please see: "The Changing Sino-Soviet Relationship," (Central Intelligence Agency), p. 8. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP87T00495R000900940001-8.pdf> (accessed July 19 2018).

⁸² "Mosike You Shenme Liyou Baotiao Rulei 莫斯科有什么理由暴跳如雷 [How Can Moscow be so Angry]," *People's Daily*, April 17 1979.

⁸³ Ma Xusheng, "Wo Qinli De Zhongsu Guanxi Zhengchanghua Guocheng 我亲历的中苏关系正常化过程 [The Sino-Soviet Rapprochement Process I Participated in]," *Bai Nian Chao 百年潮* 4(1999): p. 34.

the Soviet withdrawal from Mongolia. In addition, both China and the Soviet Union should not build military bases in each other's neighboring countries.⁸⁴

The second wave of Chinese efforts to push the Soviet Union to give up its military presence in Mongolia started in 1982. The Soviet Union refused to include the Mongolian issue in the negotiations during the first wave of China's diplomatic efforts. After a few years, however, Brezhnev's remark in Tashkent hinted that the Soviet Union could have some flexibility on the border issue with China.⁸⁵ Seeing this as another opportunity, China held its very first press conference in PRC history after two days of responding to Brezhnev.⁸⁶ Similar to the first wave, Deng held a senior Chinese leader meeting in the summer of 1982 to establish principles and strategies regarding how to negotiate with the Soviet Union.⁸⁷ Once again, Chinese leaders put Soviet military withdrawal from Mongolia, combined with withdrawal from the Sino-Soviet borders, as the priority among the other issues. In the following negotiations with the Soviets, the history of how the Russian Empire encroached on China became a part of the arguments with which Qian Qichen criticized his Soviet counterpart, Andrei Gromyko.⁸⁸

China's efforts did result in a subtle change in the Soviet Union's position in this time. Although the Soviet Union did not agree to withdraw any forces from Mongolia during the negotiations, its position on this issue shifted from "not to discuss issues related to a third country" to "not to harm the interests of a third country." Evidently, utilizing China's geopolitical anxiety over Mongolia to maintain the momentum of the negotiations became a factor that Soviet leaders thought about. Gromyko, for example, proposed at a CPSU Politburo meeting in 1983 that a partial withdrawal from Mongolia could further the Sino-Soviet normalization process.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Deng Xiaoping Nianpu: 1975-1997 (Shang) 邓小平年谱: 1975-1997 (上) [The Chronicle of Deng Xiaoping: 1975-1997 I]. (Central Party Literature Press, 2004), p. 557.

⁸⁵ "Sino-Soviet Relations: President Brezhnev's Speech, Tashkent 24 March 1982 (Excerpts)," *Survival* 24, no. 4 (1982): p. 186.

⁸⁶ "Jiu Bolieriniefu Zai Tashengan De Jianghua Woguo Waijiaobu Fayaren Fabiao Tanhua 就勃列日涅夫在塔什干的讲话我国外交部发言人发表谈话 [A Spokesman of MOFA Responds to Brezhnev's Remark at Tashkent]," *People's Daily*, March 27 1982.

⁸⁷ Qian Qichen, *Waijiao Shiji 外交十记 [Ten Stories of A Diplomat Qian Qichen]* (Beijing: World Affair Press, 2003), p. 6.

⁸⁸ Li Fenglin, "Zhongsu Fengyun Ershi Nian Jianzhenglu: Xia 中苏风云二十年见证录: 下 [The Record of the Twenty-Years of the Sino-Soviet Relations: II]," *Zongheng 纵横* 9(2002): p. 11.

⁸⁹ "Meeting Minutes of the Politburo of the CC CPSU, Regarding Western Plans for Deployment of New Nuclear Weapons in Europe," (History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Wilson Center). <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115981> (accessed August 11 2018).

The third wave of Chinese efforts took place after Gorbachev succeeded Chernenko as the General Secretary of the CPSU in March 1985. Since Gorbachev took office, Deng aggressively hinted to the Soviet Union at multiple meetings with foreign visitors that Gorbachev had not yet done anything to improve Sino-Soviet relations, and the removal of any of the three obstacles would be conducive to the rapprochement.⁹⁰ In 1986, Gorbachev formally responded to Deng's appeal in a speech at Vladivostok, expressing that the Soviet Union was considering withdrawing a significant number of Soviet forces from Mongolia.⁹¹ Once again, China quickly seized this opportunity and proceeded with a two-pronged diplomatic maneuver toward Mongolia and the Soviet Union simultaneously with the objective of neutralizing Mongolia militarily.

In its actions toward Mongolia, China aimed to defuse Mongolia's suspicions regarding China's territorial ambitions. China understood that a rapprochement with Mongolia was necessary since Mongolia's suspicion of China was one important factor impeding the Soviet withdrawal. Ten days after Gorbachev's speech, China sent Vice Foreign Minister Liu Shuqing for talks in Ulaanbaatar, the highest level of Chinese officials to be sent to Mongolia in the past two decades. Liu's mission was to ease Mongolia's resistance to the withdrawal. Although Mongolia refused Liu's proposal of full Soviet military withdrawal, a consular agreement with China was concluded.⁹²

To further reassure Mongolia, China took many concrete steps in the following years to demonstrate that China would respect Mongolia's territorial sovereignty after the Soviet withdrawal. Given that Chinese forces intruded on Mongolia's territory many times during the Sino-Soviet split, a border agreement regarding how to deal with border disputes between the two sides was concluded in 1988, indicating that China would respect the current Sino-Mongolia border thereafter. In March 1989, Yang said to the visiting Mongolian Foreign Minister that "China will respect Mongolia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity."⁹³ This phrase was later written into the Sino-Mongolian Joint Communiqué of 1990 and became a

⁹⁰ *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu: 1975-1997 (Xia) 邓小平年谱: 1975-1997 (下)* [The Chronicle of Deng Xiaoping: 1975-1997 II]. (Central Party Literature Press, 2004), p. 1084.

⁹¹ *The Soviet Union as an Asian Pacific Power: Implications of Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok Initiative*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), p. 219.

⁹² Elizabeth Green, "China and Mongolia: Recurring Trends and Prospects for Change," *Asian Survey* 26, no. 12 (1986): p. 1362.

⁹³ Liu Shuiming, "Yangzhuxi Jian Menggu Waizhang 杨主席见蒙古外长 [President Yang Met Foreign Minister of Mongolia]," *People's Daily*, April 1 1989.

standard diplomatic phrase used by China in most statements and legal documents on the Sino-Mongolian relations.⁹⁴

In its actions toward the Soviet Union, China sought to ensure that the Soviet forces would never return to Mongolia's territory in the future. After the Soviet Union agreed to the withdrawal, the focus of Chinese officials turned to making the Soviet withdrawal irreversible and complete. For example, when Soviet Ministry of Defense announced the first wave of withdrawal from Mongolia in January 1987, Deng immediately questioned the sincerity of the Soviet Union by pointing to the fact that the Soviet bases and facilities in Mongolia were still intact, which permitted the Soviets to reestablish their presence overnight if they wished.⁹⁵ Qian also pressed his Soviet counterpart during the negotiations by saying "You said that 75 percent of Soviet forces would be withdrawn from Mongolia. Excellent. But, what will happen to the remaining 25 percent? Should one leave a tail?"⁹⁶

To consolidate the military neutralization of Mongolia, China pushed the Soviet Union to legally promise on not to using Mongolia for military purposes in the future. This goal was eventually realized in the Sino-Soviet Joint Communiqué issued at the Deng-Gorbachev summit in 1989, which specifically stipulated that each side would not militarily use the territory of a country bordering the two sides to threaten the other side.⁹⁷ To what extent China's request influenced the Soviet Union's decision so far is unknown. It is clear, however, that China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia motivated Deng to militarily neutralize Mongolia from the orbit of the Soviet Union, as he confessed to US President George H. W. Bush:

With regard to the Sino-Soviet relationship, if talks with Gorbachev prove to be successful, and Sino-Soviet relations are normalized, then what will follow? Personally, I think it is still an unknown...Mr. President, you are my friend. I hope you will look at the map to see what happened after the Soviet Union severed Outer Mongolia from China. What kind of strategic situation did we find ourselves in...The

⁹⁴ "Zhongmeng Lianhe Gongbao 中蒙联合公报 [The Sino-Mongolian Joint Communiqué]," *ibid.*, May 8 1990.

⁹⁵ Sergey Radchenko, "Soviet Withdrawal from Mongolia, 1986-1992: A Reassessment," p. 194.

⁹⁶ "Diary of Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze, 2 February 1989," (History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Wilson Center). <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111240> (accessed July 19 2018).

⁹⁷ "Zhongsu Lianhe Gongbao 中苏联合公报 [The Sino-Soviet Joint Communiqué]," *People's Daily*, May 19 1989.

strategic situation I have mentioned is very unfavorable for China... This encirclement of China has continued from the Khrushchev period through Brezhnev to the present.⁹⁸

6.5 Strengthening Mongolian Neutralization

Triggered by multiple internal and external crises, the Soviet Union began to crumble in the spring of 1990 and eventually ceased to exist in December 1991. Suddenly, China was free from a decades-long shadow of potential Soviet military threat from Mongolia. This completely new geopolitical environment China faced after 1991 raised a theoretically meaningful question in terms of buffer thinking: how did China deal with Mongolia after the Sino-Soviet buffer system disappeared?

The current literature does not offer an explicit theoretical answer to this question. Although many scholars have recognized Mongolia as a buffer state between China and the Soviet Union/Russia, the way China responded to Mongolia has not attracted much scholarly discussion in terms of the concept of buffer state.⁹⁹ Theoretically speaking, China should have annexed Mongolia once and for all after the Soviet Union disappeared. Because Chinese leaders had been haunted by China's geopolitical vulnerability to Mongolia since the 1960s, this course of action would have defused the perennial geopolitical anxiety. Nevertheless, China never annexed Mongolia. Instead of incorporating Mongolia into its territory, China signed the Sino-Mongolian Friendship and Cooperation Relationship Treaty with Mongolia in 1994, in which China vowed to respect Mongolia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.¹⁰⁰

Why was that? How can we explain China's decision to give up a great opportunity to take Mongolia back, which Chinese leaders had desired for decades, and accepted Mongolia's legitimate existence as an independent political entity from China, even though Chinese leaders

⁹⁸ "February 26, 1989, Memorandum of Conversation between George H. W. Bush and Chairman Deng Xiaoping in Beijing," (History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Wilson Center). <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116507> (accessed July 19 2018).

⁹⁹ R. Bold, "Military Aspects of Mongolian Geopolitics," *The Mongolian Journal of International Affairs* 2(1995); Lu Junyuan, "Mengguguo Diyuanyuan Texting Jiqi Guojiguanxi 蒙古国地缘特性及其国际关系 [On Mongolia's Geopolitical Features and Its International Relations]."; Jargalsaykhany Enkhsaykhan, "Some External Aspects of Mongolia's Security," *The Mongolian Journal of International Affairs* 4(1997).

¹⁰⁰ Regarding the content of this treaty, please visit:

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/tytj_674911/tyfg_674913/t5725.shtml (accessed August 28 2018)

had long been refraining from recognizing it in public? The current literature on Mongolia has an obvious research gap in this regard. Works from the 1990s seem to focus either on Mongolia's democratization movement¹⁰¹ or on Mongolia's new foreign policy trends.¹⁰² To be fair, dramatic geopolitical events on a global scale, such as the demise of the Soviet Union and the third wave of democratization transforming the socialist camp, easily draw scholars' attention at the time. The problem is, however, the question remains unanswered in the existing research on Mongolia.¹⁰³ Therefore, this section aims to explain the rationale behind China's conclusion of this treaty from the angle of China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia.

Chinese leaders arguably held strong buffer thinking toward Mongolia after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, although the leaders refrained from talking about issues related to Mongolia from a geopolitical perspective in public. Leaders in China who controlled the real policymaking power in the early 1990s, such as Deng, Yang, Chen Yun, and Li Xiannian, were all second-generation CCP leaders who had experienced the Sino-Soviet rivalry in person. Their opinions and instructions strongly influenced the third generation of CCP leaders until the mid-1990s. In this sense, it is sufficient to argue that China's buffer thinking toward Mongolia still effectively influenced how Chinese leaders perceived Mongolia after 1991.

In fact, few Chinese scholars would deny the geopolitical importance of Mongolia to China owing to Mongolia's unique location of being sandwiched between China and Russia. Zhang

¹⁰¹ V. Fritz, "Mongolia: Dependent Democratization," *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 18, no. 4 (2002); Tom Ginsburg, "Political Reform in Mongolia: Between Russia and China," *Asian Survey* 35, no. 5 (1995); Sheldon R. Severinghaus, "Mongolia in 1994: Strengthening Democracy," *ibid.*, no. 1.

¹⁰² Hou Hongyu, "Menggu Yu Daguo De Guanxi 蒙古与大国的关系 [Mongolia's Relations with Great Powers]," *Guoji Yanjiu Cankao 国际研究参考 [International Study Reference]* 3(1993); Sun Shuli, "Mengguguo De Xin Waijiao 蒙古国的新外交 [The New Diplomacy of Mongolia]," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi 现代国际关系 [Contemporary International Relations]* 5(1994); "Meimeng Guanxi Xunsu Fazhan 美蒙关系迅速发展 [The Increasing Development in the US-Mongolian Relations]," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi 现代国际关系 [Contemporary International Relations]* 1(1996); Zhang Lijun, "Zhonghe Guanxi Xin Geju De Gouzhu Yu Mengguguo Waijiao Zhanlue De Zhiheng He Hudong 中俄关系新格局的构筑与蒙古国外交战略的制衡和互动 [Building of A New Structure of the Sino-Russian Relations and the Balance and Interactions of Mongolia's Foreign Policy Strategy]," *Meimenggu Daxue Xuebao (Zhexue Shehui Gexue Ban) 内蒙古大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) Journal of Inner Mongolia University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 5(1996); "Mengguguo De Junshi Lilun Yu Diyuan Anquan Zhengce 蒙古国的均势理论与地缘安全政策 [Mongolia's Balance of Power and Geo-Security Policy]," *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu 国际政治研究 [Journal of International Studies]* 1(1997).

¹⁰³ Tsedendamba Batbayar, "Mongolian-Russian Relations in the Past Decade," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 6 (2003); Alan M. Wachman, "Mongolia's Geopolitical Gambit: Preserving a Precarious Independence While Resisting 'Soft Colonialism'. "; Li Narangoa, "Mongolia and Preventive Diplomacy: Haunted by History and Becoming Cosmopolitan. "; Wang Jianjun, *Menggu Yu Meiguo Guanxi Yanjiu 蒙古与美国关系研究 [The Study on the Mongolia-US Relations]* (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2014); Lu Junyuan, "Mengguguo Diyuan Texing Jiqi Guojiguanxi 蒙古国地缘特性及其国际关系 [On Mongolia's Geopolitical Features and Its International Relations]."

Wenmu, for example, vividly argued that the Mongolian plateau has been functioning as a key “game changer” to the wax and wane of Chinese dynasties in history. Taking Mongolia from China is equal to opening an incision in China’s chest, which is like stabbing China’s lungs and pointing to its heart (Beijing).¹⁰⁴ Wang Jianjun pointed out that, historically speaking, most threats against China were from the north, which is why a famous general of the Qing Dynasty, Zuo Zongtang, insightfully warned, “to place a high value on Xinjiang can protect Mongolia, and to protect Mongolia is to guard Beijing.”¹⁰⁵ Lu Junyuan maintained that the question of whether Mongolia is a security screen for China’s north or a base of foreign threats depends on what kind of policy Mongolia holds toward China.¹⁰⁶ If Mongolia holds a friendly policy toward China, it becomes a buffer between China and Russia. Putting those views together, it is apparent that geographical proximity, potential military threat, and historical memory are three essential components in these Chinese scholars’ view of Mongolia, which are exactly the same three components of buffer thinking analyzed in this thesis.

Since China’s buffer thinking toward Mongolia continued to be a critical influence on how Chinese leaders viewed Mongolia after 1991, what factors then intervened and hence made the leaders ultimately decide not to take Mongolia? Arguably, the decision to sign the treaty with Mongolia could be a result of three compounding factors. To begin with, economic reform preoccupied most of China’s energy after 1990. Since the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP of 1978, China set the development of socialist modernization as the paramount strategic objective of China for the coming decades. To this end, it was necessary to create a peaceful environment in which China could concentrate on its economic development. Deng, in his Southern Talk of 1992, reiterated such a necessity.¹⁰⁷ Conquering foreign territory, therefore, fundamentally contradicted this objective.

Second, the legitimacy of the CCP regime in China was on the brink at that moment. The third wave of democratization reached China at the end of the 1980s, during which a myriad of students, intellectuals, and urban middle-class groups all over China demanded democracy. The zenith of the democratization activity in China was the protest at the Tiananmen Square in

¹⁰⁴ Zhang Wenmu, *Zhongguo Diyuan Zhengzhi Lun 中国地缘政治论 [On China's Geopolitics]* (Beijing: China Ocean Press, 2015), pp. 17-22.

¹⁰⁵ Wang Jianjun, *Menggu Yu Meiguo Guanxi Yanjiu 蒙古与美国关系研究 [The Study on the Mongolia-US Relations]*, pp. 43-4.

¹⁰⁶ Lu Junyuan, "Mengguguo Diyuan Texing Jiqi Guojiguanxi 蒙古国地缘特性及其国际关系 [On Mongolia's Geopolitical Features and Its International Relations]," p. 39.

¹⁰⁷ Deng Xiaoping, "Zai Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shanghai Dengdi De Tanhua Yaodian 在武昌, 深圳, 珠海, 上海等地的谈话要点 [Talking Points in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shanghai]."

June 1989. However, the bloody crackdown by the Chinese government on the protesters shocked the international community, which subsequently put a series of long-term economic sanctions and weapons embargos on China. Suffering internal and external pressure at the same time, waging war on Mongolia would have further damaged China's tarnished national image and possibly served a fatal blow to the faltering CCP regime.¹⁰⁸

Certainly, a severe international event such a crisis or war against a foreign country could generate a so-called rally-round-the-flag effect, with people becoming more supportive of their government.¹⁰⁹ Scholars have often agreed that the connection between internal political stability and use of external force is a compelling way to explain China's foreign behavior, especially in Mao's era. Thomas Christensen, for example, used the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis to explain how Mao mobilized Chinese support for the socialism campaign of the Great Leap Forward.¹¹⁰ Following this line of reasoning, Chinese leaders in the early 1990s might have considered bolstering the popularity of the CCP regime by creating an international crisis against Mongolia and annexing Mongolia accordingly.

Indeed, this line of reasoning is not empirically groundless. Mongolia started to reach out to the US after the Soviet Union decided to withdraw military forces from Mongolia. The relationship between the two sides ramped up quickly in all respects under the acceleration of Mongolian democratization. The two sides established diplomatic ties in 1987. In August 1990, US Secretary of State James Baker paid a high-profile visit to Mongolia. During his visit, he meaningfully hinted that "[the US] will be your third neighbor" in his address to Mongolians.¹¹¹ In March 1991, both houses of the US Congress made an unprecedented joint resolution, "urging the US government to continue to grant all appropriate economic and technical assistance to Mongolia and its people."¹¹² In the following two years, the US agreed to help

¹⁰⁸ James C. Hsiung, "China's Omni-Directional Diplomacy: Realignment to Cope with Monopolar U.S. Power," *Asian Survey* 35, no. 6 (1995).

¹⁰⁹ Matthew A. Baum, "The Constituent Foundations of the Rally-Round-the-Flag Phenomenon," *International Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2002); John E. Mueller, "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson," *The American Political Science Review* 64, no. 1 (1970); Richard Brody and Catherine Shapiro, eds., *A Reconsideration of the Rally Phenomenon in Public Opinion*, vol. 2, Political Behavior Annual (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).

¹¹⁰ Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958*, CH 6.

¹¹¹ Mohan Malik, "Mongolia's Policy Options in the Post-Soviet World," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 7, no. 1 (1995): p. 296.

¹¹² Please see Congressional Record of 102nd Congress (1991-1992) at: <http://webarchive.loc.gov/congressional-record/20160321122813/http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?r102:8:./temp/~r102Qry8tW> (accessed September 5 2018)

Mongolia with military personnel training and replace outdated Soviet military equipment with US equipment.¹¹³

In the eyes of Chinese leaders, what the US was doing was promptly filling the power vacuum between China and Russia left by the Soviet Union. Although Chinese leaders at the time did not comment too much on the increasingly close relationship between the US and Mongolia in public, Chinese scholars were very vigilant about the potential geopolitical consequences of it. They mainly interpreted the US approach to Mongolia from two different standpoints but shared the same belief—China would be the US enemy in the future.¹¹⁴ On the one hand, supporting Mongolia's democracy served as an important part of the US' grand strategy of promoting a peaceful evolution against China. On the other hand, the US attempted to use Mongolia to contain China, as exemplified in one sentence frequently cited by Chinese scholars, "[what the US is doing is] intervening in a place between the bear's mouth and the dragon's claw."¹¹⁵

Thus, to explain China's puzzling agreement to the treaty of 1994, at a time of the demise of the Soviet Union and the fast-evolving US-Mongolian relationship, one has also to consider a factor that is able to pacify China's perennial geopolitical anxiety over Mongolia. Among other things, Mongolia's foreign policy course of neutralizing itself had the most significant effect in this regard. This course of action by Mongolia was timely and served the fundamental geopolitical goal of China toward Mongolia since the 1960s—neutralizing Mongolia.

Mongolia started to readjust its foreign policy course from comprehensively leaning on the Soviet Union to a more balanced and neutral position between its two neighbors at the end of the 1980s. Faced with the withered military support of the Soviet Union, Mongolia turned to

¹¹³ Wang Jianjun, *Menggu Yu Meiguo Guanxi Yanjiu* 蒙古与美国关系研究 [The Study on the Mongolia-US Relations], p. 100-3.

¹¹⁴ Sun Shuli, "Meimeng Guanxi Xunsu Fazhan 美蒙关系迅速发展 [The Increasing Development in the US-Mongolian Relations]."; Na Lin, "Mengmei Guanxi Fazhan De Dongli Shi Huxu 蒙美关系发展的动力是互惠 [The Dynamic of the Development of the US-Mongolian Relations Is the Mutual Need]," *Dongbeiyi Luntan* 东北亚论坛 [Northeast Asia Forum] 3(1999); Zhang Lijun, "Mengguguo De Junshi Lilun Yu Diyuan Anquan Zhengce 蒙古国的均势理论与地缘安全政策 [Mongolia's Balance of Power and Geo-Security Policy]."; "Zhonghe Guanxi Xin Geju De Gouzhu Yu Mengguguo Waijiao Zhanlue De Zhiheng He Hudong 中俄关系新格局的构筑与蒙古国外交战略的制衡和互动 [Building of A New Structure of the Sino-Russian Relations and the Balance and Interactions of Mongolia's Foreign Policy Strategy]."; Sun Shuli, "Mengguguo De Xin Waijiao 蒙古国的新外交 [The New Diplomacy of Mongolia]."

¹¹⁵ "Meimeng Guanxi Xunsu Fazhan 美蒙关系迅速发展 [The Increasing Development in the US-Mongolian Relations]," p. 34; Zhang Lijun, "Mengguguo De Junshi Lilun Yu Diyuan Anquan Zhengce 蒙古国的均势理论与地缘安全政策 [Mongolia's Balance of Power and Geo-Security Policy]," p. 42.

rely on political means to ensure Mongolia's independence and sovereignty in the future, and the idea of Mongolian neutralization was born. To reach this goal, Mongolia needed to develop an equal relationship with its two powerful neighbors externally and faithfully embrace this policy course internally at the same time. The debut of this course of foreign policy was Punsalmaagiyn Ochirbat's visit to China in May 1990. Ochirbat, who was elected as Chairman of the Presidium of the People's Great Hural of Mongolia two months previously, unprecedentedly chose China rather than the Soviet Union to be his first foreign visit country, symbolizing the first move of this neutralized position. He said, "Mongolia valued its cooperative relationship with China and the Soviet Union at the same time."¹¹⁶ In 1991, Mongolia joined the Non-Aligned Movement and took an active part in the Ministerial Conferences. In January the following year, Mongolia's new constitution explicitly specified that stationing foreign military forces in Mongolia and traversing Mongolia's territory were both prohibited.

Apparently, China welcomed the idea of Mongolian neutralization after the Tiananmen crackdown. As discussed in the last section, China attempted to restore its relationship with Mongolia after the mid-1980s, which served as part of efforts towards the military neutralization of Mongolia. Following the trend of reconciliation with Mongolia, Chinese leaders were willing to see Mongolia take this path one step further as this would contribute to the stable and peaceful security environment China desperately needed during the time of the CCP regime crisis. In a meeting with Ochirbat in May 1990, for example, Chinese Premier Li Peng stressed that the Sino-Mongolian border areas should become peaceful areas and China's priority was to maintain political stability.¹¹⁷ Chinese President Jiang Zemin reiterated this priority the next day.¹¹⁸

Instead of changing its position on Mongolian neutralization, China continued to support it after the demise of the Soviet Union in December 1991. China responded to the dramatic change of the geopolitical environment around Mongolia quickly in 1992, and it was apparent from a series of measures adopted by China that it wanted to keep neutralizing Mongolia in this volatile environment. For instance, Mongolian Prime Minister Dashiin Byambasuren paid a visit to China in May 1992. In the meetings with Byambasuren, Jiang, Yang, and Li all

¹¹⁶ Wen Xian, "Li Peng Tong Aoqierbate Juxing Huitan 李鹏同奥其尔巴特举行会谈 [Li Peng Holds a Meeting with Ochirbat]," *People's Daily*, May 5 1990.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Wen Xian, "Jiang Zemin Huijian Aoqierbate 江泽民会见奥其尔巴特 [Jiang Zemin Received Ochirbat]," *People's Daily*, May 6 1990.

conveyed the same message that China wanted to keep close communications with Mongolian leaders during this complex and unstable international situation. While Li hoped that the mutual border between China and Mongolia would be peaceful and cooperative, he also promised that China's policy toward Mongolia would not change and the policy would still be under the guidance of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between China and Mongolia of 1960, and the Sino-Mongolian Joint Communiqué of 1990.¹¹⁹ The Sino-Russo Joint Statement on the Foundation of the Mutual Relations signed in December 1992 was further evidence of this as the statement continued the spirit of the Sino-Soviet Joint Statement of 1989—not to militarily use the territory of a country bordering the two sides to threaten the other side.¹²⁰

Against this backdrop, it was not too surprising to see that China agreed to sign the Sino-Mongolian Friendship and Cooperation Relationship Treaty with Mongolia in 1994. To legally cement its neutralized position one step further, Mongolia firstly approached Russia to gain the guarantee of a great power. The two sides concluded the Russo-Mongolian Treaty on Friendly Relations and Cooperation in 1993, which legalized Mongolia's neutralized position.¹²¹ Then Mongolia approached China with a similar treaty, in which both sides agreed on Mongolia's neutralized political and military position:

Both of the signatories will not participate in any military and political alliance against the other party; will not sign any treaty undermining the national sovereignty and security of the other party; none of the parties will allow a third state to use its territory to undermine the national sovereignty and security of the other party.¹²²

Arguably, it was this very clause that made China consent to legally bind itself to a position of respecting Mongolia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, because a politically and militarily neutralized Mongolia was exactly what China had been pursuing for decades. More importantly, this comprehensive idea of neutralizing Mongolia satisfied the geopolitical goal of China at a time when Chinese leaders desperately needed a stable security environment. This explained why Li, when signing the treaty, commented that "China praises Mongolia's aggressive effort to maintain the

¹¹⁹ Ma Xiaoning, "Zhongmeng Liangguo Zongli Juxing Huitan 中蒙两国总理举行会谈 [A Meeting was Held between Prime Ministers of China and Mongolia]," *ibid.*, May 9 1992.

¹²⁰ Regarding the text of this joint statement, please visit: <http://www.cctv.com/special/903/6/70491.html> (accessed September 7 2018)

¹²¹ Regarding the text of this joint statement, please visit: file:///C:/Users/u5281821/Downloads/01Mar_DonrovG_Redacted.pdf (accessed September 7 2018)

¹²² Regarding the content of this treaty, please visit: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/tytj_674911/tyfg_674913/t5725.shtml (accessed August 28 2018)

peace and stability in this region.”¹²³ Since then, the idea of Mongolian neutralization has consistently appeared together with the idea of China’s respect for Mongolia’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity in a number of statements and treaties between the two sides.

6.6 Conclusion

The geopolitical value of Mongolia did not appear in the minds of CCP leaders under the asymmetrical CCP-Soviet Union relationship before the establishment of the PRC. In contrast to the KMT, which emphasized Mongolia as a natural shield protecting the survival of China,¹²⁴ and the Soviet Union, which focused on Mongolia’s geopolitical function in fending off the Soviet’s potential enemy, the CCP was the only party viewing Mongolia through a minority nationality lens. Owing to this perspective, supporting Mongolia’s independence on the basis of the principle of national self-determination offered the CCP a useful tool for managing the conflicts between Chinese nationalism and the Soviet Union geopolitical interests as well as to weaken the support base of the KMT. China’s buffer thinking toward Mongolia appeared only after the Sino-Soviet rivalry relationship emerged in 1964. Mongolia was believed to be one place from which the Soviet Union would launch its military strike on China. The memory of how the Russian Empire encroached on China augmented this belief. Driven by this geopolitical mentality, China initiated the TFC in the 1960s, pushing for Soviet military withdrawal from Mongolia in the 1970–80s, and signing a treaty respecting Mongolia’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity in 1994. Although China demonstrated three different types of behavior in the three episodes, the purpose of neutralizing Mongolia was behind all of the three.

¹²³ Xu Hongzhi and Ao Qier, "Lipeng Zongli Tong Zhasilai Zongli Huitan 李鹏总理同扎斯莱总理会谈 [Premier Li Peng Met with Prime Minister Jasrai]," *People's Daily*, April 30 1994.

¹²⁴ Chiang Kai-shek, *Zhongguo Zhi Mingyun 中國之命運 [China's Destiny]*, p. 6.

CH 7 Conclusion

This chapter will first summarize the four major findings of this thesis, and then it will discuss in detail the contributions of this thesis to the fields of IR and geopolitics. The final section will outline four future research directions related to China's buffer thinking as a final conclusion.

7.1 China's Buffer Thinking

This thesis began with an empirical puzzle: China's behavior toward North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia has a decades-long consistency, shown in China's policy goals of maintaining the existence of North Korea, annexing Taiwan, and neutralizing Mongolia. The argument this thesis provides is that this behavior is driven by China's buffer thinking toward the three territories. Buffer thinking is a geopolitical mentality that entails the logic of "secure this territory against my rival now, otherwise the rival may launch a military attack from it against me in the future once the rival has occupied the territory." This mentality only emerges after a rivalrous relationship has become established (in China's case, with the US or the Soviet Union). Starting from a defensive calculus of how to cut off a potential invasion route of a rival and protect cities and industrial bases behind a buffer, the conclusion Chinese leaders arrived at is to actively secure the territory of the buffer beyond China's borders. Although China demonstrated different types of "securing behavior in different cases and at different times, ranging from military actions and diplomatic negotiations, to even a grand strategic retreat from a front line, all of these actions serve the same purpose—keeping a physical distance from the rival. The historical memories of how China was invaded via the buffers in the past further strengthens the necessity of securing the buffer. In this way, buffer thinking is a unique

synthesis of the sensitivity to the geographical location of a buffer, traumatic historical memories of the buffer, and estimations of potential military threats of a rival via the buffer.

There are four major findings that have emerged from the three case studies in this thesis. First and foremost, geopolitical imperatives have played a much more prominent role in the making of Chinese foreign policy than scholars have previously recognized. As detailed in Chapter Two, scholars in China Studies have drawn a wide range of variables to explain China's foreign policy, including history, ideology, power struggle within the CCP, and nationalism and so forth. These studies have often led to the conclusion that China is a passive and inward-looking state. The geopolitical imperatives of China did not gain much scholarly attention for many years. This lack of attention is especially discernable in the English world. As this thesis has documented, however, China's buffer thinking based on geopolitical imperatives has been a dominating factor in shaping China's interactions with Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia. This has been evident across a number of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) administrations: from Mao's China to Deng's China, to Jiang's China, and then to Hu's China. Beijing has long been closely watching and managing these buffers around its periphery. It is highly likely that Xi Jinping's China would be driven by the same thinking particularly given the Sino-US rivalry that has been gaining traction since 2016. In this sense, the behavioral consistency of China should not simply be construed as bureaucratic inertia, but should also be interpreted as a decades-long effort in which China rationally and intentionally has pursuing a more secure geopolitical environment around its periphery. Without factoring in China's buffer thinking, one cannot fully understand the rationale behind China's behavior toward Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia.

Second, the CCP's perception of the value of Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia has evolved through three fairly distinct periods: a non-geopolitical period (1921–1946), a shaping period (1946–1964), and a geopolitical period (1964–). In the non-geopolitical period, there is little evidence to suggest that the CCP's views of these three territories held geopolitical significance to the security of China. Minority nationality was the principal lens through which the CCP saw the value of the three, which was mostly for fighting against Japan and weakening the support base of the Kuomintang. The period from 1946–1964 represented a definitive twenty-years in which Chinese leaders started to recognize the geopolitical value of Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia. As explained in Chapter Three, buffer state status is not only an objective reality, but is also shaped by the subjective perception of buffered states of their rivalry with another state. Accordingly, before the emergence of the Sino-US rivalry in June 1946, the CCP

did not see any geopolitical value of Taiwan Island to the security of China. Similarly, on the eve of the Korean War (1950–53), Mao Zedong's promise to help Kim Il Sung in the execution of his plan to unify the peninsula by force was not predicated on the geopolitical value of the Korean Peninsula. Prior to identifying the Soviet Union as a hostile state with the ambition to invade China in 1964, Beijing did not defend or even demarcate the Sino-Mongolian border. Ultimately, however, the geopolitical value of each territory appeared in the minds of Chinese leaders at the respective junctures of 1949, 1950, and 1964. In the CCP's eyes, those territories constituted potential routes through which a rival could launch military attacks against China. Since this shaping period, the geopolitical value of these three territories has remained crucial in the minds of Chinese leaders.

Third, the effect of historical memories on China's behavior is profound and vast. One significant effect of the historical memories of how the Japanese Empire, the Russian Empire, the US, and the Soviet Union undermined the security interests of China via the three buffers is that the threat assessment by Chinese leaders sometimes disconnected with the military reality. When assessing a military threat, Chinese leaders have typically prioritized their own historical memories over other factors, such as intentions, purposes, or preconditions. As mentioned in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, for instance, the Mongolian-Soviet defense treaty in 1964 shared many similarities with the mutual defense treaty that Taiwan and the US signed in 1955. Both were aimed at maintaining the *status quo* by a greater power offering its military protection to a smaller power neighboring China. Both would only be activated if China undermined the territorial integrity of the smaller power. And both indicated their adherence to the Charter of the United Nations. For instance, at the signing of the Mongolian-Soviet defense treaty, Leonid Brezhnev commented as follows:

As is known, China has not renounced its claim towards its northern neighbors, and this is sufficient for both the Soviet Union and Mongolia to be vigilant...The basic sense of the Russian-Mongolian treaty lies in the fact that it recognizes the real possibility that the independence of a Socialist country can be endangered by another Socialist country.¹

However, those factors did not carry the same weight as China's own historical memory of how the Tsar's encroachment on Qing China's sovereignty. The case of North Korea exhibited a similar pattern. During the Korean War, Harry Truman's strategic objective to avoid

¹ Ram Rahul Sheel, "Mongolia in International Perspective," *International Studies* 22, no. 3 (1985): p. 231.

spreading the conflict onto China's soil was clear, however, the assumption of Chinese leaders during the war was that the US was determined to copy the strategy of the Japanese Empire.

The effect of these historical memories is that China's buffer thinking has acted like a "glue," firmly sticking a part of China onto an old polarity despite the power configuration of the international system has entered into a new pattern. Such memories are encapsulated in a series of vividly historical descriptions of China's geopolitical vulnerability to the three buffers: "The US is trying to occupy Taiwan as the Japanese Empire did in 1895;" "MacArthur and Dulles regarded Taiwan as an unsinkable aircraft carrier in Asia and the Pacific;" "US imperialism invasion of Taiwan and North Korea is literally copying Tanaka Giichi's plan;" "The developed countries' policy of bullying undeveloped countries remains;" and "The Soviet revisionist new Tsar has completely taken over the old Tsar's expansionist tradition."² Given that the sources used in this thesis were official statements and internal declassified documents, the position of this thesis is that, instead of simply regarding those descriptions as propaganda, they should be treated as powerful tools utilized by Chinese leaders both in seeking consensus inside the CCP and mobilizing support from ordinary Chinese people. Moreover, it is not too difficult to discover that the recent statements by Chinese officials, policy papers, news, or scholarly works regarding how China looks at the three buffers have inherited the same historical memories. In this way, once Chinese leaders apply buffer thinking to a given territory, it is very difficult for them to get rid of the shadow of this geopolitical mentality whenever they look at that territory.

Finally, buffer thinking has sound explanatory power for understanding China's behavior in relation to other competing explanations. As discussed in Chapter Three, the selection of Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia as case studies made it possible to examine China's buffer thinking in a methodologically rigorous fashion. This is because the three cases constitute different types of buffers for China in terms of their disparate geographical settings as buffer states. Mongolia, being an inland state exclusively bordering China and Russia, is a classic buffer state. Taiwan, being an island located 150 kilometers from the Chinese coast and with ambiguous US support, least fits the buffer state concept. North Korea, adjoining China's border on one side and a state that houses US forces on the other, is a case somewhere in between. This thesis demonstrated that the explanatory power of China's buffer thinking was strongest in the case of Taiwan and weakest in the case of Mongolia. This means the argument

² For the citations in this paragraph, please see previous chapters.

propounded in this thesis has considerable explanatory power because it survived a critical least-likely test.

On the other hand, the weak performance of the most-likely case of Mongolia cannot and should not deny the significance of China's buffer thinking developed in this thesis. As shown in Chapter Six, the Mongolian case entailed a considerable degree of influence from structural and state level factors, which was the main reason why China's behavior toward Mongolia demonstrated the greatest variance among the three cases. However, the influence of China's buffer thinking in the Mongolian case is still clearly discernable. More importantly, the weak performance of China's buffer thinking in this case should be attributed more to the limited sources than a lack of explanatory power *per se*. Among the three cases, declassified documents on Mongolia are the most limited in China and, in general, Chinese officials largely refrain from mentioning making geopolitical reference to Mongolia. By contrast, sources on China's geopolitical views of Taiwan are ample, and Chinese officials do not shy away from voicing their military plans against Taiwan in the public realm. If Mongolia-related document were more accessible in China, it is likely that the explanatory power of China's buffer thinking toward its peripheral and neighboring states would be increased significantly.

7.2 Contribution to IR and Geopolitics

The most important contribution of this thesis has been the bringing back of geography to the field of IR. The term "geopolitics" was coined by Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen in an 1899 article to emphasize the importance of understanding the rationale of state behavior from each state's unique geographical conditions, or spatial conditions in a broader sense.³ Since then, geopolitics became a popular academic discipline in many countries, Germany in particular, in the first half of the 20th century. However, being discredited as a pseudo-science due to its association with Nazi ideology, geopolitics considerably lost its attraction in academic circles after World War II (WWII, 1939–45). The result is that the term geopolitics is widely employed in the context of global politics, but usually with no rigorous definition and not treated geography seriously as an intervene or independent variable in their works. For

³ Regarding Kjellen's works please see this detailed review: Carl Marklund, "The Return of Geopolitics in the Era of Soft Power: Rereading Rudolf Kjellén on Geopolitical Imaginary and Competitive Identity," *Geopolitics* 20, no. 2 (2015).

example, it seems that the term geopolitics is exchangeable to terms such as global, security, or even great power to a large certain extent in Michael Dempsey's commentary on the future flash points:

If 2018 was a year marked by international challenges that percolated but did not boil over into full-blown crises, next year may well be the year in which that good fortune runs out...So, let me highlight five major geopolitical challenges that I fear may become more troublesome in the coming months, as well as a few less publicized but still worrisome "hot spots" that may also command policy maker attention in the year ahead.⁴

This trend also reflects in a phenomenon that the dominate theories and research agendas in several key IR journals occasionally speaks of geography in analyzing state foreign policy. There will only five articles show up if one searches by the key word "geography" on *International Organization* in the time period from 1945 to 2019.⁵ The search result of *American Political Science Review* is 34⁶ while *World Politics* is 13⁷. None of the top 50 most cited articles of *International Security* placed geographic factors at the center of their works explaining state foreign policy.⁸ Research regarding geographical factors tends to cluster in journals relevant to peace and conflict research. A fashion of conducting quantitative research further marginalized the importance of theorizing geographical factors in terms of IR theories in this field. As a result, when it comes to scholarly work on geographical factors in the field of IR today, the most systematic works are that of Nicholas Spykman published in the 1940s, which discusses various geographical factors involved in the making of foreign policy, and

⁴ Michael P. Dempsey, "The Geopolitical Flash Points of 2019," December 19 2018.

⁵ Please see the search result in here:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-organization/listing?q=geography&filters%5BdateYearRange%5D%5Bfrom%5D=1945&filters%5BdateYearRange%5D%5Bto%5D=2019&searchWithinIds=146C8B1E6606CE283EBC5B10B255F4C0> (accessed March 20 2019).

⁶ Please see the search result in here:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/listing?q=geography&filters%5BdateYearRange%5D%5Bfrom%5D=1945&filters%5BdateYearRange%5D%5Bto%5D=2019&searchWithinIds=833A7242AC7B607BA7F6168DA072DB3B%2CDEF6D9E6432F4E804AD2D9416C8C2165> (accessed March 20 2019).

⁷ Please see the search result in here:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/world-politics/listing?q=geography&filters%5BdateYearRange%5D%5Bfrom%5D=1945&filters%5BdateYearRange%5D%5Bto%5D=2019&searchWithinIds=A44674D47342D5A8F85F9FF5A0AFDC43> (accessed March 20 2019).

⁸ Please see the search result in here:

<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/action/showMostCitedArticles?journalCode=isec> (accessed March 20 2019).

famously revised Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory.⁹ As for the discussion on geography's relationship with polarity, the research is even rare. One of the most important works in this regard is Robert Ross' "The Geography of the Peace," a title that honors Spykman's work.¹⁰ It is a bit unfortunate that relatively few IR scholars nowadays place geography at the center of their research,¹¹ especially considering that geographical and spatial concerns have never ceased to influence policymakers after WWII. Hence, by borrowing the concept of buffer state from the field of geopolitics and then incorporating it into IR research, this thesis continues this vital discussion in the field of IR.

Second, this thesis also provides critical contributions to IR theories based on material ontology and non-material ontology. To theories in the former category, structural realism in particular, this thesis had re-conceptualized a widely accepted assumption that the relationship between state behavior and structural change is responsive. To theories emphasizing the importance of non-material ontology, especially social constructivism, this thesis pointed out one promising direction to further this school of thought.

To study state behavior in a more scientifically rigorous way, Kenneth Waltz proposed a theory of structural realism in *Theory of International Politics*, arguing that structure largely determines state behavior.¹² According to Waltz's definition, a structure is composed of two elements: attributes of and relations among the units (states) in the international system. Although structures vary according to the ordering principle of the international system, the specification of the functions of units, and the type of the distribution of power across units, in fact structures only differ along the power distribution across units because the ordering principle of the system has been anarchy and states are functional alike units. In this sense, what state behavior actually responds to is the change in power configuration, or so-called polarity, in the international system. Following the advent of structural realism, the assumption

⁹ Nicholas J. Spykman, "Geography and Foreign Policy, II.," "Frontiers, Security, and International Organization," *Geographical Review* 32, no. 3 (1942); *The Geography of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944); *America's Strategy in World Politics, the United States and the Balance of Power* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008); Nicholas J. Spykman and Abbie A. Rollins, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy, I.," "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy, II," *The American Political Science Review* 33, no. 4 (1939); Nicholas J. Spykman, "Geography and Foreign Policy, I," *ibid.* 32, no. 1 (1938).

¹⁰ Robert S. Ross, "The Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-First Century," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999).

¹¹ As mentioned in Chapter One, Robert Ross, John Mearsheimer, Jack Levy and William Thompson's works have included geographical factors in their main arguments.

¹² Robert O. Keohane, ed. *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), CH 11; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

that state behavior will be shaped by changes in polarity has been a key component underpinning of various IR theories across different schools of thought up until today.

However, as demonstrated in Chapters Four to Six, a finding that has emerged in this thesis is that the effects of changes in polarity are “territorially conditional” in the case of China. While China’s behavior toward great powers such as the Soviet Union and the US have been quite responsive to changes of polarity in the system, it is not the case in its behavior toward Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia. China’s ultimate geopolitical goals against the three small neighbors on China’s periphery in fact crossed different power configurations in different timeframes. China’s buffer thinking, in other words, has been functioning as an intervening variable, mediating the effect of the alternation of the power distribution in the system on China’s behavior toward Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia over the decades. Moreover, China is not the only case in point. Many analysts have observed that Russia’s maintenance of Ukraine as a buffer state was one important motive behind its military takeover of Crimea in 2014, despite the fact that the Cold War ended more than two decades ago.¹³ Therefore, this thesis suggests that one should not treat the assumption that state behavior changes in accordance with shifts of polarity in the international system as a given. Instead, scholars and analysts may need to examine whether a state exhibits buffer thinking toward another state before he/she applies this assumption to his/her works.

In Alexander Wendt’s social constructivism, on the other hand, international politics is interpreted as a dynamic process in which agents’ (states) identities define how they interact with one another, which determines what types of anarchical cultures they live in.¹⁴ Different anarchical cultures, in turn, shape the way that states engage with one another differently. That is, two states may view each other as enemies now, but this shared identity between the two can become rivals later. Thus, according to Wendt, the way in which one state views another state’s identity can change with the passage of time and through interaction.

The analysis presented in this thesis, however, suggests that Wendt’s theory too may be territorially conditional in the case of China. When China perceives an invasion by a rival state via a small state to be a real possibility, an identity of “my buffer state” is the identity that China gives to the small state and it hence become a default identity whenever China looks at

¹³ Stephen M. Walt, "History Shows Caution Is the Best Approach for Foreign Action," *The New York Times*, May 15 2015; Peter Harris, "Ukraine's Dilemma: Who'd Want to be a Buffer State?," *The National Interest*, 5 September 2014.

¹⁴ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.

this small state. This identity shaped by buffer thinking does not fade when the threat of the rival recedes or when the rival interacts differently with China, but remains deeply embedded in the territory controlled by the small state. The historical memory of this territory serves as a reminder to Chinese leaders of the small state's identity, making this subjective and unilateral perception of buffer state status persists. Furthermore, Wendt does not offer a clear answer to the question of what specific mechanisms enable one anarchical culture to evolve into another and hence transform the identity of states within it. The answer to the unresolved question may hinge upon this question—how to overcome one state's buffer thinking toward another state?

Although this thesis provides significant contributions to structural realism and social constructivism at the same time, it does not intend to take a side in any IR research paradigm debate such as realists vis-à-vis liberalists or rationalists vis-à-vis reflexivists.¹⁵ Alastair Iain Johnston touched on the importance of culture and history variables in the making of China's foreign policy behavior in *Culture Realism* of 1995, which reflected the background of the third/fourth IR research paradigm debate in the 1990s.¹⁶ The position of this thesis is that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for this thesis to claim as a supporter in any camp of the debates because the boundary separating each camp's assumptions, ontology, epistemology, analytical level, and methodology has never been a clear line. What this thesis does is to use tools and methods available from any camp as much as possible. In fact, any side in any of the debates may find this thesis disturbing due to this thesis's certain elements in terms of assumptions, analytical level, and arguments. This thesis starts from a realist assumption on the responsive nature between state behavior and polarity change, opens the black box of decision-making in the analytic process as what a liberalist would do, and argues like a constructivist that the weight of past history of how the territories were used by China's previous enemies makes Chinese leaders believe the behavior of securing the three buffers is necessary. While China's buffer thinking originates and contains Chinese leaders' perception

¹⁵ Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1988).

¹⁶ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Culture Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, pp. 1-4. The first IR research paradigm debate occurred in the 1940s, during which realists challenged idealists. The second IR research paradigm debate appeared in a disagreement between behaviourists and traditionalists over research methodology in the 1950s–1960s. While some scholars think the debate between structural realists and institutional liberalists in the 1970s is another wave of IR research paradigm debate, others argue that this debate is not a genuine research paradigm debate but a “neo-neo synthesis.” If that debate should be recognized as an inter-paradigm debate in the field of IR, then the challenge social constructivists posed to structural realists and institutional liberalists in the 1990s is the third IR research paradigm debate. Please see: Ole Wæver, "The Rise and Fall of the Inter-Paradigm Debate," in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. Ken Booth Steve Smith, and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

of military threat from a rival in a rational calculation, the stickiness of the history renders China's behavior disconnected to the objective military reality in some cases.

This thesis, however, does share the same epistemology with rationalists. The common ground of this thesis and rationalists' theories is that both of us try to build a scientific, objective, and verifiable explanation to understand this complex world. While this thesis acknowledges that theories at the system level may have to sacrifice a significant degree of complexity, it also stands on a position that researchers should try to specify the bounds of applicability of their theory as much as possible. Based on the structural realist's model that states would mechanically respond to the change of the polarity, this thesis further specifies the condition under which the structural force would not generate the expected outcome in the case of China. The same structural force would cause China to perform two different types of behavior if buffer thinking exists. In this sense, the contribution of this thesis is going to make this complex world more complex because it decoded the simple formula of realists, reminding researchers to carefully examine how structural force works on each state individually rather than collectively. If China has buffer thinking, who is next?

Third and finally, this thesis sheds new light on applying the concept of buffer states to the field of geopolitics. Generally speaking, the literature on buffer states can be separated into two distinct categories. On the one hand, half the works focus on a single empirical case study of a buffer state. The themes explored in this type of work are how buffer states between two bigger neighbors behave in a rivalrous relationship or how the two neighbors compete for the buffer.¹⁷ On the other hand, there are works that address the theoretical dimension of buffer states collectively, such as buffer state's functions, features, or fates, from a holistic vantage point.¹⁸ These two different approaches to studying buffer states have sharply divided this research community, and both sides have overlooked a major factor in their work—a buffered state may have multiple buffers in different buffer systems at one time. This factor is significant for understanding how buffers function. As demonstrated in Chapter Five, China's buffer thinking

¹⁷ John Chay, "Korea, A Buffer State."; G. P. Deshpande, "Mongolia: The Reluctant Buffer," *China Report* 4, no. 19 (1968); Seung-Young Kim, "Russo-Japanese Rivalry over Korean Buffer at the Beginning of the 20th Century and its Implications," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 16(2005); Keith McLachlan, "Afghanistan: The Geopolitics of a Buffer State," *Geopolitics and International Boundaries* 2, no. 1 (1997); Vatthana Pholsena and Ruth Banomyong, *Laos: From Buffer State to Crossroads?* (Chiang Mai: Mekong press, 2006); Efraim Karsh, "Geographical Determinism: Finnish Neutrality Revisited."

¹⁸ Tanisha M. Fazal, "State Death in the International System."; Mary Barnes Gear, "Role of Buffer States in International Relations."; Michael Greenfield Partem, "The Buffer System in International Relations."; Rajan Menon and Jack L. Snyder, "Buffer Zones: Anachronism, Power Vacuum, or Confidence Builder?."; Olav Fagelund Knudsen, "Easten Europe: The Buffer Effect of A Cordon Sanitaire."; Nicholas J. Spykman and Abbie A. Rollins, "Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy, I."

toward Taiwan contributed to China's behavior toward North Korea during the Korean War. Both Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin agreed that, to seize Taiwan, it is necessary to demonstrate China's power on the Korean battlefield. In other words, how a state views buffer state "A" may be influenced by its view of buffer state "B."

Nevertheless, aside from the case of the Korean War, this thesis has not discovered any explicit evidence suggesting a mutual connection between China's buffer views toward Taiwan, Mongolia, and North Korea. However, it is very likely that this lack of evidence is due to the fact that, at the time of writing, the only documents that have been declassified by the Chinese government are those dated before 1966. Some clues did suggest that China might view the Mongolian and Taiwan buffer collectively. The formation of the Sino-Soviet rivalry prompted China to cooperate with the US geopolitically in the early 1970s, and the meeting records of the negotiation between Chinese and US officials showed that Zhou Enlai went to great lengths to argue the necessity of a US withdrawal from Taiwan. The underlying assumption of this request of Zhou was that the US and Japan may use this island in the future—which is, essentially, buffer thinking.¹⁹ This indicates that a linkage between China's buffer thinking toward Taiwan and Mongolia is theoretically possible. Moreover, the lack of evidence in the case of China does not and should not exclude the possibility that such a connection may apply to other buffered states. For example, the Soviet Union's buffer thinking toward Poland may be related to its treatment of Mongolia and/or Finland.

Also, this thesis has explored a relatively rigor definition to examine a state's buffer state status by incorporating buffered state's subjective perception. As Chapter Three indicated, when scholars talk about buffers states nowadays, they often rely on a definition of buffer state on the basis of objective elements, i.e. geography, function, and power. A better definition for buffer state should be—*a buffer state is a relatively weak state that is geographically located in a place with strategic importance for two or more stronger rival states and that directly contributes to matters of key national security for either one of them. And at least one of the rival states perceives this strategic importance of the weak state.* There several advantages of adopting this definition. With a definition included subjective perception of buffered states, one is able to make a more academically precise statement regarding buffer states. For example, North Korea is a buffer state of China but not a buffer state of the US. Nepal, located between

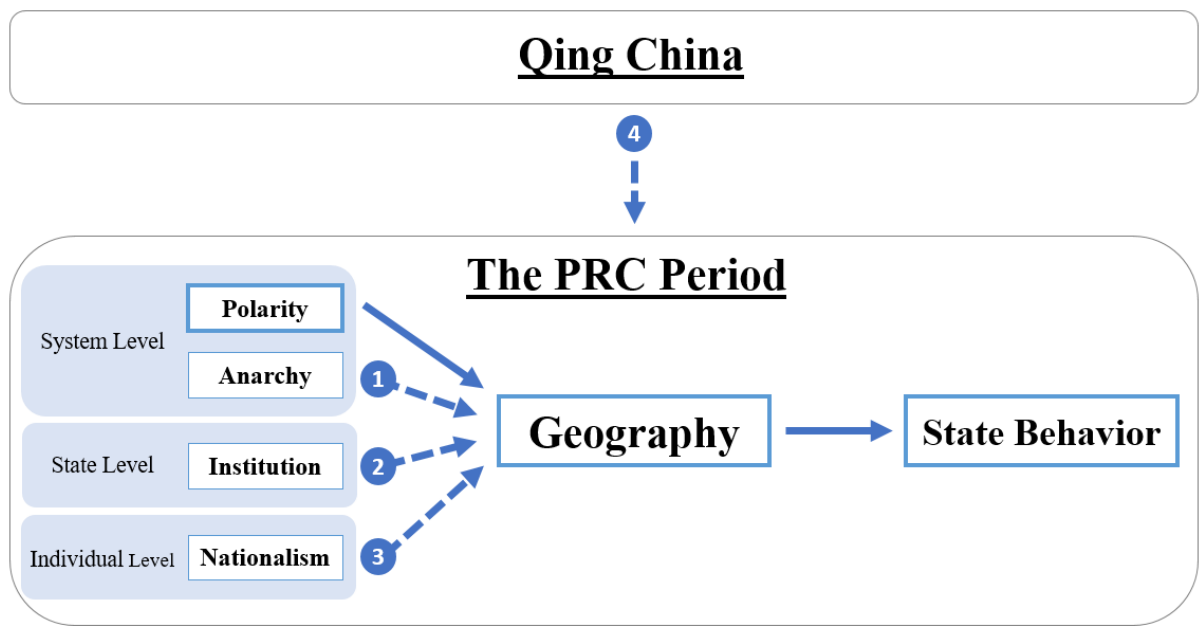
¹⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-76, Volume XVII, China, 1969-76*, ed. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2010). <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d139> (accessed July 19 2018).

China and India, is not a buffer state of China due to the lack of China’s subjective perception. Furthermore, except for enabling one to trace the variance of each buffer state’s buffer state status as how this thesis has completed, the new definition can further broaden the research scope of two types literature on buffer state mentioned above. For example, will the number of subjective perceptions from powerful neighbors influence buffer states’ behavior significantly? Whether a buffer state with one subjective perception from one powerful neighbor lives longer than the one with two subjective perceptions simultaneously? Thus, the new definition will enrich the current understanding of the concept of buffer state.

7.3 Pathways for Further Research

Although the focus of this thesis has been on China’s buffer thinking toward Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), it is my hope that scholars who are interested in this topic will continue to explore the concept of China’s buffer thinking from other analytical levels and timeframes in the future. There are four potential research paths that would build on the findings of this thesis (Figure 6):

Figure 6: Future Research Projects



1. The Relationship between Geography and Anarchy

In addition to the effect of polarity, anarchy is another indispensable assumption accepted by a majority of mainstream IR scholars. The anarchical nature of the international system pushes states to rely on their own power to protect themselves from attacks by others. Classical IR concepts such as balance of power, security dilemma, and relative gain have all developed from the concept of anarchy. The effect of anarchy has thus been a key foundation for a vast array of IR theories across different schools of thought. Since this thesis has examined the relationship between geography and polarity, exploring geography's relationship with anarchy is one necessary step in understanding the role geography plays at the system level in more depth.

Theoretically speaking, states surrounded by buffer states would enjoy a higher level of sense of security than states with no surrounding buffers, because the buffered states are spatially separated from their rivals by the buffers. Buffer states function to temper buffered states' perceptions of the external threats they face in this anarchical environment, as the territories of the buffer states provide buffered states with extra space and time for observation, intervention, mobilization, and defense. This extra space and time can, as a result, mitigate the effects of anarchy on buffered states' behavior. That is why, throughout history, establishing buffer states along power frontiers was a common strategy among states seeking to manage their security environment. The Holy Roman Empire, for instance, set up "march states" along its frontiers to ensure the security of its inland territory. Meanwhile, the British and Russian Empires both maintained Afghanistan as a buffer state in the 19th century to avoid a clash of power. Joseph Stalin wrenched Mongolia from China's control on the premise that the Soviet Union required a buffer state for its security.

This function of buffer states in tempering the threat perceptions of states in the anarchical environment is also widely recognized by scholars in different fields. Historian Paul Schroeder points out that the importance of buffer states for the stability of Europe has been underestimated.²⁰ He argues that buffer states such as the Kingdoms of the United Netherlands, Scandinavia, Switzerland, the German Confederation all played roles as intermediary bodies for absorbing conflicts and connecting mutual interests among Britain, Austria, Russia, and

²⁰ Paul W. Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory."; *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848*; "The 19th Century International System: Changes in the Structure."

France in 19th century European international politics. By employing quantitative methods, political scientists have proved that there is a significantly positive correlation between spatial contiguity and war-prone behavior among states.²¹ John Mearsheimer, a towering IR figure, maintained that the buffer zone between the Soviet Union and Germany in the 1930s encouraged the Soviet Union to adopt the behavior of buck-passing.

Considering the substantial security benefits that buffer states can potentially bring, one would assume that great powers would endeavor to maintain the existence of their neighboring buffer states at all costs. However, the empirical evidence points to the contrary. Tanisha Fazal, in her classic work on buffer states, calculated that 50 out of 207 states in the world “died” due to military occupation and conquest since 1816, among which a majority had the status of buffer state.²² She found that the lack of trust between two rivaling powers was the primary cause behind their decision to take over the buffers in between first before the other one does. In other words, having a buffer state against a rival may not necessarily make a state feel more secure in the end.

Thus, one research question that arises from this is—what kind of buffer state behavior would increase the sense of threat of the two rivaling powers, and what kind of behavior would serve to decrease the sense of threat?

This question has significant policy importance for leaders in small states neighboring China today. Since Xi took power in 2012, China has exhibited aggressive behavior toward the world, especially countries in Asia. US Secretary of Defense James Mattis believes this behavior is predicated on China’s desire to reshape the world order in its favor at the expense of the US and its allies.²³ In response to this challenge, the Trump government has pushed back forcefully against China on multiple issue areas ranging, from trade to human rights and from cybersecurity to geopolitics. While the Sino-US rivalry is ramping up, other leaders in Asia are seeking ways to best manage this situation so as not to escalate the rivalry. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, for instance, made the following remarks to her populace on Taiwan’s National Day in 2018:

²¹ John O’Loughlin, "Spatial Models of International Conflicts: Extending Current Theories of War Behavior."; Erik Gartzke, "The Capitalist Peace."; John R. Oneal et al., "The Liberal Peace: Interdependence, Democracy, and International Conflict, 1950-85."; Patrick J. McDonald, "Great Powers, Hierarchy, and Endogenous Regimes: Rethinking the Domestic Causes of Peace."; Giacomo Chiozza, "Is There a Clash of Civilizations? Evidence from Patterns of International Conflict Involvement, 1946-97."

²² Tanisha M. Fazal, *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation*, CH 4.

²³ Mattis commented on China’s behavior in his resignation letter. Please see: "READ: James Mattis' resignation letter," *CNN*, December 21 2018.

I trust that you have all seen dramatic changes in the international political and economic situation. The US-China trade dispute has led to a restructuring of the global industrial division of labor...As president, I want to assure everyone that we will neither act rashly to escalate confrontation, nor will we give in.²⁴

Evidently, the matter of what to do and not to do has become increasingly critical to leaders of states bordering China, who are highly vulnerable to such rivalry.

2. The Relationship between Geography and Institutions

There are some key questions regarding buffer thinking have left unanswered in this thesis due to the purpose of the thesis and space limitations. For example, how many types of behavior can China's buffer thinking generate? It is likely and reasonable that buffer thinking can generate more than these three types of behavior. Also, the reasons China did not annex Mongolia or North Korea, and did not force Taiwan or North Korea to become neutral states, are yet to be determined. Although, those questions are theoretically meaningful, they were beyond the scope of this thesis.

With regard to explaining why China behaved differently across the three cases, international institutions can potentially explain this variance in China's buffer thinking. One promising explanation from an international institutional perspective is that China's behavior has been socialized by the norms and rules of the international community to a great extent. Since China already recognized Mongolia as an independent state, seizing Mongolia militarily became a very unattractive option to Chinese leaders even though Mongolia was the easiest target among the three cases. By contrast, if China keeps refusing to recognize the statehood of the Republic of China on Taiwan Island, China can maintain every possible means at its disposal to resolve the Taiwan issue. As for North Korea, it is not only recognized by China as a sovereign state, but Pyongyang also enjoys the status of a treaty ally of China under the Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty. Accordingly, of the three states, North Korea has been subject to the least intervention. In this sense, international institutions may thus hold the key to understanding why the same buffer thinking led to different state behavior.

²⁴ Please see the full text of the speech of Tsai Ing-wen here: <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/5548> (accessed March 20 2019).

Another important question that arises from this institutional perspective is: under what conditions can buffer thinking dissipate? As demonstrated previously, it is very difficult for Chinese leaders to move out of the shadow of buffer thinking toward a given territory once such thinking has been formed. However, it appears that this is not the case for the buffer system constituted by France, Germany, and Belgium. Belgium was a buffer state between France and Germany in the inter-war period and was occupied consecutively by Germany. Theoretically speaking, France's buffer thinking toward Belgium should be entrenched. However, there is little evidence of such a geopolitical mindset among French leaders today, and it is highly unlikely this thinking will appear in the foreseeable future. How did France overcome its buffer thinking toward Belgium?

The most likely explanation for this is that a web of international institutions in Europe, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Europe Union successfully erased, or at least considerably contained, the emergence of France's buffer thinking toward Belgium after WWII. While IR functionalists, neo-functionalists, and institutionalists have crafted the theoretical concept of the pacifying effect of international institutions/organizations on state behavior since the 1940s, very few works have touched upon the issue of France's geopolitical shift in perspective toward Belgium, which has resulted from institutional cooperation.²⁵

Taken together, to further comprehend the concept of buffer thinking, it is essential to unravel the relationship between buffer thinking and international institutions. Shifting the analytical level from the system to the state level, a project with the aim to examining the nature of the relationship between geography and international institutions, would have tremendous policy implications for states surrounding great powers. In particular, the findings of such a project could offer valuable insights for policymakers in Taipei, Pyongyang, and Ulaanbaatar regarding institutional means to lessen Beijing's geopolitical sense of insecurity.

3. *The Relationship between Geography and Chinese Nationalism*

²⁵ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*; Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 3rd ed. (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2006); Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables."; Ernst Bernard Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economical Forces, 1950-1957* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958); David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System: An Argument for the Functional Development of International Organization* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1943); Lisa L. Martin, "Interests, Power, and Multilateralism," *International Organization* 46, no. 4 (1992).

One prevalent approach to understanding constraints on foreign policy decision-making in China is to follow the logic of *Innenpolitik*.²⁶ Among all of the variables in this logic, Chinese nationalism has gained the most attraction in the field of China Studies in recent decades.²⁷ The conventional wisdom of Chinese nationalism is that the stigma of “the century of humiliation” in the minds of the Chinese people is the main factor constraining the policy choices of Chinese leaders. The scenario that Chinese leaders worry most about is one involving a mass protest of a discontented people united by nationalism against the CCP regime. This concern is the key reason why China’s foreign policies toward Taiwan, Japan, and the US appear to be irrational and lacking in flexibility.

While scholars have tended to focus on the cases of Taiwan, Japan, or the US in exploring Chinese nationalism, there is a lacuna in the literature on the Cold War socialist states. Are there any strains of Chinese nationalism centered on the current/previous socialist states in Asia today? If so, what is the relationship between Chinese nationalism and China’s geopolitical imperatives toward the socialist states?

Mongolia is an interesting case in point given that, from China’s perspective, it was part of Qing China’s territory and was seized illegally by the Soviet Union. However, it is quite puzzling that there has not been any substantial Chinese nationalist movement demanding the return of Mongolia to this day. How ordinary Chinese have reacted to the new language policy of Mongolia is a good example of this. The current official language of Mongolia is Cyrillic script, which was adopted in the 1940s for better connecting Mongolia to the Soviet world. Since the mid-to-late 1980s, the Mongolian government has been trying to revert the importance of Uighur-Mongolian script (the Mongol biching), a traditional Mongolian language.²⁸ Although this move was more a reflection of how Mongolia plans to position itself in the post-Cold War era, this language policy sparked hope for reunification with Mongolia among a significant number of Chinese. This was based on the fact that the Uighur-Mongolian script is also

²⁶ Please see Chapter Two.

²⁷ Allen S. Whiting, *China Eyes Japan*; Peter Hays Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*; Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower: How China’s Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise*; Zhao Suisheng, "Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: The Strident Turn."; Alastair Iain Johnston, "The Correlates of Beijing Public Opinion toward the US, 1998-2004," in *New Directions in the Study of China’s Foreign Policy*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006).

²⁸ Franck Billel, "Sounds and Scripts of Modernity: Language Ideologies and Practices in Contemporary Mongolia," *Inner Asia* 12, no. 2 (2010); Stéphane Grivelet, "Reintroducing the Uighur-Mongolian Script in Mongolia Today," *Mongolian Studies* 18(1995).

currently the language utilized in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. This hope for reunification was widely expressed in various online forums in China.

There are also many indications that Chinese nationalism against North Korea has been burgeoning in recent years. Since 2006, the year that North Korea conducted its first nuclear test, growing numbers of Chinese netizens and scholars are publicly questioning their government's long-standing "sheltering" policy toward North Korea on online forums, through social media, and in academic articles in China. This sentiment was something unthinkable twenty years ago. One key argument that has been put forward is that keeping North Korea close will not bring substantive security benefits to China in modern warfare. Instead, North Korea undermines China's security interests. Deng Yuwen, the deputy editor of *Study Times*, a journal of the Central Party School of the CCP, argued in an op-ed in *Financial Times* that China should abandon North Korea and press for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula.²⁹ Jia Qingguo, a professor at the Peking University, also believes that it is time for China to discuss contingency plans concerning North Korea with the US and South Korea.³⁰

While there has yet to be significant nationalist movement emerge in relation to either case or any sort of resentment against the Chinese government occurring, this trend is academically intriguing—Chinese nationalism is increasingly diverging from China's current geopolitical imperatives of neutralizing Mongolia and maintaining the existence of North Korea. This trend can provide empirical evidence to the emerging debate on the relationship between Chinese nationalism and China's geopolitical imperatives.³¹

In sum, by focusing on an individual level of analysis, this research avenue could ascertain the nature of the relationship between geography and Chinese nationalism. In so doing, it would not only fill a research gap in the existing literature on Chinese nationalism but would also shed light on the most recent research trend of it.

4. The Similarity and the Continuity of Buffer Thinking between the PRC and Qing China

A final potential project would focus on a different analytical timeframe: is there any evidence of buffer thinking in China prior to the PRC period? In light of the fact that buffer thinking

²⁹ Deng Yuwen, "China Should Abandon North Korea," *Financial Times*, February 27 2013.

³⁰ Jia Qingguo, "Time to Prepare for the Worst in North Korea," *East Asia Forum*, September 11 2017.

³¹ Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing," *International Security* 41, no. 3 (2017); Christopher Hughes, "Reclassifying Chinese Nationalism: The Geopolitik Turn."

emerged in the PRC period in the context of China conceiving of ways to fend off potential military threats from specific neighboring territories with geostrategic importance. It is probably not the only period in Chinese history in which such thinking emerged. It is likely that Qing China exhibited similar thinking toward Taiwan, North Korea, and Mongolia.

Since its founding in 1644, Qing China faced a series of security challenges from Taiwan, Mongolia, and the Korean Peninsula. As mentioned briefly in Chapter Four, rulers of China traditionally were not interested in bringing Taiwan Island under their control. When the Dutch occupied the Pescadores Islands, Ming China's territory at that time, as a base to trade with China in the early 17th century, the Ming forces expelled them militarily. However, Ming officials suggested and then led the Dutch to establish a base on an island which was then *terra nullius*—Taiwan. From that time until Qing China formally took control of the island in 1683, Taiwan was occupied by Japanese, Dutch, Spanish, and also Ming loyalist Zheng Chenggong. These regimes all posed varying threats to Qing China.

The Sino-Russo rivalry over Mongolia discussed in Chapter Six can be traced back to the 17th century, a period in which Qing China and the Russian Empire rivaled over the Zungar Mongols. After defusing military threats from southern China, Qing China gradually expanded its territory into the east and south of Mongolia from the end of the 17th century. One important strategic motive for Qing China in doing so was the awareness of the presence of the Russian threat from Mongolia: Russia was encroaching on Mongolian territory step by step from the north and the west. The relationship between Qing China, Russia, and the Zungar Mongols could therefore be regarded as the prototype of the modern PRC-Russia-MPR relationship.

The military threat from the Korean Peninsula toward Qing China was the last to emerge among the three territories. Although the Joseon Dynasty of Korea had a bitter history with the Manchus, who later established Qing China at the very beginning, it had a very close relationship with Qing China throughout most of its history. Korea regarded itself as a little brother of Qing China and, in turn, Qing China also treated Korea as a protectorate. Accordingly, Qing China was free of military threats from the peninsula for roughly two hundred years. This relatively peaceful period, however, was disrupted by the Japanese Empire's challenges after the mid-19th century, which resulted in the Treaty of Ganghwa Island, the Donghak Peasant Revolution, the First Sino-Japanese War, and finally the Japanese occupation of Korea.

Evidently, the geopolitical environment that Qing China once faced was very similar to that of the PRC. A potential project would thus expand the analytical timeframe of this thesis, to examine the extent to which China's buffer thinking was evident in the minds of Qing officials when managing threats from Taiwan, Mongolia, and the Korean Peninsula.

This project could provide insightful lessons for IR theory. If the findings show that there is a substantial similarity between Qing China and the PRC's perception of the three territories, then IR liberalists focus on norms, ideas, and international institutions may have little explanatory power. Although liberal values and mechanisms in the past four hundred years have improved the international system in which China operates, when it comes to surrounding territories, China still adheres to the same old geopolitical mentality. On the other hand, if the findings do not indicate substantial similarity, this would encourage an exploration of what liberal mechanisms have altered China's threat assessment, and the means by which they have done so.

Although each of these projects outlined above only addresses a small piece of the puzzle of China's foreign behavior, they would help along with this thesis to hone the concept of buffer thinking therein.

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