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Notes

The Search for Full Recognition:

A Review of China's UK Policy in the 1950s

LIAN, Shu

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Introduction

The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 turned Sino-American relations sour, entry of the United States Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait on 28 July that year spoiled China's plans for unification and consequently the Taiwan issue remained unresolved. More significantly, America's influence over its Western Allies led to countries supporting the Nationalist Government (Kuomintang) in Taiwan and denying the legitimacy of China's Communist Government. China's inability to gain recognition as a sovereign nation hurt its ability to act in the interests of its nation and its inability to gain legitimacy in the international realm would also create difficulties back home. Thus, it became evident that gaining diplomatic recognition, especially from Western countries, would

take precedence in formulating China's new foreign policy and that the Taiwan issue would take center stage.

This study is about Chinese policy with respect to gaining full recognition from Britain¹⁾. China's foreign policy towards Britain in the 1950s has been widely covered in the studies of Sino-British relations²⁾. Previous studies focused on Chinese policies towards Britain within the range of the political and economic relations between the two countries. Since Chinese foreign policies of the 1950s are extensions of revolutionary diplomatic policies of the Chinese communist party³⁾, the revolutionary ideas and theories formed during the Chinese revolutionary movement also influenced China's new diplomacy. While the previous studies emphasized the ideological factors of China's foreign policies, new documents released by the Chinese Foreign Ministry have shed new light. Since 2004, the ministry has slowly begun to declassify and publish documents on China's foreign policy. Making use of these documents, this study revisits China's foreign policy towards Britain in the 1950s, with an emphasis on how the recognition issue shaped China's policy. By analyzing China's policies towards Britain, this study will review China's foreign policies in the 1950s from a pragmatic point of view. By verifying the Chinese policies towards Britain, it is clear that China did try hard to obtain full recognition from Britain, a Western country, and also an ally of the US, in order to gain diplomatic recognition from the world and enable China to function as a sovereign state and an independent nation in the international community. Contrary to its fierce rhetoric against imperialism, China's policies towards the UK are very practical and China has even tried to have direct talks with the US over the recognition issue using the UK as an intermediary. Pragmatism did play a very important role in its foreign strategy in the 1950s.

China's principles on Sino-British relations

The People's Republic of China (PRC) was established by the Chinese Communists on 1 October 1949. On 6 January 1950, the British

Government issued a statement. The British Consul-General in Beijing informed the Foreign Minister of the Central People's Government of China that as a consequence of its decision to recognize the new Communist Government, the British Government no longer recognized the Nationalist Government of China.

After recognition of the Beijing government, Britain expected that formal diplomatic contact and channels would be set up smoothly, but China moved cautiously with Britain. Wang Bingnan, the Director of the General Office of the Chinese Foreign Ministry at the time interpreted Britain's announcement and its move to recognize China in the following manner: "First of all, the People's Liberation Army has just marched to China's south-west border (very near to Hong Kong), and the British Government is eager to deter the spread of the Chinese revolution beyond this region. Second, Britain's China policy is essentially no different from that of the US"⁴). However, Britain wished to profit from its diplomacy with China. Britain had invested heavily in China at the time, but it was America that monopolized the Chinese market. Britain aimed to capitalize on America's withdrawal from the Chinese market and gain a foothold in China. Yet she was unable to take a clear stance against the US on the US China policy⁵). As shown by Wang Bingnan's comments, it was clear to China as to what Britain's motives were. China did not establish official relations with the UK immediately, but its response was not entirely negative either. The new leaders expressed a willingness to establish diplomatic relations and they would welcome J. C. Hutchinson to Beijing as an official British representative for diplomatic talks. The British recognition was considered by the new Chinese leadership merely as a first step towards normal diplomatic relations which required negotiations.

Believing that successfully established diplomatic relations with Britain would act as the prototype and template for how it could and should interact with other Western countries, China's initial response to British recognition was to act prudently. On 20 January 1950, in response to Britain and India's request to establish diplomatic ties with China, Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Central Government, himself set the tone. His

instructions were to “create difficulties, and delay negotiations” (chu xie nanti, tuoyan shiri)⁶. Mao believed Britain and India’s aim in establishing diplomatic ties with China was to gain access to China. Mao meant to “delay the entry of imperialist powers such as America into China (Zuan jinlai)” by delaying the diplomatic process⁷. Further, delaying the negotiations with the UK and India sent a message to the Western world that China was not in any haste to establish foreign relations with them⁸. Mao’s reaction could have been due to China’s concern that opening itself up to a Western power too early would undermine the stability of its communist regime. The other reason could have been China’s concern regarding its relations with the Soviet Union. Building a tie with western countries without Soviet concordance might jeopardize the relations between the two countries. The instruction to stall was given by Mao while he was visiting the Soviet Union and talking with the Soviet leaders in order to get the Sino-Soviet Alliance Treaty signed. In order not to be suspected by the Soviet leaders, China had no way out but to be cautious in establishing diplomatic relations with Western countries.

What concerned the Chinese most was the British position on Taiwan. Britain reopened its consulate in Tansui, Taiwan in 1947, and sent a diplomat; also a navy officer resided there⁹. Whilst proclaiming to China that it had already broken off diplomatic relations with the Nationalist Government, Britain’s consulate remained stationed and open in Taiwan¹⁰. Since the British consul still existed in Tansui of Taiwan and Britain still supported representation of the Nationalist Government at the United Nations, Beijing claimed that British recognition of the Central People’s Government was not absolute and remained cautious about establishing official relations with the UK.

However, the Chinese leaders did appreciate what benefits Sino-British diplomatic relations could bring to China. As a new regime, it was very important for the Chinese Communist Government to gain recognition as a legitimate regime both at home and in the international community. Britain was still a big power in the 1950s and had a strong influence over other Western countries. Full and official recognition from

Britain would be a tremendous asset to China.

Nevertheless, China took its relationship with Britain seriously, which is why Mao personally laid down rules of negotiations with Britain on 8 February 1950. He meant for these rules to apply to Britain and also had it in mind that these rules would send a message to the other Western countries. He set the rules as follows: ① In order to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC, Britain will break off all diplomatic relations with the Nationalist Government. Britain should give up the Nationalist regime and support the PRC as China's one and only legitimate representative at the UN council and other international organizations. Britain is to disclose its position on and handling of all organizations and property in Hong Kong affiliated with the Kuomintang¹¹). The first two conditions were most important and to be met first. In his instructions, Mao avoided mentioning the Hong Kong issue itself. Mao also instructed the British garrison stationed in China at the time to be mentioned in the negotiations and the issue should be resolved following the establishing of diplomatic relations¹²). Evidently, China took the Taiwan issue and Britain's attitude and conduct towards Taiwan as the most serious of issues in its diplomatic talks with Britain. China would not tolerate ambivalence on the Taiwan issue. It was also clear that the Chinese position had changed since 20 January 1950 when China once tried to delay negotiations with Britain. Obviously, Chinese leaders decided to hasten the process of establishing diplomatic relations. Unfortunately, there are not enough documents to indicate as to how the process went on, but two possible reasons might be behind this change. One is that the Chinese leaders believed that even though there were some demerits such as the possible ease for westerners getting into China while the new regime was relatively unstable, the merits would be much bigger if China had diplomatic relations with the UK. The other is that the negotiations between the Sino-Soviet leaders in Moscow did not go as smoothly as Mao had expected and the Chinese leaders realized that it was necessary to develop relations with Western countries in order to make the negotiations with the Soviets advantageous.

In line with Mao's aforementioned rules of negotiation, on 2 March

1950, the Central People's Government questioned Britain's failure to sever diplomatic relations with the Kuomintang in the particular context of Chinese representation in the United Nations¹³). On 3 March 1950, Zhang Hanfu, the deputy foreign minister of the PRC met Hutchinson, the British Government representative in Beijing for diplomatic talks. He clarified China's position with Hutchinson by highlighting the importance of the Taiwan issue in bilateral ties between the two nations and stressed again that Britain must entirely break off its diplomatic relations with the Nationalist Government"¹⁴). Zhang made clear that the Chinese Government regarded Britain's support for their representation in the UN as crucial for the formal establishment of Sino-British diplomatic relations¹⁵). Seeking full and official recognition from Britain was essential to the making of China's policy on Sino-British relations.

The Korean War and Chinese Views on Recognition by Britain

Direct Anglo-Chinese negotiations over diplomatic relations began shortly after Britain's recognition of the People's Republic and were discontinued when the Korean War broke out in June 1950. However China kept a close watch on Britain's stance and attitude towards Taiwan's status after the war broke out. The Foreign Office of Britain stated on 17 July 1950 that Britain did not promise the US it would protect Taiwan together with the US¹⁶). The Prime Minister Clement Richard Attlee twice stressed that British involvement in the Korean Peninsula was not an indication of British cooperation with the US on the Taiwan issue¹⁷). Britain expressed that it was going to maintain a neutral position on Taiwan. However, at the same time, Britain stated that if war were to break out in the Taiwan Strait, she would ally with the US¹⁸). China discerned that there was a difference in approach between Britain and the US on the Taiwan issue, and concluded that Britain wished to avoid worsening its relations with China over this situation.

Britain's support for American policy and later its direct military action in Korea were, interestingly enough, not made use of by the

Chinese press to step up their criticism of British policies in Hong Kong and Malay; instead, Zhang Wentian, a senior diplomatic official at the time who became deputy foreign minister in 1955, wrote to the Central committee of CCP on 27 July 1950, stating that China should pit Britain and the US against each other by strengthening its diplomatic relationship with Britain. He argued that if it was beneficial to China's national interests, China should not hesitate to establish diplomatic relations with the UK, but only under the condition that Britain break off all diplomatic ties with the Kuomintang and recognize the People's Republic of China as the one and only legitimate government of China¹⁹). Regardless of Britain's underlying motives, British recognition of China would have been a great blow to America; especially at a time when the US was trying to strengthen its anti-communist alliance. Moreover, through the influence of Britain's actions, it was possible other Western countries might follow suit and recognize the PRC²⁰). With these considerations in mind, China proactively negotiated with Britain.

China also paid close attention to Britain at the United Nations. On 3 August 1950, Britain voted against the Soviet Union's motion to deprive the Nationalist Government of recognition by the UN. The very next day, however, Britain voted to allow the PRC's entrance to the UN. It was to be the first time the UK voted for China at the UN. China understood that Britain took this step despite a great deal of pressure from the US; confirming to them that a rift was beginning to form between the two countries over the China issue²¹).

China concluded that establishing diplomatic ties with Britain would deepen the divide between them and believed such a rift would aid China in several ways²²). First of all, it would help it reach its goal of resolving the Taiwan issue. Secondly, it believed the disagreement on Taiwan between the US and Britain could lead to a general weakening of US-UK relations²³). Finally, China thought such a rift might allow it to begin to build relations with other Western countries, and Britain's recognition of the PRC as China's legitimate government would no doubt have an impact on its other Western Allies²⁴). China hoped that ultimately, once ties were

established, it could become a trading partner with Britain, so creating further tension between Britain and the US which would be to China's advantage²⁵).

It is obvious China was trying to drive a wedge between the US and the UK and weaken the role of the US as a leader among Western countries. Ultimately, it wished to quash the US's China policy, especially with regards to Taiwan.

Talks to establish Sino-UK ties had been suspended because of the Korean War, but China kept contact with Britain even when they were fighting each other on the Korean Peninsula. During that time, junior Chinese Foreign Ministry officials in fact continued to be courteous in their dealings with British diplomats. Senior members of the Ministry also continued to accept official British communications which were not related to the Sino-British negotiations on diplomatic relations²⁶). Britain and China took antagonistic sides in the Korean War, but Sino-British relations were not broken off. Yet in 1953, China began to see a positive change in Britain's China policy. As the Korean War drew to a close, China once again considered establishing diplomatic relations with Britain.

It contemplated the effects of Britain's support of China at the UN, and concluded as follows:

First of all, establishing ties with Britain "was in concordance with the Soviet Union's peace policy"²⁷). China saw how the Soviet Union's Policy had impacted capitalist nations. It believed the divide between the US and British policy had become more apparent as a result and that the US would perhaps become further isolated. By establishing diplomatic relations with the UK, China supposed "it would not only show China's support for the Soviet Union's foreign policies, but it would also open up a new area in the Chinese diplomatic realm"²⁸). At the time, China's new regime was in its third year of rule, and its leaders relied heavily on the Soviet Union, even for national security issues. Therefore, Sino-Soviet relations were as important if not more so than Sino-American relations. In order to dispel Soviet suspicions, Chinese leaders had to be very careful in how they dealt with Western countries. But since the Soviet Union itself

started a peaceful co-existence policy with the western countries in 1952, developing Sino-British relations was considered less risky in damaging Sino-Soviet relations.

Secondly, if diplomatic relations with the UK could be established before the international political conference on the Korean War which was supposed to be held after the war, "it might motivate Britain to favor China on Taiwan, UN membership and embargo policies." "If so, the divide between the US and the UK might further deepen and cause the US to be hounded," and "China could increase its diplomatic activities" by establishing diplomatic relations with the UK²⁹). China believed a Chinese Embassy in London would make a great impact politically. China could then not only send its diplomats abroad but also ask Britain to allow China to open its consulates in Commonwealth countries such as Malaya and Singapore, and have Chinese diplomats reside in Hong Kong. China believed it could then also build diplomatic relations with European nations, notably the Netherlands and Norway, two countries that had been seeking to establish ties with China³⁰).

Thirdly, Britain's Commonwealth Nations would be impacted, especially Canada. As Canada had already shown its intention to establish ties with China before the Korean War, it was highly probable that Sino-Canadian talks would commence once Sino-British diplomatic relations were realized. China would then be able to have a base in the North American region³¹).

As evidenced above, China supposed that by establishing ties with Britain, she could not only undermine US-British relations, but more importantly, could also take an important first step in gaining support from the international community, especially on the Taiwan issue. In the 1950s, Britain remained a major power in the international community. China seemed to believe it would be difficult for the US to promulgate its China non-recognition policy without British support. Behind Chinese policies towards Britain in the 1950s, one objective was always to isolate the US for its stance on China issues. China also believed the occasion of the truce agreement for the Korean War was the perfect time for China to

act³²).

The Geneva Conference and China Seeking Full Recognition from the UK

The Geneva Conference in 1954 was the first major international meeting that representatives from China attended. Sino-British relations improved greatly as a result of the Geneva Conference.

Up until then, China had insisted that as a pre-condition to establishing ties, Britain had to vote against the Kuomintang and deprive it of membership of the UN. China's softening of its stance on this issue at the Geneva Conference was a breakthrough for the negotiation process. When Premier Zhou Enlai met the Labour Party MP Robert Wilson and the Conservative Party MP Robson Brown at the Geneva Conference on 30 May 1954, Zhou let Wilson and Brown know of China's intention to strengthen Sino-British ties and added that "the Chinese people understand it is going to take some time for China to get into the UN; the development of Sino-British relations shouldn't all depend on the solutions of this issue"³³). From Zhou's words, one sees China's commitment to improving its relations with the UK and China's willingness to overlook Britain's seeming inability to fully support China's position at the UN. At the same time, however, Zhou accused the US of using its power to stop China from getting into the UN. He stated, "We trust Britain will play its role. As the US controls a majority of the votes in the UN we don't expect Britain's support to impact the vote; yet Britain's differing view from the US will make an impression"³⁴). China realized that the British Government was under great pressure from the US and pro-American conservatives at home, and that it was very difficult politically for the British Government to make any concessions on China issues such as UN membership³⁵). For these reasons it relaxed the conditions it previously gave to Britain by instead asking Britain to make its differing opinions over the China issue known to the world. The Geneva Conference provided an opportunity for Anthony Eden and Zhou Enlai to discuss

bilateral relations. In their first meeting, Zhou indicated that China was prepared to work with Britain. The ministerial meetings between Britain and China were also largely conducted at the conference. Sino-British relations made a breakthrough at the Geneva Conference and China accepted Humphrey Trevelyan as Britain's Charge D'Affaires to China. China also opened a diplomatic office in London and sent Huan Xiang to reside there as a Chinese Government representative and to enjoy diplomatic immunity as Trevelyan had in Beijing.

On 1 January 1954, Prime Minister Winston Churchill gave a speech in which he referred to the "revitalization of the Lokarno spirit." On 3 February 1954, in his speech to Parliament, the foreign minister Anthony Eden also touched on the subject of allowing South-East Asian countries to enter into a Lokarno style agreement. A formal exchange of Charge D' Affairs occurred even when Washington and Beijing were still hostile to each other. Britain's policy towards China reveals that Britain's view and policy in the Far East differed from those of the US even though they never seriously threatened Anglo-American cooperation; but to China, all these marked a change in Britain's Asia policy³⁶).

The achievement gained in the Geneva Conference made Chinese leaders more optimistic and their view on the difference between the US and UK became more divorced from reality. China decided to extend the achievement and speeded up strengthening its relations with Britain after the conference. Since official relations between China and Britain did not exist, China made use of every channel they could use to set forth its position on the Taiwan issue. Strengthening its relations with the Labour Party was one of them.

When the delegation of the British Labour Party visited China in August 1954, China believed its visit had the backing of the British Government. It was a sign to China that the British Government wanted to move forward to build Sino-British relations³⁷), and China was not going to miss the chance to deepen relations. On 15 August 1954, Zhou raised the Taiwan issue with the delegation: "The Taiwan issue is a very sensitive topic for the Chinese people. We hope that our British noble

friends can understand Chinese sentiment in resolving this issue”³⁸). Zhou spoke highly of the Labour Party’s views on the Taiwan issue, saying he hoped “the Labour Party would continue its effort to keep new disputes from arising between China and Britain over the Taiwan issue”³⁹). However, Zhou stressed that “while exchanges between the two governments, the two parties and the people of the two countries should be strengthened,” “all of these activities were only the first steps to affirming Sino-UK ties. If Britain is able to collect votes at the UN to oust the representatives of the Nationalist Government and support Chinese participation in the United Nations, then the two countries can exchange ambassadors. This is the only condition that needs to be met for China to exchange ambassadors”⁴⁰). Zhou repeated the Chinese position and again asked Britain to vote against the Kuomintang and to show the world Britain’s opposing view to the US.

China’s Stance on Taiwan and the Impasse between China and Britain

To liberate Taiwan and thus bring about complete reunification was a serious aim of the new rulers, both because they considered it to be a part of Chinese territory unjustly withheld from them by foreign invaders and because they genuinely feared a joint invasion of the mainland by American and Kuomintang forces. The Taiwan issue was set aside for a while because of the outbreak of the Korean War, but fulfilling the task of unifying the country never left the minds of China’s leaders. Soon after the Geneva Conference, Mao stated that the liberation of Taiwan could no longer be delayed and on 23 July 1954, the People’s Daily editorial “The Chinese People Must Liberate Taiwan” was published. It was in August later that year that the first Taiwan Strait Crisis broke out. China was trying to remind the international community that the Taiwan issue was an internal affair and China’s alone.

In October of 1954, Zhou met with a British nongovernmental delegation. The first Taiwan Strait Crisis had just ended at the time and

members of the British delegation asked China not to use their armed forces to settle the Taiwan issue. Zhou responded by saying: “we have explained to the British Government that the best way to settle the Taiwan issue is for you (Britain) to persuade America to withdraw its military forces peacefully from the Taiwan Strait. Certainly this is not an easy job, but if we all get together to persuade them, then this goal will someday be realized”⁴¹⁾. In this way, Zhou stressed that US withdrawal of its military forces from the Taiwan Straits was key to resolving the Taiwan issue, and asked Britain once again to cooperate with China to realize this goal. Zhou also stressed that “the US was the source of tensions around the world” and accused the US of “building contrary military alliances around the world and interfering in other countries’ internal affairs”⁴²⁾. China was unwavering on its stance that America should withdraw its forces and leave Chinese waters.

As Britain had interests in South-East Asia, it worried that such high tensions regarding the Taiwan issue would destabilize the region. To keep tensions from rising it tried to act as a mediator. Trevelyan met Zhou on 28 February 1955 to hand him a message from Britain’s Foreign Minister Eden. The message from Eden was that if China could make a statement publicly which asserted Chinese authority over Taiwan while at the same time stating it had no intention of using armed forces to settle the Taiwan issue, Britain would be willing to mediate between the US and China to try and ease tensions between the two countries. Eden himself was ready to go to Hong Kong to meet Zhou to discuss peaceful solutions⁴³⁾. Zhou promised to study the British suggestions, but stated again that the crisis on the Taiwan Strait had been caused by the US and insisted that the US give up its invasion policy and talk to China directly; otherwise the Taiwan issue could never be solved. In addition, Zhou said the US was threatening China and that China would not surrender to such threats even if the US policies were supported by Britain⁴⁴⁾. Further, Zhou reiterated that China wanted to further develop its relations with Britain but was disappointed to see that Britain “was trying to make a deal with the US by sacrificing Chinese interests”⁴⁵⁾. Zhou’s reaction reflects Chinese

pragmatism, as described by Lucian Pye, in that Chinese demands cannot be changed when the issue is related to “high principles”⁴⁶). The Taiwan issue is a “principled” one to the Chinese people and China cannot make any compromise but expects the other party to give in to their demands.

China expected from the UK much more than they had any hope of getting. What they expected from Britain was indicated by Mao, who urged the Labour Party delegation: to press the Americans to remove the Seventh Fleet from Taiwan, to refuse to join the South-East Asia Treaty Organization and to disagree to the rearmament of Germany and Japan⁴⁷). This medley of bilateral ties led to an impasse between China and Britain. Certainly, China could not afford to settle the Taiwan issue by giving up its arms, not during the Cold War. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, it was also unrealistic of China to expect Britain to persuade the US to withdraw its forces from the Taiwan Straits, as not only was it against American interests, but against British interests as well.

China’s Wish for Direct talks with the US helped by the UK

But the Chinese are supreme realists who are quick to adjust their behavior in order to exploit the logic of whatever that situation is. This is another feature of Chinese pragmatism⁴⁸). After the Chinese failed to reach their goal by shelling Quemoy, they switched to diplomatic channels. In March 1955, China told New Delhi that they were willing to talk with the United States, but reluctant to formally renounce the use of force as a means of settling their differences with Chiang Kai-shek⁴⁹). On 23 April 1955, Zhou announced at the Bandung Conference his government’s willingness to sit down and enter into negotiations with the US Government to discuss the question of easing tensions in the Far East, and especially the question of easing tensions over the Taiwan Strait. The American response to Zhou’s announcement was not encouraging and this made China even more anxious. Notwithstanding this, China did not give up on the idea. Zhou met with Trevelyan again on May 26th of that year to reiterate China’s position on Sino-American relations and the Taiwan

issue. Zhou made four requests. The first being that to realize negotiations between the US and China, it was necessary for both sides to make direct and indirect efforts to ease tensions in the Taiwan Strait area. China had already issued several statements since the Bandung Conference indicating China's willingness to ease tensions in the area but it planned to do even more. China believed that, under Britain's influence, the United States should also take measures to ease tensions and that it would be helpful for both sides to sit down to talks⁵⁰). Second, Zhou made it known that China was now ready to engage in talks with America. He elaborated, "The meeting can be arranged through the help of the UK, Soviet Union or India. The US and China could also be introduced by your three countries. Diplomats from China and the United States could then contact each other through Moscow, London, or New Delhi"⁵¹). Zhou's third request was that "The main focus of the negotiations between China and the US should be on how to reduce tensions in the Taiwan area. Negotiations could be in the form of a ten-country conference as the Soviets suggested, or made up of more or less than ten countries. China and the United States could also have direct talks with the assistance of other countries⁵²). The fourth and final request was that Chiang Kai-shek was not to attend any of the conferences. He clarified that the Chinese Government preferred to hold direct talks with Chiang"⁵³). In this way, Zhou sought direct talks with the US through the help of the USSR, India and Britain. At the same time, as a pre-condition to going ahead with the talks, Zhou insisted that his discussion with Trevelyan on the four points and, indeed, the talks to be held with the US all be held behind closed doors⁵⁴). China was eager to make a breakthrough on the China recognition issue and wished Britain could play the role of mediator.

China tried to leverage its relationship with Britain to get the US to the table for direct talks. China had made its wish for direct talks with the US known several times following the Bandung talks, but failed to rouse the US into action. China's goal in attacking Quemoy and seeking direct negotiations with the US was the same, to get the US at the table to talk about the China recognition issue.

The Policy of Seeking Full Recognition remained unchanged until the end of the 1950s

There was a general deterioration in the mood of British relations with China after the first Taiwan Strait Crisis, but China kept working on Britain. China's post-1957 foreign policy saw a continuation of China trying to persuade Britain to fully recognize it and support its position over the Taiwan issue.

A delegation from the UK consisting of Labour Party MPs visited China on 24 May 1957. Zhou Enlai met with the delegation and told them "Britain should fully recognize China. Its recognition of China should not be limited to the confines of London or Beijing. Britain should make it known both in the UN and the international community that it recognizes the PRC and not the Kuomintang"⁵⁵). Zhou repeated this statement when he met the Labour Party MP, Robert Wilson, on 25 February 1958. Zhou said China and Britain had reached an agreement at the Geneva Conference to keep relations between the two countries moving forward, but four years had passed and the final goal remained unrealized⁵⁶). Zhou then discussed the looming obstacle in Sino-British relations. He covered four topics. The first topic was China's UN membership issue. Zhou said "China suggested four years ago that China and Britain could exchange ambassadors if the UK acted together with India to oust the Nationalist Government from the United Nations and vote for China's participation, but the aim still remains unmet. China is not asking Britain to guarantee China's entrance to the UN, but China does believe Britain should support the motion raised by India, in which the issue of Chinese representation ought to be discussed in the United Nations"⁵⁷). Second, Zhou covered the Taiwan issue. "America realizes its non-recognition policies will not last long, and has started to foster Taiwan as an independent country to try to keep Taiwan under American influence. Some British and Japanese governmental members are performing at the front and America is manipulating at the back. China wants British friends to know it would have an impact on Chinese sentiment towards Britain if it supports the

American two-China policy”⁵⁸). Third, Zhou discussed the Hong Kong issue. At the time there were many incidents such as Chinese schools being closed and stories of Chinese people’s rights being infringed upon. Zhou asked that Britain take measures to protect the life and property of Chinese citizens⁵⁹). Lastly, Zhou discussed embargo policies. Zhou said “over 95% of the items China wants to import are on the embargo list. It is impossible to have equal and beneficial trade relations between the two countries without fully eliminating these obstacles. Economic relations should be developed freely between countries regardless of their differing political systems”⁶⁰). Zhou emphasized to Wilson that these four issues mentioned above were extremely important to China and asked Britain to continue its effort to improve relations between its two countries. The issues China raised here were almost identical to those raised in 1954. China was trying hard to stop Britain from taking any further steps backward over the China issue. Even though China knew Britain had committed to supporting the US’ position over the Taiwan issue, it did not abandon its aim to gain full recognition of China by the UK.

Despite China’s efforts, the results were not in China’s favor. In 1958, there was an Industrial Exhibition held in Hong Kong. It was there that Herder Grantham, the British governor of Hong Kong, met an industrial and business delegation sent by the Nationalists. With the backing of the British Hong Kong government, the Nationalist Government continued their activities against mainland China in Hong Kong⁶¹). In April 1958, despite protests from China, the Hong Kong Government returned combat planes China had requested back to the Nationalist Government⁶²). Later in September of that year, when a Taiwanese classical theater group was invited by Britain, China saw it as the British Government’s way of letting the public know of its two-China policy⁶³). China viewed these actions by Britain as a step back to pre-Geneva Conference times and became more vehement in its remarks on Britain. In his speech made at the People’s Congress in February 1958, Zhou said “undoubtedly, it would damage Sino-British relations unless Britain changes its two-faced policy (liang mian pai) towards China”⁶⁴).

It was under such circumstances that the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis began. After two Taiwan Strait crises the world, including Britain, had learned that China is inflexible in its determination. The Chinese standpoint has always been that the offshore islands and Taiwan are completely a matter for them and them only. Relations between the two countries became more remote. At the time, the nationalist movements around the Middle East seriously threatened British colonial rule in that area. Britain had to strengthen its alliance with the US in order to maintain its interests in the Middle East region. Britain adopted a tougher policy towards China and supported America in condemning China after the second crisis⁶⁵). Harold Macmillan's administration was more cooperative with the US over the China issue than were his predecessors Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden⁶⁶). When he visited the US as the new Prime Minister of Britain, Macmillan assured President Eisenhower that Britain would oppose any activities to get China into the UN⁶⁷). The Chinese media increased its denunciations of Britain's China policy. As the People's Daily put it in December 1958, "a group advocating the creation of two Chinas has long made its appearance in British ruling circles. In the past, those out of power shouted more vigorously than those in power. But now the British Government has come out in the open and is behaving more blatantly and viciously than at any other time." During this period, China's view of Britain was less positive than before. China understood that Britain's China policy was essentially the same as America's and that "America's China policy had no possibility of changing and that Britain had no choice but to follow America's lead"⁶⁸).

A cold atmosphere prevailed at the political level between China and Britain by 1957-58; the Chinese had realized that seeking full recognition from Britain had become gradually more difficult, and they also realized they needed to take a long-term view and focus on areas such as trade in order to keep Sino-British relations rolling. The British Government took the decision to remove the China Differential in 1957. The Chinese viewed the partial relaxation as an important step towards deepening its relations with Britain. F. J. Erroll, Parliamentary secretary to the Board of Trade

visited China in 1957 and on 29 August he was received by Zhou Enlai. Zhou stressed to F.J. Erroll and other British visitors the Chinese position on the Taiwan issue and asked support again from Britain on issues of China recognition and UN membership⁶⁹). Meanwhile, a Chinese economic and technical mission led by Ji Chaoding visited Britain and signed up several contracts with their British counterparts. Nevertheless, China still believed that there were marked differences between the US and the UK. The British left rallied to China's side in the second Strait crisis, although this was as much due to the growing fear of nuclear war as to sympathy for China's actions⁷⁰). The labour Party opposed any military action over Quemoy and Matsu and no Government of Britain could go to war without the support of the opposition⁷¹). Hugh Gaitskell, who had become labour leader in 1955 and was on the right of the party, took the position that "we should not support, still less participate in, any war to defend the islands"⁷²). China paid close attention to every change that the British Government made on China. In a speech on Chinese Foreign Policy, Zhang Wentian, the deputy foreign minister, included Britain in a group of countries like France that he said should be considered as "neutral zones." In China's eyes, despite France and Britain being Western Allies of the US, they were still intermediate zone countries because on a scale with the socialist block at one end and America at the other, these countries were somewhere in the middle⁷³). Other than publicly chastising Britain, China did not take any steps towards ending diplomatic ties.

Conclusion

This study has examined Chinese foreign policies towards Britain in the 1950s. The Korean War pitted China and the US against each other. Sino-American relations became hostile and with US intervention unification with Taiwan became impossible for China. It also became extremely difficult to gain recognition from other Western countries under the glare of US disapproval. However, the PRC recognition issue was of the utmost importance to China at the time, because it concerned not only

Chinese sovereignty, but also the legitimacy of the Chinese communist regime. China attempted to hold direct talks with the US, and at the same time, it also tried to weaken America's influence by improving its ties with the US's Western Allies. China's pro-active UK policies in the 1950s in large part were derived from a desire to gain full recognition from Britain in order to undermine the US's non-recognition policy of China.

China had three parts to its UK policies. First, China tried to improve relations with Britain in order to persuade Britain into fully recognizing China. Given British influence, China believed Western countries would follow Britain's lead and this would result in more recognition of China in the international community. Second, China tried to convince Britain to act and speak differently from the US in the international community, especially over the Taiwan issue. China understood it would still be difficult to gain membership of the United Nations without American approval even if Britain were to vote for China's participation. Despite this, China insisted that Britain hold a different view from the US on Chinese representation in the UN. Finally, China tried to get Britain to act as mediator between the United States and China. Britain was regarded as one of the most important channels of communication with the United States at the time of the Taiwan Straits crisis. China asked Britain to persuade the US to withdraw its forces from the Taiwan Straits. It also tried to have "diplomatic contact" with or "hold direct talks" with the United States having Britain act as an intermediary.

Despite the fact that Sino-British relations greatly improved during the Geneva Conference, limits on where that relationship would lead were soon realized. Against the backdrop of all this, the Cold War was the reason behind China's failure to lure Britain to fully take China's side. However, it is also important to note that China's failure stems from its lack of understanding of British foreign policy. The Chinese were too optimistic to remember the fact that China and Britain belonged to two different alliances and it was impossible for either side to have acted alone.

However, contrary to its fierce rhetoric against imperialism, China's policies towards the UK in the 1950s were flexible in many ways. China

tried every means to seek full recognition from the UK and the relationship between China and the UK of conflicting ideology is seldom an ardent one. The Chinese Communists understood very well that they could not achieve their goals merely through revolutionary and nationalistic ideas. They were a party of pragmatists⁷⁴). The pragmatic factors can be seen in Chinese policy towards Britain in the 1950s.

- 1) There was a different understanding about the recognition of China between China and Britain in the 1950s. On January 6th, 1950, the British government issued a statement to recognize the People's Republic of China and Britain claimed this recognition is an official one. However, since the British consul still existed in Tansui of Taiwan and Britain still supported the representation of the Nationalist Government at the United Nations after Britain announced they had severed diplomatic relations with the Nationalist Government, Beijing claimed that British recognition over the People's Republic of China was not a FULL one. Therefore "Seeking OFFICIAL (or FULL) recognition from Britain" in this essay was from the view of the Chinese side and not from a stand of international law.
- 2) The representative studies are as follows: David Clayton: *Imperialism Revisited - Political and Economic Relations between Britain and China 1950-54* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), James Tuck-Hong Tang: *Britain's Encounter with Revolutionary China, 1949-54*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1992. Wenguang Shao: *China, Britain and Businessmen-Political and Commercial Relations 1949-1957* (Oxford: Macmillan, 1991), Robert Boardman: *Britain and The People's Republic of China 1949-74* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), Evan Luard: *Britain and China* (London: Chatto Windus Ltd, 1962), Giovanni Bressi: China and Western Europe, *Asian Survey*, Vol.12, No.10,1972, pp.819-845. John Gittings: The Great-Power Triangle and Chinese Foreign Policy, *The China Quarterly*, No.39, 1969, pp.41-54.
- 3) Niujun, *Chinese Diplomatic Policy Making during the Cold War*, Tokyo: Chikurasyobo, 2007, p.314.
- 4) Xu Jingli, *Jiemi Zhongguo Weijiao Dangan* (Declassified Diplomatic Documents of China), (Beijing: Zhongguo Dangan, 2005), pp.161-162.
- 5) *Ibid.*

- 6) "Mao's explanation of the aims of Britain and India and his instructions for delaying diplomatic negotiations with them", Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 110-00022-05.
- 7) *Ibid.*
- 8) *Ibid.*
- 9) Kew, London, United Kingdom: FO371/83561 FC1912/1 to /21.
- 10) "Recognition of China", FO371/92233/C1027/4.
- 11) *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan* (Selected Diplomatic Papers of Mao Zedong), (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi, 1994), p.129.
- 12) *Ibid.*
- 13) FO 371/92233/C1027/4.
- 14) FO371/92235/FC1027/66. Mar, 3, 1950.
- 15) FC1022/518.
- 16) "Britain's Attitude towards Taiwan since the Korean War", Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 110-00024-19.
- 17) *Ibid.*
- 18) *Ibid.*
- 19) *Zhang Wentian nianpu* (A Chronological Record of Zhang Wentian), Vol.2, (Beijing: Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2000), p.909.
- 20) *Ibid.*
- 21) "Suggestions for Sino-British Diplomatic Negotiations", Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 110-00024-17.
- 22) *Ibid.*
- 23) *Ibid.*
- 24) *Ibid.*
- 25) *Ibid.*
- 26) FC1022/439.
- 27) "Issues concerning the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with Britain", Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 110-00235-10.
- 28) *Ibid.*
- 29) *Ibid.*
- 30) *Ibid.*
- 31) *Ibid.*
- 32) *Ibid.*

- 33) *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao dang'an xuanbian-1954 Rineiwa huiyi* (Selected Diplomatic Documents of the People's Republic of China -Geneve Conference in 1954), Vol. 1, p.413.
- 34) *Ibid.*, 415.
- 35) *Ibid.*, 414.
- 36) "The so-called Asian style Lokarno Plan", Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 110-0244-03.
- 37) "Carrying forward Sino-British Relations, Win over Peaceful Cooperation", *Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan*, pp.79-80. "Zhou Enlai's telegram to Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi and the Central Committee on Activities over a meeting with British Delegation", *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao dang'an xuanbian-1954 Rineiwa huiyi*, Vol. 1, p.415.
- 38) "Records of Talks between Premier Zhou Enlai and the British Labour Party Delegation at A Banquet", Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 110-00027-05.
- 39) *Ibid.*
- 40) *Ibid.*
- 41) *Ibid.*
- 42) *Ibid.*
- 43) "Records of Talks between Premier Zhou Enlai and British Charge d'Affaires Trevelyan", Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 110-00034-02.
- 44) *Ibid.*
- 45) *Ibid.*
- 46) Lucian W. Pye, *The Mandarin and the Cadre: China's Political Cultures*, Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1988, p.80.
- 47) Humphrey Trevelyan, *Living with the Communists*, Gambit, 1977, pp.131-132.
- 48) Lucian W. Pye, *The Mandarin and the Cadre: China's Political Cultures*, p.82.
- 49) Robert Boardman, *Britain and The People's Republic of China 1949-74*, p.128.
- 50) "Records of Talks between Premier Zhou Enlai and British Charge d'Affaires Trevelyan", Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 111-00141-03.
- 51) *Ibid.*
- 52) *Ibid.*
- 53) *Ibid.*
- 54) *Ibid.*

- 55) *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949-1975* (Important Events in Zhou Enlai's Diplomatic Activities, 1949-1975) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi, 1993), p.206.
- 56) *Ibid.*, p.234.
- 57) Li Jiasong, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao dashiji* (Important Events of the People's Republic of China), (Beijin: Shijiezhishi, 2001), Vol. 2, p.61, p.73.
- 58) *Ibid.*
- 59) *Ibid.*
- 60) *Ibid.*
- 61) *Ibid.*, pp.45-46.
- 62) *Ibid.*, pp.56-57.
- 63) *Ibid.*, p.28.
- 64) Evan Luard, *Britain and China*, p.173.
- 65) House of Commons Debates, vol. 594, 30 October 1958, cols. 327-328.
- 66) Evan Luard, *Britain and China*, p.172.
- 67) Eisenhower archives, Dulles Papers, White House memo series Box 5, meetings with the president 1957(2), memo of dinner conversation at the White House, 23th October 1957.
- 68) "Records of Talks between Zhou Enlai and Japan Socialist Party Mission to the Soviet Union", Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 105-00541-06.
- 69) Zhou Enlia nianpu (A Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai 1949-1976), Vol. 2, (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Press, 1997), p.91.
- 70) Tom Buchanan, *East Wind: China and the British left, 1925-1976*, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp.166-167.
- 71) House of Commons Debates, vol. 594, 30 October 1958, cols. 423-424.
- 72) Daliy Worker, 13, September 1958.
- 73) Zhang Wentian nianpu (A Chronological Record of Zhang Wentian), Vol. 2, (Beijing: Zhongyang Dangshi, 2000), p.1080.
- 74) James Tuck-Hong Tang, *Britain's Encounter with Revolutionary China, 1949-54*, p.20.